NĀ HUA EA AND BUILDING DECOLOLONIAL COMMUNITY: WRITING POETRY WITH ʻĀINA AND EACH OTHER

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This dissertation explores decolonial community building through writing and performing community-engaged poetry. It is written from the perspective of a lead organizer of the annual Hawaiian sovereignty poetry, music, and community teach-in event, Nā Hua Ea. Through interviews with writers, artists, and activists, I share a range of insights on decolonial love, ea (Indigenous life, sovereignty), and the creative writing process as a way to build decolonial community across diverse peoples of Indigenous and settler ancestries. These key interviews are with Ellen-Rae Cachola, Noʻu Revilla, Reyna Ramolete Hayashi, Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada, Lyz Soto, Grace Alvaro Caligtan, Justin Takaha White, Dawn Mahi, Logan Narikawa, Joy Enomoto, Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, Mehanaokalā Hind, and Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua. In conversation with critical ethnic studies, Asian settler colonial theory, and feminist-led demilitarization activism, I describe a multiethnic solidarity counter to one based on shared plantation struggle. This “huakaʻi solidarity” is a practice of genealogizing and traveling to connect different experiences of colonization and sources of strength, and to increase our capacity for kuleana. In conversation with theory from queer Third World women and Indigenous studies, I maintain that love is central to community building, and focus on “decolonial love,” honoring the wisdom of Indigenous queer love, desire, the erotic, and the worldmaking power of aloha ʻāina. In conversation with histories of local literature in Hawaiʻi and the study of community-engaged poetry, I also discuss the methods and poetics of three Hawaiʻi-based community-engaged poetry groups—Poets in the Schools, Hoʻomoʻomoʻo (an anthology by Women’s Voices Women Speak), and Pacific Tongues—and the rich models of community-building they offer. The final chapter shares creative writing prompts and journal entries from Nā Hua Ea, in hopes that they inspire more community-engaged poetry projects.
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INTRODUCTION

Because of You, I Am

For La‘i

When we are called to help our friends in need
You and I have become leftovers
You and I have become spears

When we are called to help our friends in need
You and I are the placenta
You and I are the navel cord
You and I can hear our ancestors crying

When we are called to help our friends in need
You and I are 400,000 feathers
You and I will be the site of memory
You and I will hear our ancestors being born

I published this poem in a blog post titled “Writing Decolonial Poetry for Ea,” on Ke Kaupu Hehi Ale, a collective blog of writing and reflection about and by the Pacific, in July 2016. The post was about the experience of participating in a small group workshop facilitated by Noʻukahauʻoli Revilla and Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio at the Osorio hale in Pālolo, and designed to inspire and create writing for our upcoming performance event: Nā Hua Ea. Held every July since 2014 at Papahana Kuaola in Waipao, He‘eia, O‘ahu, Nā Hua Ea is a creative
performance space to celebrate “genuine sovereignty, genuine security,” as part of a month-long celebration for the Hawaiian kingdom national holiday, Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea. We usually get a crowd of around eighty folks, and have had spoken word stars, first-time poets, beloved Hawaiian musicians, Hawaiian and other Indigenous hip-hop artists, Hawaiian-language immersion keiki performing moʻolelo, mothers of murdered children sharing their stories, women activists performing oral histories of “aloha ‘āina aunties,” emcees making up poems on the spot, Decolonial Pin@ys mourning lost sisters, women from diverse places in the Pacific talking about demilitarization, art activities, the opportunity to drink and share ‘awa, and more. I have had the privilege and honor of having helped to envision and organize this event since its birth. Through this experience, I have learned so much about friendship, collective decolonization, and the role of the arts and poetry in creating space for ea—for us to feel sovereign, and to breathe again.

As I remember it, Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua and I first started talking about this event as a combination of a birthday wish and the continuation of a book project that we had edited together, *The Value of Hawaiʻi I 2: Ancestral Roots, Oceanic Visions*. Thanks to the Center for Biographical Research at UH Mānoa, we had secured some grant money from the Hawaiʻi Council of the Humanities to do public humanities programming and discussion in connection with this collection of over forty authors/artists/cultural practitioners/scholars/community workers. Noe and her ‘ohana were also deeply involved in organizing the annual community celebration Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea. Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea, or “Sovereignty Restoration Day,” was initiated in 1843 by KamehamaIII Kauikeaouli to commemorate the rightful return of sovereignty to the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi by Great Britain after a temporary occupation. Following the 1893 illegal overthrow of the multiethnic Hawaiian nation by US businessmen, refusal by the US to restore Queen Liliʻuokalani and her government, and in the resulting decades of increased settler
colonial and military control over Hawai‘i lands, waters, education, culture, history, and peoples, this history of political justice had gotten buried. The political possibility this history points to was also erased from the general public imagination of the State of Hawai‘i. In 1985, Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea began to be celebrated again in Hawai‘i, in the midst of a growing Kanaka Maoli cultural revitalization. Led by community leader and sovereignty activist Dr. Kekuni Blaisdell, Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea became a time for Kānaka and others to gather over important civic issues, and learn and celebrate histories and futures of independence. On Oʻahu, this community celebration is now led by ʻĪmaikalani Winchester, and has grown into a month-long series, including film festivals, hip-hop and other musical concerts, mālama ʻāina workdays, teacher education summits, panel discussion and teach-in events, artmaking, hula, building imu and sharing ʻawa, a flag-raising ceremony and historical reenactment, and, also, Nā Hua Ea.

Noe wanted to create a space for political poetry performance in Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea, and the timing worked out well to collaborate between The Value of Hawaiʻi project and Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea that July. We talked about this desire with Lyz Soto, then-Executive Director of Pacific Tongues and long-time spoken word poetry mama of O‘ahu, to ask for her guidance. Lyz stressed one thing: that it would be wonderful to hold an event where real time and energy was dedicated to process and creating together, instead of just showing up for a performance and then going home. It was a fruitful time to birth new things, as we were also thinking about the upcoming birth of Noe’s son, Moku, due to arrive in our world in July too.

This element of creating space to make together became crucial for me in understanding and planning that first Nā Hua Ea in 2014. In collaboration with the grassroots demilitarization group Women’s Voices, Women Speak, we put a call out to gather poets and artists and community organizers to come together to learn and talk about “ea” and Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea, and
then to do creative writing and drawing and discussion exercises together. ʻĪmai and Noe helped guide those first ea conversations, and later workshops throughout the years on Oʻahu were facilitated by Lyz, myself, Noe, Jamaica, and Noʻu, and others, as well as the manaʻo brought by larger groups and our collective richness of experience in various social justice struggles in Hawaiʻi. In 2015 and 2016, we had the privilege of traveling to Hawaiʻi Island and Molokaʻi, working with mālama ʻāina organizations huiMAU and Hui o Kuapā to put on poetry and visual art and hip-hop workshops and a performance in collaboration with their communities. Each Nā Hua Ea was rooted not just in humans, but in ʻāina—in Kānaka and land in intimate and productive relationship with each other. Mahalo nui to the invigorating headwaters of Haʻakōlea in Waipao, to the cliffs and kīpuka of Koholālele, and to the multigenerational peace and fortitude of Keawanui Fishpond.

“Nā hua ea” can be translated as the fruit or the seeds of ea. Ea can be translated as sovereignty, life, breath, and the action of rising. These are too-quick translations that the rest of this dissertation will make space to grow. In that first meeting with a group of us to workshop for Nā Hua Ea, Noe drew on a speech given by Davida Kahalemaile in 1871—recorded in the Hawaiian-language nūpepa, later written about by Leilani Basham—to inspire our creating in this context of education about Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea. Kahalemaile lists various and exciting pairings, to awaken possibilities of ea in us. “Ke ea o ka ia he wai. Ke ea o ke kanaka he makani. Ke ea o ka honua he kanaka. Ke ea o ka moku he hoeuli. Ke ea o ko Hawaii Pae Aina, o ia no ka noho Aupuni ana”¹ The ea of the fish is water. The ea of the person is wind. The ea of the earth is the person. The ea of the canoe is the steering paddle. The ea of our Hawaiʻi is the independent government. As Noelani Goodyear Kaʻōpua elaborates on in her introduction to *A Nation Rising*,

¹ Noenoe Silva also discusses Leilani Basham’s writing about this speech in *Steel-Tipped Pen*, to show that Kānaka and ʻāina have reciprocal aloha for each other.
ea exceeds political sovereignty, to also encompass reciprocity between Kānaka and ʻāina, and life that sustains all beings. Ea becomes a fertile world for imagining and enacting independences and interdependences that do not depend on the settler colonial state for recognition. As Kānaka continue to explore the wisdom of ea, the meanings of “nā hua ea” continue to bloom.

On May 10, 2018 at UH Mānoa, No’eau Peralto defended his dissertation titled “Kokolo mai ka mole uaua o ‘Ī.” He shared about the ʻŌiwi organization huiMAU, that he helped to cofound in Hāmākua Hikina, Hawai‘i Island, and their “piko of resurgence” that they are practicing—a convergence of people, place, and practices from which ea emerges. Peralto’s work honors Kānaka ʻŌiwi who noho papa, who refused to leave their ʻāina aloha, who “were empowered to stay” through colonial dispossession; and the everyday praxis of resurgence and aloha ʻāina. He asks in his project and his life: “how deeply can we come to know our place?” The tremendous wisdom and strength of these piko are deep sources of ea and hope.

My dissertation project explores a different source of ea—the movement between and connecting many stories and places and peoples. Each Nā Hua Ea has proven a meaningful space to explore Indigenous-settler relationships that build ea, as a Kanaka sovereignty event that holds space for peoples of non-Kanaka ancestries to speak and contribute. In the process of writing and performing poetry together, we are learning how to cultivate ea in a diverse community. We bring our different histories and beloved places together, and listen across colonial silences. We risk difficult stories and feelings in a shared commitment to vulnerability. We exercise and explore our voices. We awaken a desire for sovereignty and interdependence in each other. These experiences are all hua of a growing collective experience of ea. Hua, translated as seed, fruit, testicles, eggs, words. We plant, we eat, we speak, we create. Fed by these hua ea, we rise.
As a non-Kanaka artist and organizer, working to create the space of Nā Hua Ea has taught me a lot about solidarity and building diverse community for social justice. In that 2016 blog post, I was moved to write about what I learned about activism from this work:

Activism means we are committed to learning about and honoring our connections. The powerful ʻāina, kai, and kānaka of Hawaiʻi have fed and cared for my family and loved ones. I am indebted to you. When I fight for pono futures for Hawaiʻi, I fight for a better dream for everyone I love. Because of you, I am.

Activism is love and commitment over generations of memory.

In this statement of solidarity, I do not see a common enemy or oppression as the main purpose for joining together. I see my own cultural (okage sama de) and familial and personal values channeled into and bringing mana to the ea of Hawaiʻi. As I have witnessed in myself and other Nā Hua Ea participants, we can bring our different decolonial methods and sources of ea together to strengthen each other as we work and live for pono futures. This dissertation endeavors to describe an ea that grows from a rich and diverse decolonial love.

Chapter 1, “Genealogizing community-engaged poetry hui in Hawaiʻi,” maps a literary history of community-engaged poetry for social justice that my own community practice draws from. I then dive more deeply into the methods and poetics of three Hawaiʻi-based community-engaged poetry hui (groups/collectives)—Poets in the Schools, Hoʻomoʻomoʻoʻo (an anthology by Women’s Voices Women Speak), and Pacific Tongues. Connecting these projects to Nā Hua Ea enriches our genealogy, creating new pathways for mana and inspiration to flow. These projects saw poetry as worldbuilding and multivocal community practice, and offer rich models of community building across difference and for social change.
In Chapter 2, “Building Decolonial Community: Huaka‘i Solidarity and Decolonial Love,” I ask: What pulls us to come together over difference? What motivates us to change? I survey models of solidarity and community-building from Indigenous studies, critical ethnic studies, Asian settler colonial theory, and Pacific Islands studies. In contrast to a multicultural community built on Hawai‘i’s plantation history, I define *decolonial community-building* as the education, transformation, and joining together of diverse peoples to cultivate *ea*. I gather activist and demilitarization theories to try out an idea of “huaka‘i solidarity”—a practice of genealogizing and traveling to connect different experiences of colonization and sources of strength, and to increase our capacity for kuleana. I maintain that love is central to decolonial community-building and at risk always of being mangled by settler colonialism. I invite space for decolonial love, honoring the wisdom of Indigenous queer love, desire, and the erotic, and the worldmaking power of aloha ‘āina.

Chapter 3, “Voices from Nā Hua Ea,” asks how decolonial community-building is fed by the *hua* of poetry, and the process of writing and performing poetry together with ‘āina. I explore interviews and poems from Nā Hua Ea participants from 2014 and 2016, asking how we tell stories about our connections to each other and how these connections lead to courage and transformation. For literary scholars, I hope this record of poetry as a community and political process can push back against our tendency to read literature as a finished product. For community organizers, I hope that looking at Nā Hua Ea as a collective offers exciting examples of how *ea* is nurtured and created in response to diverse perspectives. The voices shared in this chapter are: Ellen-Rae Cachola, Noʻu Revilla, Reyna Ramolete Hayashi, Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada, Lyz Soto, Grace Alvaro Caligtan, Justin Takaha White, Dawn Mahi, Logan Narikawa,
Joy Enomoto, Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, Mehanaokalā Hind, and Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua.

In lieu of a standard conclusion, Chapter 4, “Growing Nā Hua Ea,” offers some hua to grow more decolonial community, decolonial poetry experiences. I include our first chapbook, designed by Justin Takaha White, and distributed free to the public at that 2014 Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea, and personal journal entries from more recent Nā Hua Ea workshops. I offer creative writing prompts inspired by past and future Nā Hua Ea. I hope this chapter will not dictate but inspire others to innovate and proliferate methods based on their own contexts. I hope this entire project inspires you to create together with ‘āina and each other.

Methodology

I write this dissertation as a poet, poetry teacher, scholar, and community organizer in Hawaiʻi. My ideas about creative writing, poetry, and social change were planted by reading Haunani-Kay Trask’s *From a Native Daughter*, and meeting some fierce eighteen and nineteen-year-old poets in NYC who were quoting Roque Dalton, Paulo Freire, and starting their own community liberation schools. I first started creating this kind of space for my own community by cofounding a short-lived after-school “local literature” poetry program (named [after]words) at my high school alma mater in Kāneʻohe. As an undergraduate in the early 2000s I wrote my own poems while helping to run a poetry reading series on campus (Lunch Poems), and editing the literature section of the college online arts magazine, *Ka Lamakua*. As a graduate student, I found soulful community with other graduate students studying Pacific and decolonial literatures at UH Mānoa, and we came together over many projects and events around social issues over the past decade, including Hawaiian sovereignty, the Thirty-Meter Telescope, Black Lives Matter, Pacific Island arts and sovereignty events, Free West Papua, and spoken-word poetry. At UH-
Mānoa, I have gotten to develop and teach undergraduate literature and creative writing courses in literatures of Hawai‘i, postcolonial/decolonial literatures, spoken word, and poetry and drama for community building. All of these experiences have helped me to explore my passion and creativity as a poet and poetry teacher.

As a community organizer, I have shaped and run panels and community discussion events around *The Value of Hawaiʻi* and *The Value of Hawaiʻi 2*, bringing together diverse communities and perspectives in the same room for meaningful exchange. I served as a Board member and Board President of the Hawai‘i People’s Fund, an over forty-years-old grassroots organization that funds social justice initiatives in Hawai‘i. I have lived, laughed, cried, and worked extensively with two grassroots community groups: HOA (Hawai‘i Okinawa Alliance), an ad hoc group for peace and demilitarization, and Women’s Voices Women Speak, a women-run organization building international and ancestral relationships around demilitarization and “genuine security.” All of these experiences have deeply shaped my ideas around diversity, solidarity, and community building, and help account for the focus on process and pragmatic details in this dissertation.

I write this dissertation with all the silences and gifts of complex genealogies that I am learning how to care for. My mother, Aileen Yamashiro, is a wise and silly artist and teacher and mother. Her family migrated to Maui from Japan in the early 1900s. Her grandfather worked as a carpenter and sold saimin and apple pie on the sugar plantations in Puʻunēnē, Maui, and her father became an architect, working on many State projects, after returning with two Purple Hearts as a veteran in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Her mother told me stories of blacking out the windows during martial law in Hawaiʻi, and as a working woman in the beauty department at Longs Drugstore in Honolulu, she fought for her dream of middle-class canned
food and box-cake-mix American success for herself and her family. My father who raised me, Dennis Yamashiro, a sensitive and caring and tough police officer, grew up rough-and-tumble in Kāne‘ohe, among pig farms and autobody shops. His grandfather was the first generation to migrate from Kin, Okinawa, where he worked as a peddler in Kāne‘ohe. My father’s father became a mechanic who went to Okinawa to work in the devastating aftermath of the Pacific War, where he met my grandmother (herself from Yanbaru, Okinawa) and brought her, pregnant, back to Hawai‘i. My father grew up helping his mom, keeping her company, and hearing lots of stories about the family and her life. I grew up held by the scrappy community of Kāne‘ohe, its abundant streams and fresh water, by the powerful Ko‘olau mountain range. I grew up with my enjoy-life younger brother, Daniel, and stronger-than-me younger sister, Amy, and together we navigated financial troubles, health troubles, various addictions, Daniel’s special needs and special gifts, and the passing of our Dad into the ancestral realm in 2019. I learned about love and commitment from these experiences, this family. My biological father, Alexander Untalan Mesa, grew up as part of a big and loving CHamoru family in Sinahánña and Agaña Heights, Guåhan (Guam). Powerful dear friends helped me to reconnect to this family a few years ago, in a way that deeply humbled me to the universes we hold. I am so grateful for the family I have met through that journey, and all they have taught me about generosity and genealogy.

As a first-generation scholar, I have been given life and possibility by Indigenous and Pacific Islander and women of color academic scholarship that honors the deep wisdoms in our communities outside of the western academy. This dissertation is in conversation with their innovative methodologies and deep commitments to community, and all the work they have done to decolonize academic spaces. Scholars like Audre Lorde, Albert Wendt, Teresia Teaiwa, Haunani-Kay Trask, Craig Santos Perez, Alice Te Punga Somerville, Mary Perez Hattori, Joakim

The interviews that I discuss in detail in Chapter 3 took place with performer poets from Nā Hua Ea in 2014 and Nā Hua Ea in 2016. I chose to speak to the participants who were involved with not just the performance, but the creative writing workshops we ran prior to those two performances. I conducted the 2014 interviews a few months after our July 2014 performance. In 2014, we also spent time visiting with the ʻāina of Waipao as an event prior to the performance date, and some of those interviewees speak to that experience as well. I conducted these interviews one-on-one in offices and coffee/tea shops and as someone trained in oral history methods. I was interested in their stories of who they are in relation to their memories of the experience of creating and performing for Nā Hua Ea. I also conducted these interviews as a poet. Before going through my interview questions, I asked each interviewee to read their poem to me, and we began from the enlivened space of that hua. I conducted the 2016 interviews in the month following our July 2016 performance. I chose to do these interviews in pairs because I was interested in the interview experience itself as a way to share stories, reflect, and build relationships beyond the dyad of interviewer and interviewee. With all of my interviewees, we went through a consent process that affirmed certain ethics of the process: for the power and gift of their specific stories, that they would have final editing say over
publication or use of their transcripts, that they could choose to not answer questions if they felt upset or uncomfortable, and that they would not remain anonymous because their names and identities are crucial to telling their stories. I transcribed each interview and got each storyteller’s approval to use the texts here. None of these interviews are meant to be ethnographic or comprehensive, and I had no desire to set up control groups or count linguistic patterns. Rather, I find these interviews valuable as multivoiced storytelling about diversity, community-building, and testimony to literary process.

To return to the story of the opening poem. In that writing workshop for the 2016 Nā Hua Ea, queer Kanaka and Pacific poet Noʻukahauʻoli Revilla led us to talk and as she put it then, “think about ea as sharing stories.” A group of thirteen—mostly women of different ages, including two teenagers, plus one girl—shared pieces of poems, songs, and stories we had each brought. Then Noʻu directed us to write down some of these precious words, and “give them away” to someone else in the group. I brought a story of war and devastation from my Okinawan ancestry, in the song “Kanpo nu Kwee Nukusaa.” I kept a line: “You and I have become scrap leftovers of the battleships,” and felt the pain and impossibility of this living memory. What I tried to capture in that blog post was the vulnerability of sharing traumatic stories of colonialism, and the gift and surprise that we could be to each other, in creating together. Our youngest poet that night, Laʻilaʻikūhonua Kaʻōpua-Winchester, brought a Bruno Mars pop song lyric to share with us. The line I got from her, “when you are called to help a friend in need,” gave me life, breath, rising. Asked me to tell my story in a new relationship, and created new possibilities of movement. I write this dissertation with this spirit, and am filled with gratitude for all the people and ʻāina that have helped to make Nā Hua Ea this powerful gathering and transformative space.
CHAPTER 1. GENEALOGIZING COMMUNITY-ENGAGED POETRY HUI IN HAWAI‘I

Genealogizing is not a one-way interaction. As a decolonial practice, genealogizing is a rich, multidirectional experience that brings us into closer presence and understanding of ourselves in relation to past and future ancestors. Māori literary scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville describes this well in “Nau Mai Hoki Mai,” where she reads Māori poems about homecoming after and through colonial disconnection. Te Punga Somerville argues that this reconnection is “neither portal nor representation of ancestors but a space in which ancestors are present, and the speaker is gradually joined by relatives over the course of the poem” (83). These scenes of “ancestral proliferation” reverberate into an “ever-widening ancestral matrix of connection and relationship among land, house, and people” (84), including the act of writing and reading in the present:

If wharenui [ancestral houses] are ancestors and the speakers of the poems are engaged in restoring wharenui, then the act of restoration and, indeed, the poems restore our ancestors and, thereby, us. Just as carvings are not merely representative of tūpuna, these texts about approaching the ancestral house do not merely describe homecoming but produce it. Writing the ancestral house; writing, the ancestral house. (86)

The vitality in Te Punga Somerville’s passage attests to the ea and creative energy thrumming through the act of genealogizing. This chapter will prepare us for exploring Nā Hua Ea through activating multiple genealogies of community-engaged poetry. I am grateful to many teachers for sharing their stories and experiences with me for this chapter. I am moved by their courage and generosity to create, to change, to invite truth, to want more.
First, I will offer a broader context of community-engaged poets and poetry projects, including thinkers like Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, June Jordan, Anna Deavere Smith, Rhodessa Jones, and Mark Nowak. These writers assert poetry as a pathway—to question power and injustice in society, to explore and transform our lived realities. None of these thinkers are writing about land, Indigeneity, Hawai‘i, or the Pacific. I choose to call on them as ancestors because their work has taught and shaped me and my own thinking about community-engaged poetry. In the act of genealogizing, who you call upon will reveal certain things and obscure others. Calling upon these particular teachers help to illuminate the groundedness of voice and story in life experience, as well as the fluidity and changability of identity in relation to others.

Next, I will look at three historical community-engaged poetry projects in Hawai‘i—Poets in the Schools, the anthology Ho‘omo‘omo‘o, and Pacific Tongues. Like Nā Hua Ea, these hui were engaged in exploring community-based creative writing pedagogy, and the relationship between poetry and societal transformation. I explore each project’s goals, pedagogy, and experience of building and transforming community in the context of colonization. I see Poets in the Schools as having helped to create a multiethnic local literary community that had to assert itself in a colonial literary scene dominated by continental US writers. Ho‘omo‘omo‘o and Pacific Tongues gave voice to later communities of writers who both benefited from a Hawai‘i local literary framework and brought new political projects and anticolonial critique to multicultural literature. Though these three ancestors have all already nourished the work of Nā Hua Ea, spending intentional time with their stories in this chapter will reveal new lessons and questions about creativity as a decolonial community act. I have chosen these three projects also for the lessons they hold about not just writers, but collectives of writers, and the ea that is
Community-Engaged Poetry as Worldmaking and Multivocal Community Practice

I situate my genealogy within a broader literary and theoretical context of community-engaged poetry as worldmaking and multivocal community practice. A revolutionary mother in this field is Audre Lorde, who famously insisted that poetry is not a luxury, but a way to honor the fullness and feeling of her experience as a Black lesbian woman. The poetry she spoke of comes out of need, from marginalized peoples, a “revelatory distillation of experience” not “sterile word play.” Speaking as a Black woman in a Euroamerican tradition, Lorde says:

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. (“Poetry is not a Luxury,” 37)

The feelings of Black queer women are radical in a racist, misogynist, dehumanizing dominant society, where “we were never meant to survive.” Lorde describes poetry as a pathway between feeling and action: “As they become known to us and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas. They become a safe-house for that difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action” (“Poetry is not a Luxury,” 37).

A friend and contemporary of Lorde, Adrienne Rich, conceived of socially engaged poetry as language committed to creation. In “Poetry and Commitment,” Rich identifies that
language can be “merely formulaic—to be used for repression, manipulation, empty certitudes to ensure obedience.” In contrast, an “engaged poetics” “endures the weight of the unknown, the untracked, the unrealized, along with its urgencies for and against” (33). Rich offers poetry as activism: 1) a commitment to exploring the power of language within a material reality of our world’s unequal distribution of power and wealth; and 2) a commitment to poetry’s ability to proliferate meaning and possibility—imagining something unknown and undetermined beyond the present reality. Taking Lorde and Rich as starting points, I will now turn to some examples of community-engaged poetry projects. They show how poetry can open up histories, empower marginalized voices and identities, explore more possible futures, and call out and stretch community boundaries. Although none of these thinkers frame their work in terms of decolonization, I contend that the moves they make help till the ground for decolonial community-building, by setting clear ethical and political stakes of poetry and emphasizing a multivocal movement and transformation.

Documentary poet, literature professor, and labor activist Mark Nowak challenges MFA programs and universities to think of poetry as a social practice, as opposed to a model of a poet “taking” raw material to then voice into a writing the poet owns (19). Instead, Nowak challenges writers to create poetry dialogue workshops and experiences outside of the academy. As a labor activist, Nowak is interested in how the portability of poetry makes transnational connections possible. The following passage shows how “poetry dialogues” can span time and place and perspective.

My next, and current, round of poetry dialogues is with a support and advocacy organization for Muslim healthcare workers that’s just trying to get its feet on the
ground: Rufaidah (named after the first known Muslim nurse, Rufaidah bint Sa’ad). It’s a collaboration with two of my former students who are now RNs at local hospitals, Rahma Warsame and Nimo Abdi. Healthcare workers—from entry-level home health workers to RNs—meet once a month to examine and analyze their working conditions through both critiquing and writing poetry. Our sessions began with close readings of Walt Whitman’s “The Wound Dresser” and then extended into the writing of poems about the healthcare workers’ memories (and later adding their family members’ memories) of both the civil war in Somalia/Mogadishu—all the participants in the early sessions of this dialogue were born in Somalia—and how the injured were treated and cared for during a civil war that has occurred many years and across an ocean from the one addressed by Whitman. Our goal is to eventually hold a series of “poetry dialogues” with local and national nurses unions—an area that has become so tense in the past few years and escalated into violence between the SEIU and the California Nurses Association—as well as traveling, as a group, to engage in both “poetry dialogues” and healthcare education/practice with organizations and healthcare workers in Africa. That is our long-term objective. (Metres and Nowak, pp. 20–21)

These poetry projects create complex multivocal models of community. An inspiration for Nowak’s community poetics is the work of playwright and actor Anna Deavere Smith. Deavere Smith has become known for plays that explore the edges of a community, through oral-histories-turned-monologues that converge around a heated community conflict. *Fires in the Mirror* (1992), for example, featured twenty-six characters talking about the death of a child, and

Although she first performs these as virtuosic one-woman plays, Deavere Smith explains she writes them for casts of actors to portray people who are quite unlike themselves in terms of gender and race (“The Word Becomes You,” pp. 40–41). In this way, the process of writing and performing each piece also shakes up personal and collective identities. She describes these transgressions as follows:

> There is listening, and then there is *talking as* (the foundation of acting). My grandfather once said, “If you say a word often enough, it becomes you.” And so I have been going to communities, tape-recording people, and saying their words over and over. I’m putting myself in people’s words the way you might think of walking in someone else’s shoes. But our identities are accounted for through stories as well as actions. So I also collect stories with the idea of juxtaposing contrasting stories to illuminate some truth. The communities I have visited while collecting stories range from riot-torn Los Angeles and riot-torn Brooklyn to the cool hallways and wood-paneled rooms of the Yale–New Haven Hospital. My work starts with listening. (“The Word Becomes You,” p. 40)

Deavere Smith understands community as something in perpetual motion—a motion impacted by listening and speaking. In her work to create performance pieces and artistic collectives, Deavere Smith describes her impact as:
being mobile, going to and fro, and trying to make a difference while “visiting” or while “returning.” I long ago began to think of the predicament of “belonging.” When one belongs to a certain group or place, one necessarily becomes a camp member, a tribe member in a kind of “safe house” of identity. My desire has been, and is, to create the places in between those safe houses, a crossroads of ambiguity where new works and new relationships evolve . . . . My suggestion is that we find ways of sparking unlikely collaborations—collaborations that will enrich the public sphere, inspiring and encouraging all kinds of people to come out of their safe houses. (“The Word Becomes You,” pp. 53–54)

This model contrasts the one I opened this chapter with, by Alice Te Punga Somerville. Instead of staying true to the genealogies we have inherited, Anna Deavere Smith wants the transgressive, crossing boundaries of representation to find something new in the interaction. Some messy combination of Te Punga Somerville and Deavere Smith is where I locate the decolonial community possible in creative spaces. For me, this is where we must learn, know, honor who we are and where we come from, while also pushing into the risky unknown together.

