

## Introduction: Of Oceans and Islands

Once again we enter an era in which islands are positioned at the forefront of social and environmental transformation. With the increasing threat of global warming, islands have become harbingers of planetary ecological change. This is a remarkable shift because history-making has been so often associated with large continental landmasses and centres of demographic and economic density and power. Yet if we consider the large and often paradoxical body of fantasies, visions, and desires projected onto islands—such as exoticism, enclosure, boundedness, isolation, shipwreck, leisure, romance, nature, degeneration, dystopia, cannibalism, utopia, tourism, and the Garden of Eden—this newly fashioned role as signifiers of our changing global climate is not altogether surprising. Last year the world turned its attention to the twenty-six-island Republic of the Maldives which, in anticipation of the United Nations Copenhagen Summit on climate change, hosted the first underwater cabinet meeting to foreground the plight of islands in the wake of sea-level rising and global climate change (Figure 1). As scientists have predicted that climate change will render the Maldives uninhabitable by 2100, the agenda of the underwater meeting was a resolution to cut global carbon emissions. Not surprisingly, the vote to pass the resolution was unanimous.<sup>1</sup>



Fig 1. Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed signs a declaration during the first underwater cabinet meeting.

The island has often functioned as a metonymy for our fragile planet, a connection implicit in the Maldives cabinet meeting and one that they hoped would inspire definitive action to limit carbon emissions across the globe. Their performance—including two months of scuba diving training for cabinet members—may not have garnered the immediate political response that was desired, but the staging of this event drew upon a long history in which island change was interpreted metonymically, at a planetary level. As Richard Grove has demonstrated, the European colonisation of the tropical islands of the Caribbean, Pacific, and Indian Ocean facilitated an interconnected body of scientific societies in which the concept of the isolated island “directly stimulated the emergence of a detached self-consciousness and critical view” of origins that was symbolised in colonial texts such as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (8). By extension, “the island easily became, in practical environmental as well as mental terms, an easily conceived allegory of a whole world” (9). Through this process, colonial observations of ecological degradation from deforestation to desertification “were easily converted into premonitions of environmental destruction on a more global scale” (9).

This special issue of *new literatures review* on the literature of postcolonial islands takes as a starting point that, to borrow from Trinidadian novelist Sam Selvon, “an island is a world.” The essays collected here represent a challenge to the colonial myth that islands are peripheral to the march of world history. The colonial myth of island isolation, backwardness, and insignificance erases the vital contribution of island resources, landscapes, and labour to the constitution of many European empires. Scholars have pointed out the ways in which the island shipwreck narrative, including hundreds of popular revisions of *Robinson Crusoe*, has been vital to the construction of empire, muscular Christianity, and the naturalisation of European migration and management of the colonies.<sup>2</sup> Our focus here on contemporary postcolonial island literatures and contexts of the Caribbean, Mediterranean, Pacific, and Indian Oceans acknowledges the long history of colonial island representation and destabilises the ways in which islands have been rendered as peripheral to world modernity.

While there is a veritable cottage industry of texts turning to the ways in which Euro-Americans represented their tropical island colonies, the scholarship on contemporary postcolonial island writers is smaller. The reasons for this are multiple: postcolonial studies continues to be a small and often marginalised field in most literature departments; the field generally

