IN OUR OWN VERSE:

TONGAN MUSIC AND POETRY-WRITING AS DECOLONIAL PRAXIS

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section one: introduction
Tulou, tulou, tulou.

I humbly ask of my elders, my teachers, and my family, to give me leave to speak on a subject about which I am most passionate. I am still a student of my Tongan language and culture, and as such I ask for your patience and understanding as I present this work on Tongan culture, music and poetry. If I should offend or speak out of turn regarding our culture, I humbly ask to be forgiven: first, by the Tongan composers, writers and poets who make up the genealogies of Tongan music and the inspiration for this portfolio; second, by all those whose words and guidance have shaped my understanding of music and poetry in Tonga; third, by my family whose name I carry; and finally, by the people of Tonga, whose spirit and memory are the heart of our islands.

My hope is that the knowledge I was gained over the course of learning from my family, my communities in Tonga, and my own research, have guided this project in a way that opens up possibilities for more community work and creative expression through music and poetry-writing. It is in the capacity of a young student, and hopeful future teacher, that I offer this portfolio as a series of reflections on some of the purposes, possibilities and power of making music and poetry in Tonga.

goals and hopes

This portfolio is centered on the relationship between creative practice in Tonga and how that practice articulates decolonization in Tonga specifically, and the Pacific more generally. I base my exploration of creative practice in Tonga on the community work I had the privilege of doing from June-August of 2014. During that time, I was able to meet Joshua Savieti and Lineti Latu, organizers of the ICON Tonga creative arts program based in Nuku'alofa, and was invited to run a 5-week long music-writing workshop series that I entitled “The Pacific Verse.” The
Pacific Verse was free and open to the public, and was initially planned out as a series where I, along with other members of ICON Tonga leadership, would facilitate a series of workshops that covered music-writing skills such as lyrics-writing and musical performance. The goal was that at the end of the series, participants would have written and performed at least one original piece of music that included Tongan language in the lyrics. Over the course of the workshops, we expanded the curriculum to include poetry-writing in order to accommodate the styles of expression that participants wanted use.

The planning, organization, and running of the ten Pacific Verse workshops, along with the final performance showcase, are the heart of this portfolio. I use these experiences to reflect back on the initial definitions of decolonization in the Pacific that shaped my perspectives before going to Tonga. What this portfolio aims to convey is how decolonization can be defined in Tongan contexts given the unique nature of Tongan culture and history as the only Pacific Island nation that has never been formally politically colonized. In light of this history, I aim to re-articulate—or rather, indigenize—decolonial action in ways that are relevant to Tongan realities. This portfolio situates creative practice, particularly that of music and poetry-making, as decolonial action within Tongan frames of reference and worldviews. Ultimately, I am positioning Tongan culture, genealogies, and perspectives as necessary and important to broader conversations of Pacific self-determination, independence, and decolonization.

The remainder of this introduction will cover a general outline of the critical analysis I brought with me to Tonga before running the Pacific Verse workshops. In the next section, I touch on the methods used throughout this portfolio. The genealogy section that follows covers elements of Tongan musical and poetic genealogy that resonate with parts of the Pacific Verse workshop curriculum. Though I wrote the genealogy section after the completion of the Pacific
Verse in Tonga as part of the critical reflection process, I place it before the on-the-ground section which covers the Pacific Verse itself in order to give more cultural context to the workshops. After the genealogy and on-the-ground sections, I revisit the terms and ideas of decolonization, practice, and creative praxis from this introduction in the mashup section. This section focuses exclusively on the re-articulation of decolonization in terms of the creative practices established over the course of the Pacific Verse. Finally, the conclusion section gives a brief summary of the significance of this work and future goals for the Pacific Verse in Tonga. Following the conclusion, I include an appendix with two short critical/creative pieces of reflection that give some context to original music tracks I wrote to explore some of the elements of practice within this portfolio. Both reflection pieces include a link to listen to each track.

What follows now are some of the general thoughts and critical analyses on decolonization, musical practice, and praxis that informed my outlook before heading to Tonga and running the Pacific Verse.

*decolonization*

In *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith constructs definitions of decolonization by moving between critical examinations of colonial ideology and the specific actions by which indigenous peoples are combatting those ideologies through research. Moving between broader explorations of colonial thought and indigenous decolonial projects, Smith reveals how decolonization is manifested first through critical examination of how indigenous peoples were/are represented through colonial constructions. Decolonization therefore requires the development of a critical consciousness of colonialism regarding indigenous representations, which must be followed by deliberate actions that reclaim indigenous ownership over those representations. Konai Helu Thaman also addresses how to decolonize of the mind through the
critical examination of how representations of indigenous peoples are created to support a value system of knowledge. This value system, which Thaman situates both within and beyond academic contexts, perpetuates the silence and erasure of indigenous knowledges and wisdoms (Thaman, 2004). I read Thaman’s scholarship to mean that, in order to decolonize, we must first critically address the genealogy of ideas, ideology and theory that have devalued and silenced indigenous voices and control over self-representation. Reading Smith and Thaman together, I defined decolonization as: 1) the process of developing a critical consciousness of how colonialism has represented indigenous peoples through theory and ideology; and 2) the translation of critical consciousness into actions that reclaim indigenous power over self-representation and productions of knowledge.

Smith and Thaman have both centered their discussions of decolonization within contexts of academic research and pedagogy. This portfolio deals in part with the ways in which music and poetry-writing develop a critical consciousness of cultural genealogy, which resonates with the critical engagement the origins of ideas and representations that Smith and Thaman itemize as crucial to decolonizing the mind and the academy. I expand upon these ideas in order to include a definition of decolonization that relies on the creative practices and expressions of the Pacific. In order to conceptualize how Pacific modes of creative expression help define decolonial action, I draw from the work of Epeli Hauʻofa and Albert Wendt—both of whom discuss and practice decolonization through their own creative works and decolonial imaginaries in Oceania.

I revisit Wendt’s “Towards a New Oceania” (1974) and Hauʻofa’s “Our Sea of Islands” (1994) in order to conceptualize how imagination and creative expression are fundamentally decolonial within Pacific contexts. Wendt emphasizes how artistic expressions in the Pacific are
“reinforcing our identities/self-respect/and pride, and taking us through a genuine
decolonisation” (Wendt, 85). These artistic expressions are connecting artists across the Pacific,
connections which Wendt asserts are the embodiment of decolonization. In another light, Epeli
Hau’ofa’s work emphasizes connection by redefining the ocean outside of a colonial paradigm
where borders and distance between islands and Islanders conceptualized as the reason for
treating Pacific places and peoples as primitive, remote, tiny, and in need of stewardship. By
reclaiming an imagination of the ocean as a force of connection, instead of the embodiment of a
psychological, emotional and physical barrier, Hau’ofa critically and creatively situates a
decolonial imaginary that centers Pacific worldviews. In short, Hau’ofa and Wendt define
decolonization in terms of connection; Wendt specifically conceptualizes connection through the
arts, and Hau’ofa shapes connection through a reclamation of the oceanic. By their example, I
highlight artistic expression and imagination as the mediums through which decolonization is
made possible.

By placing Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Konai Helu Thaman, Albert Wendt and Epeli Hau’ofa
in conversation, I defined decolonization as: 1) the development of critical consciousness
regarding colonial representations of indigenous cultures; 2) the application of this critical
consciousness in the practice of culturally specific actions that overwrite and reclaim these
representations; 3) the creation of connection through processes of artistic expression; 4) the
creation Pacific-centered imaginaries that make space for possibility and empowerment. Because
of Tonga’s history as the only Pacific Island nation to never be formally politically colonized, the
ideas of reclamation that Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Konai Helu Thaman refer to needed to be

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1 Referring to this quote in “Towards a New Oceania”: “Across the political barriers dividing our countries an
intense artistic activity is starting to weave firm links between us. This cultural awakening, inspired and fostered and
led by our people, will not stop at the artificial frontiers drawn by the colonial powers. And for me, this awakening
is the first real sign that we are breaking from the colonial chill and starting to find our own beings.” (Wendt, 82)
recontextualized in ways that acknowledge Tonga’s unique history and relationship to ideas of colonization and decolonization. Before doing work in Tonga, I identified these definitions of decolonization guiding points for thinking about how music could embody decolonization in as a creative framework relevant to Tongan culture and realities. Music could be the creative force and social practice that defined what decolonization looked like within Tongan contexts.

**musical practice and praxis in the Pacific**

In order to better understand how music could be a medium for decolonization, I researched music as social practice and found a body of literature on music praxialism, which has been developed from the fields of philosophy and musical education. Within this field, scholars such as Philip Alperson, Thomas Regelski and David Elliott have shaped and analyzed definitions of musical praxis and praxialism in the contexts of North American, English-speaking, public-school musical education.² What I found to be most important in researching this philosophy of musical education was the attention these scholars paid to the history of definitions of music, art, and aesthetics, which were were in turn applied to concepts of musical education. In reading Alperson and Regelski side by side, my understanding of the goals of musical praxialism is that it aims to develop a pedagogy of musical education in which practicing music allows individuals to mediate, negotiate and transform their everyday, lived realities. In his summary on the main arguments of Alperson and Regelski, J. Scott Goble gives a very brief genealogy and overview of the term “praxis” that supports this fundamental goal in musical praxialism. He states that “praxis signified knowledge that takes into account the sorts of

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² J. Scott Goble identifies the emergence of praxialism in music education within the contexts of North American public school musical education in an overview and comparison of David Elliott’s and Thomas Regelski’s approaches to praxialism in “Perspectives on Practice: A Pragmatic Comparison of the Praxial Philosophies of David Elliott and Thomas Regelski” (2003).
reasoning and critical thinking necessary for getting ‘right results’ for the benefit of people in a given domain or situation” (Goble, 2003). To apply this definition of praxis to the fields of musical education, Goble summarizes Alperson’s definitions of praxialism as a “view of music and music education” where “different forms of musical endeavor are regarded as different practices, and the aesthetic approaches to music...are best ‘placed alongside’ the functions that different musical practices serve and have served in different cultural contexts” (Goble, 2003). In my reading of Alperson’s robust praxialism, Thomas Regelski’s discussions on music as social praxis through pragmatism, and critiques of David Elliott’s approach to praxis was a general idea of how to think about musical practice, and praxis in general, before going to Tonga.

**what does this mean in the Pacific?**

To answer this, I read the elements of musical praxialism alongside some of the literature by Pacific Islander scholar/writer/musicians who discuss how practicing music in the Pacific embodies memory, genealogy, resistance, and identity. With regard to music as memory in the Pacific, I highlight Jon Osorio’s work on Hawaiian language and culture in music learning and performance. In his essay on Hawaiian mele–where he discusses Hawaiian identity and memory through music–he poignantly states that:

> The voice and thoughts of our people continue and have not been stilled by conversions, political takeovers or the suppression of our language, history and culture. We are more audible today than ever and we owe our continued existence as a people to those lovely men and women who compose songs of love, nature and alienation, and made us remember who we are.

(Osorio, 23)

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The idea of the audibility of Hawaiian identity, or what Osorio calls “Hawaiian-ness”,⁶ speaks not just to the power of music and song in carrying memory, but also to the importance of that memory in defining and negotiating identity. In the same vein, Amy Stillman has highlighted genealogy of resistance within Hawaiian culture and identity through poetic and musical forms.⁷ Stillman points up the ways in which Hawaiian poets and musicians transformed their own poetic forms to speak to their immediate contexts and realities. In doing so, she shows how musical practice was not just an act of engaging memory, but is also a vital process of using genealogical knowledge to guide and inform the immediate needs of a people whose existence and identity was/is under direct attack by colonial forces.

Speaking to this relationship between genealogy, memory and identity, there is a growing body of work by scholar/poet/musicians who explore how Pacific Islanders are mixing and remixing musical forms from all over the world in ways that make their identities audible in multiple genres and styles. April Henderson’s work on hip-hop in Sāmoan diaspora highlights how Pacific Islanders are translating strands of imagery and language that represent their identities through the beats and rhythms of hip-hop. In the same vein, Kirsten Zemke-White has written about Pacific rap artists using hip-hop to create space for social commentary and political expression (which resonates with Amy Stillman’s work on Hawaiian poetry and music as resistance). kuʻualoha hoʻomanaʻanui has written on reggae as a medium for expressing Hawaiian identities, while Tony Mitchell and Alastair Pennycook have looked at hip-hop in the

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⁷ Amy Stillman has written extensively on Hawaiian poetry and music, particularly in reference to the Hawaiian counterrevolution of the 1890s. In one particular piece, “History Reinterpreted in Song: The Case of the Hawaiian Counterrevolution,” she analyzes the hula kuʻi poetic form from the Buke Mele Lahui to show how Hawaiian poets and musicians transformed a poetic from King Kalākaua’s reign. They did this in order to voice their aloha ʻaina across the entirety of the Hawaiian archipelago, solidifying a new poetic unit of reference for solidarity and sovereignty among the Hawaiian people.
Pacific as the “reconvergence” of local Pacific traditions that shape, and are shaped by, global cultural forms. I connect these scholar’s work to an understanding of the inherent creativity within the genealogies of Pacific cultures—a genealogy of creativity that is embodied in our histories as navigators, survivors, and creators of Oceania. Read side-by-side with the work of Jon Osorio and Amy Stillman, the body of work on Pacific hip-hop and reggae (which is by no means an exhaustive list of genres given the ever-growing number of Pacific Islanders writing and performing opera, country, jazz, etc.), shows how practicing music in the Pacific is inherently a process of negotiating how audible we decide to make our cultural genealogies within the sounds and beats of our current contexts. In relation to the ideas of Alperson, Regelski and Elliott, I thought of Pacific musical praxialism as the process of interpreting the images, values, and language of our Pacific genealogies into new rhythms, beats and sounds that we choose to use in reflecting who we are now. In the words of April Henderson, I thought of musical praxialism and praxis in the Pacific as the process that “stir[s] pools of possibility, destroying, creating, and remixing the old world to spin it anew.”