In literary creative space, this experimentation can often take the form of trading or putting on another’s voice. Here is an example of community-engaged writing that crosses human/non-human boundaries. In *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theater for Incarcerated Women*, American Studies scholar Rena Fraden analyzes the performance and pedagogy of a contemporary theater and writing program for incarcerated women in San Francisco, led by African American performance artist and activist Rhodessa Jones. First performing in 1992, The Medea Project creates space for creative and personal writing that explores experiences of discrimination on account of race, gender, and sexuality, and alternate
ways of understanding one’s own story. The autobiographical monologues are crafted into a bold performance that draws on Greek mythology. Fraden describes the cumulative effect of the structure and pedagogy here:

individual monologues, songs, and group dancing are juxtaposed; old-time wisdom, myths, and spiritual histories are brought into relation with contemporary women, who sometimes stand alone to tell their individual stories, and sometimes sing and dance together en masse. The women learn discipline and coordination from the goddesses, and the goddesses are also changed, as their ancient rituals are modified, updated, and their classic stories are performed anew. (9)

As a conscious community project, The Medea Project centers rejected community members through providing a new way for their voices to be heard, via esteemed and sacred personas. I love here how the broad ripples of consequence, how both the women and goddesses are changed in the act of this experimentation.

Are real-world conditions changed in this act of transgressive storytelling? Jones is clear that a cure or salvation is not the outcome of the program, but that the creative process might give women tools to save their own lives (24). The writing and discussion process explores “plots that lead to imprisonment—the causes for addiction, rage, recidivism—in hopes that by asking certain questions, the women might not count on miracles but instead plot a different course” (17). This understanding of the limited power of creative writing in the context of a precarious existence echoes Audre Lorde—poetry as a pathway to imagine another way to live.

It is exciting to think about the civic foundation laid by experiences common to the poetry or creative writing workshop—telling your story, listening, experimentation. June
Jordan’s “Poetry for the People” project at UC Berkeley describes a civically engaged poetry born from African American Studies and Women’s Studies of the 1990s:

Poetry is a political action undertaken for the sake of information, the faith, the exorcism, and the lyrical invention, that telling the truth makes possible. Poetry means taking control of the language of your life. Good poems can interdict a suicide, rescue a love affair, and build a revolution in which speaking and listening to somebody becomes the first and last purpose to every social encounter. I would hope that folks throughout the USA would consider the creation of poems as a foundation for true community: a fearless democratic society. (3)

The pedagogy of Poetry for the People offers a model of building a community of trust among difference. Writers are pushed to share their “truth,” including stories of conflict, hard experience, and other things that might be difficult to express. “Poetry for the People rests upon a belief that the art of telling the truth is a necessary and healthy way to create powerful, and positive connections among people who, otherwise, remain (unknown and unaware) strangers. The goal is not to kill connections but, rather, to create and to deepen them among truly different men and women” (16). The collective experience of the workshop and presentation is where we have the opportunity to practice listening as a community ethic. The Poetry for the People teachers describe their goal was to create a space that could “expose volatile issues without attacking one another, and can sustain responsibility rather than denial. It takes more than arranging the chairs in a circle” (53). In the next section, I will focus more on this work all around the voices, the texts, the bodies. The writing together, sharing together, trying together, listening together is what defines a community-engaged practice of poetry.
This is a partial and personal genealogy of some community-engaged poetry projects that have inspired me in their commitments to social justice and questioning power and voice. In these examples, creative writing together helps to build multivocal and complex communities. Poetry gives permission to explore the emotion, freedom, and possibility in one’s own life. Community is activated through sharing meaningful insight and listening to others. Centering multiple marginalized voices unsettles the limits of comfortable established community.

Building community in an unjust society is a process of critique and transformation. The work to decolonize has a more specific goal than social justice. Decolonizing reaches in many directions, while grounding in Indigenous life. In the next section, I will turn to three Hawai‘i-based poetry projects to investigate their theories and methods of building decolonial community for ea.

Poets in the Schools

I was first introduced to Poets In The Schools (PITS) in 2005 when I was an undergraduate in the English Dept at UH Mānoa. I had come back ambitious and inspired from a sophomore study-away year at Hunter College in NYC. There, I had met eighteen and nineteen-year-old poets and philosophers, and we had lots of adventures together, including reading Paulo Freire for fun and trying to create our own free night school for the people. I came back home wanting to fight injustice and underrepresentation in my own community, and realizing I didn’t have to wait until I was “an adult” to start making something happen. I teamed up with Lehua Ledbetter, a fellow BA student, and later Ryan Oishi, an MA student, to put together an after-school local literature program at my alma mater, Castle High School. We called this program (after)words, and we eventually expanded to three high schools, recruiting volunteer teacher-tutors from UHM and publishing high-school student poetry in the online UHM creative arts
Having never been introduced to local literature until college, I was eager to help high school students have an experience that could empower them to write their own stories and see themselves as part of a proud and vibrant literary tradition.

While we were dreaming up (after)words, Professor Paul Lyons at the UHM English Department excitedly introduced us to PITS. Though the program had not been held for over a decade, Paul thought it would be an interesting model to draw from, especially if we were thinking about institutionalizing the grassroots work we were doing. We never followed up on that idea, but I nonetheless remained interested in PITS and the size and success of their project. I have used their publications in creative writing workshops for my college students (who are always amazed and a little envious that such young people can write such fresh and unexpected poems) as well as to help create pedagogy for community poetry work—particularly with a project Billy Kinney and I tried with the community stewardship nonprofit KUA, and Ola home school network, where we facilitated youth to write poems about their place, Mo‘omomi, in order to strengthen their voices so they could better serve as kia‘i for their ʻāina.

PITS started in O‘ahu in 1973, as part of the federal Artists-in-the-Schools program—a national Teachers & Writers Collaborative Program initiative—funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and locally by the Hawai‘i State Foundation for Culture and the Arts. Its goal was to place professional writers and artists in schools, in collaboration with teachers. This pilot program began in 1966 and expanded throughout the US through state arts councils. Literary and pedagogy publications like Teachers & Writers Magazine documented this work nationally, and local publications documented it in each area (Cohen Taylor). At the national level, PITS included these goals: “to give jobs to writers; to teach students to read literature; to

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Thanks to many who helped make (after)words, including teacher-tutors: Ryan Oishi, Jamie Economou, Julia Wieting, and No‘u Revilla.
provide insights into the creative process; and to build new audiences for literature” (Sewalk-Karcher 307). Phyllis Thompson initiated Hawai‘i’s chapter, and Eric Chock later took over as the coordinator of the project. Eric was generous enough to meet with me and share many of his teaching materials. We sat outside the giant Friends of the Library Book Sale at McKinley High School and talked about idealism and security, and the risks of grassroots projects like PITS and Bamboo Ridge. We talked about health insurance and retirement, and the question of how to do meaningful work that can actually support us. This is still a question. I left with armfuls of handouts, exercises, and precious Haku Mele books, and inspired to honor this teacher and his commitment by doing my part to help reinvigorate this amazing history that my peers knew little about.

PITS consisted of a group of poets, friends, colleagues who took short contracts for individual schools or classrooms, ranging in age from mostly elementary to some high school-aged students. Once there, the poet would teach a week-long unit of different writing exercises, that normally culminated in poems and a class poetry reading. Many of these poets also contributed to a collection of pedagogy and student writing that came out of the program, called Haku Mele, which was published regularly beginning in 1976. This publication was supported by the Department of Education, and served as a record of the diversity and poignancy of the work of PITS. Most of this section is based on Haku Mele, and I chose to look at the first ten years: volumes 1976 (vol. 1) until 1986, to explore the lessons there as this group of poet-teachers were defining themselves and their work, talking and learning about impact. Each volume of Haku

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4 It would be interesting to research further how the goals of the program changed over time. In 1980, some proponents of the national program were advocating for more refinement of goals over the years. For example, in 1980, PITS poet Kathleen Sewalk-Karcher argued: “The past nine years [of PITS] have emphasized ‘opening up’ the student and having students become confident in expressing themselves through written language” (297), but where the program had yet to go was training teachers to better serve as creative writers and writing instructors, and reap the benefits of the PITS program (Sewalk-Karcher).
Mele is divided into sections, where individual PITS teachers shared combinations that included narrative reflection about their pedagogy, exercise examples, and student work. Schools who participated included many on O‘ahu, as well as some on Maui and Hawai‘i Island, and included a school for the deaf and blind. The poets were not necessarily trained as teachers, let alone as teachers of young children, so many reflect on being stretched outside the role of just a writer, and figuring out what would energize young people and create good poetry.

The local poets in PITS had to talk about the value of poetry and the work they were doing in response to specific sociohistorical pressures. First, in response to questions about the legitimacy and value of poetry in society, and as something deserving of being resourced. In his introduction to a 1978 Haku Mele, Eric Chock talks about poetry as a valuable thing that doesn’t get as much attention in the classroom as art and music. Also, the PITS program created financial support for poets that did not depend on teaching at a university, which was itself a radical idea. This structure itself proved to be tenuous, based on federal NEA grant funding that disappeared in the 1980s. PITS remained focused on proving their value in terms of institutional education (versus broader society), seeking DOE/BOE and state funding.

Second, many of the PITS poets were rebels themselves, in the context of canonical Western poetry, and writing while cognizant of the question looming over their shoulders: “are these [what we are producing] real poems?” A number of them saw themselves as part of a movement of contemporary poetry of the 1970s, characterized by irreverence, free verse, attention to concrete detail, experimentation. In a search for fresh language, surprise was valorized over adherence to more classical forms.

Third, PITS was doing work in an exciting time of struggle to build a legitimate Hawai‘i-based literature in English. The work of PITS program went hand-in-hand with a growing local
literary movement in opposition to US-based literary canons. Richard Hamasaki documents some of this in “Singing in their Genealogical Trees: The Emergence of Contemporary Hawaiian Poetry in English.” Some markers he points out includes 1973—when Dana Naone became editor in chief of *Hawai‘i Literary Review*, and it became *Hawai‘i Review*. In her editor’s introduction to that issue she captures the change in heart of this literary period beautifully: “what the University of Hawaii needs to do now is turn around and face the mountains of Manoa. When we are aware of the mountains in our lives again, we will know what to do” (Naone, “editor’s introduction”). In 1978, Eric Chock and Darrell Lum founded Bamboo Ridge Press, whose regular journals and events created an exciting kūpuka and community for local writers of color. In 1980, Wayne Westlake and Richard Hamasaki started teaching a Hawai‘i literature class at UH Mānoa, that was not allowed to be classified as a literature class, but instead was offered as an Ethnic Studies class. In 1981, Eric Chock became president of the Hawai‘i Literary Arts Council, and under his leadership held the Hawaii Writers Conference—a gathering instrumental in further defining the proud identity and contested issues of Hawai‘i local literature.

Fourth, PITS was challenged by the opportunity to work with young children as legitimate poets with something important to say. They had to prove this within one-week time frames, often as teachers with no formal training in elementary education. They had to learn what would get a “result” in one week. Individual poets had a lot of pedagogical leeway, and often built their lessons around their own aesthetics or content interest. Eric Chock, in his analysis of multiple poets’ pedagogy, asserts that poet-teachers used a combination of form-based and emotion-based writing exercises—they began with a clever formal activity that created stimulation for writing or began with a topic that lands hard, that is motivation to write (vol. 3, p.
3). Many poets reflected on topics and structures that are particularly relevant to youth. For example, Chock listed common subjects as: “the family, images of the self, or secret places where one can be alone. Common structural elements include simile and comparison poems, images capturing a moment, poems begun on the phrase ‘I am’ or poems created out of titles or starter lines” (vol. 9, 1982, p. 46). Form and pedagogy transformed in response to the youth and logistics of the one-week program.

The unique energy of children’s poetry is central to the enduring power of PITS poetry and pedagogy. The poems in Haku Mele grab you. Effortlessly, unselfconsciously, they turn expected reality and expected language every which way. They are short, quick. They leave. And the adult reader is left—a little stunned, maybe with a smile, maybe with a little ache in the heart. Many of the poet-teachers try to describe this energy. “What characterized the work of these children is boundless energy, life and vitality” (vol. 2, 1977, p. 16), Dana Naone writes. For her, this energy is created by leaving workbooks behind, and being more present with the moment, the people in front of you, and the “current I felt in the individual classes and individual students . . . . The result was a spontaneous, and even combustible, time for myself as well as the students” (vol. 2, 1977, p. 10). She goes on: “Children have fantastic radar, and know instinctively where the real energy lies once assured that they’re free to dip into it and are encouraged to do so” (vol. 2, 1977, p. 10). Eric Chock and Jody Manabe emphasize the force of this energy: “Many times, a certain subject (perhaps something particularly local in nature) will be currently popular or appropriate. There is nothing quite as powerful as a child’s imagination going full blast on something he or she is totally engrossed in. We try to use this energy whenever we can” (vol. 4, 1978, p. 54).
Beyond the energy of striking individual poems, PITS emphasized the energy of creating, imagining together. Many poets describe what feels like success in this classroom context: the energy in the room, in the group, that comes from collaboration. Kids egging each other on, put into pairs and small groups for games, responding genuinely to their classmates. For example, as Mel Takahara writes: “All the time I try to keep myself open to loving the people in the classroom. I know I’m there because I love the poem. But in the classroom, what matters is the people. I feel an exchange between people must happen before they start writing poems for each other. I know a workshop has succeeded when I realize suddenly that we have begun writing poems to each other” (vol. 1, 1976, p. 47). This emphasis on group experience and exchange and not just solo-writing or development of individual authors is a great lesson from PITS for community writing pedagogy.

Certain writing prompts channeled this group energy very well. A prompt discussed by many poet teachers is one that asked children to explore multiple kinds of vision and worlds. Dana Naone details asking children to write about their dreams, to write about “the memory before you were born, as something else,” to write about “the memory of something that one imagines having happened,” to write about what you can see with “extraordinary powers of vision to help them see their world, or the next world, in a new way” (vol. 2, 1977, pp. 11–15). Martha Webb writes about Dana Naone’s dream prompts as something she borrowed to great success. “To me the lesson about dreams is the most important of the five I present, as it’s most directly concerned with opening the paths between the inner world and outer, those worlds we’re too often encouraged to think of as separate and unequal. I begin by asking the children Dana Naone’s question: is a dream real?” (vol. 4, 1978, p. 134).

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5 Lorca as starting point for this, for Naone.
I’m able to talk briefly about symbolism. Dreams hold meaning bodied as symbol, not cut-and-dried symbol as, “the flag stands for our country,” or, “If you dream of an airplane, you will travel,” but a meaning that is like a kaleidoscope of shifting feeling, experience, projection and reception. Each dream possesses a feeling-content that might come closest to its own definition. (vol. 4, 1978, p. 135).

Dreaming and sharing in a group remains a part of the pedagogy. For example, Caroline Garrett in “‘Eye is Bolt’ Poetry Writing with Deaf Children,” relates an exercise she developed where one person will relate their dream and everyone else will write down what they saw (vol. 3, 1978, pp. 101–105).

Dana Naone is one of the PITS teachers who was known for creating poetry pedagogy consciously growing from Kanaka values. A poet and editor, she has contributed greatly to the publication of Native Hawaiian authors and material, and also became renowned for her work as a community activist, around water rights, development, and Indigenous access rights. In “Three Reports from Maui Schools,” Naone describes poetry as a “quickening” that can resensitize us in an urban and disconnected world (vol. 9, 1982, p. 94). She also elaborates on a theory of language: “I have told students I met in class that language comes from people living in a particular place, and that each language is, in that sense, rooted in place, so that when they speak they might imagine that the words they use rise up in them from the ground itself. Language is a way of knowing who they are and where they come from” (94). Naone’s framing of her student poems adds a political edge and possibility to them. She asks them to write about elders and language and land in a historical context of Kanaka cultural loss that adult readers would be well

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6 If a child says they do not dream, Webb asks them to imagine the dream of someone else, of hands or a stork, for example.
aware of. She asks them to write about dreams and then what happened when they woke up—a shift that maybe only adults would find tragic. Furthermore, she maintains how the feeling of language and identity exist even if not passed on whole—a philosophy critical to the hope decolonization requires.

Though PITS did not proclaim a decolonial mission, the writing and methods that emerged from this literary hui buzzed with this potential. In the following few pages, I will look closely at an example of PITS youth writing about Kaho‘olawe, to reveal some surprising dimensions of the roles of literature and creative writing in decolonization.

“I wish I could see you up close”: Reconnecting to Kaho‘olawe

Kahoolawe once was a giant.
The people living on this giant had to feed him. He grew lots of food on his body. The people began running out of food so they asked their god how to get rid of him. He said they had to sing to him. They sang to him everyday, but nothing happened. Then a little girl sang to him. She sang so beautifully, he turned into an Island, Kahoolawe.

―Andy Pele, Grade 5 (Westlake 23)
This poem was published in 1977 in a small collection of poetry and photos titled *Kahoolawe: Chants, Legends, Poems, Stories by Children of Maui*. The collection was dedicated to George Helm and Kimo Mitchell, two young Hawaiians who were lost at sea on March 6, 1977, during a grassroots effort to occupy the island of Kaho‘olawe, which was then being exclusively used by the US military for training and bombing exercises, from 1941 until 1990. *Kahoolawe: Chants, Legends, Poems, Stories by Children of Maui* was compiled by Wayne Kaumualii Westlake (1947-1984)—Hawaiian poet, translator, journalist, teacher, and publisher in Hawai‘i—from his work in PITS. It was distributed to state legislators in 1977 (Hamasaki xxi), republished in the literary journal *Seaweeds and Constructions* 5, and also in the 1984 special issue of *Bamboo Ridge, Ho‘iho‘i Hou*, edited by Rodney Morales and also dedicated to George Helm and Kimo Mitchell. These poems by children have thus entered into the historical and literary memory of Kaho‘olawe, and have been used in different contexts and times to inspire demilitarization and decolonial efforts in Hawai‘i. The poem above intervenes in the military’s understanding of Kaho‘olawe as empty and uninhabited, instead turning the land into a living being who is bound up in the life and survival of his human community. We are reminded of other kinds of “security”: in the relationships between people, land, food, and spirituality. The little girl who saves the community does so through her power and skill as an artist, not through violence. In short, these poems are meant to reclaim and repopulate Kaho‘olawe as home, against the US military’s understanding of islands as small, strategic, and expendable bomb sites. In the next few pages, I will briefly examine a few of these poems to think about their surprising and creative decolonial strategies. I am particularly interested in the ways the poems make large

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7 I have not seen the first version of this publication, and am analyzing the second, which is markedly different from the third (different poems in different order, and the third publication doesn’t use photos). A deeper study would require more archival work to take this into account.
leaps in time, space, and perspective, and employ a multiple legendary framework to re-story place.

Many of the poems draw attention to position and space to clear the ground for radical new ways of thinking about Kaho‘olawe. For example, the second page of the collection contains two tiny, three-line poems floating in the bottom left corner of the empty page like small islands. One poem reads:

Kahoolawe is small
and the men are bombing Kahoolawe
I wonder why.

—Lorna Solanzo. Grade 5 (Westlake 6)

This poem’s tone is unaggressive; instead of striking a political line, it invites you gently to “wonder” along with it. The first two lines are factual, but juxtaposed against each other, they seem to not make sense. We might assume men would bomb a place that is threatening, but here Kaho‘olawe is just “small.” These lines do not rely on fanciful metaphor, imagery, or rhyme. Their poetics depend on position, and the consciousness of the writer manipulating and repositioning “facts,” calling our attention to how easily real-world facts can be positioned and manipulated, and how different understandings can come from these spatial reorientations.

When read with the facing page, the unthreatening smallness of this poem transforms into something unpredictable. The facing page has a poem titled “The Great Warrior,” and describes Kaho‘olawe as “once” a “great Kahuna Warrior,” dangerous and powerful, with sharp teeth and eyes that “would glow so hard that you would / have to stay about five-hundred feet away.” This poem takes a dramatically different tack than the first; instead of characterizing Kaho‘olawe as powerless and innocent, this poem argues the land is alive and itself can pose a kind of ferocious
threat. This giant “killed anybody he’d see.” Vision and seeing, or not seeing, is positioned as a
critical site of power.

These poems intervene in the military’s claim over Kaho‘olawe by building the capacity
to see, despite different kinds of distances. In the first stanza of “The Great Warrior,” there is
another unnamed watcher in the poem: the “you” who is watching from a proscribed distance, in
the lines: “you would / have to stay about five-hundred feet away.” Juxtaposed with the giant,
this non-magical or human “you”/watcher/reader holds an ambiguous role in the story. This
figure is disconnected from Kaho‘olawe across space as well as time. The second stanza leaps to
“now,” and returns to the trope of smallness:

Kahoolawe now is an island so small you can’t even see it on
the world map. Kahoolawe, the smallest island of Hawaii. The
sleeping giant someday will awaken.

—Greg Santiago. Grade 5 (7)

Since no one could lawfully enter the island without military permission, the demilitarization and
decolonial challenge of the 1970s was how to reclaim home and connection to Kaho‘olawe at a
distance. What you can do from a distance, or what you can feel from a distance, or what can
travel across distance; these were all crucial questions that the movement building to protect
Kaho‘olawe had to address.

This poem, through using wondrous leaps in perspective, highlight both the difference
and the possibility of transcending and transforming this barrier. This poem is placed above a
black and white aerial photo of Kaho‘olawe that takes up half the printed page. The proximity of
the poem transforms what might be an ordinary, documentary, realistic photo of Kaho‘olawe to
something more difficult to pin down. The size and framing of the photo itself resists smallness:
the island stretches flat from end to end of the photo and clouds tower over it. We are positioned in the air, looking down at the island, which might be a giant. Or are we the giant, looking down from a great height upon it? Then, who is the poem calling to awaken? Relying on juxtaposition and adjacency, the poem is not entirely clear, and requires us to make the imaginative leaps across distance to connect the dots.

The second thing I’d like to notice about these poems is their tactic of building a complex relationship with Kaho‘olawe through inventing a legendary past that is cacophonous and unpredictable. I think about this in terms of what S. Shankar has named a “vernacular postcolonialism.” Shankar defines the vernacular as language and sensibility, marked by: untranslatability, vernacular sensibility is “oriented toward the rooted, the culturally autonomous, the local, the contingent, the practical, and the particular. It shares ground with the folk, the indigenous, and the traditional, without becoming synonymous with them” (147). What the theory can offer is a more nuanced way of reading local responses to colonialism.

The child authors of these poems repeatedly disarm us, blurring the lines between nonsense and imaginative clarity, between truth and fiction. They also write children as pivotal characters in their stories. For example, in a later poem by Nalani Kaopuiki, Grade 5, Kaho‘olawe “was once a very young and beautiful girl” who caught the attention of a young boy who wanted her to go to O‘ahu with him. When he learned she couldn’t because she “gave her heart / and soul to Maliki the Volcano God,” he frees her by running “around the Island three times in one day.” The poem ends in the rush of the moment of discovery:

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8 Folklore scholar Cristina Bacchilega has defined and critiqued the idea of a “legendary Hawai‘i”—a translation of indigenous modes of storytelling and history into a kind of popular and scholarly “product” at the beginning of the 20th century, a “space constructed for non-Hawaiians (and especially Americans) to experience, via Hawaiian legends, a Hawai‘i that is exotic and primitive while beautiful and welcoming” (5). These Kaho‘olawe poems, I would argue, retranslate this “legendary Hawai‘i” into a vernacular mobilized to resist colonial militarized understandings of Kaho‘olawe.
He ran as fast as he could. Then he saw her!

He did it! He made it! She would go to Oahu with him! (23)

There are some very interesting things we could say about the translation of indigenous knowledge into an unpredictable vernacular. For now, I just want to point to the force and urgency of this poem. I love the shift from this legendary past to an immediate breathless present, and the power of the child actor to exert a creative trickster change. (how does running apply to demilitarization?) [I imagine the figure as both the young boy who ran three times around the island and the giant Island the little girl sang to.] We need nuanced understandings of what decolonial “resistance” is in order to appreciate this poem in its context. I argue here that PITS helped to create a vernacular resistance within a context of broader cultural disconnection from knowledge and tradition. Today, we are inheriting this kind of rich and contradictory resistance within a context of Indigenous cultural revitalization and recovery.

The unreliable and unpredictable energy of this collection flows from the child authors of these poems who repeatedly disarm us, blurring the lines between nonsense and imaginative clarity, between truth and fiction. We are reminded of the child’s perspective by the paratextual material as well as the byline of each poem, which always gives the author’s name and school grade level. The child authors also write children as pivotal characters in their stories. For example, in a long poem by Teresa Akana, Grade 5, Kaho‘olawe was a man “as strong as ten bulldozers” who was deathly injured after trying to save “youngsters” from an exploding volcano (10). In the poem at the beginning of this section, it is only the song of a “little girl” that can transform Kaho‘olawe. On the page facing the poem about the singing little girl and the poem of the marvelous running boy is an uncaptioned photo of a young, presumably Hawaiian, boy.⁹ He

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⁹ The photo is attributed to Jerome Baker, who was a prolific photographer in Hawai‘i at the beginning of the 20th century. Many of his ethnographic and landscape photos are preserved today as glimpses into Hawai‘i’s Territorial
is standing, facing the camera, arms and legs crossed in a sassy way, and suppressing a smile. He is wearing a light-colored shirt too big for him, tucked into cut-off pants, and a hat. He looks too smart for his own good. He is framed so the camera is eye-level with him, and his body commands the photo. He is a giant as large as all of the text of the opposing page combined, and I imagine him as both the young boy who ran three times around the island and the Island the little girl sang to. As he looks out at me, the reader, I realize I am caught in his trickster vision too. The poems, photos, and spatial arrangements of the pages of Kahoolawe transform place by telling shifting and contradictory origin stories. These stories repeople Kahoʻolawe as living ‘āina, as human, and as charged site of human debate and conflict.

How were these poems created? I don’t know for sure, but there are clues in Haku Mele in the articles written by editor Wayne Westlake about his pedagogy. Wayne Westlake developed pedagogy using Chinese characters, ideograms, and “translation” activities. This non-English language of pictures “exposes them to something poetic that is so foreign, so new, mysterious and even bizarre, that they plunge right in with characteristic childhood curiosity” (vol. 2, 1977, p. 32). A year later, he describes exercises that begin with introducing your genealogy, and then move on to Hawaiian petroglyphs that the children arrange, make up meanings for, and then “translate” into English. He also uses concrete and visual poetry techniques, and the prompt: “use your bestest pidgin,” to loosen them up (vol. 4, 1978, pp. 21–28, Highlands Intermediate and Honowai). It is in this kind of pedagogical context that Westlake later asked his students to write on the topic of Kahoʻolawe (vol. 4, 1978, p. 82, Manana), as the island targeted by the US military began to be a center of Hawaiian cultural and political activism. This playful pedagogy seems to belie the serious work of the poems. By approaching

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era. A deeper study should think more about this, perhaps in relation to Bacchilega’s discussion of photography in Legendary Hawai‘i.
decolonization and youth together, PITS teachers learned they had to necessarily reach toward the close, the embodied, and the play as process and method. This was critical to creating writing with genuine charge.

One of the central teachings PITS has for Nā Hua Ea is that an approach to decolonization and creative community can center fun and surprise. In my experience as an activist, the rhetoric of “fight” and “healing” are important and common frameworks. In contrast, the poets in the schools working with these young people show another way to remake the world. Through looking at their work, we see that decolonial community need not only be heavy and full of trauma, or directly pointed at a specific activist goal. Decolonial process can be what helps us feel alive and inspired to write, spill over boundaries, raise in cacophony together, rise and exceed the real.