privileges national or regional modes of analysis rather than geographic or intercolonial comparisons; and there is an ongoing colonial legacy of dismissing islands as negligible sites of cultural production. In fact, scholars working in postcolonial island literature studies may experience limited access to book publishing due to a presumed lack of a “market”—to many editors, small islands equal small readerships. As such, postcolonial island studies still has colonial legacies to address and overcome. Many scholars have been inspired by Tongan anthropologist Epeli Hau’ofa who famously argued that islands must not be considered as isolated spots of land in a large sea, but rather as a “sea of islands,” a refusal of colonial “belittlement” in order to foreground dynamism, migration, and the process of “world enlargement” (6) experienced by island travelers. Turning to geology, oceanography, and histories of voyaging, scholars such as Vicente Díaz have argued against colonial models of island isolation to demonstrate that the “Pacific is on the move,” understood in terms of tectonics, human migration, and a growing field of scholarship (Díaz and Kauanui 317). In a similar vein, Martinican theorist Edouard Glissant has used geography and geology to foreground Caribbean modernity, explaining that every “island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea” (*Caribbean Discourse* 139). This geographic model has positioned the archipelagoes of the Caribbean and Pacific as natural models of intercultural “Relation” (*Poetics* 34–35).<sup>3</sup> In emphasising mobility and migration, Cuban author Antonio Benítez-Rojo determines that “the culture of the Caribbean ... is not terrestrial but aquatic ... [it] is the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds and double folds, of fluidity and sinuosity” (11). Thus many postcolonial island authors, from their revisions of island colonisation narratives such as Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, to theorisations of islander mobility and modernity, have greatly complicated colonial mystifications of island isolation by turning to the always changing relationship of land and sea. The authors collected here build upon this emergent body of work, foregrounding island geography—and oceanography—as constitutive elements of literary interpretation and comparison.

We might place these postcolonial interventions in a dialogue with the recent emergence of the interdisciplinary field of island studies, which has been catalysed by the International Small Islands Studies Association (ISISA), an organisation that has hosted a biannual conference since its

founding in 1992. Over the next decade and more, special issues of geography and social science journals on island studies have expanded. Most recently island studies has gathered momentum with the establishment in 2006, by anthropologist Godfrey Baldacchino, of the *Island Studies Journal*. As Lisa Fletcher's article "... some distance to go": A Critical Survey of Island Studies" suggests, the field of island studies ("nissology"), while it claims to be interdisciplinary, primarily reflects the work of social scientists and has not been especially receptive to the role of language and literature in the construction of island space and knowledge. Perhaps due to the field's novelty and its desire to establish itself in the sciences, some island studies scholars, Fletcher explains, have positioned "nissology as a *hard science*." Fletcher argues convincingly that "island studies in its current formulation and practice is driven by habits of thinking which impede interdisciplinary research," most notably the lack of engagement with literary scholars and a fundamental dismissal of the "imagined world" of islands as a direct threat to the "real world" of islands. As Fletcher explains, the critique of colonial literature's myths of island utopia has been taken so far that seemingly *all* forms of literary representation have been dismissed as mere "fantasy" and "misinformation." This is an inadequate response because it does not query either the role of the imagination in all spatial representations nor does it take into account the mediating function of language in interpellating the "real world." Unfortunately it seems that for this particular group of scholars, postcolonial literary representations have not been fully accounted for in this ongoing dialogue of what constitutes island studies.

Fletcher suggests that island studies scholars might be better served by utilising a model of "performative geographies" which is a way of moving beyond the binary modes of thinking produced by the disciplinary division between the humanities and sciences. She argues that by turning to a model of performative geographies, island studies scholars would be able to foreground the "dynamic and mutually constitutive relationship between places and the ways in which they are depicted." To illustrate her point, she turns to Chris Bongie's groundbreaking analysis of the geo-poetic space of the island, which argues:

The island is a figure that can and must be read in more than one way: on the one hand, as the absolutely particular, a space complete unto itself and thus an ideal metaphor for a traditionally conceived, unified and unitary, identity; on the other, as a fragment, a part of some greater whole from which it is in exile and to which it must be

related—in an act of (never completed) completion that is always also, as it were, an ex-isle, a loss of the particular. The island is thus the site of a double identity—closed and open— ... (*Islands and Exiles* 18)

In an effort to ensure that this model of island identity is not fixed, Bongie suggests that it remain "performative and fictive" (22), an argument Fletcher builds upon to argue persuasively that island studies needs to be attentive to the fluidity of island identities and their complex modes of cultural and linguistic representation.