Tongan contexts: approaching cultural values and identity

When addressing Tongan culture, I relied on the examples of my own family and the work of Tongan writers, scholars and artists who have identified key elements shaping the definitions of Tongan values and identity. Scholars such as Futa Helu, Epeli Hau‘ofa and Konai Helu Thaman have not only itemized certain core values of Tongan culture, but have also

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critically and creatively explored how Tongan relationships to those values shift in ways that determine definitions of Tongan-ness. For example, in her critical and creative reflections on her journeys from Tonga, Konai Helu Thaman reflects on how “geographical movements caused significant shifts in [her] concept of self, sense of identity, and worldview” (Thaman 1985, 115). In another light, Epeli Hau‘ofa has documented and analyzed how Tongans have shifted their identities in relationship to hierarchy, kinship bonds, and connections in Tonga through development of the pro-democracy movement (Hau‘ofa, 1994). Both Thaman and Hau‘ofa point up how perspectives on what it means to be Tongan are tied very much to how Tongans position themselves to people, ideas and cultures within and beyond Tonga and the Pacific. We are always negotiating our relationships to the values of our culture which have been collectively determined to define Tongan-ness.

In approaching some of the definitions of Tongan culture, it has been helpful to think between the broader values that have been established as elements of our cultural identity, and the context-specific realities of Tongan lives in which those values are defined, redefined and perpetuated. Futa Helu has theorized the relationship between elements of culture and the negotiation of those elements in lived realities in his discussions on cultural change (Helu, 1999). Whereas the lived realities of Tongans are infinitely diverse, Helu discusses how certain values have been perpetuated across contexts of time and place to “constitute the identity” of Tongan culture (Helu 1999, 18). I identify the values of respect, sharing, generosity, reciprocity, obligation, and responsibility as the core values of Tongan culture. If we think of our core values as general guidelines, and our relationships to and negotiation of those values as context-specific, I believe we can rethink Tongan culture as not just a rigid set of values, but instead as an
encompassing worldview that has room for expressions of identities that are context-specific, and necessarily diverse.

*approaching decolonization in Tongan contexts*

Before going to Tonga, my thoughts on decolonization in the contexts of Tongan culture and history were just that—thoughts, (which were more akin to theoretical guesses than anything else). The definitions I worked with were literally based on the pages of my academic work at UH Mānoa, where I understood “decolonization” and “decolonial” as they were defined by the creative and critical work of Pacific Islander writer/scholars in Pacific Islands Studies, Pacific literature, and Indigenous Studies. Within these conversations and readings on decolonization, I also had a working definition of “indigenous” which I understood from readings and discussions on Pacific resistance, decolonization movements, and Pacific-based critiques on the UN definitions of indigenous identities. From these contexts, my understanding of indigeneity was relatively general, but Pacific-based; what I thought of as indigenous to the Pacific was defined as the genealogical connection between a people and their (is)lands as the first stewards of those places. My definition of being indigenous to the Pacific was that, as indigenous Pacific Islanders, we tied our genealogy and origins not just to one another as people, but to the land and ocean as well.

Through the creative community work I did in Tonga, these definitions were shifted and reshaped to be more relevant to what I was seeing everyday in the processes of music and poetry writing. The Pacific Verse became the filter through which I began to itemize decolonial action

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specific to Tongan contexts. Reflecting on decolonization through the lens of the Pacific Verse also helped illuminate how creative practices could define what an indigenizing process might look like, at least in terms of indigenizing “decolonization” to Tongan contexts. The reflection process helped redefine “indigeneity” in Tonga, which I think of not so much in terms, but in the actions of everyday life. These actions ranged from how we wore our ta’ovala as a daily show of respect, to the confidence with which we declared ourselves the direct descendants, inheritors, and stewards of our islands. In the mashup and conclusion sections of this portfolio, I go into more detail about how music and poetry writing in Tonga reframed what decolonization and indigeneity look like in Tongan terms.

*moving forward*

Ultimately, this portfolio aims to define Tongan creative practice as decolonial praxis through the mediums of music and poetry. The sections above are a brief documentation of the critical analysis I took with me to Tonga, which was more or less limited to “the page.” My understandings of decolonization, indigeneity, praxis, and even Tongan culture, were mostly based out readings and discussion in academic settings at UH Mānoa. While the terms and ideas of “decolonization”, “praxis” and “indigeneity” are valuable as identifiers within and beyond academic contexts, the following sections, particularly “on the ground” and “the mashup,” look at these terms through the lens of creative community work in Tonga. In doing so, this portfolio works to interpret decolonization in terms that center Tongan culture through music and poetry.
section two: methods

As students within the UH Mānoa Center for Pacific Islands Studies, we are asked to critically and creatively develop methods of representing and researching Oceania that work deliberately through indigenous-centered, interdisciplinary and critically reflexive texts. Before heading to Tonga, I understood a decolonial approach to research and being in Tonga as engaging with my community in Tonga with humility; respecting the fact that I would be an outsider asking for knowledge, and that part of empowering self-determination meant acknowledging and embracing feedback from people I would be asking about music might mean that my research might not be helpful or useful. Other aspects of this methodological approach was that I would be transparent about my goals in learning about music and why I was doing an MA in the first place; that I would engage in critical self-reflection about my positionality and privilege; and that I had a responsibility to my people to be respectful and helpful; and I would behave to the best of my ability in ways that reflected my dedication to Tongan culture and protocol, especially when it came to asking for knowledge.

I have organized this piece into sections that place the methods of this portfolio within the contexts from which they arose. There are the initial stages of methodological approach, which were based on discussions of decolonizing and indigenous methods we covered in the first year of coursework in CPIS. The second section deals with methods of this portfolio that were adapted during my time in Tonga, and the final section details the methods of reflection.
developed after I returned to Hawai‘i. Contextualizing these methods has helped me to understand the transition from theoretical conversations to action, and then reflection. The goal is to use these methods as guidelines for future Pacific Verse work in Tonga, and the understanding of changing contexts and flexible methods is crucial to more successful work. With that in mind, what follows are highlights of the main goals and elements of methodology as they were determined before Tonga, during my time there, and afterward as I completed this project back in Hawai‘i.

existence, fluidity, and performance

There are three key elements of my actions in Tonga that developed into the foundations of my own methodology while learning about Tongan perspectives and attitudes toward music and poetry. The first, and the most difficult to learn, was simply to exist—and observe—in Tonga. Arriving in Tonga in early June, it was nearly two weeks before I began getting to know people within the creative arts community. Those first two weeks were incredibly difficult because I felt that I had neither direction, nor a clear idea, as to what I was doing a “researcher.” There was always an anxiety to do something, find someone, make an appointment, etc. However the greatest lesson, which would become the basis of my methodology in Tonga, was to learn how to be proactive in getting in touch with musicians, organizers, teachers, and dancers, while also taking time to simply be in Tonga. This kind of acknowledgement of being, of learning to be fluid with timelines and expectations, became an essential model to the ways in which I made myself available to people and projects within the arts community in and around Nuku‘alofa. Prioritizing what was going on in the moment, and now what I wanted to be happening, created space for understanding a rhythm of being in Tonga that I would not have noticed otherwise. Prioritizing of what was going on right in front of me and acknowledging that research was not
the central point of reference, shifted my understanding of doing work in Tonga profoundly. It took to learn about what was happening in the community and what events and projects were important and relevant. This meant that my plans needed to be a more fluid and responsive to what mattered to the community at the time.

The second method that underscored almost every aspect of my time in Tonga was performance. As a singer and guitar player, it was essential that I show my own understanding of music through performing. Playing songs for family and friends for the first few weeks became an integral part of my time in Tonga, and helped me in part to legitimize my own place as a student of music in Tongan culture, while also allowing me to develop relationships and teach. Performance became part of my own identity as a workshop facilitator, and friend, and member of the community. My experiences singing and performing allowed me to relate to people who would later speak with me in more formal interviews about music from their perspectives. Performance also created a common ground between myself, other creative arts organizers, and participants in the Pacific Verse workshop series. In essence, performance as a method created a space of common ground that was inherently collaborative, creative, and open for anyone to become a part.

Being in the moment in Tonga, and adapting to the rhythm and pace of learning about creative projects, transferred to the ways in which I eventually ran the 5-week Pacific Verse series. After the first two weeks in Tonga, I was able meet Joshua Savieti and Lineti Latu, co-founders and organizers of ICON Tonga, which has been an active non-profit creative arts program in Tonga since 2010. After meeting with in mid-June, we planned to start the Pacific Verse music-writing workshops on July 7th with workshops twice a week until August 13th. These workshops were originally focused only on getting participants to write music and original
lyrics while using as much Tongan as possible. However, many participants began to ask if I might be able to work with them on writing original poetry. Some of the participants had been previously exposed to slam poetry, and were more interested in working on a spoken word piece first, before diving into lyrics composition. Because of this, the Pacific Verse curriculum shifted to focus equally on poetry and music writing. At the end of the workshop series, ICON Tonga hosted the first Pacific Verse showcase at Café Escape in Nukuʻalofa.

Designing these workshops was always a process of adapting the curriculum to the needs of the participants who were exploring their writing and singing in both Tongan and English. The approach to each workshop, how we worked through prompts and questions, how we collaboratively supported each other’s work, and how we discussed Tongan and English expressions of poetry and imagery, are all on-the-ground experiences that created Tongan-specific commentary on musical aesthetics, practice and performance.

**interviews and conversation**

I was able to conduct interviews which were supplemental to the everyday conversations I took part in regarding the realities of running song-writing and poetry workshops, organizing performances, and participating in jam sessions and practices. The sit-down interviews where I was given permission to record conversations, were a culmination of a much longer process of becoming familiar with the creative community in Nukuʻalofa and actively participating in performances and workshops. Some of the interviews informed the content of the Pacific Verse workshops; for example, I was able to sit down with Sisi‘uno Helu, the director of the ‘Atenisi Foundation of Performing Arts, and learn from her about the roles and importance of heliaki (Tongan form of poetic indirectness), tau e langi (the “ascending to heaven” motif in Tongan singing and performance), and māfana (the feeling of “warmth”, or spirit, from a moving
performance) before starting to plan the curriculum of the workshops. Sione Langi, who runs the Tau’olunga Komipiuta Recording Studio, gave me his insights on some of his hopes and expectations for the future of Tongan music-writing, with a particular emphasis on the need for spaces and opportunities where youth can develop their talents and make themselves heard in creative arts. Because of the knowledge and insights Sisii’uno and Sione gave me in their interviews—and continued to give in conversation and jam sessions throughout my time in Tonga—I was able to think about how to create a creative and supportive space for youth, and people of all ages, that would incorporate concepts of Tongan aesthetics in the structure, goals and pedagogy of a creative arts workshop.

A majority of the interviews I was able to run happened toward the end of the Pacific Verse series. Because of their timing, the knowledge and suggestions from those who spoke with me became integral to the critical reflections on the Pacific Verse and creative practices in Tonga. In the “on-the-ground” section, I combine quotes from interviews alongside poetry in order to recall the voices that shaped the Pacific Verse project, and document some of the perspectives of those who contributed their time and knowledge on Tongan music and poetry to this portfolio. The concluding section also features direct quotes from interviewees as the guiding voices for future plans and considerations for the Pacific Verse and creative arts work in Tonga.

**music as reflection**

I pair the written work of this portfolio with two music tracks that, through their composition, lyrics, and language, work through some elements of creative practice and

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12 Sione Langi, in discussion with author, July 2014.
genealogy documented in this portfolio. It is the music-writing process—perhaps more-so than the content of the music tracks—that I use as a practical exercise for documenting a process of melding elements of Tongan musical and poetic conventions with my own personal music process. I document this process in the appendix to this portfolio, which also has the online links to both tracks. Questions that I asked myself while writing were: what patterns and structures am I using from Tongan genealogy? why these patterns? what am I writing in Tongan? where, how and why am I using English? who are these tracks for? how does my intended audience determine my instrumentation, lyrics, rhythm, structure, etc.? These are only a few of the questions I use to guide the writing-process for these two tracks. Using music-writing as a method within this portfolio was a process I found important to document for future use in Pacific Verse planning and workshops.