PITS also offers rich questions about what decolonization looks like at different historical moments. Though leaders in the PITS program did talk about building pedagogy located in Hawai‘i and Kanaka values, history, and form, PITS was not talking about their work in terms of decolonization. What makes me read this work as decolonial or political has a lot to do with the editing and arrangement of the adult poet-teacher. In other words, the poet-teachers find the force of language and topic where the youth might be thinking: I am just writing down my dream the way I see it. In another example, Chock and Manabe describe an exercise called “chant poems” they tried out at Māʻili and Nanikapono Elementary Schools. Playing with cause and effect and formal restrictions around linking lines, they worked with youth to create a shared spoken poem, or “class chant” with rhythm, instruments, and dynamic volume changes. They describe a crescendo, and increasing the speed to a thunderous shared storm of energy—“It was wonderful” (vol. 4, 1978, pp. 55–60). Yet they end this reflection with an interesting caveat: “Yet, we
wondered just how valuable our ‘chant poems’ were. We thought of the old use of chants, how
the rhythms and repetitions of words and lines were like a polished gourd in which truths could
be passed on from mother to daughter, father to son. Reverberations of an oral tradition that
would outlast their creators because they had been spoken and shared, not written and lost” (vol.
4, 1978, p. 59). I appreciate the generosity of the uncertainty in this pedagogical reflection. If
derolonization is not intentional, does it still count?

When thinking about the staying power of PITS poetry alongside theories from other
community-engaged poets and Indigenous thinkers, I am reminded how much decolonization
needs children—to inspire and energize and ground the mākua and kūpuna, to shake up colonial
hierarchies of knowledge, and to loosen up the limitations of our dreaming.

Hoʻomoʻomoʻo

“Resisting militarization in Hawaiʻi or anyplace can feel lonely. This gift is meant
to bridge the divides between us as women, divides which further fuel the
oppressor, and weaken the voices of the oppressed.”

(Introduction, Hoʻomoʻomoʻo)

Ho‘omo‘omo‘o is a collection of poems and artwork put together by the grassroots O‘ahu-based
demilitarization organization Women’s Voices Women Speak, in preparation for their delegation
to San Francisco to participate in the 2007 International Women’s Network Against Militarism
meeting. This collection describes itself as “mo‘omo’o,” or, “a bundle of fibers which stick
together” in the first beating of kapa. The collection also theorizes poetry as “mo‘o,” reptilian-
like akua, often women, who serve as protectors of water and other sacred places. As the editors
write: “Like these mo’o who protected our sacred sites in the past, the voices of women collected
in this book are meant to expose the impacts of militarization on our communities, and to protect
our ‘āina from further militarization” (Introduction, n.p.). Finally, this collection describes poetry as a shelter, from which to speak more openly. The introduction continues: “We come from a place where colonization and militarization run under our skin, a place where many of us are drowning in contradictions. Some of us live with conflicting identities, where our voices and actions work against aspects of our lives, our families or our personal histories. For some, it is only under the shadows of words where we can speak truth freely with fierce tongues.” The collection is carefully bound in handmade paper containing kaunaʻoa and other plants symbolic to the delegation’s experiences together to prepare for their San Francisco trip.

The poems found here call out militarization from a women-centered perspective, explore painful and personal experiences, and offer models of resistance and life. There are multiple purposes in this collection—to bridge experiences and identities, to rekindle passion, to remember, to mourn. There are multiple audiences—brothers in war, those who have been lost in war, the US President, the self, akua, and others. Hoʻomoʻomoʻo offers a model of decolonial community as an outpouring of many voices remaking connections in the context of violence and war. These women hold their work and their lives with resolve and compassion and ferocity. This has been my experience of the women-led activist community committed to demilitarization.

One of the leaders of this work, Darlene Rodrigues, met me at Von’s Chicken in Palama Supermarket in Waimalu, the day after Thanksgiving in 2018, to help me understand a little more about the making of Hoʻomoʻomoʻo. Darlene is a searing poet and much-respected social justice community leader on O‘ahu. At the time we talked, she was in seminary training,
collecting clothes for the houseless, and caring for her mother. I have always looked up to her grace and steady confidence. I first met her as a facilitator and organizer with the nonprofit Hawai‘i People’s Fund. At the time, she was organizing community conversations around difficult topics in a series called Kīpuka for Change. I got to know her better through her work with Filipino and working-class communities in Kalihi, helping to organize a Kalihi-based Stations of the Cross walk that elevated sacred stories of that place. Darlene is both soulful and fierce, always stretching herself and her community toward new perspectives or voices not heard. We talked a little about social justice and other ways to gather, and she shared with me her goal in preaching: “the grace in your heart needs to meet the justice in your head.”

The making of Hoʻomoʻomoʻoʻo was a heavy time, she shared. Depleted uranium had been discovered at Schofield. The Stryker Brigade was coming to Hawai‘i and Pete Doktor and other good friends who were protesting this buildup were getting arrested. The WVWS delegation was participating in these actions while preparing for their presentation about the militarization of O‘ahu. They were learning about prostitution in Wahiawā and disinterred Hawaiian bones at Mōkapu. They found a dead baby manō at Pearl Harbor, and carried the body to Mākua. There was a lot of stress, Darlene shared, and “we didn’t tend to our spirit or soul.” In addition to the stress of personally encountering the violence of militarization, there were tensions in the group because of their diverse identities and perspectives. As Darlene put it, there were seven of us, and “what is the kuleana of that?” She repeated a few times that poetry was a unique way for everyone to have a voice, in a way that couldn’t or didn’t happen in the activism. “There was no voice for us but it came out through here [this book].” They gathered poems from the group and

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Rodrigues’s poetry can be found in many places. For an essay that made an important contribution to local literature and the impact of representation on community, see her work titled “Imagining Ourselves: Reflections on the Controversy over Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s Blu’s Hanging.”
asked for others to submit things. “We collected all the lamentation of everything,” she said. We thought, “let’s do this collection as an offering.”

There is a lot in what Darlene told me that I needed to hear as someone who is a part of Hawai‘i’s literary and activist community, but that would not be right to share in a dissertation. I say this as a reminder to myself and the reader that in telling stories about communities, there are lots of stories that don’t belong to any one person or to the public. Here are the lessons that do feel right to share: We must acknowledge that we need spirit and love in the work of decolonial healing. We must care and cultivate trust, and “moving at the speed of trust.”

Poetry might offer a way to listen across painful differences in a diverse group fighting to make a better world. I will now turn to four poems from *Hoʻomoʻomoʻo* to explore lessons about poetry and decolonial community that emerged from this hui.

The first poem is by Grace Alvaro Caligtan, a Hawai‘i-based activist for women’s health and demilitarization, who is of Filipin@ and Igorot descent. In *Hoʻomoʻomoʻo*, Grace identifies herself as working independently as Grace Intelligence to “share her talents and partners with organizations that value and understand the critical need to foster girls’ and women’s health and wellness as a key strategy for community and planetary healing” (6). Her poem is titled “Hay(na)ku for Love in Occupied Nations: For moments when resistance means solidarity.” Hay(na)ku refers to a poetic form coined by Filipino American poet Eileen Tabios in 2003, referencing Independence Day in the Philippines as well as diaspora and postcolonialism. It is a form of three lines: one word, then two words, then three words to finish the stanza. Grace also weaves Audre Lorde into her poem, echoing Lorde’s famous words, “we were never meant to

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11 This quotation is not from Darlene, but from an April 2016 generative somatics embodied leadership retreat I participated in, put on for community activists by Hawai‘i People’s Fund. The facilitators there were Adrienne Marie Brown, Liu Hoi-Man, Nathan Shara, Prentis Hemphill, and Kasha Ho, and this was a teaching I learned from them.
survive.” In her use of form and quotation, Grace’s poem writes about and enacts bridgemaking. The hay(na)ku form of one, one-two, one-two-three presents a model of how to make connections: step by step. Grace introduces her poem through specific connection and context: “In memory of the 2003 testimony given by four Pilipina women against the United States Marine Corps to use Waikāne Valley for military jungle training in Mindanao. In gratitude to Auntie Terri and Kyle for being the bridge” (6). Every small movement is an intention in this poem, as Grace calls us to witness connections across space and time.

In Grace’s bridge, time is not linear, moving from history to the future. Instead, time is in surge and conversation, the past and present pulling at each other. We can see this in her opening lines:

bound
destinies surface
in Hawai‘i’s present

now
brought together
on stolen land (6–7)

Grace does not tell a triumphant story of immigration and assimilation. Instead, she locates us in Hawai‘i beset by colonization and war. The poem continues: “common / wounds weaving / intimate spaces-places” on the violence of “thrice occupied bodies” (7). Grace’s model of solidarity recognizes shared colonial violences across the globe, and centers the experience of violence on bodies. One of these violences is the loss of connection with history and ancestor. As she writes:
Ancestors
pleading to
remember sacred ties

when
generations forget
love between us (7)

Here again we see the pull of the past on the present, and an undetermined “us”—one that could be intergenerational as well as across ethnic communities. This “us” seems to encompass Kānaka and Filipin@ and the military, in a later stanza: “No / permission to / enter before-sharing // a /
place now / on island shores” (7). The spareness of the hay(na)ku form allows for multiple meanings. We can think of the US military and the act of “permission” of asking for public feedback about using a site for jungle warfare training, and we can also think of the coming of Filipin@ and other settlers/migrants to Hawai‘i. In the context of Grace’s life, we hear the protocol of consent as critical here, and in this poem the rhetoric of consent (of the body, of intimacy) is laid as a protocol for interaction with (always Native) land.

The collective “we” shifts throughout. The first “we” were “never / meant to survive.” The second “we” “pīkai / correct our distortions.”12 As ʻāina enters, the poem shifts—the protagonist moves from a human “us” to ʻāina.

We

witness ʻāina

awakening, engulfing us

12 Pīkai is defined by Grace in a footnote: “to sprinkle with sea water or salted fresh water to purify of remove taboo”
land
prays open
in morning gratitude (7)
In the stanzas that follow, there are no clear human actors. Instead, there are coral, descendants, and singing, exhalation. The poem ends in morning imagery and a new collective emerging: “for / a new / time, exhaling EA.” This “new time” is marked by an openness to vibrant relationship and exchange among communities, between people and land, between past and present.

I will next look at “How to Leave Your Mother” a poem by well-known Hawai‘i writer Brenda Kwon (of Korean descent). This poem begins at the ground, literally, with feet, connection, dirt. Kwon describes skyscrapers and towers wanting to leave the earth. People too wanting to leave the earth. The personification of earth as mother builds, alongside a critique of violence, waste, and thoughtless growth. This poem posits development as akin to forgetting your mother and thrusting her away.13

Kwon then pivots, explaining a better way to leave:

To leave your mother,
you unburden her,
Remove the knapsack of your welfare
from her back.
...
You earn your keep to let her rest.

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13 See Candace Fujikane for a critique of the concept of development in the literature of Lois-Ann Yamanaka.
You let her stretch.” (18)

And then later: “You do for her / all she did for you, / because now you can” (18). Kwon reorients us in filial responsibility and gratitude to the earth, just as we are to our ancestors (mothers) and to our past. The end resignifies the humble image of dirt on your shoe. Kwon writes:

She stayed with you.
clinging to your shoes
to remind you how she will always
cradle your steps
in the palm of her hand.

Even when you leave.
Even when you leave.

Even when you’ve left.

Even when you’ve gone. (18)

In this poem, development and growth are redefined as a turning back toward who made you, with humility and gratitude. Like in Grace’s poem, the straight line of development and expansion is rejected for a pause and turning back. This circular motion helps us imagine the future more boldly. Instead of the future of climate change and environmental suffering we seem inevitably bound for, we are asked to think of the earth relaxing and taking her ease, and that we
are intimately and directly responsible for the earth’s well-being. Both Brenda and Grace’s poems ask emotional questions about leaving and returning.

The act of redefining takes a different shape in the poetry written by Kanaka in this collection. During the creation of *Ho’omo’omo’o*, WVWS was led by a few Kanaka women. Aunty Terri Keko’olani was one of them, and the other was Summer Kaimalia Nemeth. In Summer’s poem, “Nā Wahine Koa,” she redefines both woman and warrior in the context of the prostitution of Hawaiian culture. The speaker stands steadfast in destruction “upon sickened shores / in tainted waters / where ‘ō‘io and ulua swim / and dead mollusks tell stories” (25). We might imagine here the huaka‘i to militarized places that WVWS went on throughout O‘ahu. We are asked to see and feel not military maps or historical battlefields, or the names of generals and arsenal. Instead we listen to the dead and wounded. Summer’s poem prioritizes an Indigenous perspective, calling the woman speaker a “word warrior” “who throws words like spears / to penetrate the heart / of the tourist industry …. To awaken the thoughts / of the seventh generation” (24).

The speaker, the woman warrior, then names akua and ‘āina as a way of restoring story and strength to militarized colonized places. “Our Mākua, / Līhu‘e, / Lualualei, / Pōhakuloa, / Nohili, / Waikāne, / Waimomi, / Wai‘anae . . . // our waiwai / our ‘āina / our kai” (26). Repeating wai, the speaker reminds us of water and wealth. Name by name, the scale builds to a massive proportion. The woman warrior is the one who can call this net of Indigenous connection, in the midst of violence. In contrast to the generic earth of Brenda’s poem, Summer’s poem relates specific storied ‘āina. This poem also does not narrate leaving as an option, but instead resists on

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14 For an often-cited exploration of this metaphor, see Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter*.
15 See Candace Fujikane’s essay in *Marvels and Tales* on huaka‘i and the work of mo‘olelo in resurgence and decolonization.
a return. A return is linked to a clear “no”: no to polluted waters, no to military bases, no to cultural prostitution. The speaker in this poem does not focus on being healed by ‘āina, but on becoming a fierce kiaʻi, guardian, of ‘āina who need help.

What marks this kiaʻi way is recursive memory and storytelling. A recitation of names and remembering those who have come before adorn this warrior:

In the time of Lono

When the flag of white kapa flies

I am a woman

a weaver of words

Who reinforces red feathers to capes

that connect and entwine

the blood of fallen generations

to the shoulders of young warriors

To ensure that their mana is restored

That their bones shall live

So that their bones shall live . . . (26–27)

In all three poems so far, activating memory and returning to relationships with ‘āina and each other are key to decolonization and demilitarization.

The last poem I will turn to is by Darlene Rodrigues and titled, “The Meaning of Peace.” The poem relies on decisive turns in perception and understanding. In section one, “Gifts,” the first line reads: “This war is a gift” then lists President Bush, the death of the author’s cousin (24
years old, she says earlier) in Iraq, then takes a sharp and surprising turn. Instead of anger and retribution, Darlene stories loss as a potential gift: “Is the gift of our pain / To tell the world that true security comes / Not from the point of a gun / But from the hands of our family / From the ground we walk on / From the fresh wai that feeds us” (32–33). This reversal pulls us up short and prepares us to listen differently.

In section two, “True Security,” Darlene gives examples of different demilitarization struggles Okinawa and the Philippines, linking them with actions taken far away in Hawai‘i. Henoko protests by fisherpeople are connected to a protest at the Japanese Consulate in Hawai‘i. An action against the GMA is connected with diasporic Filipin@ who “feel the pain of their kapatid” at the FILCOM. True security is thus made international and intergenerational, weaving a net of kuleana across many places. This section ends with a definition of true security as embodied:

True security is Kyle giving me
Worms to start my own bin
Learning to transform our waste back to
Nourishment for the ‘āina (34)

Here waste encompasses the violence and pain of war, and metabolizes this back into healthy land which can feed. In the vastness of militarization, this is a small intimate act. This is also a relational act between Darlene and Kyle, worms and waste, Darlene and ‘āina. This poem activates a web of relationship and care that spirals back and forth from the intimate to the global.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{16}\) For another example of a similar demilitarizing and decolonizing poetics, see the Instagram profile guinaiya671. In a story on June 4, 2019, this Chamorro farmer on Guåhan jumped from the destruction of latte’ sites to a photo of planting and harvesting kalo, with the explanation: “soul-utions to life worries: keep planting, keep faith, ready the youth.”
Section three is titled “Gratitude.” Darlene’s poem ends: “You push us hard and we / Throw you off in a move / Flowing hands in flight” (34). This is not a turn-the-other cheek ending. There is strength here, and victory. An agility that disrupts a violent reality. Unlike Summer’s poem that confronts fight with fight, Darlene’s poem asks for another way to move.

Together, the four poems from Ho‘omo‘omo‘o I have discussed here describe a poetics of decolonization committed to exploring connection and movement. They do not agree with each other on strategy. The historical and present-day violence different groups and individuals have experienced are not commensurate with each other. In their diversity, they provide an array of answers to the question: What is a decolonial response that stands up to violence while also building community? This is the bundle of fibers described in the introduction, the mo‘o, discrete voices held together. To describe a decolonizing and demilitarizing poetics, these poems proliferate movement. They question the experiences of leaving and returning home. They offer the ability to move in unexpected and agile ways—move through time, move through generations, move between islands, moving scale—and always aligning with ‘āina and ancestors.

Here is the second mo‘o of the introduction—the akua who has the power to shapeshift, changing form from woman to “lizard.” Finally, the introduction calls poetry a shelter. In these poems, I see a sense of safety being created through modeling the action of feeling one’s way inward (personal) and outward (Hawai‘i, global). While exploring sources and consequences, the poems find relationships of exchange. These connections give us new ways to see, new ways to live.

Pacific Tongues

I first met Youth Speaks Hawai‘i through poet facilitators like Lyz Soto and amazing poets like Jamaica Osorio, Jocelyn Ng, Harrison Ines, and William Giles. In 2012 I helped Lyz,
Jason Mateo, Julia Morgan, and Jon Osorio put together a symposium on spoken word and performance in Oceania. Called “Spoken Word Symposium: Building a Community of Oceanic Voices and Performances,” it was held at UH Mānoa Hālau o Haumea in July of that year, and brought together spoken word community in Hawai‘i with other kinds of Pacific Islander and Kanaka artists, orators, and performers. As the public announcement about the symposium below shows, the new organization Pacific Tongues was born out of a struggle to re-root spoken word in a different genealogy, in something more ancient and intimate to Oceania:

We recognize that spoken word is a vital creative living art especially for the people of the Pacific. But the current institution and practice of spoken word is heavily centered in the continental U.S. How can we sustain dialogue between spoken word and Oceanic traditions of orature? How can we support spoken word in education and in communities in the Pacific? How can we build more vibrant performance spaces? Join us—artists, teachers, community organizers, students, and lovers of poetry—in committed conversation and planning for a rising Oceanic spoken word movement. (makaaiko, “oceanic voices rising”)

By 2018, the mission and vision of Pacific Tongues had been refined to this language:

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.

Our commitment is to honor the practice of kuleana through creative workshops, public events and pedagogical development. (Pacific Tongues “About”)

First I will very briefly introduce some of the values and principles of Pacific Tongues within the literary tradition of spoken word. Then I will focus on two in-depth autoethnographic studies—
one authored by poet facilitators Jason Mateo and Melvin Won Pat-Borja, and the second by poet facilitator Leora Kava. These two studies will help us think about the power of community-engaged poetry in Hawai‘i to build both kuleana and voice.

I want to give this caveat: that my thoughts here are not comprehensive of the breadth, beauty, and richness of Pacific Tongues. I look forward to the day when true experts—Pacific Tongues youth and poet facilitators—feel compelled to write and share more about their process and pedagogy. My pilina with this organization does not come from working as a direct part of the group, but through going to many of their events, collaborating with them as fellow artists and organizers, and over the past decade learning so much from them about teaching poetry.

While writing this chapter, I took a break to attend Pacific Tongues poet Keali‘i MacKenzie’s launch of his first chapbook, *From Hunger to Prayer* (November 24, 2018). Being in the audience of this spoken word event reminded me how close and loving and supportive this community is with each other. How their poems feel like writers saving their own lives. And as audience members, we feel somehow saved too. We leave feeling like it might be safe to open our hearts in public like that. To be vulnerable and to be held.

Youth Speaks Hawai‘i (YSH) was born from a larger continental US spoken word culture of community-building based on voice and truth telling. A forefather of this culture is construction worker Marc Smith, who first hosted poetry slams in Chicago in the 1980s, marked by a style of brash, emotional, poetry, spoken and judged by the everyday person. Youth Speaks Hawai‘i was founded in 2005 by Melvin Won Pat-Borja, Travis Ka‘ululā‘au Thompson, and Kealoha (Wong), in collaboration with Bay Area Youth Speaks mentors Jason Mateo and Michelle Lee (Soto 23). As longtime mentor and former YSH executive director Lyz Soto documents in her essay “So Listen To Me,” “YSH works towards facilitating youth in finding
their own voice through slam poetry and spoken word. Our guiding principle is that young people have important things to say, but they may need some help in discovering how to say them” (23). Critical to this process is the experience of the poetry workshop space:

These workshop spaces were and continue to be inviting, stimulating, and most importantly, safe. Attending youth will not be harassed because of who they are, where they come from, or what they have experienced. They can openly talk about what we, as adults, like to pretend that people under the age of twenty do not understand, much less experience. They talk about prejudice and bullying in their schools or at home. They write about homelessness, parental alcoholism and drug addiction, or familial mental illness. They talk about the consequences of economic disparities and cultural bigotry. In these workshops, they can turn feelings of ostracism and alienation into declaration, then into testimony, and finally into performance. (Soto 25)

Spoken word in Hawai‘i is famous for tackling hard political and identity issues, like colonization, poverty, climate change, gender identity, racism, domestic and sexual violence, and language loss. In 2008, the YSH team of Jamaica Osorio, Ittai Wong, William Giles, Alaka‘i Kotrys, and Jocelyn Ng took first place on stage of the national slam poetry competition Brave New Voices. One of their powerful group pieces was their bilingual poem “Kaona,” about the determination of Queen Lili‘uokalani during her imprisonment in the palace, and the ongoing resilience of Kānaka and their language. Just as the Queen was given gifts of flowers wrapped in patriotic newspapers, so children today are wrapped with mo‘olelo and mele, ma ka ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. In a climactic ending, Giles and Kotrys chant “E hō mai,” while Osorio recites in
Hawaiian and Wong recites in English, all these voices weaving together, aimed at the past and future, into a glorious refusal to be silenced.17

Soto also speaks to the magic that happens in a spoken word performance, between performer and audience:

We, as a multigenerational community, need access to a spoken catharsis. Since its inception, many YSH performances have moved audiences with spoken word poems that demanded emotional responses to issues that have often been so intellectualized as to become inaccessible to many members of our community—not because of a lack of understanding, but rather through a lack of heart. The brain tells us how to get things done, but the heart tells us why we should do them. The best moments of spoken word join these two together and move the audience to acknowledgment and action, because at its core, spoken word poetry in Hawai‘i invokes the practice of call and response. (30)

Spoken word practitioners have also called out the limits of this safe space and genre of performance, warning against competitions that seem to reward the poems with the most trauma in them (Soto; Weinstein and West). Susan Weinstein and Anna West, in “Call and Responsibility: Critical Questions for Youth Spoken Word Poetry,” caution against the way performing a finished poem might pigeonhole youth who are in the process of exploring a developing self. They write:

By privileging the poem as a completed product that represents a final pronouncement, audiences (whether attendees at a slam, viewers of a televised performance, or peers and teaching artists in a workshop) prematurely close off

17 For more on the poem “Kaona,” see *Vice-Versa*, and Chun, “Flowing to First.”
the process of identity exploration that is so crucial to YSW’s practices. As Robin Park and others bring to the fore here, there are risks involved in self-exploration, in bringing one’s current, contingent “truths” to the stage. These performance risks require a community of support: peers and adults whose responsiveness will matter most in the contexts of relationships, many of which take place far away from the stage itself.” (300)

This idea of contingent, in-motion truths is an important reminder of identity as something not set, but emergent in community, in response to each other. In this dissertation research, I focus on poetry hui and the writing process in order to give light to these dynamics and transformations. In spoken word poetry pedagogy and performance, the fireworks and polish of a well-practiced performance grapples with the ongoing and less-theatrical experience of growing and changing one’s story.

Weinstein and West, as well as Soto, also ask us to critically question the power of this genre to make material change in the world and in the lives of youth. Weinstein and West state: “mentors have a responsibility to be clear about the limits of this counterpublic space to transform the everyday realities of the youth. They must work with dominant discourses and institutions to create spaces of change and translation for the youth they serve” (300). Soto wonders how spoken word can provide a sustainable economic living in Hawai‘i. With a lack of steady material support, poets and mentors are often asked to contribute to the community without getting paid. She also calls for more self-evaluation, thinking about how while many poems criticize issues and problems, not so many envision futures. She offers: “Let us begin speaking the future into action” (29).
I now will turn to two M.A. Projects completed in Pacific Islands Studies at UH Mānoa, for reflections on the work of Pacific Tongues from the perspectives of its poet facilitators. The first, by Melvin Won Pat-Borja and Jason Mateo, is titled “Cultivator: Pacific Tongues Educators’ Guide to cultivating an active artistic Oceanic community of writers, spoken word performers, leaders, educators, and students of all ages.” It gives an overview of the philosophy of Pacific Tongues from two of its founders. The second, by Leora Kava, is titled “In Our Own Verse: Tongan Music and Poetry-Writing as Decolonial Praxis.” This project documents Kava’s experience piloting a Pacific Tongues program in her ancestral homeland, Tonga. Both of these rich analyses were completed in 2015.

Mateo and Won Pat-Borja break the goals of Pacific Tongues into three: identity, representation, and empowerment. Their thesis describes “how Spoken Arts Education can be used as a tool for young Pacific Islander students to: create a positive and culturally conscious sense of identity, play an active role in how they are represented in text and in the media, and empower them to create positive change in their lives and in their communities” (3). Speaking of youth they worked with in Hawai‘i, Palau, and Guåhan, Mateo and Won-Pat Borja’s pedagogical community is primarily Pacific Islander, and with some shared experiences of marginalization, oppression, and colonization. They describe the youth they work with as those who fall through the cracks, who come from blue collar working families, who do not achieve well academically in the western system, and who are people of color.

Leora Kava’s MA Thesis documents the planning, execution, and reflection of developing and running a five-week long music-writing and poetry-writing workshop series in Nuku’alofa in 2014, where the goal was to engage participants in creating and performing at least one original piece that incorporated Tongan language. Armed with theories of
decolonization from mostly Indigenous Pacific scholars, Kava’s research makes an important contribution by reflecting on how her ideas about decolonization changed through her praxis in a unique Pacific context. Kava questions the idea of a fixed identity, naming Futa Helu, Konai Helu Thaman, and Epeli Hau’ofa as writers who describe Tonganness as something both rooted and fluid, with common values that are themselves open to interpretation (9–11). Kava also gifts us a narrative of her own process of building belonging as a diasporic Tongan, a younger person, and a language-learner. Music and song and other performing arts have the power of “carrying memory” and letting stories be transformed in reinterpretation and performance.

For Pacific Tongues, poetry is both an end goal as well as a vehicle that build youth voice and leadership. Their focus on educating youth communities allows them to ask important questions about the malleability of identity. Both emphasize the kuleana of youth in defining themselves as well as their larger communities.

Mateo and Won Pat-Borja stress the work of Pacific Tongues to resist an overarching western literary aesthetic, and instead grounding aesthetic judgment in specific cultural communities. They argue that “good writing” is culturally subjective, and it was more valuable for Pacific Tongues facilitation to focus on “emotional and educational parts of the writing process and leave the aesthetic value to be judged by the writer and his/her home community” (4). As they explain in more detail:

As native people, it is our right and responsibility to promote and preserve the cultural and artistic aesthetics that we value in our own communities. We encourage you and your community to be the creative authorities on what makes a “good poem.” We must be the stewards of our own art, music, and ways of expression. We cannot stress enough the importance of localizing and
indigenizing the curriculum so that it can have a meaningful and lasting effect on the community it is meant to serve. Ultimately, it is the passion behind the words, the inspiration behind the lessons, and the community that is created on each island that matters the most.” (4)

As Mateo reflects:

Excellence comes in many forms when participating in our workshops. Our workshops are filled with a diverse bunch of young people who are of different ages, heritages, economic status, sexual orientation, writing and performing levels. Some start off with little to no experience in spoken word, poetry, or even community engagement. Most gain the confidence to write critically, brave an audience to present themselves publicly, and find a larger sense of their role in their community. (16–17, emphasis mine).

