

# In the Canoe

## Intersections in Space, Time, and Becoming

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On a cool clear morning in Kawaihae, Hawai'i, I sat with a gathering of Hawaiian men atop Pu'u Kohola heiau, the temple built in 1791 by Kamehameha I to unite the islands. We rose before dawn, bathed in the sea, donned something approximating traditional garb, and entered with ceremony this temple of state. It was a seemingly random set of circumstances that brought me here. I had met with Mel Kalahiki, a Hawaiian elder, regarding an Indigenous geography project I wanted to do on Nu'uaniu valley, inland from Honolulu. Within five minutes of meeting him, I was invited to come to the Big Island in August for this ceremony. I continued to attend this ceremony for five years, until my elder and chief, Mel Kalahiki, stepped down and passed the mantle to his son. Then, it seemed, my time was done.

I have since written about Pu'u Kohola as a symbolic landscape (Herman 2008a). For that study, I conceptualized the relationship between time and space using the oceanic metaphor of the canoe. On an oceanic voyage, the passengers remain in the same location the entire time: *in the canoe*. The canoe stays in one place. Between departure and arrival, the people have always been in the canoe, but during that time, the space underneath the canoe has moved, bringing the destination to them. I then applied this to Pu'u Kohola as a place moving through time like a canoe on the ocean. It is also a journey of meaning, and it has different passengers along the way.

My coming to participate in this ceremony tells another story of the intersection of place, time, and people, a story that substantially changed my interaction with the community I was working with and which continues to pose questions for me regarding who I am in relation to these people, this place, and the work I have been doing. In this essay, I want to take the canoe metaphor in a different direction, one that focuses on the journeys that are involved with place-based fieldwork in Indigenous settings and the deeper sense of place that these experiences can provoke.

My intent is to conceptualize the research project itself as the canoe. It is the vehicle that brings together you the researcher, the community members with whom

you are working, and the place itself for a period of time, possibly a lifetime. All of these have their individual trajectories before, after, and even during the project and are not necessarily in the same place at the same time. But in fact they are all the paddlers that move the canoe forward. I see in this metaphor a means for theorizing Indigenous geography fieldwork in a way that enables us practitioners to be more effective both as scholars and as human beings.

Each of us approaches our work with our own distinct maps and tools, derived from who we are and the choices we have made. These inform us both epistemologically and theoretically for the work we do. To the extent that “research is research,” these are maps of *being* and *becoming*. They are maps of our expanding understanding of our world and our place in it, should we choose to recognize them as such. Such recognition is my point here.

### Maps of Being

In my own case, the maps I gained extend the notion of “more than white”—which has been used to craft this present volume into a broader cross-cultural and cross-epistemological milieu. Although I was raised in the Judeo-Christian tradition (my father a Jew, my mother a Christian), I early on took a keen interest in world religions and majored in comparative religion as an undergraduate. Here, I focused particularly on Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism.

These traditions share some common principles and differ markedly from the Judeo-Christian tradition in their epistemological starting points. For me, the basic principles may be summarized as follows:

The manifest world arises from the unmanifest, and returns to it  
 This world that we understand as multitudinous and diverse has a  
 fundamental, underlying unitary nature

There is a pretty straightforward formula for human action that can move us  
 toward greater understanding of, and ultimately unity with, this divine  
 nature.

The path for each individual is different, depending on our personal makeup  
 and experiences (karma), but has some basic characteristics of  
 focusing the mind,  
 dismantling the ego, and  
 letting go of attachments

Finally, Hinduism and Buddhism share a notion of karma as defining our  
 manifestation, and our connections with people, places, and so on. Karma  
 (or cause and effect) accumulates over eons of death and rebirth.

On the whole, these principles are not uncommon to Indigenous understandings, though articulated differently in each case. In all cultures, we find recipes for how to become more fully human, and one can find these same principles in the Christian gospels. But in contemporary US culture, we seem to have lost the central principle that this is our real mission in this life. We can reach back to blame the Catholic Church, the Scientific Revolution and the Protestant Reformation (Herman 2008b), or turn to more recent forces, including industrial capitalism, large corporations, television, and so on, all of which I think are culprits. Current Western science and much of popular culture are hostile to serious discussion of the unmanifest and the true business of being human.

