NAKEM PEDAGOGY
(SOUL CONSCIOUSNESS)
AND
CONSTITUTIVE ELEMENTS OF NAKEM PRAXIS

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Dedication

To the Ilocos,
the land of my birth,
where my grandfather taught me how to ride
the gentle strength of the water buffalo.

To Kalihi,
the land where I learned to love
and be loved.
You have protected me all these years
and I am forever indebted to you.

To my Father,
who is enduring his trauma in the First World,
and always believed the Promised Land was the Philippines.

To my Mother,
who loaned her life,
suspended her dreams,
and dedicated every waking moment
to me and my sister.

To my sister,
for standing up for me,
crying for me,
hurting for me,
and never settling
in the dark abyss of depression.

For the poor and working class,
indigenous and (im)migrant
who struggle and resist
to speak their Language,
to reclaim their Body,
to return to their Land,
to find their Story.

For our Wandering Souls
come now,
this is your Home.
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Abstract

This dissertation develops a foundation for Nakem (Soul Consciousness) Pedagogy—a pedagogy centered on the use of stories and storytelling. By framing stories as empirical truths rather than anecdotal evidence I develop an educational methodology called Social Biography. Social Biography situates the individual/collective story as part of a social narrative and builds a critical framework that sees in the architecture of stories a political, economic, historical and social relational dimension.

Through a theoretical inquiry I trace the genealogy of thought that led up to my articulation of Social Biography as incorporated in Nakem Pedagogy. Popular (grassroots) education, Indigenous Studies, and Critical Pedagogy are the three disciplinary threads that make Nakem Pedagogy.

In addition, this dissertation develops a philosophical theory of the three constitutive elements that make up Nakem Praxis—Language, Body, and Land. In Language I indigenize and acculturate Christian Liberation Theology into Ilokano Indigenous cosmology. With language as the spiritual lens, I develop a theory of the Body as the locus of embedded story—as a “text” that allows us to read the world. Furthermore, like the Body, the Land as pedagogical space allows for stories to emerge and re-member it to our consciousness, while enlarging the walls of the classroom.

This pedagogical articulation challenges Western normative and institutionalized educational practices. The results of the Nakem Pedagogy create a more dynamic and organic educational process that incorporates the living component of one’s identity. Nakem Pedagogy, through the use of Social Biography, ultimately calls for an ethic of
relationality in our educational framework. Its aim is to restore an affirmative view of our identity with regard to our self-becoming and historical self-hood.
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Part I
Introduction to the Study and Social Biography

Part I consists of the introduction to the study and the methodology. Chapter one introduces the spirit and context that catalyzed my study and articulation of Nakem Pedagogy.

Chapter 2 is a theoretical inquiry into the genealogy of Social Biography, exploring in detail the theoretical strands that have informed my own practice and theory of education and pedagogy.

The intention for Part II is to provide a personal account of my own personal journey and political orientation and introduce the concept of story, storytelling and Social Biography.
Chapter 1
Introduction:
We Make The Story by Telling

Introduction: Locating My Body, Re-tracing My Social Biography

I grew up in constant movement. People going back and forth constantly searching for that elusive dream, hoping one day, life will be kind. I was born on the base of a mountain overlooking the dry and parched earth of the Ilocos. My first memory was riding on the back of a water buffalo while my grandfather, with his slick bolo knife and thick straw hat, would make our way deep into the Ilocos valleys. I remember the strength of the water buffalo carrying us with a certain ease, stopping when tired, drinking when thirsty, and leaving deep muddy hoof prints, as if to mark where we had come from.

My parents moved to Manila when I was one year old. No mountains or water buffalos; instead, train tracks and skyscrapers. We did not ride on them or go in them. Poverty does not allow you to touch—only see—at the most. Despite growing up 30 feet away from the train tracks, to this day I have never ridden a train. We ended up as squatters in Manila. My father banked on the promise that the Philippine government would grant him land for serving in the Philippine military—and he is still waiting. He was deployed to the war zones in Mindanao and my mother would make her way back to the Ilocos. As in my birth, my father was not present when my sister was born.

And so, we go back to where the mountains embraced me. As soon as my baby sister could walk, we moved back to that home along the railroad. My mother, after coming up with ways to make a peso or two, by selling vegetables and ice water, would soon come to the difficult decision of migrating to Hawai‘i. The dollar was more
handsome than the peso. She says there are diamonds in Hawai‘i. So, she packs her bags, tells my father to wait for our visas and then we will get to be with her.

After a year of absence a six-year-old boy does not know the difference between one or two or four years of not seeing his mother. Absence is also absence of time. She comes back waving the visas only for my sister and I. My father will have to wait. My mother brings us to Hawai‘i, she says two jobs does not make enough diamonds to hire a babysitter. She sends us back to the Philippines. My father is happy. My mother sends money to us while my young retired military father assumes all duties of a single parent.

In time, my mother returns with a visa for my father and soon after, all of us mother, sister and I would make that long trip to Hawai‘i—America. But being together means something different in America—it means you live near each other with never having to be with each other. My father would match my mother one job for another—four jobs together—and when my sister and I start working it is six jobs all together.

Fast forward to today.

My sister graduated college and is now living in Seattle. I, on the other hand, keep graduating from college. My father is retired. My mother will soon follow, but for now is still working—although only one and a half job. Happily-ever-after? Is this the “American Dream?”

When I look back at this painful journey, I realize now that I am not the only one with this story. Many other immigrants have similar experiences. Throughout my formal schooling, I never talked about this experience; perhaps because I was too busy learning about experiences other than my own. When I was in college I tried hard to forget about this experience, I even denied, for a long time, that I was born in the Philippines, denied
everything about growing up poor and working class. I never mentioned what jobs my mother and father had. I did not invite my friends to our cramped one bedroom place. I lied about everything, especially about myself. And now I realize I could not have told this story about my experience and myself. The reality was that I was embarrassed by my story. I thought that it would be heard in a condescending way/or not heard at all. However, the truth was that I did not understand myself, or myself in context. I did not have a frame to understand myself, and the complexity of my experience. I did not understand my story. I did not know I had a story.

However, the more I tell my story the more I begin to understand myself. Stories are not just stories; they are more than a retelling of “anecdotal” events. When stories are entwined with other stories and strung together, they make up narratives that shape and give meaning to our lives—past and present. In short, my/our lives become meaningful when we speak and begin to give an account. Yet, I/we have not been given many chances to tell stories that speak to our experiences. I realize now that I have been called many names in many kinds of stories: person of color, working class, (im)migrant, poor, squatter. Depending on the story, its time, and its place I am named: subaltern, third world, cyborg, oppressed, marginalized, subjugated, colonized, and slave.

Different names, similar experiences, often pathologized as “the problem” in need of being saved by a purportedly purer unsoiled self; and always being written about and objectified\(^1\). When do I/we get to tell my/our stories? What is the meaning of my/our stories? How do I/we find out the ‘truth’ about my/our stories? And what stories do we

\(^1\) The objectification are codified in film, educational policy and especially in master narratives.
tell about myself/ourselves when we do not know my/our stories? How do I/we tell a story affirmative of who we are and who we are not? Where do I/we begin?  

Whereas the tradition of western academic research begins with the written text (books, journal articles, etc.), Social Biography begins with our lives, our bodies, our traumas, our hopes and fears—our lived experiences. This is not to strip the power of the written text, rather we give our lived experiences an equal seat on the table of knowledge and wisdom—our world must sit next to the word. To use our lived experiences means we make visible, through our (embodied) stories, what we see and feel—in addition to what we read.

My study is premised on the idea that epistemologically, ontologically, theologically, and pedagogically, stories matter. In an effort to illuminate and draw out the significance of these four dimensions I turn to the concept of Social Biography. Social Biography is the theoretical frame in which I view stories. The concept of Social Biography has evolved throughout my experience working in various educational spaces. The following section is a re-tracing of my work in both grassroots education and formal education in the university that led to my articulation of Social Biography.

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2 My usage of “I” and “we”, “our”, “us” refers to the multiple identities/labels that I occupy. Throughout the dissertation I will often defer to “we”, “our”, “us” as my identification with groups that are immigrant, migrant, indigenous, working class/poor, and groups that are relegated to the margins. Though I realize that these groups carry specific social locations and variances of power and agency, I want to acknowledge that all have been subject to the forces of colonization, perhaps a product of the colonial encounter, and have been forced into silence, invisibility, and assimilation into mainstream culture. Moreover, all have not had many opportunities to tell their story in a manner that is dignified and not pathologized. My identification is largely a personal and political project to be one of many voices from these communities of struggle, but more important one of many voices bridging these communities to see the commonality of their struggle for liberation. I see the “I” as always being connected to the “we” as experiences of the community always affect the “I” and vice versa.
Represent to Witness and Critical Faith

I came to the concept of Social Biography during my study in the seminary in Berkeley, California. Through my involvement in a youth leadership program called Represent to Witness (R2W) run by a popular educator and student of the late Paulo Freire, Michael James\(^3\), in an organization dedicated to youth leadership development among Asian and Pacific Islander (API), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ), indigenous, and working class youth. The youth leadership program was made up of young people-of-color from all over the United States—mainly from Hawai‘i, Texas, California, New York, and Washington State. For about two and a half years, I was immersed in a transformative way of learning and teaching that engaged both the body and soul. By nature of being housed in a seminary, Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, the spiritual milieu of the place and the faith traditions of the youth and leaders brought out a constant engagement with the participants’ faith/spiritual/wisdom traditions. Michael James developed a methodology called Critical Faith, an incorporation of liberation pedagogy, popular education with faith-based traditions\(^4\). Discussions of faith were situated in issues such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and language and always in the context of colonization and imperialism. Here, the use of Social Biography, as an element of Critical Faith, challenged assumed “truths” that participants held deeply. The sharing and witnessing of each other’s Social Biography...

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\(^3\) For a quick overview of his Michale James' work see his website: [http://mjcriticalteaching.blogspot.com/](http://mjcriticalteaching.blogspot.com/)

described and exposed underlying colonial potencies that shaped the participants life. Stories become a apparatus for social critique. I saw, for the first time, the use of faith traditions as a form of emancipation and decolonization. I saw, for the first time, the use of stories, personal and collective, as a vehicle for social change.

*Rise Up! Roots of Liberation*

After returning from the seminary in Berkeley, I was hired by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) Hawai‘i Program Committee (currently organization is known as Hawai‘i, Peace and Justice: Nā Pua Hoʻāla i ka Pono – "The flowers/youth rising in peace and justice") to run a youth program, *Rise Up! Roots of Liberation,* mainly comprised of Filipino, Japanese and Native Hawaiian youth. Here, I was able to develop what I learned through R2W and localized the curriculum and pedagogy that was used in Berkeley. With the majority of students coming from Native Hawaiian charter schools, the curriculum and pedagogy I used from R2W was indigenized to incorporate indigenous epistemologies and worldviews. While Michael James’ educational team was comprised of artists and educators coming from faith based traditions, the team that I worked with in *Rise Up!* was comprised of civil and indigenous rights activists who advocated for a demilitarization of the Hawaiian Islands; some were union organizers, women’s rights advocates, and others were part of the Protect Kahoolawe ‘Ohana (PKO). Being around these complex political orientations gave me an understanding of the multi-faceted issues that faced Hawaiʻi. The pedagogy for this particular program was infused with activist and more overt political orientations. Through this experience I took away
a profound understanding of how much the ‘Āina (“that which feeds”) is a source of knowledge and the impact it has on indigenous way of relationality.

(Un)bounded Classrooms

After doing popular education among youth in the Bay Area and Hawai‘i, I was hired to teach in the Ilokano Language Program at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) during my graduate program in Asian Studies. There, I began to teach in a more formal classroom setting and all the formalities took over me.

The syllabus functioned like a contract. If it is not written, it does not have to be followed. Short, compact, linear and repetitive learning governed the classroom. Make sure your grading is clear. No talk of spirit. No mention of G-d or the Sacred. The Professor knows best. S/he is the teacher that teaches. Students sit and listen. It is all about the grades! Extra credit, yes please! Happy students = good evaluations. No complaints, no lawsuits. Semester done. Repeat.

All lectures point to what will be on the test and students meticulously write every word verbatim. Stories, whenever I used them, are viewed with ambivalence: “Will it be on the test?” is the enduring question I am asked.

Educational institutions shape the ethos of the classroom. The seats are lined up in straight rows and columns, facing the chalkboard, where the teacher will pontificate. Bodies, too, are structured—students face forward, their backs are the only visible thing to each other, all the while the teacher sees all the faces—in one policing glance and panoptical posture.

The architecture of the classroom is built so the teacher and student do not see each other in a meaningful relationality—a pedagogy of apartheid: teacher/student,
head/soul, theory/experience—binaries, boundaries, and borders shape the knowledge and relationship (re)produced in the classroom. When is education a form of degradation? Under what condition does it destroy our curiosity for learning, for each other?

My soul was shrinking and I strongly believed the souls of my students were shrinking as well. In an effort to recapture what I gained from (or what I saw transpire in) my Berkeley and AFSC experience working with youth, I decided to “unbound the classroom” and the formalized syllabus. I turned to Social Biography and made stories central. I restructured the classroom so that it would revolve around the stories of the students—stories of their homes, parents, peoples—then we told stories in their homes, with their parents, in front of their peoples. In telling their stories, the students cried, laughed, got angry and scared, and became frustrated. I began to see that the students who initially complained about a two and a half hour class for once a week would stay for a couple more hours to talk-story and discuss the meaning of what they learned after class. This noticeable shift from detachment to a search for interconnectedness is what I call nakem—soul consciousness. In essence, the stories catalyzed nakem and Nakem Pedagogy was born.

What is Nakem and Soul-Consciousness?

Nakem is an indigenous Ilokano word that has a myriad of meanings depending on how one uses it. Loosely, it can be translated as habit, manners, or feelings. However, in the context of this study and pedagogical project I define it as soul-consciousness. I do not intend to enter into a religious, philosophical or metaphysical
discourse on the nature and substance of the soul, rather I will use, in part, the definition
Rachel Kessler uses for soul in her work in education:

I use the word soul...to call for attention in schools to inner life; to the
depth dimension of human experience; to students’ longings for something
more than an ordinary, material, and fragmented existence.5

I add to Rachel Kessler’s definition of soul and include in the “depth dimension of human
experience” a call for the use of one’s stories as rooted through the body, routed through
genealogical ancestry and always tied to the Land that one was born in and/or currently
call as home. The soul in the indigenous Ilokano sense is the knowledge that consciously
and unconsciously animates and mitigates our understanding of ourselves and the
world.6 The Ilokano Language scholar, Aurelio Agcaoili, in his Ilokano dictionary
defines nakem five different ways:

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6 I want to make explicit my multi-layered use of “our”, “we”, “us” and other inclusive pronouns in this dissertation. The “our”, “we”, “us” refers to people/communities who occupy/share similar social locations with regard to an identity that has been marginalized, excluded, silenced, displaced, and continually resist and struggle for an affirmative identity in the educational process. Consequently, this study is intended for the people who share this identity of struggle. However, even as I construct this framework I also intended for those who cannot identify to the “we” to feel a relational connection—to feel even for a moment the possibility of the “Other” as “I” or “We” as “me”. Thus, my study does not revolve around the centrality of my being Ilokano/Filipino and other identities. Rather, my being Ilokano/Filipino, in certain instances of this study, as a vehicle in examining similar ontological oppressions. In other words, the ontological nature of being from the “margins” does not exclusively reside in the Ilokano or any other identity group. Rather it is the condition of marginality that is the shared ontology that allows for the usage of “we.” In the context of the historical and colonial usage of “we” as homogenizing and (mis)representing particular groups (often situated against a colonial hierarchy) my attempt to use “we” and other inclusive pronouns is to be able to relate and never to appropriate the struggles of identity. In doing so, I render this study as a praxis of seeing ourselves as the “subject” rather than an “object” of study. In the end, when I use “we” I only mean to “speak to” and “speak
nakem (1) 1. A critical consciousness 2. a moral standard among Ilokanos 3. the measure of one’s person 5. the core of one’s being.


nakem (3) 1. free will 2. will 3. determination 4. a divine plan

nakem (4) 1. an idea 2. a thought 3. a reflection 4. an opinion 5. a point of view 6. a belief

nakem (5) 1. prudence 2. the quality of having a sound judgment 3. the quality of having discretion 4. the quality of being reasonable 5. the quality of having maturity in evaluating things 6. the quality of having discretion.7

Indeed, nakem is all of the above and more. To use our nakem, soul-consciousness, means that we summon the totality of our being, including summoning not only our personal and immediate experiences but also our ancestors’ experiences—for our “measure”, “core, “wisdom”, “knowledge” and various qualities of our being is always rooted in our ancestral genealogy. To use nakem in our pedagogy is to bring into the process of education this “critical consciousness” that is informed by our ontology, epistemology and cosmology.

Statement of the Problem

Our soul shrinks in the classroom. Isolated, alone, and partitioned-off from each other our souls shrink when the four walls of the classroom do not allow us to speak to and hear each other. Our souls have the capacity to knock down or speak back to the four walls of the classroom, asking them their secrets and insights, only if we are able to reimagine what the walls can be for the community of learners.

from” this shared space/identity of struggle. I leave to the reader to decide ones’ relationality to the “we” and ones’ subjectivity to the study.

Here, I use walls in two different ways. In one sense, walls can function as an artificial boundary that separate us from communities, our environments, our connectedness and our ability to seek knowledge that can nurture life. In this sense, walls become those barriers that box us in from the larger world and at the same time isolate us from one another. These walls limit our understanding of ourselves while perpetuating and promoting “knowledge” from a singular space, separating the academic from the personal, theory from experience, spiritual from secular, anecdotal from empirical. The walls in this narrow definition become a fatalistic limitation.

In another sense, the four walls of the classroom can be imagined as the dynamic environment we live in—society at large. Walls in this sense represent the limitations of how far we can go and possibilities of the space we can transcend. Walls become the liminal space where we can discern where we are and where we want to go.

This dialogical relationship between our soul and the four walls can only happen when we can imagine the walls to be a container for learning and not an incarceration for domesticating the community of learners. Thus, walls ought to be always moving, inclusive and expansive but always a place in which the soul and the process of education make the self educable—the walls must be re-imagined as our home, the streets, the Land and Ocean, popular culture, the near and far, the now and then. Walls, in a liberatory sense, are seen as an invitation to transgress ones immediate limitation—a liminal space of possibility.

Here, Nakem Pedagogy or a pedagogy of soul-consciousness could articulate and make audible the wounds that our bodies carry that are often hidden or suppressed in the classroom space. It could give insight to our experiences within colonial structures and
how they can be transformed. In addition, it introduces and encourages the indigeneity of the students to become manifest in the classroom and thereby affecting curriculum.

In the time of this writing, which is a time of budget cuts, standardized curricula, testing based on common core standards are becoming the dominant practice of educational institutions. State-sponsored curriculum and textbooks are the students’ primary instruments for learning in the K-12 educational arena. In higher education, though there are not any state-sponsored curricula, there are “cannons” or “classics” that are hailed and given the performatory function with similar hegemonic scope. These texts are the primary instrument, codified in the holy syllabus and programitized in the sacred (or profane) curriculum. The answers to the test point toward the textbook. Because the “answer” is in the textbook, it creates a dangerous equivocation that the source of knowledge is found only in the textbook. Textbooks become an entrapment of learning and teaching—limiting the epistemological possibilities of understanding knowledge and the reality perceived.

We need to reimagine and resignify textbooks in multiple ways. When textbooks are reimagined, it can become a source of emancipatory site for learning. If we imagine textbooks simply as a container of knowledge, bounded in a single space, read and recited, though not necessarily in printed form, then it does not preclude us in seeing our soul as a textbook. Our soul carries in itself stories of ourselves and stories of how we perceive the world. These stories illuminate our experiences and inform and instruct us in navigating the world—these stories are also the basis of knowledge. Our stories as (unwritten) text, bounded together by our soul, become a textbook.
Nakem Pedagogy believes in the notion that the primary textbook that ought to be used in class is our soul. When we can conceive of the maxim: “everything we need to know we already know but we just do not know it yet” as true then all the (written) text in the traditional textbooks become equal to the text (story) embedded in our souls. It is not to say that the written word (books, articles, and scholarly materials) is valued less, rather the written words becomes deeper when it is situated in the lived experiences and immediate context of the world of the student/learner—only when there is a dialogical relationship between the written text and the text of the soul can a liberative and emancipatory education happen.

Nakem Pedagogy seeks to bring out, through our stories, the textuality of our soul—allowing us to engage the pages of our life and read the story that we carry in our soul. A pedagogy of soul consciousness makes center the reading of the story embedded in our bodies. The stories that reside in the soul, intersected and interwoven, become the foundation of a literacy/understanding of the soul.

When we can begin to learn through telling our own story and hearing the stories of others past and present experiences we can re-signify those stories that have shaped and molded us into who we did not want to be and to transform these stories in such a way that affirms who we want to become. Or rather, we re-write and flip the script of the stories that have forced our souls to recite and inherit the story of the oppressors—in other words, we do not allow our stories to be a source of oppression—rather, our stories become a source of emancipation.

Because we become the stories that we tell it matters what story is told of ourselves. If we hold stories that always see ourselves as a pathology—“lazy”,

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“uneducated”, “savage”, “slave”, “colonized”—then our soul essentially becomes lazy, uneducated, savage, slave and colonized. Stories have the power to write, mark, cut, severe and fragment our soul. Stories via Social Biography help us to see that our souls are written and offer a vehicle to re-write, flip, reclaim, decolonize, the colonial experiences we have inherited and kept us fragmented from ourselves and each other. Stories framed through Social Biography have two interwoven capacities—it allows us to expose the depth of the soul wound and allows us to rewrite the stories that have limited our self.

However, in order for our souls to become mended (as oppose to fragmented) and our stories as a source of emancipatory wisdom, we need to understand the context that forced our souls in exilic silence and schizophrenic identity—that is to say, our souls have gone through potent, traumatic, social and political forces that have adversely affected the way we learn, understand ourselves and construe the world we live in.

This force, namely, is the brutal encounter of colonization and the continued hegemonic instruments (vis-à-vis educational systems—schooling) that serves to sustain a colonized and fragmented self. Because the schooling process has largely been one of the primary tools used by the process of colonization the classroom has been a site that has reinforced and privileged colonial values and narratives of domination/subordination. As a result, students are indoctrinated into a curriculum of assimilation and inherited an ontology of absence and fragmentation.

The soul, self, and ontology, though different and distinct, are inseparable and interrelated. I cannot see a fragmented self with a whole soul and ontology. Neither do I see a fragmented ontology that can result in a non-fragmented self and soul.
Furthermore, a malnourished soul is a result of a fragmented self and ontology. Because of all three are inseparable, all three I use interchangeably.

In my experience teaching classes in *Philippine Popular Culture, Philippine Literature, Community and Culture in Education, Philippine Cultural Mapping in Hawai‘i* at the University as well as conducting popular education in various communities in Hawai‘i and California, I have witnessed many of my students, when asked to speak about why their parents or grandparents moved to Hawai‘i and the United States (majority of my students are between first and third generation), will reiterate the institutionalized myth of the material promise of the “American Dream.” They consistently make reference to the Philippines as a place of “suffering”, “backwardness”, and a place that one should leave in order to live a “better life.” In their view, America is where dreams come true and the Philippines is where nightmares are born. In fairness, they do not have the tools to consider their colonial pedagogical inculcation. What forces shape or give credence to this recurring imaginary of America and the Philippines? How can Nakem Pedagogy challenge and disrupt this perennial view? Given this entrenched view, I situate Nakem Pedagogy and the current educational milieu in a neo-postcolonial context. That is, we are living in a reality that has to a certain extent shed the formality of colonialism and slipped into a more sophisticated arena of psychic and somatic enslavement and linguistic manipulation—colonial relationships have moved from feudalism to capitalism, master/slave to producer/consumer, and imperialism to globalization.

Students and teachers who want to teach and learn with a liberatory trajectory must be aware of the reality that has shaped their traumas and experiences, both
individual and collective, and challenge spaces that perpetuate and sustain its violent existence. In doing so, we will be able to name structures, systems, and narratives that is sustaining our fragmented soul and identity. In turn, we will be able to remember or at least conceive of a past for/of our self/soul that was not colonized—consequently it will give us hope for an ontology that is not constructed on the ideals of a colonial imagination. In the final analysis, a soul-consciousness pedagogy will have profoundly re-oriented education as a practice of self-becoming and a reclamation and realization of ones historical-selfhood.

Nakem Pedagogy in its visions towards a liberatory education pushes the pedagogical boundaries to account for the use of stories and our soul-consciousness. The research questions below attempt to focus on the use of stories framed through Social Biography with particular attention to the theorization of Language, Body and Land as significant elements of Nakem Pedagogy.
Research Guide Questions:

1. How does using stories facilitate a student's understanding of the world and their context?\(^8\)

2. What is the significance of understanding stories through the frame of Social Biography?

3. How does using soul-consciousness (nakem) pedagogy affirm our identity with respect to our *Language, Body, Land*?\(^9\)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to develop a foundation for Nakem Pedagogy (soul-consciousness pedagogy) and to develop a philosophical theory (a set of ideas and/or beliefs) of the three constitutive elements that make up Nakem Praxis—Language, Body, and Land. Because my articulations of Nakem Pedagogy is linked to my vocation in rendering a voice for communities of struggle (whom reside in the margins of educational discourse) present in educational spaces this study and pedagogical articulation gives a theoretical basis of the work that I have done in both grassroots and academic spaces.

For many years, I relied only on my “feelings” with regard to the importance of the

\(^8\) Here I use “facilitate” not in a curricular, instructive, or directive sense but an ontological and epistemological sense. Stories facilitate or rather become the vehicle in which students are able to grasp their own existential being in navigating the world and their context. In addition, I use “student” as a category for anyone who is part of a space in the educational process. Student, in this case, can mean both the traditional pupil in formal institutions of learning (K-12 school, university) and also someone who is in a non-formal, non-state sponsored place of learning (popular education, adult education, martial arts classroom). The category of student applies to anyone who is in learning space with usually a “teacher” who leads but does not dominate/subjugate the community of learners.

\(^9\) My discussion and articulations of “pedagogy” has to do more with the philosophy of learning and teaching and less to do with curriculum, instruction, or formulaic activities and practices. Pedagogy in this project is limited to the theorization of the epistemological and ontological dimensions of learning and teaching specifically within the themes of Language, Body, and Land.
constitutive elements in Nakem Pedagogy. This study is an opportunity to translate these “feelings” into a pedagogy that gives credence to communities/educators that see Language, Body, and Land as an epistemological necessity in using nakem, soul consciousness, in educational praxis.¹⁰

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lays in articulating a new pedagogy of soul-consciousness that has been piloted through my work in the community and the university for the past 10 years. In addition, weaving together various conceptual, philosophical, theological and theoretical lines of thought to create a framework for understanding stories—Social Biography—pushes further the profundity of personal and collective experiences in shaping the process of consciousness raising.

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¹⁰ Because of the fetish of pedagogies in the educational marketplace the risk of a pedagogy that developed in the “Margins” is always at the risk of being appropriated—de-territorialized and dis-embodied from the very ground and people in which it emerged. This appropriation may be in the desire for its portability, that is, to be packaged and shipped to another place and to be consumed by anyone and everyone, especially by those in the Center. This phenomenon of consumption of educational methods and pedagogies has the potential to reduce Nakem Pedagogy to a “fad”, “fashion”, “trend” and become part of the “Pedagogy Olympics.” At the risk of sounding exclusionary, Nakem Pedagogy cannot simply be packaged and picked up like an instructional booklet of Aikido (Japanese martial arts) and be practiced. Like Aikido, one needs to witness and participate, in body and soul, the transformative aspects of Nakem Pedagogy. Moreover, the community of learners who practice Nakem Pedagogy must see themselves as part of a larger movement that takes their Language, Body, and Land as political act in the milieu of neoliberalism. Therefore, Nakem Pedagogy cannot be practiced in the Center for the Center, although it can insinuate itself and claim a space in the Center. It is similar to the historical role that Ethnic Studies, Women Studies, Indigenous Studies, and API languages, Educational Foundations have played in the University—they all claimed territory for a particular people advocating for a particular ideological and linguistic space.
Nakem Pedagogy seeks to make central the concept of soul-consciousness in the educational process. The result in, learning and teaching, in both formal (university) and non-formal (community) settings must incorporate the cultural, social, religious, and spiritual dimensions of the student and teacher. In doing so, the boundaries of secular and non-secular, community and university, personal and collective, become intentionally blurred, forcing us to learn in relationality, with in/tension to the spirituality of education.

Significantly, Nakem Pedagogy advances knowledge production in its intentions to weave together Critical Pedagogy, Liberation Theology and Indigenous Studies. This interlaced attempt addresses, in part, the lack in current institutional disciplinary knowledge—curriculum and foundations—and thus envisions new educational horizons where stories wielded as empirical tools in challenging and shaping the world we live in.

Scopes and Limitation:

My articulation of Nakem Pedagogy is limited to my experiences in working with largely Native Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Islander (particularly Filipino, Samoan, Tongan) and African American, particular coming from poor and working class, (im)migrant high school and college age youth in Hawai‘i and California. These teaching spaces in which I was able to develop this pedagogy materialized both in the university, seminary and larger public community setting in Hawai‘i and California.

This pedagogy is only a genesis of an articulation of an emerging pedagogical practice; therefore I situate my study as foundational and not as a definitive approach to a soul-consciousness based pedagogy. These constitutive elements outlined is what emerged in my own practice with respect to the Land of Hawai‘i, California and the
Philippines. My work is open to a subtraction or addition of these constitutive elements depending on where it is practiced and who it is in practice with.

A Nakem Pedagogy rests on the practitioners own social location, meaning their nakem (soul consciousness) has its own particularities—soul wounds, language, desires, hopes—these particularities shape the limitations and possibilities. Moreover, Nakem Pedagogy is shaped by the ethos of the particular land (Hawai‘i, California, Philippines) in which it is was born and practiced in. In the final analysis, my work as described earlier is but one iteration of a soul-consciousness pedagogy.

I limit my study to the articulation of Social Biography as a framework and the constitutive elements of an emerging pedagogical praxis. Moreover, in the pedagogy that I develop I intentionally do not give a prescriptive and formulaic account of learning and teaching, rather it is limited to my articulation of the theory and philosophy of using the Language, Body and the Land as part of the process of a soul conscious education. In other words, examples of “things to do” and “how to do” matters that are usually found in curricular and programmatic activities and workbooks are not part of this project. Instead, I hope to give an account of the multiple meanings that undergirds the use of Language, Body, and Land in a soul consciousness pedagogy. Simply, the dissertation tackles not the educational method or practical techniques of a pedagogy but what the pedagogy entails as far as the philosophical, ontological and epistemological nature of using the Language, Body and Land, centered on Social Biography, with the intention of developing an educational praxis.\footnote{In this dissertation, the model of the philosophical articulation of Nakem Pedagogy and its educational philosophy within the field of critical pedagogy follows and is inspired by the works of Paulo Freire and other grassroots/popular/critical...}
Positions and Intentions

spaces away from K-12 and higher education—they are, in my experience, teachers who have created popular and guerilla-types of spaces in specific communities—Third World, working poor, women, indigenous, (im)migrant, and queer—where the students complex identity and geographic home are the site of learning. As such, the nature of guerilla-type of teaching and learning is that it pops up here and there, often on “soft” money through grants administered by various non-profits and at other times operates on zero budget, and sustained only by the spirit of the community of learners. These spaces are rarely supported by/in K-12 and institutions of higher education probably due to their political trajectory, namely their intention of challenging institutional structures that promote and reinforce, consciously and unconsciously, oppression. However, even as my educational pedagogical methodology has been shaped by the ethos of guerilla learning and popular/liberatory education, I cannot concede spaces of public education and institutions of higher education as only for the middle class, and elite/ruling class of society. Popular education and its trajectory for liberative and emancipatory education should not be seen in opposition to state sponsored education. In fact, state sponsored education, in order to fulfill its mission of providing access to the masses, must and need to incorporate the creative and life affirming educational elements found in popular/liberatory education. Only in this way can we conceive of education not only as a site of learning but healing and restorative justice as well.