This is a critical transformation at the center of Pacific Tongues work. The work to facilitate the growth of youth into critical and outspoken community leaders is guided by a belief that “we do not make art for art’s sake; we make art for the sake of political liberation and social upliftment,” where poetry slams are not just about individual artists sharing their work but about artists as representative of peoples breaking histories of silence (48–49). This goal argues that material change happens by cultivating poets who can think critically and share courageously, who learn leadership and connection to a larger community. This is another way of describing kuleana.

Kava’s project is more about exploring decolonization and language loss in Tonga’s unique context of being an independent political nation. She defines decolonization fourfold: developing critical consciousness; applying critical consciousness; using creative arts as connection; and empowering Pacific-centered imaginaries (5). To the last point, Kava deepens
Mateo and Won Pat-Borja’s discussion of cultural aesthetics by incorporating specific Tongan aesthetics into her methodology and pedagogy. For example, Kava explains the significance of “heliaki,” or layered meaning or verbal indirectness, in Tongan creative composition and performance, as a relational aesthetic that communicates relationship to space, place, and time, and that balances between the individual and community (24–26). Kava also delves into “tau e langi” as an ascending (“ascending to the sky”) Tongan musical structure that helps to produce “māfana,” a feeling of “warmth or inspiration” (28–29). These cultural aesthetics transcend western and English-language notions of genre, beauty, and performance.

In both these analyses, there is a dynamic relationship among poetry, politics, and culture. Poetry, politics, and culture resist and nourish each other. In a decolonial context, this interplay is not a smooth or easy fit, and instead gains power through live open questions. Dialogue in the creative writing process created a practice of self-discovery and self-determination. Both studies draw heavily from dialectical models of education and self-formation laid out by popular educator Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Pedagogy is student-guided, politicized, and a dialogical space of trust, growth, and excitement. This practice required an open heart and an openness to where conversation goes. For example, Lee found with Pacific Verse that her students and collaborators needed to trust her, an outsider, to facilitate, and that she and her students had to trust in the process of answers emerging (61).

Mateo and Won Pat-Borja organize their narrative in a linear, cumulative pedagogy of Identity, Representation, and Empowerment. In the “Identity” section of their thesis, they emphasize pedagogy based on personal narrative. The poet facilitator must spit a poem first, that is memorized, visceral, and creates a relevant connection. In the “Representation” section, Won Pat-Borja talks about poetry being a vehicle for youth to have the confidence to express and give
testimony in public community space, talking specifically about DEIS community hearings in Guåhan in 2009 and 2010 around military build-up. In the “Empowerment” section, the authors characterize the poetry slam as a way for students to be responsible for their words. The slam is also a place where diversity can be expressed, against the “conformity” of the mainstream culture.

Pacific Tongues, pedagogy asks youth to identify as a community with shared experiences of oppression and resistance to colonization, and I wonder how much space was held for diversity within the group. Resistance framed by Mateo and Won Pat-Borja was much like going to war. For example, a lesson in the “Empowerment” section asks students to discuss: what would you be willing to fight for? What would you be willing to die for? (58–59). With this as given, it might be hard to say something like: “I am not fighting at all.” In contrast Kava’s pedagogy was designed to hold more contradiction around identity, mirroring her own journey of a diasporic language-learner. Kava created pedagogy that made space for hybrid forms that could stretch and push against notions of authenticity and tradition while still valuing them. For example, Kava had students speak the same lyrics differently based on the emotion they wanted to convey, to “commit to emoting through voice” (36). The process encouraged play and diverse interpretation.

Kava underscores that circling at the end of each workshop to share and give feedback (asking questions, saying more than just “good job”) became one of the most important practices for Pacific Verse. What began as a way to get feedback from workshop leaders changed into something less hierarchical. When shifted to the collective, a group culture of “bravery and energy” was created, and individuals were encouraged to share “where we were even if we were lost” (40). As Kava theorizes: “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” (45).18

The community building of Pacific Tongues poetry pedagogy has much to teach Nā Hua Ea and larger movement building. After her work facilitating poetry and music with Pacific Verse, Kava redefines decolonization as “Critical and creative engagement with genealogy” (62), genealogy being a “critical consciousness of connection” (63). Creating music and poetry becomes an important practice of self-determination, “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” (63). This creative collective experience helps strengthen a community’s ability “to imagine a multi-faceted and culturally rooted future of self-determination” (66). In future Pacific Verse experiences, Kava aims to: 1) shift artistic training from individual creation to understanding individual creation within longer traditions and genealogies, and 2) devise more conscious ways to trouble lines between audience and performer (67–68). These changes will further shift the emphasis from the creative individual to a community creating and connecting.

In all of this Pacific Tongues pedagogy, love is central to community-engaged poetry. For youth of color and Pacific Islands youth, loving who they are in the face of colonization is a powerful experience. Growing this kind of love is necessary to empower youth to be leaders, to create space, to wield their histories, to shape their communities and futures. Mateo and Won Pat-Borja say a lot about their love for the youth they work with, and the importance of learning self-love, as facilitators and as students. Kava asserts that Indigenous language learning is foundational for loving and reconnecting with community in a time of decolonization, and how

18 See Kava’s beautiful poem: “let’s circle up and circle back…” (46).
this requires intergenerational dialogue and the courage, perseverance, and respect to work through intergenerational tension. In both projects, youth connect through love and listening to their own identities as individuals, to an emerging community of artists, and to a larger more complex community. Kuleana is not something simple to take on. What Pacific Tongues provides is support to do so, by building a culture of courageous voice.

**Conclusion**

There are personal friendship and artistic genealogical connections among the people involved in PITS, Women’s Voices, Women Speak, Pacific Tongues, and Nā Hua Ea, with the last three groups having the most overlap together. This dissertation is the first instance I know of to intentionally call PITS, WVWS, and Pacific Tongues ancestors whose work Nā Hua Ea can honor. The three projects discussed in this chapter bring together diverse perspectives and insights about the role of poetry in building decolonial community. From PITS we are reminded of the power of working with young children—the spilling over, breaking rules, the force of fun and surprise. From *Ho‘omo‘omo‘o*, we learn about the struggle of connection across difference—how we might move with care through time and place and different experiences of trauma. From Pacific Tongues we learn about building communities of courage and kuleana.

This chapter also uplifts the creativity we find in hui—in collective work. Foregrounding stories about hui show how growth happens in exchange and response. This kind of exploration helps to reveal ea. No‘eau Peralto shares this mana‘o in his opening speech at Lā Ho‘iho‘i Ea 2016, in Hāmākua: “As we come together as a collective, that is where we ea, that’s where we rise, that’s where we breathe into the future all of that positive energy which makes us rise” (huiMAU ‘ohana). When we pay attention to what is happening in community, we better learn how to nurture and create experiences of ea.
CHAPTER 2. BUILDING DECOLONIAL COMMUNITY: HUAKA‘I SOLIDARITY AND DECOLONIAL LOVE

I understand decolonial community-building as the education, transformation, and joining together of diverse peoples to cultivate ea. To build a larger movement for ea in Hawai‘i, we can learn from stories of how and why diverse peoples commit to Hawai‘i. A seed of this for me is the ‘ōlelo no‘eau “Hoʻokahi lā o ka malihini,” and what I have been taught about this saying: that you have only a short time as a guest, and then you have the kuleana to pitch in and help.19 This chapter will explore some theories about solidarity, community-building, and love. I will focus on two things that fascinate me about community-building: difference, and transformation. What pulls us to come together across difference? What motivates us to change?

The first section of this chapter will survey some existing scholarship around solidarity and community-building in Hawai‘i. In this work, we will see a range of approaches in dealing with difference and sameness in relationship-building. Community and togetherness are defined in different ways—Local, Asian settler, Kānaka ʻŌiwi, Pacific. Solidarity is often cast as a strategic step where different groups align forces in order to defeat a common enemy. We will see a range of reasons for coming together, including loss, refusal, a shared identity/experience, or a shared hope. Finally, I sketch an idea of “huaka‘i solidarity,” as a journey to reclaim our ancestors, our lands, and each other.

The second section of this chapter argues simply that decolonial community-building needs love. In Hawai‘i, the center of this love is aloha ʻāina. We will also weave in lessons from a genealogy of scholarship and writing about decolonial love, and the act of reclaiming

19 Mahalo to Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada for first sharing with me this hua many years ago. This ‘ōlelo no‘eau also inspired my 2009 article “Ethics in Song: Becoming Kamaʻāina in Hapa-Haole Music,” in the journal Cultural Analysis.
Indigenous erotics and desire from heteropatriarchy, misogyny, and homophobia. Decolonial love creates space for difference. Decolonial loving makes us open and vulnerable to the deep transformation that decolonization requires. To end, I will turn to Indigenous literary scholarship that emphasizes the transformative experience of love in writing and reading texts.

**Solidarity and building decolonial community**

Tensions can arise within community work as movements for social justice may contradict or overlook each other’s revolutionary dreams or analyses of oppression. Decolonial solidarities are ones that make Indigenous concerns about decolonization foundational to the work to change the world. For example, in “Decolonizing Antiracism,” Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua’s 2005 critique of the tokenization of Indigenous issues within antiracist and postcolonial scholarship and organizing, they write: “At the core of Indigenous survival and resistance is reclaiming a relationship to land. Yet, within antiracism theory and practice, the question of land as contested space is seldom taken up” (126). They warn against “decolonization struggles becom[ing] one component of a larger antiracist struggle. Such pluralism, while utopian in intent, marginalizes decolonization struggles and continues to obscure the complex ways in which people of color have participated in projects of settlement” (131). Rather, antiracist work should take the “recognition of ongoing colonization as foundational” (136), that “Indigenous realities” are foundational (137), also that they must put their frameworks within the context of restoring land and sovereignty (137). Similarly, Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, in "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy," an article directed at whitestream/mainstream feminisms, argue that decolonizing feminist work for justice also means centering Indigeneity. Drawing from feminists of color, they remind us that multiple oppressions
co-constitute each other, and that therefore “a decolonization movement must thirst for the eradication of both heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism or else it will do little to achieve decolonization for either Indigenous women or men” (16–17).

Both of these pieces call out the importance of paying attention to differences among social movements, in order to work for broader and deeper social justice. For example, Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill list five challenges that Native feminist theories pose to women and gender studies, including the exhortation to “Craft alliances that directly address differences” instead of smoothing them over (19–20). In Andrea Smith’s oft-cited piece on intersectionality, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing,” she argues that models of people of color organizing are often based on shared victimhood or oppression and cannot articulate how white supremacy works differently on different communities, and seduces different communities to participate in dominating others. She offers the three pillars of slavery/capitalism, genocide/capitalism, and Orientalism/war to give a framework for more strategic alliances, to “help us to develop resistance strategies that do not inadvertently keep the system in place for all of us, and keep all of us accountable. In all of these cases, we would check our aspirations against the aspirations of other communities to ensure that our model of liberation does not become the model of oppression for others” (69).

Smith’s work has since come under critique after it became more public that her claims to Indigenous identity seemed to not hold any water. A 2015 collective statement by Indigenous feminist scholars holds an important lesson about this related to solidarity and community-building: “Asking for transparency, self-reflexivity, and honesty about our complex histories and scholarly investments is motivated by the desire to strengthen ethical indigenous scholarship by

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20 For a deeper dive into the need for greater intersection among feminism, transnationalism, anti-racism, and the need for intersection with colonialism, see Dhamoon.
both indigenous and non-indigenous scholars . . . One of the devastating consequences of Smith having served as the often singular representative of indigeneity in a variety of academic and activist social justice contexts is damage to strategic alliance building, especially between indigenous and non-indigenous women of color. Accountability to communities, kinship networks and multiple histories is part of the difficult work scholars of indigenous and critical race studies must be willing to undertake to ensure that our work combats rather than reinforces or leaves untouched the intricate dynamics of heteropatriarchal racist colonialism” (Barker et al.).

A decolonial solidarity also needs a way to hold incommensurable difference that does not defang decolonization into empty metaphors. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue for an “ethic of incommensurability” in “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” that requires material changes like land repatriation, and psychological resolve for “relinquishing settler futurity” (36) instead of “rescuing settler normalcy” (35). In a long and harrowing passage, Tuck and Yang take us at breakneck speed through a series of violent entangled relationships (of colonialism, war, slavery), that span vast stretches of time and place and peoples. Here is only the beginning:

*Breaking the settler colonial triad, in direct terms, means repatriating land to sovereign Native tribes and nations, abolition of slavery in its contemporary forms, and the dismantling of the imperial metropole. Decolonization “here” is intimately connected to anti-imperialism elsewhere. However, decolonial struggles here/there are not parallel, not shared equally, nor do they bring neat closure to the concerns of all involved - particularly not for settlers. Decolonization is not equivocal to other anti-colonial struggles. It is incommensurable.*
There is so much that is incommensurable, so many overlaps that can’t be figured, that cannot be resolved. Settler colonialism fuels imperialism all around the globe. Oil is the motor and motive for war and so was salt, so will be water. Settler sovereignty over these very pieces of earth, air, and water is what makes possible these imperialisms. The same yellow pollen in the water of the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New Mexico, Leslie Marmon Silko reminds us, is the same uranium that annihilated over 200,000 strangers in 2 flashes. The same yellow pollen that poisons the land from where it came. Used in the same war that took a generation of young Pueblo men….

Tuck and Yang’s work reminds me that decolonial solidarity must be able to hold these painful connections without looking away. Decolonial community-building must reach far into the past and present, and reckon with the intersection of many histories and peoples.

Following Tuck and Yang’s ethics of incommensurability, Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández’s 2012 article “Decolonization and the pedagogy of solidarity,” differentiates some aspects of solidarity for decolonization from a broader Western history of solidarity. Writing into the context of the twenty-first century—increased global capitalism and militarism together with increased resistance among Indigenous and diasporic peoples—he historicizes the concept of “solidarity” within national struggles in Europe. Drawing also from theories of critical pedagogy and Third World women activists, Gaztambide-Fernández emphasizes: “Most of the time, solidarity hinges on similarities in characteristics, political interests, social needs, or moral obligations. Most relevant to projects of decolonization, yet more rare and complicated to theorize, is a conception of solidarity that hinges on radical differences and that insists on relationships of incommensurable interdependency” (46).
This particular article has helped me pinpoint the significance of personal and community transformation in thinking about decolonial community-building. Gaztambide-Fernández offers three qualities to describe a decolonial pedagogy of solidarity: relational, transitive, and creative. Relational he describes as: “co-presence,” “that individual subjects do not enter into relationships, but rather subjects are made in and through relationships” (52). Transitive he describes as a solidarity that takes action in the world and with others that in turn changes us, “rejects a static position and embraces contingency,” “permanently seeks transformation,” (54). Creative he describes as: “concerned with the multiplicity of cultural practices that might evolve in such encounters, as a way of countering the versions of “culture” and “identity” that are imposed by the colonial project of modernity” (57). Gaztambide-Fernández concludes: “The pedagogy of solidarity requires a profound faith in the creative possibilities that become available when we recognize each other (and each ‘Other’) as we come together on the basis of a commitment to decolonization that, as Veracini suggests ‘must emphasize open-endedness’” (61).

The dominant story of solidarity in Hawai‘i is a multiethnic story of plantation immigrants from China, Japan, Portugal, Okinawa, the Philippines, Korea, and Puerto Rico, together with Hawaiians, coming together to form a “local” working-class identity in opposition to rich and politically powerful white plantation owners and businessmen. In the next section, I will review the work of historians and activists who have critiqued this dominant story, and consider our various stories of multiethnic solidarity, their weaknesses and potential to serve as hua for decolonization. I am interested in solidarity birth stories and solidarity growth stories, and how we remember and retell these examples of being together.
Multiculturalism and Local Identity in Hawai‘i

The story of multicultural solidarity born out of shared plantation struggle remains the hegemonic story of solidarity and togetherness in the State of Hawai‘i. It is a story of working-class immigrants of color oppressed by a white US businessowner oligarchy, who overcome hardship together with Native Hawaiians to achieve education, power, and belonging in Hawai‘i. For example, Ronald Takaki’s 1983 publication *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii 1835–1920*, was the first book-length study of sugar plantation life and labor from a race and class perspective. Looking at plantation documents, labor union and newsletter documents, and oral history research, he tells a history of a new world of labor that rose to fight for humanity and dignity. Writing in the rapidly urbanizing 1980s, he writes to counter a forgetting of the struggle of plantation Hawai‘i. Takaki’s way of honoring this history holds a romanticism still common today. In the last line of his prologue he recreates a scene from his oral history interviews: “In the midst of all the talking with an old man, vividly recalling the mountains of cane he had cut and carried, proudly exclaims: ‘With my bare hands and calloused heart and patience, I helped build Hawaii’” (2).

Waves of writing and scholarship have critiqued the inequalities and obscuring tendencies in “local” as well as the erasure of Indigenous lives and histories in the phrase: “we built Hawaii’i.” Sociologist and ethnic studies teacher Jonathan Okamura has issued the most sustained critique and study of local identity in Hawai‘i.21 In his 1980 *AmerAsia* article, “Aloha Kanaka me ke Aloha ʻAina: Local Culture and Society in Hawaii,” Okamura argues how local is an oppositional identity, that developed out of an experience of oppression around “the principal

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21 In contemporary discussions and critiques of local identity, a very common source is Eric Yamamoto’s 1970’s BA project, “The Significance of Local” later published in a 1979 issue of *Social Process*. He discussed local Japanese identity as a “compromise” between tradition and development.
cleavage in Hawaiian society . . . . between the dominant Haoles and the subject Hawaiians and immigrant groups,” and was then reinforced through the 1970s to distinguish between a local population who held shared values and cared about Hawai‘i, and an influx of outsiders, including mainland haole, Japanese investors, and tourists (135–36). He is quick to critique common verbs used to celebrate Hawai‘i’s multicultural local identity, as “mixing, melting, and sharing.”

Okamura writes, “the view that local culture is derived from a sharing of diverse cultures seems to ignore the imposing of American institutions on Hawaiians and the immigrant plantation groups through armed revolution and the penal sanctions of the contract labor system. This latter point is perhaps the most serious deficiency of the blending and sharing perspective of local culture; it tends to ignore the complex historical processes that were involved in its development” (123).

In his historiography of the infamous Massie Case, historian and ethnic studies teacher John Rosa emphasizes the way “local” is continuously re-remembered and re-made to fulfill societal needs. Countering Eric Yamamoto’s claim that local identity was first documented (in print) in response to this racist case, Rosa writes, “The Massie Case of 1931–32 did not cause local identity to emerge, but the case itself and narratives of it in the postwar years have consistently served as a means to express local identity as a cultural identity continually in the making,” and particularly to politicize and “facilitate a collective memory of [working class] oppression” (100). Rosa describes how the Massie Case became a part of public high school curriculum starting in the 1980s, as a lesson about race relations, particularly the tension between military haole and civilian local populations, and the (in)ability to find justice in courts of law (104–105). As Rosa argues in the rest of the article: “When told solely as a story of local
identity, the Massie Case narrative assists in fashioning a politicized ‘local’ identity that obscures historical differences between Native Hawaiian and non-Native groups” (110).

The work of these scholars points out the inability for “local” identity and politics to hold possibility for decolonial solidarity because of the way differences between Indigenous and immigrant settlers are subsumed, and histories forgotten. Writing in 2000, as part of a rising tide of a movement for Hawaiian sovereignty (and writing against local pushback and fear about this), Kanaka activist and scholar Haunani-Kay Trask names a specific local Asian hegemony in “Settlers of Color and ‘Immigrant’ Hegemony: ‘Locals’ in Hawai‘i,” an article that became foundational for later Asian settler colonial theory. She writes: “The issues before Hawaiians are those of indigenous land, cultural rights, and survival as a people. In contrast, the issues before ‘locals’ have merely to do with finding a comfortable fit in Hawai‘i that guarantees a rising income, upward mobility, and the general accoutrements of a middle-class ‘American’ way of life” (20). Targeting in particular AJA control, including Senator Daniel Inouye, over politics and land in Hawai‘i, she says: “The Japanese know that they have, as a group, benefited from the dispossession of Hawaiians. Justice for us would require, among other things, an end to Japanese Democratic Party control over Hawaiian lands and waters” (11).

These political injustices carry over into representation in Hawai‘i literature and media, and colonial control over storytelling power. As novelist and editor Rodney Morales pointed out in 1998, the metaphors for multiculturalism in literature of Hawai‘i often have to do with food, which “engages the rhetoric of sharing and fair play” but “may be a new brand of colonialism in which successful Asians have established a hegemonic relationship over those who are less fortunate” (115). As publisher and teacher Dennis Kawaharada writes in 2001, in his critique of Bamboo Ridge’s disproportionate support of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean settler writers
(sixteen out of nineteen single-author books in the first twenty-two years of the press) over Hawaiian and Filipino ones: “Capitalist bosses and immigrant labor were both part of the colonial system; the fact that laborers worked hard, suffered discrimination, and led strikes against the plantation doesn’t make them anti-colonial. No one denies the important work of many immigrant workers and their descendants toward social and political equality in Hawai‘i. But the work was carried out to improve wages and working conditions and promote democracy within the colonial system; the workers were not revolutionaries who sought to overthrow the colonial system or re-establish the Hawaiian nation” (“Local Mythologies”).

The 2008 collection edited by Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura put a name and analytic to this growing critique of local hegemony: “Asian settler colonialism.” Drawing largely from Trask’s critique of local Asians and Patrick Wolfe’s analysis of settler colonialism in Australia as an act of genocide and “a structure not an event,” Fujikane and Okamura’s volume critiques especially Japanese and Korean settlers’ rise to political, economic, and educational power at the expense of Native lands and lives. In his later article, “Why Asian Settler Colonialism Matters,” Dean Saranillio affirms the political importance of the Native-settler binary, explaining that “while migration in and of itself does not equate to colonialism, migration to a settler colonial space, where Native lands and resources are under political, ecological, and spiritual contestation, means the political agency of immigrant communities can bolster a colonial system initiated by White settlers” (286). This body of theorizing has made an impact within settler studies, Asian American studies, Indigenous studies, and academia within

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22 First published as a 2000 special issue of AmerAsia. This volume was inspired by Trask’s 1997 International MELUS Conference address by Haunani-Kay Trask, which became “Settlers of Color and ‘Immigrant’ Hegemony: ‘Locals’ in Hawai‘i.”
Hawai‘i, by prying open the political capital of “local” and laying out an incommensurable difference between “local” and Indigeneity that decolonial solidarity must account for.

Trask describes well some of the psychological and emotional obstacle to a decolonial solidarity within the multicultural plantation equal-rights-and-opportunity-based solidarity model. She writes, “it is the resilience of settler ideology which facilitates and justifies non-Native hegemony: ‘immigrants’ who have struggled so hard and for so long deserve political and economic supremacy. By comparison, indigenous Hawaiians aren’t in power because they haven’t worked (or paid their dues) to achieve supremacy. In more obviously racist terms, Hawaiians deserve their fate” (“Settlers of Color” 4). As scholars of plantation economies have argued, the plantation was a “racemaking” institution (Beechert). How can stories of plantation solidarity and identity be redirected for decolonization? I argue that we need to dive more courageously into our diverse and complex histories, release the framework of what we deserve, and think instead about our shared and different kuleana to Hawai‘i.

Grassroots histories of activism in Hawai‘i offer rich ground in which to find decolonial examples of solidarity. A strong multiethnic group of laborers stand shoulder-to-shoulder behind hand-lettered words: “We Built Hawaii and Our History Will Be Told!” on the cover of the 1999 special issue of Social Process in Hawai‘i, titled The Ethnic Studies Story: Politics and Social Movements in Hawai‘i. This multi-authored collection narrates the community effort to establish Ethnic Studies at the University of Hawai‘i-Mānoa, and its connection to social justice work outside of the university. As a multivocal history, The Ethnic Studies Story presents some pathways to think about how a working-class local identity was energized and challenged in the 1970s over a decade of struggles for land, housing, and anti-war.

Community activist and founder of Hawai‘i People’s Fund John Witeck, in his article,
“The Rise of Ethnic Studies at the University of Hawai‘i: Anti-War, Student, and Early Community Struggles,” frames the UHM movement as one of many student movements across the United States connected to 1960s civil rights struggles, movements that gained intensity after the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, in tandem with growing draft resistance and other youth-led movements for peace in response to US war in Vietnam and Cambodia, and, in Hawai‘i, the massive student and faculty protest over the firing of Oliver Lee (12–16). According to Witeck, an important moment in the ethnic studies struggle in Hawai‘i was the clarifying of the relationship between the anti-war student movements and localized struggles over land and development in Hawai‘i, including evictions and development in Kalama Valley, Waiāhole-Waikâne, Sand Island, and Chinatown, and demilitarization of Kaho‘olawe (14–16).

This complex relationship grew through on-the-ground movement and theorizing, and led to conflicts over whose voice should be at the forefront of these movements for social change. As Kanaka Maoli activist and leader within the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement Soli Kīhei Niheu reflects in an interview in the special issue, organizations had to make difficult decisions to intentionally make sure Hawaiian voices and bodies were put in leadership positions, and these decisions sometimes led to disagreement that he characterizes as a battle between cultural and class analysis.23 He cites the decades-long protest against building the H-3 freeway as an example where cultural and class interests collided, and a larger community of Hawai‘i could not be mobilized in part because the organized labor movement couldn’t see an alignment between their fears of not having work and Kanaka Maoli fears of destruction of sacred places (51). The Ethnic Studies Story attests to the power of a growing Hawaiian cultural

23 Fred Ho’s Afro Asia or Daryl Joji Maeda’s Rethinking the Asian American Movement are a few other examples where scholars have discussed a similar tension between nationalist and class-centered analyses during the 1960s and 1970s.
and political sovereignty movement being built alongside and intersectionally with labor organizing and other struggles against evictions and war. Davianna Pōmaikaʻi McGregor’s essay, “Research in Action: Ethnohistory of Puna,” demonstrates how ethnic studies as an educational program gave space and resources to develop Kanaka Maoli ethnohistory methods that had material impact on community struggles to protect specific places. D. Māhealani Dudoit’s essay, “Against Extinction: A Legacy of Native Hawaiian Resistance Literature,” describes the significant cultural move of reclaiming unbroken genealogies of resistant Native voices in Hawaiʻi’s literature.

More recent projects that document histories of community activism continue to reveal how rich our histories of being together are. There are countless lived examples of diverse people who have dedicated their lives and families towards pono futures for ʻāina, Kānaka, and settlers. These stories are often personal, and found via oral histories and other life writing, or by talking with and spending time with these people. Some very recent examples of these kinds of histories are Nā Wāhine Koa, a collection of four oral histories of Kanaka women leaders in Kahoʻolawe as well as other social justice struggles (edited by Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua), and two collections featuring interviews with over thirty activists in the Kalama Valley struggle: Hawaii Stories of Change: Kokua Hawaii Oral History Project (edited by Gary Kubota, 2018) and the documentary series Kōkua Hawaiʻi: The Beginning of the Revolutionary Movement of Hawaiʻi, detailing (produced by Gary Pak, 2019).

Later waves of Asian settler scholarship in Hawaiʻi are also pushing for more complex connections between Asian settlers and Kānaka, for pono futures for a diverse decolonial community. For example, in her 2017 dissertation “Emergent Allies: Decolonizing Hawaiʻi from a Filipin@ Perspective,” Pin@y demilitarization activist and writer Kim Compoc describes her
project as follows: “I was more interested in the grassroots efforts of decolonial Filipin@s and Hawaiians to recognize each other’s struggles for dignity and self-determination. I rejected a framework of competing “immigrant rights” and “Indigenous rights” with the settler state as neutral arbiter, and tried to imagine a politics that decenters the settler state altogether, one that puts U.S. empire on trial for all its crimes against the sacredness of our land and bodies” (Compoc 32). Academic and community work by colleagues like Kim Compoc, Logan Narikawa, Kelsey Amos are inspired by Indigenous resurgence as well as histories of activism, collaboration, and friendship.