At the same time, there are some more recent Western maps that have tried to clue us in. Two that I found useful are those developed by the psychoanalysts Carl Jung and Stanislav Grof. Jung's mapping of the unconscious is very much in accord with Eastern religions, albeit in a different code. Jung focused on the unconscious as the interface between manifest and unmanifest aspects of the psyche, and of the relationships of the self to the world. He wrote that "the unconscious undergoes or produces change." And once he had familiarized himself with alchemy, he went on to state that "the unconscious is a *process*, and . . . the psyche is transformed or developed by the relationship of the ego to the contents of the unconscious. . . . In collective life [that transformation] has left its deposit principally in the various religious systems and their changing symbols" (Jung 1961, 209).

For Jung, psychology was a field where biology and spirituality met. To use current terminology, we might phrase this by saying that humans are biological organisms with certain *hardwired* programming and simultaneously spiritual beings with *software* that drives us toward a state of greater wholeness he called individuation. Individuation may be a more mundane goal than the enlightenment sought by mystics, but it is nonetheless the outcome of the same general process. Jung remarked on the lack of boundary between manifest and unmanifest realities, pointing out particularly in his discussion of synchronicity that states of mind and external occurrences can appear causally linked without any apparent connection. Jung concluded, "Since psyche and matter are contained in one and the same world, and moreover are in continuous contact with one another and ultimately rest on irrepresentable, transcendental factors, it is not only possible but fairly probably, even, that psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing" (Jung 1954, 215).

Synchronicity was also noted by psychedelic researcher Stanislav Grof who drew on three decades of clinical research with LSD. Grof elaborated a new model of consciousness based on what he called the most challenging element resulting from psychedelic research: the transpersonal experience. "The common denominator

of this rich and ramified group of unusual experiences is the individual's feeling that his or her consciousness has expanded beyond the ego boundaries and has transcended the limitations of time and space" (Grof 1985, 41).

A significant aspect of some transpersonal experiences is their interconnection or interwovenness with the fabric of the material world, where occurring events in people's lives mirrored stages of their psychic journeys. This is a minor phenomenon reflective of a much broader model of reality that Grof proposed.

Drawing on the physicist David Bohm's theory of the structure of the universe and voluminous data from his own psychedelic research, Grof argues that the phenomenal, perceived world represents only a fragment of reality, the *unfolded* or *explicate order* that is contained within and emerging from the *enfolding* or *implicate order* that is its source and generating matrix (Grof 1985, 83). This model was the only way to explain the phenomena he had encountered and the data he had amassed. Grof was drawn—as I and many others had been—to Capra's discussion in *The Tao of Physics* (1975) regarding the dual wave/particle nature of electrons and subatomic particles: "Particles are merely local condensations of the field; concentrations of energy which come and go, thereby losing their individual character and dissolving into the underlying field" (Capra 1975, 196–97).

Capra also turned to Eastern mysticism as portraying this more fluid sense of the world in which we are less like fixed entities and more like fluctuating pools of energy that interact with other patterns of energy around us. I sometimes follow Jung in referring to this as an "energetic" model of the world and sometimes simply call it the "spiritual" approach, because here is where the manifest and unmanifest worlds can be better comprehended and worked with together. The general principles of this model include:

- there is no clear boundary between consciousness and the world;
- states of mind and worldly interaction are mutually constitutive;
- where we are at in our Being affects what encounters we actually have in the world, and how those encounters play out;
- There is an organic, preprogrammed tendency or drive in human beings toward a state of higher integration of the self and between the self and the world;
- There is, however, an alternative tendency to pursue mundane self-satisfaction and go deeper into selfishness, attachments, and confusion. This has its own allure—we might call it the Dark Side—hence our religions warn against it.

If we wanted to map a general understanding of systems that might precariously be lumped together under the heading "Eastern mysticism," it might look like a mandala (figure 5). The mandala suggests a tiered mountain, with enlightenment



Fig. 5. The Kalachakra Mandala

in the very center. One approaches it from one of the four directions, and all the symbolism and imagery in here represent the kinds of obstacles and encounters one might have en route. It is a figurative map of the journey to enlightenment.