I imagine education as a site of healing because it is a space in which we can tackle the complicated questions that deal with our own suffering—psychological, emotional, bodily, spiritual, social, and historical. When the goal of healing is integrated in the process of education the learning outcomes moves away from regurgitated
knowledge to a living wisdom that allows us to re-spect each other—to see each other again and again and assume that we are always evolving—subject to change—and allow for each voice to democratically shape the society we live in.

I want to make explicit my pre-occupation, position and intention in endeavoring to create Nakem Pedagogy and pedagogies that nurture the soul: It is for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. In the manner of Liberation Theology as articulated by the liberation theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid, I use ‘poor’ not only as an economic term but as the “site of marginalization” and “oppressed” as a “site of struggle” and “struggle for justice in their communities…of denunciation and/or annunciation of alternative ways of being communities and societies.” It is my hope that Nakem Pedagogy can bring about an education that heals both our historical and present trauma, and provokes and evokes a militant affirmation of life, and in doing so, bring down the walls of apartheid that separate formal and informal, institutional and popular, secular and spiritual, indigenous and (im)migrant education—in the final analysis, Nakem Pedagogy is a way for a community of learners, particularly communities who are dare to struggle to free themselves from the mechanism of oppression, to see education as a practice for social transformation towards a relational ethic of being and being in the world.

Organization of Study

Part I, Introducing Social Biography, of the dissertation consist of chapter one and two. In chapter one I introduce the project using a piece of my Social Biography. Here I start from my personal journey and introduce my positionality and intention for the

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overall project. In chapter two I employ a theoretical inquiry as part of the methodology and literature review. I draw the theoretical genealogy that is most pertinent to the creation of Nakem Pedagogy.

Part II, Constitutive Elements of Nakem Praxis, is the “thickest” part of the dissertation. It is the theorization of the articulation of the three constitutive elements of Nakem Praxis. Chapter three speaks to the necessity of using and developing a language of spirituality in educational practice. In the context and experiences of the community that I have worked in I develop Nakem Theology of Liberation as the language of spirituality in Nakem Pedagogy. I explore this spiritual language and draw out both its Western and Indigenous roots and routes.

Chapter four draws on the discourse of Social Biography in order to tease out the Body as a site of meaning-making and knowledge production. Here, I use three separate but interrelated vignettes of my own Social Biography in order to demonstrate the relationality of my body/story with the meta-narratives that we live in/by. I theorize my body/story and transition to the use of Social Biography in order to understand its social, political, historical and economic dimensions.

Chapter five is the third constitutive element that makes center the Land. I claim that the Body is always related to the Land on which its stands on. We cannot understand the Body if we do not understand the Land. The Social Biography of the Body is always connected to the Social Biography of the Land. I explore various epistemologies from Indigenous/Native/Aboriginal peoples who have developed relationality with the Land. I highlight two different schools in Japan and Hawai‘i that use Land based pedagogy to illustrate different usages of the Land in curricular and pedagogical philosophy. In the
end I attempt to articulate the necessity of developing a pedagogical ethic that sees the Land as vital to a pedagogy of soul consciousness.

Part III, *A Praxis of Soul Consciousness* of the dissertation consist of the last chapter. Chapter six is the animation of the three constitutive elements into a pedagogical praxis of soul consciousness. I weave together the elements and provide vignettes of the pedagogy in action in the community and university. These stories will provide an entry into the heart of the Nakem Pedagogy and Praxis.
Chapter 2
Methodology/Literature Review:
Theoretical Tapestry of Social Biography

Methodology/ Literature Review
Interdisciplinary Theoretical Inquiry and Social Praxis

The method I use in this study is an interdisciplinary theoretical inquiry, weaving threads from critical pedagogy, liberation theology, and indigenous studies. I examine various theoretical threads that explore, directly and indirectly, the broad theme of education, theology and indigeneity—especially the use of stories/story-telling, the body, and the land in education. From this multi-thread inquiry I synthesize my findings to develop a theoretical framework I call Social Biography. What I intend for this methodology section is to highlight the theoretical threads from Critical Pedagogy, Liberation Theology, and Indigenous Studies in order to better grasp the genealogy of Social Biography.

What follows below is a retracing of critical pedagogy, Freirian pedagogy, and grassroots/liberation pedagogy as articulated by community educator Michael James. In addition, I briefly introduce Ilokano Indigenous Liberation Theology as the guiding critical language and spirit of Social Biography. These threads make up the most pertinent component of Social Biography. In chapter three I will discuss the language of spirituality more in depth as one of the constitutive elements in Nakem Praxis.

Genealogy of Social Biography

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy traces itself to Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School was housed under the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt in 1923
to “challenge the traditional forms of rationality” and was motivated by “an underlying commitment to the notion that the theory, as well as practice, must inform the work of those who seek to transform the oppressive conditions of the world.”¹ The institute fell under the direction of Max Horkeimer in 1930. Among the thinkers that significantly developed critical social theory was Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse, and more recently Jürgen Habermas.²

Educational scholar Michael Peters identifies several key characteristics that shape the limitations and possibilities of critical pedagogy: a wariness of the metanarrative; critique of the “single subject”; and the use of multiple theoretical resources in educational theory.³ Peter’s articulation of critical pedagogy is to enter into educational spaces like schools and classrooms and challenge hegemonic narratives that shape the educational process. Peters opens up critical pedagogy to address the subject, or rather “disappearing subject”. Critical pedagogy tackles meta-narratives by deconstructing cultures in formal and informal educational spaces.

Colin Lankshear expands on Peter’s survey of critical pedagogy by using counternarratives as political mobilization. Lankshear sees counternarratives as spaces where the agency of subjects are asserted in order to engage and challenge hegemonic epistemologies, thereby dislodging the subsuming power of structures and categories that stifle the individual or collective into a mere category or static identity. Critical

² Ibid.
pedagogy becomes also a militant force in critiquing spaces that promote a culture of homogeneity.⁴

Critical pedagogy as a field of study maintains porous boundaries and open possibilities. John Algot Nasstrom in his tracing of popular education examines two philosophical approaches of education: the liberal-humanist stance “essentially a process leading to understanding, which is a quality of critical awareness”⁵ and the more grassroots and community education for social change led by educational thinkers like Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire.⁶ These two strands create tensions that do not contradict but rather work in unison due to their larger vision of problematizing the construction of the individual in society. The two strands— theoretical and practical application— can also be traced through scholars like Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux and Michael Peters and popular educators Ivan Illich, Paulo Freire and John Algot Nasstrom.⁷

Though not the only popular educator to both engage the theoretical and practical application of critical pedagogy\textsuperscript{8}. To a significant extent Paulo Freire bridged and built a praxis that is founded on a non-binary prescriptions of educational subjects: theory/praxis, student/teacher, and content/method. For Freire learning and knowing is in part challenging structures of domination that impose hegemonic values and metanarratives that hinder the subject from growing in the world:

Knowing, whatever its level, is not the act by which a Subject transformed into an object, docilely and passively accepts the contents others give or impose on him or her. Knowledge, on the contrary, necessitates the curious presence of Subjects confronted with the world. It requires their transforming action on reality. It demands a constant searching. It implies invention and re-invention. It claims from each person a critical reflection on the very act of knowing.\textsuperscript{9}

Freire advocates against ‘banking education,’ a process that negates the wisdom and experience of the student and instead assumes that a depositing of the teachers knowledge of the material should constitute the educational process. In this situation, the teacher and student act as oppositional and dependent binaries. In addition, Freire pushes educational structures to be co-creative of knowledge and fostering of the student and teacher to realize their own power and agency for a liberative transformation of society. Freire’s remarks are worth quoting at length:

Indeed, the interest of the oppressors lie in “changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them”; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of “welfare recipients.” They are treated as individual cases, as marginal persona who deviate from the general


\textsuperscript{9} Freire, \textit{Education for Critical Consciousness}, 100-101.
configuration of a “good, organized and just” society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these “incompetent and lazy” folks to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginal need to be “integrated,” “incorporated” into the healthy society that they have “forsaken.

The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not “marginal,” are not people living “outside” society. They have always been “inside”—inside the structure which made them “beings for others.” The solution is not to “integrate” them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become “beings for themselves.” Such transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors’ purposes; hence their utilization of the banking concept of education to avoid the threat of student conscientização.¹⁰

Indeed, Freire integrated a critical approach in his literacy programs to teach not only content but develop the ontological capacity to learn from ones own contexts inside the structure of society. It is the context of the student that provided the curriculum for consciousness raising. At the same time, it is where the student is able to command, with a dialogical approach, and affirm the knowledge that he or she developed in those very conditions that dehumanize and humanize their being.

As a student of Paulo Freire, grassroots educator Michael James was able to integrate critical pedagogy with liberation theology into a methodology called Critical Faith. James grew out of a very spiritual background with his African American father and Japanese American mother in the working class neighborhoods of San Francisco. James describes his life in San Francisco and explicitly describes his politicization:

As a neighborhood child I was fascinated and intrigued by the complexity of adult conversations around our kitchen table, on our stoop, on the street corner. These folks—mostly working people with more informal than formal education—debated, instructed, and reflected deeply on life, work, culture and the issues of the day. They reported the news to each other, about events out of Birmingham, Delano, and DC. They editorialized

¹⁰ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 75.
about the Marshall Plan and the GI Bill; they reviewed *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *Kind of Blue*. They developed a grassroots discourse about history, politics, spirituality, and culture. Their dignity and intelligence contradicted the shabbiness of our flats and possessions.

Like many young people during those years, I was inspired by the skill and depth of folks like John Coltrane, Maya Angelou, and Cesar Chavez. I was particularly intrigued by the respect they commanded from people of power and privilege.

All of this taught me that working class people, despite our lack of means, possessed moral, intellectual, and aesthetic depth. Moreover, we had a unique vantage point from which we could critically analyze society—from our location on the rough edges of its contradictions.\(^\text{11}\)

For James, a discussion of oppression cannot exclude discussions of faith, imperialism and colonization. James’ works primarily deals with Asian and Pacific Island communities in predominantly working class and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered communities. While Critical Faith as a methodology includes many components I want to focus specifically on the element of *Social Biography*.\(^\text{12}\) In Michael Campos’ study of Michael James Critical Faith, more specifically Social Biography he describes as:

As a teaching/learning practice, critical faith encourages participants to question, analyze, respect personal experience/knowledge, study major social issues, and develop faith/spirituality and witness. At each gathering, R2W opens with a “check-in,” i.e., self-introductory practices that name each participant’s concern for the day. These “check-ins” are demarcated by shared “accords” that nurture and problematize or individual stories, defining a habitus akin to liturgical thresholds—liminal moments where time, space and encounters are differentiated from the every day. As trust increases and personal check-ins deepen, the political, economic, religious, historical and colonial forces at play in participants’ lives are

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exposed. This is most apparent in “life mapping” activities that encourage participants to mark significant life events alongside historical moments in their communities. In these practices, individual narratives emerge from the broader political, religious and economic webs that enwrap a people’s experience. The weaving of individual and social histories invites participants to find resonance across diverse contexts. Individual narratives thus become social biographies, the interwoven discourse of the whole. For James, social biographies evoke the retrieval—not the mere affirmation—of individual agency. This simultaneous gesture of learning (from another) and unlearning (one’s assumptions) constitutes the practice conscientização that Paulo Freire describes as necessary for humanization.  

Campos in his analysis of Social Biography adds:

As a strategy for self-naming, social biographies re-codify—and thus subvert—hegemonic values that structure API life. Among R2W’s newcomers, for example, the label “working class” evokes an ambivalent relationship to the broader socio-economic system of North American life. To identify as working class assumes a “failure” to adequately assimilate/buy into the American dream. It is a marker of exclusion and marginalization. As participants learn to articulate their social biographies, however, they reorient the potency of a “working class” identity from that of an “outsider” to one committed to political engagement and transformation. To be working class lends one a critical perspective for social activism.

The central idea to Social Biography is to tell ones story as a form of knowledge and legitimated experiences. The act of Social Biography is to affirm and see one’s story as a “text” to be held sacred and read as a “scripture” for social transformation. The process of telling one’s story is to affirm the agency of the individual and realize his/her own historical self-hood. Their story as texts is meant to be a critique of society and a critique of themselves, rather a dialectical approach to understanding complex issues that have

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13 See Michael Campos
14 Ibid., 4.
arisen from their personal experiences. Michael James succinctly defines *Social Biography* as:

*The social context of my life and my life as a transformer of the social context.* An ongoing inquiry and construction of the narrative of one’s experience and identity as an individual and member of social groups. It has multiple values: it generates themes and codifications; it is also a process in which each person learns to represent her or his story as a person in social, political, economic, historical, and spiritual context; it challenges one to research their ethnic heritage/ consider gender experience/ affirm sexual orientation/ understand class experience/ etc.\(^\text{15}\)

As Social Biography becomes more complex it takes on nuanced social dimensions of the phenomena: Social, economic, historical, and spiritual. One’s story becomes situated in terms of analyzing, where implicitly and explicitly, the power structures that generated one’s experiences. The transformative power lies in the person to affirm and then to re-claim his or herself not as a pathology of oppression but an agent capable of changing and being conscious of one’s life context.

A new wave of scholars and community activists have added a more layered critique to Paulo Friere’s notion of the pedagogy of the oppressed, with the “oppressed” largely constituting a socio-economic identity with intonations of a Marxist category—the working class. Social and educational thinkers like Alice Walker, bell hooks, Peter McLaren, Chela Sandoval, and Parker Palmer have added a more nuanced critique of oppression in educational settings by adding gender and race in addition to class as part of unveiling layers of oppression and unmasking institutional forces.

Grassroots educators and theologians have also added a spiritual dimension to critical pedagogy through faith traditions and indigenous cosmology. These concurrent

iterations have been localized to specific contexts and experiences. It is on this point that I insert my articulation of Social Biography and synthesize the theoretical and practical application of critical pedagogy to create an educational methodology and liberatory praxis.

In the following section I highlight major theoretical threads and compelling examples of approaches that I draw from to develop the methodology of this study. What follows is my addition to critical pedagogy, grassroots pedagogy, and my articulation and deployment of the framework of Social Biography.

Re-iteration, Re-routing and Re-rooting Social Biography

“They sensed that we knew. They feared what we knew. In our most coherent moments, we knew that we were the controversy.”
—Michael James

Social Biography, as I use it, weaves together critical pedagogy and Freirian pedagogy with grassroots education. Social Biography uses stories as the central site of analysis and simultaneously the axis of learning and teaching. Stories become the entry point in the way we understand our own being and being in the world. When personal and collective stories are seen through the frame of Social Biography the stories become a dynamic source of meaning-making. When inherited stories are decontextualized, Social Biography is the frame in which we rewrite, flip and retrieve them. Without a Social Biographic frame the “American Dream” narrative that is told and retold by students assumes that everyone has equal opportunity to achieve success; therefore minority groups (i.e. immigrants, LGBTQ, working class, women) who do not “make it” are either “lazy” or “just need to work harder.” Social Biography as a frame to view our
stories allow us to see the political, economic, historical and social dimensions, giving the individual/collective an agential role in assigning a transformative meaning to the past.

Whereas, Michael James saw Social Biography as one of several elements comprising his educational methodology called *Critical Faith*, I take it as the central feature. In my development and practice of Social Biography in Hawai‘i, I worked with Native Hawaiians, Asians and Pacific Islanders from the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum. I saw their stories and the act of storytelling as central to an emancipatory and liberatory pedagogical process.

Michael James, in the quote above, speaks to the readiness of stories to be deployed at any given time. “What we knew” is what we often experience. Given the way history has been silent on stories from the margin and the marginalized, these experiences are not often read, taught or respected in the everyday discourse of formal education. Where marginalized communities such as poor and working class, LGBTQ, and youth of color have limited access to resources and tools of production, telling their stories is an act that can subvert and challenge hegemonic narratives: to tell one’s story is to reflect on and discern history. The act of telling one’s story is essentially a writing of one’s story. Louise DeSalvo describes stories and writing processes as:

> the accumulation of the stories we tell ourselves about who we are. So changing our stories...can change our personal history, can change us. Through writing, we revisit our past and review and revise it. What we thought happened, what we believed happened to us, shifts and changes as we discover deeper and more complex truths. It isn’t that we use our writing to deny what we’ve experienced. Rather, we use it to shift our perspective.¹⁶

Telling our stories, like writing our stories, allows us to shift not only our own perspectives but also those of other people and institutions. Indeed, telling our stories is a way to write our stories. However, the summoning of our story is not an easy process. Summoning a story that is affirmative and reflects the power struggle in which our story is located, often results in unearthing deeply buried traumatic history and memory. Educators must be cautioned not to re-traumatize the person through the retelling of their story. This is precisely why Social Biography as a method must see stories as constitutive of the person’s soul and identity. Operating on this premise allows us to move in a delicate dance when using one’s personal story.

Here, I situate stories as more than “anecdotal evidence” but rather as the empirical evidence in which we describe how we see and interpret the world. Simply put, stories, either told by us or about us, shape our ontological and epistemological worldview. Stories are not just “tools” but rather an entry point into the world of the person or community. Tools can be disposed of but stories remain and become the compass for one’s survival.

The mere act of storytelling is not Social Biography. Though a vital component, on its own, it is merely data collection. Social Biography is the act of telling and looking through one’s story situated in context of one’s social, political, economic and historical agency alongside the intersection of ones personal story with the story of the land/place/community that one resides in. In other words, the story we tell either about the world or ourselves must be situated in what I call the social dimensions of relationality (historical, political, economic and social). The stories we tell exist in a dynamic interchange with the world we live in—it is not created in a vacuum but rather
are shaped through various social forces that have formed our framework of understanding our story—in extensu—our selves and the world we live in.

Herein lies the problematic of a world shaped by colonization—the stories we tell may or may not speak of the ‘truths’ of the social reality we live in. Depending on how and what we tell through our story—we can affirm or deny the social forces that have affected us. In short, certain power relations shape the stories we tell of ourselves—we ought to know how these stories shape us and the world we live in. Through the use of story-based strategies of direct action Doyle Canning and Patrick Reinsborough uses narrative power analysis, they are worth quoting in length:

A narrative analysis of power is the simple (but radical) recognition that humans understand the world (and our role in it) through stories, and thus all power relations have a narrative dimension. Stories are embedded with power—the power to explain and justify the status quo as well as the power to make change imaginable and necessary. Which stories define the cultural norms? Which stories are used to make meaning and shape our world? Who is portrayed as the main character, and whose story is ignored or erased? These questions are the narrative components of the physical relationships of power and privilege, the unequal access to resources, and denials of self-determination that define much of the global system.17

Indeed, stories are always situated in power relations, struggling to cover or uncover, depending on the intentionality and realities that one wants to emerge. I situate stories in my study in a neo/postcolonial context and use postcolonial theory to understand “the

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multiple ways (language, values, customs, positions of power, borders) colonialism continues in the everyday lives of people, and how it is resisted and challenged.”  

In the case of Hawai‘i, where Asians and Pacific Islanders along with Native Hawaiians are intertwined with colonization and imperialism and where they are put into economies of subservience (plantation, domestic work, hotel, military, etc.) stories articulated by our own community may not reflect an affirmative narrative. Complex colonial relationships have warped the way we tell stories of ourselves and the Land we live on. For example, Filipino students in classes that I have taught at the university often repeat stories about the Philippines’ ‘third world’ condition, and consent to a view of the entire islands as being ‘poor’ and ‘dirty’. They rarely reflect collectively on the stereotypical representation of ‘everyone clamoring to come to America’ or ‘Filipinos want to come to America for a better life’. Their expressed sentiments, whether they are born in the Philippines or not, assume the lesser, more negative condition where people escape from the Philippines and America being land of promise and the place of hope. This is the hegemonic narrative that has been handed down for many generations, a story that is often repeated and assumed as true for all and for eternity.

I assert that Social Biography does not assume that our stories are neither, in the greater sense, ‘True’ or ‘False’, but a reflection and articulation of how we have experienced our own lived realities. It is true in the sense that it is how we have experienced and perceived what our bodies went through; and it is false in the sense that we do not really understand the depth and totality of our experience because we only see our Social Biography through the lens of the power relations of colonial domination. It is

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true that we came to America and perhaps our lives are relatively “better” in a material sense (dollars versus peso, educational access, healthcare etc.) but it is false in a sense that the Philippines did not always exist in this political and economic condition. That is to say, given the proper framing of our own histories and experiences as colonized peoples, we may have memories that are “false” that were generated to confront, persevere and endure the harsh inhumane conditions of oppression through subjugation. The truth(s) of our own experience may not allow us to live in the current reality. Cognitive dissonance allows us to perform our daily tasks without being bogged down by the injustice of our personal and collective historical trauma.

When we examine this neo-post-colonial era, we see that formerly colonized peoples still have an ontological tendency for self-deprecation even when there is no colonial master. Our stories that we tell of ourselves still have a colonial residue, as if we have allowed the colonial master to take residence inside of our souls. It is no wonder we are so afraid of ourselves, even when the colonial master, or the authority that we always fear is not present—the fact is, they never left us, they possessed us and rooted themselves in our depth dimensions, altering and shifting our values so much so that they reflect theirs.

Social Biography allows us to exorcise these demons and authoritarian values that were imprinted on us. By telling our stories we are able to cast a spell on time, to freeze it, and seize the ‘false memories’ that were imprinted in our bodies and soul. In that moment we are allowed to see the social fabric of society in relation to our story and re-orient and reframe how our story fits in the social-political history of the past and present.
By telling our stories we can unravel the illusory narrative that has veiled us from realizing our own agency in the context of our own history of oppression. When we turn oppression or suffering and place it in the larger frame of struggle, only then can we see and realize a redemptive and liberatory history. Only then can our own stories, Social Biographies become a map for a self-becoming and for our own communities to realize their own historical self-hood. Apart from the colonial paradigm Social Biography then becomes a site for knowledge production and at the same time an engaged and critical praxis. Social Biography turns our stories into a medicine that can heal the traumas that have prevented us from seeing life as affirmative.

In my earlier works, I stated that, “everything begins with our story. We cannot understand who we are nor the world we live in unless we understand how our life is intricately woven in the social fabric of reality. We cannot enter into our own reality without re-specting our Social Biography—to see again and again how our lives are shaped by the world we in habit.”\(^\text{19}\) Though everything begins with our story it does not end with our story—Social Biography as a methodology sees stories as interacting and intertwining with other(ed) stories. Social Biography creates connections, leaves traces, and become a vehicle for self-reflexive energy for a spiritual connection to the Other. The larger political-spiritual project of Social Biography is to realize one’s own connection to both existing meta-narratives and see how one is able to navigate and negotiate ones always shifting identity to create a reality that is more humane and affirmative.

Part of the spiritual element of Social Biography is using a theological language in addressing our stories. What follows is a brief discussion on the use and acculturation of Judeo-Christian theological framework into an indigenous Ilokano cosmology to create an indigenous liberatory theological language.

**Nakem Indigenous Liberation Theology**

Judeo-Christian theological discourse normally revolves around the exegetical or eisegetical reading of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. These sacred texts speak to stories, conversations and historical events that came out of the history of the Jewish community. With respect to the Judeo-Christian tradition I see the same significance and profundity between reading the Judeo-Christian texts and the stories that emerge out of our soul journey. If we are indeed, “made in the image of God (Gen 1:27)” then it follows that our stories must be a reflection the God. Through a Social Biographic lens I view our stories as sacred as the stories found in the cannon and archive of sacred literature. Our stories, personal and collective, reflect history and a carry in them a gospel of emancipation.

Part of the indigenous and theological framework of Social Biography is in seeing our story and the act of story-telling as a sacred co-creation of history. Indigenous to the Ilokano cosmology is the concept of *pakasaritaan*. The link between history (pakasaritaan) and story (sarita) has been drawn up in many works, including those that have been demonstrated by Ilokano linguist scholars like Aurelio Agcaoili, and developed further by Julius Soria.\(^\text{20}\) The Ilokano tradition of narratives—and the shape

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\(^{20}\) Agcaoili, Aurelio. *Nakaparsuaan: Indigenous epistemology of the environment of the Ilokanos*. Indigenous Environmental Studies, Palawan State University,
and form of narrativity—are indigenous ways of commitment to the task of memory-making and the attendant act of history-making that sustains the community.

*Pakasaritaan: the word and world according to the Ilokano*

Pakasaritaan in the most general and loosely used definition means “history.” However, when scrutinized using critical metalinguistics the definitions begin to break up and create a world of their own, much in the same way that the Ilokano creates her own world through language. Pakasaritaan, methodologically will come into play in understanding how the Ilokano conceives of herself as an agent of history. One engages in pakasaritaan while at the same time being aware of the act of creating history. It is also the manner in which the act of conversing can be given a deeper meaning in what seemingly is a minor saritaan or talk-story session and turn into a meaning-making and history-making act.

Pakasaritaan can be broken down in and thus defined in three parts: sarita, saritaan, pakasaritaan. Sarita is the root word. It means, “to speak”, “the word(s).” Saritaan means, “dialogue”, “story”, “story-telling”, “talk-story”. The intricate relationship between sarita and pakasaritaan rests on its active tense of producing an understanding of history in relation to the present realities. In other words, sarita as the spoken word creates and at the same times challenges and affirms pakasaritaan as history.

Philippines, Dec. 10-12, 1995. See also: Soria, Julius. *Pakasaritaan: A Study of Heritage Learners, Ilokano in Kalihi.* PhD dissertation, University of Hawai‘i, 2012. Julius Soria has expanded on the work of Aurelio Agcaoili's use of Pakasaritaan. It is through their work that I have found courage to use Ilokano concepts and methodologies in my life and study.
Pakasaritaan reiterated from above as “history.” Aurelio Agcaoili explains, poetically, the essence of pakasaritaan:

Sarita and pakasaritaan, story and history, the story in history, and history in the story. In the Ilokano mind, sarita is the seed of pakasaritaan, with pakasaritaan (paka+sarita+an) the abstraction of the sarita, and thus, always-already invoking a certain ‘story-of-ness.’ We can think of an allusion here: the mustard tree and the mustard seed. Or the Philippine narra. The thing is: the seed contains the tree that grows and grows—and the tree that grows and grows contains the seed too! The seed points forward toward the tree; the tree points backward toward the seed.

Somewhere, someone said, “Stories are what we are.” Indeed, the what-we-are in the Ilokano is in the pakasaritaan, that history that maps out the dreams of the Ilokano since time immemorial, dreams in full color, dreams in the human languages he can speak, but dreams that are also in the Ilokano language.21

This act of dreaming is embedded in pakasaritaan. Pakasaritaan is an act of creation not meant only to be recited and read. It is an act of creating history and at the same time remembering that which has passed but continues to be part of the present in order to forge a vision ahead. It is a mechanism that allows for a re-membering of history and the lessons of the ancestors in the fullest sense of the term—to become, once again, membered to a community that refuses to let go in the face of colonization. Agcaoili describes pakasaritaan as “the reciprocal anchoring of sarita and pakasaritaan, which means that there is a dialectical link that connects the act of storymaking and the manner of writing history”22 adding that, “in the precolonial times of the Ilokanos, pakasaritaan is

the record of their sublime thoughts, one of the expressions of which is the epic, which is a kind of a proto-novel, a first document of the history of a race.”23

Pakasaritaan coupled with liberation theology will be the way in which I critically and sacredly view stories in Nakem Pedagogy. Their stories viewed in this frame allows their hopes, longings, and values to be declared loud in their lived struggles for self-becoming and historical self-hood. I further discuss and develop the indigenous and theological language as part of Nakem Pedagogy in chapter three of this study.

**Threads of Social Biography**

Critical pedagogy, grassroots/community liberation pedagogy, and Ilokano indigenous cosmology acculturated into Judeo-Christian faith traditions as threads woven together make up the pertinent components of Social Biography as the theoretical framework for understanding and situating our identity through the stories. With the guiding framework of Social Biography Part II will explore how stories are employed and situated in the constitutive elements of Nakem Praxis—Language, Body, and Land

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23Agcaoili, *Panagtaripato*, 129.
Part II
Constitutive Elements of Nakem Praxis

Part II explores and expands in detail the three constitutive elements of Nakem Praxis intertwined with the framework of Social Biography. The three constitutive elements—Language, Body and Land—though distinct and singular are not separate but inter-related and build upon each other. I assert that weaving together the dynamic interface of Language, Body and Land methodologically in a pedagogy will awaken one’s soul consciousness.

I discuss in detail, though separately, the function of the three elements. And only in the concluding chapter do I tie in the three elements together. The intention for Part II of this study is to theorize individually the constitutive elements that make up Nakem Praxis.

Part II is structured to move from Language to Body to Land in a way that encompasses the spirit of each other. In this study I argue that a language of spirituality facilitates the word to world the Body as a site of storied transgressions. Understanding our bodies in this way will help us in connecting with the Land and see our relationality.

In pedagogical practice, like the flow of water from river to ocean, the borders between Language, Body and Land are porous and do not have a static delineation of where it begins and ends. In other words, the Language, Body and Land move in dynamic dependency. The power of the reflexivity of the constitutive elements allows the soul consciousness to fully engage one’s life journey as a Nakem Praxis.
Language is not just a tool. Tools can be disposed or shelved when not needed. But language remains in us, giving form to our ideas, and moving our bodies to the rhythm that our language announces. However, spawned from the subjugations of colonialism, our language today is stripped of imagination and the courage to speak truth to power.

We need a language that not only addresses our current condition but changes the conditions as well. We need a language, to borrow from Marx, that not only interprets the world but shapes it as well. And this language needs to be based on a spiritual connection to the world. Alfred Taiaiake, a Onkwehonwe Native American scholar speaks to this necessity:

Onkwehonwe are awakening to the need to move from the materialist orientation of our politics and social reality toward a restored spiritual foundation, channeling that spiritual strength and the unity it creates into a power that can affect political and economic relations. A true revolution is spiritual at its core; every single one of the world’s materialist revolutions has failed to produce the conditions of life that are markedly different from those who which it opposed.

With the same tenacity that oppressed peoples of the Third World have engaged in armed struggle, our duty as educators must turn to the arena of words, a struggle to (re)define words that we use to create worlds.

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What is the change in our society that will allow us to shift our values and engagement with the world? What is the ontological vocation of the silenced? It is, precisely, to find the language that address her condition, and to find the language that will transform her cosmological condition.

Self-becoming and historical self-hood, still begins with the Self. It is the most important starting place to begin transforming society. We need to be able to change to the way we think about ourselves, to create our own words, to live our own realities, to have the courage to indigenize colonial structures, including religion and language, into something that allows our identities to spring into affirmation.

We need language to fight off the crippling effects of colonization from pathologizing our identity as indigenous and diasporic peoples. We need a language that makes vulnerable and disrupts the permanent fixtures of our boxed identity. My personal attempt is to develop a language that will keep us from inheriting the values that were produced through the colonial encounter.

This language is deeply rooted in the Ilokano conceptions of Nakem while attempting to insinuate its ethos into the inherited colonial religion of Christianity. While I know the core of my being is Ilokano, it is the religion of the colonial masters that has been the vehicle of my articulation of faith. This language is an endeavor towards creating a language of affirmative possibility through a superimposed religion. Nonetheless, this language is but one language that we can use to Nakem Praxis. Precisely, this language uses indigenous cosmology for the theological conceptions. What I mean by theological is rooted in the Greek word theo, although it is Greek in origin and appropriated by Judeo-Christian tradition, and in this pedagogy I define theo
as “sacred.” We, therefore, need a sacred language in which to address the spiritual component of our ontological makeup. Part of this ontological makeup is the acknowledgement that we are not alone, but are connected to the nonhuman nature of this world. This imperative to decenter our adopted anthropocentric view of nature and connect our language with the rest of the living world is what David Abram, a linguistic scholar, speaks to:

If human discourse is experienced by indigenous, oral peoples to be participant with the speech of birds, of wolves, and even of the wind, how could it ever have become severed from that vaster of life? How could we ever have become so deaf to these other voices that nonhuman nature now seems to stand mute and dumb, devoid of any meaning besides that which we choose to give it?3

Indeed, how did we ever lose the ability to hear the voice of other living beings?

Locating Language

Nakem Theology of Liberation is both a language that is specific to my own nakem and the nakem of the community in which this pedagogy has emerged. Precisely, borne out of the experiences of the Christianized Ilokano-Filipino, in Hawai‘i, the Philippines, and California; it is a negotiated language between the indigenous and the colonial, and lives in the tensions between the forced movements of the native to the diasporic and to the (im)migrant. It is my hope to generate a language that brings us back to full-circle, and begin again our identity as rooted in our indigenous values while navigating to undo the harsh cruelties of this neo-postcolonial world. Ultimately, it is a language that refutes colonialism’s definition of the oppressed, harnesses our

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contradictory identity as a source of historical self-hood, and confronts colonial residues that have amalgamated into our Self.