One way of decolonizing plantation histories of solidarity is to retell stories of racialization and labor together with ‘āina (land and people, living land, land that heals and decolonizes). In “A Question of Wai: Seeking Justice through Law for Hawai‘i’s Streams and Communities,” Kapuaʻala Sproat follows the history of water access and diversion to argue that “sugar’s rise to dominance rewrote the social contract” between people, government, and land (Nation Rising 203). In “Alternative Economies for Alternative Futures,” Dean Saranillio argues that low wages for exploited Asian immigrant laborers on the sugar plantations were connected to seizing Indigenous land and water, under the settler colonial and capitalist logic of “work or be hungry” (198–99). In this labor disconnected from land, your entire day is spent working to grow a food crop, for a wage that then allows you to buy food and other things you need. Conversely, subsistence Kānaka ʻŌiwi practices and relationship to ‘āina point to alternative futures. Saranillio quotes lo‘i farmer Hōkūao Pellegrino in the context of a struggle over stream diversion on Maui, where jobs and Hawaiian culture were pitted against each other: “I may not be able to employ 800 people, but I can feed 800 people—if I was able to grow on all of my land” (202).
In March 2017, I got to see the potential of repurposing plantation stories for decolonial purposes by participating in the Lānaʻi Manso Mural Project organized by the Lānaʻi Junior Board and 808 Urban. This community art and storytelling project aimed to revitalize two stories: the 1951 Lānaʻi pineapple workers’ strike that brought together Japanese and Filipino workers, and stopped production for 201 days, and the legendary Filipina “manso women” workers who were motivated by dreams of better futures for their families to become the fastest and most determined pickers in the later decades of the plantation. Kumu Simon Seisho Tajiri was the alaka‘i for the story dimension of this project, convening a team of Lānaʻi teachers and artists to research and envision the panels, and working with elementary students for months leading up to the painting, finding exciting ways to tell these stories and have them reflected back in student drawing and writing that then became inspiration for the four walls of the mural.

It was no small thing to tell stories of a strike on an island owned by Larry Ellison, where many residents depend on “the Company” for work. Instead of celebrating the pride of achievement of succeeding within a plantation system, Tajiri and the rest of the team stirred up pride in the ʻāina kamahaʻo of Lānaʻi and the proud strong people of that place. The story of the strike became a story about the ingenuity and power to feed and house one’s own community instead of depending on a plantation master. The process of the mural painting involved visits to wahi pana and looking for hōʻailona, and asked students and teachers to learn ʻoli for their place. Celebrating plantation heroes was aligned with celebrating the histories and moʻolelo of Lānaʻi before the plantations. In these ways, ʻāina was kept central to remembering and retelling plantation histories. We hoped this experience created openings for more powerful and independent future visions for Lānaʻi.24

24 See @lanaijuniorboard Instagram account for more documentation of this project, along with the Manso! Zine volume 1.
A huakaʻi solidarity and building decolonial community

Growing and strengthening relationship with ʻāina is central to the work of building decolonial community. Transformation happens in the interaction between powerful ʻāina and human bodies. We grow courage, resolve, and insight through going to visit and mālama particular ʻāina. We learn leadership and dedication through witnessing kiaʻi and kua ʻāina of a place. Many have attested to mālama ʻāina and aloha ʻāina as forces that can change our lives and our world. In just one example of how ea emerges through relationship between Kānaka and ʻāina, Jonathan Kamakawiwoʻole Osorio writes about the US military’s use of the island of Kahoʻolawe, then renamed “Target Island” for live fire training and bombing practice for over fifty years. Though it is uncertain how much life the island and its cracked water table can now sustain, Kānaka and others continue to travel and return to Kahoʻolawe to mālama ʻāina, learn, transform. Osorio describes the impact of Kahoʻolawe on Kānaka who go there: “They are affected in deeply meaningful ways, observing in the punishment and neglect dealt to the island a corollary to their own lives. The island’s survival is an inspiration to hoʻomau—to endure, to continue. In the end, this is one aspect of ea; sovereignty, life, spirit, and breath emanate from Kanaloa and touch us” (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, Nation Rising, 157).

How can we reroute the ea of settlers to mālama ʻāina and aloha ʻāina? Jeffrey Tangonan Acido writes about Nakem (an Ilokano word he defines as “soul consciousness”) pedagogy that invites the engaged historical soul, and affirms identity and “self-becoming” in relation to three elements: language, body, and land. Drawing from liberation theology, Indigenous studies and ethnic studies, and critical pedagogy transformed in the context of Hawaiʻi, Acido describes his own social biography together with his experience of ten years of grassroots social justice organizing and education in Hawaiʻi—in peace and justice work and with urban working-class
Filipino youth. He identifies colonial amnesia and separation as central violences to himself and his community, that his community forgets they are “old roots” not new immigrants (149). Acido writes: “We forget only to survive; we search in order to heal; and remember in order to live” (117).

Acido writes that being with ʻāina is a crucial part to helping the soul to remember and connect. He describes his time working with diverse communities at the mālama ʻāina site Hoʻoulu ʻĀina in Kalihi Valley:

My visits to Hoʻoulu ʻĀina always involve stories of the Land and its powerful evocation of certain memories of trauma and liberation. The people whom have visited the nature preserve as well as the program educators working there spoke of many instances of people, whom have never met each other, standing in a particular spot on the Land and speak of similar stories. Certain parts of the Land would evoke memories of childhood dreams; another spot would provoke memories of separation/divorce; another spot made you hungry, a prompt of eating/cooking a favorite food; another spot made you feel lonely retelling your displacement/immigration; another got you dirty in mud reminiscent of you planting/farming in your native land; and yet another spot where the touch of wind/rain made you feel alive inducing a memory of hopeful possibilities. The particularity of the Land moved a particular part of our memory that would have otherwise remained buried and unspoken. (152)

In Acido’s work, remembering necessitates reclaiming the wounded as wounded healers. The solidarity that emerges from immigrant stories is in the possibility to create connections through multiple homes: “The results of colonization, for both the colonized and the colonizer, have
given us the burden and gift of assuming multiple identifications of home. This is precisely what the diasporic community can offer to Lands that they have sought refuge in—a bridge to another Land” (151). Awakening settlers and other diverse peoples to ‘āina in Hawai‘i can activate these people as powerful bridges between many ancestors, histories, and homes.25

In her essay documenting the grassroots work of the Concerned Elders of Wai‘anae, KĀHEA, and the AFSC to reclaim militarized spaces in Waianae as abundant ‘āina, Candace Fujikane argues that huaka‘i is one process to connect diverse communities to ea. She describes huaka‘i as “physical and spiritual travels to celebrated places, what Kūkauakahī describes as ‘a cultural and spiritual walk in the footsteps of our ancestors that allows us to see the land through their eyes.’ In this way, huaka‘i connect past and future generations through the wonder of the mo‘olelo, enabling those on the huaka‘i to grow aloha ‘āina, a love for the land that takes root in our hearts, and one through which undercurrents of national consciousness flow today” (“Mapping Wonder” 47). For Fujikane, this can grow a “settler aloha ʻāina,” and settler affinities to protect Hawai‘i land and peoples. Fujikane emphasizes the importance of story—how these Kanaka stories transform our ideas and relationships to these places.

In the next few paragraphs I will describe a kind of “huaka‘i solidarity” I have learned from my experience in community activism with the feminist demilitarization group Women’s Voices Women Speak. Here are some of its hallmarks: 1) listening to and connecting diverse stories of colonial and military trauma; 2) centering ‘āina as a source and teacher; 3) genealogizing; and 4) learning protocols and processes of healing.

Terrilee Kekoolani has been a key mentor to WVWS in the work of demilitarization, and it is her teachings about the ethics of huaka‘i that shape my understanding of it as a form of

25 See also Pua Burgess’s “Building the Beloved Community” for a model of community pedagogy where each person is seen as a gift.
solidarity. As a young woman, Aunty Terri participated in the fifth landing of Hawaiian activists on Kahoʻolawe in 1977. Aunty Terri was also a key organizer in founding Ethnic Studies at UHM, and helped initiate WVWS in 2004. Aunty Terri has constantly emphasized to us in WVWS the importance of traveling, of physically going yourself to different places to connect communities, struggles, peoples. One way this philosophy has manifested is via the demilitarization method of the DeTour that Aunty Terri developed together with demilitarization activist Kyle Kajihiro. These DeTours denaturalize the military occupation of Hawaiʻi and center Indigenous histories/herstories of Hawaiʻi (Grandinetti; Kajihiro). In contrast with Pearl Harbor tour guides who celebrate US occupation, the DeTour guides lead groups through these same militarized places while telling alternative stories that reveal how the military-touristic complex keeps the military “hidden in plain sight.” These alternative stories are complex, and include Kanaka moʻolelo of rich harbors full of food and powerful akua, stories of resistant ancestors, and experiences with military personnel. This particular DeTour often ends at the Hanakehau farm and art-making space run by Andre Perez and his ʻohana, an example of genuine security and sovereign Indigenous futures. Between 2004 and 2019, DeTours have educated over 1,400 locals and visitors on Oʻahu (Kajihiro).

In an article about the important demilitarization work of these DeTours, Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez and Laurel Mei-Singh describe Kekoʻolani and Kajihiro’s DeTours as connectivity that can “traverse the localized hauntings of a global history of war and displacement. They convey the interlocking, nonlinear nature of time, recognize spaces shaped by loss, and also enact the resurgent songs, projects, and texts that imagine possible collective

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26 For Kekoʻolani’s rich stories about demilitarizing Kahoʻolawe, see Nā Wāhine Koa
27 “Hidden in plain sight” is an analysis of militarization in Hawaiʻi that Kyle often shares during DeTours, and that he attributes to Ferguson and Turnbull’s work, Oh, Say, Can You See. Ferguson and Turnbull in turn attribute this metaphor to Kathleen Kane.
futures” (185). They quote Kajihiro in the article as explaining that genealogy is messy, and that his travel to meet with activists across the world has taught him that genealogy is also about “mutual exchange and reciprocity” (186). Genealogy is described as an ethics and method that can address multiple perspectives, hold a larger story of interlocking oppression, and “breathe life into multiple and overlapping projects for decolonization, demilitarization, and Kanaka Maoli self-determination” (186).

In my experience with WVWS, I have also felt that multidirectional genealogizing is one of the most revolutionary and transformative methods to create international decolonial solidarity. Since the group’s first trip to the Philippines in 2004, WVWS has taken small delegations of women to San Francisco, Vieques, Guahan, and Okinawa, to meet with other delegations in the International Women’s Network Against Militarism. Each trip has been a combination of learning from grassroots efforts, dialoguing with women leaders from other nations, and often a physical return of members of WVWS to ancestral land. In an article I coauthored with WVWS members Ellen-Rae Cachola and Tina Grandinetti, we reflect on this experience as an “ʻāina-centered framework of solidarity” that is rooted in what we’ve learned from mālama and aloha ʻāina movements back home, as well as from more deeply exploring our particular genealogical responsibilities and connections elsewhere. As we reflect in that piece:

Rather than flattening our differences, ʻāina-based solidarity demands we act on the kuleana that grows out of our complicated and tangled relationships to places that feed us. We learned that genealogy is an intimate, visceral, and reciprocal process, and exploring, carrying, and politicizing these tough contradictions is what deepens our ability to do transformative community work. Like the back-and-forth exchange of breathing, we travel to refuse the violent ways we are
connected and instead bring the power of our genealogies with us to activate new connections that sustain each other’s life. As Aunty Terri shared on our February 2018 WVWS huaka‘i to Pōhakuloa: “We have to huaka‘i so we can haku our struggles together.” Haku, a verb to weave or braid, as a lei for a beloved person or place, reminds us that this process of solidarity—of connecting with each other—is not just a strategy to win, but also a way of increasing meaning and love in our lives. Moreover, we understand our value in this struggle as non-Kānaka, as diverse and scarred, as we each hold ‘āina dear to us that we refuse to let go.

(Cachola et. al., 91)

Demilitarization work in Hawai‘i has taught me a lot about radical interdependency, and the care with which we can treat each other. Through having to deal head-on with violence and destruction on massive and individual scales, life-or-death stakes of ‘āina and people, we learn courage and how sacred life is. From the work of many women and queer women leaders, we are reminded that the personal is political and that the work to root out violence, patriarchy, and colonialism in every relationship and aspect of our lives is ongoing. From international relationships and strategy we learn how necessary huaka‘i and connections are to truly achieve peace and hope in any one place. A process of solidarity based on huaka‘i can be the hua for a deeper decolonial community-building. Because of these experiences with demilitarization, I understand building decolonial community as building trust and care among multiple peoples and ‘āina.

Turning to Pacific Islands (mostly literary) scholarship can offer a wealth of metaphors and models with which broaden an understanding of huaka‘i solidarity. This is a key pressure
point in the decolonial work to see Hawai‘i not as the 50th state of the US, but as a Pacific Island, connected historically, culturally, spiritually to other islands and peoples in the Pacific.

An essay and concept that has made a huge impact on Pacific Studies and Pacific literary studies is Tongan-Fijian anthropologist and artist Epeli Hau‘ofa’s “Our Sea of Islands.” Writing back against the idea of islands being tiny insignificant dots scattered and alone in a huge ocean, Hau‘ofa turns to Pele (he had been visiting Hawai‘i Island) and epic Pacific mo‘olelo to combat the defeat in “my students’ faces,” and to posit a vast sea of interconnected islands, to show his students that “their world was anything but tiny” (31). This kind of rhetoric was important for Pacific literary studies in the 1970s and 1980s publishing the first Indigenous-led anthologies, to legitimate and establish themselves against colonial literary traditions, and “inside/out” debates. In political movements like the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific of the early 1980s, and the international Pacific women’s movement to denuclearize, it became important strategically for different islands to band together to make PI voices more audible in an international arena (like the United Nations) and to stand up to politically powerful countries and militaries.28 To Hau‘ofa, an important concept of being a connected Pacific Islander was the ability and practice of (ordinary people) traveling between islands, keeping relationships (and economies) alive. This aspect of Hau‘ofa’s idea is a rich one that connects to the concept of huaka‘i, pointing to a continuous movement that decolonial community-building may require.

Māori literary scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville, in her 2012 monograph Once Were Pacific: Māori Connections to Oceania, talks about the difficulty under the New Zealand settler colonial government for Indigenous and immigrant Pacific peoples to talk to and relate to each other. They are often positioned in relation to the nation state, and in competition and strife for

28 See for example Pacific Women Speak Out for Independence and Denuclearization, edited by Zole de Ishtar, to see the rhetoric of the only way to fight the US is by joining together.
scarce resources (175). Te Punga Somerville turns to literature and history to show the deeper familial relationships between Pacific peoples, of “this huge family in search of one another” (81–84). This model of solidarity is about shifting the focus away from the oppressor, and returning and “re-remembering” our genealogies and relations that have been obscured by colonialism.

In the 2007 (started in 2000) anthology *Women Writing Oceania: Weaving the Sails of Vaka*, editors Kēhaulani Kauanui and Caroline Sinavaiana delve into the wisdom of vaka to describe relations throughout the Pacific. Intending to show a continuous women-led literary tradition, they highlight ancient and powerful women akua voyagers like Pele, Nafanua, and Nei Nimanoa. They ask us to think about the labor of women weaving sails that creates mobility, dialogue with the wind and atmospheric gods, and that moves our communities into the future (Sinavaiana 5–6). The elements of time and spirituality and material labor are important specifics that Hau‘ofa does not mention in his metaphor of navigation, and are aspects to think about in a huaka‘i solidarity.

These metaphors of travel and memory come together in an essay published in *The Value of Hawai‘i* 2, in 2014, by Kanaka ‘Ōiwi navigator Bonnie Kahape‘a-Tanner. Kahape‘a-Tanner writes about the importance of Oceanic (re)connections in order to recover local ancestral knowledge. She recounts the famous example of Hawaiian traditional navigation being revived and retaught by “Papa” Mau Piailug, a navigator from Satawal. A student of Papa Mau, she emphasizes the sacrifices Papa Mau made to teach Kānaka—ostracizing himself and his children from his own community and breaking cultural protocol in order to pass these traditions on. Kahape‘a-Tanner emphasizes a key lesson of the wa‘a: “You are together, and you have to rely on one another for everyone to be safe and to make the journey” (175). This model teaches me to
ask how huakaʻi solidarity is about how we need each other to make our journeys, and also how
to remember and acknowledge the gifts and sacrifices that people made who came before us, and
as Kahapeʻa puts it, “our kuleana to ask ourselves how we are going to live differently because
of it” (177). We hold kīpuka for each other that can help us remember ourselves.29 I think also of
the 2014 Pacific literary anthology Huihui: Navigating Art and Literature in the Pacific, where
editors Jeffrey Carroll, Brandy Nālani McDougall, and Georganne Nordstrom posit the
relationship of huihui, which they define as mixed (defying linearity and development) but also a
constellation (1–2) that we can be nourished and navigate by (12). We remain distinct as stars in
the sky, but need each other and each other’s ancestral wisdom, to find our way.

On March 1, 2018, I helped organize a Pacific Islands student panel called “Island
Soldiers: Living with Militarization in Micronesia” at UH Mānoa. As the Marianas Club (a UH
Mānoa student organization), we worked together with the student club Micronesia Connections
to explore this question with student speakers from Marshall Islands, Palau, Guåhan, and
Pohnpei: Thinking of your own community, islands, ancestors, and personal life experiences,
what does it mean to continue to live with militarization in Micronesia? As we struggled to think
about our shared and coerced participation in militarization, Carol Ann Carl offered the wisdom
of Nelson Mandela: that to speak to a person’s heart, one must speak to them in their own
language. In her community work, she wished for Ponapeans to spend less time learning English,
and more time learning many other different Pacific languages. This is a vision of being together
that pushes against the potential sameness of solidarity, into a world of abundance and
multilingual community connection. We can become fluent in each other’s resurgence and
cultural revitalization work, turning to each other to better return to our own sources.

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29 I explore this more in my poetry blog post with Lia Maria Barcinas, titled “Gathered by Plants: Some Decolonial
Love Letters.”
These metaphors of movement and connection from the Pacific are just starting places for us to think about the many ways we can describe our relationships to each other in a huakaʻi solidarity. They point toward deep wealth, world-enlargement, memory, roots/routes, and interdependence. They ask for vast connection alongside deep specificity and difference. We are called into being islanders in relation to each other.

I will always remember with gratitude the time that, through mutual friends, Teresia Teaiwa came to my house to watch some Pacific cinema. It was such an honor to have this beloved Oceanic scholar and poet, of demilitarization, independence, feminism, be near enough to touch. I wanted to learn from this fierce and compassionate poet, whose collection of poems, *Nei Nimaʻnoa*, had given me so much courage and compassion in my own journey to find my writing and my ancestors. I finally mustered the courage to ask for advice about bringing community together to talk about something as polarizing and contentious as demilitarization. How do you do it? Teresia described to me community meetings with military personnel and veterans and civilians—about saving a threatened area, or military training, or base expansion, or something else contested. “The first question is: what do you love about this place?” she said. That question sets the tone, redirects people from fighting with each other. Instead, everyone can feel and focus on the future they want, the thing they want to protect. This advice she gave me was firmly planted, and has continued to grow in me as a tenet of what decolonial community-building is—to work for decolonization while drawing strength and insight from the ʻāina and people you love. Our activism and transformation is not fed primarily by our anger and pain or even a shared enemy, but by our care for and reclaiming of our ancestors, our lands, and each

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30 Mahalo Tagi Qolouvaki and Christine Lipat.
other. The next section of this chapter describes love as a guiding principle of this decolonial community-building.

**Some warnings about love & colonization**

Settler colonial theory is highly suspicious of love and other feelings that an uneasy settler might rely upon to lay claim to contested homeland. As Stephen Turner describes in his 2002 personal narrative / literary criticism essay on being a Pakeha settler on Māori homeland in “Being Colonial/Colonial Being,” settler stories and bodies exist on an “unstable ground” and troubled by mysterious tapu. The “settler self is built on shame,” which the settler often responds to with attempts to cover over the brokenness between past and place (49). Turner warns against one settler strategy to heal this brokenness: through proving “real feeling for the place and indigenous people,” which might “entitle” someone to claim Indigenous identity or belonging (50).

Tuck and Yang, in “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” warn against “settler moves to innocence” as “those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all” (10). Drawing from the work of Frantz Fanon, they emphasize that decolonization has physical material consequences, and that it is work that is unsettling and difficult, with no synonym (3), that requires repatriation of land (7), that will “require a change in the order of the world” (31). Their focus on an “ethics of incommensurability” instead of commonality specifically talks back to rhetorics of settler state-sponsored reconciliation, Third World transnationalisms, critical pedagogy, and slavery abolitionist movements. Tuck and Yang continue: “The answers will not emerge from friendly understanding, and indeed require a dangerous understanding of uncommonality that un-coalesces coalition politics—moves that
may feel very unfriendly” (35).\footnote{What would be a poetics guided by an ethics of incommensurability? “Overlap,” inexorability, pain/grief and refusal to look away or “move to innocence.” Focus on complicity and sharp deep pain. Without relief. Centered on non-equivalence. It might be very suspicious of analogy and metaphor/simile. You’d have to build relationships and make leaps in other ways. The italics section in Tuck and Yang’s essay is a very provocative example of creative writing pedagogy.} In one of the fiercest and most precise lines I have ever seen end a scholarly essay, Tuck and Yang write: “Decolonization offers a different perspective to human and civil rights based approaches to justice, an unsettling one, rather than a complementary one. Decolonization is not an ‘and.’ It is an elsewhere” (36).

Though not engaging with the specific analytical frameworks of settler colonialism, Keiko Ohnuma’s 2008 essay “‘Aloha Spirit’ and the Cultural Politics of Sentiment as National Belonging” holds a similar suspicion of good feelings and love in particular, as ways of avoiding deeper historical and ongoing injustice. She writes: “the signification of aloha eludes us . . . because it has served to obscure a history of traumatic meanings, all carrying political investments that remain hidden beneath the seemingly transparent universality of such private sentiments as love and kindness” (366). The perceived ability of “aloha spirit” to cover over differences became particularly important in the political transition to statehood and the concomitant burst in the mass tourism industry (370), and in the rise of immigrant local Asians to political power (376). Though Ohnuma briefly considers the politicization of aloha through the resonance of “aloha ʻāina” in 1970s Hawaiian activist movements, she ultimately argues that aloha cannot sustain revolutionary change, because “where one stands in relationship to belonging in Hawaiʻi is negotiated through feeling” and individual choice, not through carefully facing and working through historical trauma (383). This concern about aloha continues to be relevant today, as our settler state continues to position Hawaiian sovereignty critics as threats to the happiness and well-being of our hard-won multicultural paradise.
Many writers have addressed the problem of aloha as co-opted by the State and exploited most clearly in our mass tourism economy. Those who write about the intersections of Indigeneity, gender, and sexuality offer the most incisive critique of aloha as love. Haunani-Kay Trask’s “‘Lovely Hula Hands’: Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture” is one landmark essay on the feminization and sexualization of Hawaiian culture in a colonial economy. More recently, Stephanie Nohelani Teves’s Defiant Indigeneity: The Politics of Hawaiian Performance distinguish between “the spirit of aloha” and the Aloha State apparatus—forced regulated performances of aloha within the tourism industry—and aloha as social connection and committed familial relationship among Kanaka, land, and others.

Both of these critics stand fiercely in aloha despite attempts to appropriate and dilute this concept. Haunani-Kay Trask’s “Writing in Captivity: Poetry in a Time of Decolonization” describes a decolonizing poetics as encompassing both rage and rapture, resistance and celebration in a larger “Hawaiian revival in the language, the arts, and most visibly, in the struggle for our mother, the land” (Inside Out 18). Trask finds love central to her own poetics, as long as it can be both “a furious, but nurturing, aloha for Hawai‘i” (Inside Out 20). She describes:

In my own work, resistance to the strangulation of our people and culture is interwoven with a celebration of the magnificence of our nation: the lavish beauty of our delicate islands; the intricate relationship between our emotional ties to one another and our ties to the land; the centuries-old ways of caring for the ʻāina (land), the kai (sea), and, of course, the mana (spiritual power) that is generated by human beings in love with, and dependent upon, the natural world. (19)
In the context of the ongoing destruction and desecration of Kanaka lands and ways of life, she continues: “Finally, rage is entangled with rapture, with spiritual and emotional possession by the beauty of our islands, the beauty that is only here, in Hawaii. The beauty that is, for our people, a belongingness no settler can ever truthfully claim. This *aloha* for our beautiful land and its many sacred places is born of our ancient knowledge of the divinity of our home, Hawai’i” (19).

In her writing on Indigenous activism and settler allyship around missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, Rachel Flowers also insists upon the importance of anger and rage within a resistant form of love. She writes: “I am concerned with the effects of the increasingly common tendency to conflate Indigenous women’s resistance with love. While I do not reject love, I question the discursive separation of love from anger and the triumphalist narrative of love. Finally, I hope to reclaim space for Indigenous women’s rage, orienting it around a refusal to forgive, as informing an anticolonial approach to disrupting forms of violence and domination that reify settler colonialism” (33). Flowers critiques the way love has been coopted by the settler state and other violent heteronormative and misogynist hegemonies. For example, she writes—

Increasingly, antiviolence demonstrations and organizing around missing and murdered Indigenous women are adopting the language of love and emphasizing that these women were mothers, sisters, aunties, and daughters, and also students or professionals. While the intention is to remind the public that these women are valued, the effect of the reminders to recuperate the humanity of these women

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32 Flowers continues: “our love often does not extend into the colonial sector; our love is reserved for one another. Indeed, Indigenous women commonly experience depression and sadness as an entirely reasonable response to the heteropatriarchal colonial violence in our everyday lives. Often our love and positions we hold in the community make us targets of colonial violence; ultimately, our resentment and anger are in response to the modes of gendered colonial violence that exploit our love” (40).
also functions to devalue women who may live on the margins or are involved in sex work and therefore deemed “vulnerable” and “at risk.” Certainly, for families of missing or murdered loved ones, these memorials and protests are a space for grief and love for our sisters; but make no mistake, we are also angry. Our resistance is written in both rage and love. (40)

Flowers extends her critique and caution to other Indigenous women in movement-building work, warning folks away from narrations of transcendent linear love, where Indigenous women “are trapped in ‘frustrated anger’ until we reach a redemptive stage of ‘empowering loving action.’” (41). In a passage that reminds me very much of Trask, Flowers puts love and anger in generative relationship with each other:

When the dehumanization of all Indigenous peoples is accepted as normal, especially aimed at the minds and bodies of Indigenous women through continued land dispossession and violence, it is unrealistic for settler society to expect us to forgive let alone love. In those moments when we come together in protest or in remembrance for our sisters (and brothers and non-binary relations) our anger is not abandoned, our resentment is not relinquished; it is because of our profound love for one another and our lands that we are full of rage. (40–41)

She maintains refusal as an ethical and reasonable response to the untenable situation of the ones suffering the most violence to also be expected or pressured to offer generosity, forgiveness, or absolution. The warnings here about love under colonization help protect the wild and revolutionary power of love from the violences of misogyny, heteropatriarchy, and settler colonialism. In the next section we will turn to a lehulehu of community-engaged writers who testify to the necessity of rich Indigenous concepts of love in decolonization.
Aloha ‘āina

I learned slowly about the transformative and worldmaking power of aloha ‘āina through befriending and being surrounded by Kānaka and non-Kānaka dedicated to restoring lo’i kalo, loko i’a, caring for wao nahele, mauna, wai, puna, kai, alahele, manu, i’a, la’au, keiki, and practicing lomi, la’au lapa‘au, ho‘oponopono, hānau, ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. As an MA student, I developed a relationship with mālama ‘āina site and program Ho‘oulu ‘Āina, and the stories from Kalihi, ‘Ouaua, and Māluawai shared with me by the kia‘i there set the foundation for my continued learning about aloha ‘āina—about reciprocity, listening, commitment, abundance, and transformation.33

More than an individual feeling, aloha ‘āina has long sustained collective political struggles for sovereignty, demilitarization, and environmental justice in Hawai‘i. Political historians like Noenoe Silva have worked to document this value in nineteenth-century struggles for the sovereignty of the Hawaiian kingdom. She writes about aloha ‘āina being similar to but not analogous to the idea of patriotism. Additionally, it is bound up in Hawaiian worldviews of care and kuleana that rely on sovereignty to be realized. Reflecting on Hawaiian statesman Joseph Nāwahī’s writings about aloha ‘āina in the Hawaiian-language newspaper Ke Aloha ‘Āina, Silva insists upon this practical politicization of aloha ‘āina: “Aloha ‘āina, then, meant more than an abstract or emotional love for the ‘one hānau” (birth sands). For Nawahī and the other po‘e aloha ‘āina, it meant that people must strive continuously to control their own government in order to provide life to the people and to care for their land properly” (142). Aloha ‘āina also connects us to the 1970s political struggle to stop US military bombing

33 I will always remember how Puni Jackson put it to me—how they see people come to Ho‘oulu Aina and marvel at ‘āina, but then as the relationship grows people’s perspectives change, from “wow this is so amazing,” to “I feel ‘āina cultivating my best gift. How can I continue to cultivate that, to give back?”
exercises on Kahoʻolawe. The moʻolelo of a handful of young twenty-something activists being able to successfully stand up to the mighty US military through dedication and using their bodies to occupy that land remains a deeply compelling story for my generation. As “aloha ʻāina warrior” Walter Ritte, Jr. explains, central to that struggle was aloha ʻāina and the realization that “the military couldn’t deal with love” (Moʻolelo Aloha ʻAina).34

Aloha ʻāina also continues to be central and nourishing to educational revitalization work. In their writing about Hawaiian charter school Hālau Kū Māna, Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua mā reflect on some of the challenges and joys of practicing aloha ʻāina with young students today. They argue that a multi-directional approach is necessary, one that foregrounds physical hana with the land and students learning and feeling their genealogical connection to land and kalo. Caring for the land helps the HKM community develop love for it, but a love that requires responsibility, commitment, and a recognition of the interconnectedness between the health of the land and the health of the community. “In the way we contextualize this concept for our students, we are the ʻāina too. Mālama ʻāina extends beyond the confines of the land itself and can be interpreted as taking care of your own health, securing the well-being of your family and friends, and participating in the protection and care of your community” (173). This love demands action to protect the land and its cultivation. Markedly different from the “no-place” of Chela Sandoval’s theorization of a revolutionary love,35 aloha ʻāina draws its meaning from being grounded in place and from reciprocal ongoing care flowing between place and people. As

34 See also Nā Wahine Koa for much more on aloha in the struggle for Kahoʻolawe.

35 In her chapter on love in the Methodology of the Oppressed, Sandoval uses Roland Barthes to talk about love as a “punctum” that can transgress boundaries and plunge subjects out of “reality” and into a freefall place of possibility. This focus on the coatlicue state as the place of possibility has less purchase in Indigenous studies, which values instead knowledge and relationship with specific land and genealogy.
Kanaka environmental scientist and leimaker Mehana Blaich Vaughan elegantly describes her research methodology: “ʻāina as source, ʻāina as people, and ʻāina as ongoing connection and care” (Vaughan 45).