The legacy of colonial interpellation of tropical islands as utopia (as gardens of Eden) or dystopia (as sites of cannibalism, degeneration, and resistance to colonial settlement) has been an important influence upon the contemporary production of postcolonial island literature. In her essay "Utopia, Dystopia, and Heterotopia: Writing/Reading the Small Island," Elaine Savory turns to the Caribbean to exemplify how these particular models of island space have impacted Barbadian writers such as George Lamming, Kamau Brathwaite, Austin Clarke, and Paule Marshall. Barbados is an important site for inquiry because of its early colonial interpellation as "Little England," its early deforestation, and because the sugar plantocracy homogenised the landscape in ways that curtailed slave escapes and maroon communities. Savory turns to one of the founding English island texts, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, reading it as an unstable text that, like all colonial island contexts to follow, represents a heterotopia rather than a straightforward utopia. She draws upon Michel Foucault's well-known theorisation of heterotopia which he locates in the colonies, islands, and ships—those "jumbled" and "messy" spaces that reflect the juxtaposition of multiple "real sites" within a contained space that are "contested, and inverted" (Foucault 3).

Savory traces out the attempt by Barbadian writers to escape the legacy of utopian and dystopian island narratives, even while recognising the ways in which utopian narratives might facilitate anti-colonial nationalism. She demonstrates how Barbadian writers offer heterotopic representations of small island life which are continually shifting due to migration patterns that connect the island to other spaces, particularly New York (in Paule Marshall's work) or Toronto (in Austin Clarke's novels). Turning to the work of Kamau Brathwaite, Savory examines his attempts to geographically and imaginatively connect the island to a more foundational (and maternal) transatlantic history that is rooted in Africa. Brathwaite explains of his

collection *Mother Poem*:

This poem is about porous limestone: my mother, Barbados, most English of the West Indian islands, but at the same time nearest as the slaves fly, to Africa. Hence the protestant Pentecostalism of its language, interleaved with Catholic bells and kumina. The poem is also about slavery (which brought us here). ("Preface")

As such, the "jumbled" spaces that Foucault noted of the colonies might be tied to the violent history of Caribbean creolisation and its religious and linguistic legacies, a history that locates the forced hybridisation of island peoples as a constitutive space of world modernity.

Véronique Bragard's essay turns to dystopian histories of the Indian Ocean, particularly the Chagos Archipelago. She examines how thousands of Chagossians (Ilois), primarily descendents of slaves from British copra plantations, were expelled from their island home so that Americans could erect a military base at Diego Garcia. Transplanted to Mauritius where they are greatly marginalised, the Chagossians have, after great struggle, won an international legal case to return to their home islands. This return was prevented by Prime Minister Tony Blair after the 2001 attacks on the United States catalysed the military expansion of Diego Garcia. In "'Righting' the Expulsion of Diego Garcia's 'Unpeople': The Island Space as Heterotopia in Literary Texts about the Chagos Islands," Bragard turns to the "long-established colonial fallacy that islands are terra nullius" to demonstrate how the Chagossians were removed based on the refusal to recognise their sovereignty. This is painfully evident in the words of British Diplomat Sir Denis Arthur Greenhill, who observed, "unfortunately along with the birds go some few Tarzans or Man Fridays whose origins are obscure and who are being hopefully wished on to Mauritius" (qtd. in Pilger 38). Bragard turns to literary representations of these forced removals and the way in which nostalgia for the island homeland and a dream of future utopia work together to address the memory of trauma. She argues that "their idealization of their past society and their utopia-tinged projects for the future both echo and interrogate the connection between utopia and colonial representation of islands as Edens." Turning to Peter Benson's elegiac novel *A Lesser Dependency*, Shenaz Patel's Mauritian novel *Le Silence des Chagos*, Anita Sullivan's BBC Radio 4 production, *Exiled from Paradise*, and Khal Torabully's poetry collection *Cahier d'un impossible retour au pays natal*, Bragard suggests that trauma, nostalgia, and the Eden myth are powerfully mobilised in these representations of the expulsion,

suggesting a critique of colonial myths even while some of those myths are utilised to argue for Ilois cultural distinctiveness and sovereignty of their island homeland.