What I propose is but one language that has emerged and developed through the soul, cosmology, and epistemology of the community of learners that I have been engrossed over the 10 years of the journey of this pedagogical articulation. I do not use this as the universal language for the totality of learners; rather, it is an example of a language that can emerge out of even the most oppressive of circumstances—a language that can bring about a word and world of hope and possibility—a language that brings us closer to the Sacred. T.S. Eliot’s chorus in the poem The Rock reflects what is happening in our society:

Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in the knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.4

Language of Spirituality

What follows below is the genesis and revelation of an emerging ingenious/indigenized Christian liberation theology. In Nakem Pedagogy this prophetic language is what I employ in attempting to bring about a spiritual education. By spirituality, I refer to what Parker Palmer defines as the notion of being connected to each other and the world.5 I use Nakem Theology of Liberation in order to answer questions that deal with the intangibility of hope and open the doors of imagination in an otherwise

4 Quoted in Ivan Illich, Health as Ones Own Responsibility-No, Thank You! A speech given in Hanover, Germany September 14, 1990. Translated by Juta Mason and edited by Lee Hoinacki.
cynical educational milieu. In the final analysis, Nakem Theology as part of Nakem Pedagogy moves away from a language of practicality to a language of vision in the educational process. We cannot anymore employ a language of practicality and pragmatism with a goal to simply “get the grade” in order to “get the degree.” Theological language precisely is alien to this teleology of grades and degrees. Instead, it uses poems and metaphors that allow us to address our deepest desires, most cherished values, and pressing concerns. In the end, the courage of this kind of spiritual language brings down the artificial walls that has been constructed around us and allow our words to touch and shape our human becoming and being human.

Liberating Theology Through Nakem

Nakem Pedagogy draws from the consciousness of the soul, the relationship with the Land, and our ancestral genealogy—all three inform and animate the individual to interact and shape their reality and all three make up the ‘essence’ of the individual. This essence, nakem, is precisely how one receives and registers experiences of the world. In other words, it is how one understands, makes meaning, and enables one to act out a life in the world. This action in the world is the praxis in which Nakem consciousness arises. In demonstrating Nakem consciousness and exploring the dynamic and creative tension between the individual and the society, I want to ground this concept in the indigenous cosmology and context of the Ilokano peoples and see how a Nakem Theology of Liberation can emerge.
**Nakem as Ortho-Theo-Praxis**

Nakem is the guiding post between the theory and practice of an Ilokano liberation theology. Nakem as soul and critical consciousness is what animates the Ilokano to move and interact critically in his own environment. A theology of liberation required theory to be put in practice—praxis—the Ilokano adds nakem as another component to the spiral praxis. Nakem is the medium between the doing and theorizing—it is the cosmological, epistemological, and ontological operating system that decides whether the doing and theorizing is operable. In addition, no matter how complicated the situation the Ilokano find himself in it is the nakem that will decide how and what is the best course of action. Nakem on the surface level is the habit or daily practices of the Ilokano. However, on the deeper layer, nakem is that which analyzes the condition in which he finds himself. Nakem is the frame of reference in which ideas of justice, freedom, ethics, and life is made intelligible. It is not uncommon to hear the Ilokano elders speak of a person living without nakem. And to live without nakem means to live without any form of tradition, intellect, and respect. To be dubbed as having no nakem is to be looked at as an animate human being with no soul—a walking automaton that cares nothing about his/her existence with and for others.

It must be said that the notion of nakem is not static. It is continually changing, adapting, and adopting ways that are always in relation to the land and community. Nakem is gathered up from the collective knowledge of the community in which the individual is situated. While the collective has its own understanding of nakem; the individual builds his own understanding and becomes dialectically involved in generating a common nakem. In other words, the individual nor the community neither owns the
conception of nakem. Both the individual and the community create the dynamism of nakem. It is dependent upon the experiences of the individual and the community and moving together towards a harmony of sustainable co-existence ritualized in the everyday interactions. Nakem is the collective operationalized wisdom. This element of nakem is the ortho-theo-praxis of Nakem Theology of Liberation.

Using the ideas set forth by theologians Jose De Mesa and Leonardo Mercado through theological re-rooting and inculturation, the following explores the possibilities how nakem can be ‘re-rooted’ in the Christian cosmology; and how, at the same time, Christian cosmology can be inculturated by nakem. I see this as the parallel example for rooting Nakem Pedagogy in dominant/hegemonic pedagogy and curriculum instruction. Nakem Pedagogy follows the process of rooting and inculturating of the larger society, shaping the ensemble of social relations, while starting from the individual’s experience.

**Theological Re-rooting**

In tandem with the concept of inculturation, theological re-rooting seeks to make the Gospel be:

Proclaimed and explained in a way comprehensible to the people’s way of thinking. Its meaning and implications must be spelled out in relation to the aspirations and problems of the locality…Indigenous theological reflection is indeed an essential component in fostering the growth of a local church…Such a theological endeavor aims at re-rooting the Gospel from one historical and cultural environment into another. Not only should the Gospel be incarnated anew in every cultural context, it also needs to be re-rooted in each historical epoch of the culture.⁶

Jose de Mesa borrows his definition of theological re-rooting from Kosuke Koyama as “a thoughtful attempt to translate the inner meaning of the message of Jesus Christ from one historical and cultural milieu and root it into another.”7 In other words, that though the message of Christ found in the Gospels may be forever unchanged, the meaning, rooted in a different time and place, will give new meanings, perhaps, more relevant to the specific time and place. De Mesa elaborates:

One of the reasons why the Church has failed to incarnate the Gospel message properly is that people have forgotten that even from the very beginning God did not reveal himself to us in his own language, but in human language and in the culture of the people to whom he spoke, with all the limitations involved. The task today is that of bringing the same message to other people in terms of their own language and culture and beginning with their own cultural values.

The task of theological re-rooting is burdened with two particularly difficult assignments:

1. to show forth a fresh aspect of the “unspeakable gift of God” (2 Cor. 9:15) and thus to deepen the meaning of the Gospel in the understanding of the people to whom it intends to re-root, and
2. This task is highly interpretive; it has to try to reinterpret the inner meaning of the message concerning Jesus Christ.8

Here, we must admit our sense of finitude and summon our humility to accept that we cannot know, at the same time, all of what the “unspeakable gift” and the “inner meaning of the message” of what God and the Gospels has to offer. We can only know what is revealed to us in the current time and place, using only what our culture has made available to us.

In order to fully appreciate theological re-rooting, Jose de Mesa requires a clarification of three important terms: “the inner meaning of the message”, “culture”, and

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7 Ibid., 34.
8 Ibid., 35.
“translation.” De Mesa believes that “the two poles, Gospel and culture, must be bridged by such a translation.”

The “inner meaning of Christ’s message” although changes in form, stays true to the core. “This living core is never without a historically conditioned and culturally situat[ed] expression. Distinguishing the inner meaning of the Gospel from its culturally bound formulations is sometimes relatively easy.” However, we must be careful in this assumption and keep in mind that there is no “zero-ground” when interpreting the meaning, we are always in dialogue with cultural embellishments. Because of this complex and difficult situation De Mesa ultimately relies on a dialogical approach, inherent in a theology of inculturation and an inculturated theology in order to sift out what is Gospel and what is cultural expression.

In terms of the meaning of the Gospels he quotes from the writings of Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

> The good news is first of all “to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to witness that in hi Son God has loved the world—that in his Incarnate Word he has given being to all things and has called me to eternal life”...The message “will also always contain—as the foundation, center and at the same time summit of dynamism—a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, as gift of God’s grace and mercy.”

Though he uses the words of Paul VI, De Mesa advises that the Pope’s words must be “freshly translated for every culture and each new age...that this *kerygma* can be understood and expressed in many different ways, a fact attested to by the presence of different religious tradition and theologies in the Church,” moreover, “any attempt to re-

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9 Ibid., 36.
10 Ibid., 36.
11 Ibid., 38.
root the Gospel in a given socio-cultural context must begin with the understanding of the human situation together with its needs, concerns and questions.”

*Changeability of Culture*

To De Mesa, what is important is the historicity and changeability of culture “in the context of making social life more human both within the family and in the civic community.” What is significant is the agency of collective/individual ability to create and shape the culture she is in. And because she has the ability to create herself and the culture she is in, humanity should not feel helpless and cannot absolve herself of the actions that she takes. Theologically, it means that the Christians indigenous culture should not be uncritically accepted, but rather challenged, discerned and always in conversation of what is and what ought to be. At the same time, according to De Mesa, “theological re-rooting while taking into consideration the future situation does not live in the future. The Gospel must confront the here and now, and this is the sphere of our concern and responsibility.” In addition, culture cannot romanticize and idealize the past, insisting that the past is what the future ought to be. This can be debilitating for those living in the present, not allowing them to grow and follow that path that God has called out for them, De Mesa says it aptly “it is a dynamic process that is rooted in the past, lives in the present, and through a vital introduction of values inspired by the Gospel, which hopefully become part of the culture that is yet to be, courageously faces

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 40.
14 Ibid., 41.
15 Ibid., 43.
the future.”¹⁶ In the final analysis, these values generated in a dynamic, dialectical synthesis ultimately rests whether the people hear and understand so much so that it becomes the catalyst for praxis in being a Christian.¹⁷

_Translating the Gospel, Translating Culture_

De Mesa defines “translation” in the concept of theological re-rooting using the words of Panikkar: “If any language about Christ has to be intelligible to one who lives outside the cultural area in which that language has been forged, it will have to be really translated and not only transliterated…there is no intelligibility—and much less ‘proclaiming’ of any message—if there is no sharing in the same context of experience between the two parties.” De Mesa adds, “evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness, if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life.”¹⁸ Indeed, what good is it to translate concepts and ideas, whether radical or orthodox, if what is translated is irrelevant to the benefit of the person and community. In addition, not only does the Gospel need to be translated and rooted in one’s culture, “the Good News will come to its recipients as something that affirms their personhood, coupled with the realization that to become a Christian does not mean ceasing to be what one is. In this way, not only will the Gospel of Christ lead the culture to its fullness, but also submit it to a creative criticism.”¹⁹ Translating the Gospel into the Ilokano culture requires that the

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¹⁶ Ibid., 44.
¹⁷ Ibid.
¹⁸ Ibid., 45.
¹⁹ Ibid., 46.
Gospel root itself into the critical and soul consciousness, the nakem, of the Ilokano. The stories in the Gospels must be a mirror of experiences when held up against the face of the Ilokano. If the Ilokano do not see her experiences when juxtaposed in the backdrop of the Gospels then it becomes simply another instrument of colonization—rendering invisible the Ilokano, therefore the Ilokano face of Christ. The Gospel, when translated and understood in the depth dimensions of the Ilokano soul, allows the Ilokano to find herself in dialogue with the history and experiences found in the Word, and thereby infusing the Word with the orthopraxis of the Ilokano. A reading of the word must be rooted in the reading of the nakem.

Elements of theological re-rooting: Context, Dialogue, Inculturation, and Implications in Society

If theology is to be relevant it needs to be contextual. It does not mean simply to do the theologizing in the backdrop of a particular context and fit it conveniently, but to “take the historical and cultural aspects seriously, and to challenge them in the light of faith. This is important, because Christianity will find its roots only if it challenges the soil in which it seeks rooting.” Contextualizing the theology in the historical experience of the Ilokano ought to be what gives life to the dynamic faith of the Ilokano. Culture rooted in its being historical does away with the static notion of faith and destabilizes a ‘fixed’ identity of the Ilokano. In other words, the contextualization of an Ilokano theology is what gives the spirit of resistance in the backdrop of oppression.

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20 Ibid., 57.
Dialogue is a necessary act in process of theological re-rooting. In short, “theologians must be first listeners and discoverers.” To listen and discover means to open up to the culture without imposing ones biases, to discern and reflect what the ‘truth’ means for them, through a hermeneutic of suspicion and generosity. We must understand that even the theologian does not hold the monopoly of truth nor does she understand fully the Good News. Dialogue as a creative act allows for both parties to unravel the complexity of the sacred in order that the truth is shared. A dialogical approach will then consist of two elements: “listening-understanding and challenging.”

When listening-understanding is met a challenging from within is necessary. De Mesa quotes Virgilio Elizondo in speaking about this challenge: “Every culture, has its share of grace and of sinfulness, and it is the task of the Gospel to permeate the culture and gradually to challenge the culture to go beyond itself—not to destroy but coming through it to begin to challenge it from within.”

For example, considering the history of colonization in the Ilocos and the Philippines, certain colonial residues have been absorbed by the natives thus naturalizing it into the culture, the way women have played a role in Ilokano society was altered by the Spanish and the West’s view of women; sexualities were redefined and relationality warped. A dialogical approach to challenging the culture allows the spirit of Christ to exorcise the demons of colonization and at the same time allow for the culture to adopt and adapt to elements that is required for the culture to survive in the contemporary era. “Genuine theological re-rooting is letting

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21 Ibid., 63.
22 Ibid., 66.
23 Ibid., 67.
God’s Word produce its explosive and revolutionary effect within the culture.”

Leonardo Mercado will articulate the last component—inculturation—of theological re-rooting.

*Theology of Inculturation, Inculturating Theology*

Leonardo Mercado outlines a theology of inculturation:

In attempting to inculturate theology in the Philippines, the following may serve as a criterion for authenticity. First, Filipino theology has to be communal. That means the people are the real theologians while the writer is the spokesman of the community. He distills what the community sense and feel. In short it is collaborative. Secondly, Filipino theology is interdisciplinary…Inculturation has to depend much on the social sciences. This interdependence is mutually enriching. It is a dialogue between the different sciences. Thirdly, inculturated theology is ecumenical. It aims to be free from confessional infighting since it is a dialogue between culture and faith, between the Filipino and the Word of God. Fourthly, inculturated theology should be open to the world. That is it should be intelligible to the contemporary people. It must be committed to the poor.

Mercado goes deeper in defining inculturation:

Inculturation may be defined as “the process by which there comes about an ongoing integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of its people.” Inculturation therefore is the “process by which the Church becomes part of the Culture of a people.” When the Good News is inculturated in a particular church, the experience of this process “becomes a for that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal.”

Inculturation not only allows my mother to use her culture as a spiritual well, but necessitates the church from acknowledging that she too is enriching to the church. To offer up food and chant in Ilokano and to summon the ancestors and at the same time chant the supplications of the rosary does not, in any way, contradict each other. Rather,

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24 Ibid., 57.
26 Ibid. 23.
it complements each other. Mercado further adds to the definition, “inculturation is so closely allied with the people that if the majority are poor and oppressed, then inculturation is also connected with option for the poor.”27 Material and economic conditions also play a profound part in inculturating a theology for the Ilokano.

Inculturation, like an onion, has multiple layers of meaning, and the deeper you penetrate into the center, the more significant it is; and the more we can begin to define the ontology of that particular theology/person/community, in our case the Ilokano. One level is the personnel. The Church needs to be Ilokano in both lay and clergy. It cannot be led and articulated outside of the experiences of being Ilokano. And if the Ilokano are the people, the vestments of the church, in material and design must be Ilokano. The gothic churches of Europe, towering and grandiose, need not be the only designs of the church. It can be made out of the indigenous materials and resources of the land—bamboo and the abong-abong are just as beautiful to use.28 But what is more significant, Mercado says is the “inculturation of thinking. This includes concepts and attitudes. This deeper level will naturally translate itself into the dress or symbols. On the other hand, signs without the inner inculturation remain superficial.”29

Mercado has three phases for the inculturation of thinking: inculturating philosophy, native language usage, and language as the carrier of culture and worldview. The inculturating of philosophy must begin with a slow move away from the western thinkers to a philosophy born out of the wisdom of the natives of the Philippines. The second phase is to use the native language of the people. It is the language closest to the

27 Ibid., 24.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
experience and worldview of the native and thus, unlike English, requires no translation. The third phase sees the language as the “carrier of culture and of world view. Philosophizing in the native language gives birth to indigenous ideas in which give birth to local philosophies.” Mercado adds with caution, “but merely philosophizing in Filipino is not enough. The right models must be used to provide the fertile ground for ideas to grow. The wrong models frustrate inculturation because they lead to false directions.”

An inculturated theology for the Ilokano must be articulated by using indigenous worldviews and epistemology, using the wisdom that is rooted in the ground that she stands on, while using the Iluko language as the medium of the world she wants to form and communicate. That is not to say that the Ilokano must use only Ilokano as the language of communication but only to say that if Ilokano is the closest language to her soul and body, it follows that Ilokano will be the most significant and meaningful in the exchange of words and worlds. Only in Ilokano can my mother, fully truly appreciate summoning the spirits of her ancestors; using English loses the specific intentions of words that she might otherwise have in using Ilokano.

According to Mercado there two ways in which to approach a theology of inculturation—culture as preparation for evangelization or “culture as a necessary ingredient for the incarnation of Christ.” Though Mercado does not disagree with the former, he admits that the latter is the best model for inculturation. And this models fits well in constructing an Ilokano Christ(ian) theology. “The incarnation model implies the exchange between two components: humanity and God.”

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 29.
32 Ibid., 30.
take form in the culture that the Ilokano embody. Christ and culture need to be married, with both working to see each other as a necessary act in a symbiotic relationship. Mercado paraphrases a patristic paradox, “through the marriage between God and humankind, God become man so that man could become God.”\textsuperscript{33} In our case, Christ became Ilokano so that the Ilokano can become Christ.

There is a balancing act that is necessary in keeping the integrity of both the Ilokano culture and the Christian tradition, particularly found in the Scriptures. One must remember that the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament are founded on Judeo-Christian tradition. Mercado cautions us “if the pole of Judeo-Christian tradition alone is stressed, the result will be a form of religious colonialism.”\textsuperscript{34} It is the same colonial religiosity demonstrated by the Jewish Christians when they imposed their culture on the Greeks. It is also the same religious colonialism when the Church before (and after) Vatican II tried to force Rome as the standard to follow in all cultures.\textsuperscript{35} Because both culture and Christianity work together in a dialectical relationship, spiraling towards the ultimate good—God—the Ilokano cannot assume that what is right for the Ilokano is right for everyone else. At best, the Ilokano will have to see himself as only a particular that fits in the universal and never the universal that applies to every particular. Mercado contextualizes the life of Jesus as Christ:

\begin{quote}
Jesus Christ as a real person lived like a Jew. His being Jew has challenged other nationalities through the centuries to make him alive, so to speak, in their cultural way of following Christ. So when the first missionaries (who were Jewish converts) preached to the Greeks, the Greeks inculturated Christ in their own culture. Hence the preaching of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
Christ has always been inculturated. In other words, preaching Jesus Christ as the Good News is not culture-free because it has always the cultural bias of the preacher. We cannot fault the Western missionaries for preaching the Western Christ.36

While we cannot fault Western missionaries for preaching the Western Christ we can be cautiously vigilant of this lesson and remember the damaging results of a domination of one culture over the other and the dangerous notion of a theology of “one-size-fits-all.” This kind of hegemonic logic happens when we become insular and only look within.

With the concept of re-rooting and inculturation, I proceed to articulate how our ‘essence’—culture, soul, and language—nakem—can be a source of shaping our world and how we react to it.

Theologizing Where The Soul Resides

Language is where the soul resides. It is home. And home is where the soul can fully express its ontological existence. A careful look at language and dismissing the notion that language is simply a ‘tool’ to communicate, will allow us a more profound understanding of what it means to breathe in and out words that shape our understanding of reality. Interrogating and extrapolating the fullness of what the Ilokano language can offer will be the vehicle in which we understand how—nakem—the ortho-theo-praxis—of the Ilokano is the spirit and ontology of the Ilokano. Locating the nakem in the Ilokano language is to summon the “cosmological, epistemological and ontological.”37

Agcaoili explains:

The cosmological deals with how the Ilokanos come to terms with the world as natura naturata, the created world, the physical world, their

36 Ibid., 32.
surroundings; in particular, it deals with that connection between their old Ilokano world and the new world they have come into.

The epistemological deals with the Ilokano’s understanding of what they know, and how this knowledge of self and others and the world leads them to creative ways of dealing with their present circumstances. The ontological, on the one hand, makes them see the value of their existence, their being-as-becoming, and their becoming-as-being in that productive circle of endless and yet hopeful search for life’s gifts, meaning and blessing, and grace.38

An Ilokano theology must begin with the individuals’ hope and aspirations but cannot end there. This individual’s wish must go back and converse with the wish of the society, the collective longing for the good. And this good, like the tides of the ocean, goes back and forth from the collective to the individual and with the land as the common mediator. This relationship becomes a spiral relationship working its way toward the ultimate aspirations of the people. That is to say, ones wish is the wish of the community and the community’s wish cannot simply disregard the wish of the individual who make up the community.

To speak and summon the intricacies, intimacies and therefore its divinities of Ilokano is to summon the consciousness of a whole community past and present. This consciousness resides in the Ilokano language. It is a place where the speaker can summon all of its stories, histories and genealogies of its people; it is where the indigeneity of a person or community resides. The Native American linguist, historian and member of the Dakota Nation, Waziyatawin Angela Wilson speaks of the power of language when she says, “The history of an Indigenous people cannot be cut from its roots. The Indigenous perspective is holistic and inescapably link to language,” adding that the “Language is linked to systems of thought, which are linked to history and to

38 Ibid.
identity. Every description of the world depends on language, every ceremony conducted depends on language, every teaching about the past depends on language; language conveys the meaning of life.”

Language must always understood as words that contain in themselves worlds lived by the past and present of the community. Agcaoili furthers explains that what “is revealed is that the world, to be understood, must first become a word and that the word, in an ontological sense, must word a world.”

Entering into the language will give us worlds of possibilities while unlocking the many possibilities of words. We move onto Ilokano cosmology to see how nakem operates in the Ilokano language.

Languaging Ilokano Cosmology: Apo, Kaapu-apuan, Bagi, Kabsat and Kabagis as manifestations of Nakem

In order to unpack the notion of nakem as the spiritual force that animates the Ilokano soul and gave life to the faith-experiences of the tropic figures mentioned above we will look at several interconnected words and concepts in the Ilokano language: Apo, Pagapuan, Bagi, Kabsat, and Kabagis. These words will be the starting point in extrapolating other words and worlds that will give us a further understanding of how nakem binds all these concepts together.

As people of the lukong—the lowlands—Ilokanos are dependent on using its surrounding geography to navigate the Amianan. Elemental beings come into relationship with human beings in the cosmology of the Ilokanos. We start from the appellation ‘Apo’

39 Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, Remember This!: Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives, trans. Wahpetunwin Carolyn Schommer (University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 51.
40 Aurelio Agcaoili, and Melania Abad, Patnubay Tiamson. Salaysay: Panaliksik Sa wika At Paniitian (Quezon: Kaguro sa Filipino at Departmento Ng Filipino, Miriam College, 2001), 163.
as our entry into the mind of the Ilokano. Apo is roughly translated as ‘lord or god’ with no gender specifications, it is often attached to ‘Apo Daga’ (Lord Earth), ‘Apo Init’ (Lord Sun), ‘Apo Baybay’ (Lord Sea), ‘Apo Bulan’ (Lord Moon)\textsuperscript{41}. The appellation Apo signifies a form of divinity giving the status of the elements earth, sun, sea, and moon as gods. It is not uncommon to hear the elders speak of the elements as someone they are in relationship with, as in: “Apo Bulan is full and bright tonight, she must be happy”, or ‘Apo Bulan is about to rise, she will be hungry, lets prepare some rice for the warsi.” In many instances I witnessed my grandfather saying “Lets hope that Apo Init gives us enough light for today so we can harvest.” As if to say that everything depends on Apo Init for the success of a good harvest. The same ‘Apo’ has been attached when addressing the Christian God or Jesus, Apo Dios (Lord God) and Apo Jesus, (Lord Jesus). It is uncommon to hear Jesus or God without the appellation Apo. God or Jesus, in the Ilokano mind, would not have the divinity and respect they are afforded if the ‘Apo’ is not used as a prefix. Meaning Jesus or God by itself cannot assume the status of divinity unless the ‘Apo’ is attached. The elements and Christian deities are dependent on the Ilokano language to gain its divinity.

This ‘Apo’ logic extends to humanity as well. Apo can also be attached to people and their name, for example: Apo Jeff, Apo Patricia, Apo Hannah, Apo John, Apo Rod, and Apo Gay. It is a form of endearment, reverence, and respect. By logic of extension the divinity is taken on by the person as well. They become equal in reverence to the elemental gods and the Christian deities as well. That is not to say that all are equal in character but equal in recognition of our innate sacredness.

\textsuperscript{41} Agcaoili, Abad, Tiampson, \textit{Salaysay}, 166.
The appellation Apo, morphophonemically, can be traced to a main concept— \textit{kaapu-apuan}. Kaapu-apuan roughly translated is ‘genealogy, ‘primary’ its root words is ‘apo’ or ‘gapu’ which has similar connotations as ‘apo’. The kaapu-apuan is usually invoked in prayers, implying in the usage a gratitude for the first peoples or the primary source of life. It is meant to acknowledge that we come from the same source, the kaapu-apuan that makes us all related and all sacred, all coming from a single strand of life giving entity. In this case the “I” of the Ilokano cannot exist without the “we” and the “we” comes from a single source—the pagapuan.

Having established the divinity inherent in persons we can now move to the concept of the body as mediated by the Ilokano language. This will give us an insight into how the body is thought of in contrast to the “I” and “we” of the West. These concepts will be the basis of de-stabilizing the \textit{Imago Dei} or the image of god. Four concepts that are interrelated come into play—\textit{bagi} (self, body, ), \textit{bagi} (ownership, to posses), \textit{kabagis} (sibling; of the same cut, intestine, coming from the same navel; coming from the same umbilical cord) and \textit{kabsat} (sibling). The word bagi as ‘self’ and ‘body’ has the stress on the second syllable. With the same sound but different meanings the bagi come into relation in the concept of creation—the world and cosmos.

If we collapse the multiple meanings of bagi in a parallel concept we can see how tight the responsibility of the Ilokanos have to the community and the earth. Because we are inherently divine (read: apo) and that all human beings and elements come from the pagapuan we are essentially tied to being in kinship with the earth. The world, the cosmos, is essentially ours in ownership in a steward/kinship sense—not only are we part of the world or cosmos but we are in fact the world and cosmos itself. The
connections are clear in so for as we see the world as alive and in relationship with. Here, we can see a cosmology that sees ourself coming from the earth and unto the earth we shall go back.\textsuperscript{42}

There is a relationship as well with how we see our bodies in relation to community. The bagi in both senses is related to \textit{kabagis} and \textit{kabsat}—the bagi is the same ‘bagi’ in kabagis, where the root of the word is ‘bagis’ meaning ‘guts’ or ‘inside of the body’ referring to the organs and intestines of a person. This means that while we are individuals we are always in relation to our relatives. The word kabsat will bring this idea full circle. Kabsat meaning sibling, sister or brother, comes from the word \textit{kapessat} meaning ‘to be a piece of’ implying that a once whole was cut in pieces. Kapessat has the root word \textit{pessat} with the variant \textit{bessat}. Looking in to the Agcaoili’s \textit{Kontemporaneo a Diksonario nga Ilokano-Ingles} will give us a more comprehensive definition:\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{pessat} 1. var. of bessat 2. of the same length 3. of the same cut 4. from the same (source, fabric, material, intestine) 5. cf. agpessat, pumessat, kapessat, mangpessat, panagpessat, panangpessat, ipepessat, sipepessat, sangkapessat, sangapessat, sangsangkapessat \textbf{6. ex.} ‘Sangsangkapessattayo amin isu nga awan gapuna a ditayo agsisinnaranay.’—‘We are all from the same source so there is no reason why we should not help each other.’ 7. cf. kabessat, kabsat, kapessat (p. 1020)

\textbf{bessat} 1. var. of pessat 2. of the same length 3. of the same cut 4. from the same (source, fabric, material, intestine) 5. cf. agbessat, bumessat, kabessat, mangbessat, panagbessat, panangbessat, ibebessat, sibebessat,


sangkabessat, sangabessat, sangsangkabessat 6. ex. ‘Amin a tao ket maymaysa a bessat.’--‘All people are of the same cut.’ 7. cf. kabessat, kabsat, kapessat (p. 640)

To be a sibling means to come from the same source. The usage of bagi, kabagis, kabsat are used very loosely—in the sense that one could easily call a stranger as being their kabagis and kabsat. It is not uncommon to hear Ilokanos address each other as older brother/sister despite not being legally related. “We are all from the same source so there is no reason why we should not help each other”, and “All people are of the same cut” expresses the sentiment of mutual respect and a deeper sense of relationality. It is the acknowledgment that whether one is a known relative or not does not matter. The genealogy of that two particular statements root the people from a single, main source.

The words, as Agcaoili referred to earlier, all carry in themselves worlds that unlock our understanding of our positionality in the cosmos. We have the right to own our bodies as an individual but only in relation to the larger body of the community. The “I”, if we afford it its existence, will always be lesser in centrality to the ‘we’ of the West. It is not the case that the “I” does not exist but exist only in a spiraling dialectical relationship towards the sacred—the Pagapuan.

*Theologizing Ilokano Cosmology: Reframing the Imago Dei with Nakem*

What is the value of theologizing the Ilokano cosmology? How do we situate the Ilokano sense of sacredness and inter-related communality in the frame of liberation theology? The value of theologizing the Ilokano cosmology is to birth a theology out of the experiences of the Ilokano peoples. This theologizing is meant to provide the Ilokano people a theology that does not use the Euro-American lens to interpret their own experiences in relation to the Christian text and faith.  Ferndandez poses that the question
is not “How can we adapt theology to our needs?’ but rather, ‘How can our needs create a theology which is our own?’ The intention is not to adapt or modify a theological product but to “produce the product in a new way for a new purpose.’”

The intention is not to see Christian values and validate it in the Ilokano context but to see Ilokano cosmology, therefore spirituality, as challenging, informing, and dialoguing with the Christian understanding of the divinity. This understanding regards the Ilokano ontology as the central theme in order to counter the hegemony of Western readings of scripture and theology. Carlos Abesamis alludes to this process:

The procedure is not taking a Western tree and transplanting it on African or Asian soil; rather it is planting our own African or Asian tree and grafting on whatever is needed for its life and health.

That is not to say that every person or community needs Christianity for its life and health but that every person or community who sees value in Christianity must be able to see their own image and experience in the Christian faith. When liberation theology is taken from this context we can begin to flip the script on Christianity. When we situate sacredness and divinity, in the language and world-view of the Ilokanos, in the reading and understanding of the bible and god, we can begin to construct by de-constructing the western understanding of the *Imago Dei*.

To the Ilokanos the imago dei is an image of the Ilokano in search for his connection to the transcendent, to the life-affirming energies of his universe. This image reflects an Ilokano understanding and sensibility of people and the environment. This god

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as conceived by the Ilokanos does not separate itself from the lives of the people and the environment—the god of the Ilokanos comes into being only through the acknowledgment of our own innate sacredness and relationship in all living things—especially the land. In tying the divine, sacred, theology and the environment, Fernandez situates this image and understanding in what he calls the organic-process model:

The organic-process model of God-world relation implies an intense organize interrelatedness. It may take the analogy of the relationship between an individual to a community of which the individual is organically related, or it may take the analogy of the world as God’s body... God is affected by the world, suffers with the world, and changes with the world. Between God and the world there is interdependence and reciprocity.46

This organic-process model of God-world relation is descriptive of how the wor(l)d is animated in apo, kaapu-apuan, bagi, kabagis, and kabsat. Because the God-world relationship does not function on an either/or dictum, as in the world, humans and god are equally sacred, the power dynamics between god, humans and the world, with emphasis on land and environment, challenges an anthropocentric view of the cosmos—a view that has traditionally been associated with western theology and resulted in justification of environmental degradation and genocide of many peoples. What we can imagine in this image is a relationship based on an ethic of relationality. The idea of god as omnipotent is rendered impotent—this god must cry, hurt, and feel pain as the land’s skin is torched and dug up—and as the peoples lives depend on the land they too cry, hurt and feel pain through the interconnectivity of their genealogies—to the apo daga (god of land)—to the pagapuan. In an ethic of relationality a theology of relationality emerges and no single

component in the god/human/world is greater or lesser than each other. God is not greater than humans and humans no greater than the world. In a theology of relationality all are dependent and powerful only in its sym-tri-otic relationship. In this liberative theology god cannot be the all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present, separate from the lives of humanity and the land.