Though some scholars define a “settler aloha ʻāina” I will diverge here because from my experience I find that aloha ʻāina itself exceeds settler colonialism in every way. Instead of distinguishing between kinds of aloha ʻāina, I find it more productive to better learn the modes of reckoning with positionality and genealogy already built into these Kanaka concepts. For example, in a grassroots pedagogy for ea developed by the Kanaka-led collective MANA (Movement for Aloha No ka ʻĀina) they take participants through a reflective exercise to explore one’s own kuleana in relation to a diverse group of others. Participants stand in a circle and step closer or farther to the center depending on their answers to certain questions about generational relationship, everyday intimate knowledge of specific ʻāina, etc. This exercise is not designed to define or fix kinds of kuleana, but to show the richness in the concept of kuleana itself. The vast array of kinds of relationships and responsibilities in the group, depending on different positionalities, opens up productive questions to discuss and guide individual action (MANA, Movement Building for Ea). I see aloha ʻāina, like kuleana here, as a moving concept, defined and affirmed through ongoing action and commitment individually and collectively with community and ʻāina.

Decolonial love

Aloha ʻāina is a vast world of its own that encompasses dedicated relationship with place and Kānaka, and a political commitment to ea. I hope that the love we practice within Nā Hua Ea nurtures and plants seeds for aloha ʻāina. I also want to distinguish between the broader decolonizing work of Nā Hua Ea and how I understand aloha ʻāina as a more committed and
community-engaged practice in Hawai‘i. Decolonization is a desire and action to understand and undo the violence of colonization in many aspects of our lives. Deep love and relationship with ‘āina, to me, is something earned and cultivated over time. As Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua writes in *The Seeds We Planted*, an “ʻāina-based literacy” includes physical presence, learning oli, and learning moʻolelo, such that the relationship is reciprocal, where the land also recognizes you. As a collective, Nā Hua Ea does not have that depth of relationship with ʻāina or an ongoing practice of physical hana or mālama ʻāina, although I believe we all hold aloha ʻāina as something to strive for, and individuals may have that relationship in their own lives.

In this dissertation, I would like to draw attention to another kind of love that helps me think about building decolonial community. “Decolonial love” encompasses a growing body of work led by largely queer Indigenous scholars and artists. As I understand it, this concept one, holds resolutely to both love and decolonization. It is not looking for equality or recognition under settler colonial nations. Two, decolonial love invites internal community reflection on difference, by focusing on queerness, the erotic, and desire, and how these ways of living have been colonized even within Indigenous communities. Three, this body of work draws on a specific genealogy of queer Third World women theorizing, and within this community, there are provocative and important ways of talking about difference and connection across difference.

Decolonial love rushes the violent boundaries of patriarchy, Christian heteronormativity, and the nuclear family, positing queer Indigenous love as a radical source of power to remember and reclaim. “Decolonial love” uplifts the pleasure and love for our own Indigenous worldviews, practices, families, and communities as foundational to resistance and refusal. Anishinaabe scholar and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s 2013 collection of stories/essays/poems titled *Islands of Decolonial Love* helped to seed the idea of “decolonial love” across many Indigenous
communities. For Simpson, decolonial love is an expression of political resurgence, as opposed to reconciliation with a settler colonial state. In *Dancing On Our Turtle’s Back*, Simpson defines colonialism as death, and resurgence as what can “create more life, propel life, nurture life, motion, presence, and emergence” (143). She argues that often social movement theory will look for marches and court cases and legal battles, missing the hard-to-record resistance of living a good life in the face of genocide (*Dancing on our Turtle’s Back*). Simpson and other Indigenous scholars contributing to the work of resurgence insist that we cannot just focus on reforming existing violent systems, but we living out alternatives in relation to our ancestors and each other.

This intimacy and inward-facing aspect of decolonial love is described by Simpson in a 2016 interview after the publication of *Islands*:

> The idea of decolonial love comes from Junot Díaz, but we have different ideas of what this means. One of the most evil parts of colonialism is that its violence infiltrates and encodes itself into our most intimate relationships – the damage of colonialism plays out in our relationships with the people we love the most. Decolonial love refuses that, and generates a series of radical attachments, empathys and compassions *as practices*, in the face of ongoing violence, based on the ways love is conceptualized and practices within for me Nishnaabewin. (Simpson, interview with Shannon Webb-Campbell)

In this same interview, Simpson describes resurgent storytelling as not “healing,” but refusal and creation: “I am interested in processing the trauma of ongoing colonialism, so that I can continue to refuse it and to generate within my own life, family and community a nation that my ancestors would recognize as their own. My ancestors are right here, with me, with those yet
unborn, and our job is to generate a Nishnaabeg present. The spiritual world is at the base of that. I’m interested in having a profound relationship with that world, but I’m not interested in healing.” This reframing by Simpson is an example of how, for her, decolonial love is about centering Indigenous knowledge and thinking, instead of centering the traumatic experience of colonialism.

Kim Tallbear is another Indigenous scholar creating space for a growing body of work on decolonial sexualities. She has turned to writing about love, sex, and intimacy as a way of understanding compulsory monogamy, state-sanctioned marriage, and other settler cultural practices as colonizing Indigenous bodies and biologies. As the formerly anonymous Critical Polyamorist, Tallbear has created an introduction to “sexual sovereignty and decolonizing relationships on her blog The Critical Polyamorist (see in particular the page titled “Links: Decolonial Relations”), which began in 2013 and continues until today. Tallbear has also collaborated with others to create the live storytelling and revue show Tipi Confessions, highlighting “Indigenous, decolonial, humourous, creative, feminist, queer, and/or educational perspectives,” and reminding us that “sex is always political” (“About the Show,” Tipi Confessions). The following quote from “Critical Poly 100s,” a collection of 100-word writings on critical polyamory, offers some rich thought in thinking about the ethics of traversing diversity and connection:

In my Indigenous and Dakota translation, polyamorous multiplicity is not only about human relations. It is an ethic that also focuses on multiple relations with place, and values the hard work of relating to and translating among different knowledges. In my ways of relating with human, earthly, and conceptual loves, I reject the usual definition of “promiscuity” as random and indiscriminate. In my
redefinition, "promiscuous" is to seek abundance through partial connections. It is openness to multiple human loves, and/or to deep connection with other-than-humans, with the lands and waters of our hearts, and with different knowledge forms and approaches that enable us to flourish as Indigenous Peoples. (*The Critical Polyamorist*)

Gwen Benaway’s 2017 group profile of emerging Indigenous queer and two-spirit artists, titled “Decolonial love: these Indigenous artists are taking back the self-love colonialism stole,” defines “decolonial love” as a healing force directed towards the queer Indigenous self. Benaway writes: “To put decolonial love into everyday language, it is learning to love each other and ourselves without the burden of racism, sexism, transphobia or homophobia.” Nehiyaw-Saulteaux-Métis artist and curator Lindsay Nixon, shared: "I need decolonial love to heal myself, even from my own community, to envisage an Indigenous world, Indigenous possibility, that is gentler, kinder. I need decolonial love to quite literally love my body back to life" (Benaway). The poem “sacred” by acclaimed poet and scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt, of the Driftpile Cree Nation, is for me another powerful example of the difficult stories decolonial love explores. The poem ends:

and i think about the time an elder told me to be a man and to decolonize in the same breath. there are days when i want to wear nail polish more than i want to protest. but then i remember that i wasn’t meant to live life here and i paint my nails because 1) it looks cute and 2) it is a protest. and even though i know i am too queer to be sacred anymore, i dance that broken circle dance because i am still waiting for hands who want to hold mine too. (*Nakinisowin*)

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36 First published as a blog post, this poem is also in Belcourt’s amazing poetry book *The Wound is a World.*
Queer Indigenous writers at the forefront of defining and practicing decolonial love are grappling with tough questions about identity and belonging, and bring to this challenge the courage to look critically at our own communities and intimate desires.

Many who are writing about decolonial love today draw from Third World queer women’s writing and scholarship about the erotic and its revolutionary power. Reclaiming our own feelings in the face of genocide, slavery, and environmental destruction has long been a wisdom carried by women of color fighting for their lives. In her book *Medicine Stories: History, Culture, and the Politics of Integrity*, Aurora Levins Morales puts this insistence at the center of overturning the violence of capitalism, militarism, and patriarchy:

To shamelessly insist that our bodies are for our own delight and connection with others clearly defies the predatory appropriations of incestuous relatives and rapists; but it also defies the poisoning of our food and water and air with chemicals that give us cancer and enrich the already obscenely wealthy, the theft of our lives in harsh labor, our bodies used up to fill bank accounts already bloated, the massive abduction of our young people to be hurled at each other as weapons for the defense and expansion of those bank accounts—all the ways in which our deep pleasure in living has been cut off so as not to interfere with the profitability of our bodies. (119)

Adrienne Marie Brown, a movement organizer with the Ruckus Society and Black Lives Matter, asks even more explicitly about pleasure as a community-building strategy: “How would we organize and move our communities if we shifted to focus on what we long for and love, rather than what we are negatively reacting to? Is it possible for justice and pleasure to feel the same way in our collective body?” Brown and Levins Morales are both drawing from a genealogy of
love and activism lived and theorized by women of color, where healing and strengthening the traumatized, oppressed self is at the center of the process of social change.37

A mother source in these lines of thought is “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” by Audre Lorde, where Lorde reclaims the erotic from the pornographic, as a deep and full feeling that arises from within and empowers us to question the boundaries of our docile and obedient lives. In a racist, homophobic, misogynist society, the erotic is “a question of how acutely and fully we [and for Lorde in particular women] can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors brings us closest to that fullness. The aim of each thing which we do is to make our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible” (54–55).

Lorde chooses to highlight joy as a way of sharing deeply with another: “the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference” (56). An ethics of courageous vulnerability guides Lorde’s erotic, to be “brave enough to risk sharing the erotic’s electrical charge without having to look away, and without distorting the enormously powerful and creative nature of that exchange” (59). Taken into community practice, these queer women of color theorists offer rich contributions to models of decolonial love and decolonial community-building.

I find it inspiring to think about how these insights about love were created in transgressive and collaborative spaces of queer women of color and Indigenous women in deep relationship with each other. Beth Brant and Deborah Miranda were part of groups that put out anthologies like This Bridge Called My Back, and part of the workshops, teach-ins, protests,

37 See also Alexis Pauline Gumbs on “revolutionary mothering.”
retreats, and other gatherings that created deep relationship and radical writing and art among all these women. Indigenous scholars and writers today continue to quote Lorde and others. These explorations of love continue to circulate and spark in nonlinear and emergent ways.

I have a memory from my own activist work when I felt the energy of diverse, collective, revolutionary love. In our final press conference in Okinawa after a week of participating in an international women’s demilitarization gathering (June 25th, 2017), Gwyn Kirk, IWNAM co-founder and member of Women for Genuine Security, shared the following words, reflecting on the past twenty years of the network: “we maintained personal relationships and connected to each other’s hearts as women.” As a first-time participant in the IWNAM meeting, I found the gathering unlike anything I had experienced before. Never before had I seen women, and largely women of color, from such different cultural and national backgrounds come together with such deep regard and commitment to each other’s healing. For years, I felt my activist work was about bridging my own multiple roots and allegiances. I had often come to bridging with hesitation or anxiety, yet have found resolve through those obstacles. The final night of the conference, in a tiny restaurant in Naha, we danced for hours, taking turns teaching each other different ways to move our bodies in protest and celebration. We smiled and held each other and teased each other into motion—these same women who had dedicated their lives to voicing and healing stories of unspeakable violence. For a good hour, there was no music besides our hearts and voices. This was the first time I had experienced the collective and conscious exuberance of joy in the face of deep pain. Let me remember this forever, I thought. This is what freedom feels like.

A growing number of Kanaka scholars are increasingly weaving together aloha ‘āina and decolonial love in stunning ways. Kahala Johnson, Māhealani Ahia, Jamaica Heolimeleikalani

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38 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s work on the Combahee River Collective is one example of someone documenting these friendships and collective moments, and their importance to movement building.
Osorio, and No‘u Revilla, for example, regularly present on queerness, desire, Hawaiian language, and moʻolelo. For example, on February 22, 2018, Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio presented a talk at UH Mānoa titled “(Re)membering ‘Upena of Intimacies: A Kanaka Maoli Moʻolelo Beyond Queer Theory” where she said that studying pilina (particularly the moʻolelo of Hiʻiaka, Hopoe, and Pele) in the rich archives of Kanaka moʻolelo, show that pleasure and kuleana are inextricable, that intimacy with land teaches us intimacy with each other, and that “ea requires healing our pilina.” In her dissertation defense in May 2018, Osorio argued that it is aloha ‘āina that connects this rich and diverse net of pilina and kuleana. She went on to say: “what we are harvesting in the ‘upena is possibility beyond my imagination. That is what will feed us.” Beyond the academy, kiaʻi, lovers, poets, and farmers also theorize and live out aloha ‘āina and decolonial love together.

How does decolonial love show up in the genre of poetry and in the practice of writing poetry? In this final section, I will turn to Indigenous literary scholars writing about the power of love. Deborah Miranda draws on Audre Lorde’s “Poetry is not a Luxury” and “Uses of the Erotic” to argue that the erotic is a dangerous and powerful force in American Indian women’s literature that should be paid more attention to. She argues, “Love poetry and erotics, however, are a kind of ‘elite’ [on par with Western philosophy] literacy that express truly consequential discourses about power, souls, well-being, and the transformational aspects of relationships based not only on injustice and trauma, but on celebration of pleasure and our humanity” (146). Like other thinkers I recount here, she describes the erotic as a refusal and creation. Miranda reads a poem by Chrystos, and writes that the erotic works “not to punish but to ignore patriarchal presence by allowing the erotic to acknowledge itself. By doing this, the lover makes

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See for example Ruth Aloua on Instagram @lovelikeaina
herself visible and patriarchal culture suddenly invisible. In that instant, as she creates herself, each lover grasps what Lorde calls the power of the erotic, and what I suggest here to be more specifically the power to create, to become visible, and become the creator of her own visibility—to assert presence in a physical, historical and political sense” (143–44). Important for this dissertation about not just texts but the writing process, the poetics of decolonial love that Miranda describes is affirming and transformative for the writer as well as the reader. 

Waaseyaa’sin Christine Sy offers insight into the impact of decolonizing on the experience of writing poetry. She narrates her journey of decolonization along three main themes: her experience of reconnection to language, Indigenous and two-spirit erotica, and validating dreaming and other Indigenous sources of knowledge. Sy talks about the feeling of “joy” to get to a point of language learning where she could use Anishinaabemowin without consulting a dictionary—to “pull an ancestral word out of my body in the act of naming something” (189). When writing and reading erotic poetry, she describes the feeling as one of “possibility and permission” to explore an erotic voice and consciously write literature that “generates imaginative space (not exclusive, status quo space)” (192). And when talking about accepting dreaming as a mode of communication, she writes about feeling “insight” and “ease” with which to engage with deep sources of power, where knowledge is not immediately apparent but unfolds over a lifetime. Sy reminds me that it is important to listen to your own pleasure in the experience of decolonization, as this feeling helps to sustain our growth on this path. 

I learn from scholars like Brandy Nālani McDougall that a poetics of decolonial love is active and can transcend time and generation. In her book, Finding Meaning: Kaona and Contemporary Hawaiian Literature, McDougall argues that aesthetics are valuable as a political tool for sovereignty, in the ways they can create a map to Kanaka Maoli perceptions of “beauty,
power, excellence, and pleasure” crucial to decolonial struggle (44–45). She breaks down boundaries of the English term “aesthetic,” offering a range of provocative Hawaiian-language approximations and proverbs around pono (balanced, right), nani (beautiful), ‘ono (delicious, craving), liʻu (well-seasoned), and ‘ala (fragrance) [glosses are hers] that proliferate methods of engaging with the richness of the text.

She stresses the active process of reading or experiencing literature through describing the dynamism of kaona. Kaona is often defined simplistically as a literary device of “hidden meaning” or “wordplay” in Hawaiian literature. Kaona is a unique Hawaiian cultural practice, McDougall retorts, a method and communication “of hiding and finding meaning through analogy, allegory, and figuration” and “found and received across time and space” (25). She guides us through multiple readings of each text in the book, pointing out how meaning morphs depending on the sociopolitical context of the encounter, of the unique relationship between each writer and reader, how the hiding and finding activates us and brings enjoyment. How the hiding and finding is part of the decolonial process of reconnection: “as our kūpuna [elders, ancestors] knew, we learn and remember knowledge more deeply when we have been given the opportunity to reflect, make connections to our lives, and arrive at the knowledge ourselves (51).

These invigorating and inspiring connections across generations are made possible through love. As Daniel Heath Justice writes in Why Indigenous Literatures Matter, love is:

the binding cord that links us to the world, and from it come all the other meaningful connections between the ancestors and descendants of generations to come: respect, reciprocity, accountability, commitment, generosity. Connection through relationship. It’s not easy; it’s messy, and painful, and uncomfortable. It

40 McDougall cites Kanaka literary scholar Māhealani Dudoit to help her revalue aesthetics in terms of functionality, and what it can do (47)
calls us to be better than we are, to be braver than we expected, in a living world
that bears the memory of who we were and the vision of who we are meant to be.
It asks us to open ourselves to vulnerability—emotional as well as physical—and
to risk the blurring of our boundaries of self in the connection with others. But it
requires action.” (70)

Becoming better relatives, practicing kinship with diverse humans and more-than-humans and
land, is critical to decolonization. What I cherish here is Justice’s insistence that love and kinship
is about showing up daily, and is full of consensual risk and transformative power. Drawing from
his years of research on fantastic and queer Indigenous stories, Justice writes: “We need to make
love, in all its messy complicated diversity, acceptable again. And pleasure. And joy. To speak it,
to celebrate it, to share it, to insist upon it. This, to me, is the heart of decolonization. Love isn’t
saccharine sentiment. It’s not easy answers, or getting along all the time. It’s difficult, and fierce,
and fabulous. It’s fragile, and it’s strong. It sometimes lasts a lifetime, and sometimes it ends, but
it is always—always—ours” (111).

As we think about how to build a diverse decolonial community, Justice reminds us that
story helps to build our empathy, which in turn makes us better relatives: “story helps us to
recognize that others beyond ourselves have identities, desires, loves, fears, and feelings . . . .
The more expansive our imaginations, the deeper our capacity for empathy, and the healthier our

41 “Kinship, like love, like creation, like sex, is a messy thing. It’s about what happens when bodies and
imaginations come together in relationship, when boundaries are breached and something else comes into being, for
good or ill—or sometimes, for both. Kinship is the complex, embodied practice of sovereign belonging. It’s not just
about our ties to one another, but to the willing, intentional re-creation and reaffirmation of those ties in daily
interactions—we choose to be kin, and we’re chosen. . . . Belonging is relational and reciprocal, not unidirectional . .
. . kinship also comes into being through the lived interplay between bodies, minds, and spirits—living, dead, and
other-than-human—and makes possible the living link between the past and the future within the bodies of the
present.” (Justice 104–105).
relationships and communities will likely be” (77). Furthermore, he is interested in stories that push us: “What is clear is that the stories that will make a difference aren’t the easy ones. If they don’t challenge us, confound us, make us uncomfortable or uncertain or humble, then I’m not sure what they offer us in the long run, because to my mind it’s the difficult stories that offer hope of something better” (102). This is a practice of imagination that breaks and remakes the world, of decolonization as, remembering Tuck and Yang, “an elsewhere.”

Drawing from all of the writers in this section I understand decolonial love as a powerful force in building decolonial communities of care and difference. Decolonial love is about recentering Indigenous desires, and taking a hard look at our own communities and ideas of belonging. Decolonial love listens especially for queerness and erotics and joy. Decolonial love sees our intimate relationships with ourselves, our lands, and our communities as ethical practices of political sovereignty. And quite simply, love inspires us to transform. The next chapter will feature the poetry and reflections of some of the writers and performers of Nā Hua Ea. As we continue to explore the questions—what pulls us to come together over difference? What motivates us to change?—these voices offer brilliant insight into the role of creative writing and collective performance in building a diverse decolonial community.

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42 He also reminds us that empathy is hard and scary, especially as kinship obligations expand, “the more important and potentially devastating our individual actions become” (Justice 77).
CHAPTER 3. VOICES FROM NĀ HUA EA

In this chapter I feature poems and interviews from a diverse range of Nā Hua Ea participants, to share their brilliant insights on ea and decolonial community-building. I consider each of these interviewees friends, collaborators, and role models of creativity and community leadership. I feel deeply grateful that each of these interviewees chose to trust me in the interview process, and also stuck with this project through the years it took to write this dissertation. I feel the kuleana of carrying their voices. Truly it is this kuleana that was a main motivation for me to overcome the personal obstacles I had with finishing this dissertation. From first conceiving this writing project, I knew that including many voices from Nā Hua Ea would be critical to more deeply and accurately exploring our collective experience. What I did not expect was how much these voices would care for me and push me in the writing and learning process. In writing these drafts about ea, often I felt carried by them. I feel the life and mana in this dissertation is largely from the wealth of manaʻo shared here.

Interview methodology

I shared with each interviewee the idea for this dissertation, and that I was asking to interview them about their experience of Nā Hua Ea, their reflections on diversity in community building, and their definitions of ea. I also shared with them that these interviews were oral histories in two senses: 1) their identities and life stories and experiences are an important part of these interviews and 2) they would maintain power over the way their stories were told. To this second point, each interviewee agreed to this process: that I would record their interviews for transcription purposes, that I would send them a final transcript, and that they would then have the option to change or remove anything they are not comfortable sharing, or remove their interview from the project entirely. I provided these promises verbally and in writing to them,
and talked with each of them about the potential risk of running into subjects that might feel uncomfortable or painful to discuss. I let them know that they were free to not answer any question they wouldn’t want to, or stop the interview at any time. Each interviewee agreed to this process and approved their final transcripts. In April 2020, I also showed each of them the draft as it appears here, to see if they wanted to make any more edits to their stories after some time has passed. Each of these interviews took between one and two hours, and were conducted in tea shops, offices, and homes (sometimes with keiki running around).

That they all agreed to share their time and personal stories with this project is a testament to their individual commitments to Hawai‘i and to ea and the value they found in their Nā Hua Ea experiences. They all found it meaningful to create a record of their thoughts about this community event. That they all agreed to this project is also a testament to the strength of the personal relationships that exist among us. These relationships grew through our shared experiences of Nā Hua Ea and also exist on their own, through sharing many personal, artistic, political, spiritual experiences together. I do not take these relationships lightly and am honored to live out the kuleana that comes from them.

These interviews were conducted in two rounds. The first round consisted of people involved in the first Nā Hua Ea of July 2014—in both the writing and creating process as well as the performance event. These interviews were conducted in February and March of 2015. These interviewees were Ellen-Rae Cachola, No‘ukahau‘oli Revilla, Grace Alvaro Caligtan, Justin Takaha White, Lyz Soto, Dawn Mahi, Logan Narikawa, and Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada. These interviews were one-on-one except for Dawn and Logan (who wrote a poem together and were interviewed together). In this first batch of interviews, I asked each person to start by reading the poem they had created. They then reflected on lines they thought were most powerful and why,
and from there we went into questions about the writing process, and what was most memorable about the writing and the performance. It felt important to start with the poems as a portal back into Nā Hua Ea as well as an invitation to activate more personal and nonlinear ways of expression in the interview. I asked them how they would define ea in relation to their experiences. I asked them to reflect on some key words of the dissertation at that time: vulnerability, love, decolonial community and decolonial relationship. I also asked them to describe their personal relationship and commitment to Hawai‘i.

After this first round, I sat with their interview transcripts and their poems to see what might emerge in relation to each other. At the time, I was interested in activating a more multidirectional relationship between text and process. I hope I showed in the readings shared here that one can learn a lot more about a poem and a person when the two are put in conversation with each other. In addition to the important stories shared, I think insights about ea and a poetic process of ea emerge in these readings, helpful for literary scholars and teachers.

The second round took place in August 2016, and were interviews done in pairs. These pairs were Noʻu Revilla and Reyna Ramolete, Joy Enomoto and Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, and Noelani Goodyear Kaʻōpua and Mehanaokalā Hind. In this second round we reflected on the Nā Hua Ea of July 2016. Noʻu, Reyna, Jamaica, and Noe were all involved in the writing workshop leading up to the event. Noʻu and Jamaica designed the creative writing part of the workshop, and Noe shared history at that workshop about Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea. At the actual event, Joy shared a powerful unrehearsed and unrecorded speech on the relevance of Black Lives Matter to Hawaiian movements for sovereignty that had the crowd surging. Mehana emceed that event, as she has almost every Nā Hua Ea since its inception, and had written a poem in the moment to share on the spot, in response to listening to the scheduled lineup. In these interviews,
I asked them to describe their relationship and commitment to Hawai‘i. I then asked about the writing workshop (if they participated in it), the poems or speeches they shared and what was most meaningful to them and why, as well as what else about the event was most memorable to them. I asked them to reflect directly on the term “decolonial community,” and bringing diverse people together, as well as what community felt like to them, in Nā Hua Ea. Like the first round, I asked them to describe what ea means to them in relation to their Nā Hua Ea experience.

In working with this second round of transcripts, I wanted to try exploring more collaboratively what ea and community means. I was interested not just in the ideas shared, but how they emerged and changed in exchange among the three of us, as opposed to just an interviewee and interviewer. I hope the excerpts shared here show some of this dynamic, which feels important to document for those practicing the work of community-building.

Like many Indigenous scholars, I have been influenced by the work and academic legacy of Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. In particular, her writing about insider research, a community-action approach, and the importance of process over product. Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that insider researcher must be ethical, respectful, reflexive, critical and “humble, because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships, status and position” (233). She also describes a community action approach, to “assume that people know and can reflect on their own lives, have questions and priorities of their own, and have skills or sensitivities that can enhance (or undermine) any community-based projects” (217). Tuhiwai Smith stresses the importance of thoughtful process to overcome colonial experiences with research as well as to empower our communities beyond the research project. “Processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate. They are expected to lead one small step further towards
self-determination” (218-19). The process of interviewing for this dissertation grew from these kinds of tenets, but could also grow and learn much more from them.