The next three essays complicate the myth of island isolation by turning to histories of diaspora and migration in the Pacific, Mediterranean, and Caribbean. In "On *Kala Pani* and Transoceanic Fluids," I build upon *Routes and Roots*, which argues that the "transoceanic imaginary" is a constitutive component of island writing, by turning to Indian diaspora narratives of indenture, particularly in Fiji. I examine how Fijian writers of Indian descent have depicted the history of transoceanic crossing in terms drawn specifically from Atlantic slave ships, foregrounding the postcolonial genre of transoceanic migration. While most critical narratives of diaspora neglect the gendering of travellers and space, my essay explores how transoceanic narratives are gendered in terms of masculine shipboard communities, or *jahaji bhai*. Turning to what is perhaps the first published Indo-Fijian novel, J.S. Kanwal's *The Morning (Savera)*, I analyse the author's use of the historical archive on Indian indenture and his gendering of the spaces of diaspora and nation. His historical realist narrative of indenture employs the discourse of spatial, caste, and gendered contagion suggested by historical proscriptions against crossing *kala pani*, or the black waters. This essay argues that shipboard fraternities, while they neglect the presence of women subjects, mobilise feminised metaphors of fluidity in order to solidify homosocial bonds. Women are largely erased from these fraternal models of diaspora, but their feminised (and often contaminating) presence is necessarily invoked through the concepts of oceanic and bodily fluid.

In "On the Trail of the Post-Colonial: Transcultural Spaces, Cosmopolitanism, and the Islands of the Mediterranean," Luisa Pèrcopo adopts Fernando Ortiz' well-known theory of "transculturation" which he associated with the island plantation context of Cuba, and she adopts this model of cultural hybridity for examining the Mediterranean. She argues that the region's history of modernity, evident in "the many arrivals, conquests, pillages, and departures across this sea" that have been documented by Janet Abu-Lughod and others, is vital to understanding the contemporary Mediterranean context in which new waves of migration are popularly understood to destabilise ethnic and national identities which in fact were already fluid and in flux. Arguing for the strategic importance of islands as "positive examples of transcultural spaces," Pèrcopo builds upon the work

of Fernand Braudel to argue for the maritime connection of Mediterranean peoples and to foreground an ongoing fluid aesthetic of a "sea of intimacy" (Matvejevic 14). She demonstrates the ways in which key Mediterranean islands such as Lampedusa and Pantelleria (Sicily) as well as Malta and Sardinia are geographically situated as vital to connecting the northern and southern shores of the region and have become destinations of African migration into Europe.

Recognising the ways in which the sea connects the region is vital to Pèrcopo, who condemns the lack of attention in European media to the plight of African migrants who all too often shipwreck and drown in the crossing to these northern islands, or are deported without consideration of asylum to Libya where human rights abuses in the prisons are well documented. As in so many migration issues from the global south to the northern metropole, "the same European governments who are so eager to stop 'illegal' immigration are those who are responsible for the conditions that force people to leave their home countries," Pèrcopo argues, pointing out the ways in which French uranium contracts in Niger contribute to emigration to the Mediterranean. Her work destabilises the myth of island isolation by turning to the complexity of migration history in the region, arguing that this cosmopolitanism might be used as a model for reconfiguring contemporary political resistance to new *arrivants*.