For the Ilokanos god cannot exist outside of the symtriotic relationship. God cannot punish, reward, or dictate the people outside of this relationship. Dorothee Soelle expresses this kind of caution when god is attributed a reified transcendence:

All three statements about the absoluteness of God—his omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence—all three ‘omnis’ express a fatal imperialistic tendency in theology: the power of the independent ruler. This God is in fact no more than the dream of a culture dominated by males...this myth is about independent male heroes who owe no one nothing, who need no one, for whom mutual help, exchange, and community are secondary matters. His strengths lie in himself alone, and to this degree this primal story reflects a God who equally needs no one, a male God.  

Indeed, God cannot be solely male nor inherit these ‘omni’ qualities, if it is to be relevant and liberative for the Ilokanos. There is also a danger in seeing god only as female. We cannot simply move from a male god to a female god and expect a radical shift in power-relations and humanistic aspirations. As Kwok Pui-Lan has said:

A postcolonial feminist epistemological framework debunks any claims to the innate form of feminine knowing that is superior to or subversive of male knowing and finds embarrassing any romanticizing suggestions that women by nature, are more caring and loving, or closer to God. The colonizers have been both men and women, and female colonizers, either through their overt support of the colonial regimes, or through their silent

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complicity, have not demonstrated themselves to know more about loving and God.\textsuperscript{48}

The image of god for the Ilokanos must move freely, never to be fixed on a single static image, like the beddeng, it is restless, fixless, and can never be permanently situated. The notion of the beddeng in relation to the fixless image of god must allow us as well to see god and sacredness in what the “First World” deem as homeless, sick, poor and ugly—qualities that are relegated to the marginalized in societies of affluence that value the “I” more than the “we”. An Ilokano liberative theology must lift up, confront, and challenge the image of god in the Ilokano who is homeless, sick, poor and deemed ugly. Can a homeless Ilokano believe in a god who lives in a 10-bedroom mansion? Can a sick and dying person find comfort in a god that does not know how to cough out blood? Can the hungry have a loving relationship with a god who does not know the meaning of ‘zero balance?’ Can an Ilokano find beauty in her or himself when god has only blonde hair, blue eyes, and white skin? No. For the Ilokano god too is homeless, sick, poor, and has stubborn black hair, brown eyes and skin. It is not that god is sick, homeless, poor and colored but that god resides with and in the experiences of the homeless, sick, poor and colored. A liberative Ilokano theology does not accept these oppressive conditions because these conditions are symptoms of a broken symtriotic relationship—an over/under valuing of a selected group of people beyond the land and god relationship. It cannot be that case that only a few have access to the basic necessities of life if a theology of relationality is lived. If one is homeless, sick, poor, and ugly then all are homeless, sick, poor and ugly. The bagi, both in terms of self and body, ownership and

communality, is what inextricably binds the community together. When one part of the body occupies an abject space then the whole body of the community is sick, in extenso, god and the world. In this context, we echo what oppressed people have been saying for centuries, “we cannot live by bread alone”, and with regards to the bagi and all its connotations of community and inter-relatedness, “we cannot eat bread alone.” That is bread alone does not nourish our bodies and eating alone does not nourish souls. Exactly so, there are conditions that allow our being be sustained outside of itself. The bagi, the body of community, has a responsibility to nurture life and make it flourish. Judith Butler expounds on this responsibility:

Our obligations are precisely to the conditions that make life possible, not to “life itself,” or rather, our obligations emerge from the insight that there can be no sustained life without those sustaining conditions, and that those conditions are both our political responsibility and the matter of our most vexed ethical decisions.49

In order that we survive, we must see ourselves and our values embodied in the word and lived in the world. When we do not carry out these values we get ‘sick’ and our corresponding reality do not make sense or mean anything. “When do we say that something makes sense?” The Liberation theologian Rubem Alves asks and answers, “It is when we feel that our structure of values is being confirmed by our experience.”50

Iterations of Liberative Language

Secular language has become too reductive and at the same time strips the spirituality of language of its connection to our engagement with life. To use a spiritual language, whether it comes from our religions, faith, wisdom/indigenous languages, is to draw from the springs of our ancestral traditions. We cannot anymore address the sacredness of life in the alienating language of the secular. Neither can we continue to use antiquated, anachronistic and oppressive interpretations of our religious, faith, wisdom/indigenous traditions. The power of these languages must speak to today's vexing issues.

We need not come up with a new “universal” language in order to communicate to the each/Other because we already have this language—it is not lost, yet. It need only be awakened and made conscious. Martin Heidegger poses how close we are to language:

> We are, then, within language and with language before all else. A way to language is not needed. Besides, the way to language is impossible if we indeed are already at that point to which the way is to take us. But are we at that point? Are we so fully within language that we experience its nature, that we think speech as speech by grasping its idiom in listening to it? Do we in fact already live close to language even without our doing?\(^{51}\)

To answer Heidigger’s question: Yes! We are always close and always and already in the proximity of language. But only when we are made aware that we are in the language can we summon its power and relevance. Nakem Theology is one of those languages that nakem pedagogy has lived in. Moreover, I hope that there are many other languages of the soul—Abrahamic Religions to Buddhism, Hinduism to wisdom traditions of Oceania

and Africa—that we can begin to take back from the perversions of colonial and imperial interpretation.

What we summon when we use languages of the soul or soul languages is a language that brings us into remembering—and when this happens we remember through our own body, felt through our skin, synchopated with our heart beat, and brings us back into moments when we are one with the Sacred—when we are then invited to dream, imagine, and vision a reality that would not otherwise be possible. Language of the soul opens up realities that cynicism closes its doors to, precisely because soul languages does not need the materiality of proof, it runs on hope, conviction and always in a critical and affirmative engagement with reality.

This chapter on language opens up different metaphors and possibilities on seeing our Body as a site of meaning-making. The following chapter deals with our Body and Social Biography.
Chapter 4
Social Biography and the Body
Our Body as Sites of Transgressions

In this chapter I draw upon the body, while using Social Biography, as a central site of meaning-making. I use my story, Social Biography, and body to draw upon storied experiences that have dialectally affected my life and the larger society that I am a part of. This chapter demonstrates how Social Biography frames our story and attempts to situate our personal/individual story in the larger collective narrative of society.

Because Nakem Pedagogy always starts from the personal I use my story in order to bring to full consciousness the history that resides in my body. I want to bring into light the details, textures, raw emotions as the starting point of my story. This endeavor to recall the dark and forgotten shadows of the past necessitates always a courageous risk and renders one open to confronting trauma and unearthing buried wounds. These buried wounds and confrontations of trauma are precisely what will release us from being in a petrified, constricted, and fragmented condition to a fluid, liberated state, and therefore bring us into the entirety of our being. Essentially, this reclamation will allow us to move from a being of guilt to a being of love.

This chapter incorporates and demonstrates both my story and the process of seeing it as a Social Biography—that is, to see my story as more than a story, rather, a story and reflection of the current conditions that I/We live in. It is an explication of my story as Social Biography and the theoretical implication of using our story as the starting point of developing an ethic of relationality. Here, I demonstrate how to see each story as containing a truth that is part of the larger Truth. To see our story as not just a provincial
story that impacts the so-called “larger” history but to see it as making up the arch of history itself.

Because one of the main threads that make up Social Biography is critical pedagogy’s philosophy I will use my body as the site of meaning-making through the use of my story—my body. I use critical and feminist theorist Sherry Shapiro’s definition of critical pedagogy in order to situate how I will use my body as the site of historical re-articulation, she illuminates:

Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of praxis concerned with emancipation, and committed to a process that connects self-reflection and understanding to a knowledge that makes transformation of the social conditions we live possible. It begins by making it possible for the silenced voices of students to speak in the classroom about their own experiences, concerns, and desires. It therefore remakes the curriculum into a dialectic between their particular hermeneutic of the lived world and the explanatory narrative of a critical theoretical framework. Without either the personal narrative or the critical framework, the pedagogy is incomplete. Without the personal narrative, one cannot articulate or begin to problematize one’s everyday existence needed for conscious decision making. And without a critical framework, the personal narrative is privatized, hindering relational understanding of the social forces which structure existence.¹

In using my body I make visible the “body memories” that “reveal through critical reflection the relationship between ourselves, others, and the world in which we live.”²

Indeed, my body is shaped, and always in relation to, by the larger societal body and is inscribed meaning according to the discourse of that particular place and time. Making center our body memories moves us away from de-territorializing our lived experience and confronts disembodied discourses that neglect the very body that has lived the story.

² Ibid., 80.
My intention for the following section is to illuminate what our body signifies, grasp how our stories provide us access into the social fabric of society, and realize a critical relationality between my lived (bodily) experiences with the social forces that have shaped society. It has been always a precept of Nakem Pedagogy that our stories are the empirical evidence of our struggle—and this struggle is lived in the flesh and articulated through a reflexive praxis. Furthermore, my story enfleshed will provide us the entry point into the relational ethic of Social Biography—to see how our lives are inter-woven not only in (re)creating our society but the ethos that which undergirds our most vexing relationships.

What follows are vignettes of my story framed through Social Biography and situated within Nakem Pedagogy. The process of Social Biography deals with the textures of my story, not simply as a re-telling of a story but re-specting—to see again and again—how that story has shaped my being and self-becoming. My story deals particularly of the struggle of being in the diaspora, my birth in the Philippines and the painful attempt in returning “home” to the Philippines. My attempt is to re-encounter our body memory as a terrain of contestation and meaning-making. That is to say, whenever we summon our body to remember, we essentially give power to ourselves to re-signify moments of trauma and find the redemptive accent that allows us to speak in a language that does not pathologize our articulation, our historical-self hood and our journey to self-becoming. I begin each section with a vignette and provide not so much an explanation of that particular piece of my life but what it means and how it is used in Nakem Pedagogy.
Window #1
Barok, My Son

Barok, I am leaving for Hawai‘i now
In a year or two we will be together again
It will not be long and we will sing our song.

Barok, I have to go now. The minutes
Between us are gone, and the road beckons
I will send some money for your needs
Some dollars for your upkeep
So that in the currency of our dreams
You will remember that I had to leave.

Barok, I have your visa in my hand
The gods have been kind, the angels too
They listen to our dreams, you know:
You and your sister will come to Hawai‘i
And in the morning we will count
The days, all days that have gone by.

Barok, wake up now! Shake off
The sleep on your skin and body
Take a shower and eat your meal
I made fried rice with eggs in a hurry
So you can catch up with time.

Your uncle will drop you off to school
And there learn the English of your vision
Spell what spell is as enchantment
So that here, in this land, we learn to live.

Barok, I will see you after work
When the body has grown so tired
I will pick you up after school
When all roads lead to home
Wait for your sister by her class
Don’t forget her one more time
Or she finds her way to another town
Where aliens are not welcome

Barok, I’m sorry, I had 10 checkouts today
I didn’t even eat lunch, only the pandesal
I put in my pocket. Did your Grandma pick
You up from school and then tell you her tales
Of the old homeland we leave behind, never to return?
Barok, I missed your football game.
So sorry I had to stay, work more, harder.
Did you win? Did your dream of winning
Got to you and so you could run the fastest
Go to where the medals are and sing?

Barok, how come you major in philosophy?
What kind of job will you get?
Why not business? Or become a doctor?
Anyway, when are you graduating?

Barok, I’m so proud of you!
You are the first one to graduate.
You don’t have student loans. Lucky, you, e!

But, barok, why are you crying?
Has hunger gotten into you or the prospect
Of the days when you will see
That I will no longer clean people’s beds
Throw away their garbage
And remove the crease on their curtains?

Mother, you look so old now
Mother, I have begun to miss you
A long time ago, a long time since.

From Autobiography to Social Biography:
Transformation and Liberation in Finding My Story

The poem above speaks to the effects of migration from the Philippines to Hawai‘i. This migration experience centers on a conversation with my mother and how I perceived her to be—absent—and not only until I hear in the end that I begin to understand her. In the early years of her going back and forth from Hawai‘i to seek employment I always understood our relationship as absent—substituted only by the care packages—balikbayan boxes—that she would send from Hawai‘i. Even after my sister and I arrived to Hawai‘i the relationship again was absent—no football games, no parent teacher conferences, no play in the parks. My teachers interpreted these absences as my
mother not caring for her children’s education; not supportive of her children’s extra-curricular activities; and not valuing quality time. What I learned from observing many middle class families, reinforced by the media, and my formal education was that my family did not value being together—that we are the cause of our own alienation. As feelings of resentment and shame started to take me over I began to internalize these societal definitions and saw my family as indeed being the problem.

It was only when I began to hear these stories from a youth program that I was part of in Berkeley that I began to see similar patterns about immigrant, working class families. There I realize that my story is part of a larger story, that I was riding a powerful narrative that affected the way I understood myself and my family. The poem attempts to flip the script on the relationship between the mother and son. “I have begun to miss you” is a reconciliatory gesture and acknowledgment that no one is at fault and perhaps I realized this unconsciously but did not have any critical language to name this particular alienation.

When I returned home to Hawai‘i to teach a section of a *Philippine Popular Culture* class that I taught at the university. I began to see similar responses of similar kind of oppression from my students. Indeed, the phenomena of alienation was the same but the oppression manifested differently.

In a creative group presentation my students decided to dress up in super hero outfits and discuss the concept of power. One of the goals for that group was to engage the class and flip the script on power in order to discover their own “inherent super powers” in the context of oppression. A young Hawaiian man says to the class, “I was bullied in my youth, rejected by my friends and called ugly names by my parents. As a result, I
was depressed most of my life. My power is being able to walk into a room full of strangers and feel who is suffering from depression.” A young Filipina woman said, “Given through adoption, I grew up in an abusive foster home all my life. I had a younger brother and as soon as I turned 18, I took him in and became his legal guardian. I am both a sister and a mother, full-time worker and student—I know how to raise a child and a master of time management.” Yet, another Filipino woman proclaimed, “I am the first one in my family to attend the university. I did not have anyone to mentor me nor did I have anyone to follow. But I have mastered the ins and outs of this university—I can tell you how to keep those young Filipinos like me in college.” These exclamations, rooted in their own experience, subverted and reoriented the concept of power. The often crippling power of oppression and oppressive realities that the student came from did not hinder their self-becoming. Indeed, the power of articulating our own bodily experiences through our stories in Nakem Pedagogy lays in being able to flip the script on oppression; to turn upside down pathologizing experiences, and point that storied experience toward a form of eventual transformation and liberation.

Liberation and Transformation as Process

In this section I theorize the process of transformation and liberation in the context of Nakem Pedagogy, focusing on the ontological process rather than the evident manifestation of the transformation and liberation, and secondly how they fit with Social Biography and autobiography. I want to speak to the liberative and transformative powers of being able to situate ones story in a larger narrative and map out the liberatory and transformative process that emerges out of being able to find one’s self in one’s story.
In the course of teaching in the university and community, I have witnessed numerous students and community members transformed and expressed feelings of liberation. And while I have witnessed this mystical moment of ontological transfiguration I want to state that for Nakem Pedagogy liberation and transformation is not an end goal, rather liberation and transformation resides in the process in which one continues to self-become in conversation with one’s historical-selfhood. Nakem Pedagogy’s dynamic process of learning finds meaning in the tension between the constant movement from the individual to the collective, the particular to the universal, and the here and now to the there and then. To reside in this creative tension allows one to realize ones potential liberation and transformation. What I want to speak of is liberation and transformation’s ontological process. This process is the cause of a change in their psycho-social being, the evident change that can be seen and felt.

In describing Nakem Pedagogy’s process of learning I borrow from adult educator and transformative theorist Jack Mezirow’s description of learning “as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide to future action.”3 Coming up with a ‘new’ or ‘revised’ interpretation can only happen when one looks back at one’s ‘prior interpretation’. In the context of Nakem Pedagogy this process of looking back almost always entails a “subjective reframing” and comes with “an intensely threatening emotional experience in which we have to become aware of both the assumptions

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undergirding our ideas and those supporting our emotional responses to need to change."

Liberation is always difficult precisely because it shakes the foundation of the way we see and engage the world. And transformation for the student requires time, that is to say, learning to unlearn is not always a palatable process and transformative education is not always seen as immediately positive.

bell hooks remarks about this experience:

I found through the years that many of my students who bitch endlessly while they are taking my classes contact me at a later date to talk about how much that experience meant to them, how much they learned. In my professorial role I had to surrender my need for immediate affirmation of successful teaching (even though some reward is immediate) and accept that students may not appreciate the value of a certain standpoint or process straightaway.

Ultimately, Transformative Theory according to Mezirow focuses on “how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others—to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers.” While I incorporate Mezirow’s focus of transformative theory I do not necessarily believe that “socially responsible” and “clear-thinking decision makers” create transformed and liberated persons. It is quite possible to be socially responsible and clear-thinking and still capitulate to the status-quo and play a part in maintaining oppressive realities. Nakem Pedagogy sees liberation and transformation through being socially transgressive and imaginative/visionary-thinkers.

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4 Ibid., 6-7.
5 bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 42.
6 Mezirow, Learning to think like an Adult, 8.
While I see Nakem Pedagogy as producing socially transgressive and imaginative/visionary-thinkers, I do not mean that we transgress for the sake of transgressing. The act of transgression is set within the boundaries of oppression; we transgress only so that life is made to flourish and reach its potential. This transgression is never rooted in the cynicism (transgressions that arise out of cynicism can only be pragmatic) of the present but born from a vision that looks toward a reality in which oppression does not have an omnipotent crippling force but rather seen as temporary and always surmountable.

There is a double meaning to transgressing oppression; it means to move out of the literal space and at the same time reframing oppression and what it means not to be oppressed, thereby challenging oppression on its own terms and flipping the script on what it means to be oppressed. Moreover, we succumb to oppression only when we are crippled by it. That is to say, even though we can or have escape the physical space in which oppression happens, how we come out of it ontologically is also where the "transgressions" can happen.

In this context I define liberation as the refusal to submit to the fatalistic notions of destiny, a crippling of our ability to follow a path in which life is seen as an affirmative. Liberation is the collective movement to remember that life ought to be breathed with nourishment that allows life to flourish. It is the refusal to submit to the idols of oppression and break the crippling hold of relational apartheid—a belief that the Other has no relation to us—a severance of the spiritual umbilical chord to each other—a
complete distortion of the mirrors that reflect the Other/Face of our humanity.\textsuperscript{7} Related to liberation, I define transformation as the movement from living a life of permanent fixture with immutable truths to an affirmative “epistemological curiosity” of life.\textsuperscript{8} Transformation entails a rupturing of the dogmatic self and openness to an expansive ontology that is always seeking an affirmative and critical truth in ones relational being. Transformation and liberation builds upon each other. It is not possible to be transformed and not be liberated nor to be liberated and not transformed. Moreover, it is not possible to be transformed and liberated only once, rather, to be transformed and liberated requires one to be constantly engaged in the process of transformation and liberation—seeking to be always in places/spaces of transformation and liberation. That is why teaching and learning always requires one to move in and out of different and differing contexts with other people and places.

Teaching and learning for Nakem Pedagogy is liberative and transformative only as far as ones body is in dialogue with other bodies and the world. Education in this context is always collective, relational, and involves a dialogical process. Paulo Freire speaks to this necessary relationship:

> Sometimes educators forget to recognize that no one gets from one side of the street without crossing it! No one reaches the other side by starting from the same side. One can only reach the other side by starting from the opposite side. The level of my present knowledge is the other side to my students. I have to begin from the opposite side, that of the students. My


knowledge is my reality, not theirs. So I have to begin from their reality to bring them to my reality.⁹

The “opposite” side or where the students reside does not mean they are less or oppositional in nature. It means that knowledge exists on both sides and an exchange of this knowledge requires one to be open and courageously transgresses from one’s immediate location to the other—ones immediate body to the Other. Liberation and transformation happens when both teacher and student can cross on both sides of the street and realize that there are other roads to walk and other sides to cross outside of the path laid out by society. It is the realization that one can get to the other side, that knowledge has multiple locations—in time, space, and body.

In Nakem Pedagogy the language of transformation and liberation, to borrow from liberation theologian Dorothee Soelle, is “a vehicle of collective experience and it is meaningful only when it speaks of experience and address itself to experience.”¹⁰ In this case, it is only meaningful when it speaks to our body and addresses itself to body. Indeed, liberation and transformation is tied to our experiences. More explicitly, our experiences become liberatory and transformative when it moves from autobiography to Social Biography. This important process of moving from internal to external perception of our experience allows us to see our engagement as both particular and universal.

From Autobiography to Social Biography

I remember during my undergraduate years and most of my graduate studies being told that I could not use “I” in my essays. I had to remove myself from my

research and assumed an “objective” identity. This logic of erasure and invisibility
instilled in me that I did not matter and the “I” should be discarded anytime I wanted to
present anything that is “valid”. Instead the “I” became the “author,” “writer,”
“researcher.” It was never the case that “I” had an identity outside of being the “author,”
“writer” or “researcher”. Nakem Pedagogy deals away with the false notion of
objectivity—that is the belief that by removing the “I” that I become objective. Instead,
Nakem Pedagogy sees the “I” as central to acknowledging our subjectivity—that being
subjective and speaking from the “I” holds a certain epistemological vantage point. The
“I” is given the power of being the empirical evidence in which to address problems and
suggest solutions.

Nakem Pedagogy sees the “I” as the starting point of an individual’s
autobiography. One’s autobiography is how one perceives the world through one’s
experience of the world—it is essentially a story of the person. While I believe that
Nakem Pedagogy must start from one’s autobiography, seeing the self as important and
significant, the process of liberation and transformation begins to take hold when the “I”
or “my story” sees a dialectical relationship to the “We” and “Our Story.” Namely, this
specific movement is from autobiography to Social Biography. Social Biography gives
the autobiography, personal story, or the “I” a frame in which to view itself as part of
larger narrative and connect that personal lived experience to more than what we
immediately perceive. In essence, using Social Biography as the frame of understanding
our experience allows us to see the particularity our experience and at the same time
marks the boundaries of its limitations. In doing so, we can frame and reframe our story,
thereby giving our story different meanings and finding relationality in other people,
place and time. It is worth quoting Annette Kuhn in her finding meaning in her mother’s words:

Knowledge from below, common knowledge, is often dismissed as superstition, ‘female intuition’, ‘old wives’; or at best patronised as ‘folklore’, the quaintly earthly wisdom of the unlettered. Looked at from a different standpoint, though, it can be seen as the knowledge of those who understand that the world does not belong to them, but who see themselves as belonging to the world: indigenous peoples and peasants. To the extent that they inherit or share it, it is also the knowledge of the working classes of industrial societies, especially of the women among them. Common knowledge is mundane and practical: it makes use of the stuff of everyday life, and is always directed towards some useful purpose. Given that this knowledge would have been completely inadmissible to my school’s social and academic agendas, my mother was right in her guess that I was being led away from things she knew and valued—and so from her. And indeed many years were to pass before I saw the positive value of her ways of knowing, understood where it came from, and learned that this was a birthright that I had been enjoined to cast aside.¹¹

This relational aspect of Social Biography is what gives credence to the Other’s story as “Our” story and consequently finds solidarity among groups of seemingly different social locations. Social Biography, in essence, is both a critical frame in which to view stories and a precept that sees stories as epistemological, cosmological, and fundamental to understanding and changing the social fabric of society. However, Nakem Pedagogy does not do away with autobiography since the personal story is always the starting point of analysis. Social Biography, rather returns to renew how one articulates his/her autobiography. In other words, the more one knows how to frame their story the better he/she can understand the context of the story and the better they know his/her self. This shift from the particular to the universal allows one to see oneself as a product of socio-historical forces. Paulo Freire speaks to this process:

My presence in the world, with the world, and with other people implies my complete knowledge of myself. And the better I understand myself in such completeness, the more it will be possible for me to make history, knowing that I too am made by history.\textsuperscript{12}

The power of seeing ones story as a story of Othered people allows one to transgress socially constructed barriers (race, class, gender, etc.), participate in either the perpetuation or destruction of that particular construction and realize that one is not ‘fixed’ that one can “be” and “not be” and that it is possible to transgress—in this process, we can acknowledge ourselves as making history and being made by history.

\textit{Window #2}
\textit{A Letter to My Unborn Self}

\textit{Agmurmurayka!}
\textit{Breathe the air of your ancestors,}

Now you see, now you see: You are not an accident of life. Your mother meant it all, this fact of your birthing, its substance and what it means to her and to you. The facts are wrought in stone, those hardy excess of the mountains and hills that depress into the lukong of your birthday, until that lukong—indeed, the Ilocos—reach out to the vast sea in the west: born July 3, 1985, in the days of disquiet of your birthland, some few months before the people rise up in revolution against the dictator with only their rage to call the shots so he, the dictator, would remember, that he had not the right to stay a second longer in power. So you were a prelude to the newfound birth of people's courage, mind you. You never knew—but now you do.

Like everyone else in your barrio, you were born away from the loneliness of hospitals or clinics. You were with your people, in the very heart of it all: in the warm and smoky kitchen built by your grandfather who had come to Hawai`i to seek his fortune over here, maybe misfortune, but fortune nonetheless.

I could imagine the welcome, my dear kadkadua:\textsuperscript{13} our twin cries breaking the silence in that hour of our birth, pacifying the anxiety, and giving calm and balm to the mother of our child's dreams, in the Philippines and in Hawai`i, much later on. Our whole neighborhood could have come to give witness to this birthing, the midwife with her

\textsuperscript{12} Paulo Freire, \textit{Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach}, (Boulder, Colorado: 2005), 95.
\textsuperscript{13} Kadkadua is the Ilokano word for twin, companion, placenta, and soul.
crude but certain ways, and the relatives’ prayers that went with their frenzied ways of attending to the needs of both mother and midwife—and then us.

Someone could have gathered the leaves: the marunggay to coax our mother's breast so she would have more of those colostrum, the first of the first milk we would need.

Someone could have put out the basi, the arak, the tobacco, the gaiety could have begun right there and then despite our young father's absence.

You see: he had to go away to fight a war he did not understand. Perhaps he did not like to wage a war with others, but Ilocos being Ilocos, with each parched earth and broken promises, he did not have to justify his leaving, for leaving he had to fight a war for a dictator who bluffed his way into greatness as empty as the fields lying fallow when the first rains of May fail us.

So we were born without him, coming into this world in war and in chaos, and in the din of what was left of the Philippines in those times with rallies and demonstrations that marked each day that we had to fight it out, with mother finally deciding to let go of the homeland and join her family over here so we can have a chance, one fat chance to be something better, to eke it out somewhere else in the hope that in eking out some life would come to us at last.

And so we left, you remember that. We left the barrio of our birth to get into another barrio—the same poverty we were escaping from—in the big city, where soldiers like our father were doomed to be poor, were the poor were doomed to be poorer.

In the big city, we waited for the coming of our younger sister, Des, she who had come with smiles on her face, sunny smiles, bright smiles, her charm those of the days that gave out some hope for a land so rendered hopeless.

With us, you my kadkadua, Des, and I, we waited for our parents to come home, our mother from a faraway land she had gone to, and our father from the many wars he had to fight in Mindanao.

Some days, our mother would come, but not long—and Des would not know her, remember? Perhaps I was more understanding, more tolerant of absences? Perhaps I was getting used to it, this life with our neighbors shared day in day out, a life of absence, a life of constant looking for something better, something more redeeming beyond the small piece of meat we would share with equally poor children.

Kadkadua: You realize at a very early age that in the geography of pain and separation your neighbors were closer to you than your family in Hawai‘i—both in reach and intimacy. And your birthland is the same thing, despite its wretchedness: it is where you wanted to stay longer—and linger on. You remember the ceremonies of arriving and departing from this birthland, the ceremonies in the language you knew: Ilokano. Some night an adult with you tagging along would take the bus, and in the morning sunlight,
there you were in Bacarra, in those flat lands of rice and garlic that in the east would reach up to the mountains and in the west would bow to the power of the waters of the sea.

This land of the Ilokos you returned to many times, as if in a ritual. And when it was time for you to leave, you just called out to your name: Umaykan, umaykan, di ka agbatbati! (Come, come, you are not to be left behind!) Of course, you were calling out to yourself.

I was calling out to you, my kadkadua.

The sounds of your first language, you are sure, are the powerful winds of the Ilokos mountains, the clatter of the water buffalo's steps as it pulls the sled that carries the bolo knives and shovels that allow the earth to breath, and the flow of the water of life to the thirsty rice fields of the Ilokos. Do not allow this language to be dead in you, kadkadua. It will be a struggle, yes, but it will be your connection to the gods and goddesses you will search for. There is no shortcut to the redeeming ways of the gods and the goddesses, you see.

The American Dream: Inherited Experiences and Class (Un)consciousness

Our Body in Narrative

We are the extensions of the experience of our ancestors. Whatever the joys and sufferings they experienced we inherit the latent effects of those moments. These effects had a profound effect in the way I grew up in Hawai‘i. Even as I moved to Hawai‘i at a young age, living my life in Hawai‘i for more years than I have lived in the Philippines, my memory of my childhood in the Ilocos and Manila, has always been my reference point. It is not that my memories in Hawai‘i are less profound, only that my mother and father’s experience living in Ilocos has been the ethos that have guided me in the struggles we faced in Hawai‘i. They see Hawai‘i in light of their experience in the Ilocos. And because they see Hawai‘i through the lens of their Ilocos and Manila experience it was natural that I inherit these worldviews—these lived and inherited experiences.
Their experiences come from a specific social location, particularly the body of a working class, indigenous farmer, migrant to Manila, and eventual permanent resident of Hawai‘i. While my mother graduated college in Ilocos, she did not have the chance to pursue the career track she studied for because of her move to Hawai‘i immediately forced her to enter the hotel industry as a housekeeper. My father, a retired military man also entered the hotel industry as a janitor. These inherited experiences come with them socio-cultural trajectories that have shaped my life—one of these trajectories include “The American Dream.”

The American Dream—a largely working class aspiration to become part of the middle class, was the narrative-force that facilitated their move to Hawai‘i. This illusive and problematic aspiration coupled with their working class, immigrant, and indigenous experiences created a schizophrenic way of raising children—they wanted us to be Ilokano in body and soul but the aspirations of living the American Dream did not allow this to happen.

They wanted us to be fluent in Ilokano, to be able to communicate to them in the language they knew best but at the same time, they wanted us to speak English as fluent as our blond-hair-blue-eye counter parts. In the end the English language colonized our tongue—no longer we would roll the Rs, and slowly the American vowels displaced the sounds that dwelled in our souls.

The reality is they figured this out even before they arrived in Hawai‘i. America had already been on their shores for nearly a hundred years prior to their coming to Hawai‘i. They saw English replace their beloved Ilokano in the homelands. They new immediately what was the language of business. The American teachers helped drum
beat the promise of America and if they only could experience the promise land they
would be better off. What they did not know was it was also the language of false hopes
and empty promises. The exchange rate for the dollar required us to give up what we
were and who we should become.

My sister and I were climbing the ladder to the middle class life while my parents
remained where they were. They worked double jobs, triple jobs to pay off rent and bills,
school tuition and live a life promised by the dollar. While they worked, we studied. The
higher we got into our education, the more we unlearned the values we grew up with.
The university education we received turned our working class, immigrant and rural
values that shaped our life, helped us to deal with the harsh reality of poverty and
working class realities began to become a source of shame. In the many classes I took in
the university, we learned how to assume histories and experiences we did not have. We
spoke a different language, not the one that taught us how to hustle the streets, but the
one that flattered the university professors—perfect tenses while quoting Western
philosophers and theorists who described our world in Greek, Latin, and German. We
spoke a language that was alien to our own experience and increasingly define our path
for success, while at the same time pulling away from the world of my parents and
ancestors. Ann Kuhn speaks of this alienation of the academe:

I discovered, on the pulse, that it is not quite so easy: you cannot lightly
shed everything that has gone into your formation when you don the
uniform of a ‘good school’. You learn, through messages that are none
the less forceful for being unspoken, that your clothes don’t quite fit, that
your voice doesn’t quite ring true, that you don’t belong. For survival’s
sake, you can acquire a veneer of refinement, learn to keep quiet about
what really matters to you, lower your sights, and keep your ambitions
modest. But then you risk forgetting the value of those ‘resources of
generations gone before’ that might still be there inside of you, in spite of
everything; your resilience, your courage, your capacity for endurance, your quick wit; your ready sense of the ironic, your ability to feel.