Another example of community and interview-based research that has impacted me is Noelani Goodyear Kaʻōpua’s work *The Seeds We Planted*. I do not achieve anywhere near the fullness of her “portraiture” in the way she tells stories about the haumāna and kumu of the Hawaiian culture-based charter school she continues to care for. But I would like to connect some of what this chapter attempts with her description of “hoʻomana.” Goodyear-Kaʻōpua’s chapter on “Creating Mana Through Students’ Voices” looks at how hula, oli, speeches, and poetry helped to create political and societal change (as pushing against state “safety zones”) as well as simultaneously doing the “personal, political work of confronting the blockages of mana that lay within” students and teachers (219). She defines “hoʻomana” as “practices that open up the mutual flow of mana within a relationship—cultural practices that work toward pono (justice/balance)” (208). I was particularly inspired by the exchange Goodyear-Kaʻōpua recounts between Kumu Dan and Alika, a teacher and student. Through their close relationship and conversation, they were able to explore the teacher’s anxieties around hula being too effeminate, and the student’s fears about not being smart enough to finish his education (221–23). In a mutual relationship and larger cultural and educational context characterized by the action of hoʻomana, Kumu Dan and Alika were able to ask difficult things and listen to each other’s stories, helping each other remove blockages to expression and empowerment. The idea of hoʻomana feels helpful as a way to reflect on the dynamics of the following interviews. It focuses our attention on exchange and flow among people, poems, ʻāina, and ea.

In excerpting all the interviews from round one and two, I focused on a few things. One, thoughts shared on the process of creative writing, not just the final text. Two, thoughts shared
on decolonial community-building, in particular the experience of diversity and difference, the role of love and decolonial love, and the conditions of personal or collective transformation.

Three, I asked each interviewee to define ea, and have shared much of that manaʻo here. The complex multivocal definition of ea shared in this chapter is critical to this dissertation. Collectively, these voices from Nā Hua Ea give an powerful example of how ea is not fixed but lives and emerges in relation and in creative community. In all the interview excerpts in this chapter, [...] denotes me excerpting part of the transcript, whereas “. . .” denotes a pause in the interview.

[“being able to be broken”]

The first Nā Hua Ea poet I’d like to introduce is Ellen-Rae Cachola. Ellen is an activist for demilitarization in Hawaiʻi and the Philippines, leader and co-founder of Oʻahu-based organization Women’s Voices Women Speak, co-founder of the Filipin@ grassroots group Decolonial Pin@ys, ethnic studies teacher and William S. Richardson Law School Library archivist at UH Mānoa. She was raised as a local Ilocana in Maui, and for her entire adult life has fought for demilitarization and genuine security, in close collaboration with Kānaka like Terrilee Kekoʻolani and other women across the world through the International Women’s Network Against Militarism. This demilitarization activist journey has also been a deep personal one for Ellen’s own reconnection with her Filipin@ roots. Ellen has participated in nearly every year of Nā Hua Ea. She has workshopped and written her own poems in collaboration with the larger group and with ‘āina, and she has mourned and testified to deaths of dear friends in our activist community. In this interview reflecting on the first Nā Hua Ea event in 2014 as well as her work to create and lead WVWS retreat in June 2014, Ellen talks about the stress of organizing, and
specifically about the guilt, anger, and silence that can be part of the space of multiethnic
decolonial community:

I wasn’t joyful about it. I don’t know what it was. It felt traumatized by it. I don’t
want to make it sound like a negative thing, but it has been intense for me, the
political work, the decolonizing work. It’s because talking about Filipinos and
Hawaiians meant that the issue of settler colonialism was on my mind. I felt the
guilt, but I knew that I couldn’t be debilitated by it [. . .] But having learned that
concept, it shifted the way that I engaged with Hawaiians. When I was younger, I
had this casualness about how we could relate as friends because we grew up
together in public school and in our families. And when I learned settler
colonialism, I was like “oh shit, those privileges of Asian plantation workers that
Haunani Trask and Candace Fujikane described were true, in my life at least
because my grandparent built our life on Maui because of the job he had at the
Pu‘unēnē sugar plantation mill”. So that shifted me [....] I had to learn how to face
up to the truth of my responsibility to Kānaka, this place and my culture. So this
retreat was trying to address this question: How do we build multiethnic dialogue
about demilitarization in Hawai‘i, in a way that is experiential and gets us to
understand the truth of our positionalities, our responsibilities, our mentalities, our
assumptions? But how can we not let the discomfort, guilt, resentments,
uncertainty, and unknowing define us, but rather, invite us to dig deeper about
ourselves and each other, in a way that connects us to our genealogies of
resistance to militarization across the Pacific? How do we create a deep sense of
love for ourselves and for each other? So the poem I shared at Nā Hua Ea was an invocation because it felt like that whole retreat was a prayer.

At the same time, Ellen maintains the possibility of true wealth in this diverse space, and the possibilities that diasporic and broken peoples bring. She recasts multiethnic settlers as bringing a particular decolonizing energy, saying, “I feel like we’re such bridge builders! And when we are grounded in Hawaiian knowledge or Hawaiian values of self-determination, it calls us to find out and remember our own genealogies to empower and transform ourselves.” This willingness to sit with difficult feelings while holding on to self-love and possibility creates the dynamics for Ellen’s decolonial love.

Turning to Ellen’s poem, “Invocation,” she suggests how poetry can help settlers work through some of these difficult feelings. Place becomes a primary organizing structure of her poem, as Ellen writes about a visit we made during the WVWS retreat, to the burial ground sand dunes of Mōkapu currently occupied by the Marine Corps Base, and the hills and stream of Papahana Kuaola in Heʻeia, where we participated in a mālama ʻāina day. ʻĀina was a space big enough to hold all her complex layers, and powerful enough to help transform her tumult into a commitment to moving forward together. The poem begins and ends with this verse:

Guide us like the curve of the coast
Sharpen us like the tip of a summit
Build our courage to stand
Like mountains that prevent armies to pass
Inspire us like wind that breathe across divisions
Fill us with will to transform relations
Sustain our connections as peoples
Ellen questions what it means to fight by derailing the usual militaristic metaphors. Instead of “sharpening like a spear,” she asks to be as sharp as a mountain summit. This mountain is powerful in its own way; it doesn’t destroy an army, but simply stops it from moving towards its goal. Images and characteristics of ‘āina create a model for peace and demilitarization, both between nations and within Ellen herself. In the middle of her poem, Ellen again redefines what it means to fight:

Like hands clearing the weeds
Uncertainty, assumptions, guilt, binaries
Let the shoots of medicine grow
Recognize there’s a task for each
Answer to your question
Quietly buried
Pluck from the root
Tendrils of truth emerge

The images of hope and healing are small and vulnerable, “shoots, “tendrils,” and earlier in the poem: “tender hands cultivate / fertile hearts in pain.” There is no immediate answer, but a preparation of ground / heart, and a hope that something small will turn into something stronger one day. These notes resonate with Gaztambide-Fernandez’s discussion of solidarity being both relational (Ellen in relation with her feelings and with ‘āina) and transitive (Ellen’s process of transformation). What her poem adds to a model of decolonial solidarity is the assertion that things like care, attention, and patience are what is necessary for this transformative process.

We often call a change or a new idea a “breakthrough” moment. Returning to the interview, Ellen reflects on the experience of not a breakthrough, but of breaking. Talking about
what she personally needs to bring to conversations and work for Hawaiian sovereignty, Ellen shares:

It requires a vigilance in terms of staying clear about who we are. We have to bring all the pieces of who we are to that conversation because we cannot default or fall back on . . . Hawaiians, like, okay, it’s your stuff, so you talk. No. We also have to be vigilant with ourselves because we are all affected by this phenomenon. But then there’s that vulnerability, in terms of being humble about it and not being pulled into politics of supremacy. And it’s also to have the courage to have your heart broken. And to be okay to feel broken, because it means we are changing our minds, growing into something different.

Ellen’s experience and reflection on the creative process of Nā Hua Ea helps me understand that to decolonize we might need a safe space to break, in the swing between vigilance and vulnerability, guilt and self-love. Her story teaches me that in that rough experience, turning to ‘āina can offer medicine and ways to move. Through Nā Hua Ea, Ellen found both safe space in her experience with ‘āina as well as in the experience of performance together.

EC: That event was so powerful because of the people that were in that room. The leaders that were there. The ambience of it. The mana of it. The land that we were on was vibrating and it intensified with all the people that were there [makes loud vibrating noise]. It was intense for me. The intensity, the heart that everybody brought. They brought their whole selves in. And I guess that was what was new space of growth for me. I was still tripping about the idea of Hawaiian sovereignty and can non-Hawaiians participate? Some Hawaiians say no and some say yes. I have been with ones that said no. And so that was my
feeling before, oh I can’t participate and be honest about how I feel, ‘cause that’s not my space. But that’s why it [Nā Hua Ea] was so powerful, because Hawaiians were welcoming non-Hawaiians to be and to share. That was new for me. And the aloha that was there. That was what was powerful. And I think I was struggling with a lot of things because I was bringing my past framework as my reference on how to be in that space.

AY: Based on your experience with this, how would you define ea?

EC: Hmm, ea. Well the breath, I think? That is what I know about it. And there was definitely a shared breath at that place, at Nā Hua Ea, because again, everybody was bringing themselves.

AY: Including you.

“Everyone was bringing themselves,” in other words, ea was fed by a collective intensity. Ellen felt invited and challenged by ‘āina and by Kānaka to bring her whole self. To rise to the breaking open, to rise to the wholeness, to rise to all these scary possibilities is what decolonial community requires.

[“put my mother’s name in your mouth”]

No’ukahau’oli Revilla is a queer Kanaka Maoli poet who was raised in Waiʻehu, Maui. She completed her PhD dissertation on queer Indigenous poetics, and now teaches as an Assistant Professor in the UH Mānoa English Department. Noʻu is well-known in Hawaiʻi and Indigenous poetry circles as a stunning performer, writer, and teacher, always exploring intimacy, risk, and form. Besides teaching at UH Mānoa, Noʻu has taught in community and activist settings in ka pae ‘āina o Hawaiʻi, Papua New Guinea, and beyond, and instigated poetry-activist performances like one in January 2017, in commemoration of Queen Liliʻuokalani (Revilla “Ua
Mohala”). She has been involved with nearly every Nā Hua Ea in some form, sometimes as a teacher, sometimes as a collaborator-performer. The reflections that follow come from the first Nā Hua Ea, in 2014.

In the opening of our interview, Noʻu shares what inspired her poem, “Bathwater.” Like Ellen’s story, she narrates a strong emotional and spiritual response in connection with the ‘āina of Waipao, however, her experience is much more specific, intimate, and familial.

NR: Well before Nā Hua Ea began, the event, we were taken on the ‘āina by ‘Ilima Long and introduced to the various parts of the ‘āina. And we went walking up to meet the po‘owai. And when ‘Ilima spoke about the po‘owai, she mentioned Haumea and Ha‘akolea, and then we went to go see the puna, which is also named Kapuna. And I had thought before the tour of the ‘āina that I was going to write, you know, something else to animate ea. But then on this tour when we’re being introduced to the ‘āina and Haumea is being named and this po‘owai is being named, I looked at the water and felt it on my foot and could not believe that I was actually thinking of introducing myself to this event and not commemorating her. Not commemorating Haumea. I thought, “how maha ‘oi of me!” And then I just got really excited.

So I reprimanded myself for imagining entering that space without naming her at least. But then I got really excited because we were on the ‘āina, we were hearing stories about the ‘ohana, how the land was, how it became what it is today. And I just really felt this kind of kolohe energy. Because ‘Ilima actually went along and she asked “so, can you share words that you associate with how you’re feeling
right now, after the tour?” And my first word was kolohë. Because you know, the mud between your feet, that cold water playing with your feet. And so I just decided to write to Haumea and ask her permission to be part of the event on that ʻāina. And thank her and her storied body there by writing about how I felt in that place and how it reminded me of all the kinds of moʻo wāhine, all the kinds of water bodies I have known in my life. Which all happen to be very female, aside from my father. So it was really a privilege to be able to meet the ʻāina that way and then enter the event and the space. And the ʻohana that is there, with the poem.

And I really liked the thought of bathwater because it’s this kind of cleansing to give yourself to a new place or a new level, in a clean way. It was fun.

[...]

When we were putting names into the loʻi. That was another—this kind of communicating with kūpuna. And then we got just, muddy. We were really in the loʻi, putting these names in there. This collaborative practice of resistance. But we got muddy. So everyone kind of just rinsed off, going back to the hale. And how am I not supposed to write about bathing as a little girl, when after all of this, I am just caked with mud, happily caked. And then we were just all calm. We weren’t rushing to get clean. We just, I just ended up sitting in that cold water rushing past. Just sitting. And it felt really good to be able to be in—that introduction to the ʻāina in such a physical way was really beautiful. I really don’t understand the
“not get dirty” kind of approach to poetics. [laughter] I think the closer you can get to water, the better.

In her powerful essay “Getting Dirty: The Eco-Eroticism of Women in Native Oral Literatures,” Melissa Nelson talks about an ethics of kinship that gets created in sensual engagement between humans and more-than-humans:

This “contact zone” is the place that I call “getting dirty”—a messy, visceral, eco-erotic boundary-crossing entanglement of difference that can engender empathy and kinship and a lived environmental ethic. I assert that this contact zone is facilitated and supported by communities that practice oral traditions about territorial attachment to ancestral places and beings. Indigenous eco-erotics are maintained and strengthened through pansexual stories, clan and family identification, and a trans-human concept of nationhood. (232)

Reconnecting to these erotics can create a “multivocal dialogue” “essential for decolonization, liberation, and even the very survival of our, and other, species” (236). What Nelson elaborates throughout the essay is the ethics required of this vibrant kinship relationship, whether it be in the form of consent, agreements, or respectful treaty.

Noʻu’s love poem to Haumea and her family also affirms the intertwining of ethics and erotics. Her poem centers bodies and their intense experiences, pleasure and desire that leaps among human, akua, and ʻāina. Beginning with the small and specific intimacy of a little girl being bathed in the sink with Jergens soap, the poem builds in run-on lines, remembering huge and forever things, like caves, grandmothers, lizard women, mountains and sky. The poem opens flow between Noʻu’s genealogy and Haumea, introducing herself to this akua. The rhymes and repetition happen orally through ʻōlelo Hawai‘i—ka puna [spring/source] with kūpuna
[ancestors], wai with waiwai with `o wai [as fresh water, as treasure, as who are you?], moʻo puna [grandchild] with moʻo woman [as source now]—the physicality of these links through the tongue (and these memories and connections triggered by Noʻuʻs physical encounters with these places). By the last few lines, the speaker blends with ʻāina herself: “my mind is a pond you poʻowai,” but we also remember the echoes of the opening lines (in the sink’s “chrome mountains” and the “sky of my mother’s chest”) that truly the speaker and her family were ʻāina all along. The repetition creates an ethic of return, where the poem returns Noʻu to her family, her moʻokūʻauhau, and humbly, to Haumea.

The ethic of Noʻu’s poetry is rooted in human and land bodies and how they connect to each other. In another part of the interview, she stresses the importance of physical bodies when gathering and building community: “I think people forget that when they’re all lined up in stacks of chairs. It’s very easy to forget that you’re next to another human body, who lives, breathes, has aloha for something. But when you touch, when you’re allowed to touch, and honi. That very important dimension of collaboration is revealed. Amplified, really.” She continues later:

I think like this gathering of people demonstrates how one part of that decolonial relationship is using each other’s correct names. You can’t say that you’re honoring a relationship with me and you’re not using my name. You’re not saying my name correctly. And I had to write for Haumea and Haʻakolea. Brandy writes about Haunani. Craig had that marvelously interactive performance of the testimonies in Guåhan. That’s first, you know. You can’t say that we’re pono but you can’t say my name. You can’t feel my name. You don’t put my mother’s mother’s name in your mouth, and speak it. Mellifluously. Or try to? You are not
being pono with me. And why would we continue to speak. And I would need to know how to say your mother’s mother’s names….

The bodies at play here extend to our ancestors, and ask of us that we learn many different tongues. An ethics of voice in relation to each other is more than telling your own story, but being able to respectfully hold another person’s story in your mouth. Noʻu requires this intimacy, and reminds us to hold each other’s bodies as carefully as we might bathe a child.

Noʻu’s poetic process involved speaking with and creating with specific ‘āina, humbly, reverently, and playfully. When I asked her to define ea, based on our conversation and her experience with that 2014 event, Noʻu responded: “But this doesn’t fit with the official definition at all, but. Ea is that tremble. That expands you, you know? ‘Cause I swear, when Bryan did his poem. When Noe gave her gratitude to Aunty Terri. That tremble you feel in the space but in your naʻau. That something just became possible. Yeah. Yeah. I think that’s how I feel.”

Following Noʻu through her poem truly creates tremendous new possibilities in space (in place), inside (in ourselves), in the flowing relationship between. This is the ea I find in her love poem: a relationship of care and joy that emerges through erotic discovery with ‘āina, self, family.

[“an island chain reaction”]

Justin Takaha White, aka Culture Shocka, is a social justice visual artist and musician who was raised on Oʻahu by a haole father and a Japanese national mother. Justin freelances as a graphic and web designer and donates a huge amount of talent and energy to various community causes. In his interview, he described early encounters with race and class privilege as what shaped him into wanting to know more about social inequality. He grew up going to public schools and experiencing things like “kill haole day,” and those moments of conflict (remarkably) built in him a sense of “curiosity” instead of “revenge.” He was introduced to
community organizing and art activism in Portland, Oregon, and returned to O‘ahu to live shortly before our first Nā Hua Ea in 2014. He performed and participated in the first Nā Hua Ea event and workshops, as well as donated an art piece that we used on our first event flyers and cover of the 2014 chapbook, which he also designed for us. Since that first year, Justin has continued to regularly gift his art to Nā Hua Ea, helping create flyers and designing T-shirts.

Reading Justin’s interview and poem/song together offers a model of ea that accounts for settler privilege and feeling like an outsider. Read in the context of his life, Justin reminds us that the experience of growing up as a settler in Hawai‘i is complicated and full of multiple shaping influences:

But ever since the day, middle school, high school-ish, ever since that switch was turned on of the awareness of not just race and class privilege, but specifically to Hawai‘i, um, settler and colonial mentalities versus Indigenous perspective. I’ve always carried that sense of you know, being an outsider and being on extremely thin ice at all times, and not wanting to offend or overstep boundaries. [. . .]
[about being born and raised] A lot of the morals, a lot of my value system, my character today is shaped by either classes that weren’t taught by a Hawaiian but were Hawaiian-subject matter, or by Hawaiians—Hawaiian community leaders, practitioners. It’s a mixture of the things that my mom gave me as far as Japanese ways of being. And then a combination of local, mix, plantation, post-plantation culture mixing, and those value systems. But equal parts if not majority Hawaiian values I feel like have informed my decisionmaking.

When I asked Justin to describe his connection to Hawai‘i, he said:
Grateful is definitely the first word that comes to mind [. . .] It’s just so humbling I feel, how grateful. It’s [Hawai‘i] made me. And once I get past the feelings of gratefulness, then we start to get into the things of conflict, or internal conflict [. . .] And there’s also this sense of just . . . pain. I don’t know, injustice? That’s not necessarily a feeling. But this sense of how Hawai‘i as a place, Hawaiians as a people, have been so wronged. And that sense of wanting to try to do a little bit to even those scales or give back in some way to a place of a people that’s given so much to me. And I don’t know necessarily if I can pinpoint the feelings that come with that sense of hurting for this place that’s done so much for me.

Justin narrates an experience of settler connection that is conscious of settler privilege, but motivated and energized by a strong feeling of gratitude. Despite uncertainty and internal conflict, gratitude pushes Justin into creative action.

Justin’s rap, “Island Chain Reaction,” that he performed at that first event, focused on breaking down stereotypes about Hawaiian paradise. The audience seems to be local—the “you and me” that are the victims of broken and corrupt politicians’ promises. Justin also specifically critiques US colonialism, renaming Captain Cook as “Captain CROOK.” His reference to historical contact with Western might flows effortlessly into a contemporary line about American wealth, how one would “probably pick a Porsche OVER kalo.” This back-and-forth flow between temporalities creates a frenzied web of problems, as we can see in this stanza:

PAINFUL to watch but i hold back tears
cuz the ocean was LOWER last year
out here crime waves measure from BACK
some go over the falls some fall thru CRACK
The initial crime of Western takeover speeds into the present, with the next stanza talking about drug addiction and prison overpopulation. The rapper’s tears flow into the ocean, juxtaposing the largeness of the climate changing ocean with the minuteness of one person’s sadness in the face of these huge problems. Rather than just listing grievances, Justin creates a vast web of links—Captain Cook to Porsches to crack addiction, tears to the ocean, etc., trying to break through a blase mentality of “relaxin,” into “an island chain reaction.” The rap ends with this stanza:

see MOST these condos we can’t afford it
MOST these tourists got it distorted
MOST this food and drinks imported
makes you wonder what’s really important

As we follow Justin’s design, we learn to make decolonizing connections among different aspects of past and contemporary community suffering, creating a complex picture about social justice in Hawai‘i. Justin does not end with an injunction or demand, but a call to wonder and to think about what we truly value.

When I asked Justin to reflect on some of the keywords I was thinking about, including commitment and love around “decolonial relationships,” he shared some mana‘o around speed, technology, and memory loss: that with all the conveniences social technology brings, “there’s more potential for expediting short term memory, long term memory loss too for that matter. Just memory loss. I hope it doesn’t continue down this path but it really feels like technology is facilitating that. You’re in a constant state of amnesia almost.” He then contrasted this trend with “the amount of love and patience and commitment” that it would take “not only to foster
decolonial relationships, but reclaim any number of things that might have been taken or wronged.”

In his framework around speed and memory I can appreciate his rap even more, as fostering remembering, and cultivating the agility to connect diverse issues and diverse times. Ea here is a practice to become adept at remembering and making rapid connections. Furthermore, Justin’s decolonial settler poetics communicates an ethics of “hurting for” without wanting to lead a solution. Rather, his open ending asks others to join him in thinking and expressing and mixing their emotions and ideas with him. I want to emphasize that Justin’s piece is not characterized by unease or discomfort around his identity that analyses of settler colonial literature often point out. Instead, his poetics of decolonial love is guided by gratitude, by wanting to change things and give back to Hawai‘i without becoming a dominant voice.

[“we belong to each other”]

I first met Grace Alvaro Caligtan as a strong mother, sister, aunty, a leader in Decolonial Pin@ys and Women’s Voices Women Speak, and as someone I would go to to talk about women’s health, power, and mentorship. Grace teaches me to always bring things back to the body, and reach for a bigger story. She grew up on the East Coast of the US, and moved to Hawai‘i with her partner, Paul, where they raised their daughter, Malaya. Grace is a descendant of Kankanaey Igorot and Ilokana midwives, and at the time of Nā Hua Ea 2014 was training as an apprentice midwife and serving as a birth attendant and doula. She served as doula for Craig Santos Perez and Brandy Nālani McDougall, two poets and teachers who welcomed their first child into the world earlier in 2014. Both Craig and Brandy performed at that first Nā Hua Ea, and Grace dedicated and debuted her poem, “Transition” to them and to their new daughter. As she shared in her interview with me, the poem did not feel like reading a text, but like a spiritual offering
that had a real impact on the space. Grace was also assisting Noe with her pregnancy and birth of her son, Moku, who at the time of Nā Hua Ea was a hua ready to burst. It was so meaningful for Grace to connect and gather all that birth energy in the room with her words and body. In her interview with me, she described the inspiration for her poem in historical context:

So I wrote this poem a few weeks after Kaikainaliʻi was born. And it was also during the time of the DOI [Department of Interior] hearings, when there seemed to be this tension between the desire to have a quick solution to sovereignty by administrative order, versus the long process that it takes to build a consensus, to prepare the nation for sovereignty. And so I think one of the lessons that I feel I’ve been really meditating on and gestating is that anything worth having really just takes time. And I think time is kind of a trickster in birth. You think that you’ve been in there for a long time, but it really hasn’t been long at all. Because you have to endure the surges—what I like to call surges, and not pains. But for Mama uninitiated, who’s never had a baby before, the surges can be a little too intense. The time passing can be a little too long. And so as a midwife in training, and as someone who’s attended to the birth process and the miracle involved and the miracle that I feel is happening here in Hawaiʻi, there is a certain kind of patience we must cultivate inside ourselves. And hold out possibility for those who are doing the hardest lifting, so to speak. Really being present to be pushed against. And being present in another’s hell, sometimes. And having—it’s not a Pollyanna-ish positivity. But I think that when one is a midwife to anything, whether it’s a creative act, or building a nation. There has to be a certain kind of certainty. That it will happen. And yet this commitment to the upholding of it all,
right, that’s just what we’re kind of trained to do. To be okay with not knowing. And okay with watching something unfold.

The metaphor of birthing a nation is a common one in literature, but I have never heard an actual midwife explain this metaphor from her own experience. In terms of decolonial community-building, I am captured by Grace’s description here of this relationship requiring patience and certainty, of “being present in another’s hell” to encourage someone through their pain and fear, as she puts it later: “somebody when we don’t, when we can’t see, to be like ‘keep going.’” Later she elaborates on the commitment required to bring that presence to a relationship:

Similarly when a parent has to be up all night feeding their child or they’re sick and they’re not always able to [tend?] themselves but they have to! I don’t know what grows that commitment. There’s something about that, that it’s a choice that people make. It’s kind of very similar to what a midwife has to do: they just sit there sometimes and take the pushing against the tensing. The body tenses, the body contracts. And it’s painful. And when you love anyone and they’re in pain, they might bite you. I’ve heard about partners biting their spouses. They may push on you, they may not want you to talk. So there’s that kind of commitment to walk through that.

The commitment Grace describes is a powerful standard of relationship in the tough work to change reality, bring forth something new. I see this depth of commitment as what is required for decolonial love. In Grace’s poem, breathing becomes a sure thing to hold on to in the difficult process of childbirth. She begins the poem with the sun setting, and the time before the baby crowns:

Over amniotic waves, in the wa’a that is your body
Your little one paddles with mighty surges

Tiny shoulders, feet, hands, and legs push
Everything out below heart and lungs

Round belly tightens. You hold it steady.
You rise and meet the pull of life.

Longing to bring this island close,
It feels too far in the distance.

So we breathe. We find another. Exhale.
So we breathe. We find another. Exhale.
We breathe. We find one another. Together exhale.

As she spoke these words to us that night at Papahana Kuaola, I could feel the room coming together, breathing in, and exhaling with her rhythmically as she paused at the ends of these lines. The “we” expands and contracts with each breath—sometimes being the Native-settler connection Grace narrates in her contextualization of the poem, sometimes being partners, sometimes being a mother and child, sometimes being friends, sometimes being yourself and your ancestors. These breaths center us in our own body, and direct us toward others—physical and spiritual—who are supporting us. Though these people shift, the focus remains constant, everyone’s intentions gathered toward the same horizon of birth. In all these transitions and
blurs, Grace repeats the line throughout her poem: “She is coming, she is coming. We promise she is coming.” Here is another model of what ea feels like together.

When I asked Grace to describe her connection to Hawai‘i she responded in a few different ways, and then came to this:

I don’t know how to say it . . . the best way to describe it is by giving birth to Malaya, and because of Malaya’s genealogy of being both Vietnamese, and both Ilocano and Igorot, there is a particular trajectory that this child has here in Hawai‘i and a contribution to this place. And I feel that there is something that she sees and understands that even Paul and I cannot understand or see. That there is a certain kind of interesting design, and that she brings these genealogies home. Occupation could not have happened in the Philippines without the taking of Hawai‘i, nor could the Vietnam War. Yet her return to this place is about a certain kind of healing, a certain kind of repair. And I feel that, I don’t often say that. Certainly, it’s different. It’s not like she’s been educated like other immigrant children. She’s been given a certain kind of consciousness. But I really feel through her, her birth here, we’re connected. And through other births of women, local families, Native families, that we’re connected. That we’ve made family. We belong to each other.

What Grace’s reflection teaches me is that decolonial community-building is happening and working itself out over many generations, past and future. Grace talked about the feeling of “relief” at that year’s Nā Hua Ea and Lā Ho‘iho‘i Ea celebration as those intergenerational decolonial relationships between Kanaka and Filipino communities became more legible:
Well I think the thing that was important was that particular Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea was there to honor Aunty Peggy Haʻo Ross and Aunty Terri. And both of those women in the way they have woven their lives, allowed us [Filipinas] to be there. Because they have included us, so to speak, in their work. Aunty Terri with Women’s Voices Women Speak and all the ways that she’s helped to bring people to their own homelands and all the ways that we’ve stood by her to help protect this place. And even though I really didn’t know Aunty Peggy Haʻo Ross, the gift of that was meeting her daughter and her son and her former husband, Uncle Johnny Verzon. And that was a profound gift because at that time we just didn’t know any other Filipinos were doing this work before we did! And so to find somebody who had a little bit of that genealogy: who got married on Kahoʻolawe. Who has been part of educating Filipino communities; it was a relief! Because you just know, there’s gotta be other people doing this stuff but they’re not always so visible.