### Practice

These maps are all very exciting, but maps are one thing and making the journey is another. Joseph Campbell (1988) pointed out that each religion is like a distinct software program: if you truly use it, it will take you to fulfillment (enlightenment, freedom, individuation, call it what you will). But, the key is that you have to actually follow the program. Knowing how the program works and having the disk in your drawer still doesn't accomplish anything. Moreover, doing the program takes real work and effort. I didn't understand this as an undergraduate religion major. But then in 1982 I took advantage of my college's rotating quarter system to spend two months in residence at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, an orthodox Ch'an (Chinese Zen) monastery in Northern California. Master Hsuan Hua, Ninth Patriarch of the Wei Yang Sect, transplanted this Chinese tradition virtually unchanged onto American soil. The schedule was quite rigorous. Days started at 3:30 A.M. Here I learned the meaning of spiritual practice: that what you know or believe in is a very small part of religion. The real business is what you actually do in your everyday life. If you are walking the path to enlightenment, then every thought, word, action, and encounter is a moment for you to practice, to *be conscious* and act consciously. Belief and faith are means—they keep your eye on

Table 2. The Buddha's Eightfold Path.

|                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Right View          | Wisdom & Knowledge |
| Right Intention     |                    |
| Right Speech        | External Conduct   |
| Right Action        |                    |
| Right Livelihood    |                    |
| Right Effort        | Internal Conduct   |
| Right Mindfulness   |                    |
| Right Concentration |                    |

*Note:* The division into the three fields of Wisdom & Knowledge, External Conduct, and Internal Conduct are mine. Of course, all three are interrelated in their functioning.

the goal—but are not ends in themselves. Texts show the way, but one still has to make the trip.

The Buddha himself summed this up in his recipe known as the Eight-fold Path. These are the things you need to do, he said, that will enable you to release your attachments. That is, they are another recipe for becoming fully human. I organize these eight guidelines into three groups: Wisdom and Knowledge, External Conduct, and Internal Conduct:

In reality, Buddhist practice is much more complex than this, involving many vows for monks and nuns—and some for serious lay people—to help us regulate our behavior. The monks and nuns then engage in that rigorous schedule of hard work, meditation, and other practices. And this is true also for Yogis and other true mystical seekers. The work is hard and the dedication must be 100 percent. But on a more mundane level for us as average mortals, the principles are the same: orient your life—as much as you can—in a way that aligns you toward the goal of liberation and enlightenment.

The word “Right” generally used to translate these Buddhist concepts for me aligns with the Hawaiian term *pono*. Pono means “right,” “things as they should be,” and always conveys to me a larger sense of “cosmically right.” I compare it to the old Chinese notion of things being in accord with the will of heaven: that there is an order and balance to the universe, and when you act in accord with this, things prosper and thrive. But if you run contrary to this, disharmony ensues and trouble results. To NOT be *pono* creates an imbalance within the self, the community, and up to much larger scales. We are part of the machinery of the universe, so being “right” in our conduct has implications beyond ourselves. Hence, this term conveys to me a sense of responsibility beyond myself.

Walking the path is not easy, regardless of which map one uses. Buddhism offers the Six Paramitas (“Perfections”) as strategic approaches to being *pono* in the face of internal and external obstacles (table 3).

I find notable here the juxtaposition of inner-focused and outer-focused principles, such as meditative effort (inner) with generosity (outer), wisdom (inner) and patience (outer). Clearly, all of these have both internal and external resonance.

The Six Paramitas are comparable to the Seven Grandfather teachings found in Anishinaabe tradition. As told by Anishinaabe elders,<sup>1</sup> in this story a village youth named Little Boy goes in search of knowledge to help his people. Along his journey, seven grandfathers in animal form teach him the important lessons for being fully human: love, honesty, respect, truth, bravery, humility, and wisdom. Like the Eight-fold Path and the Six Paramitas, this list demonstrates a mix of external effort, internal effort, and letting go of ego. By the time Little Boy returns to his village, he is an old man. Thus the story imparts the message that it takes a lifetime to learn these lessons but also that we won’t learn these if we don’t go looking in the first place.