Anthony Carrigan turns to a different impetus for island migration in his essay "(Eco)Catastrophe, Reconstruction, and Representation: Montserrat and the Limits of Sustainability." Turning to Yvonne Weekes's memoir, *Volcano* (2006), Carrigan examines the ways in which the eruptions of the island of Montserrat's Soufrière volcano have become the catalyst for reflecting on the relationship of island vulnerability, ecology, identity, and disaster management policies. After a series of eruptions in 1995 and 1997, the island of Montserrat lost two-thirds of its inhabitants to outmigration and the majority of its habitable space, greatly disrupting virtually every aspect of its political, cultural, and ecological stability. Carrigan examines Weekes' complex memoir as presenting a "profoundly ecological notion of selfhood" which ties identity to the volcano and the island community, even as she condemns the mountain for its uncontrolled destruction. Weekes also provides a scathing condemnation of British colonial policy which paid islanders to leave rather than invest in the rebuilding, arguing "the present set of managers need to acknowledge that their mismanagement is the cause of the mass exodus of Montserratian

people from the island. It is their mismanagement that has caused more lasting harm to Montserrat than the Langs Soufrière" (82-5). Carrigan reads the conclusion of Weekes' narrative as one that stages disaster in dialectical relationship to regeneration, backing up Kamau Brathwaite's theory that "[t]he beauty of the Caribbean is (re)born out of ... catastrophic origins" ("Preface" 7). Thus Weekes' memoir, Carrigan suggests, positions her connection to place and genealogy through language in a context in which these relations need to be rebuilt. Importantly she eschews the "fatal impact" narrative that so often characterises island representations, in order to "resist the naturalisation of depopulation and the dehistoricisation of environment."

The final three essays of this special issue turn to the Pacific, examining the ways in which concepts of indigeneity are tied to the island. While volumes have been written about European conceptions of the tropical island, scholarship (in English) about Japan's representation of its island colonies has not been widely available. Naoto Sudo's essay, "Japanese Colonial Representations of the 'South Island': Textual Hybridity, Transracial Love Plots, and Postcolonial Consciousness" thus makes an important contribution by examining how both Japanese and Euro-American myths of the tropical island came together and influenced cultural production in an era when Japanese troops occupied German-controlled Micronesia in the First World War and the decades to follow. He argues that the concept of the "south island" has been a space of literary production for Japanese writers, particularly those who travelled to the colonised Nanyo or "South Sea Islands." He turns to iconic texts such as "Boken Dankichi" or "Dankichi the Adventurous," a best-selling 1930s Japanese comic, in which an imaginary "south island" functions as a laboratory for Japanese adventure as well as a cultural representation of Japan's "civilising mission" in Micronesia.

Sudo traces back the early textual hybridisation of Japanese colonial island discourses to three literary texts published in the early 1920s, all entitled "Shunkan" and written by Kurata Hyakuzo, Kikuchi Kan, and Akutagawa Ryunosuke, which retell the legend of a twelfth-century Buddhist monk who is exiled to a tropical "south island" for treason and dies there. Kikuchi's version of Shunkan echoes tropes familiar to the master/slave relationship of Prospero/Caliban and Crusoe/Friday, and invokes the assimilation process of teaching the colonial language to the islander, whereas Akutagawa's version is inspired by Paul Gauguin's

retreat to Tahiti and eschews the customs and habits of the urban metropole. Sudo demonstrates that over time the "south island" took on a gendered connotation in Japanese songs and comics of the 1930s, associating the island with the colonial trope of the "dusky maiden," suggesting another mode of Japanese settlement in Micronesia as well as the influence of American cartoons such as *Betty Boop*. As such, these texts adopt the "double logic" Paul Lyons has attributed to what he calls "American Pacificism": that is, how "islands are imagined at once as places to be civilized and as escapes from civilization" (27). Sudo argues that these narratives adopt the "structure of the transracial love plot to romanticise Japan's large scale assimilation policy," suggesting a remarkable similarity to European island colonisation narratives.