Section three: genealogy

Centering genealogy is a critical approach to writing that I believe is crucial to the future of Tongan music. Many young Tongan artists are listening to older generations of Tongan
songwriters in order to keep close ties with their Tongan identity.\textsuperscript{13} Artists are also combining Tongan songs with beats and rhythms from all over the world by emulating the sounds of jazz, big band, disco, rock, opera, reggae, and hip-hop—to name only a few. Tongan musicians all over the Pacific and beyond are writing lyrics in Tongan and English in multiple genres, which in turn have their own important and specific genealogies. What I believe to be essential in approaching music-writing in Tonga is to acknowledge, study, and learn from our own musical genealogy, while also expanding our skills in incorporating the conventions of other music traditions in critical, respectful ways. In doing so, we can think about how we are expanding the possibilities of defining and creating Tonga music. In this section, I outline a few of concepts, themes, writers, composers and singers that I find instrumental in conceptualizing how music-writing in Tonga can incorporate a critical examination of our own cultural music conventions, while also opening up avenues for incorporating elements of music that we listen to and gravitate toward as contemporary listeners. Though much of this section deals with music in Tongan genealogy, these elements still applied very closely and effectively to the ways in which we approached poetry in the Pacific Verse workshops. I focus here not just on technical conventions of sound or poetics, but also the relationship our composers had to the forms and structures they created in both music and poetry—it is to this relationship that I turn first.

\textit{punake}

When conceptualizing an approach to music-writing in Tonga, it is vitally important to consider the genealogies created by Tongan composers—the punake. In his work on Tongan

\textsuperscript{13} There is actually an archive of Tongan music accessible on Youtube, where we can find younger Tongan musicians covering pieces considered to be Tongan standards composed by Queen Sālota, Tu‘imala Kaho, and many other major composers of Tongan musical genealogy. Some examples include multiple covers of songs such as Tu‘imala Kaho’s “Lose Hina O Kahala”, Queen Sālote’s “Hala Kuo Papa”, and many more.
poetry, renowned teacher, thinker and theorist Futa Helu provides a glimpse of the relationship between poetry, music, and dance, which were encompassed in the compositions of Tongan punake:

Tongan poetry was, and is, inextricably connected with music and dance. This unity of music, poetry and dance existed especially in the art of ancient Tonga. We cannot, however, regard this as a case of subordinating poetry to music, for the Tongan punake (poet) has a conception of his at quite different from that of his European counterpart.

(Helu 2012, 50)

The "unity" that Futa Helu refers to between poetry, music and dance is something I believe to be crucially important in conceptualizing how Tongan composers approached the form, content and purposes of their craft. What I take away from this concept of unity is the idea that there was not necessarily a strict compartmentalization in the approach, composition, and performance of music, dance and poetry. This can be seen in the ways Tongan compositions and genres are named. The lakalaka and tau‘olunga, for example, are terms for a genres of Tongan composition defined by specific dances. These dances correspond to specific song types, which in turn have their own poetic conventions. True, lakalaka and tau‘olunga are terms that most immediately connote forms of dance; however, in the context of conceptualizing Tongan approaches to categorization and genre, these terms also illustrate how action, sound and poetry are fully present within the definition and connotation of one term. By comparison, when thinking in English, there are the terms "poetry", "music", or "dance" which are used to categorize a performance. These terms remain separate, though they may be combined together to describe the elements of one piece. This is a very basic comparison between the concepts of categorization in performance between Tongan and English languages; however, my point is that the Tongan language can serve as a model for a different conceptualization of composition that does not make distinctions in sharp lines between what is poetry, what is dance, and what is
music. This is because of the ways in which Tongans have created a genealogy of relationship between sound, voice and dance. One of the major limitations of this project is that I will be operating almost completely in English while knowing that there are concepts of relationship and connection in performance in Tongan that do not correspond to concepts or terms in English because of the differences in cultural perspectives on the definitions and categorizations of art forms. What I want to highlight in my references to lakalaka and tau'olunga are the ways in which a close reading of Tongan labels of dances/songs/poetry are indicative of an approach to composition that required, and was indeed defined by, the interweaving of sound, word, and action.\footnote{This is not to say that there were not specialists who focused on composing only lyrics, song or choreography. In his section on Tongan composition, Richard Moyle gives an overview of different processes of musical composition, stating that “musical composition in Tonga involves ro one to three separate acts” (Moyle, 41). Melodies require a single act, while songs require creating music followed by words, and dances require first movement, then words and music (Moyle 41-42). Moyle documents that individuals who compose songs are pulotu ta'anga, music composers are pulotu hiva, and choreographers are pulotu haka. Only those who are skilled in all three compositions are considered punake (Moyle, 42).}

To further expand on Futa Helu’s idea of “unity”, I want to highlight that Tongan punake did not compartmentalize their work as creating pieces that separated their compositions from the social and political contexts in which they lived.\footnote{In her work on Queen Sálote’s poetry, Adrienne Kaepller discusses that social and political contexts are just as important to determining poetic content as are musical and performative settings. (Kaepller, 27-29)} They wrote as deeply imbedded members of their own society, within specific times and places that influenced their compositions deeply. Futa Helu illustrates this relationship between punake and all levels of Tongan society here:

> The other important feature of Tongan poetry is that it is essentially social poetry or collective lyricism. Although there is scope for expression of individual and private feelings, they all have to pass through the transforming prism of social sanction and standardization. They must all be expressed through the medium of accepted social symbols and norms, that is, in symbolism, imagery and conceits (cf. the metaphysical poets such as Donne, etc.) that have been sanctioned by usage and society as a whole.

(Helu 2012, 51-52)
These general themes of Tongan composition emphasize the role and understanding of relationship within Tongan worldviews, particularly as these perspectives on connection and relationship were embodied in the creative expression of Tongan composers and compositions. The act of looking into the genealogies of Tongan music therefore reveals how important it is to look not only at the themes and motifs of the music and poetry, but to also understand the roles that punake held within their own times; the cultural contexts that were being negotiated while they composed; and the social atmospheres they composed within. Looking into our genealogy requires us to understand layers of connection between composers and their works that both reflected and shaped the social events and issues surrounding them.

Within the larger understandings of connection and place that are embodied in Tongan composition, there are some specific elements within our musical genealogy that can be used as guidelines for identifying, defining and guiding future music-writing. The following points are only part of my own limited understanding of the guidelines and sounding points of Tongan elements of composition. I group these elements of music as context, content, structure, sound and performance within Tongan composition. Though I arrange these categories separately in order to think through them each in turn, they are by no means separate within the processes of composition.

**approaching context**

Social and political contexts, which are also further defined by specific place, space and time in Tonga, shape the content, structure, tone and intent of Tongan composition. In essence, context roots a composition in a specific time and place, while also dictating the manner in which a punake will portray the relationship to that context with consciously selected forms, imagery, metaphor and performance. For an example of this relationship to context, HRH
Nanasipau‘u Tuku‘aho, Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, Melenaite Taumoefolau and Adrienne Kaeppler have provided an extensive look into the poetry of Queen Sālote, whose compositions are considered the highest standard for contemporary Tongan poetic forms. In their collection of essays introducing a selection of Queen Sālote’s poetry, these writers go into great detail about the social, political, and economic contexts that served as a backdrop to the genealogy and personal life of Queen Sālote. Their essays are a critical look at the contexts which directly informed the content, structure and performance of Queen Sālote’s poetry.

The critical consciousness of context, as exemplified in the genealogy of Tongan composition, is a particularly important when thinking about how newer Tongan writers might engage with their own contexts. If a composition is rooted by engaging context, it is crucial that new writers speak—or compose—from their individual perspectives and take from their own knowledge to create new pieces. Speaking from personal knowledge requires a measure of caution however, in order to avoid writing a piece of music or poetry that is so personal, it ceases to be relatable to any audience. Futa Helu has discussed this need for a critical awareness of being too excessive with individuality with regard to composition in his discussions of hiva kakala.

The concepts of engaging larger contexts while engaging with personal knowledge are two concepts that point up how each composer must balance, or bridge, between relating what they know personally and how they relate to their audiences through contextually-specific imagery, lyrics and sound. At the very basis, the ways that specific contexts have defined the

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17 Both Futa Helu and Richard Moyle discuss the nature of hiva kakala, or the contemporary Tongan love songs. Moyle describes this genre as “the sole medium for individual expression within the medium of vocal music,” (Moyle, 179). Futa Helu critically analyzes hiva kakala in his essay “Tongan Poetry” (2012) in which he discusses the excessive use of individualism that has begun to define the genre over time.
structure, sound and content of Tongan composition are important to how we think critically about what new original pieces address in subject matter and who the compositions are for.

**approaching content**

Stemming from the idea of context as something that roots Tongan music, there are some layers of specific structural and poetic elements that dictate how content is portrayed. In the Pacific Verse, we focused specifically on one such element—that of heliaki. Heliaki is deeply imbedded in Tongan culture as a form of verbal indirectness, which is also defined in Tongan poetics as “imagery” and “metaphor.”18 The idea of addressing a subject or issue through the use of indirectness is a concept that ties directly into the larger ideas of knowing place and connection with Tongan culture. Tongan society was, and still is, based on a hierarchy determined by birth, gender and social status. Just as the “unity” of compositional art is itself a reflection of the Tongan conceptions of music, so too is heliaki (or layered imagery), a reflection of the ways in which relationships are maintained/shifted through indirect address and conversation in everyday life. Tongan metaphor is a direct product and reflection of the ways in which Tongan society is shaped and defined. The specific imagery and style of heliaki is thus dependent on the place, space and time in which a piece is being composed, as there are multiple ways of fostering and maintaining relationships and understanding place within Tongan society throughout our islands. The use of specific images and the styles of heliaki are, as Futa Helu has described earlier, defined and refined through social lyricism and communal definitions; Tongan imagery and metaphor have set rules determined by specific contexts whereby layers of meaning are interpreted and understood differently by various audiences. For example, the use of particular images from a lakalaka composed by a punake from Niuatoputapu will have different

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18 These two different definitions have been used separately by Futa Helu (2012) and Adrienne Kaeppler (2004).
layers of meaning depending on the members of the audience. Those listeners from Niuatoputapu will understand to a more personal level the social commentary and nuances behind certain place-based imagery of a piece, whereas a listener from Ha'apai may understand to a broader extent the symbols of a piece, but will not necessarily have the closer, more intimate knowledge of the meaning or references within a piece.\footnote{Wendy Pond has written an article detailing how Tongan punake in the islands of Niua have used the specific imagery of their islands as the frames of reference for their heliaki. These punake have also manipulated certain Tongan compositional conventions in ways that create messages of resistance and social criticism. (Pond, 1990)}

The beauty of heliaki is that it works as a the vessel within Tongan compositions—it holds the images, meanings and specific rules of those images based on the specificity of a composer’s social context in Tonga. Heliaki also remains a portable element of composition that can be added to throughout time and space. Like any vessel on the open water, it requires careful attention and balancing—that is to say, for new composers engaging with imagery and metaphor in Tongan language, there must be a balance between the specificity of consciously chosen imagery, layered messages beneath such images, and the general reach of that imagery to various audiences. Just as with context—where a composer must take care of the connection between their personal context and the understanding of the audience—heliaki requires another kind of balance in composition that deals with layers of, and accessibility to, multiple meanings within one composition.

This balance of layer and meaning is also echoed in the balance between the expected and unexpected in Tongan composition.\footnote{Futa Helu discusses the beauty of creating simple, subtle, yet unexpected connections in Tongan metaphor. (Helu, 1999)} The question of balance then is just how unexpectedly you want to present a message through metaphor, while also composing in such a way that is recognizable to your audience. Essentially, the use of heliaki is the creation of connection.
between ideas that are unexpected enough to show something new to your audience, while also presenting something that is recognizable and enjoyable aesthetically as well.

sound

As new writers, how does our genealogy inform how we sound?

This is a question that is perhaps the hardest for me to address, as I am a relatively late student to Tongan language, poetry, and music-writing. There is only so far I can go in writing and through pages of musical text and critical analysis of Tongan music provided by scholars such as Futa Helu, Adrienne Kaeppler and Richard Moyle. As far as the patterns and conventions of melody and harmony that sound out the genealogy of what is considered traditional Tongan music, there are very useful anthologies and collections of Tongan music written in Western European notation and Tongan tu‘ungafasi, accompanied by multiple translations and editions that can help in guiding newer composers. The written aspect is, however, only the smallest piece to engaging with Tongan music—which by its own nature, is communal and place-based, requiring writers to engage with their own communities first in actual spaces for singing, learning and practicing. What is written down on pages or notated on sheet paper is secondary, even tertiary, to the importance of being able to make music together.

As far as formal sound structures go, Futa Helu has stated that, “in the case of traditional Tongan music we have only a handful of set melodic patterns, and the punake must be thoroughly versed in these patterns and their limited variations.” (Helu 2012, 50). He goes on to say that “some Tongan melodic patterns are contrived with simple but at the same time very subtle means” (Helu 2012, 50-51). The question I want to pose here is not just about how and when new composers emulate these patterns or conventions, but also how they might critically and creatively combine Tongan conventions with other musical forms like reggae, or hip-hop.
Tongan music itself contains a genealogy of songs from Sāmoa and Wallis and Futuna that were altered or added upon by Tongan dancers and composers. How might we follow those examples of mixing and remixing from our genealogy? How might we itemize particular patterns of sound, combine them with specific lyrics, and consider choreographing actions or dance?