Table 3. Buddhism’s Six Paramitas and the Anishinaabe Seven Teachings

| Buddhism<br>The Six Paramitas | Anishinaabe<br>The Seven Grandfathers’ Teachings |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Generosity                    | Love                                             |
| Ethics                        | Honesty                                          |
| Patience                      | Respect                                          |
| Effort                        | Truth                                            |
| Meditative Concentration      | Bravery                                          |
| Wisdom                        | Humility                                         |
|                               | Wisdom                                           |

So it is important both to have good maps and to have a good practice or vehicle to enable one's journey on the path. Here again a chance encounter in Hawai'i led me to adopt a method that was taught by a traditional healing *kahuna*, Mornnah Simeona. Simeona had a personal revelation that she used to reformulate the traditional Hawaiian practice of conflict resolution, *ho'oponopono*, into a powerful tool for taking responsibility and clearing up negative energy and karmic obstacles. Ho'oponopono again uses this word "pono" and means "the act of making right," of setting things in order. Often simply called "cleansing" by its practitioners, it is an active meditative practice that restores balance within the various aspects of the self by clearing away karmic obstacles. As a daily practice, it includes clearing obstacles in advance with people and places we work with.

The map for this practice draws quite openly on Buddhist/Hindu notions of karma (cause and effect, accumulated energies and ties) and samsara (cycles of death and rebirth) and combines them with a uniquely Hawaiian map of the body-mind. Working with the unconscious as the interface between the physical, mental, and spiritual realms, it enables one to work with the relationship between manifest and unmanifest realities more directly. By cleaning up the mess on the unmanifest side through releasing negative energies and karmic ties, our actions and encounters in the manifest world move forward more smoothly and productively. Here "forward" and "productive" mean not just the obvious, get-the-job-done aspects of life, but the business of *becoming*, the forward motion toward becoming fully human, and acting in accordance with the will of heaven.

Again, if we see the living world as vibrant pools of energy that are constantly interacting and interpenetrating in ways that take concrete form in the manifest world, then this system makes sense. Deal with it before it becomes manifest. And if you have to deal with the manifest on the spot, work on the energy behind the situation to enable you to act freely and appropriately. An example I often use for this is the common experience of encountering someone for the first time and hating them (or being hated by them) immediately. That's karma: you've encountered each other before, and the negative energies are piled up from past lives. Clean it up and you can get along better, perhaps even become friends or allies. Don't, and you may continue to lock horns for reasons you cannot fathom. This has important relevance for doing ethnographic fieldwork in other places, especially Indigenous settings where engaging the unmanifest is still culturally relevant.

Thus far, I have outlined epistemological and (for lack of a better word) *spiritual* tools that are certainly "more than white." But for me the "white" part, Western geography, is the hermeneutic anchor to all of this. Here is a discipline that elaborates a great many things about how the world works. Like de Blij (1981), I see geography as the hub of the wheel of academic disciplines, providing spatial context

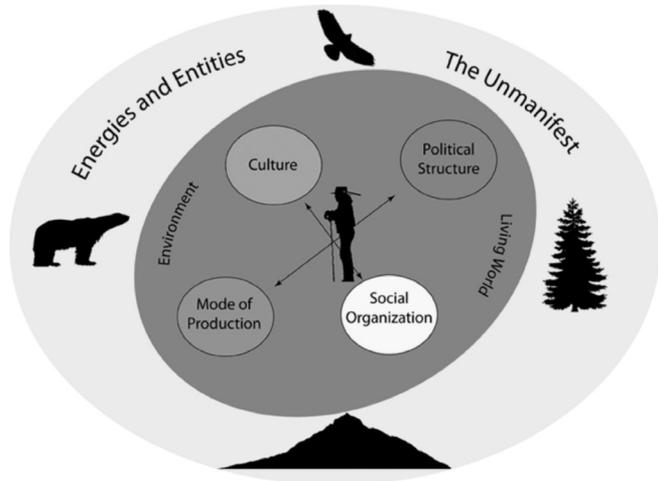


Figure 6. A way of conceiving Indigenous geography as materialist geography contextualized by a relationship to the unmanifest.

and understanding to economic, social, and cultural life. If one is to act effectively in the world—on issues such as social justice, hunger, poverty, and the like, then geography offers a very powerful set of tools and models. This is all the more true for contemporary g informed by critical theory, elaborating and identifying relations of power. Critical theory provides maps of how NOT to engage in practices that create unequal or exploitative relations of power, a problem for geography and ethnography since at least the nineteenth century. Especially in working with Indigenous peoples, we are always contending with the matter of decolonization and the role we play as scholars in regard to self-determination. Smith's (1999) work on this topic is often pointed to. I would add that the decolonizing of research methodologies is an important aspect of being *pono*. Combining critical geography with the spiritual tools and models I have outlined above greatly enhances both. At the same time, I emphasize that the standard tools of geography fieldwork are still valid and potent, and form an important part of my toolbox. Critical geography merely ensures that I use these tools more wisely and respectfully.