Paul Sharrad's essay continues the focus on Micronesia, turning to its indigenous cultural production and arguing that its key expressions are to be found in orality—chant, song, formal orature, and word of mouth. Using the geography of islands as a means of reading cultural communication, Sharrad suggests that in insular contexts, communication is necessarily stylised so that cultural critique may be expressed "as allegory or in ritually sanctioned satiric theatre to serve as a release valve" and to function as a social corrective. Sharrad traces out how codes of orality shift when islanders either migrate or turn to writing, which has historically been associated with missionary and colonial powers. Since contextual codes of oral communication are lost, the production of writing raises important questions about the epistemic gaps between orality and literacy. Moreover this question of form is further complicated when we consider the history of Guam in which abrupt transitions from Spanish, American, and Japanese rule (in which multiple colonial archives were destroyed) created fractured historical legacies in terms of the languages of empire and their legacies.

Sharrad uses this history of rupture to interpret Chris Perez Howard's biography of his mother, *Mariquita: A Tragedy of Guam* (1986), a narrative that seeks to patch together a life from the viewpoint of a diasporic son who faces family silences and a spotty written archive about his mother's wartime disappearance. Perez Howard's struggle with form is reflected in a "curious hybrid of documentary and fictional devices, chatty oral history and written formality, biography and autobiography" which Sharrad likens to other early Pacific texts written at the cusp of modern indigenous movements. The U.S.-raised author, by returning to the land of his mother's birth, traces out her story in a way that underlines a matrilineal model

of genealogy. Yet this genealogy, while it helps the author to rediscover his Chamorro identity, is necessarily incomplete, Sharrad argues, because amnesia is a part of colonial history. Therefore Perez Howard's narrative continues rather than complicates the American narrative of an island paradise, and falters in its attempts to recuperate an indigenous past in a context of long-term and complex colonial hybridisation. As such, Sharrad positions the text (as does its author) as a catalysing one in which a Chamorro "off islander" utilises a hybrid and diasporic perspective to regenerate anti-colonial indigenous identity.

In our final essay of this special issue of *new literatures review*, Otto Heim turns to "Breath as a Metaphor of Sovereignty and Connectedness in Pacific Island Poetry." By turning to recent work in island studies, Heim argues for a model of place-based situational thinking in which space and place are reconfigured, following Arif Dirlik, "from below." In addressing the way in which island studies scholars have critiqued the metaphorical language of island space, Heim echoes the key points of Fletcher's opening essay by reminding us not to overlook "the metaphorical nature of any geographic vocabulary." Turning to indigenous Pacific conceptions of place, Heim draws from the work of Manulani Aluli Meyer and Joël Bonnemaïson in which place is understood as a source of knowledge-building, a flexible model that David Welchman Gegeo refers to as the "portability of place" (495) in the indigenous Pacific. The key symbol for this portability in recent Pacific work has been the voyaging canoe, a symbol of circulation and mobility that invokes bodily fluids like blood and sperm, words etymologically and semantically linked to the term "diaspora" (DeLoughrey). Heim argues that this metaphor of the circulation of bodily fluids (blood) emphasises a contained and ethnically-determined space of exchange, whereas the metaphor of breath promotes an island-based metaphor of circulation that exceeds ethnic and racial borders. Thus he traces out the thematics of breath, knowledge, and circulation in three collections of Pacific Island poetry: Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard's *Alchemies of Distance*, Teweiariki Tezero's *Waa in Storms*, and Robert Sullivan's *Star Waka*.

Heim argues that the exchange of breath, a traditional greeting in the Pacific, can be read as a manifestation of a form of knowing, a way of "breathing in" that "emphasises an awareness of a relationship with a living environment." As such this highlights a Samoan concept that Albert Wendt has long emphasised, the "va" or space-between that reflects a

relationship of potential rather than the void. Heim explores how Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard's poetry has adopted this metaphor of the breath or *va*, in which she describes "poetry as oxygen" as she articulates oral traditions of Pacific literature and links them to the voyaging canoe, a vehicle that connects islanders to each other. Likewise, Teweiariki Teaero's poetry uses spatial metaphors derived from Kiribati to connect the canoe (*waa*), the voice, and the poem in ways that emphasise the process of cultivating the relational space between. Robert Sullivan's collection of poems about the transoceanic voyaging canoe, the *waka*, inscribes shifting vehicles from the space ship to a Honda, demonstrating that the *waka* always "holds together a space of constantly moving relationships," from molecules to the breath of the poet's daughter sleeping.