I do not mean to answer these questions here; I pose them as possible guidelines for approaching new work. There are multiple ways in which new composers might work with certain patterns of sound, be that from singing and composing in Tonga in groups, studying recordings, or working from written notation such as the Tongan tu‘ungafasi.\(^{21}\) There are infinite ways in which certain patterns might be remembered, through both social and written contexts. What I hope to work toward in future Tongan song-writing are methods by which new composers are incorporating these sound patterns in ways that engage context-specific forms while also keeping space for new patterns and influence.

Another major question that comes up refers to the use of sound patterns from Tongan traditions. What purposes and meanings we might take from the combination of say, a Tongan style of melody and harmony accompanied by electronic instruments? What would it mean to compose a faha‘i hiva\(^{22}\) over a hip-hop track? For me, these actually lead to more questions about what we use to define Tongan music, and whether that definition is supposed to be flexible enough to encompass shifting contexts of Tongan realities. If genealogy is memory, and a genealogy of music in Tonga encompasses sounds and words that come from a specific context with specific meanings, then how do we responsibly “remix” or “mash-up” the memories of our

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\(^{21}\) Tu‘ungafasi is Tongan musical notation uses numbers to correspond to parts of a scale. Richard Moyle and Kik Velt, among many other writers, have described the history of tu‘ungafasi in Tonga with the arrival of missionaries, and the advent of writing down music in a way that incorporated both Tongan and Western music styles.

\(^{22}\) Richard Moyle has documented several patterns and songs of faha‘i hiva, which are “part-songs...distinguished musically by its accompaniment of stamping tubes and multipart clapping” (Moyle, 165).
genealogy with those of other influences? These are questions I would like to incorporate in future Pacific Verse projects.

In looking and hearing back to our genealogy for melody and harmony, we can think about not only emulating the sounds we hear, but also about how new melodies might exemplify ideas of simplicity and subtlety in conjunction with harmony, movement and meaning. Composing a new piece with these elements in mind would also ideally create an emotional connection between performer(s) and audience that create what are considered māfana and malie. These two concepts—māfana and malie—are fundamental parts of the following two discussions on structure and performance.

structure

Futa Helu, Adrienne Kaeppler, Richard Moyle, Melenai Teufoolau and Wendy Pond, among many others, have documented, discussed and analyzed the different kinds of structures that correspond to Tongan compositional styles and forms. From the chanting of fakatangi to the lyricism and metaphor of hiva kakala, these scholars have provided essential written work that can help guide new composers through the written theory of Tongan competition structures. I focus on one particulate structural convention in Tongan writing—that of tau e langi—to work through some general ideas about how our composition structures teach us about an approach to music-writing that is critical, flexible, and important to the ways we listen to and compose music.

In an interview with UNESCO, Sisi’uno Helu, current director of the ‘Atenisi Foundation for Performing Arts (AFPA), compared musical concepts of emotion and structure between Tongan and European traditions. She focuses her comparison on the concept of māfana and tau e langi here:
The basis of our music I think is to develop melody and rhythm to some kind of peak, or climax. Through change in the melody and change in the rhythm and communal contribution to the building up of this māfana we call tau e langi. Whereas is in European music I think that it does build to a peak in the middle of the music, but then it has to go down again until it forms this symmetrical balance. Whereas our music, it just goes up and bang! It just finishes up there.\textsuperscript{23}

The concepts of māfana (the feeling of warmth or inspiration) and tau e langi (ascending to the sky) portray a direct connection between the structures of Tongan composition and the emotions that composers and performers want to elicit from their audience. These examples require us to think about the function of our pieces and that structure in Tongan composition creates another layer of the meaning beneath the words and sounds of a piece.

With this in mind, we can start to think about how structure amplifies lyrics and sound and what repetition, variation, māfana and tau e langi do for the overall effect of a piece. These considerations tie into part of the main ideas of how context, content, sound, and structure all come together at once in the time and space of a single performance.

\textit{Performance}

In the genealogies of Tongan performance, just as in the concepts Tongan poetry, music and dance in Tongan genealogy, there is a blurring of the lines that, in Western traditions, have been drawn between audience and performance. Sisi'uno Helu highlights this separation of audience and performers with stages and chairs, the sectioning of action in the time of performance between the actual performance (the show) and the audience's clapping (the emotional and/or perfunctory acknowledgement or appreciation of said show):

The emotion we put into our music is spontaneous, but on the other side, the European [music]...it doesn't come spontaneously, you have to practice it ... in

\textsuperscript{23} Sisi'uno Helu, interview for UNESCO, Youtube. 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6g4XNC_PWGM.
Europe you go to their music theatres, and you sit in a little chair, and you show your emotion by just clapping at the end. You just can’t get excited in the middle of the symphony and jump and go crazy or something.24

By contrast, in Tongan genealogies of performance there are a combinations of māfana, tau e langi, and expressions of appreciation that create the atmosphere for blurring the lines of audience and performer. Richard Moyle briefly touches on tau e langi and the ways in which a composition “generates in the listener the kind of profoundly moving effect known as māfana” (Moyle, 46). Moyle further describes how these performances here:

Dancers react favourably to such music and initiate the process of mutual encouragement between themselves and the audience which results in audience empathy with themselves, and which transforms the dance from an artistic to a psychic or spiritual phenomenon.

(Moyle, 46)

The relationship that Moyle points up here between performers and audience portrays how a composition can be performed in such a way that the feeling of māfana is not confined to set spaces and times. This is not to say that all Tongan performances incorporate performers and audiences; it is simply to suggest that in Tongan approaches to performance, there are still the overarching connections and relationships that call for performers and audience to meld into one another. People blur the separation between stage and audience through the emotional connections of māfana and malie, the donations of the fakapaʻe, and the ways in which audience members become performers and vice versa within the space of one performance.

**Conclusion**

How does this genealogy inform our conscious and critical composition when we think about performing new work? We can think about how each of these concepts are flexible, context-driven and interweaving with one another. We can think about how these concepts can

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24 Sisiʻuno Helu, interview for UNESCO, Youtube, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5g4XNePWGKM.
be used in what Joshua Savieti has coined as “an industry of support,”\textsuperscript{25} where we engage new art forms, but still seek the aspects of moving performances through heliaki, tau e langi, and māfana.

Our genealogy of composition shows how deeply our composers layered themselves and their work within Tongan society. This deep-rootedness required time, training, and support—lessons by which we can start to think about what it takes in reality to create music that is relevant, moving, and recognizable to our Tongan audiences. What tools do we need to be aware of—what spaces do we create—in order to give people the opportunity to be the next composers of Tongan music?

I believe that our genealogies are essential to developing a critical awareness and engagement with who we want to be as Tongan writers, poets, and musicians. Our genealogies teach us what is recognizable as Tongan in the elements of music and poetry, as well as the importance of spontaneity, the unexpected, and the unscripted. The question for future Tongan musicians and poets is how we’ll be incorporating new forms with traditions that are critically chosen, and consciously used to expand what we think of as Tongan in music. The creativity, memory, balance, and overarching consciousness of social connection in Tongan culture are the legacies of our genealogy that I believe are vital to future music-writing in Tonga.

\textsuperscript{25} Joshua Savieti, co-founder of ICON Tonga, coined this phrase in an interview with me when he described his goals for ICON and the creative arts community in Tonga.
section four: on the ground

“there is a need for creative arts here in Tonga.” there is a need
- Joshua (Josh) Savieti

“we need stuff, kinda like another bridge between
the people, using music as another way to reach
the people to do positive stuff, to do good in their
life, to change, not just through
the ordinary way of being.”
- Mike O’Brien Tonga

“one thing that i’ve seen here in Tonga,
they are looking to do something,
the youth here in Tonga.
To be understood, to be seen, to be acknowledged.”
- Josh

“I think when you’re in that environment,
and you feel free, and creativity starts,
and you feel free to express.”
- Tupouseini Taumoepeau

“A lot of young people do that, they perform.
But it’s the whole being heard,
it’s about them being heard”
- Tupouseini

“But even knowing where to start,
I guess that’s one thing.”
- Josh

“If we can create this opportunity to do something,
then, yeah, that’s big. That’s really all we can do.”
- Josh
This section combines interviews, prose, and poetry to document the thoughts, considerations, and conversations of the Pacific Verse workshops. Some of these interviews happened before the Pacific Verse started on July 7th, while others were conducted a few days before the Pacific Verse Showcase on August 13th. I have the arranged quotations, prose, and poetry below in an order that does not follow the timeline of the interviews themselves, but rather a thematic order that addresses some major considerations on music-making, workshop-planning and performance. All poems and interview-poem “mash-ups” are joined in smaller sections that follow the timeline of the Pacific Verse workshops. I mix and arrange the quotes to inform particular elements of the overall process of planning the workshops, and by extension, how words illuminate important points from the vantage point of reflection after a process of running music workshops in Tonga.

What I hope to show through the smaller moments of the Pacific Verse, combined with the perspectives and knowledge of those who gave interviews, is that this is a growing project and process of thinking about Tongan music and music-writing. The ideas that I try to document here will be used in future Pacific Verse projects which, over time, are aimed at building some approaches to music and creative writing pedagogy in Tonga.

\textit{elements of sound and writing}

\begin{verbatim}
Workshop #1
the clock strikes
upon 5pm in Tonga
at the Family Health building
whiteboard is set
Neti Josh and Nela circle
notebooks and pencils
stacked ready
on the one desk
in the corner
of the cement-floored
\end{verbatim}
pink-painted
open-air
Tonga Family Health

in the center
sitting on cement foundation
people circle
around the whiteboard—
we begin

I split the first Pacific Verse workshop into two parts; the first part was group conversation about what elements of music—any kind of music—they liked and why. We planned that once we got people talking with one another about the type of music they liked and why, we could start creating a list of specific elements of music that attracted us, and by extension, we could start being conscious of musical elements we might want to use in our own writing. The second part of the workshop would be a writing exercise for everyone to start writing individually, where we would share as a group at the end. This first workshop was focused on creating an atmosphere for free expression of new, original and exciting writing through conversations and individual reflection.

1. Part One
First prompt—
Make a list
together
of artists you really love—
who inspires you
to listen?

Some answers:
Tupac
Bruno Mars
Lincoln Park
Biggie
John Mayer
Beyonce

Question:
Why do we like these artists?
Why do we gravitate
to their sound?

Some answers:
real life lyrics
voice
rhythm
beat—

these
are elements
of music we can use
in our own writing
to create our own
gravitational pull
of real life lyrics
voice
rhythm
and beat

2. Part Two
if a poem is a painting
then we mix words
in word banks
making color
in word palettes—

this is where we start
drawing lines
of poetry
shades of myth
and legend
time and value
landmark and location

Writing prompt one:
use at least one word
from each palette
draw a line
of poetry
to complete
this sentence
"I was..."26

26 This prompt is the first of three in an initial writing workshop designed by Pacific Tongues. Permission to cite given by Pacific Tongues.
The goal of this first workshop was to create a space for collaborating, writing, and expressing new ideas through our writing. After the group discussions on artists and musical elements, we were only able to complete the first part of the writing workshop. Even though we only got to the first sentence exercise, many workshop participants kept the space open as they read their first lines of “I am” sentences. By the end of the workshop, we had at least created a space where people felt there was at least method for starting to put ideas down on paper. We had begun conversations on what we listen to and what elements of music we might want to consider using in later lyrics. I believe the biggest accomplishment of this first workshop was to bridge the gap between pen and paper in order to get people excited about a method of starting to write. What was most important to me was to see so many people willing to share their initial writing. After only a few activities, everyone had created a space through their writing where they were not afraid to share the images and ideas they had put together. Many participants thought the sentences initially sounded silly and improbable—which was the initial goal of the writing exercise. I believe we succeeded in opening up the space in the room and on the page for unexpected images and ideas to be shared as a collective.

*elements of voice*

*Workshop #2*

*the clock strikes / upon the hour /
and the sun begins to fade*

*still enough time / to figure out how to chase /
these blues / away*

*I’ve done alright / up ‘til now /
it’s the light / of / day /
that shows me how*
but when the night
falls

loneliness
calls

For the second workshop, I wanted to focus on the elements and importance of using the voice. Instead of writing, this workshop was designed to provide examples and activities for how we could manipulate meaning in the ways we changed our voices to create emotion. As an example, Neti and I re-worked and performed the first two verses of Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" in order to exemplify how you can change the tone of lyrics, change your inflection, where you breathe, where you choose to break the line, to create new meanings. Mostly, we wanted to model how you can play around with performance in a way that focuses on infusing lyrics with emotion.

The main exercise of the workshops consisted of passing out a pair of lyrics options for people to work with in groups—I printed out copies of 6 lyrics in English while Taniela Petelo provided six 1-2 line lyrics from 6 different Tongan songs. The goal was to get workshop participants to work in groups to practice putting emotions into the lyrics they had—they could manipulate the words in whatever ways they wanted. As a facilitator, I wanted to emphasize the creative license and intentionality needed to create a new interpretation of a music piece or lyric. The goal was to get people to consciously decide how they would like to interpret lyrics with their own individual emotions—they had to consciously decide what message they wanted to portray in their interpretation, and commit to emoting through voice.