This is the portfolio of maps and tools I have in place before actually doing fieldwork in Indigenous settings in the year 2000. It has since been useful for me to draw on a Marxian model to how Indigenous geography differs from the contemporary Western framework (figure 6). I start with Marx's four categories of mode of production, social organization, political structure, and culture, placed in the environmental context and organized in such a way as to emphasize that these are part of an interconnected system in which changes in one can affect the other three. We know now that changes in culture can affect mode of production (e.g., the growing desire for organic foods affecting agricultural practices), and that two cultures can have the same mode of production but organize very differently

(e.g., socialist versus individualist) to produce very different political structures and cultures. The environment is the setting in which all of this takes place, offering certain limits and possibilities, and the cultural landscape is the product that reflects how the system manifests. This alone is a useful teaching model for introductory geography classes.

But for Indigenous geography, there is an additional factor that needs to be added. Where the basic Marxian model focuses exclusively on the manifest world (physical and mental), Indigenous understandings include the unmanifest world as well, whether it be the creator or any messengers therefrom, or a more general sense of the creative force manifesting in various ways, as well as animal spirits and a whole spirit world, and indeed perhaps the whole of creation as alive, aware, and consciously interacting. For Indigenous peoples, this is a normal and accepted aspect of reality that guides our actions in the present, particularly toward the environment and its many nations of beings, and toward each other.

This model codifies what I have come to realize over the course of my work in Indigenous communities. But in addition to this static model, there are dynamic aspects of actually doing the work that merit attention. In the following sections, I present four themes drawing on the experiences I have had and the lessons I have learned from my work in Indigenous settings during the last decade, including a Hopi community in Arizona, three land divisions (*ahupua'a*) in the Hawaiian Islands, and four communities in western Micronesia.

## Positionality

Both in terms of approaching fieldwork in Indigenous communities and in terms of striving toward being more fully human and acting appropriately in the world, the matter of first importance from the outset is, Where do I stand in relation to this work, this place, and these people? From what position *within myself* am I moving forward into this project? Is this project *pono*, and am I going about it in a way that is *pono*?

I began my project, *Pacific Worlds*, while an assistant professor at Towson University in Baltimore. *Pacific Worlds*<sup>2</sup> was based on the *Indigenous Geography* project I had helped design for the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in 1999. It involves producing profiles of Native communities using ethnographic fieldwork as well as bibliographic research on those communities. The text predominantly derives from interviews with community members, so that they themselves are explaining their communities to the reader. This is a mediated form of ethnographic representation, what Kurin (1997) calls "culture brokering." As the geographer, with a clear map of what categories of information I want to present, I work with the community members who actually provide the content.

From the outset, this involves the task of convincing reluctant Indigenous participants to grant me interviews that I would edit and post on the internet for the world to see. Although appropriate methodologies of informed consent, review and editing, and final approval worked to assure the empowerment of the community in determining the content, there is still that potential reaction of *Who the hell are you that we should share this with you and with the world?* One thing I knew for certain was that this work demanded an extraordinarily high level of integrity from me. In approaching these communities, I had to demonstrate honesty and integrity in my very *being*. Everything about me, my methodology, and the project's design and purpose had to be *pono*, or this was not going to work. Consequently, the project can be understood by what Wilson (2008) would call "research as ceremony." It's not just about my doing, but about my Being.

Hence as I undertake my work, I am doing my ho'oponopono practice in advance to clean up with the people and places with whom I am working. And, I am opening myself to the uncertainty of the journey, putting myself in a space where I may be mindful enough and guided to do what is *pono* and away from what is not *pono*, all the time bearing in mind that I am a catalyst that may produce unexpected consequences. Once one is in this frame of mind and positioned in this manner to do fieldwork, actually going into the field and doing this kind of work in Indigenous settings still isn't easy, but the process leads to deep and profound experiences of place.