You can so easily internalize the judgments of a different culture and believe—no, know—that there is something shameful and wrong about you, that you are inarticulate and stupid, have nothing to say of any value or importance, that no one will listen to you in any case, that you are underserving, unentitled, cannot think properly, are incapable of ‘getting right’. You know that if you pretend to be something else, if you try to act as if you were one of the entitled, you risk exposure and humiliation. And you learn that these feelings may return to haunt you for the rest of your life.

…the price they were asked to pay for their education was amnesia, a sense of being uprooted—and above all, perhaps, a loss of authenticity, an inability to draw on the wisdom, strengths and resources of their roots to forge their own paths to adulthood.\(^{14}\)

This identity performance in the academe, largely a microcosm of the larger society who aspires to the American Dream, may lead you to believe that you are indeed what you say you are regardless of your contradictory history. More than what you say you are, is what you desire to have—the American Dream is sourced from the values of what you have, not what you are. What you did not have was the source of shame, if you have nothing then you are nothing.

Because my parents started with ‘nothing’ they believed that those who had ‘something’ was the people they wanted us to aspire to. In large part, getting an education was a way to have something and be ‘somebody’. This socially constructed path to success increasingly became a path away from my parents, thus away from the values that they taught us. There were many Ilokano immigrants who I have seen follow this path and the more I see the more I believe in the false sense of solidarity within racial boundaries—at times the pretentions were heightened when we were among middle class

\(^{14}\) Kuhn, 117.
Filipinos. bell hooks speaks to this phenomenon when she spoke of Black middle class folks in the capitalist system, “Allegiance to their class interests usually supersedes racial solidarity. They are not only leaving the underprivileged black masses behind, they collude in the systems of domination that ensure the continued exploitation and oppression of the poor.”\textsuperscript{15} It is no different for many of the middle class Filipinos. One only needs to see the history of middle class cohesiveness in the people power revolution—only when the middle class can agree on something that revolutions begin to ferment—when the poor and working class cries out the ear plugs of the middle class mechanically drowns out their collective cry.

Looking back at my educational experience I realize now that working class values shaped the way I saw the world. It was not an experience to run away from or hide, but rather a place in which I drew my identity—hard work and honest living with an ethic that valued community was what guided me to see the beauty of what life has to offer. I realize now that class struggle was not only about getting access to what the middle class received, nor was it raising the standard of living by moving to the suburbs—it was about acknowledging working class values and conditions, particularly seeing an ethic of relationality, suffering in collective dignity even as conditions force people to turn on each other.

What continues to be ignored in the class relations of the West and the rest of the developing world is not a material insufficiency of the poor but the ontological relations of the ruling class. Simply giving the poor and the working class the same access and material trajectory of the middle and ruling class will not solve the inequity and

\textsuperscript{15} bell hooks, \textit{Where we stand: class matters} (New York: Routledge, 2000), 96.
inequality of the world—in fact, this is the delusion and the pathology of consumerism. We do not solve these injustices by consuming more material, or worse, believing in the delusion that we are what we possess. What the poor and the working class, the oppressed, the indigenous offers to the world is an ontology of collective suffering and relational dignity—we are who we are, regardless of what we have—and we will live as long as we live together. It is the values that are generated in living-in-community and living-with-less is what will transform this pathology of consumerism, a love-one-self, to an ontology of relationality, a love-of-community.

Window #3
Coming/Leaving Home

At Manila International Airport, Overseas Filipino Worker gate entrance:

“I will send money.”

“Do well in school. I want you to be an honor student all the time.”

“Don’t cry, baby, I will be back soon.”

Her vacation ends and I watch my mother leave for Hawai‘i. In six weeks I will do the same.

It’s been 19 years and the words like these do not get easier to hear. Only this time the passports have changed color—Green to Blue—the color of the eyes of our American employers and Europeans who come to visit these islands looking for a ‘good wife’ and ‘cheap shirts’ to bring back to their homes, where it’s cooler and the bus arrives on schedule.

Philippine passports are now brown—off to Dubai, Hong Kong, Japan, and Singapore.

I witness daughters, with clenched fists, tightly holding onto to their mother’s shoulder, refusing to let go, parting only because the deafening whistle of the security guard drowns the ‘good-bye’s and ‘I love you’s. The boys stay silent but cry with more tears than their sisters. In time, their turn will come—boys become fathers who will soon say their ‘good bye’s.

Husbands have learned how and when to cry:
When soap gets into the eyes while scrubbing away the dirt by hand from your children’s school uniform.

Or after the long distance phone call, when your wife have made promises to send the toys your children saw on television.

Or at the end of the day, when you made their breakfast, packed their lunch, picked them up from school, made their dinner, bathe their bodies, and told them stories of how you met your mother—and then you sleep your weary body into the night—crying in your dreams is still crying.

I thought my tears dried up like the spring wells of Ilocos but the spirits that are left behind in this airport have a way of making you remember what you tried hard to forget—in my playing as an ‘adult’ I try hard not to look at this sad scene but my memory is more real than reality—tears will help cool my face in the heat of Manila.

It was 19 years ago when my father was my mother and my mother was my father.

I have been in the Philippines for 33 days and each day my father calls from Hawai‘i to check in and hear what we ate, where we went, whom we talked to, and if we remember the faces of those who taught us how to share one hotdog among six growing children.

I tell him that I am eating well, visited Baclaran and Divisoria—the shopping center of the poor—to shop for thrifty deals, talked to uncle Jessie, and our neighbor Christopher has a baby boy.

I told him that I bought another guitar—classical, where the tune reminds you of sounds of the past—I have two guitars now, despite not learning anything from my guitar class at the university. I can’t play a complete song, pluck only to hear a memory.

More and more I am convinced I bought it for other reasons.

During those days of loneliness my father would invite his friend—Pilimone—the guitar master of the squatters—the karaoke machine of nostalgia—jeepney driver by day and full time father at night—he would pluck and sing while pouring a bottle of San Miguel beer in his cup—a private concert for my sister, father and me.

Time did not exist in those songs of love. A warm embrace of a father to his daughter will make the full moon late for bed. The admiration of a son to his father will make the sun envy, forgetting to rise so the moments of embrace and silent hoping last for one more song. And one more song. And one more song.

Schools days were repetitive: drop off, pick up, homework, sleep.
Weekends were exciting: Luneta, the state park, for the swings and slides, Cine for that movie everyone is talking about, maybe a trip to Bulacan or Laguna, to our cousins, for a long bus ride to the mountains.

When days were bad we did not see him. He loved us so much he could not allow us to witness his tears ride the waves across the Pacific to his wife. During his night of solitude we would become refugees looking for a place away from the emptiness of home, for food, for a father and mother to a six-year-old son and four-year-old daughter.

Another night of sharing a 5 inch hot dog among six people.

I understand but I do not understand.

“Narigat ti agbalin a ama, narigrigat ti agbalin nga tao,” “It is difficult to become a father, it is more difficult to become a person.” No, it is harder to be a father.

There has not yet been any sorries or anyone forgiven. We do not know who is at fault when both parties cry. For now we must grieve before any kind of sorries are said. For now, we witness each other and open up our windows of vulnerability.

The Politics of Address:
Locating Nakem in the Other through Our Body, Windows, and Terminals

My hope in remembering my return home—the Philippines—illuminates the traumatic complexity of people who are indigenous to the Philippines who face leaving and returning to their homeland. There are multiple themes that texture this particular vignette: diaspora, (im)migration, gender, class, nostalgia. My intention for this piece is precisely to see and feel the pain of the Other who is in exile and in search for a home. What follows below is my attempt to speak to the social forces that shape oppression, particularly in the Other. I draw from the examples of Filipino migration to Hawai‘i and explore how Nakem Pedagogy can address the Other by using the metaphor of the window of vulnerability used by Dorothee Soelle:

The window of vulnerability
Must be closed—
So the military say
To justify the arms race
My skin
Is a window of vulnerability
without moisture, without touching
I must die

The window of vulnerability
Is being walled up
My land
Cannot live

We need light
So we can think
We need air
So we can breathe
We need a window
Open toward heaven.\(^{16}\)

Nakem Pedagogy believes in opening up the window of vulnerability in the fragility of our human condition, precisely because we are fragile that we ought to make wider our window of vulnerability. This act of uncalculated courage requires, of course, that we believe all persons have a window in which the spirit of humanity can see, hear, and touch each other. This window is often, in the manner of the military, seen as a ‘weakness’—it is what makes us susceptible to the enemy—susceptible to the Other. In the eyes of the military, all windows must be covered and any vulnerability must be secured. In contrast, Nakem Pedagogy believes that our window must remain open and made wider while vulnerabilities seen as an invitation. Nakem Pedagogy’s intent is to breakdown any construction that inhibit our selves from being seen, heard, and touched—to obstruct this window is to embrace the disease of alienation—resulting in spiritual suicide.

\(^{16}\) Dorothee Soelle, *Window of Vulnerability.*
In this section, I wish to examine the values that Nakem Pedagogy contribute to the diverse array of bodies in the context of education, address what opportunities to those who seemingly resist the liberatory aspect of this pedagogy and explore the systems/narratives of colonization that divide and often pit the “oppressed” against each other—it is to see our bodies as bridges and not barriers.

Valuing Nakem Pedagogy

On April 3, 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered the speech, *I’ve Been to the Mountaintop*, this was to be his last speech on the eve of his assassination. In his speech he proclaimed that he has “been to the mountaintop…looked over…and seen the Promised Land…and we, as a people will get to the Promised Land.” I believe what Dr. King saw at the top of the mountain as the ‘Promise Land’ was the people situated on the base of the mountain—he saw the miracle of solidarity and the witness of oppression being overcome by all walks of life. He saw from the base of the mountain oppressive social constructions crumble at the yearning of all people to live a common destiny of life-becoming—a life that could only be lived if we are bound together in an affirmative process of soul-expansion and allow the buoyancy of life-abundant keep us always above oppression. Nakem Pedagogy draws from this vision from the mountaintop and derives core values manifested in the people at the base of the mountain, namely—community, relationality, and love.

The value of community sees that all people have the obligation to nurture each other in life-affirming ways. It means that being together takes precedence over any circumstance. There was a rural village in Jeju Island, South Korea where a community faced eviction from their own hometown. The South Korean government along with the
United States government planned to level the village in order to build a U.S. Naval base. The village resisted and protested resulting in one of the prominent leaders being detained and arrested. The village did not have enough money to bail their leader out and so was forced to negotiate a deal with the local authorities. The deal meant that they would release their leader but would have to vacate their ancestral land. In a difficult decision the village nearly split—some wanted to stay—but in the end chose to be together. They packed their belongings and relocated the whole village to another spot on the island. The value of community does not only bind us together physically but preserves a way of life that exists only when we are together. This mechanism of togetherness allows for the memory of the past to guide us in the future: we resisted, we kept our dignity, and we never left anyone behind. Had everyone sold their own lot, allowed the leader to remain in jail, and moved to different parts of the island the people’s memory of each other and themselves would have slowly withered away. The ancestral wisdoms—culture, language, music, art—would have taken its seat into antiquity—and no “home” would have been possible to either go or return to. The value of community does not mean that we prevent each other from separating but rather hold each other accountable to keeping alive a community, both viscerally and somatically, that we can always return to. The value of community is the value of being able to return—home. This value of community is reinforced by an ethic of relationality.

An ethic of relationality requires us to see each other as not only part of the community but always related to each other in both time and space. In the context of Nakem Pedagogy the value of relationality allows us to transgress the limitations of

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17 see the documentary by Regis Tremblay, *The Ghost of Jeju*. The film highlights the United States military imposition on the people of Jeju island of Korea.
certain social constructions—race, class, sex—and insert ourselves in a genealogy of struggle as a new identity based on oppression and liberation. When I mean we are related, I do not mean that we base our relationality on the least common denominator and severe our relationality when the “struggle” or “movement” is won. I have witnessed this limited form of relationality in many groups who have sought ally-ship in order to “unite” against a common “oppressor”, though I see value in this approach the worse thing to happen for this type of phenomenon is for the struggle to be actually won. Once the struggle have been won the people disband, fragment, and continue on their own individual “mission.” Relationality becomes a means not the end and reduced to a “political strategy.” Relationality cannot be seen as mere strategy but an ontology that sees each other us bounded by a spiritual umbilical chord that cannot be untied or severed—for better and for worse. Being in community is dependent on seeing each other as always in relationality. And when we embody an ontology of relationality we see oppression also in a relational manner. If we are related and oppression is, too, relational then it would render useless an analysis that separates and privileges a politic of identity. That is to say, we cannot see, for example, class, sex, and race as separate and isolated, and affecting only those who are discriminated by it. Those who have built up this infrastructure of oppression, if seen through a community and relational lens, must also be affected in a negative way—only one is not aware of it—because one has forgotten of the connection. Because the nature of oppression prevents us from living in community and seeing each other as related a more powerful force needs to be present—love.

“Let me say at the risk of seeming ridiculous that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love.” Che Guevera echoes the necessary and transgressive value—
love—of Nakem Pedagogy. The value of love allows us to belong to a community and see our relationality to each other—the transformative power of love keeps us from settling into the binary of “oppressed/oppressor”, “man/woman”, “black/white”, “poor/rich”, etc. In Nakem Pedagogy love is the driving force that believes no oppression/person/construction is impenetrable. These values will permeate my discussion of resistance to the liberatory aspect of education and address of systems/narratives of colonization among oppressed peoples.

Resisting Liberation and Liberating Resistance

Nakem Pedagogy calls for a methodological and epistemological shift in seeing constructions and identities as impenetrable. Simply, in order to address those people who may be resistant to the liberatory aspect of Nakem Pedagogy we must reframe what it means to be “resistant” and to be “oppressed.” In the final analysis, resistance to liberation means either we are not aware of the extent of our oppression or accept a life in which the currency of existence is alienation. I want to challenge the notion of people resisting Nakem Pedagogy’s goal of liberatory education. I suspect that most people who resist the liberatory and transformative power of a pedagogy of soul-consciousness is not aware of their own context of oppression and given the choice in life would not prefer to live an alienating colonial existence.

I assert that in this reality, given our deteriorating relationality and lack of community, we are suffering from collective amnesia and driven by a delusion of individualism. In the context of colonization, we do not realize that we are living in, what Indigenous scholars Wand McCaslin and Denise Breton, the colonizer’s cage. In
this cage, we are believed to be healthy and given the illusion that freedom, justice, and healing are something to be feared and simultaneously detrimental to our being. Living in this cage assumes a false reality and therefore a false assumption of ourselves:

This, then, is the core challenge: We cannot practice justice as a way of life and remain colonizers. We cannot avoid confronting the colonizing cage—a cage that traps both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. If there is a genuine effort to practice justice as our way of life—a way informed by values of respect, humility, inclusivity, and all the other values essential to healing justice—then we will invariably come to a point where it is apparent to all of us that Eurocentric thought, with its inherently colonizing assumptions, expectations, behaviors, norms, and institutions, must go.18

In the context of Nakem Pedagogy, people resist only because they fear liberation, but do not necessarily oppose to it. For so long we have been under the illusion that what is good for us is inside the cage, we have flourished so much so (under the illusory condition), that even the makers of the cage have joined us. Moreover, the cage is so powerful that it has taken a life of its own, trapping both the colonized and the colonizer, and making them believe that all is well. This cage is the reality that Nakem Pedagogy is trying to break and those whom resist this pedagogy are precisely the people who benefit from it. Resistance in this case is the entry point of establishing a relationship and to realize together that “somewhere along the way, we ceased being people and somehow became performers in an Aboriginal minstrel show for White North America.”19

19 Thomas King, The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 68.
This cage, theatre show, in which we are performers living on the subsistence of colonialism gives us a false ontology, that refuses the touch of liberation, but embrace relationships of domination, Dorothee Soelle explains:

Our false ontology, in which relationship is nothing but domination, also leads us to disguise and tame the contradictoriness of the reality. Our positivist notion of science makes us blind to the deepest dimension of reality—namely, human consciousness that demands liberation… This postulate is fulfilled by the philosophy that is born to neutralize this reality, “so that it no longer approaches me, so that it no longer touches me.”

Nakem Pedagogy’s approach is to see the hostile ‘resistance’ as the wound and trauma that resulted in being trapped in that cage. This wound becomes a mirror to hold up to one’s resistance and show that the act of resisting keeps the wound from healing. This wound is not a pathologizing condition but rather a starting point to become a healer, what Henry Nouwen calls, a wounded healer, somebody who “must look after his own wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.”

To Nouwen these wounds have the potential to heal others, he elaborates:

Making one’s own wounds a source of healing, therefore, does not call for a sharing of superficial personal pains but for a constant willingness to see one’s own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which all men share.

It is healing because it takes away the false illusion that wholeness can be given by one to another. It is healing because it does not take away the loneliness and the pain of another, but invites him to recognize his loneliness on a level where it can be shared.

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22 Ibid., 88.
23 Ibid., 92.
The recognition of the “loneliness and pain of another” that rises from the “depth of the human condition” makes Nakem Pedagogy, in theological language, a healing ministry. In a healing ministry, we look for signs of woundedness and see therefore the sign of resistance as entry points of a liberatory engagement. What happens then when we give in to constructions that see oppression as barriers and not an invitation to community and relationality? What follows is Nakem Pedagogy’s framework when tackling systems of oppression that divide and pit the “oppressed” against each other. In an age of rampant sectarianism how do we live out the vision of the theme song of the civil right movement: We shall overcome!

*Bounding our Struggle*

When I was studying in Berkeley, California I encountered a peculiar understanding of fashioning an identity—the more oppressed, the more privileged, the more one has the right and authority to speak. On the streets as well as in the classroom students/groups engaged each other on a discourse on who is more oppressed, and therefore who occupies the number “1” spot on the list for the “preferential option.” I remember at one point, the “winner” of the preferential contest went to the black-queer-working class-single-homeless mother. This social location was deemed the “most oppressed” and deserving of all the resources and that after we address this particular social location then we can address all other peoples and oppressions. I have seen many non-profit organizations build around this methodology—the preferential option for the more oppressed. This phenomenon of understanding oppression has saturated popular culture and evolved a more sophisticated iteration in the academy—the deferential option for the epistemologically privileged.
The deferential option for the epistemologically privileged is the belief that the “most oppressed”, above all, should know most, perhaps exclusively and therefore should know how to solve the “problem” of their own oppression. While there is certainly some truth to be said about the oppressed knowing their situation, I do not believe that they should have the sole burden of “solving” their own oppression. Oppression is always part of a system; therefore, our bodies are always part of a larger body and to be relational means to be related even in our particular oppression.

In Hawai’i, this complexity lives out in the dynamic between the constructions of the Native/Indigenous vs. the Asian settler. More explicitly, this is the narrative/system that has pitted oppressed groups against each other.

Inculcating stories among minoritized groups are powerful ways of creating false realities. One such sophisticated narrative is found in the social construction of *Asian Settler Colonialism*. Haunani Kay Trask, Native Hawaiian scholar and Hawaiian nationalist remarked:

Finally, it must be recalled that history does not begin with the present, nor does its terrible legacy appear with the arrival of a new consciousness. Non-Natives need to examine and reexamine their many and continuing benefits from Hawaiian dispossession. Those benefits do not end when non-Natives begin supporting Hawaiians, just as our dispossession as Natives does not end when we become active nationalists. Equations of Native exploitation and of settler benefit continue. For non-Natives, the question that needs to be answered every day is simply the one posed in the old union song: “Which side are you on?”

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“Which side are you on” simply reiterates a binary of opposition and in this context the “right” side is always and only the indigenous side. Dean Saranillo, a Filipino scholar responds:

Because the United States invaded Hawai‘i, Filipinos, like other settlers who immigrated to Hawai‘i, live in a colonized nation where the indigenous peoples do not possess their human right to self-determination, and because of this Filipinos are settlers. The word “settler” is a means to an end. The goal is not to win a game of semantics or to engage in name calling, but rather for settlers to have a firm understanding of our participation in sustaining U.S. colonialism and the end to support Native Hawaiians in achieving self-determination and the decolonization of Hawai‘i.\(^{25}\)

Not only Filipinos but all other Asians become settlers regardless of the particularity of their historical circumstance, Candace Fujikane adds:

All Asians, then, including those who do not have political power, are identified in this book as settlers who participate in U.S. settler colonialism… Other groups in Hawai‘i besides Asians can also be identified as settlers, but we leave it to those communities to identify their responsibilities to Hawaiians.\(^{26}\)

Moreover, addressing the issue of mix-race Hawaiians, Fujikane adds:

Mixed-race Hawaiians are still genealogical descendants of the land despite their settler ancestries; to argue anything less is an act of colonial theft that takes Hawaiians’ genealogical heritage away from them. In the U.S. colony of Hawai‘i, Asians are settlers who come from own ancestral homelands where their own genealogical tie lie.\(^{27}\)

This binary of opposition, the narrative of Asian settler vs. indigenous is engaged without accounting for the complex social-historical traumatic experience of both groups with a shortsighted vision of addressing this entangled oppression. This story is an example of a “planted story”, Ben Okri elaborates:

\(^{25}\) Dean Saranillo, Colonial Amnesia: Rethinking Filipino “American” Settler Empowerment in the U.S. Colony of Hawai‘i in Asian Settler Colonialism.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 5.
In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is possibly a heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted—knowingly or unknowingly—in our selves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.28

This narrative is a more sophisticated version of “divide and conquer.” We do not know that we are living a story that was planted in us by social forces of colonialism. What if we changed the terms and reframed the struggle of “Asian settlers” in such a way that neither side does not have to out weigh the other and both sides can bring its gravity to dismantle colonialism and address both the effects on all peoples, including the colonizer. Thomas King reminds us the potency of stories becoming medicine, “stories were medicine, that a story told one way could cure, that the same story told another way could injure.”29 And warns us of the problem of choosing to address only one side: “What difference does it make if we write for a non-Native audience or a Native audience, when the fact of the matter is that we need to reach both?”30 Indeed, colonialism, for both, and for all, affects all—indigenous and im(migrant), colonizer and colonized. The same forces that have affected the Native Hawaiians are the same forces that have forced the migration of native/indigenous Filipinos to Hawai‘i. And this is the same forces that have given way to “white consciousness/privilege”—which, too, is a social construction and symptom of oppression.

Nakem Pedagogy does not proclaim the liberal motto: “we are all the same” rather, that we are affected differently by the same oppressive social forces. But in order

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30 Ibid., 118.
to realize this we must be able to communicate and see oppression as a “bridge” much in the same way bell hooks articulates among people of color and white women:

Often the white women I have encountered who are most passionate in their will to be anti-racist, who carry their commitment from theory to practice, are gay women. Interviewing them I heard again and again that discrimination against them on the basis of sexuality helped bridge their understanding of the pain of race-based discrimination. Rather than assuming that this pain identical to the pain they experienced, they accepted the “bridge” as merely a base to walk across, allowing them to learn from people of color the nature of our experience in the social context of white supremacy.  

It is the social forces, particularly the effects of colonization and colonialism, which Nakem Pedagogy brokers among the “oppressed” and “oppressors.” Nakem Pedagogy sees this “bridge” as opportunities to ask larger questions that encompass the oppression of all who are “connected” by the bridge. Again, this bridge makes possible the practice of community and an ethic of relationality. When we build this bridge we can ask larger and inclusive questions that address systems of oppression: What social forces have brought Asians to Hawai‘i? Can the Asian Settler ever lose their “settler” status? Is it when they return home? What if they do not have a home to return to? Is it possible to become “indigenized” to a place they are not indigenous to? Is it possible for the Native to lose one’s indigeneity? Is the “Asian settler” an indigenous person? Do they lose their indigeneity by being forced to leave their homeland? Who benefits from the discourse of native versus Asian settler? Who is marginalized in this process? Are the constructions within the discourse help to achieve human flourishing for all parties?

If we examine these questions without holding onto the “pure” and rigid social constructions of the “Native” and the “Asian settler” we can perhaps imagine new

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constructions that do not function like walls. These walls, to borrow from Dorothee Soelle are:

much more impenetrable than the famous Berlin wall. We keep ourselves apart, we make ourselves untouchable; our wall is soundproof, so that we cannot hear the cries of the poor and oppressed. Apartheid is not merely a political system in one country in Africa; apartheid is a particular way of thinking, feeling, and living without consciousness of what is going on all around us.32

These walls precisely separates us from realizing our relationality, induce an amnesia of individualism or sectarianism, and do not allow for imagining new constructions and identities in the trajectory of liberation and transformation. For Nakem Pedagogy, walls are never seen as impenetrable, it is always porous and vulnerable to the piercing power of love. It seems like an impossibility—to love our oppressors, to love anyone where the “versus” is between us—but it is this transgressive imagination that will “puncture” us and allow for a “gentle hemorrhage” of our being. Chela Sandoval, quotes and reframes Roland Barthes, in his discourse on the power of love:

Barthes points out that what we often detect in the shadow of our lover's speech is that which is "unreal," which is to say, meaning when it is unruly, willful, anarchic. The language of lovers can puncture through the everyday narratives that tie us to social time and space, to the descriptions, recitals, and plots that dull and order our senses insofar as such social narratives are tied to the law. The act of falling in love can thus function as a 'punctum,' that which breaks through social narratives to permit a bleeding, meanings unanchored and moving away from their traditional moorings—in what, Barthes writes, brings about a 'gentle hemorrhage' of being.33

This gentle hemorrhaging of our being is what will give way to asking expansive questions that address the multiple locations of oppression. But as Sandoval, through

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33 Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 139-140.
Barthes, reiterates, it is not just the act of love that is worthy of focus, but also the relationality and relationship that has emerged and created out of this transgression. Sandoval captures this moment:

To fall in love means that one must submit, however temporarily, to what is ‘intractable,’ to a state of being not subject to control or governance. It is at this point that the drifting being is able to pass into another kind of erotics, to the amplitude of Barthes's 'abyss.' It is only in the 'no-place' of the abyss that subjectivity can become freed from ideology as it binds and ties reality; here is where political weapons of consciousness are available in a constant tumult of possibility. But the process of falling in love is not the only entry to this realm, for the 'true site of originality and strength' is neither the lover nor the self. Rather, it is the 'originality of the relation' between the two actors that inspires these new powers.  

Walls, for Nakem Pedagogy, have always a potential to become a site of relationality. Walls can be traversed either by piercing through it or building a bridge around it. But it is the act of love and the belief in community and relationality that can be the scaffolding around new constructions of humanity.

In the final analysis, Nakem Pedagogy sees ‘resistance’ as inherent and naturalized among people who have been affected by the process of colonization. Thus, Nakem Pedagogy reframes ‘resistance’ as a wound of oppression that can be a starting point of their own liberation. They are ‘resistant’ only because we have been ‘wounded.’

Nakem Pedagogy, in its effort to initiate a liberatory education for the “oppressed” and the “oppressor,” believes in the values of community, relationality and love. These qualities of Nakem Pedagogy allow for us to reframe colonial narratives that pit the “oppressed” against each other and point this energy toward imagining larger visions that encompass all parties, including the “oppressor,” to dismantle the house of

34 Ibid., 41.
oppression. Ultimately, Nakem Pedagogy sees education with spirituality of liberation that is trying to heal and mend our woundedness. Parker Palmer speaks to this kind of spirituality in education:

Such an education would root ethics in its true and only ground, in the spiritual insight that beyond the broken surface of our lives there is a “hidden wholeness” on which all life depends. In such an education, intellect and spirit would be one, teachers and learners and subjects would be in vital community with one another, and a world in need of healing would be well served. That, finally, is the reason why the spirituality of education deserves and demands our attention.  

35 Parker Palmer, To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey, (New York, NY: 1993), xix.

Our Storied-Body as Terminals and Windows

Terminals transport and transform the realities we are dealt with. Through terminals, the native can become an immigrant; the lawyer a bell hop; the scientist a security guard; the school teacher a hotel maid—or it can move the other way—the immigrant become a native; security guard into a scientist; the hotel maid into a teacher. Terminals are where dreams and nightmares start to manifest—a step towards that elusive hope—a step away from that dreadful despair. While terminals have a way of giving a chance to eke out a life away from the harsh realities of the homeland, it can also make one realize the eventual and final destination—the homeland—the place one desperately tries to escape from is the place one desperately wants to escape to. When home is ‘neither here nor there’ the body and memory, too, is neither here nor there—the diasporic soul suffers from an acute nostalgia of ‘once home’ to a forced assimilation of ‘home becoming’. Terminals are pathways for staying and leaving—being and
becoming—in the homelands and in the diaspora. Terminals are where my story begins and ends.

While I have lived in Hawai‘i for more than 20 years, encompassing majority of my life, the memories of Ilocos and Manila has been my only reference point as home. I had always called Ilocos home and only until recently have I started calling Hawai‘i as home. It has taken me at least 20 years to realize, unearth, and examine my experiences of leaving and arriving, separating and reuniting, and perhaps I am slowly coming to terms with my identity as a diasporic person—in Hawai‘i and elsewhere, in America and elsewhere.

Diasporic souls find creative ways, conscious and unconscious, to deal with surviving in a foreign land. If memories of rites and rituals, roots and routes of life is the crutch for one’s identity then preserving and speaking out loud these temporal and temporary moments become necessary for remembering ourselves. Stories become preserved traces of the past. These traces are often etched in letters, captured in photographs, unearthed in surreptitious gatherings, waiting to speak only when the soul is ready to re-member itself to the deep murmurings of pain and trauma, nostalgia and melancholy—to finally mend the dissonant past—but only to make healing tangible from buried wounds. We forget only to survive; we search in order to heal; and remember in order to live.

This act of healing was made more palpable by my reflections on three significant moments in my life. These three vignettes speak to the emotions of being born on the Land, leaving one’s home, and eking out a life in a foreign land.
While I recall writing these pieces several years ago, I do not remember being moved to tears and invited into a silent witnessing until I was given the time to critically reflect on these stories. I believe it has to do with how I have come to frame stories and my Social Biography. Framing has less to do with the technicalities, compositions, and technologies but more to do with ontologies, histories, and potentialities that speak about the silences and absences of what a story holds. A proper framing of our stories will allow us to discern the intentions of these voices of history that speak to the traumas of the past.

Framing the Story Beyond the Present Body

How do we look our story beyond our own corporeality? How do we enlarge and encompass our story so much so that it relates to other peoples’ story? How do we allow this seemingly isolated piece of my life to speak to larger contexts? Surely, a story is much more powerful when we are able to encounter ourselves in it—to summon an apparition of the past into the present.

How we frame these vignettes is dependent on how we frame a story, life—a life-story—if these vignettes are captured moments of our life then we must treat the it as a story about life—in a particular moment—as part of a larger historical narrative.

The quandary of the West is the high premium put into quantitative methods. This preferential option for numbers, charts, and graphs, no doubt give us a statistical landscape in which allows us to see correlations, however, at the same time it has devalued the profound meanings and potentialities of story itself—it is mere ‘anecdotal evidence’, ‘emotional’, ‘subjective’, all words that paint a picture of ‘unreliability’,
meaning you must prove it by data—numbers are gods and they do not lie. But numbers do lie, or at least, omit the difficult truth that we must deal with—numbers hardly speak of trauma. I do not intend to put numbers and stories at a binary with each other. I only seek to highlight, that in a highly capitalistic society such as the United States, premiums are higher in a capitalistic society than things that can be quantified. But it need not be this way, if we value stories in the same way as numbers, perhaps numbers and stories can inform each other—work with each other in communicating multiple truths.

Stories fill a different kind of data in the landscape of history. If we use our stories as empirical evidence of the geography of pain and agony, joy and happiness, trauma and liberation, then we allow our whole body to receive and relate to that moment in life-history. We allow ourselves to open up our window of vulnerability, so much so, that we become transformed, our bodies become translatable, and our life and story weave into the social fabric of society. Our body and the story it evokes are part of Social Biography.