"How can we do this with taking the most important the most important"

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27 Lyrics from Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" (1987). Lineti Latu and I used the slashes and line-breaks in this Pacific Verse workshop as notes for our performance, and as a model for how to rework a set of lyrics in order to emphasize different meaning through changes in emphasis, pausing, breathing, and speed.
elements of our music and incorporate it with the Western harmony?"  
- Sisit'uno Helu

"It’s not only that you can write your own original piece, but you can play around with it."
- 'Ahota'e‘iloa Moa'a

"One syllable with all kinds of movement, it’s good to know that it doesn’t follow a set pattern."
- Sisit'uno

"I know the changes come into Tonga and its very strong, very dominant, and so there is a need for our youth - our future musicians - to know more about the important aspect, or elements, of our music and somehow incorporate it into their new works or whatever they’re creating."
- Sisit'uno

"I’m expecting someone to change the normal genre of Tongan music into something new."
- Taniela Petelū

Showing how to break down a piece—or a few lines of lyrics—was an essential exercise for this workshop. Listening to the songs we were sampling lyrics from and breaking down the basic elements of what emotions those artists were trying to convey, and how, was important for the comparison of how each participant would be manipulating the lyrics for their own emotion. Using the “slashes”, chopping up the lyrics, rearranging line breaks—these were all tools that participants used to work collaboratively on re-interpreting lyrics.

At the end of this workshop, each group of participants performed their re-interpreted lyrics, and you could literally feel the energy emanating from each performance. Some were humorous, some were more serious, some groups made new melodies and beats, while others reinterpreted their lyrics into spoken-word pieces.
heliaki

Because a major element of the Pacific Verse was to ensure that our writers were using Tongan, it was important to contextualize the ways we were going to write not only with language, but with the elements of composition that are part of the genealogy of Tongan writing. After the first two workshops, I wanted to emphasize the ideas of what heliaki was, and what we could do with it in our lyrics and poetry in the workshop. We were looking to get multiple, diverse and deep meanings from our writing, which meant that as a group and in individual work, we needed to consistently emphasize a critical use of words and language, taking the core message of what someone wanted to write, and using our word banks and conversation to come up with new ways of exploring those topics. We first had to establish the core ideas of what people wanted to convey, and then add a layer or two of imagery and metaphor in order to create a new way of looking at topics like belonging, home, love, connection, family, etc.

We rooted our conversations on heliaki and metaphor to the first exercises we did in the first Pacific Verse workshops, where we had seemingly “nonsensical” sentences, but within which we could put new and unexpected images and ideas together to create a new picture of how we would see ourselves, and eventually, how we would see the messages we wanted to convey to our audience.

“To dive splash
into different ways - and sink deep -
and i think it was really effective too - do not rely
you don’t have to just plainly explain what’s going on the surface
on but that you can have creative ways of doing that as the height
and if it’s through spoken words of all meaning -
or just a few lines of crazy metaphor, it’s just light
then so be it.”  filtering
- Josh through
we

we
are listening

"Whatchu call, heliaki - for a deeper wave -
they don't really use that, the kind that doesn't just
like our great great grandpa, travel above
when they write a song, it makes you think deep - our surfaces
the first time you listen it makes you confused,
what they talking about? meaning moves better
The message they bring on the song is really deep, you must
powerful, they dig deep dive
so you can know to hear -
what they're talking about." you must
- 'Ahota'e'i'loa sink
for that deep
talk

Working out heliaki is a process; the process of layering messages about who we are and
what we know. In reflecting on the workshop process, it seems to me that heliaki could also be
thought of as a practice that requires individual and collaborative conversation. When we
emphasize the idea of heliaki and the practice of creating metaphor, we emphasize the need for a
critical view of our own experiences and how it is we want to present them. To start this
reflection, we had to take a while to move from general to specific—for example, when asking
workshop participants about what they want to talk about, we had to work from general ideas
like "life" and "sports" and break those down into specific events or experiences. In the two
previous workshops, we only had to come up with sentences that combined unexpected ideas or,
we worked with performing lyrics that were already provided. This phase of the workshop series
required that we take a step back and reflect on what we were going to say with our own original
pieces. On top of that, we had to be more deliberate with what images or ideas we chose in order
to convey messages about our topics. Essentially, we had done the easy work in the first two
workshops, whereas now we had the task of reflecting on ourselves as to what we were actually
going to write, from what parts of ourselves we would create our lyrics, and what ideas or
images we would pair with those messages to create layers of heliaki. Part of emphasizing the use heliaki required that we consistently encourage people to use our Tongan language, simply because using Tongan automatically connects a write to everyday vernacular, jokes, humor and conversation that have metaphor and layered meanings already built within them. Because workshop participants already had deep connections to people and places they had always known in Tonga, we needed to emphasize that their perspectives and definitions and connections to place, people and time in Tonga were just as important as points of reference for metaphor, poetry and lyrics as the older perspectives of Tongan writers and composers using heliaki. If I could run this workshop again, I would emphasize heliaki in a way more similar to the way I have run poetry workshops in Hawai‘i; in those workshops, we always emphasize that there is no one way to write poetry, that “the standard is yourself.” In that light, in order to encourage Tongan writers to take inspiration and guidance from our own genealogies of heliaki and poetics, I would emphasize that their experiences make their writing unique, and since the standard for writing should be themselves and their experience, I would say that there is no one way to write heliaki—in other words, there is no one way to layer yourself. The punake of our genealogy were writing from within an environment of creativity and performance that was specific to their experiences as Tongan composers—they understood the conventions of Tongan writing by nature of their understanding of themselves. In that vein, I find it vitally important to emphasize that heliaki does not exist in just one form, but is an element of Tongan poetics that is inherently flexible in order to continue as a framework for expressing ideas and creating connection and understanding in Tongan culture.

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28 This phrase is used in Pacific Tongues workshop pedagogy. Permission to cite granted by Pacific Tongues leadership.
These are the larger ideas I have reflected on after the Pacific Verse workshops. The reality is that I believe many younger writers need to hear that their experiences are valid and important to write down; their perspectives on Tonga, their identity as Tongans, and the realities of everyday life are important to hear. What this workshop was truly aiming to do was to help people begin thinking about how they might express those experiences in the now through a critical use of our Tongan cultural genealogy through the use of heliaki. Be it through one word, one sentence, or an entire piece in Tongan, the objective of this workshop was to get everyone to expect that they would be using Tongan however they wanted in order to write and layer parts of themselves through metaphor in poetry or music lyrics.

map and center

Workshop #4
a rough map
between Lāʻie, Hawaiʻi
and Nukuʻalofa, Tonga:

I've been
telling tales
beginnings
middles
and
ends
in mud —
the combination of rain
and my Tonga’s dirt,
the combination of rain
and the walk from Café Escape
to Tonga Family Health
in Nukuʻalofa

This mud
sticks my tongue
and I trip
over my Tongan
in my Auntie’s
Lāʻie living room
Continuing on from our workshop on lyrics and heliaki, this workshop focused on decision-making and the development of central messages for each individual’s piece. Workshop participants had been working through different drafts and ideas for their songs and poems; now was the time in the workshop series that we needed to hone in on what exactly people wanted to write for the showcase. So each writer had to find the center of their piece, whether it be a person, an idea, or an object, they had to start making a decision on what they were going to focus on and shape for the rest of the workshops.

Once people started locating their central messages, we started mapping where their pieces might go—if someone had a few lines they wanted to keep as their center, we brainstormed about what stories or images they would want to surround that central message with—thus the “mapping.” We could think of these as outlines or skeletons—the point was that however we wanted to think of their piece—as a body, as a map, as a series of verses with chorus—the point was that workshop participants felt they were securing their place within their own piece, and that they would be guiding the rest of the

"my writing was always distant -
it was always distant from myself.
I think learned how to make it,
how to write from my life...
Not to write about something so distant,
but to write about what i’m going through -
experiences - something more personal,
because i think when something is real
to you, it becomes real to other people."
- Tupouseini

"If we see ourselves
from far off
center
then we must write
the maps, draft
the legends
trace and contour
what is ours
our land
our people

"It has to be real to me,
what is a mapping
so when the poetry is performed, really
it could be real to others" but lines
- Tupouseini of our sight
drawn in frames of reference
"when we think of ideas, charted in unexpected
you know where you always think passages between
of what’s convenient, where we were
or what’s already there— and how will be
opening this avenue located
gave us another place to go to in our own
ing terms of expression.” terms
- Josh

I think the most important part of this workshop was the pattern we began to adhere to with each workshop. We had already mapped a space from the very first workshop where everyone was invited to share their work. Because of the bravery and energy of the workshop participants, we were able to establish that space early on. With this workshop, we were solidifying a space for sharing, performance, and feedback as each individual writer was beginning to make decisions about the mapping and centering of their pieces. In order to help make those decisions, it was important that we come together at the end of our workshop activities and individual work in order to show people where we were in our piece, where we were in placing Tongan and heliaki, and where we were even if we were lost.

One of the most important spaces we created was the circle at the end of each workshop, which we began establishing with this workshop. Workshops #1-#3 had all used the end of the workshop for sharing pieces, but this particular workshop established our practice for the rest of the series where we all came together in a circle and helped each other recited and perform. In this space, we were not just sharing our work, but also establishing an atmosphere of support where we vocally supported each other through our pieces. We were also establishing a practice of giving constructive and critical feedback. The first workshops really only consisted of sharing
and support where I and perhaps a few other ICON organizers would give some critical feedback. We broke that mold in order to get everyone involved in giving feedback in which we challenged people to go beyond saying merely “good job”, or “that was a good piece”, to establishing how we would help each other through detailed feedback. We began asking questions and giving feedback about the meanings of certain lines or words, performance choices, etc.

I think this practice of circling up at the end of the workshop to share and give feedback was an essential part of the entire workshop series. From this practice, we were able to define a space of collaboration and support that not only set an expectation for how each workshop would run, but also set an expectation for how we would support one another both within and beyond the “central” spotlight of the stage. We were practicing not only how to be performers and writers, but perhaps more importantly, how to be members of a collaborative and supportive community where we didn’t leave anyone in solitude on the stage.

“and i buzzed out - after a few weeks of doing it “ok, we’ve got about
and we first came around a circle 10 minutes left
and we read some of our lines to each other” in this workshop.
- Josh it’s that time again -
we’re gunna circle up”

“i can have a voice. get these lines
other youth can use spoken word revolving
as their voice.” get these words
- Mike spoken
get these songs

“spoken word and music is, spinning
is something that’s in our blood, like the way
like just in being Tongan and just being Pacific
people I think it’s we’ve been ingrained to express
that way like through music, through spoken word the stars
that’s how we pass on information shout out
to the next generation, like the waves
through traditional dances and music, shape the islands
thats how the language is passed on- from the way back
cuz we’re not really like a written language, of their throats,
we’re like a language that was always expressive. the way back memory
I think it’s probably something from way back.” of their voice
- Tupouseini

“let’s circle up”

“i think my biggest joy and circle back
was seeing everyone improve to the beginning, measuring
from just doing our word banks the first time how deep
to actually writing some deep, we’ve gotten
crazy lines.” since we first
- Josh went around
spinning lines

decide and layer

Workshop #5
mapping is really
about deciding
what lines
are worth making
visible

where do you start
digging deep?
where do you chart
the unexpected?
what passage
will you take between?
what are you layering beneath
your own terms?

Working off of the ideas of centering and mapping pieces, this workshop focused on
building ideas of heliaki as well as deliberate writing and performance decisions that would deal
with elements of māfana, tau e langi, performer-audience work, messages we want to send,
dealing with form/content decisions. Not only were we working through decisions and mapping
in the content of our pieces, but we also had to decide how our performances also added meaning
and context to our messages themselves. In this workshop, we kept working through critique on
our content which was not placed alongside our performance decisions. We built from the
exercises we did with performing lyrics in workshop #3 in order to start making conscious and

critical decision on how we would be performing our own pieces.

“This māfana that the dances have -
  must be part of the performance,
  every time they do it -
  it must reach this tau eangi theme.”
- Sisi‘uno

“I think this kind of a work,
  or this kind of performance,
  would bring the audience closer to performers -
  and not only that, but the audience would also feel
  that they are a part of this performance
  cuz it would only be a performance if there’s audience
  there to work with you, they should also feel
  they are part of the whole process.”
- Sisi‘uno

The kind of work we are looking for is the kind that can bridge the gap between audience
and performer. In the previous workshops, participants had to map what parts of their
experiences they wanted to express, and how to do that through lines of their own heliaki. A lot
of that work consisted of reflecting on what life experiences they could draw from to make
pieces that spoke from their identities as Tongan young adults. At this point in the workshop
series, we were getting into more nuanced and complex ways of expressing the poetry and lyrics
they had been working on. Much of this performance work had to do with decisions on where
and how to use Tongan and English, decisions on emotion and performance, and more
increasingly, how these emotions could be conveyed to their audience—whoever that audience
might be. For the Pacific Verse, we had already established that we would be performing our
pieces in front of an audience of mostly family and friends.