### ***Walking the Land***

The great adventure of any field-based cross-cultural study is having one's framework of the world expanded, challenged, and reshaped by the encounter. The first and most explicit encounter with an Indigenous geography is the grasping of a spatial-cultural system very different from one's own. It's straightforward cultural geography work in the best tradition of the discipline, combining the drive to understand more deeply and to grasp in a more personal, physical way, what this landscape means and how it works. Again, each cultural system involves a different mode of production, set of social relations, structure of power, and cultural understanding. However paved over by colonization, this basic geography is a starting point for Indigenous-geography research. If we as cultural geographers are going to "get it," we have to engage with this as best we can. Although we are outsiders whose understanding will always be partial at best, we need to engage empathetically and viscerally. We're not going to grasp any of it if we don't get our feet on the ground.

So, I have found in every case that a first step—and many steps thereafter—is to *walk the land*. This usually involves both an initial reconnaissance shortly after my arrival, as well as ongoing sojourns during the course of the research. In the

first case, this involves a semi-methodical field reconnaissance—on foot and by car as necessary—to familiarize myself with the layout of the place, the cultural landscape, the natural environment, the commercial activities, and whatever is there. It invokes both our skills as trained geographers to begin interpreting the cultural landscape, spatial organization, and physical environment of the place—the external side of place-based understanding—and our phenomenological skills to feel the place, to let the land (and sea and air) speak to us, and have our own existential relationship with the place unfiltered or distracted by the input of other people. This is just groundwork, and many things will be meaningless to me until my guides explain them, but at least I have an initial sense of place and am already asking myself questions that may be useful in the interviews to come.

From there, the process becomes informed by the ethnographic information and personal interaction with the community members, going to the various places mentioned by the participants or found in the bibliographic research. There are the places of which you are told and not taken to but which you have to explore on your own, or places to which you are taken but make a return trip on your own to explore in greater depth. Many of these are easy and obvious, but some of them involve real adventure to locate. Caves, ruins, legendary sites, and storied places—these can involve difficult and even dangerous exploration, invariably done on my own. And the medium is the message: the trouble it takes to get to these places, or to locate places long forgotten, brings us closer to the land, and closer to the experience of the people who once used these sites. Next to the interviews with elders, I find this is the most meaningful part of the fieldwork.

I place “walking the land” in distinction from the requisite site visits with local informants. Walking with a guide is certainly a major part of the fieldwork, and most of the important sites are within close access to the village being studied. Those interactions with people and place where you are asking questions of your guide as you go can be rewarding for the guide as well, as often she or he takes for granted things in the landscape that are reawakened as meaningful when you point them out and ask about them. In one such case neighbors came out and all started sharing their childhood stories about the object in question. The researcher can serve as a catalyst for reawakening interest, discussion, and new awareness of cultural sites.

But there is something critically experiential about walking the land alone using all six senses<sup>3</sup> to grasp a sense of place unmediated by others; to come to one’s own relationship with the locale. Of course, walking the land must be done mindfully. On Saipan, my community contact warned me repeatedly not to go walking across people’s properties, and I later learned that the danger was quite real. But, I had always intended to stick to the roads anyway.

### *Place as Message*

Long before I read Keith Basso's (1996) work, "Wisdom Sits in Places," my Hawaiian colleague Carlos Andrade had elaborated to me how Hawai'i's storied places "provide lessons, examples, through the words and through the eyes of the stories and of our ancestors" (Andrade 2001). He pointed out that "place-names themselves are messages from the ancestors that contain warnings, or urgings to look at something important there. They're stories about how to live" (*Pacific Worlds* 2001). He was pointing to the example of Ke'e ("avoidance") Beach at Ha'ena, Kaua'i, that had once been sacred and *kapu* ("taboo"), as an example where the name prompted you to a course of action for your own safety.

In an earlier work (Herman 1999), I examined Hawaiian place-names and how they differ qualitatively from the more recent overlay of American, Anglophone place-names that took hold particularly during the Territorial period (1900–1959) when the islands were a US colony. I have seen this also on Guam (Herman 2008c). Compared to the United States, where place-names are so often commemorative, Indigenous place-names tend to reflect greater sensitivity to the environment and greater influence of cultural meanings and practices.

Gilgillan (1886), a missionary who lived among the Ojibway in Minnesota, wrote that "the Ojibway Indian is a very close observer, a name either of a person, or a place with him always *means something*, and is never a mere arbitrary designation as with us, but expresses the *real essence of the thing*, or its dominating idea as it appears to him." Other writers either deplored the allegedly "prosaic character" of American Indian place-names (Read 1934) or alternatively overromanticized Indian connections with nature (Pearce 1951; Vogel 1963); nonetheless, the characteristics of Native place-naming practices show a more acute attention to the particular and eschew commemoration of people (see Waterman 1922).