*Social Biography and Memory Work*

“Everything begins with our story. We cannot understand who we are nor the world we live in unless we understand how our life is intricately woven into the social fabric of reality.” Indeed, our stories shaped the way we see the world and construct a world congruent to the stories we tell. This is the essence of Social Biography. Social Biography ‘reads’ our Body in the same manner as a ‘book’ much in the same way Walter Kaufman speaks of:

We must learn to feel addressed by a book, by the human being behind it, as if a person spoke directly to us. A good book or essay or poem is not primarily an object to be put to use, or an object of experience: it is the voice of You speaking to me, requiring a response.37  

Like a book, we must learn to feel addressed by our Body, conversing with it and allowing how we feel to sync up with how we think. Social Biography does not only analyze the Body, it does not intend our bodies to be reduced to a political analysis. Instead, Social Biography uses the gaze and story of the viewer to interlace and intertwine with the story of our Body. Social Biography, by the gravity of the nature of re-membering, quietly invites the viewer into a dialectical relationship.  

While Social Biography starts from the story and lived experience of the individual, it is not insular in its own understanding. The story and lived experiences is inserted to animate our own understanding of the social, political, economic, and historical dimensions of the phenomena. In other words, our stories are not merely unique, but rather, consequential—meaning our stories affect and effect the making of history and give agency to the creation of tomorrow.  

Social Biography shares the objective of what Annette Kuhn calls “memory work.” She states, “Memory work is a method and a practice of unearthing and making public untold stories, stories of ‘lives lived out on the borderlands, lives for which the central interpretive devices of the culture don’t quite work.”38 Social Biography coupled with the method of memory work will not only make public our traumas in life but make those buried traumas a source of hope and healing for the person and the larger collective. These Othered traumas, captured in our bodies, will become a portal in which we can

enter into—a window of relationality that will allow us to mourn, grieve, and collectively heal our woundedness. It is this woundedness that becomes the source of power in order to vision a mended reality while challenging that which caused the woundedness.

*Looking Through the Window of Relationality: Picturing the Body, The Body as Pictured*

Our story is a window of relationality that allow for us to see a reality lived within the frames of our Body. Though we only see within our immediate body it does not preclude us to search far beyond our physicality. For the moment, I want to parallel the reading of our Body to a reading of a photograph. Photographs, like our Bodies, speaks of a story. For the Body, like a photograph, the horizon of meaning-making stretches out beyond the borders and into the matrix of absence presences, Nick Peim articulates this well:

As we begin to figure out the relations between what is framed within and what is connected outside the framing of the photograph, we become conscious of absent ‘presences’. These maybe, as with the position of the photographer, unrepresentable, but they may also arise more intimately within the very content of the photograph.39

Looking through the window, the photograph, the Body, requires us to see what refuses to be seen—the shadows that haunt and disturbs—the *pensity* of the captured moment, captured history in the body.40 We must learn to see the meaning underneath the present obvious; there is meaning to making present this absence, and this absence gives meaning to the obvious present. The smile or sadness of a mother captured in the

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photograph, felt through her Body, is obvious and present but we do not know why she is sad or joyful, we do not know this absence until we bring it into the caption, making it present. When we make the absent become present we make the photograph and our Bodies, according to Roland Barthes, “think.”

When, in the Barthian sense, we allow the photograph to think, we become participants, dialoguing anachronistically with the life and moment captured in the photograph. We are here, yet we become transported there. When we are able to be transported and observe the moment there is a kind of grieving for the suffering, for the suffered, even if we only see a deceptive smile, a deceptive Body. This grieving becomes the genesis of transformative power, taking root in the suffering, and making way for a highly volatile resource for political reflexivity. Judith Butler speaks to the power of grief:

To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself. The disorientation of grief—“Who have I become?” or, indeed “What is left of me?” “What is it in the Other that I have lost?”—posits the “I” in the mode of unknowingness.

Looking through the window requires us to grieve not only for the person but also for ourselves—for what we have lost and gained in the Other. The grieving for the Other makes porous the borders of suffering, we are no longer immune, the walls between ‘us’ and ‘them’ becomes illusory and we begin to be afflicted by the our own grief, question what is lost by not grieving and what is gained by grieving together—through our Body,

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41 Ibid.
through Other Bodies. The Body becomes a window to an animated and continued memorializing of what is lost and found.

When grieving becomes an inward journey it constructs a way for collective healing. One must first realize the hurt in their Bodies to identify the hurt in the Other—suffering must be mirrored in each other for it to take hold of our collective being.

Grieving is an ontological necessity to realize that we cannot live by bread alone; that we are dying and suffering an unconscious death. Dorothee Soelle, a liberation theologian, speaks of the consequences of living by bread alone:

Bread alone kills us. To live by bread alone is to die a slow and dreadful death in which all human relationships are mutilated and strangled. Of course, such a death by bread alone does not mean that we cease to exist. Our bodies still function. We still go about the chores and routines of life; we accomplish things; we breathe; we produce and consume and excrete; we come, go and speak. Yet we do not really live. In Samuel Beckett’s play *Happy Days* there is a character by the name of Winnie, a woman about fifty. In the first act of Winnie is buried in sand up to her waist; nonetheless she chatters away, brushes her teeth, rummages about in her handbag, and feels sorry for her husband. In the second act she is buried up to her chin and can no longer move her head. All relationships are severed, but that stream of idle chatter, in which she takes herself so seriously, flows on and on. That is a kind of death; that is what hell is like, being buried in sand, unable to change things and yet without pain, content to whittle away the time. Abandon hope all ye who enter here”; this is the living death by bread alone. 43

Looking into the window of relationality requisites one to suffer and grieve in order to collectively heal. This process of healing will birth a vision that expands from our Body. A vision from the one who gazes into the window and within the window itself together creates a liberatory vision. The window of relationality is only relational when a new vision can be created from the histories that reside in our Body. Soelle speaks of this vision:

43 Dorothee Soelle, *The Inward Road and the Way Back*, 3.
In personal relations we miss one another when we do not know the vision of the other person or when we think we can forgo this knowledge. We know very little about one another when we do not share together the vision of life that supports us. We need pictures: of houses and cities where we live, of work, and of the relationships of people with one another. If we do not dare to dream together anymore, isolating our desires, and hide ashamed, we live in a suffocating gloominess or hollowness. It is as though we refuse to come to know the angel behind a person, as though our indifference is so great that we can content ourselves with the outside view of the mere present. Loving a person always means sensing the vision of the other. The community of love is shared vision.44

This window of relationality is, in fact, a window into the collective consciousness of the larger society. Each Body is a window, and each window, though personal and limited in view, make up the meta-landscape of the past and present, which will shape the vision of what has yet to come.

The beauty of this window is in its two-way reflexivity. In the instant that I allow myself to grieve the suffering of the story in my Body; I begin to see the Body, the window, in a new light—the definition and clarity of the Body affects me so much that the Body begins to change and take shape from a pathology of oppression to an ontology of liberation—the captured story in my Body is really a captured reality of my oppression/liberation as mirrored by the Body of the collective—the oppression of the whole—the transformative aspect lay in being able to story our Body. Its liberative aspects lay in the shifting of historical perspective, a movement that sees the universal as not only dependent on the particular, rather, the particular is what makes up the universal and the universal is nothing without the multiple particulars that make up the Body of the universal. This understanding happens when our understanding of the world is framed

through the window of relationality. This act of looking through the window will make apparent that we stand, unknowingly, in the same house of experience. Our experiences are connected, only that we do not know we are connected.

*The House of Experience and the Potentiality of an Identity of Struggle*

What the house of experiences allows us to realize are the false narratives that has been used to see through the window. Seeing into the window requires us to turn around and realize that there are many people standing in the same house looking through the window—that there are many windows in the house of experience only that we are preoccupied and intentionally distracted looking through our own window that we forget to look at other peoples’ window. These windows peek into the same outside reality that make up the larger collective narrative of the way we see the world. The moment we become conscious that we stand in the same house of experience is the moment we can begin to take hold of our own power and shape not only the way we see the world, but also change the reality in which we live in the world.

The violent effects of modernity has forced people who live in the same house of experience that turn *on* each other not *to* each other, to focus on the individual rather then the collective; to consume and be consumed as long as it has a profit margin; to make sacred the private and make profane the public. Consequential of this violence, it has made us live a fragmented reality with a consciousness built on bundles of contradictions and precarious foundation. In the final analysis, only when we are made vulnerable, made to tell our stories in the way we see it, through our own experience can we realize we are standing in the same house of experience. Only when we see each other without
the imposition on the Other can we truly encounter each other as Liberation Philosopher Enrique Dussell expounds:

This is the fundamental truth, a *veritas prima*—to see the face of someone without oneself losing the quality of someone; to see the face of the other, and yet to remain oneself; to encounter the mystery which opens out, incomprehensible and sacred beyond the eyes that I actually see and which see me in the closeness of encounter.45

What would happen if we realized that our identities we were affected by the same social forces of history? What kind of movement would manifest if the community of oppressed peoples realized they were living in the same house of experience—that the binding force of humanity is the common struggle against not a single oppressor but systematic oppression itself? It would be a sight to see when the new ethnic/class/racial/linguistic/gender identity is ‘oppression’ itself. When we are made conscious of the hegemonic realties that shape our Body and direct our lives we can begin to understand that our choices, thoughts, and beliefs do not necessarily emerge out of our individual capacity or agency.

In the context of pedagogy and liberal individualism, Megan Boler and Michalinos Zembylas speaks to this reality:

The educator encounters a further irony in attempting to dissect entrenched emotional investments in liberal individualism. Even if an educator entices students to recognize the construction of differences, and to recognize that the playing field is not level, students understandably want to believe in their own agency and free choice. No one wants to be told that the choices they believe they have made are not in fact a result of free will but rather determined by powerful ideological forces. Thus for

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the educator to suggest that we are all victims of hegemony runs counter to individualism on multiple levels.46

Indeed, the narrative of individualism and the illusion of “free choice” or “free will” have constructed the idea that we are not related and connected; that our suffering and oppression is felt individually and must be dealt with as a private and personal matter. However, if we can see oppression as the force that undergirds the relationality of our identity then a hope for dismantling hegemonic structures that continue to isolate and promote individualism is not only possible, but will be the impetus for creating a citizenship under the house of experience.

In the final analysis, I hope our bodies, windows, and terminals become more than metaphors. I hope that it becomes portals into the depth dimension of our souls—moved by a transformative force of relationality that our nakem—soul consciousness—opens its doors for inclusiveness and widen its windows for expansiveness. In the end, these metaphors are simply about finding a way to grieve, heal and for us to see again the wisdom that resides in our body.

Just as our Body is the site of stories and wisdom, the following chapter extends this logic to the Land. Chapter five explores the idea of the Land in connection to memory and healing, and develops a pedagogical ethic that sees the Land as essential in the educational process.

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Chapter 5
Social Biography and the Land
‘O ka hā o ka ʻāina ke ola o ka poʻe

The previous two chapters spoke of the necessity of using a language of spirituality in seeing the cosmology of the learner and seeing the body as a site of stories and meaning-making in developing a pedagogy of soul consciousness. This chapter builds upon the previous concepts to include the Land as a constitutive element of Nakem Praxis.¹

The Land, in addition to our body, holds in her self stories that allow us to name, re/member, and see othered realities. The Land for this reason renders itself inseparable from my articulation of a pedagogy of soul consciousness. I have observed numerous pedagogical articulations that did not see the Land as a significant participant in the educational process. Often, the Land is overlooked, seen as simply a space where learning happens but not as where the learning comes from; this exclusion engenders pedagogy as narrowly human-centric and thus alienating a source of wisdom that renders our educational processes incomplete. In other words, the Land, in modern Western educational conceptions is disconnected and disembodied from our ways of relating, feeling, and knowing. I claim that the Land ought to be an active participant in the educational process. Whether we are conscious or not, the Land informs, shapes, and facilitates our understanding of our Body and Language. Precisely, I cannot understand the totality of the concepts of Language and the Body if I separate it from the Land—all three inform each other in a reflexive symbiosis. The chapter subtitle sums up the overall

¹ My usage of the term Land connotes the topography including oceans and mountains and elemental forces (rain, sun, wind etc).
This chapter explores in detail how the Land is a living pedagogical apparatus for soul consciousness. In my conception of the Land I draw first from the literature of Indigenous studies, particularly Indigenous Ilokano, Native American, and Native Hawaiian that form their varied and layered epistemological and ontological relationship to the Land. Secondly, I discuss two educational institutions, Ojiya School in Japan and Hālau Kū Māna in Hawaiʻi, which has an embodied pedagogical practice with the Land. Lastly, I sum up and develop a pedagogical ethic based on our relationship with the Land with regard to Nakem Pedagogy.

_Epitomologies That Guard and Feed, Sing and Tell Stories:_

_Daga as Guardians_

Growing up on the base of the Ilocos Mountains in the Philippines, where chickens and goats run wild and the natives plant their hearty vegetables, I did not realize then the rites and rituals that I was immersed in. In reflecting on my experience growing up in the Ilocos I realize the reverence and the relationship in which the community and my grand parents had with the Land. The Land oriented their way of understanding and navigating the geography of the Ilocos. The Ilokano connections between the language and the body can be situated in the _Daga, Land._

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2 The chapter subtitle is the ethos of a community organization, Hoʻoulu ʻĀina, part of Kokua Kalihi Valley, situated in the ahupuaʻa of Kalihi Valley. This chapter is dedicated to Hoʻoulu ʻĀina whose kulueana has been to nurture our Grandmother so She can breathe life into the people.
The Daga, functions as the center of life. It is where one grows food, situates residence, and offers gifts to the ancestors. The complex and dynamic relationship between the Daga and the people can be illuminated by the word Kadagaan, an abstraction of the word Daga, it means, roughly, “ones relationship, oneness, acceptance, compatibility with the Land.” One’s life is necessarily dictated to its own kadagaan, ones relationship to the Land. When I ask elders in the Ilokano community what this means they say that the Daga choses the person, that it is possible for one to settle in an area and not be able to grow food, and possibly succumb to sickness, while another can flourish in health and farming, at the same spot: “Saanmo kadagaan” (it is not meant to be, you are not on the right land). Moreover, vegetation can also flourish or wither away depends on how the Daga accepts the relationship: “Saanna kadagaan”, (it is not right for the land, it cannot survive).

The prominence of the mountains as part of the Daga cannot be ignored. The word for mountain in Ilokano is Bantay. Bantay in addition to its translation of mountain has another cosmological and epistemological connotation: to guard, to be present, to watch over, to protect. The Bantay can also be deified as Apo Bantay, Mountain God, or Guardian God. Conceptually, together, it means the mountains are not only living, but also acts as guardians who watch over, protect, and always present. To the Ilokano consciousness, one can never be alone, never feel alone, never feel unsafe, as long as the mountains exist. Moreover, the word bantay, can also apply to “one who guards”, it implies that a person can also be the bantay, the person can be the “one who guards the mountains.” In the final analysis, both the mountains and the people form a relationship

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3 See chapter 3 on the Ilokano language and the indigenous usage of Apo.
of co-dependence, *tagay bantayda a dua*, both mountain and people are guardians to each other—both need each other to thrive and flourish.

*Daga as Guide*

The elemental components of the Daga also plays a directional orientation, it is the compass of topographic orientation for the Ilokano. When one understands the geographic definitions of the four directions: Amianan (North), Abagatan (South), Daya (East), Laod (West). One can never get lost for the mountains function as a directional orientation. Amianan refers to the Northern Winds, Abagatan conversely is the southern winds, while the Daya refers to where the sun rises and Laod means the Sea. The specificity of the directional terms refers to draws upon one's sensorial nature and location in a geography.

In contrast, the English directional terms, *North, South, East, and West*, I suspect at one time had ties to a particular land and culture and used similarly, though at this moment, I have seen and used it only as an abstraction, an idea that has no territorial and physical meaning, other than arrows that point to a specific but arbitrary (considering the circularity of the earth) direction.

This cosmological and genealogical makeup of the Ilokano informs their epistemological understanding within their relationship to the Land. However, this epistemic nature is not exclusive but rather shared among oral and aural communities. What follows below are brief examples of indigenous communities that draw knowledge from their relationship to the Land.

‘*Āina as Knowing*
Though part of my being is Ilokano I realize that for the majority of my life I have lived in Hawai‘i. As part of the spirit of living on these sacred islands the life-force of the ‘Āina has added to my understanding of my relationship to the Land. Hawaiian educator Manulani Meyers, in interviewing Hawaiian cultural practitioners, speaks to the ‘Āina as an epistemological theme:

‘Āina as origin, ‘Āina as mother, ‘Āina as inspiration… ‘Āina refers to the environment. How this shapes how one experiences the world is an important lens through which to view cultural epistemology. It was the place of birth (‘Āina hanau) where all mentors began their descriptors of who they were, and how it shaped their differences and values. It is where one grew up that most shaped their world view.

‘Āina became an epistemological theme during specific interviews with mentors who kept drawing from their land of origin or from their work currently on land that “feed” them. Here, “feeding” became both a literal and spiritual descriptor as mentors spoke of sustenance, growing knowledge and inspiration with regard to ‘Āina. Land, sky and ocean also became the classroom of their most vivid lessons, the place of metaphors from which they continually draw on.

The ‘Āina, indeed has fed us of our identity and the wisdom that we receive. She is the source of knowing and always tied to the conception of time and history.

Lilikala Kame‘eleihiwa is quoted by Anthropologist James Clifford concerning how the Land holds history and the ancestors, as both sources of wisdom:

It is interesting to note that in Hawaiian, the past is referred to as Ka wa mamua, or “the time in front or before.” Whereas the future, when thought of at all, is Ka wa mahope, or “the time which comes after or behind.” It is as if the Hawaiian stands firmly in the present, with his back to the future, and his eyes fixed upon the past, seeking historical answers for present-day dilemmas. Such an orientation is to Hawaiian an eminently practical one, for the future is always unknown, whereas the past is rich in glory and knowledge.” (1992:22-23).

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Most significantly, perhaps, there is no relentless “wind” of “progress” blowing the indigenous Hawaiian backward into the future. Time has no single, violent direction, but tacks resourcefully between present dilemmas and remembered answers: a pragmatic, not a teleological or a messianic orientation. The past materialized in land and ancestors, is always a source of the new.\(^5\)

The conception of ‘Āina is no doubt complex and dynamic, full of rites and rituals that unlock transcendental understanding of how we come to know ourselves and place in the universe. In the hustle and bustle of modernity the relationship with the ‘Āina can be severed but as activist and Hawaiian singer Hawane Rios learned:

that to rekindle the relationship with the earth is to simply go to the earth. It is gifting yourself a moment to lay down on the land and communicate with the sky. It is going outside to plant a seed and ake a vow to nurture and watch it grow. It is savoring the sweetness and the brilliance of a stary night. It is talking your children or relatives to the mountains or the beaches that shaped you. It is lifting your arms up to the sun and letting the rays reflect your own inner light. It is knowing, really knowing, that you come from generation of ancients gifts, of strength, of love, and of divine connection. One of the most beautiful lessons I learned in this wonderful journey is that you need not travel to return to center, for you possess within your spirit all of the wisdom needed to guide you. The earth mother, Papahānaumoku, the great healer and teacher, is all around us and resides within us. She is a living and breathing source that connects everything within to everything without. Let us all ignite that source within, ke kumu ola, heal together as people, and forward in unity.

Ola.\(^6\)

**Speaking of the Land**

In witnessing the ‘Āina, (Hawaiian) and Daga (Ilokano) serve as both that which guards and feeds the people, I turn to aboriginal Australians and their relationship to seeing the Land, with the specificity of its landscapes, in connection to stories and story


telling. In oral and aural cultures, the textuality of the Land animates their understanding of the world. Landscapes function as the grammar to ones identity and construction of the world in which one navigates. Ecologist David Abram, remarks:

To members of non-writing culture, places are never just passive settings. Remember that in oral cultures the human eyes and ears have not yet shifted their synaesthetic participation from the animate surroundings to the written word. Particular mountains, canyons, streams, boulder-strewn fields, or groves of trees have not yet lost the expressive potency and dynamism with which they spontaneously present themselves to the senses. A particular place in the land is never, for an oral culture, just a passive or inert setting for the human events that occur there. It is an active participant in those occurrences.\(^7\)

In addition, I want to make explicit what the Land means in terms of role in Language as it relates to its control in orienting our bodies in navigating our Land. Abram, speaking of Australian Aboriginal cultures remarks:

Language here is inseparable from song and story, and the songs and stories, in turn, are inseparable from the shapes and features of the land. The chanting of any part of a song cycle links the human singer. The chanting of any part of a song cycle links the human singer to tone of the animals or plants or powers within landscape, to Crocodile Man or Pandanus Tree Woman or Thunderstorm Man—to whatever more-than-human being first chanted those verses as he or she wandered across the dreaming earth. But it also binds the human singer to the land itself, to the specific hills, rocks and streambeds that are the visible correlate of those sung stanzas.\(^8\)

Abram, draws from an anecdote that American poet Gary Snyder tells about his travels in Australia with a Pintupi elder named Jimmy Tjungurrayi. Driving through the rugged terrain of the central desert, the elder begins to speak very rapidly, telling him a Dreamtime story about the Wallaby people and Lizard girls at a mountain they saw from the road. Snyder notices that the elder is rapidly telling a story one after the other about

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\(^8\) Ibid., 173.
the each surrounding hills. He realizes that “after about half an hour of this that these were tales meant to be told while walking, and that I was experiencing a speeded-up version of what might be leisurely told over several days of foot travel.”

Abram cites another story of traveling across the desert, of an aboriginal man nicknamed Limpy, whose clan Ancestor was the Native Cat or tjilpa. As the driver, Arkady, treks across the a stream and route of the Tjilpa Men, Limpy,

“bounced into action...he shoved his head through both windows. His eyes rolled wildly over the rocks, the cliffs, the palms, the water. His lips moved at the speed of a ventriloquist’s and, through them, came a rustle: the sound of wind through branches.

Arkady knew at once what was happening. Limpy had learnt his Native Cat couplets for walking pace, at four miles an hour, and we were traveling at twenty five.

Arkady shifted into bottom gear, and we cralawed along no faster than a walker. Instantly, Limpy matched his tempo to the new speed. He was smiling. His head swayed to and fro. The sound became a lovely melodious swishing; and you knew that, as far as he was concerned, he was the Native Cat...

Abraham understands these anecdotes the land speaking through the body:

the felt correspondence between the oral language and the landscape, an alliance so thorough that the speaker must pace his stories or songs to match the speed with which he moves through the terrain. It is as though specific loci in the land releases specific stories or stanzas in those Aboriginal persons who travel by them. Or as though, at such times, it is not the native person who speaks, but rather the land that speaks through him as he journeys across it.

In similar epistemological frameworks of the Land linguistic anthropologist Keith Basso and his work among Western Apaches quotes an Apache woman, Mrs. Annie Peaches, she reminds us that the “Land is always stalking people. The land makes people live

9 Ibid.
10 Ibid. 174
right. The land looks after us. The land looks after people.”12 With regard to storytelling and its relationship to the Land, Basso speaks of his observation:

Nothing is considered more basic to the effective telling of a Western Apache “story” or “narrative”... than identifying the geographical locations at which events in the story unfold. For unless Apache listeners are able to picture a physical setting for narrated events (unless, as one my consultants said, “your mind can travel the place and really see it”), the event themselves will be difficult to imagine. This is because events in the narrative will seem to “happen nowhere” (dowhaa’agodzaa da), and such an idea, Apaches assert, is both preposterous and disquieting. Placeless events are an impossibility, everything that happens must happen somewhere. The location of an event is an integral aspect of the event itself, and therefore indentifying the event’s location is essential to properly depicting—and effectively picturing—the event’s occurrence.13

To summon a story that is de-territorialized, that is not rooted in any physicality or that one’s body cannot stand firmly on, renders the story in the Western sense “fictional” and therefore has no “real” meaning. In other words, stories are not soley constructed from the imaginary but is rooted in the materiality, the corporeal and topographic realities. Stories are felt through the Body and on the Land.

What I intentionally summon from these stories is to grasp a specific relationality that points toward an ontological and epistemological relationship that does not situate the human/person as the center or dominant agent in birthing knowledge. It is not only the person that can tell a story but the Land as well. The Land as articulated in the stories among indigenous communities also as its own

13 Keith Basso, Speaking with Names: Language and Landscape Among Western Apache, in Cultural Anthropology, May 1988, 111.
Social Biography. And what this Social Biography is always connected to the Body’s Social Biography.

Because of the Land’s nature and ability to tell a story and hold a reflective space for story telling, I briefly highlight two schools, one from Japan and the other in Hawai‘i, that incorporates the Land in both pedagogy and curriculum. The descriptions below offer only a glimpse into the schools educational philosophy.

Ojiya School

Educator John Miller described Ojiya School as sitting on the large grounds that encircle an open areas that is called Friendship Pasture with various animals including goats, chickens, rabbits and turtles. The 440 square meter pen in the pasture was built by students and their parents of the school. This is situated in a forest called Yasho Homeland Forest with about three hundred trees previously planted by the students of Ojiya School as part of their curriculum. The students were careful to identify native trees and vegetation. Ikue Tezuka comments on what he saw:

The result is beautiful to see. Spring is the season of the biggest change. Many of the trees burst forth in buds and blossoms at the same time. In May, the green grows deeper and the red blossoms are brilliant against the green background. The red azaleas are especially beautiful. From early summer to autumn, the various trees flower one after another with their white, red, and purple flowers. In autumn, the trees bend toward the earth under their load of delicious fruit. Then comes the seasons of autumnal coloring. Red and yellow leaves are beautiful against the background of the evergreen. The leaves of deciduous trees begin to fall, covering the ground like a beautiful carpet. In winter, the trees stand silent, waiting for

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the thaw which will bring them back to life. Some begin to flower in the snow.\textsuperscript{15}

The result of the students’ involvement in creating the school and integrating an earth curriculum fostered a deep reverence for the natural world. Below are poems by students of the Ojiya School, expressing their relationship with the trees:

Trees in the Home Forest

By Yukari Kazama

I saw trees in the ground.  
They are moving as if they were dancing with snow.  
Don’t they feel heavy  
When they have snow in their branches!

Trees

By Takumi Yokota

I saw trees.  
They look as if they were weeping in the snow.  
Don’t they feel pain when they are bound with ropes?  
I’d like to remove the ropes to make them feel better.

Home Forest

By Rie Sato

Trees in Home Forest.  
Dead Trees.  
They are covered with snow.  
They look as if they were saying, “It’s cold.”  
They seem to be saying to the neighboring trees:  
“It’s cold. I hope spring comes soon.”  
The trees are good friends.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 98.
What the poems demonstrate is an interconnected reverence and relationship to nature. This sense of awareness and sensitivity develops their consciousness in principles of conservation, exemplified by the students transformed action of throwing away leaves for disposal to composting and enriching the soil for the trees.\textsuperscript{17} Giichiro Yamanouchi, a former principal and responsible for the ecological framework of Ojiya School, feels that a forest can provide numerous ways of learning about life and caring for the natural environment. Both science and literary activities can be done in the forest. Speaking to children in another school where they build a forest, Yamanouchi remarked:

\begin{quote}
You go to the forest often, don’t you? When you come to school in the morning, at break times, and after school, I am glad. Some people believe that the forest is sacred, and when you go into it you can be your true self. Forests are natural meditation rooms where we can be alone and listen quietly to the forest. This helps our souls to grow strong. There is good, clean air, in the forest also, which is good for our bodies. If we are troubled in body and in our minds, we can go into the forest to meditate and to breathe deeply and we can become renewed and vigorous.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Yamanouchi, now retired, but active and president of the Japanese Holistic Education society advocates for integrated activities. I list several examples of what he has done in early childhood education:

1\textsuperscript{st} graders:

- masks of leaves;
- making dolls of pampas grass and corn;
- going to the house of an elderly woman to listen to folk tales and folklore

2\textsuperscript{nd} graders:

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 98-99.
dyeing with grass and wood;
making picture books.

3rd graders:
raising silkworms, making silk, and weaving cloth;
researching new year’s customs and events;
praying for a rich harvest.

4th graders:
raising buckwheat from sowing and harvesting
making noodles from the buckwheat and eating them.

5th graders:
planting and raising rice
harvesting, drying, and threshing rice;
raising red beans
making rice cakes.19

Yamanouchi, in addition to teaching students to engage in abstract thinking, stresses the importance of human development. In the end, learning and having a relationship with the Land is about becoming an ethical and moral human being:

The most important responsibility of teachers is to help children grow to be a human being, having much knowledge is not important. To think for oneself, to learn independently, to treat others kindly and fairly to work with friends, to encourage others, to say that one thinks, and to act as one thinks: these are the things where are important. And, of course, a strong, healthy body is also important. In other words, a child needs help in developing all aspects of her personality and her life as a human being.20

19 Ibid.,101.
20 Ibid.,100.
Ojiya School in Japan, though has its own set of negotiations with its own national government, as far as education is concerned, does not deal with the complexity of an indigenous institution situated in a (neo)colonial state. Below is an example of an indigenous learning institution that has managed to negotiate its own values, pedagogy and curriculum in a government that is not always supportive of indigenous rights and survivance.

Hālau Kū Māna (HKM)

HKM, a secondary school in urban Honolulu was founded in 1999 by a core group of young parents and fresh college graduates, among the more notable founders are Keola Nakanishi and Noelani Goodyear Kaopua. Goodyear Kaopua is the author of *The Seeds We Planted*, a documentation of the birth, context, struggles, and success of HKM. Goodyear-Kaopua situates HKM as an indigenous school in a settler society. In her work, she grapples with the negotiations of indigenous learning institutions in an imperial, colonial, settler and white supremacist environment. One of the methods that have enabled HKM to confront and re-orient colonial educational trajectories is through land-centered literacies, Goodyear-Kaopua remarks:

Land-centered literacies...form the basis of a pedagogical praxis of aloha ʻĀina. By land-centered literacies, I mean a range of critically engaged observational, interpretive, and expressive practices that put land and natural environment at the center. Land-centered literacies can include narrower definitions of literacy that refer to specifically working with printed text, but they can also include reading the patterns of winds or the balance of water in a stream. Moreover, the Hawaiian land-centered

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21 Noelani Goodyear-Kaopua is now a professor in the political science department at the University of Hawaiʻi at Manoa. I use her work to describe HKM. See Noelani Goodyear-Kaopua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
literacies...include study of and engagement with historical and contemporary relations of power.\textsuperscript{22}

Land-centered literacies and the pedagogical praxis of aloha ‘Āina is both a political and educational philosophy that addresses “the marginalization and suppression of Indigenous knowledge [that] has gone hand in hand with the transformation and degradation of Indigenous economic systems and the ecosystems that nourish us.”\textsuperscript{23} The challenge for HKM is to develop pedagogy that challenge consumer capitalist values of production while affirming indigenous methods that have sustained its population before colonial contact. Thus, in order to perpetuate knowledge of food and economic systems, HKM makes the restoration of lo‘i kalo (taro) and ‘auwai (irrigation ditch systems) as central to the curriculum.

One of the projects for HKM’s eleventh and twelfth grade class is a Lo‘i project in Manoa Valley in a place called ‘Aihualama. The entry into this particular space is worth mentioning, as it is pertains to an ethic of relationality:

The group’s entry into ‘Aihualama is framed by a set of protocols, chants composed in antiquity and in recent years, intended to remind everyone present—students, kumu, unseen ancestors, and the land itself—of their relationship to one another. Each Tuesday, the ‘ōpio’s voices ring through the lush, broad valley, aptly named Mānoa. A senior haumāna from among them, almost always a kāne (man/male), issues the opening call, and then all join in:

\begin{quote}
Eia ae na kauouo, na oha o Haloa
Ua awa, ua pae I ta ua Tuahine
Linohau Luahine a ta puu Manoa
We are the descendants of Haloa,

Young offshoots of the kalo,
And we ourselves have grown roots in this ‘‘Āina
nurtured here in the back recess of the valley
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., xvi.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 127.
by the rain called Tuahine. Luahine and Pu‘u Manoa are beautifully adorned.  