However, I think we can expand more on what considerations went into making decisions
of layering content, performance and audience. Something this kind of work brings up is the way
in which a writing process—for both music and poetry—in Tongan contexts is a conversation the artist creates between the genealogy of Tongan cultural forms in music, and the every-day lived experiences that shape a new, original piece. When making conscious decisions about what we can use from the complex genealogy of Tongan poetry and music, we have to shift the ways we understand those elements in ways that we can use them to convey our experiences in the now. What this workshop showed was that practicing heliaki means we have to move between how heliaki has been used in the examples of our songs and poems in the past and shift those connections of metaphor to deal with every-day, lived realities, places and people now. Making decisions between what elements of writing we can use from our cultural genealogy can be extremely daunting at times because we might be overwhelmed with sticking to one definition of what heliaki can be, and by extension, what a one definition of the “right” way to write Tongan poetry and metaphor might be. For the Pacific Verse, I think framing heliaki as a critical practice of layering and decision making between content and performance is the most flexible and accessible way of expanding how we can express experience and identity in our writing as Tongans.

“So I think if I’m talking about culture, I always want it to come across as to make people understand—not to just flaunt your pride, to show off where you’re from—but I think it’s more to create understanding.” - Tupouseini

“that is my identity that’s my culture - I was birthed out of this country, out of this blood - I’m Tongan, and I love it... I love everything about this country.” - Josh

how do we decide to show up important—show our Tongan culture language poetry perspective as important?

do we just show up? do we assume people see us as Tongan?
“I like it when people are just themselves, in their own unique way, like they express whoever it is they are. They’re not always copying other artists, or copying other cultures, which can be strong. Like other cultures have strong influences upon Tonga. But it’s cool when someone is just, cool to be Tongan, whatever kind of Tongan they are.”
- Tupouseini

when do we decide to show and when do we just write - is there ever a time we are not sounding ourselves out?

do we ever have the luxury of just writing? what is a Tongan writer? what is a writer who happens to be Tongan?

practice

As we kept going through the routine of the workshops, we also began mapping our own expectations of how we supported one another in workshop practice and individual work. In a sense, the routine of working in groups, working individually, practicing and sharing in pairs, and finally performing to one another in one large circle to close the workshop—all of these became a part of mapping the space we needed as writers and singers. This highlighted another goal of the workshop which was not just to develop individual work, but to emphasize the collaboration and support that we all need as artists—it was part of de-centering the stage as the all-important space of performance in order to emphasize the multiple places that we occupy as artists who support one another. We move throughout a performative environment as members of the audience; as supporters for the person who is speaking/performing; as constructive and brave critics; and of course, as performers ourselves.

“you need to cater to your audience - serve
cater through the language - your language
that is how you connect” in generous
- Sione Langi portions
“when you think of things in Tongan, we write
it changes everything.” to feast
- Tupouseini we invite
all to come -

“i wanted to have a piece in Tongan no one eats
to know what alone
that feels like ha'ū o kai

to speak these things ha'ū o lea
in the Tongan language speak
for myself” eat
- Josh

in Tongan

“Things that you normally say in English, ha'ū o lea
when you say it in Tongan, ha'ū o kai
you have to change it right around-
layer taste
I was trying to talk about the waves of salt
and sand
and i refer to foi'one'one because that refers to Ha'apai, family land–
where my father's from.
So instead of just talking all the places
about any kind of beach, that feed–
it's referring to a specific kind of beach,
with delicious words
on a specific island, which is known - everyone is a cook
instead of saying Ha'apai, everybody knows ha'ū o kai
that it's foi'one'one, ha'ū o lea
because it has the finest sand.”
- Tupouseini

As the second half of the Pacific Verse workshops series, these workshops were designed much more loosely than the beginning five sessions. We kept the set pattern of having an initial gathering and welcome, followed by individual work where participants worked individually, occasionally working in collaboration with other writers before coming together at the end of the workshop to share their work in our closing circle. What was most important about these workshops was individual work and smaller collaboration followed by the overall group performances at the end. These workshops showed the value of creating performance practice,
where we as writers, artists and musicians could depend on set time and space to hone our pieces and develop our experience as writers.

*performance*

_August 13th, 2014_  
_Pacific Verse Showcase_  
_by 6pm_  
_two platforms_  
_make our stage_  
_elevated space_  
_for amplified voice_  
_blue tent over audience chairs_  
_sound check and last-minute_  
_rehearsals in small corners_  
_around Café Escape_  
_Nukuʻalofa_  
_Tonga_

_by 6:59pm_  
_Neti and Josh_  
_circle round_  
_our stage is set_  
_pictures snap, we shake_  
_nervous hands and smile—_  
_the clock strikes_  
_the sun sets_  
_and our night begins_

The Pacific Verse Showcase provided a snapshot of the dedication, practice and hard work of all the workshop participants, and I believe the most important accomplishment of this showcase was that we were able to create a stage—a place where our participants and their voices were made center to an audience of friends, family and new audiences. The showcase was important because it was a public stage, a literal platform where they could show the fruits of their practice in the workshops while also experiencing the emotion and improvisation of live performance. All the circles from previous workshops, all the support we practiced in our
workshops, were present in the context of public performance. We were finally presenting original work and looking to our audience for reactions to this music, poetry, and performance style.

What the Pacific Verse workshops were in the beginning evolved over the course of the 5-week period. My goal for these workshops in the beginning was that we provide a loose map for creating original music that would be informed by Tongan language and cultural conventions on composition. What these workshops became was a space for creative writing and composition that was adaptable and responsive to what workshop participants wanted to create—we began to focus on heliaki in spoken word and poetry. In focusing on poetry, I believe we were able to relieve some of the stress of creating full music tracks with instrumentals and Tongan music conventions to start with a foundation of writing that would solidify how we could go about creating imagery, connecting ideas in unexpected ways, and layering the content of our pieces in heliaki.

What I hope for these workshops and the space we were able to create between July 7th—the start of the workshop series—and the final Pacific Verse Showcase on August 13th, is expectation. An expectation that there are open, receptive and flexible spaces for creating music and poetry that center on Tongan perspectives and language. An expectation that there we are building and “industry of support”\textsuperscript{29} that not only creates a stage, but emphasizes the importance of the “circle,” the emphasis that as Tongan artists, we are just as important as creators of space as we are performing within that space.

What I hope for the next series of Pacific Verse workshops in Tonga is that we will build on the patterns of writing, practice, support and performance that we began in the first series. My ultimate goal is that we will be able to plan more time in order to develop not only more poetry

\textsuperscript{29} Joshua Savieti, in discussion with author, August, 2014.
pedagogy, but also a system of music pedagogy that allows for more work and practice with instruments, musicality and recording. As we build more on poetry and music, it is also imperative that we encourage and cultivate more facilitators who will be able to create their own pedagogy of poetry and music-writing that will create more guidelines for writing original work. I believe that spaces where we are able to collaborate, create a system of practice, and write and compose taking from the genealogy of Tongan convention while incorporating our everyday realities as Tongans is essential to the future of poetry and music-writing in Tonga. The acts of creating poetry and music can be modes practice for critical engagement of expression, meaning and genealogy. This critical engagement is defined in the ways that writers and musicians can look to cultural perspectives and practices of writing, expression and performance and intertwine those conventions in ways that create pieces that keep open spaces for modes of expression and influences that we gravitate toward as listeners to diverse and transformative musical traditions and innovations.

There is so much room for how we can improve on the guidelines and pedagogy of the Pacific Verse workshops. What I rely on is the inspiration that there is so much we have to say, so much we have to learn, and that through poetry and music-writing that takes guidance from our own Tongan language and genealogy of creative expression, we are able to recognize the vital nature of creating space for our voice, the vital nature of an approach to communicating ourselves and investing in our own poetics.

"so music and dance and poetry... inside us
that's how we are lines important
celebrate to celebrate
that's how we express express
that's how we teach teach
the next generation our culture remember
i think it's very important write
it's like a tool we use just and keep"
to keep the culture -
or to change the culture"
   - Tupouseini
   
   "next generations--
keep going with that flow--
so we can still have it
if we don't do this more often
maybe sometimes
it will disappear forever
because we don't want that to happen
cuz that's what's makes us Tongan"
   - 'Ahota'e'iloa

"everyone has a different
way of expressing themselves...
some people do it through dancing singing or whatever
if there are people who can't do either--
but there's something
inside them poetic--
then i guess i really wanna help them
bring or express their views"
   - Josh
section five: the mashup

why the mashup?

In order to define Tongan music and poetry-writing as decolonial praxis, this section combines definitions of decolonization previously outlined in the introduction with the experiences and processes itemized in the on-the-ground work. I use the term mashup here not just to conceptualize the combination of two sections in this portfolio, but also as a way of centering my understanding of a musical process as a method of translation, re-articulation, and ultimately, a framework for indigenization. By indigenization, I mean the translation and re-articulation of “decolonial action” into contexts of Tongan realities by way of music and poetry-writing.

“The mashup” is a framework and method of reflection that can also be a process of interweaving—this being a frame of reference used throughout Pacific Islands Studies scholarship and creative work that has rooted academic reflection in Pacific-centered imagery. I conceptualize the “mashup” in ways that are similar to how weaving has been used to indigenize the academy. The mashup is a form of integration, and just as mashups in hip-hop and other genres of music-making are a method of putting multiple songs together to create new sounds, I use the mashup here as a way to organize how I re-articulate decolonization within Tongan contexts.

between critical analysis and on-the-ground work

Because of Tonga’s unique history as the only Pacific Island place that has never been formally politically colonized, describing my own work as “decolonizing” or “decolonial” was
highly problematic in that these terms were not relevant to Tongan realities. I learned very quickly from feedback and conversations with people in my community that terms like “indigenous” and “decolonial” were not only difficult to relate to within the context of everyday life, but that they were also rather alienating and inaccessible when I used them to describe the work I wanted to do. I realized that using the word “decolonization” to a certain extent actually reified a level of power and control over definition, self-determination and empowerment that I was fundamentally trying to deconstruct and work against. This is why the on-the-ground work of the Pacific Verse workshops were so critical to the larger goals of the portfolio. Without the opportunities and privileges that the ICON family and larger creative arts community in Nuku‘alofa gave me, I would not have learned to understand and articulate self-determination, empowerment, critical consciousness and community responsibility in ways that would redefine “decolonization” in terms more relevant to Tongan culture. Before going to Tonga, I understood decolonization to be more or less a process of critical awareness of colonial representations of Pacific Islanders, which needed to be reclaimed. Praxis was even more loosely defined as the application of creative practices—like music and poetry—as a medium that would reflect and engage everyday realities. Understanding musical praxis in Pacific contexts meant rooting praxis within the frames of reference that were fundamental to Pacific cultural contexts—this being an even more vague sense “Pacific-ness”. I got on the plane to Tonga loaded with terms and ideas that were created in contexts outside of Tonga, which centered decolonization and decolonial praxis within the goals of my own academic training. Being in Tonga, meeting the ICON Tonga family, and being able to run the Pacific Verse workshop series profoundly shifted these initial, and I turn to that shift; that re-articulation; that mashup; in the following sections.

re-articulating

56
terms

Re-articulating the terms “decolonization”, “decolonial” and “indigenous” in the contexts of Tongan culture and everyday realities is more a process than an act of one-to-one translation. Decolonization connotes a much larger realm of ideas and ideologies that are understood in the contexts and genealogy—or culture\(^{30}\)—of English speaking. Making a one-to-one relationship that would place definitions and connotations of “decolonization” into Tongan contexts thereby becomes a much more complicated process, especially in light of Tonga’s history. What I think is best in an attempt to translate, retranslate, negotiate, and discuss “decolonization” in Tongan contexts is to reach past the word itself (in English) and connect the ideas behind the term to actions in Tonga that not only foster the idea, but reshape the goals and understanding of what we call “decolonization” can be in Tonga.

In that vein, I think of the process of re-articulation as an act of indigenization—“indigenization” being a term that also requires a process of translation within Tongan contexts. In my view, indigenization is the act of translating thoughts and actions into the collective imagery and understanding of connection that define a frame of reference—or worldview. In the Pacific, these frames of reference are defined and carried by our languages, and with regard to indigenizing concepts of decolonization within Tongan contexts, this portfolio inherently falls short by nature of being almost entirely written in English. Though this portfolio falls short of enacting indigenization through the use of Tongan language, my goal has been to think through acts of creativity as another medium for indigenization.

creative practice, praxis and pedagogy
(after the Pacific Verse)

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Heading to Tonga, I did not know that I would have the opportunity to run music workshops, let alone meet and work with ICON Tonga to develop and expand a workshop curriculum that would focus on poetry-writing as well. After being invited to run the 5-week workshops series, I began planning the first workshop based on what I had already learned from collaborating with my fellow CPIS graduate cohort members—Melvin Won Pat-Borja and Jason Mateo—who are the co-founders of the Pacific Tongues organization.\textsuperscript{31} The first Pacific Verse workshop—described in the "elements of sound and writing" passage of the on-the-ground section—centered on workshop participants creating word banks they would use to combine words and ideas together to complete the sentences: "I was...", "I am...", and "I will be...". This template was only for the first workshop, and the curriculum plans that followed were developed based on the overall goal that participants would perform their original at the Pacific Verse Showcase on August 13th, 2014. With a larger performance as the end goal, each workshop was adapted based on what we needed in order to help participants build their songs and poems. In that sense, the workshop curriculum developed out of the progress of each participant which we were able to see through the pattern of collaborative and individual work during the workshops, and the "circling up" performances at the end of each workshop starting with workshop #3.