Thornton (1997) points out that place-names intersect language, thought, and environment: they provide valuable insights into cultural understanding of the world and how the landscape is used to communicate those understandings. Studying this intersection of language, culture, and landscape was most prominently pioneered by Waterman (1922) and Boaz (1934), though linguists of varying competencies have explored American Indian place-names since Schoolcraft (1845) and Trumbull ([1881] 1974). Place-names are the first, but by no means the last, area of indigenous-geography research where language is important.

Much of what makes an Indigenous geography unique is encoded in the language: geographic schema, terminology, classifications, and categories that map out a very different but very pragmatic and coherent notion of places, their uses, and the responsibilities of people in and to these places and to each other. Language is the key to understanding the cultural messages of places. In Hawaiian language,

winds and rains of different valleys have distinct personal names—there are twelve named winds in the little valley of Ha'ena alone, each with different characteristics and each expressing meaning. The use of place-names in Hawaiian poetry and chant is powerful and has been aptly discussed by Luomala (1964), Pukui, Elbert, and Mo'okini (1974), Handy and Handy (1972), Kimura (1983), and Pi'ianai'a (n.d.).

Also, in language are the words to designate different kinds of places, different use areas, and all the categories and taxonomies of places that make up the cultural landscape in the terminology of the community itself. This includes terms of direction, as well as rich cultural understandings of the directions that are particularly characteristic in American Indian traditions. Without access to the language, one misses some of these messages and this richness of expression about place. So it behooves us, as researchers, to gain as much of the Native language as we can, or at least to investigate areas of geographic terminology and taxonomy.

### *Place and Experience*

The phrase “the power of place” is a cliché for the importance of geography in everyday life. But, places have power, and visiting places affects us. Places evoke feelings. Granted, “feeling” is a mediated experience, filtered by one's thoughts and experiences, so sense of place can be highly subjective. Other times, the energy of a place is so clear and overwhelming that it is hard to dispute. Here too it is up to us to be informed by the culture we are researching, to listen to their understanding of the world and the relationships with animals, plants, and spirits. Part of this is found in the two layers of knowledge and language discussed in the previous sections. But moving beyond these, places speak to us directly.

Indigenous cultures worldwide have identified sites of particular energy, or places where the boundary between the manifest and unmanifest worlds seems less rigid: sacred places, places magical to varying degrees, places to go for wisdom and guidance. Generally, we find such places in the wilderness. For wilderness itself—the absence of human society and its formations—opens to us the myriad societies of beings with whom we share the planet and the various forces of nature within which they operate. So, it is here that we go to learn from the earth itself: How does this place speak to you?

For me, no matter how many maps I have of the universe as a fluid place, I don't normally live in a society for which that is an actual ontology. In Hawai'i, for the Hawaiians I work with, it very much is a lived reality. I can't experience that the way they do, but I can listen and learn, and adapt my own ontology. My own experience becomes informed by Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture. But it's up to me to do the work.

Elsewhere I have elaborated the relationship between the unmanifest world

(*Po*), and the manifest world (*Ao*) in Hawaiian cosmology (Herman 1999). Energies and entities are understood as flowing back and forth between these two realms. Gods manifest as plants, animals, and phenomena. Deceased family members can be deified and in turn can manifest as sharks, owls, and other forms, and this appearance of the spiritual in the material is not abnormal. Modern Hawaiians often tell me stories of experiences they have had that one might call “supernatural” but to them reflect a coherent and reasonable worldview. Understanding nature and the spirit world as alive, aware, and interactive with humanity makes for a different relationship to the world; it invokes more care, more respect, and the responsibility to tread more consciously.

This brings us back to walking the land. The solo journeys to remote places, informed by the host culture, give us that opportunity to have our own experiences of place: to stand there and listen, and feel, and to try to imagine ourselves in the place of the old ones who once were there and grasp at how they might have experienced this place.

For my project on Nu‘uanu Valley, I had thorough documentation of the sites in the valley from previous researchers (Sterling and Summers 1978) who culled through the historical documents and interviews with elders. But the landscape had changed considerably in the fifty to one hundred years since most of those statements were made, and painstaking research on the ground was required. In the end, I located most of the sites, including legendary spots and important sacred places that disappeared off maps a century ago and are probably known to very few people today. It is easy to revel, Indiana Jones–like, in the thrill of “discovery.” But these were opportunities to respect these sites and the spirits that may dwell there, to feel the *mana* (power, energy) of these places, and to experience them as part of a landscape still present yet invisible.