Only after this protocol can they enter and start to do work in the lo‘i. As part of their science project, students collected data concerning the lo‘i system—the flow rate of the intake and the return, a examination of invasive and native species, and methods of mulching kalo. It is important to note that “work” in the lo‘i and the planting of kalo is seen as rooted in the ethics of kuleana. It is counter to the “work” of capitalism and does not see the kalo simply as a “product” to be planted or consumed. This epistemological space generates a level of understanding, as Goodyear-Kaopua explains, that see:

Hāloa (the kalo plant) [as] both elder sibling and, historically, the primary staple of food of Kānaka Maoli. E mālama iā Hāloa (care for Hāloa) is the central ethic and framework for HKM’s multidisciplinary Papa Lo‘i Project. The work of rebuilding and the ‘auwai and the lo‘i that carry water and shelter to Hāloa aims not only to ground learning in math, science, social studies, and language but also to root student in an ethics of kuleana—a notion of responsibilities, authority, and rights that are tied one’s positionality in relation to place, genealogy, and effort to put forth in knowledge acquisition/production. The process of finding and restoring kuleana is a powerful method of inquiry, teaching and learning in contemporary Hawaiian education.

As a result of working at ‘Aihualama, one of the HKM graduate Pōmai‘a‘i Freed, described her favorite part, ho‘okahe wai (to cause the waters to flow) as an act of healing practice, in cleaning up debris that block the water ways, she remarks:

24 Ibid., 129. I do not provide the full script and translation simply because I do not know myself, and because the oli is accessible and meant only for those who have a relationship with the kumu, Kamuela Yim and HKM, who composed this chant. As Goodyear Kaopua explains: “When I was taught oli during my time in HKM as a researcher, employee, or board member, it was with the understanding that I would use these chants in practice at the school or in my personal life and that I might write about their use and general meaning but not publish them in full.”

25 Ibid., 133.

26 Ibid., 133.
Even before you do the work to open up lo‘i, you have to make sure the water that will feed you has a steady flow. I believe in that process is where you make those sacrifices, so that one day you may reap the benefits. Every day you walk up that stream to go clean a little bit further, a little bit further, so that one day you can build the ‘auwai and watch water flow into your work. To ho‘ōla. To bring that mana into it…

Ho‘okaha wai is also to do that within yourself so that your own mana can flow better, in a more pono way. To have your own mana flowing better, you have to face some things within yourself, so you can clear the blockages that we slowly set up. It’s definitely a process, but we come out stronger for it.27

The metaphor of clearing the blockages speak to the many ways that we have been violated, wounded, and traumatized under colonial systems. The journey inward ourselves needs us to recognize these harmful obstructions and only then can we allow the potential of healing happen. In the end, Goodyear-Kaopua sums up what the land-centered pedagogy means:

In these practices of storytelling, restoration, and cultivation, HKM kumu have articulated the central epistemological point that ‘Āina is not something but someone. Their pedagogies of aloha ‘Āina exceed models of environmental or place-based education that focus on examining and studying phenomena of the natural world without allowing students to cultivate deep relationships with those places and powers. Using ‘Āina-based pedagogies, HKM kumu have taught their students the chants ho‘okupu, and hana offered to ‘Aihualama and other ‘Āina they work and visit are a means of conversing, acknowledging that the ‘Āina is alive, listening and actively communicating. Correspondingly, they have sought guidance from the daily, weekly, and seasonal hō ‘ailona (signs) that the ‘āina and kūpuna offer. Caring for and deepening that relationship has therefore become the centerpiece of their multidisciplinary learning.28

Though I have seen very few educational institutions that see the Land as the central pedagogical axis, my intention was to show that there are pockets of hope and resistance to colonial and fragmented philosophies of education. Ojiya School and HKM are only two examples, but are examples nonetheless, of educational institutions that believe in the

27 Ibid., 146.
28 Ibid., 114.
healing, restorative, and affirmative power of the Daga/ʻ āina/Earth/Land as a pedagogical praxis.

Thus far, I have shown complex, dynamic, and spiritual relationships to the Land using Indigenous Ilokano, Native Hawaiian, Native American and Australian Aboriginal epistemology. In drawing out the epistemic nature I sought to demonstrate its applicability into a pedagogy and curriculum using Ojiya School and HKM. What the following section fleshes out is how Nakem Pedagogy incorporates Land based epistemologies into its educational framework to develop an ethical and pedagogical relationality with the Land.

*The Land as Relationality*

It was not long ago when I attended a sustainability conference at a prestigious university in California that I encountered a disconcerting but revealing way of understanding our relationship to the Land. It was a conference attended by many experts in the field of sustainability. The participants were composed of corporate executives, non-profit directors, professors, a few community leaders and university students who were earning a degree in sustainability, almost all where educated in Western universities. In a panel presentation concerning “defining sustainability” they exchanged a lively discussion on frameworks that could engage people who do not normally think about sustainability. Someone proposed an economic model; to incentivize the people to recycle; another suggested passing legislation that would make photovoltaic panels mandatory; other’s spoke to the urgency of why we should take care of this earth. One of the comments that struck me most came from a white male student, “When all is said and
done, the Earth is just a piece of rock, that’s a fact! But it doesn’t mean that we should not take care of it.” Another male of South Asian descent added, “Yes, and we, humans, are the dominant species, we can do whatever we want to this piece of rock, we are responsible.” In response I asked the two males where they learned this “fact.” With great confidence and surety they responded, “Everyone knows this, it is a scientific fact, we learn this in school and in academic conferences.” Overwhelmed by these comments my body began to tremble, my heart started to shrink, and a trail of tears began to run down my cheeks. At the end of the conference, I asked the white male student what Land did his ancestors came from and what language they spoke. He remarked that he was from America and they spoke English. I asked him if he was Native American and he said “no.” He said he did not know what language his ancestors spoke but they did come from all over Europe. Feeling distraught, he dismissed himself to prepare for his trip to Africa, to help those fighting climate change. While his sentiments did not represent all of the people who attended the conference, it was certainly part of the liberal philosophy that was shared by many who attended.

At that moment, I recognized that our relationship with the Land frames our understanding of the world and how live in it. I realized that a pedagogy that does not address the Social Biography of the Land results in an alienated relationality. What is the nature of our relationship with the Land if we see it as “just a piece of rock and humans as the dominant species” or “the Land is our Grandmother and we are guardians/stewards of Her?” In contrast to the story above I am fortunate to have a space where the latter statement is a lived reality.
In the back of Kalihi Valley in urban Honolulu is a 20-acre nature preserve called Hoʻoulu ʻĀina. Upon entering the park one is immediately greeted with the sign “This Land is Your Grandmother.” The sign is categorically a codification of an ethic that people at the nature preserve embodies. The sense one feels about the work that happens on this particular Land is one of deep reverence to growing food, Land education, and cultivating relationships. One can feel similarly about this nature preserve with how Walking Buffalo feels about the scenes of the Great Spirit:

Hills are always more beautiful than stone buildings, you know. Living in a city is an artificial existence. Lots of people hardly feel real soil under their feet, see plants grow except in flowerpots, or get far enough beyond the street light to catch the enchantment of a night sky studded with stars. When people live far from scenes of the Great Spirit’s making, it’s easy for them to forget his laws.

We saw the Great Spirit’s work in almost everything: sun, moon, trees, wind, and mountains. Sometimes we approached him through these things. Was that so bad? I think we have a true belief in the supreme being, a stronger faith that most of the whites who called us pagans...Indians living close to nature and nature’s ruler are not living in darkness. Did you know that trees talk: Well they do. They talk to each other; and they’ll talk to you if you listen. Trouble is, white people don’t listen. They never learned to listen to Indians so I don’t suppose they’ll listen to other voices in nature. But I have learned a lot from trees; sometimes about the weather, sometimes about animals, sometimes about the Great Spirit.”

Indeed, the language of the Great Spirit speaks at Hoʻoulu ʻĀina. These two contrasting experiences and statements about how we relate to the Land are matters of grave concern. It has to do with how we exist in co/existence. It is to recognize where we have come from and the Social Biography of the Land that has shaped us. Many students, like the one mentioned earlier, believes with good intention about this earth but his manner of relating to the Land is not one of coexistence and codependence. In his framework, all

29 Quoted in John P. Miller, *Education and Soul*, 104.
history is severed from his genealogy of Land and Language. He is from America but
does not see Native America. He speaks English but is not aware of the beautiful
languages of his Ancestors. His existence is based on the supremacy of the present and
epistemology of western scientific discourse. However, I say this not as a judgment but a
description of the modern industrialized condition of humanity, of which the ethos of
many of our students have been educated in. Be that as it may be, there are ways in
which to reroute and reroot our selves back into the Land. We need only to listen and
remember those who have come before us. In a conversation between Native Scholar
Taiaiake Alfred and Oren Lyons, a Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation and influential
figure in Onkwehonwe politics, they speak to the importance of remembering where we
come from. Oren Lyons, tell a story of being reminded of his roots by an old man named
Herb Powless, immediately after he graduated from the university:

“…we were sitting in the boat, we could see where a cliff came right down
the water. Up on the topside of the cliff, there was a tree, a nice pine, not
a big one. And then he says to me, “You see that tree?” and I said “Yup.”
“Well” he says, “you are the same as that tree. You’re no different. You
see where the roots are, where the roots go, finding the earth? That’s how
your roots are too.” He said, “You got old roots that go back long way. I
know your father, and I know your grandmother, and I know this sister…”
and he went on and on. “Old roots, that’s who you are,” he told me, “The
earth, where it goes in, that’s your mother. That’s all you have to
remember. Can you remember that?” I said, “Yeah, yeah,. Well, I will
never forget it now!” But he was a man who saw that I had something that
I had yet to know. He saw that I was pretty full of myself, pretty cocksure
about everything, cocksure about my abilities, and so forth. And he took
the time and made that point. You see, when I reflect back on that now,
he had to think about that before he set that whole thing up. He thought it
was important enough for him to take the time to teach me something. So
what if I went through university and I had a degree? I learned more in
those couple of hours on the lake than that whole four years in college.
After that he said, “Well, it’s about time we try another place.” And I said, “Yeah, good idea.” That was it, he never mentioned it again.”

What the genealogical story above reminds us are our roots to the Land. That in the process of education we cannot forget that we are “old roots” and what sustains us is the Land regardless of our socially constructed identity—native, indigenous, immigrant, diasporic, settler—roots and Land are an ontological necessity of the human being—and of being human.

What does it say about the university education we receive when we come out not knowing our “old roots?” What is the premium attributed to the technical knowledge gained in the university versus the knowledge-of-self taught through the Land? What ultimately is the purpose of finding our “old roots?” Precisely, these questions have to do with the matter of finding ones identity, rooted onto ones memory, and finding home.

*The Land as Home*

In every class that I teach, in the university as well as the community, I always open with a protocol that center on names: Name, Home, and Ancestor. I invite each person in the community of learners to pronounce their full name, announce where is home, and summon an ancestor. I do this precisely to acknowledge that they have a genealogy rooted in a home inhabited by their ancestors. The protocol, while seemingly simple, evokes difficult and ambivalent feelings. Only a few, with great seriousness, are able to recall the name of an ancestor and identify a geographic home. Conversely, they are able to summon history and peoples that they have studied in their other classes.

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They know about the great figures of history and what happened on particular Lands. In other words, they know more about other people and places then their own particular history—they are multicultural without knowing their own culture. While it is important to learn about Othered Lands and Othered People it cannot be a liberal way of understanding “multiculturalism”, educator Mark Edmondson warns of this phenomena:

My fear about the multicultural curriculum is that I may ask students to know others before they know themselves. If we learn only or chiefly of difference without taking the time to find, or make, the inner being, we risk being walking voids, readily taken up by, say, commercial interests, ever ready to use our college-won knowledge of others for the purpose of exploiting them. Asks David Rieff: “Are the multiculturalists truly unaware of how closely their treasured catchphrases—‘cultural diversity,’ ‘difference,’ ‘the need to do away with boundaries’—resemble the stock phrases of the modern corporation: ‘product diversification,’ ‘the global market,’ and the ‘boundary-less company’? Where the inner void was, where the unbearable lightness was, there the corporation may well open its franchise.31

Indeed, educational institutions have given students ample opportunities to learn about other people and other lands, through various vehicles such as studying abroad and foreign languages. While I affirm this expansion of our knowledge of the world, it cannot be at the expense of not knowing the very culture that has shaped us, respectively. My intention in the protocol is to examine and affirm ones identity in the process of examining the Other without appropriating Othered Lands.

We need to understand the complexity of finding and rooting ourselves in a home. For Hawai‘i, living in a multicultural state, especially for the second and third generation who are not Native Hawaiian, but are born here, forces of assimilation and colonization have facilitated ”amnesia” of home. While this act of rooting ourselves in particular place where our ancestry did not originate (i.e. Ilokanos in Hawai‘i) has played a positive

role in identity formation and politics for diasporic peoples, it can also play a negative role in denying or silencing ones connection to an “ancestral home.” One does not have to pick either/or, rather one can acknowledge historical connection and ties to a particular Land. I do not intended to force upon an either/or fallacy in identifying where is home.

The results of colonization, for both the colonized and the colonizer, have given us the burden and gift of assuming multiple identification of home. This is precisely what the diasporic community can offer to Lands that they have sought refuge in—a bridge to another Land.

When one is able to connect to another Land, in another moment in time, one is able to expand its historical consciousness. What this entails is a careful analysis of social forces that have impacted their questions of home. For example, in my experience teaching second and third generation Ilokano students in Hawai‘i, most will proclaim Hawai‘i as home while their first generation parents or grandparents will say the Philippines, inspite of living on the islands for several decades. Upon realizing the dissonant answers, students are able to examine the circumstances of home and explicate social forces, particularly colonization, as having effected their indication and identification of home.

In this sequence, the possibility of bridging both Lands (Philippines and Hawai‘i), and realizing that the history of colonization (by the United States) has shaped how they identify and root themselves in a home becomes a liberatory act. This phenomenon develops an affective consciousness allowing for understanding of the particularities of historical and present oppression and make possible a redemptive possibility of identifying with multiple homes. In the final analysis, the realization that one can have
multiple homes not only becomes a bridge to each place and therefore to each other, but mend a fragmented identity, connect a shared history, and offer a possibility of healing from the violence of trauma.

*The Land as Memory-Healing*

My visits to Ho‘oulu ‘Āina always involve stories of the Land and its powerful evocation of certain memories of trauma and liberation. The people whom have visited the nature preserve as well as the program educators working there spoke of many instances of people, whom have never met each other, standing in a particular spot on the Land and speak of similar stories. Certain parts of the Land would evoke memories of childhood dreams; another spot would provoke memories of separation/divorce; another spot made you hungry, a prompt of eating/cooking a favorite food; another spot made you feel lonely retelling your displacement/immigration; another got you dirty in mud reminiscent of you planting/farming in your native land; and yet another spot where the touch of wind/rain made you feel alive inducing a memory of hopeful possibilities. The particularity of the Land moved a particular part of our memory that would have otherwise remain buried and unspoken. The unspokeness of memories attached to the Land reminds me of the poet lawyer Martin Espada when he says:

There are “unspoken” places all around us, places we never see, or see but do not see. There are hidden histories, haunted landscapes, forgotten graves, secret worlds surrounded by high walls, places of pilgrimage where pilgrimage is impossible. Sometimes, these places are “unspoken” because the unspeakable happened or continues to happen there;
sometimes, because the human beings dwelling in the land of the unspeakable find a way to resist, and their example is dangerous.\footnote{Martin Espada, \textit{The Lover of a Subversive is also a subversive: Essays and Commentaries}, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 53.}

Indeed, the mutual relationship to the Land entails each other to speak the “unspoken” and make necessary a pilgrimage to “hidden histories, haunted landscapes, and forgotten graves.” What the Land evokes in us are memories of the “unspeakable” thus allowing us to “resist” and thereby make us “dangerous.” Precisely, remembering is always a dangerous act for it reminds us that we have not always been this way—traumatized, petrified, immobilized—colonized—that somehow we were once a child, playful, hopeful and dreamed of the impossible as possible. “The breath of the Land is the life of the people” is the ethos in which we can acknowledge that without the Land, healthy and breathing, we cannot re-member and therefore become cut off from any possibility of healing. What our bodies cannot remember by itself the Land will remember and remind for us.

What being on the Land entails, as far as healing is concerned, is to remind us of the nature of our connection to both the Land itself and the Land of Other(ed) people. For example, the Land in Hawai‘i and the Land in the Philippines, while distinct people and histories emerged, suffered under the same brutal force of colonization and imperialism. Both peoples suffered the misery of being displaced, alienated in economics and politics, made subservient under white supremacy, forced to speak the English language, and total sovereignty usurped. These are traumatic narratives but are also profound connections that can be bridges of understanding and solidarity. Standing on this bridge, we ought to celebrate the tensions between being Hawaiian and being of
Hawai‘i. We cannot confuse what it means to draw from the ancestral genealogy of being Hawaiian to sharing the belief of what it means to be on/of the Land of Hawai‘i. What does it mean to see the Land as both ‘Āina and Daga, to see the Mountains as Mauna and Bantay, and see it sacredly as “that which guards/feeds” and see our responsibility as both stewards of both places.

The Land will become the bridge when our egos refuse to let us touch and see each other, “Mother Earth does not have an ego” remarked a professor I met who worked on a Native American reservation. Indeed, when all egos are set aside, we can let the ‘Āina/Daga, to mend the gap that has divided us, and begin to disrupt and dissipate the imaginary yet powerful lines that the cartography of the West has imposed on the colonized world.

*The Land as Pedagogical Ethic*

Only when we acknowledge that we are not the only ones alive on this earth can we fully understand the Indigenous Ilokano worldview that sees the mountains as guardians. The mountains guard us, and only when it is destroyed or see as something to be conquered, do we lose its deeper meaning and relationship. In the way that people have arrogantly used the expression “I conquered mount Everest”, or how the American military has bulldozed the hills of Baguio, Philippines renders the mountains a hollow death, devoid of relationality, and perverted its existence. We ought to see the mountains as our guardians, perhaps then we can understand how peoples such as the Igorots of the Philippines have protected themselves from the Spanish colonizers. It is the mountains that have guarded, protected, and became a barrier to the colonization of their being.
Because the mountains have witnessed and participated in the trauma of the people, the mountains offer us a genealogical relationship, not only physically guarding us, but also standing guard against illegitimate authority. The mountains serve to guard, and remind us of the truth that is consistently being denied or silenced. In other words, the mountains remember the injustice suffered by the people, trauma of assimilation, and trials of liberation—the land will always remember and reclaim.

Pedagogically, the Land is a vault of hidden memories waiting to be opened so that a redemptive history may emerge. What the forces of hegemonic and colonial education have forced to remain forgotten, can be made remembered when the Land is allowed to speak to our soul. The deliberate attempt to bury mute the power of the Land can always be unearthed. The Land, in this sense, is the container of the memory of which will allow us to reconnect and reclaim that history forgotten.

In a capitalist and imperialistic economy, the Land is seen as something that ought to be built over, we layer it with so many stories that promote consumption that we lose the history and replace it with the overwhelming and seductive narrative of development and gentrification. History, then, is adjudicated by the present, and not other way around. History becomes ahistorical if we allow the hyper-consumer present to dominate meaning-making. We need to look back.

We cannot destroy the Land, the very thing that will allow us to remember our history. However, there is always a redemptive aspect in the place, regardless of its aesthetics. Martin Espada, reminds us that “the truth of a place cannot be erased by simply changing the face of the landscape.” Indeed that is the power of the constancy

33 Martin Espada, *The Lover of a Subversive*, 50.
of the Land. However, what would happened if the Land is completely destroyed or separated from the people.

If the constancy of the Land reminds us of the constancy of our story, therefore, our existence then to lose the Land completely or be displaced from which your story emerged is an act of genocide. We do not exist without a story, and without a story that is attached to the Land then we become without a home. For example, Kiribati and other islands in the Pacific are in danger of losing their Land to Global Warming and its effect on climate change. They face the real and near possibility of moving and leaving, essentially being displaced and seeking refuge in another nation. There are other examples, in the Philippines with illegal mining and the bulldozing of mountains; in Hawai‘i, development has taken over farmlands and dried up spring wells. If we follow the postulate: without the Land we are without a story, and without a story we are lost and homeless. Then, for every Land that is Lost every people will be lost.

Moreover, the question is not simply where to find another home but whether home is possible at all outside of the Land that your story exists. Is a home only a matter of having a roof over your head? For Nakem Pedagogical ethic it is a resounding “No.” It is more than the physicality of where one resides, it is the ontological, epistemological, genealogical, and cosmological relationship to which one stands on the Land that makes it their home. Conceived in this way, the people when separated from their Land become spiritually malnourished and die a slow and unknowing death—as the land goes, their stories goes—and so the people follow. We exist because the Land remembers us and we remember the Land.
A pedagogical ethic that sees the Land as vital to the educational process is an affirmation of sovereignty in the greater sense. This sovereignty sees that all living creation, seen and unseen, not only have the right to life, but are interconnected in the process of creation and all are connected to the sovereignty of the Land. Indigenous scholar Sharon Venne states:

Our spirituality and our responsibilities define our duties. We understand the concept of sovereignty as woven through a fabric that encompasses our spirituality and responsibility. This is a cyclical view of sovereignty, incorporating it into our traditional philosophy and view of our responsibilities. There it differs greatly from the concept of Western sovereignty which is based upon absolute power. For us absolute power is in the Creator and the natural order of all living things; not only in human beings…Our sovereignty is related to our connections to the earth and is inherent.

The idea of a nation did not simply apply to human beings. We call the buffalo or the wolves, the fish, the trees, and all are nations. Each is sovereign, an equal part of the creation, interdependent, interwoven, and all related.34

What the Land cultivates in a pedagogical ethic shapes educational curriculum to reflect the inter-connectivity of the Social Biography of our Body to the Land. Ultimately, it is seeing education as “knowing the story of the universe” Earth Educators Swimme and Berry elaborates:

Education might well be defined as knowing the story of the universe, of the planet Earth, of life systems, and of consciousness, all as a single story, and recognizing the human role in the story. The primary purpose of education should be able to enable individual humans to fulfill their proper role in their larger pattern of meaning. We can understand this role in the Great Story only if we know the story in its full dimensions.35

Indeed, to realize and to know the story of life and the universe requires us to know the full dimensionality of the Story. What is evident, in the endeavor to know our “role”, is that we cannot leave out the story of the Land. Moreover, humans cannot be assumed as the “dominant” species but rather play only a role in creating the Story. Perhaps, when we understand that there is a Story that binds us all, can we come to realize the way we see each other is in a fragmented and disconnected way. As David Orr suggests that in a hyper-capitalistic and globalized way, our society has prioritized the buildings of shopping malls, parking lots, super-structures like condominiums that impede our view of the mountains and ocean lines—all this negatively impact ecology and center only on producing overconsumption. This all as a result of being and living compartmentalized: “These things are threads of a whole cloth. The fact that we see them as disconnected events or fail to see them at all is, I believe, evidence of a considerable failure that we have yet to acknowledge as an educational failure.”36 As a result of this educational failure the trajectory of education has been towards preparing our children for the globally competitive world. Educator John Miller sums it all: “Instead of educating human beings, we are asked to only train workers. Thomas Merton once called this whole process, ‘the mass production of people literally unfit for anything except to take part in an elaborate and completely artificial charade.’37 Precisely, there is an urgent need for a pedagogy that hinges on the ethic of seeing our relationality to the Land and to the larger story.

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37 John Miller, Education and the Soul, p. 94.
Finally, I sum up this pedagogical ethic in a story I heard in a conference that I attended in Hawai‘i. The Tongan educator poet, Konai Helu Thaman, saw the beauty of learning using the Land of Hawai‘i. I summarize what she said: “When I look at the landscape of Hawai‘i, I see birds flying, people of diverse backgrounds walking, and lush vegetation and tall trees. But what is beautiful is not only what is evident and immediate to our eyes. You need to look at what is beneath the ground. If you look at the roots of all living things, they go deep and feed to one source. Water. They share in the same source that nourishes every living thing. That is the beauty in which I see. And that is how we are all related. We share in life.”
Part III
A Praxis of Soul Consciousness

Part III concludes the study by weaving together the constitutive elements in three different vignettes of the Nakem Pedagogy. It is a reflection of Nakem Pedagogy in action in the community and the university. I conclude this study by reflecting on what the vignettes means for Nakem Pedagogy and its implication for communities who are engaged in a struggle against oppression and dare to reclaim their Language, Body and Land.
Reflecting on this pedagogical journey, I realize how sacred the spaces are that I had the privilege to be in. The three constitutive elements represent different but overlapping communities that informed this pedagogical articulation. The indigenous theological language emerged out of my work in seminary, Ilokano and other indigenous communities who practiced liberation theology; the articulation of the Body as the site of transgression arose out of my work through popular education, particularly with working class, youth-of-color in California and Hawai‘i; the Land, though was always present in the former communities mentioned, was made more explicit in Land-based indigenous programs in Hawai‘i. I realized that when all three elements are present in the educational process, it has the power and potential to fully awaken one’s soul consciousness.

Taken one by one, the elements of Nakem Pedagogy become only pedagogical elements, but animated together, wherein each element informs each the others it becomes a praxis. The Language, Body, and Land when breathed together in one motion become a praxis in self-becoming—allowing oneself to navigate the world in an ethic of relationality. This study allows me the opportunity to synthesize together these elements and theorize Nakem Pedagogy/Praxis.

In keeping with the theme of story/telling within this study, I use three vignettes to illustrate the findings, or rather, “lessons” of this study. Simply put, each story contains in itself lessons, implications, and suggestions for this emerging pedagogical
practice. These three stories weave together, more or less explicitly, the power of our Bodies, Language, and Land play in the educational spaces.

The first story speaks of a youth group from Mississippi making connections with each other through stories and histories in unexpected ways; the second story speaks of a youth group attempting to give ancestral offering in a military occupied space and finding ways to reclaim the Land; and the third story speaks of young people bringing together the elements of the Body, Language, and the Land of Nakem Pedagogy in a community social praxis called Stations of Kalihi. After each vignette, I offer my reflections as a way to slowly conclude this study.

Bridging a Sugared History

“MIS-SIS-SIPPI” that was the way I remembered my grade school teacher taught me how to spell Mississippi, and that was the only encounter I had with the idea of Mississippi. However, in an unexpected opportunity, I was asked to facilitate an African-American youth group from Mississippi in Hawai‘i. This was their first visit to Hawai‘i and I was tasked to “bridge” the youth from Mississippi with the youth in Hawai‘i. I was used to being with youth from Hawai‘i—with all its diversity. The youth group from Hawai‘i comprised of Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, and a Black/Filipina ancestries. I never worked solely with one ethnic/racial group, let alone an African-American youth group from Mississippi! To build a bridge between two seemingly different groups of people was definitely a challenge. As soon as I walked into the room, I knew I did not understand the full complexity of bridging Hawai‘i and Mississippi. I had never been to Mississippi. I have never worked exclusively with an African-American youth group. I did not know anything about Mississippi’s history other than their history of racial
segregation/discrimination. I had no context to work from. No common thread that was evident. Where do I begin?

I knew I needed to trust in the pedagogical process. Follow the protocol: What is your name? Where is home? Who is the ancestor you want to bring? We gathered in a circle; the youth interspersed between being from Hawai‘i and Mississippi. One-by-one, in a rhythmic pattern, they say their names, homes, and ancestor. When it comes to a youth from Hawai‘i, she says: “My name is…home is Kalihi, and I want to bring my Father whom abandoned me and my Mother. He was from Mississippi. That is the only connection I have to my Black ancestry. I am Filipino, but I am Black too.” With wide-open eyes, their bodies began to feel a kind of focused intensity, and her words would create the bridge that would allow us to cross paths.

From that piece of Social Biography, the youth from Mississippi, as well as from Hawai‘i, peppered her with questions, one after the other: “What was his name?” “Have you tried looking for him in Mississippi?” “How did you end up in Hawai‘i?” “Why are there so many Filipinos in Hawai‘i?” “Do you want come with us to Mississippi?” She responded: “I have never tried looking for him. My mother is Filipino. Filipinos have been here since the plantation era. And yes, I want to come to Mississippi. I have never been with Black folks. I would love to feel Black. There are very few in Hawai‘i.” Again, her words opened the bridge even wider. The Mississippi youth responds: “We have plantations too…our ancestors used to work in the sugar cane plantations!” The rest of the Hawai‘i group chimes in: “Wow, my ancestors worked in the plantations too. Mine worked on the Big Island…my grandfather worked on Maui. My grandparents worked in pineapple plantations in Haleiwa.” A youth from Hawai‘i says: “I learned in my history
class that Hawai‘i sugar was shipped to Mississippi during the Civil War.” The sound of “a-ha” encapsulates their fascinated expression. The group exchange stories of plantation history and life. Hawai‘i and Mississippi are closer than we think. The bridge grows wider and starts to connect both their personal story and the story of the Lands they come from.

The excitement of finding/establishing their relationality filled the room with energy. They shared stories of their work, life, and passions. Brimming with the vibrancy of laughter and love, we begin to close the circle: the Mississippi youth offered an old African-American Christian spiritual and the Hawai‘i youth responds with a poem of gratification. We come away closer than we began. Hawai‘i is in Mississippi and Mississippi is in Hawai‘i.

Embodied Education

Building bridges and drawing out an embodied knowledge between the Mississippi and Hawai‘i youth is not easily reproducible—in the sense that there are no formulaic equations to induce sharing one’s story. It takes a certain amount of intentionality and reflexivity within a pedagogy that is open to the creative force of the human spirit. What I have come to learn is to trust and find an imperative belief that our body is always a container of history. Meaning to say, we always have a piece of history in us, therefore, we always have something to say—even when silence is all we can summon. In educational spaces such as these, I realized that seeing a body is akin to seeing a personal narrative, much in the way that Ochs and Capps remarks: “personal narrative simultaneously is born out of experience and gives shape to experience. In this
sense, the narrative and self are inseparable.”¹ Indeed, seeing the youth from different communities in the same space is seeing the possibility of different stories/narratives being connected. And by being together, both communities emerged a larger narrative that takes into account all of their lived and historical experiences. By seeing each other as part of the narrative, whether it is slavery, plantation, colonization, or imperialism the questions that emerge become large enough to encompass both peoples—without pitting one against each other. What emerged out of sharing each others’ Social Biography is not who is more oppressed or liberated, but rather how they belonged to an oppressed and liberated history.

As I have articulated in chapter four, our Bodies become sites of transgression because we hold in ourselves transgressive histories—in this case, their shared history of plantation and marginalization transgressed geographic boundaries with each other. The statement: “I am black too,” expressed by a youth, transgresses and breaks the boundaries of one’s identity, and attaches itself to the Other, expanding one’s identity beyond the limitations of one’s physicality. It is a qualitative statement, moving away from the boundaries the mechanics of (blood) quantum—“I am 50% this, and 50% that” is challenged—the “too” is to say, simply, “I am. Equally. At the same time. In the same body.” The “too” is an affirmative statement, especially in a time and space where ones’ blackness or any other “-ness” is not permitted to be lived or vocalized, it gives credence to one’s relation, and an evocation to say that I am part of you. We share that same “I.” The youth as a group exclaimed: “We have plantations too” moves from the personal story to the historical narrative. Again, the “too” becomes operative in affirming the

relational history and making each other belong to the “We.” What would happen if we added to our grammatic ontology the “too” of relationality? How would this alter the way we see alterity?

However, even in my most coherent moments, as demonstrated in my nervousness to facilitate the youth group, it is difficult to remember and believe in this maxim when we have been only trained to see history as being codified in the materiality of the textbook. During those moments of awkward silence and painful waiting, my body wanted to reach out for a reference, a book, something to “validate” the stories that emerged of the circle. My formal training has been in the academy and the academy has trained me as such. I do not intend to polarize methods of seeing history, but rather advocate for multiple ways of seeing history and multiple ways of affirming and signifying where history/story/narrative is embedded—among those places are our Bodies.