The Pacific Verse curriculum was therefore developed out of a combination of performance, writing exercises (from a Pacific Tongues workshop approach), and the individual needs of participants as they drafted, practiced, collaborated, and performed their ideas in workshops. It is the process of how participants crafted their pieces to incorporate Tongan

\textsuperscript{31} Based in Honolulu, HI, Pacific Tongues is a nonprofit organization that cultivates an active artistic Oceanic community of writers, spoken word performers, leaders, educators and students of all ages (from the Pacific Tongues website, pacifictongues.org). Pacific Tongues has been running weekly after-school writing workshops in Honolulu since 2005. In 2013, Melvin Won Pat-Borja and Jason Mateo, co-founders of Pacific Tongues, completed their collaborative MA portfolio at the UH Mānoa Center for Pacific Islands Studies in which they developed a curriculum guide for facilitating poetry workshops in the Pacific.
language alongside English, engaged with general ideas of our Tongan musical and poetic
genealogy (heliaki and māfana for example), and critically reflected on the structures and
contents of their pieces (both individually and in groups) that ultimately define what I consider to
be a creative practice in a Tongan context. By documenting the planning process for workshop
curricula, I was able to reflect on these actions and ideas of creative practice in Tonga as I
returned to Hawai‘i. Shortly after my return, I participated in Pacific Tongues poet-facilitator
training, which in turn, gave me more critical tools with which to reflect on creative praxis and
pedagogy in Tonga.

Pacific Tongues poet-facilitator is designed first and foremost to prepare artists for
working with youth in Hawai‘i specifically, and all ages generally, in ways that empower
individual voices through poetry and music-writing. A foundational text of this training is Paulo
Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) in which the concept of praxis based on the “essence
of dialogue”, or “the word”. In the footnotes to chapter 3 of this text, there is a word diagram
that defines “praxis” as the reciprocal relationship of action and reflection, which are the two
basic dimensions of “the word.” My understanding of Freire’s “word” is that it stands for the
interweaving of thought and action that are at all times present in the communication between
people. In essence, I understood this to mean that to speak was not simply an act of
communication, but an act of creating reality. The creation inherent within a dialogue between
people is that of connection, and in terms of the Pacific, I translated Freire’s “word” to
encompass an understanding of connection through the interweaving of language, naming and
memory. For example, my understanding of naming in Tongan culture is that it is both an action
(by nature of the speaker identifying an object or idea), and critical reflection, (by nature of how
the act of naming and object or idea comes about from the knowledge of the context and

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genealogy surrounding said object or idea). I connect Freire’s philosophy on action and reflection within “the word” to the ways in which we as Pacific peoples name our ourselves, our land, our ocean, and our genealogies to create our connected realities.

To shift back to the contexts of the Pacific Verse and creative practice in Tonga, I think of Freire’s definition of praxis as the reciprocal nature of action and reflection on two levels; the first being the actual creative work we did within the workshop space; the second being an approach to a pedagogy of creative practices. Defining praxis within the workshops ties directly into the ways we were developing our own creative practice, which was defined by using Tongan language and engaging in our genealogy of Tongan poetics and performance (i.e. heliaki, māfana, etc.). Applying these concepts from our genealogy did not function just as a development of aesthetics, but more importantly, as a set of tools with which participants could choose how to express their own narratives and realities. In my view, it was essential not only to encourage participants to write in ways that expressed their personal values and experiences, but also to think about how we might all create multiple interpretations of our work in Tongan contexts by layering those very experiences with the structures and styles from our genealogy.

Going back to the work of Freire—in conjunction with Alperson, Regelski and Elliott—praxis is the critical relationship between action and reflection where a particular process, such as music and poetry writing, is the reflection on and practice of “personal and social agency and identity” (Regelski, 72-73). Interpreting this into Tongan contexts and the Pacific Verse, creative praxis could be thought of as the relationship between the critical consciousness of how poetic/musical elements of our genealogy are creatively interpreted today in ways relate to the everyday lives of Tongans.
With regard to praxis and pedagogy in the Pacific Verse, I connect Freire’s discussion of the “dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom” (Freire, 93) to the facilitation-style of running Pacific Verse workshops. The idea of a “practice of freedom” speaks to the larger contexts of what decolonization might look like in an approach to creative arts pedagogy in Tonga. I translate the idea of approaching education—or more specifically, an approach to running music and poetry workshops in Tonga—as the empowerment and facilitation of self-determination through the creation of music and poetry. Expanding more upon the idea of self-determination as a practice of freedom, Freire defines that actions of true dialogue “require[s] an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create” (Freire, 90). I connect this faith in the power of others to make and recreate to the faith ICON Tonga organizers and members had in me to create a space for music and poetry writing. In turn, it was my duty to practice my faith in workshop participants’ power to make and recreate music and poetry that mattered to them. In larger terms of what might be considered “decolonial” in the Pacific Verse, I think the idea of this faith as fundamental to a pedagogy that seeks to empower the self-determination of each participant. Their self-determination being a freedom to express themselves in whatever creative form, and with whatever subject matter, they find most appropriate to expressing their identities.

To return to an understanding of pedagogical praxis in Tonga, the Pacific Verse curriculum was also based on planning out how certain tools for music and poetry could be delivered in a workshop setting and made relevant to participants for their own use. For example, the idea of “heliaki” was one of the major concepts from Tongan cultural genealogy that we referred to time and again as a guideline for writing lyrics/poetry. The pattern of pedagogy that emerged was one where workshops were plans were adaptable to the needs of participants and
what they wanted in terms of guidance and support to create the poetry/music they wanted to hear. These tools were tested out every afternoon as we circled up to perform what we had worked on during that workshop session. The performance aspect of the workshops put the tools we were trying to work with to the test; by performing to one another, we could gauge how a particular use of heliaki or sound structure was received by a supportive group of fellow artists. During the next workshop, we would continue to hone a particular idea based on the feedback from the previous workshop’s performances. It was essential that workshop curricula evolved on a workshop-to-workshop basis in order to address the creative tools, styles and atmosphere of support participants needed in order to practice their own freedom in musical and poetic expression. In that sense, designing the curriculum and running the Pacific Verse workshops defined a process of action and reflection that worked to provide tools for creating music and poetry that were adaptable and responsive to the goals of workshop participants.

*creative practice*

*as decolonial praxis*

Reflecting on the initial critical analysis of this portfolio through the lens of on-the-ground work in Tonga has been crucial to re-articulating decolonization into Tongan contexts, the very basis of which is the itemization of decolonial actions in Tonga as acts of creation and self-determination. In the contexts of music and poetry-writing, I articulate decolonization in Tongan contexts first as the critical and creative engagement of genealogy. If we can think of engaging genealogy as a critical process of understanding the origins, we can think of engaging genealogy as an understanding of what has come together to create something new—be that a
form of music, an idea, a person, or a nation. Music and poetry writing in the Pacific Verse could be thought of as decolonial with respect to the ways we try to engage our genealogy of composition and performance through heliaki, tau e langi, māfana, etc. I center the Tongan concepts of genealogy specifically, and Pacific cultural concepts more generally, because of the critical consciousness that engaging genealogy engenders. Tongan understandings of genealogy inherently connect to greater conceptualizations of connection and belonging that apply to all levels of life, from the positioning self-understanding to broader connections of family, people, culture, land and ocean. Genealogy can be thought of as the critical consciousness of connection, and as such, it can be used as a flexible and guiding tool when applied to mediating the diverse realities in which Tongans live through music and poetry.

I also re-articulate decolonization as a process of self-determination. In terms of music and poetry, self-determination is the freedom to write and perform what you want; to gravitate toward what you find most interesting as a form of expression; to be fearless and confident in how you decide to sound yourself out in a song or poem. Within the Pacific Verse, it was crucial that, alongside dealing with such concepts as heliaki, we also emphasized participants to decide, layer, map and center what they thought was most important to them. This also meant that participants needed to be encouraged to use styles and rhythms that they found most appropriate to their musical tastes and goals; for instance, if someone wanted to write a rap verse, or perform a slam poem, it was vital that we encourage and support their decisions not only for their musical development, but also as part of a general approach to understanding individual musical decisions fundamentally as acts of self-determination. In my perspective, defining self-determination in terms of music and poetry-writing in Tonga was the most important step in
beginning to re-articulate “decolonization” and “decolonial praxis” in a way that centered Tongan perspectives and cultural values.

*in summary*

Within the literature and ideology of Pacific Islands Studies, I defined decolonization as the critical consciousness of Pacific Islander representation within the ongoing legacies of colonial constructions; the translation of that consciousness into actions that reclaim our own representation; and the approach to that reclamation through creativity and imagination that have always been part of our genealogies and epistemologies as Pacific peoples. Through the actual work within Tongan communities, the on-the-ground work of this portfolio and the processes of the Pacific Verse, these definitions shifted in order to make room for an understanding of decolonization in more nuanced, relevant and accessible ways in Tongan contexts. In my view, re-articulating decolonial praxis as creative practice in Tonga did not just involve applying an analysis of decolonization to the on-the-ground work. Nor did this re-articulation rely solely on viewing my original understanding of decolonization through the lens of the experiences and lessons of interviews, collaboration, and community work in Tonga. For me, defining creative practice in Tonga as decolonial praxis came out of the reciprocal reflection between what I understood before in theory, and what I learned later in action. This kind of reflection shifted the paradigm of how I view decolonization away from academic and theoretical contexts and into the actions music and poetry. The goal of this section has been to document that process of re-articulation through the framework of a mashup in order to better organize my own thoughts and relationship to the two perspectives of the portfolio—the initial analysis and the on-the-ground work. As a Tongan musician who has grown up outside of Tonga, the conceptual approach to a mashup is both familiar as an artform and process of organizing, while also a major challenge.
when applied to representing Tongan culture, creative work, and ultimately, a working definition of decolonization therein.

section six: conclusion

The experiences of being in Tonga, doing creative community work with iCON Tonga and running the Pacific Verse have taught me how vitally important it is that as Tongans, we remember the value of our creativity. In our everyday lives, there is a persistent assumption that creative arts and creativity are a waste of time. This is due to many pressures that we find ourselves living under, whether it be in the environments of aggressive capitalism, the influences of globalization, or the challenges of movement and adapting to new homes outside of our islands. I believe that our creativity as Tongans specifically, and as Pacific Islanders in general, is a vital tool we need in order to support one another, challenge one another, and assert our own power.

Doing creative community work with ICON through the Pacific Verse solidified certain definitions for me that, prior to going to Tonga, were more or less confined to the pages and spaces of my academic training at UH Mānoa. From learning to just “be” in Tonga, to practicing
music and poetry, developing the curriculum of the Pacific Verse, facilitating workshops, and
being part of everyday discussions and interviews, I began to understand a little more about the
ways in which we as Tongans practice and celebrate our own self-determination. The ways we
practice our own self-determination in our islands is part of what I consider to be the practice of
our indigeneity. We do not necessarily use the term “indigenous” to describe ourselves within
our home islands, but rather, we live out our Tongan-ness in everyday ways that remind us of our
genealogy; from wearing our ta‘ovala everyday to work and speaking our language, to the
smaller everyday acts through which we creatively and critically express ourselves and our
culture. In my view, the vocabulary of our indigeneity as Tongans is defined by our connections
to our genealogy that we freely translate and/or re-negotiate in our everyday lives.

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


future plans:

training and addressing the audience

For the near future, the Pacific Verse is gearing up to start a second iteration in Tonga
from June-August, 2015. We will be building from the workshop curricula we started with in
order continue working on effective music and poetry skills from heliaki, to performance and critique in workshops. What I will be focusing on is training new facilitators for Pacific Verse workshops, itemizing more details of performance venues and opportunities, and talking with ICON members and Pacific Verse participants about what we need to focus on in terms of developing creative training. One of the biggest for areas of improvement I noticed from the first run of workshops was getting participants to invest in their own creative training. Many participants who had not already been members of ICON Tonga may have underestimated the amount of time needed to write, edit, perform, critique and practice their pieces. What I think was most effective in these workshops was the fact that there was a consistent number of participants who came to each workshop, and collectively created an atmosphere of support and practice that encouraged other participants through the workshop process.