In nurturing the *va*, the space between, Pacific epistemologies emphasise the connectivity between people and their environment, configuring the sea, the canoe, and the breath as important metaphors of exchange. Yet these are not simple metaphors of ecological harmony, for a key element of the rhythm of this exchange is the storm. Teaero's poetry describes "breathing restless hurricanes" (4) which determine the spatial and temporal constitution of the Pacific Islands.

Heim includes Teaero's poem "What is ..." as part of this dialectical engagement with the breath, and I would like to conclude by building upon his analysis to foreground this particular poem as a critique of colonial island narratives, an engagement with the land-sea "tidalectic" (Brathwaite, "Interview" 44) that constitutes island land/seascapes, and an engagement with the threat of global warming to island/planetary ecologies that opened the start of this essay. The poem's title "What is ..." foregrounds the pedagogical nature of the poet's voice (Teaero lectures in the School of Education at the University of the South Pacific) just as the ellipses foreground the unknowing, the unsaid. The poem is written in three stanzas, the first of which asks, (what is) "rising rising rising?" while the next stanza asks (what is) "falling falling falling?" (69), structurally reflecting the ebb and flow of island ecologies. The final stanza asks "what remains static?" The immediate answer to what is "rising" is "global warming / population / cost of living" and other modern and bodily stresses such as "blood pressure" and "unemployment," suggesting the local ecology (rising sea levels and blood pressure) as well as a global change in "cost of living" and "inflation." The second stanza lists the "falling" of "natural resources / respect for elders / friendliness" suggesting a change in natural,

cultural, and economic stability. This inscribes the interweaving of local and global shifts in island cultures, in which urbanisation and the falling "dollar" pose challenges alongside decreased participation in traditional cultural exchanges.

The final section of Teaero's poem, which asks "what remains static?" changes the rhythm of the poem. The author suddenly shifts into first person, admitting "i can't see / i can't feel / i can't hear / i don't know / *akea*" (69). This last stanza serves (at least) a dual purpose—it lists the limitations of the speaker's ability to perceive, just as it refuses the suggestion that the island, or the planet for which the island is a metonym, could remain static. To interpret this stanza as a refusal of the static island one must read in two languages—the last line's italicised linguistic shift to Kiribatese, ending the poem with "*akea*," a word translated by the author in the glossary as "nothing," suggests that nothing, if you know the Kiribati context, remains static. "*Akea*," while it also means space, does not reflect the relational potential of the "*va*" but rather the absence of something—this absence is reflected in the ellipses of the poem's title, and the non-knowing of the speaker's failure to see/feel/hear/know. Written two months after the second Fijian coup of 2000, these lines might echo the larger sentiment of national instability in which the ebb and flow of island tidalectics is interrupted, causing the narrator's failure to trust his senses of perception. But since what is rising and falling in this poem is articulated as the challenges of globalisation, I suggest that Teaero is offering a model in which the metonymic relation between island and globe refuses stasis, utilising *akea* to refute any queries to the contrary. As such, the poem demonstrates the dynamic island ecologies discussed in Fletcher's essay, a foregrounding of the "performative geographies" necessary to island studies, while also cautioning against totalising claims to power/knowledge in island studies methodologies.

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## Notes

- 1 See "First-ever Underwater Cabinet Meeting."
- 2 See Kevin Carpenter, *Desert Isles and Pirate Islands*, Diana Loxley's *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands*, Richard H. Grove's *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism*, Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith's edited collection *Islands in History and Representation*, and my *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*.
- 3 "Relation" is a model that engages multiple temporalities, complex and dynamic space, multilingualism, and orally transmitted knowledges (Glissant, *Poetics* 34-35). †

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