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WOMEN WRITING OCEANIA
WEAVING THE SAILS OF VAKA

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PROLOGUE

THE FIRST TASK FOR ANY PEOPLE is to survive. In the aftermath of Oceania's colonial history, one of the most critical challenges to survival is the preponderance of serious illness, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we find ourselves plagued by high rates of stress-related disease, such as cancer, cardiovascular disorders, alcoholism, drug abuse, obesity, diabetes, domestic violence, and mental illness, for example. As editors of the following collection of work by Oceanic women, we reaffirm our commitment to the belief in the importance of telling our stories, of joining our voices, as one necessary antidote to the residual toxins lingering in the neo/colonial present.

In our own specific contexts, as activist/scholars located in the "academy," we can personally attest to the physical and emotional toll exacted by the demands of multiple allegiances: to our ancestors, to our cultural and political communities, to our *aiga* and *'ohana*, to our sisters, to our countries, and to our profession. As Pacific Islanders, as indigenous women of color—as members of those woefully under represented minority groups in academics—we experience first hand every day the often overwhelming demands of such competing allegiances. Thus, in our specific social locations, we share in the lot of our larger cultural communities. We witness our peoples being overrepresented in prisons, destroyed by physical and social pathologies, buried at younger and younger ages. Thus, survival as Pacific Islanders in our historical moment remains an open question—definitely, a risky business.

In the process of working on "Women Writing Oceania," each of us has had occasion to experience first hand the daunting personal cost of our high-risk, high-stakes work in the world. While the collection was originally

intended to come out several years ago, publication had to be delayed significantly due to debilitating illnesses that beset us both en route: breast cancer in one instance, and in the other, immune disorders, injuries, and clinical depression. Thankfully, we are both on the mend now and deeply grateful for the loving kindness of family, friends and colleagues.

During that unscheduled interim, we were further reminded of the fragility of our lives and times by the loss of two giant figures in Oceania's intellectual life: Darlaine Mahealani Dudoit and Grace Mera Molisa. Therefore, it is with great *aloha* and *soifua tele lava* to each of them that we dedicate "Women Writing Oceania."

It is with profound gratitude to our ancestors, *atua*, and spiritual teachers that we have survived to (help) tell the tale.

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