With regard to training, I think back to a particular conversation in an interview with ‘Atolomake Helu, who outlined the importance of training, specifically the kind of training that got students excited about their learning. In our conversation, we both discussed the ways in which “classical” piano training shaped our views of practice, and how creating a system of musical training in Tonga would require a radically different approach to practice and training in order to be relevant to the lives of our students and fellow artists. In essence, the key to an effective training would be to present the genealogy, or story, of a particular form (like hip-hop or jazz, in terms of the Pacific Verse), that would help new poets/composers invest in what they were practicing. Part of this approach to training would the collective sharing of those stories, which would create an atmosphere of learning/performing music and poetry that offsets the emphasis on the individual as the sole center of creative expression.
Another aspect of creative training that I would like to follow-up on in the next Pacific Verse workshops is the way in which we use our performances to engage audience. The main part of the first Pacific Verse was getting participants to engage in composing original work that incorporated heliaki. I think it is important to expand our focus in the workshops to incorporate more decisions about how we might engage audience in ways that blur the lines between performer and observer. We see these lines blurred in our own dances and singing, where audience members feel the māfana of a performance and come to dance around dancers, put money on performers, and stay within the performance, effectively becoming impromptu performers themselves. What I would like to do is work on how we might still blur these lines between audience and performer in different forms of performance, such as a Tongan slam poetry piece, or hip-hop track. This kind of performance work is meant to think across the connections we share as Tongans and performers, and members of the audience that are not severed by the border lines between a “stage” and an “audience”.

future imaginations

What has been the most important question throughout the process of this portfolio has been the one I usually asked last in interviews. The question was about what each person wanted to hear and see in the future of Tongan music. All together, the answers to this question indicate for me the direction of a creative imaginary for Tonga—below are some glimpses of that image:

“enlightening elements, like a good composition that gives to enlightenment, in any area, and also the importance of the Tongan culture, and the integrity of the music, the composition that can reflect the Tongan society of today—a fresh and original composition you know, something that really reflects Tonga of today.”
- Nanise Fifita, manager of the Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC)

“because of my love for music, my love for the people here,
"I wanna see the youth really express themselves, have a way to channel their talent and be heard."
- Sione Langi, owner of the Tau'olunga Recording Studio

"the main thing I want people to hear is hope, because a lot of them think that there's nothing here in Tonga—like they're not seeing the future of Tonga, they just think that you always have to go overseas. I think we're trying to build up Tonga, people need to hear hope."
- Tupouseini

"I'm expecting someone to change the normal genre of Tongan music into something new"
- Taniela

"what I wanna hear from them, I don't wanna hear the stuff they sample it from another artist, copy and stuff like that—but do their own lyrics, just like being you—create your own."
- Mike

In terms of the Pacific Verse, I connect these hopes and goals for the future of Tongan music to a broader imagination of what creative practice can do in Tonga. In order to think creatively and imagine a future for new and exciting expression, it is vitally important that we remember the value of our creativity. This value of creativity can be determined by the ways in which creative training, from composition and performance to developing critical consciousness through genealogy, is applicable to multiple facets of everyday life. As Tupouseini pointed out, there is an atmosphere in Tonga that enforces the assumption that creative arts are a waste of time. But if we can use the creative spaces provided by organizations like ICON Tonga, then we can start to realize what creative training and the perspectives creativity can offer; the space and tools to practice our self-determination and freedom as creative people, as members of community, and as Tongans.
These spaces are what I think of when Joshua Savieti discusses his goals for ICON and the creation of an “industry of support.” To create this industry, we need to hear the hope that Tupouseini mentions in our new lyrics and poems; this hope can feed our ability to see the value in investing in Tonga through creative arts programs, collectives, and residencies. We can imagine an industry of support in Tonga where we create in ways that engage our genealogy and identities as Tongans, but also encourage our self-determination in sounding ourselves out/making ourselves visible as multi-faceted and diverse Tongan people.
appendix

The following short reflections accompany two tracks I wrote to work through the process of combining some of the elements of Tongan composition my own preferences regarding voicing, instrumentation, and style. I also wrote these tracks in order to engage with practices set down in the Pacific Verse—I wanted to work through the guidelines of the Pacific Verse in order think through some of the actual processes of writing across Tongan compositional genealogies and my own personal writing styles in order to prepare the next iteration of the program.

As I went through this process, I worked with some of the structures and forms of Tongan composition that I read from written notation, predominantly from Richard Moyle’s Tongan Music (1987). While this is an excellent resource, I found that it was important to remember that part of the writing process meant that I could write with the styles and voicings that I gravitate toward. In referring to the written notation and theory of Tongan compositions, along with collecting tracks of Tongan music for examples and guided listening, I noticed that I was becoming more and more anxious that the tracks I was writing were not correct representations of Tongan music. Furthermore, although I would practice different patterns of fakatangi and try to write along the guidelines of a hiva kakala, I realized that working from the page, and not in the context of other Tongan writers and composers, was an extremely isolating method of composition. In realizing this, I came to terms with the fact that I was writing alone, mostly on the computer, and outside of Tonga and Tongan community. In other words, I found myself trying to write music and poetry outside of the very contexts of collaboration and critique
that I know to not only be part of Tongan compositional genealogy, but also part of the Pacific Verse itself.

With that in mind, I decided let go of the tension and anxiety trying to write a Tongan song the “right way,” and focused on creating music that came from a combination of guided listening and writing styles that I felt comfortable using (mostly with guitar and singing). In this process, I worked to consciously incorporate elements of sound, voice, and poetry that were I understood to be recognizable as Tongan from my own guided listening, practice of Tongan songs, and study of written Tongan musical conventions in Moyle’s work.\(^{33}\)

The process of writing both tracks has reminded of the importance of balance in any creative practice; in the case of writing these tracks, it was important to balance the important work of going learning forms and patterns with the flow and ease of just playing music. There needed to be a balance between the extremes of sticking too close to the page in order to make the “right” sound, and the personally-driven desire to just play what I wanted to hear without thinking critically (or creatively) about how I could compose in consideration to Tongan cultural forms. It is this idea of balancing form and personal style that I think it most helpful to bring into the next round of Pacific Verse workshops in Tonga.

The following short reflections cover some of the closer details of considerations for each track.

\[\text{“manatu”}\]
\[\text{(remember)}\]

This track is based on the idea of a conversation between an island—or the islands of Tonga—and those who have left the island to make their lives outside of both land and ocean. I chose to personify the island using both Tongan and English to reflect my own position as someone born and living outside of the islands, still learning the language, and still trying to understand how to “be” Tongan when learning the language and genealogy of my culture.

The first line of each verse is a question posed by the land to those who have physically left it, or may have only visited once or twice in their lifetime. The verses themselves are meant to move as if along a genealogy of the island itself. The island is asking questions of a diasporic granddaughter or grandson that start with memory of being pulled up by the old ones (referring to Maui), and moving on to see the different vaka (canoes and/or boats) arriving at its shores, to the building of roads (hala). The last verse shows the island asking if the hearer remembers the words, or the language of the island itself. Though there is never a point where the hearer answers the island back, what I wanted to show was that the island was still listening, still remembering, still waiting for its descendants to return, if only in the language they speak, or in the memory of origin stories. To me, this was a way of addressing my own anxiety as a hafekasi Tongan, born outside of the islands, who is still struggling to learn the language and genealogies of Tonga. I thought it would be helpful to try and relieve some of that anxiety through the lyrics themselves:

\[
\textit{na’a ke fanongo ‘i he tala tupu’a (did you hear the ancient stories?)} \\
\quad \textit{can you hear the old ones talk} \\
\quad \textit{how they called and pulled me up} \\
\quad \textit{from the dark and quiet deep} \\
\quad \textit{can you hear me?}
\]

\[
\textit{na’a ke mamata ‘i he vaka (did you see the canoes?)} \\
\quad \textit{did you see them come} \\
\quad \textit{see the waves and what they carried} \\
\quad \textit{under footfall i am buried}
\]
can you see me?

*ke manatu 'i a e hala* (do you remember the roads?)
do you remember all the roads
the dust and smell of smoke
did it burn? the smell of home?
can you remember me?

*ke manatu 'i a e lea?* (do you remember the words?)
do you remember the words
of our land and the sea
do not forget to speak
remember me

*ko ho'o talanoa* (your story)
*'oku tupu mei fonua* originates in this land
*pe'i nonga ho'o ilifia* so do not be afraid—
*pea ke foki mai a* return

The Tongan of this piece is very basic, simply because my Tongan is still very elementary. What I wanted to do with my language skill was at least imagine the island of Tonga understanding the distance, both in time and space, between my life and the life of the land. The very last stanza, which also drops the guitar, is meant to highlight the island, and the Tongan language, standing not alone, but in a place of confidence and solidity. In this last passage, the island is telling the hearer that their story is in the land, and that they should not be afraid to return. I wrote this in order to think about connection, disconnection, and the ways in which we sometimes have to imagine our land and ocean speaking to us in order to feel a part of our culture and community as islanders who are constantly moving. The use of the ocean as part of the background was also meant to speak to the ideas of connection and disconnection existing in the same space. The

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34 This kind of approach to metaphor is not a style I took from Tongan conventions. Futa Helu has discussed the nature of Tongan imagery and metaphor and the styles of poetic expression that are based on collectively established modes of allusion (Helu, 1999). Because of my limitations with Tongan language, I chose to create a metaphor based on a very general image of an island. The origin stories, the boat, the road and the language that the island possesses in these lyrics are not detailed enough to refer to a specific place in Tonga, or in the Pacific for that matter. In my understanding, this kind of poetic construction would probably be considered on the most basic type of expression to a Tongan audience. My goal with these lyrics were simply to practice what Tongan I know, and place that language in a metaphor I could easily manipulate.
sound of the ocean points to the idea of connection across vast distance, while at the same time, the recording quality of the waves (which were recorded in Lā'ie at Kakela Beach, across from my Auntie’s house) is not the best. In fact, the waves can also sound like the traffic passing on the nearby Kam highway. In the same sound, we can hear and imagine both connection and interruption, which is one way I sometimes think about my own position to the Tongan islands, and my Tongan culture.

While writing this track, I was listening to songs like “Hala Kuo Papa” performed by the ‘Afokoula singers,\textsuperscript{35} and recordings of Lord Ve‘ehala playing the fangufangu and singing. Along with these songs, I was also took inspiration from Pacific-based artists and bands whose sounds were based more on urban jazz, rnb and island reggae such as Trinity Roots and Fat Freddy’s Drop (both out of Aotearoa). From the more contemporary artists of this guided listening, I got the inspiration for the chord progressions and the guitar-playing style, the use of a simple rhythm set on beats two and four (for certain sections of the song), and voicing the melody more softly and in a lower register. From the examples of Tongan guided listening, I wanted to incorporate melody writing that worked ideas of ornamentation and time change.\textsuperscript{36} I did not adhere to a precise pattern throughout the track, which in a way echoes the very basic use of Tongan language.

Ultimately, this track is about a level of healing and belonging even amidst layers of doubt and lack of connection to land, memory, and culture. What I want to remember in this

\textsuperscript{35} “Hala Kuo Papa”

\textsuperscript{36} Richard Moyle has transcribed an interview with Malukava, a renowned punake, in which he discusses the nature of ornamentation in fangufangu playing and singing. In the pages leading up to this interview, Moyle gives a detailed transcription of Tongan ornamentation in Western musical notation. These transcriptions cover hikihihitō and fakahēhē, which he describes a “elements of song performance considered commendable (mālīte) by Tongan audiences as the conscious and deliberate departure from an original model...changes in overall pitch, and ornamentation.” (Moyle, 35-40)
piece is the balance between seemingly opposite ideas, like connection and disconnection, and
that these are important dimensions to understanding how we negotiate place in the Pacific.

“ko emau talanoa eni”
(this is our story)

ko emau talanoa eni
(this is our story)
inside us
are lines important
to celebrate
express
teach
remember
write
and keep
unafraid
of change

ko e tala mei fe?
(where does this story come from?)

in the lines
of descent
and story
we must keep drawing
the maps, drafting
the legends
shaping our land
our people

koe ha e talanoa? (what is a story)
what we decide
to draw in
breath,
tie together
with unexpected
cords
of voice

ko emau talanoa eni (this is our story)
fanongo mai (come listen)
This track is much more purposefully more experimental in structure and sound. I combined a slightly altered poem from the interview poems of the “on the ground section” with a beat, bass guitar, and repetitive harmony in the background. The melody, which is hummed rather than sung, is an interpretation of elements of the fakatangi melody which Richard Moyle has documented and discussed in detail.\textsuperscript{37} I chose to interpret fakatangi melody in this particular track to make connections between fakatangi, storytelling, and community work with ICON.

To create this track, I referred again to Richard Moyle’s notations and discussions and came across more of the genealogy of the fakatangi form. Between his transcriptions, Moyle states that fakatangi existed “not so much as a song in its own right but as the sung portion of a type of spoken story called \textit{fananga}” (Moyle, 170). The aspect of the fakatangi’s role in Tongan storytelling was particularly important to me as I wanted to work with the idea of negotiation of power and independence that comes with asserting self-representation.

I chose to incorporate spoken word poetry into this piece in order to connect to another piece I was asked to draft and coach for the ICON Tonga Showcase in July 2014. For this showcase, I was asked to help create a narrative in spoken word form that gave an empowering message about youth and creative arts in Tonga. The title of this spoken word piece became “ko emau talanoa eni,”\textsuperscript{38} and was performed by several members of the ICON Tonga program at their showcase. The piece was mostly in English—due to my own limitations in Tongan—but was based on messages and narratives that ICON members had given me to arrange in a spoken word format for them to perform. In essence, the poem was performed as a group piece, and was used to create positive and affirming messages about creativity in the lives of each ICON member.

\textsuperscript{37} Moyle, 170-179.
\textsuperscript{38} Translation: “this is our story”
The poem was based on the idea of story, and that the stories of each performer were important to be heard and acknowledged.

Going back to the content of this track, I worked with multiple layers of genre to experiment with how a fakatangi, inherently a form of Tongan storytelling/singing, might work when interwoven with spoken word, beat, bass and harmony. I connect this track to the ways in which ICON Tonga has created spaces for mixing and remixing forms of creative expression. By extension, I use this track to think through the possibilities of genre mixing and bending for the next Pacific Verse workshops.

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bibliography