Across these different aspects of the field experience, there is the “deeper sense of place” that comes from weaving together an Indigenous geography. It is a story of how layers of Indigenous cultural landscape work together and transform one’s sense of place and of being in those places. In any historic place, we have the opportunity to extend our senses, our imagination, our experience of *being* into a level deeper than the contemporary landscape affords. In places of Indigenous legendary importance, we can not only reflect on the meaning of the stories of these places and what they teach us, but open ourselves to the power of place that is undoubtedly why the people of old pointed these sites out to begin with. Place is the crucible of our deeper understanding, in which we are transformed through an alchemy involving Indigenous knowledge. Our obligation to do right by the community informs that. We may go alone, but we do so in the context of our relationships and responsibilities.

### *Project as Voyage*

These various experiences and engagements with place lie within the context of the much larger voyage that is the research project itself: the experience of working with the community and the challenges of ethnographic fieldwork generally. There are culture gaps to be negotiated. There are temporal gaps between the “traditional” culture we may have studied and the contemporary amalgam—with all its mixed values, tensions, and struggles—in which we are working; and there is the reconciling of what we are doing with the needs and aspirations of the community such that we are helping to dismember—rather than perpetuate—a colonial legacy.

In the course of this kind of project, we are working with Native peoples and historical texts to tell their stories of these places. Our experience of the work and the product we create—the story we tell—are intertwined: they are facets of the same journey. Understanding them as taking place within a web of responsibilities and impacts should hone our sense of responsibility: the role of *being* for all involved. And with knowledge comes responsibility to share knowledge when it is called for by members of the community, and not to share certain information with others.

We need to be mindful that our research produces a product—whether a journal article, a website, or whatever—and that product also travels through space and time. And other people’s paths intersect with it by reading it, and sometimes then they intersect with our own paths by contacting us for further information. Our work has ongoing impacts of which we have no control. So there is a responsibility not only in the knowledge we gain, but in what we produce with it. That responsibility is even greater when we work with Indigenous peoples, the need to be *pono* more acute.

In these undertakings, we are “in the canoe,” steering a project through the time/space/people milieu. Working in concert with the participants, we are both mediating and producing information, interpretation, and representation of this place and these people. For its duration at least, we are all intersected by the project, traveling together for a time until the project comes to its conclusion. As project director, one takes the role of the navigator whose paramount responsibilities are not just for the project and its results, but also for managing the relations and participation of everyone and everything involved and seeing the journey safely and productively to a close. One doesn’t know, when setting off, which way the winds will blow, or how hard. One doesn’t know all the reefs, currents, and shoals to be navigated, and one will have to act in the moment. But when you place yourself in the manner of being *pono*, then those “chance” encounters become meaningful, even powerful.

The research project is a subjourney within one’s life voyage. It is a highly dynamic experience that, whether or not we work with it as such, will enhance our being in powerful ways. This *is* the spiritual path. If we recognize that and work with it, then we are engaging in our own *becoming* through the act of fieldwork. The more

we engage with this process consciously, the more we experience *becoming* during the course of our research. And we walk away from it changed. I am changed, they are changed, and the understanding of the place has been augmented. The place has spoken to me, taught me lessons. The participants have shared the lessons they have learned and perhaps come to see things in a new way through their encounter with me and my project. It may have them asking new questions of themselves or of this place, inasmuch as it has made me ask new questions of myself.

This is a lesson I have learned from my research with Indigenous peoples. But I would go further to say that in any endeavor, we are in the canoe. We participants come into it from our different trajectories; we are crewmates together to accomplish the goal, and then we move on—sometimes together, sometimes not. But it is how we are *Being*, as we do what we do, that is the most important matter of all. It may take a lifetime to become fully human, so best to work at it in every opportunity.

## Notes

1. This version of the story is derived from the Anishinaabe section of the “Our Universes” exhibit at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, and originates in consultation with Anishinaabe elders.
2. The site is online at [www.pacificworlds.com](http://www.pacificworlds.com). All aspects of it are free and noncommercial.
3. In Buddhism, the mind is the sixth sense, and its sense-objects are thoughts.

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