These cultural/historical circles that youth participated in that involve story telling have a tendency to be seen as trivial or acts of no significant value. However, in delineating the effects of Social Biography, story telling, and the free expression of students to tell their story, it should not be taken, as many students and teachers often said to me as “just talking story,” or “therapy.” I admit that it is therapeutic, but never a form of or intended to be therapy—it is not a pure psychological analysis of the individual, but rather constitutes a political act of the person/community to tell their story. Donaldo Macedo speaks of this practice:

Although some educators may claim that this process creates a pedagogical comfort zone, in my view, it does little beyond making the oppressed feel good about his or her own sense of victimization. In other words, the sharing of experiences should not be understood in
psychological terms only. It invariably requires a political and ideological analysis as well. That is, the sharing of experiences must always be understood within a social praxis that entails both reflection and political action. In short, it must always involve a political project with the objective of dismantling oppressive structures and mechanism.\(^2\)

To speak from one’s vulnerability, as in the case of the Black/Filipina youth, about her father, ethnic identity, and history, in a culture of repression is to assert a counter-reading of history and thus, shape the contours of one’s reality. When both youth groups spoke of their own educational work (anti-racism, anti-oppression, and identity reclamation) and expressed it with passion, indignation, and anger they were countering a fatalistic understanding of history.\(^3\) Here, Paulo Freire’s insistence for expressing a righteous anger is valid:

> I have the right to be angry and to express that anger, to hold it as my motivation to fight, just as I have the right to love and to express my love for the world, to hold it as my motivation to fight, because while a historical being, I live history as a time of possibility, not of predetermination.\(^4\)

In the end, Nakem Pedagogy provides a language that does not minimize and trivialize the hurt and suffering in which our trauma is born. It is to call attention and begin to grasp the feeling that, for so long has gone unnamed. It is to proclaim to the world that we are more than operating from the trauma, hurt, and oppression that we exhibit, but rather act from a liberated vision of humanity.

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\(^3\) The Mississippi youth participates in rural and urban areas in Mississippi doing racial equity, anti-discrimination and racial reconciliation between oppressed communities. The Hawai‘i youth group worked in similar venues, advocating for the use of poetry as a way to form identities and inform issues that concern their community.

\(^4\) Ibid., 206.
The story among Mississippi youth demonstrated the power of story telling and embodied history. In similar fashion, I draw from the next story the significance of including Land in our educational curriculum. How far and wide can we image the walls of our classroom? What kind of learning would emerge if we had our classroom confront the social realities of the students?

“He is my Brother…”

The right to offer gifts to our ancestors, visiting their graves, is supposed to be a rite and ritual that is open to all, except of course when their grave is under the golf course of a U.S. Marine Base.

We got off the bus and our youth, filled with excited energy, begin to pack the entrance hall of the checkpoint of the military base. The youth group was comprised mostly of Native Hawaiian charter school students and Filipino working class students coming from rural and urban parts of Honolulu. We asked for permission and were told to wait while the military liaison to the community waited for confirmation. We were told that it would take 30 minutes, but it was not until 2 hours later when we were given word: “You are allowed to enter… but you must leave one particular person behind” the liaison warned us. There were five adult educators (2 Filipinos, 2 Native Hawaiians, and 1 Japanese) and the liaison pointed to the second most senior educator, a local Japanese activist, scholar, and community organizer. While the adult educators gathered near the circle of youth, our senior Native Hawaiian community educator and activist, asked the liaison why we ought to leave one person behind. The liaison remarked, “He has several complaints by Native Hawaiian families and we were told not to let him in.” We were shocked and dismayed by these comments, as we knew his long-standing commitment to
Native Hawaiian sovereignty and right to self-determination. Our Native Hawaiian educator emphatically asked: ‘Who are these ‘Hawaiian families?’ Can’t you see, I am Native Hawaiian, I have kuleana over these lands, and he is my brother...can’t you see he is my brother!’ She repeats the latter statement several times: ‘He is my brother!’ These words of affirmation begin to make my body shake and tears begin to fall from my face. This moment summons my trauma of leaving behind my father in the Philippines. We were faced with a decision to leave or be together—only this time we stuck together.

In a slight turn of her body, our Native Hawaiian educator turned her body towards the youth group to include them in the conversation and decision. She explained to the youth, in front of the liaison, the situation and asked them: ‘What should we do?’ The youth upon understanding the situation confidently proclaimed: ‘We cannot leave behind uncle...we cannot leave anybody behind.’5 I could feel the group begin to take control and refuse to negotiate. It was an absolute sentiment that no one is sacrificed. The youth group decides that we would offer our gifts to the ancestors as a whole, even if it meant resigning ourselves outside and reclaiming another part of the Land as a site of our ritual. We move together away from the checkpoint and towards the edge of the ocean. Finally, the group is called towards a particular hala tree and we start our ritual to the ancestors to receive our offering. The youth, without instruction from the adult educators, took the lead. The Native Hawaiian youth chanted and danced, and then the Filipino youth joined them. In the end, they offered the gifts to the ancestors and we concluded the ritual by sharing each others Breath—standing, face to face, body to body,

5 The youth called the adult educators “aunty” and “uncle” despite not having familial relations. To be called such is a gesture of respect and very common among the people of Hawai‘i, especially among Asian and Pacific Islanders.
we bring together the touch of each others forehead and nose and share a deep intimate Breath—one by one the youth and adults share Breath in this life affirming ritual. At this moment, the social constructions begins to fall—no “youth”, no “adult”, no “school” no pretensions, just a community of learners sharing and affirming the sacredness of Life and the Land. One could hear the reflective silence—the fullness of speech—the breath shared smells of collective suffering—but also collective dignity.

Emerging Ethic, Birthing Conscience

There is an ethic that emerged and a conscience that was birthed in the youth and adults refusing and resisting their bodies from being separated. The transformative moment begins when the youth affirmatively says, “We cannot leave uncle behind…we cannot leave anybody behind.” But all of this could not have happened if we were resigned in the captivity of the modern/traditional classroom—we had to be on the Land with the ancestors as our guide. The Land provided a space that embodied, for better and for worse, the social reality of the students—in this case, the militarization/occupation/colonization of the Land. Part of extending the walls of the classroom is to include the wisdom that emerges out of being on the Land.

It did not matter that we were unable to enter the military base to make an offering at the actual site of burial. What mattered most were the students’ participation and decision to be together and the teachers’ faith in the pedagogical process. Because

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6 I capitalize “Breath” in order to signify its roots to Life. In Hawaiian it is the Ha, the breath and spirit that animates life. In Ilokano it is the lung-aw, the summoning of the god/dess of health; the condition of being healthy; and the “sigh” that which makes the body lighter, as if to allow the burdens and trauma to be released/to be shared.

7 I use “students” and “youth” synonymously and the same for “adult” and “teachers.” In referring to all participants I use “community of learners.”
the pedagogy was open to human creativity/spirit, the curriculum became living and
organic—open to the possibility of “defeat.” However, what “defeat” or rather “success”
is measured by, in pedagogy of soul-consciousness, is the growth in ones self-
affirmation. Myles Horton of the Highlander School, when asked about the effects on
people who are changed, who stand up, and face the struggle but are defeated, he
responded:

Of course there’s always some good that comes out of a situation where
people learn to fight, learn to take up for themselves, stand up. Struggle,
per se, is educational. People learn they can struggle and not get killed.
They learn they can struggle and still eat. They feel better they have stood
up for their right and engaged themselves with self-respect. It is a
powerful consciousness-raising educational process; that should not be
underestimated. If you only try to do the things where you win, then
you’ll never try to do anything worth doing.8

What transpired within the community of learners in the dynamic educational space
mentioned above was learning to struggle and still “eat.” Indeed, we still were able to eat
in the sense that although we did not offer at the exact burial ground, we reclaimed
another place on the Land, as sacred. The community of learners did not fall into the trap
of choosing from either fragmenting the group in order to enter the burial grounds or not
to enter at all, instead the students and teachers decided to still offer the gifts, only that
the place had to be negotiated, perhaps guided by the ancestors, in another place. Beyond
having the students “feel better” was the their co-participation in building “self-respect.”

In addition to the community of learner’s affirmation of their own dignity was the
profession of ones relationality to the Other. When a Native Hawaiian declares to a
Japanese/American, especially in narratives that promote Asian Settler Colonialism and

8 (Dale Jacobs (ed.), The Myles Horton Reader: Education for Social Change,
(Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 189.)
contexts of imperialism, that “He is my brother,” the profundity of these words becomes a materialized step toward Nakem Pedagogy’s language of relationality that challenge social constructions that promote “solitude and individual helplessness,” as E. San Juan says it eloquently:

In our century of homelessness, migration, exile, and diaspora...when all of us have been uprooted from our home, whether it’s the village or some other country and continent, an ancestral habitat long gone, or home now distant in time, the only defense against solitude and individual helplessness is the solidarity of all.9

This moment of declaring ones relational solidarity not only happened between the adult educators but between the Native Hawaiian and Filipino students. They engaged in a co-created ritual and spoke each other’s language through song and dance. Let me quickly frame, in order to avoid the dangers of neoliberal discourse, that what I saw, or advocate for, was not that everyone and anyone can participate in song and dance and call everyone “my brother” or “my sister.” The element that must be captured is the reaction of the community of learners in being forced to leave someone behind, a resistance against the “divide and conquer” narrative, and the human capacity/agency demonstrated to dictate their own terms and still come away practicing what they intended to do—it was their reaction to the social forces of oppression that warranted their need to call (to) each other “brother” and participate in each others indigenous protocols. This act of solidarity and reclamation of ones united identity is what the African literary writer Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o speaks of, as the resistance against the effects of the “cultural bomb,” he explains:

The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance: liberty from theft. But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people’s languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life.10

The community of learners’ refusal to be divided, insistence to be together, assert their indigenous culture, and speak their own language is to allow their “springs of life” to flourish.

The central point of this vignette attempts to recognize the importance of having the classroom on the Land and implicitly point to the limitations of the sanitized classroom in facilitating and generating a curriculum that confronts the social realities of the community of learners. In other words, I point to what Henry Giroux when calls attention to the limitations of radical pedagogy and school as site of learning:

If a radical pedagogy is to become conscious of its own limitations and strengths within the existing society, it must be viewed as having an important limited role in the struggle for oppressed groups to reclaim the ideological and material conditions for organizing their own experiences. In other words, schools will have to be seen as only one significant site providing an “opening” for revealing (and other oppressive) ideologies, and for reconstructing more emancipatory relations.11

Precisely, the hope of Nakem Pedagogy is to construct multiple ways of creating emancipatory educational spaces that are not limited to the walls of the traditional

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classroom—and to make more explicit the Land as not only a possibility, but also necessary site of transformative relationality.

The last vignette integrates the Body and Land with Language. It is the most explicit in the use of theological language with the social biography of the Body and the Land. It is also the only attempt in which I have merged learning in the university classroom with learning in the community.

*Stations of Kalihi*

*I had never done Stations as part of a formal class.*\(^{12}\) I did not know if it would have the same effect among formal students of the university. Many thoughts ran through my mind: How do I teach the Sacred; they do not yet understand what it means to organize the community; how can a class from a university do this? Could I get in trouble having “class” outside of the classroom? I have only done this with adults in the community? Is it worth the risk?

For 16 weeks, we began each class with our protocol: name, home, and ancestor. I could feel the normal nervousness of the first day of the class. I asked the students to close all their laptops, put away pens and notebooks. When all eyes fell on me I wrote on the board as our introduction to Social Biography: “You already know what you need to know, you just don’t know it yet.” This was to be our theme for the rest of the semester.

\(^{12}\) For an in-depth account of *Stations of Kalihi/Cross* see Jeffrey Acido and Gordon Lee, *On The Edge of Hope and Healing: Flipping the Script on Filipinos in Hawai‘i*, (Honolulu: TMI Global Press, 2012). This anthology reflects the experiences of students and community members who participated in this community social praxis. The event *Stations of Kalihi/Cross* was attended by about 100+ people, a diverse makeup of university students, parents, and community members mostly from Kalihi. I shall draw from their experiences, as quoted in the anthology, in order to illuminate the significance of this event on the development of Nakem Pedagogy. The quotes are reflections of the students after their participation of the class and *Stations*.
Indeed, we had to trust this maxim. Our lives were to become our primary text/book. We had to learn how to read our story; we had to learn how to interpret the chapters of our lives and find meaning in the interpretation of our historical being and being in history. This we did slowly, and as soon as we hit our stride in understanding our personal story—Social Biography—we had to move the classroom in Kalihi.

However, it was not enough to know our story, we also had to know the story of Kalihi, but rather we could not have known our own personal story unless we know the story of Kalihi. Understanding the Land of Kalihi and Kalihi as Land could open up different worlds. I could feel the sense of frustration begin to emerge: “What does Kalihi have to do with my story?” “I came in wanting to learn about community organizing but why are we talking about ourselves so much? “I don’t know...why do you keep telling me that I know...this is non-sense.” “I never know what is happening or is going to happen in this class.” “This is taking too much of my time.” We had to disorient to orient them into a larger frame of understanding ourselves and our relationality.

The persistent reading of our stories, our words and worlds, began to make sense of the “non-sense,” and the connections to ones story with the community and the Land began to emerge. While the Stations event was the culmination of the students project for the class, it was the journey and the reflection afterwards that made the pedagogical process evident. One of the students remarked on her transformation, after performing a ritual of crossing over Kalihi Stream on a bridge:

Before the beginning of the Stations, we called upon our ancestors to join us in our walk—I truly believe they were present. The day was long and hot, but everything made sense after we crossed over the bridge. I felt a change in myself after I walked over; the girl with the broken past was
gone. There was nothing that anyone could do to hurt me; I was empowered.  

Another reflected on the imperative to share one’s story as a way towards healing:

It means a whole lot more for me to have shared my story in Kalihi, my home, with my community, my family. If there is one valuable lesson that I learned from Stations of Kalihi, it is this:

The pain and traumas that we experience in life hold the power of healing; it heals those who are suffering, those who are striving to find a reason to hope.  

Another student reflected on his transformation from the beginning to the end of the class: “At the beginning of all of this, I did not know or feel that I was a part of history,” but at a certain point in class he remarked: “the class was no longer about me, but about the community and the world.” In the end he sums up his experience:

I have been able to wake up from my life of slumber and the world as it truly is...my parents and I are still under oppression even though moving to a so-called better life in America...Our lives are the textbooks, and it is our way to liberate the minds of the people.”

Several of the students made a connection to the power of relationality. They reflected on their relationality to each other and the community they represented and in the end found power in belonging to a common narrative: “In a way, individually our stories would seem weak, not powerful enough to stand on their own. However, put together our stories were special, powerful,” adding: “It was not until I learned about the struggles and oppression of my people that I began to understand myself on a deeper level.” In the end, the pedagogical reliance on Social Biography led one student to “experience the

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13 Ibid., 27.
14 Ibid., 48.
15 Ibid. 64.
16 Ibid., 68.
17 Ibid., 74.
power of story telling and framing our life experiences with the experiences of a community. We experienced how we are capable of having something worth saying. Story telling is not a personal rant. It was not about the individual, but the community.”

Indeed, to see one’s historical-selfhood is to see oneself connected to a larger history and the affirmation of ones self-becoming is to believe that one has “something worth saying.”

I want to answer my previous question about whether it was worth the risk. The answer is simply: “Yes. Risks are always worth it when it comes to reclaiming ones historical-selfhood and realizing ones self-becoming.” Risks are always necessary when we engage an education for soul-consciousness.

Wisdom Springs from Within

Nakem Pedagogy attempts to create a consciousness that does not see education simply as the obedient child of modernity. Meaning it does not sacrifice its visions and values in exchange for a technocratic certificate that professionalizes the soul. Nakem Pedagogy is a different way of learning, one that does away with a fragmented and disembodied approach to wisdom—one that allows wisdom to spring from within.

What developed in Stations is realization of the necessity of using all three constitutive elements of Nakem Praxis in order to allow their wisdom to spring into our educational spaces. I needed a theological language in order to speak a language that was not alien to metaphors and transcendence of words—this allowed us to use words and imagine worlds that were not bounded to one definition. The language component of Nakem Pedagogy argues for language not to be simply a protheses of our words—but to

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18 Ibid., 110.
see language as the house in which our souls dwell—to speak of a new language is to see the what and how we speak as forming reality, not just reacting to reality—transformative versus reactionary. Thus, we could see “Kalihi as the World and the World as Kalihi” and realize that “we are related to each other—we each experience traumas that we are still trying to heal from.”

These words challenge, or perhaps, call out to curricula that promote naiveté, Paulo Freire elaborates:

Our traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, could never develop a critical consciousness. Indeed, its own naïve dependence on high sounding phrases, reliance on rote, and tendency toward abstractness actually intensified our naiveté.

However, to overcome and counter the naiveté promoted by traditional curriculum we needed, in addition to using a spiritual language, to be on the Land. Being on the Land, in Kalihi, connected us not only by standing the same ground but made us aware of the similar geographies of trauma that we occupy. The Land provoked in us to reflect on the conditions of the Land, and in turn, provoked the conditions of ourselves. Being in Kalihi allowed the words/metaphors that make up theological language to become manifest: “poor,” “oppression,” “marginal,” “suffering,” “love,” “community,” “body,” “bread,” and “death” all took on multiple-lived-meanings when the students walked the streets, climbed the mountains, and ate with the people in Kalihi. To be on the Land embodied the concepts we learned in class and gave life to the educational process. I only mean to say that the classroom is one of many places where education happens.

When we limit education only to traditional classroom, make its mortars and bricks an

19 Ibid., 31.
obligatory symbol, then education becomes equivalent to incarceration—our words and worlds become reduced to a unilateral definition and wisdom becomes paralyzed.

What happens when our word (Language) and world (Land) is reduced to a singular meaning, narrow sighted, and insular definition of life? It means that our Body becomes incapable of imagining beyond itself. The body becomes stunted and does not allow itself to be, in Roland Barthes word, “punctured.” That is, the body resides in a perpetually induced amnesia, Susan Sontag, warns us of this kind of pathology:

Someone who is perennially surprised that depravity exists, who continues to feel disillusioned (even incredulous) when confronted with evidence of what humans are capable of inflicting in the way of gruesome, hands-on cruelties upon other humans, has not reached moral or psychological adulthood…No one after a certain age has the right to this kind of innocence, of superficiality, to this degree of ignorance, or amnesia.21

Indeed, Nakem Pedagogy takes on the challenge of this “right” to innocence, superficiality, ignorance, and amnesia. Nakem Pedagogy through its praxis creates spaces of puncturability—that is, spaces where the body can be, punctured and induced to remember. That is precisely the significance of the body in this pedagogy: The body remembers and memory resides in the body. And when Language, Body and Land are interconnectedly animated, memory becomes relational and the act of remembering becomes, in the words of Susan Sontag, an ethical act: “Remembering is an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead…Heartlessness and amnesia seem to go together.”22 With memory the “dead” is made alive, or rather, becomes alive in the educational process. This educational process takes serious the act of remembering or the gravity of forgetting

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21 Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others (New York: Picador, 2003), 114.
22 Ibid., 115.
because, as Alexander Jacqui realizes, “the forgetting is so deep that forgetting is itself part of what we have forgotten. What is so unbearable that we even forget that we have forgotten?”

Certainly, only when we use a language of spirituality and walk on (hollowed) Land can we invoke memory and remembering, and counter the act of forgetting. Thus, results in reorienting the Body to an affirmative future and do away with a fatalistic assumption of ones nature. In speaking of memory and remembering as the counter to fatalistic assumptions, Liberation Pyschologist Ignacio Martin Baro is worth quoting at length:

Recovery of Memory. The first element for putting fatalism aside is overcoming the exclusive focus on the present, not only by opening people’s minds to the future, but also by recovering the memory of their personal and collective past. Only insofar as people and groups become aware of their historical roots, especially those events and conditions which have shaped their situation, can they gain the perspective they need to take the measure of their own identity. Knowing who you are means knowing where you come from and on whom you depend. There is no true self-knowledge that is not an acknowledgement of one’s origins, one’s community identity, and one’s own history.

In the end, the Stations in Kalihi became a vehicle of all three constitutive elements. It drove the students (and the community) to remember and refuse to forget the memory in which summoned their traumas—and allowed for the possibility of hope and healing.

Emerging Conclusions

Nakem Pedagogy draws from the dynamism of inter-weaving Land, Body, and Language to form a praxis that is oriented toward addressing what Henry Nouwen called

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the “nuclear condition,” that which has crippled our ability to live affirmatively, with specific regard to indigenous, diasporic, (im)migrant, working poor, women and the Othered peoples whom continually assert their own humanity and reclaim their dignity in a society that render their identity as invisible or worse, as Fanon’s wretched of the earth.

What I hope is to have articulated is that in the immediacy that we stop viewing education as the sole responsibility of schools, and begin to think of as it that happens between the Language we use, the Bodies that are present and the Land that we stand on, then we can imagine a kind of learning, a pedagogy that addresses the political, social, historical, economic and spiritual aspect of our lives. When we are able to see the profundity of our own lives and the complexity of who we are, then we can begin to see that knowledge and wisdom do not solely reside in the university. Indeed, the university does not have a monopoly on wisdom. And when the walls of the classroom are extended to the dimensions of our life, outside of the traditional classroom, we can acknowledge and address the conditions that that make possible our oppression and liberation.

Nakem Pedagogy asserts that a colonial and fragmented education can only offer an insular and narrow vision of learning about our Language, Body, and Land. It does not offer us the possibility of transformation and rejects the conditions of our relationality. What then results is the continued expansion of the gap between us and signals to the other side of whom we want to touch that a bridge will never be built. Moreover, Nakem Pedagogy attempts to create a space and condition the community of learners to relate to each other using our stories. It is to un-train us from the inhuman and technocratic training that we have received through our formal schooling, our profession, and the hyper consumer and capitalist society that we live in. This societal straightjacket that
was imposed on us needs to be removed in order for our Bodies, our Land, and our Language to break away from the prescribed and crippling superficial roles and live out a life based on our lived-truth and experiences.

The language of education has been reduced to the dialect of grading and certification. The goal of students is to earn the “A” and to get a degree. In this sense the learning space of educational language is made narrow and more difficult because the language of education becomes locked in an arranged marriage to the professionalization and enterprise of knowledge. Language, Body, and Land have to be part of the grammar of education without which pedagogy becomes reduced to reproducing a curriculum of alienation. Nakem Pedagogy invites Language, Body, and Land to become part of the educational discourse. To neglect one over the other, or all together is to deny that which makes us human—to render our existence as automatons and become cogs in an educational capitalist machine. Similar to Michael James’ articulation of Liberation Pedagogy, Nakem Pedagogy’s believes that the:

Epistemological and pedagogical foundations should be carefully interrogated so that students and teachers can imagine learning for a greater purpose. Its practitioners and participants can be sought out to help imagine and create spaces for learning and teaching within and beyond schools and institutions.²⁵

However, the inverse of a technocratic soul-less education offers us is an education that challenges the method of educational production through the awarding and sanctification of the certificate and degrees. Education, in a Nakem Pedagogical sense, breaks the bondage of colonial dependency and certification of knowledge. It returns to the affirmative possibility of learning and drawing from the depth of within. Nakem

Pedagogy precisely draws on these constitutive elements in order to change the nature of our nuclear existence and dramatize education to induce a meaningful transformation that is not resigned, to borrow from Marx, only to “interpret but change the world.”

In changing this world, or at least for peoples who reside in the United States and Hawai‘i, Nakem Pedagogy attempts to articulate another language or rather a “second language” as aptly said by Asian American Fumitaka Matsuoka:

A “second language” is a way of speaking of America that grows out of an alternate “storied site,” in the site shaped by the language of communal values, and perspective in a particular community of often disenfranchised people, where lost memories are recovered, buried histories retraced, silence emerges in an articulated fashion, and fractured relationships with other disenfranchised neighbors are reestablished.26

Nakem Pedagogy is to resist and refuse to acquiesce to the crippling conditions of oppression—to the nuclear condition of humanity. Indeed, Michael James reminds us that oppression is not an identity, it is a condition.27 We cannot ever equivocate who we are with our oppression. It is to suggest that even under the harshest, non-life affirming conditions we are still able to create spaces of hope, and appropriate and flip the script on what is and what should be. Indeed, like the manner in which the youth who were refused to allow offerings for the ancestors, they determined their own agency and option making “liberation is at its core, a spiritual and ethical project; it is not a political state

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but a personal and collective discipline.”

A great part of this discipline is to remember and remembering collectively that is “the indispensable key to liberation.”

With regard to what has been said about our current neo-colonial reality in education, the miracle of the latest iteration of Nakem Pedagogy is its incubation and growth in the university. In a place that is perceived by critical educators, including at times myself, as a soul-less, sterile, oppressive, hyper-capitalist, top-down power and colonial space, it has allowed me to articulate my current pedagogical project. Susan Bordo, on explaining power relations conceived by Michel Foucault, remarked:

Where there is power, he came to see, there is also resistance. Dominant forms and institutions are continually being penetrated and reconstructed by values, styles, and knowledges that have been developing and gathering strength, energy, and distinctiveness “at the margins”… Such transformations do not occur in one fell swoop; they emerge gradually, through local and often minute shifts in power. They may also be served, paradoxically, through conformity to prevailing norms.

Indeed, the university must be penetrated and those people who have so long resided in the “margins” must not give into the idea that they do not belong to the “norm” that can reshape the norm by insinuating their being in the norm. Likewise, the ethos of the university today can be transformed, little by little, as the marginal in the margins come in. It is the very presence of (marginalized) Bodies, (spiritual) Languages, evocation of Land, which will change the system in systemic oppression.

It has been 10 years since I began the journey of my realization. One of my dear professors during my freshman year, proclaimed loudly: “young” does not mean “dumb;”

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28 Ibid., 35.
and “poor” does not equal “stupid.” These words continue to be the simplest explanation of why I continue to work in communities that are largely working class, working poor, youth of color, and other oppressed communities. Though it has not been a ride without adversity, overwhelming with problems and resistance, in practicing this pedagogy and hoping for change, I have been fortunate enough to come away always feeling hopeful.

The words of Laura Rendon affirm my belief in Nakem Pedagogy:

> It is very easy to be overwhelmed when we attempt to do things differently. That is why so many of us give up when others become dismissive about our work or when we confront resistance or see continued social injustice…One of the things that I have learned is that I may never see all the changes I want to see in my lifetime. However, I feel compelled to at least become part of the beginning of change. What sustains me is knowing that I am not alone in creating change, and that many others are engaged in the struggle to create a new belief system and a new language that speaks the truth of who we are as human beings.³¹

Precisely, it is the belief that I root myself in a long line of people, teachers and students, who practices pedagogy of liberation, that I remain insistent on Nakem Pedagogy’s educational trajectory. These hopeful changes have been happening if we look at our experiences today as the extension of history. Nakem Pedagogy is indeed, part of the beginning of change, and part of the pedagogical (liberative) project, as articulated by a Popular Educator, Michael James:

> Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, Ella Baker, Ernesto Cardenal, Rigoberta Menchu, and Subcomandante Marcos advanced the liberation project by insisting upon its democratization. For this they imagined a pedagogical project, one that should be energized by the oppressed- those who continue to pay the highest price for survival in a neoliberal world. When these one-time “no-ones” of the world step forward to engage in the utopian project, their authority is rooted in the fact that they know the reality of being rendered "less than" and "other,” and the preciousness of being “someone.” When they are true to the task of humanization, they are

well-suited to teach of life's fragility, and inspire others to…”be a part of something greater than yourself.”

Indeed, as I write this last chapter and once the last period has been met, let me say, that my articulations of Nakem Pedagogy is already obsolete. This in no way diminishes the work at hand but rather highlights the constant movement and evolution of what it means to learn and teach using our nakem, soul consciousness. I only mean to say that because of the nature of Nakem Pedagogy, its insistence on listening, reflecting, and attaching itself to the immediate concerns of today, walk toward the future and as we look back at our history, necessitate a constant malleability. Students, teachers, and the community of learners that have experienced this pedagogy, or similar pedagogies, will give it new language, give it new life, and allow different iterations of the soul to shape their understanding of their own historical-selfhood in order to point a trajectory for their self-becoming and shape the contours of a liberative reality.

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32 Michael James, Liberation, Conscientizazio, and Pedagogy, 85.
**Glossary**

**Agbiag:** to live, to resurrect, to affirm life, an greeting/proclamation.

**Apo:** an appellation concerning the sacredness of one’s being, title of respect, a term for divinity, a term of reverence, a grandparent, a grandchild.

**Bagi:** the body, a share, property, the self, ego, a stranger.

**Bantay:** A mountain, an unconquered area, a guard, a protector, a guardian, a defender, a caretaker.

**Colonization:** the process of the socialization wherein one culture/people/value is given the supreme and dominant position, the stripping of ones being in replace of another, the violent process of replacing/erasing ones ontological and epistemological identity, the suppression of ones cosmology over another, the rape of ones identity, a disease inherited/generated through the violent encounter of fearing the Other, pedagogical inculcation that reproduces hegemonic values.

**Conscientização:** Used by Paulo Freire to describe the teachers/students attempt to develop their consciousness and conscience, a term used in Latin American popular education circles.

**Cosmology:** a worldview and construction/situation of one’s body in the larger world, the orientation of ones being in the universe, the conception of ones existence.

**Daga:** the Land, the Earth, the Soil, a field, the god/goddess Earth, the roots of one’s being.

**Epistemology:** the systematic derivation of ones belief, how you know what you know, the root/source of one’s belief.

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1 The definition of terms I use changes/shifts/bends depending on how it is used in a specific context in the study. I want to stress the fluidity of language and the strategic deployment of definitions in order to expand current frameworks and methodologies in education, particularly decolonizing/anti-oppression works. I cautioned against subscribing to static definitions of language that can pit one group against another. It is my hope that language and attempts to define reality can become a bridge to each other and not compartmentalize and isolate each other.

In addition, I use in part Aurelio Agcaoili’s *Kontemporaneo A Dikcionario Nga Ilokano-Ingles* in defining the Ilokano terms.
Ethic of Relationality: a philosophy of relationship based on overlapping histories, a starting point of establishing relationships, a presumptive understanding that we are all related.

Hawaii Peace and Justice: A non-profit organization dedicated to the demilitarization of Hawaii and creating spaces of liberative education.

Historical Selfhood: to see oneself in history in an affirmative sense, to witness the agency of a community/person in history, to articulate ones presence in history.

Imperialism: the violent (and unauthorized) consumption of material resources from another place/people/culture, the superimposition of one culture/people over another.

Inculturation: a theoretical framework concerning the dialogical exchange of theology and culture with the goal of making culture permeate theology.

Indigenous: one who roots oneself in both the land and people of origination, one who practices the rites and rituals of ancestral culture, one who identifies with the ancestral wisdoms and traditions, one who honors the wisdom received from the Land, Language and Body (both seen and unseen).

Kabsat: sibling, a contraction of kapessat: to be a piece of, the same cut, the same cut from the same navel (of the mother).

Kadkadua: placenta, twin, soul companion, companion, a spiritual companion.

Kokua Kalihi Valley (KKV): A family comprehensive clinic in the working class neighborhood of Kalihi.

Liberation: the act of being free, the condition of being free, the reclamation of ones identity/voice/personhood.

Nakem: Soul consciousness, critical consciousness, moral standard, the core of one’s being, wisdom, knowledge, reasoning, free will, divine plan, a point of view, a belief, a reflection.

Narrative: a linkage of stories that form a specific historical trajectory, the master story in which one is arises from.

Ontology: the core of one’s being, the ancestral imprint, the self, the philosophy of oneself.

Pakasaritaan: story, story becoming history, narrative, historical narrative, an indigenous Ilokano methodology.

Pedagogy: the manifestation of the theoretical principles of teaching and learning.
Praxis: the result of a dialectical engagement between theory and practice.

Represent to Witness (R2W): A youth leadership and popular education institute created by educator Michael James. Inspired by the popular education and liberation theological movements in Latin America. Primarily a space for LGBTQ, working class, Asian And Pacific Islander, youth of color in Hawaii and the United States.

Self-Becoming: to see oneself change in light of seeing ones historical self-hood, to believe in ones possibility of change, to articulate ones hope for becoming.

Social Biography: Your life in the context of everything going on around you and how your life is the transformer of that context, a methodology used to situate personal/community stories against the meta-narrative, your story as having a spiritual, historical, economic, social and political element, you story has being consequential in changing the trajectory of history, your empirical evidence of the struggle/life.

Spirituality: the belief in energies/forces unseen and unquantifiable that governs the material world, the belief in something higher than ourselves, a mystical approach to life.

Squatters: an informal settlement of a mass population in an area deemed unfit/inhumane to live on.

Talk Story: a method of engagement often found in Asian Pacific Islander cultures, a non-structured conversation.

Theology: a rational defense of a faith, the systematic study of the Sacred.

Theology of Liberation: A theological movement that emerged in Latin America addressing concerns of the poor and the marginalized.

Window of Vulnerability: a concept that was re-appropriated from the military to describe ones weakness as strength, a wound, a suffering, a pedagogical entrance.
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