When I asked her to define ea, Grace shared:

Part of being able to breathe free, for me, is the ability to know that you also belong to a people. That you can breathe because you’re reflected and you belong in the circle. And I feel like that sense of . . . what colonization does is create a sense of separation, a sense of entitlement, a sense of separateness. And that everyone has kuleana, that everyone carries this together, that everyone belongs to each other is what is healing.

“We belong to each other,” past and future, is a powerful guide for a model of decolonial community. Breath by breath, Grace’s ea insists on connection through generations. Insists on a
courage and commitment to stick together across diverse experiences, through pain and suffering and uncertainty. Through these shared experiences, we build our belonging to each other.

[“make this our memory”]

Dawn Mahi grew up in Kailua, Washington state, Nicaragua, and Kalihi Valley, making family and community wherever she goes. We have spent a lot of time cooking and working together and had many conversations about her mother who was adopted by Hawaiian-Okinawan family, and the complex loops and velocities of genealogy. At the time of our interview, she was leading community work with Ho‘oulu ʻĀina and Kōkua Kalihi Valley, and she now does community outreach and programming with the Consuela Foundation. She is a gifted connector and listener and creator, be it crafts, food, or poetry. Logan Narikawa was raised in Makiki and Nuʻuanu, and now lives in Pūowaina with his partner and daughter while finishing his PhD in American Studies at UH Mānoa, working in publishing and engaging in community organizing. We got to know each other well when he came on board as a Project Manager for the Value of Hawaiʻi 2 community outreach project. We have talked a lot about community organizing and solidarity, about our Japanese settler families and cultures of controlling our feelings, intergenerational healing, and ways that love can transform and break open patterns. Logan is a determined and loyal friend with a strong mind and loving heart. I chose to interview them together because they wrote their poem for Nā Hua Ea 2014 together, as a call-and-response about and for their grandmothers. The poem opens with two distinct voices, the bold is Logan, the italics is Dawn:

[make this a memory]

On grey days, I sometimes stare out of the rectangular glass windows that front my house.
And I am called back to a time when it was my grandmother who did this.

She hugged me, often. And grasped for my hand whenever we waited on other people—this also happened often.

And it felt natural and normal.

In a family that rarely embraces, it is strange to think that she could have been so affectionate without making me uncomfortable.

[make this a memory]

*I can't remember her except through my mother's stories and the pictures of her smiling face.*

*I lost her before I could say her name.*

*All day she took care of me while mom was at work and I know that somewhere in my cells I am her beloved granddaughter.*

*In those moments I felt whole and courageous and protected.*
The poem begins very intimately in stories of deep love the speakers struggle to remember. Each speaker reaches toward their kūpuna as a way of understanding something important about their own lives. Through their voices remain separate when they read their poem, their memories trickle into each other, crossing the boundaries of their individual stories. When I asked them to name a favorite line, Logan said for him it was the ones said together, “make this a memory” being a shared refrain throughout the poem. Dawn replied:

Yeah, we had to practice that. I like about that too, that it shows the reflections in our stories. And sometimes you cannot fully see your own story until you reflect on it with somebody else or until you hear it from somebody else. I remember, in the process of us coming together and talking about our grandmothers, we both realized more about ourselves and our relationship.

The collaborative poetic process Dawn and Logan went through acted as hua for reflection, growth, connection. Through telling stories and listening to each other, they were able to access their own memories in new ways. This theme of reflecting and discovering together continued to expand as we talked about the collective experience of the event.

DM: It was just fun to be part of a group that in some ways kind of started together and there was this seed planted. And then we all moved through this process on kind of parallel tracks, whether or not we got together very much. The fact that we had checked in with each other, it felt a little bit like an intentional community. Like co-community. And so I felt really proud and excited for them, to hear their poems in public and to see the reaction of the crowd to what they had written, I thought was really beautiful.
LN: [...] one of the things I keep thinking about from that night is how ready everybody felt to . . . do something else together. Like performers and people who were there. It just felt like everybody was so, like they felt so connected to each other. It wasn’t like they needed to do something. That seemed like a potential way for that energy to be expressed. But it just felt like everybody wanted to be there. There were a lot of people who just kind of lingered afterward, and I don’t think they were expecting something else to happen. They just didn’t really want to leave.

DM: That’s a good point. They were feeling the energy of the space and they felt really pili to that moment. So people stayed and talked and talked. I thought Mehana was a great emcee for the evening. And then when she was inspired to share her own poem about growing up in the valley where you [Aiko] live, I thought that was really beautiful. And she was really inspiring.

I love this description of how the event felt. There was no one single source of ea. Instead, the experience felt like a switchboard lighting up, poems and stories and mana zipping around, back-and-forth. We talked some more about the diversity of the people involved, and Logan reflected that it was unusual to be in a group of Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians talking about sovereignty where nonstatist understandings of sovereignty were a shared foundation:

When people who aren’t Hawaiian enter into conversations about some future with Hawaiians, they don’t like to be . . . they don’t want to have the conversation be on the ea ground. They want to talk about sovereignty according to their idea of what government looks like. So shying away from using a word like ea, even. [but for Nā Hua Ea] It seemed like it was an assumption for everybody, “of course
this is what we want. We’re not talking about an American nation state. We’re just talking about the day when Hawai‘i will be independent. We’re gonna have to think about what our relationships are like when that day happens.” It’s not like “oh, I don’t know if I want to go there. That’s not quite what I mean when I talk about sovereignty. Or when I talk about security, I mean demilitarization, but I don’t think I can go with you all the way to the independence place, or thinking about ‘āina. I’d rather just think about the deoccupation.” It [Nā Hua Ea] was just, yeah, naturally, “we have to care about the land, and it has to be mālama ‘āina,” and we’re all kind of in agreement, it felt like.

As Logan points out, Kanaka epistemologies around caring for land were the shared ground a diverse group was standing on in order to have an event about growing ea. Dawn and Logan went on to talk about how oftentimes non-Hawaiians might feel afraid to participate in these conversations, or that the non-Hawaiians who are brazenly unafraid might say offensive things. Dawn then brought the conversation back to the unique space of art:

I think it’s important to create those spaces where people can safely explore those issues and how they feel and share. And eventually art can help bring it to a level that invites other people in. Because it feels sometimes more accessible than other things that are more kūʻē. And I feel like for it [social movements] to be successful, we have to invite those other folks. Or we have to find a way to reach their hearts. And that’s why I feel that love is a good angle, but that’s just me.

The creative process of Dawn and Logan writing poetry together was characterized by safety and care and curiosity for each other. The seeds they started with—their grandmothers—allowed them to begin from a place of personal love and meaning. These factors helped them rise toward
each other in their relationship, and carries a lesson for how to build sincere connection in the larger group. When asked to define ea after this Nā Hua Ea experience, Dawn shared:

The sentiment in this poem of the reconciliation, of finding the places where you feel the most unconditional love in your life, and being able to move from that space, even though maybe many things have happened in-between when you first felt that, and now, to me that’s what it is. And then making spaces like that creative process that we had where other people can feel the same and do that.

This first stanza of the poem, I was going through all my poetry books of mostly my Nicaraguan poet ladies, ‘cause there’s many awesome Nicaraguan women who are poets, writing about the revolution. And so I was thinking about that. There was a time in their history when everybody was fighting for something. They were fighting for their lives, and for their sovereignty, and for something that was bigger than everyone that they were all a part of and they were all subject to. And I don’t know that I’ve ever felt that in my life. The way that they would feel it because it happened to them. And so, it’s true, all the poems were about love. And that reinforced the thought, of what is sovereignty about? It’s about love.

LN: It made me want . . . I’m not saying this because it might sound like it diminishes the relationship that we formed. But it made me want to get to know people like how I got to know you [Dawn]. It made me want to connect on that level with other people.
What I hear in these lines is ea as fed by unconditional ancestral love—a love to talk about and share collectively. Ea is also the desire to build these deep and caring connections with more and more people. As I asked Dawn and Logan to describe their connection to Hawai‘i, in the context of this conversation, I could hear even more clearly the importance of building a *dynamic* engagement.

DM: [. . .] I feel a sense of reciprocity, of being a part of the land and the land is a part of me. That’s my relationship. And that includes my family and all these things that have happened in my life, and leaving here and coming back here. And there’s nothing static about it.

LN: I think that reciprocity feels like not a static state, but a dynamic state that I’m trying to reach. It doesn’t have to be in financial terms, but I actually feel like indebted to this place. And because I went away, because I went away and realized how much of who I am was shaped by growing up here. And how much all the things that I’m proud of about myself are thanks to this place and the people who were affected by this place in the same way that I think somebody who was in a reciprocal relationship with the land, how they would act. But that took awhile to figure out. It took going away, it took thinking about coming back. Going through the process of figuring out how to come back. And then coming back, reconnecting, or connecting with new people. Yeah.

Their focus on reciprocity—on giving, receiving, giving—is alive and in constant motion. I can feel the act of breathing in this description—moving to land, to self, to each other, to leaving and returning, in and out. Dawn and Logan’s poem enacts this reciprocal motion of waking up stories of ea in each other, reminding each other to remember the love we come from, helping each
other remember the stories we cannot, and asking if we can carry that strength forward in our
own lives. Decolonial love breathes across boundaries. Their voices weave more intricately and
rapidly in the last stanza, asking questions that open their memories beyond the two of them—to
the audience, to their ancestors, to themselves, all at once. This is a model of ea.

*With love*

*as the sovereignty we wield*

*might we be revolutionaries?*

*[Let this be our memory]*

*if not us, then whom?*

*if not you, then her?*

*if not her touch, then who would we be?*

you are revolutionary.

*[“so that the people I love are safe”]*

Lyz Soto has been an educator and mentor in youth spoken word for many years in
Hawai‘i, with Youth Speaks Hawai‘i and then later as a cofounder of Pacific Tongues. She
shows up for her poetry family in every way—a listening friend, a driver, a cook/mom, a teacher,
ready to laugh or cry and be there through hard things, all while also being a proud and attentive
mom to her own artistic son. She is the author of brave books of poems of how love has
transformed her and a dissertation about being a mixed-race and diasporic woman in Hawai‘i.
We have cocreated many community-engaged poetry and performance events together over the
years, and I have learned so much about presence, fullness, and collaboration from her. I now
have the privilege of working with her at Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities, where she runs
our communications. As I mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation,, it was Lyz who
advised us to slow down and focus on the collaborative process of Nā Hua Ea, instead of just the performance event.

The poem she shared at Nā Hua Ea 2014 was a love poem she dedicated to me (what a gift!) about exploring different practices of love, about losing faith and remaking commitment. In the poem, she distinguishes between a fearful love committed to “badlands / foolish dives into mirages / or battles against uninhabitable masses,” and a sweet maybe even naive love “reaching across the table.” These different practices of love manifest in the changing shape of the heart. In an early stanza describing the first kind of love, Lyz writes:

Five years ago
we called love stupid.
We thought scaling the ragged peaks of mountains
in a hailstorm
the smarter choice as if thinner air and falling skies might
make our grief weightless, but without gravity
our hearts became spherical as satellites,
peripheral to our bodies.

As a response to the intensity of grief, this speaker is trying to escape love and pain by moving as far away from the earth’s core as possible. In our interview, Lyz pointed to this line about the heart changing shape, and how it came from her learning about a scientific phenomenon that happens to astronauts in outer space: human hearts become rounder the further we are from our planet, and return to elliptical shape as we return to our gravitational field. In a later stanza, the heart marks a different kind of love:
Yesterday

almost happened

between our four fists

on a platter when we stretched our heart globes

to elliptical shadows

—risked holding hands

with the wounded

and called them namesakes.

The images are much smaller here—hands and a table—and the heart has grown to a whole world instead of a drifting satellite. In this poem, this is what grounds and expands our hearts and our capacity to love: getting closer to home and closer to each other. When I asked Lyz to describe her connection to Hawai‘i, she shared that her journey followed a similar pattern of expanding through the transformation that happens in intimate one-on-one spaces.

Evolving comes to mind. When I was a kid, I didn’t really think about these questions [about Hawaiian sovereignty and decolonization] at all. Some of it was because I was not in an environment or space where people were encouraged to think about these things. If anything, I think a lot of kids from my generation were very protected from these questions, almost thinking of those questions as being dangerous. But I mentioned earlier that so many ways into genuine activism and commitment are by loving people. And I think that was actually when my relationship to Hawai‘i really actually started to experience movement and real growth. A lot of it was through my experiences with Youth Speaks Hawai‘i, which later became Pacific Tongues. Because a lot of the young people ask
difficult questions, and challenging ones that I have never really considered as much as I should have. I might have done so in sort of mild, distracting ways. But I had never really thought of them in-depth. And there’s something about teaching that forces you to really think about things a lot deeper, especially because you have to be able to articulate them. And then from there, my community grew, and with the community also the information and stories that I learned. And the more I learned, the more my commitment grew. And the more people that I loved committed to the space, again, the more my commitment grew. So it is really funny, so often when people are wanting to pursue revolution, it becomes about this propaganda of ideas. But for me, honestly, I don’t think I ever would have been drawn to that if it had just been about ideas. I think what really committed me to Hawai‘i has been the people I love here, and the stories that I fell in love with. And from a more pragmatic standpoint, also, wanting a way to create lives that are more sustainable and that can work in these places, so that the people I love are safe. Does that make sense?

Growing this kind of love and commitment requires personal and deep intimacy. This reminds me of a value often heard in Kanaka community organizing here: he alo a he alo. When we meet face to face, person to person, breath to breath, then we can really have something meaningful happen. Lyz’s story also emphasizes to me the turn from love to protection. Her care and commitment for her community activates her to want to kia‘i their well-being, “so that the people I love are safe.”

I asked Lyz to define “ea” based on our experiences with Nā Hua Ea, and she introduced another layer to the idea of safety:
I know this is not a really good translation of the word, but I think a lot of what I was taking from this event, and really a lot of the work that as a group we have done and continue to do together, is the idea of creative sovereignty. I think a lot of times what’s been so difficult about sovereignty movements is that they get so bogged down in definitions that were created hundreds of years ago. Or a couple hundred years ago. And often by very different cultures. So a lot of the discussions that I’ve heard in these groups and been a privilege to be a part of are sort of a redefining of sovereignty and a redefining of concepts of nationhood that are more about . . . I’m trying to think of another way of putting it that doesn’t reactivate that vocabulary. The word that came to my mind was safe. But I’m thinking of a safety that isn’t constructed by boundaries, because so much of our conversations around global sovereignty have to do with policing borders. And one of the things that has drawn me to discussions in this group [Nā Hua Ea] has been ideas of sovereignty that are not about policing particular borders. Not necessarily about overrunning borders so that we wind up appropriating other people’s spaces. But again, not about being like “okay, I have to control what’s mine.” Which I feel is so much about sovereignty conversations, not necessarily Hawaiian sovereignty, but sovereignty in general.

Like Logan’s reflection on mālama ʻāina being an Indigenous political framework that expands Western statist understandings of governance, Lyz also points to a political model of ea being generated in this creative community space. This model is characterized by bordercrossing, movement, and a feeling of “safety” that she describes as tied to the collaborative community feel of Nā Hua Ea more generally: “being quite frank about community needs, but always with a
generous heart [... people involved in it were more interested in reaching across the aisle rather than being entrenched in their own positions.” When community members act “with a generous heart,” people are given permission to reach, stretch, change.

Lyz’s experience with facilitating spoken word writing workshops and community gives her a lot of experience with the powerful change that can happen in a group that trusts each other. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, the culture of spoken word is about exploring and breaking fearful silences through vulnerability that empowers the speaker and also others to share. In the spoken word context, safe space means being able to share your heart without judgment, meaning everyone must constantly practice being openly supportive of each other’s different stories and experiences. Lyz brings her ability to guard and cultivate this kind of shared space to our work to build community spaces to grow. Furthermore, she reminds us that through our actions and interactions, we all have the ability to be a source of safety for another.

[“what happens when your sacred and my sacred touch?”]

I first met Reyna Ramolete Hayashi at a writing workshop at my house in Pālolo that we held for Nā Hua Ea 2015. She made such a first impression on me of fearlessness and embodiment, in her bold commitment to sharing about the genocide and movement of the Lumad people in the Philippines (indigenous people from Mindanao made up of over 20 ethnic groups) defending their ancestral lands from logging, mining, and militarization, to sharing her own body’s stories of pain and bleeding. Reyna balances gentleness and fierceness in her work back in 2015 as a lawyer for Legal Aid, in her activism with Decolonial Pin@ys, in her ongoing growth in Buddhist practice, as well as her work to build economic alternatives and community power through the Emergent Island Economies Collective and The Trust for Public Land. She grew up in Kapālama and Waipahū, and her activist family as well as her travels sharpened her edges and
deepened her generosity that she brings to social justice work. In Kim Compoc’s dissertation, she discusses at length the poem Reyna performed at Nā Hua Ea 2016, “Life is a Prayer,” highlighting its vision of ea, and its use of elegy to move people into action. Here I will focus more on Reyna’s discussion of process, in her joint interview with Noʻu Revilla, reflecting on the writing workshop that Noʻu and Jamaica led for Nā Hua Ea 2016.

We started the interview by talking about Reyna’s experience sharing her poem at Nā Hua Ea 2016. This poem was about her experience going to the Philippines and learning about Lumad struggle and activism, a topic at first glance not clearly connected to Hawaiian sovereignty and ea. As she described it:

I was really nervous to share it at the event just because . . . I don’t know. I guess the first time I shared it was more Filipino-focused audience and oriented audience. So to be at an event focused on Native Hawaiian sovereignty, it was just nerve-wracking, you know. To know whether that was an appropriate time and space to share, and how to really bridge and connect our sovereignties and put them in touch with one another.

Noʻu responded:

Is that overwhelming at all? I think that’s very beautiful and it comes with this really enormous responsibility. I remember you sharing that story at the house at Pālolo. And I’ve been thinking about sacred a lot, especially after Mauna Kea [the first arrests in 2015 of kia‘i who were protecting Mauna Kea from telescope development]. And then I was thinking, what happens when your sacred and my sacred touch? But then when everything is sacred. Did that have an
overwhelming, disorienting effect on you? Or was it a... Yeah! Everything is sacred. If my life is a prayer, that means everything is sacred.

No‘u and Reyna continued to fruitfully explore this model of connection—through “my sacred touching your sacred”—as they reflected together on the writing workshop (which I described in greater detail in the Introduction to this dissertation). Important touchstones that emerged in their conversation were the experiences of trust and vulnerability, and vulnerability creating deeper trust—

NR: The writing is really important, but when you see how far people are willing to trust themselves in this new group of people, you can’t help but think: what happened, that everyone is willing to just go a little bit more deeper, and share? Even though I had just met many people that night. So I like that. Why people trust each other, when they start to create. It’s this beautiful risk we consent to. That’s my favorite part.

RRH: I agree. I love when I can come into a space and feel that energy. I often find if you’re in a space that doesn’t have that—that sacred quality, that safe quality, that soft vulnerable quality. People tend to more want to perform rather than fall into that scary, vulnerable place. And that feels icky when I’m in those spaces. And this was the exact opposite.

[...]

NR: It’s something about... ‘cause it’s not like we came and created from scratch, right? Everybody came with their own personal like a little piece of skin, or a little piece of gut. And they put it in the center like this little altar. And we
got to see all of that. And then part of the workshop was you gave something. You wrote something down, and you gave it to the circle. And it’s done! Someone’s gonna create with it and do what they will to it, and you had to trust that.

So really, it was so beautiful to see how people took care of each other’s language, and surprised people. Like what Jamaica did with Bryan’s “bomb.”

Was just ah! You know? I think when you create together, you really get to see creating is a way of healing and taking care of each other.

These descriptions of the workshop space are valuable in the ways they point out these elements: risk, consent, safe, soft, vulnerable, gut, not a performance. Inherent in Noʻu’s methodology for this writing workshop was consent and respect, and her emphasis on these ways to ethically engage with each other are very much tied to her practice of queer decolonial love and survival. She led us through the actions of giving away our words and receiving someone else’s words, and recognizing the important kuleana for each other that grew out of this exchange. Reyna draws this out:

And I really do feel like what happened that night [2016 workshop night], what you were describing, that’s really what it was. People bringing their stories, and bringing their pain, and bringing their poetry. And what we talked about, in terms of giving that way. And you [Noʻu] set such a beautiful tone I think. The way that you really pushed us to take that risk. And it so reminded me that that practice cannot happen alone or in isolation. That healing and transformation only happens in community. If I held that [alone], there’s no way. And to see people give things away and then feel it transform, that was really beautiful.
Here again we see the power of collaborative, collective exchange, where together we can experience what transformation feels like. Reyna also describes an outcome of this group experience in terms of building broader and bigger desire for ea:

What’s really special about Nā Hua Ea is it allows for all of us to be invested in sovereignty. To have a stake in it. To have a place in it. It’s almost like how could you not, after being a part of a space like that. How could you not want more ea in your life? And want that for yourself, and your family, and everybody you love, and the land, and everything. Like want it to be infused, how could you not?

That’s how I feel. As much as we spend a lot of time talking about decolonization and sovereignty, to really create a space where you can practice and embody it, even if it’s just for an hour or two, together, is just so special. I think that’s what it is: beginning that practice of what that would look like in community.

The new wanting that comes out of this space ties back to this dissertation’s focus on decolonial love, and its facets of desire, joy, and pleasure. Reyna explains that these kinds of feelings are what motivate people to transform and want to be part of a community for ea.

This desire and pleasure is not easy, but comes with commitment and dedication. When I asked Reyna and No’u to elaborate on what ea means to them based on their experience with this event, Reyna describes something both challenging and rewarding that has to be rooted in one’s own self-determination:

RRH: For me, it’s really this embodied practice of what it means to be more human and more free. It’s not a destination. It’s not simple like political sovereignty, like somebody can grant you. It’s really this practice of being in relationship with yourself, in relationship with other people, in relationship with
the ʻāina. Not in an idealized kind of way. In a way that’s difficult but demands the best of us. And brings out the best of us. So that we can, through all of our contradictions, ‘cause we all have them, still love each other. That’s hard to do. But I think that’s what these spaces are; they are an invitation for us to practice together.

Noʻu also highlighted the idea of relationship when describing her ideas of ea:

When I think about ea, I think about relationship. Because it’s this interconnected thing. I did that zine workshop with the [NHSS summer program] haumāna. And the theme was Black Lives Matter in the Hawaiian Kingdom. And we were talking about ea. And I challenged them, ‘cause many of them were new to the conversation. So I challenged them: “you know, what does it really mean when I say to you, and I look at you. My ea is bound to yours. And I’m gonna take that seriously.”

And Haunani [Haunani-Kay Trask], she has that—my favorite poem. In “Sons,” she writes about the rope of resistance. And I think, if I roped my wrist to your wrist. If I rope my wrist to Liliʻu’s wrist. If I rope my wrist to the ancestors in Cebu that I have no idea who they are. When I go like this [moves] what happens? Did I mess something up? It ripples in some way. So what I think about ea, and it becomes this challenge to think of how my relationships affect each other. And I think for me it creates more accountability on my end. Because when I do this [moves], what am I doing, over here? So I don’t have a definition, but I think about that.
In Noʻu’s model of ea here, our differences across our communities are not subsumed or equated. Instead, they touch and affect each other, and our kuleana is to endeavor to know and honor our countless connections. As Reyna says, the way we come to each other in this creative collaborative sacred space asks for the best in us to rise and meet.

[to come from a naʻau place]

I first met Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio as a Kanaka spoken word poet and slam champion, famous for having performed throughout Oʻahu, at the Brave New Voices competition (and HBO special) and by invitation of President Obama at the White House. For years before I met her, I had worked on organizing community and college events with her father, Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwoʻole Osorio, who is a beloved musician, Hawaiian historian, and teacher. Jamaica and her father’s combination of kolohe wit and honest heart make them stunning on the stage. Jamaica always humbles and inspires me with her aloha for her genealogy and the boldness with which she embraces her kuleana. At the time of this interview, she was directing programs for Native Hawaiian Student Services at UHM campus. She has helped to teach Nā Hua Ea workshops in 2015 on Molokai, and in 2016 for the Nā Hua Ea event we are discussing here. She now works as an Assistant Professor of Indigenous Politics at UH Mānoa. I first met Joy Enomoto as a fiery photographer, artist, teacher, and archivist entering graduate school on Oʻahu after working on many community activist issues in the Bay Area and Maui (where her Kanaka family is rooted), including health and well-being for queer women of color and incarcerated folks. I had collaborated with Joy’s powerful work as a visual artist in community events for climate change and the genocide in West Papua, and later (after this interview) gotten to know her fierce and deep heart much better through our demilitarization work and trip to an international gathering of women activists in Okinawa. Joy had attended previous Nā Hua Ea but
never spoken until this 2016 event, where we asked to her to share on one of the themes of the event: #BlackLivesMatterintheHawaiianKingdom, inspired by a social media post and artwork by Pūlama Long, linking Ferguson and the murder of other Black folks on the continent with conversations about racism in Hawai‘i. At this time, Joy was working with and helping to form The Pōpolo Project, a local organization aiming to uplift and connect marginalized Black experiences in Hawai‘i, and hold critical conversations about race, history, and belonging. When Joy took the stage that night, she spoke with the passion and certainty of many ancestors. It felt like a number of dimensions cracked open and into each other. Everyone’s jaw dropped; I think because this was the first time we had heard someone weave together all the turmoil and power of what was happening on the city streets of the US with Black Lives Matter together with Hawaiian sovereignty. As Jamaica recounted:

And then god, when Joy spoke, it completely changed my life. [JE and AY: laughter] I mean that in the most serious way; I think about what you said, often. Especially because I think Joy’s absolutely right when she says that people don’t know how to enter the conversation. I [...] There’s so much work we need to do in building solidarities with each other. To align our solidarities, to support each other’s sovereignties. And I’ve always supported Black Lives Matter from the moment I’ve heard about it, because, well fuck, Black Lives fucking matter! [JE and AY: laughter] And Brown Lives matter. And I would love to say “all lives matter” without feeling like I’m silencing some group, right? [JE: right, right]. You know what I mean?
But to make these connections . . . something I think about a lot in the work that I do is how different groups are racialized. And for Joy to get up there as a Hawaiian, Black, Indigenous woman, amongst other things—Scottish, right? [laughter]. Amongst other things, to stand up there and just give us the permission to identify with pō and the kind of blackness Hawaiians have as a part of us, in a way that isn’t appropriative, in a way that is deeply nuanced. That was really meaningful for me. Because it helped me allow myself to make connections that I was feeling but didn’t know if they were appropriate. Because you never want to appropriate someone else’s space. But returning to pō and thinking about the way our kūpuna were racialized, and even the way our kūpuna or contemporary people today have reproduced anti-Blackness in our communities, to think about these intersections and to be given permission to think about them and own them, was really really important.

And since then, Joy’s absolutely right, we’ve been talking a lot more about Black Lives Matter in the Hawaiian Kingdom. I feel like it’s given us—people like me and No’u—permission to feel like we can go out and talk about these things and not feel like we are silencing Black comrades who are also doing this work. And really taking on that kuleana. It’s our kuleana to take on anti-Blackness in the Hawaiian community. It is not our Black friends’ kuleana to take on that. This is our community, this is our ‘ohana. That’s just one bit of the work we can do to support the liberation of Black lives. So what Joy did really inspired, and we had another conversation later, really inspired a workshop I just gave on the Big Island. We called it “Pō Lives Matter.” [JE and AY: mmm, nice!] We got people
to engage with pō and writing statements of commitment to Black Lives. And statements of commitment to themselves and their kūpuna. And I just can’t wait to do this workshop in other places and for us maybe to collect some statements of commitment to each other.

So that was the most memorable in that moment and what’s great about Nā Hua Ea is that it provided space for that to be possible. Because that wouldn’t have been possible—like that space had to be created [JE: yeah], you know? And I think that speech you gave, Joy, that heartfelt address to us. We’re going to see lasting effects of that for a long time. I think it’s going to continue to inspire some really important work. [JE: wow]. Yeah. That’s how I feel about that. Trying not to cry. [JE and AY: laughter]. Um yeah, it was great! Good job!

Joy’s forging of solidarity and connection was not an easy one. She created a pathway for Kānaka to identify with Blackness as fecund, originary pō, in a way much deeper and longer than histories of US anti-Blackness. She also ferociously called out anti-Blackness perpetuated by Kānaka communities—against African American folks, against Micronesian and other Black Pacific Islanders. She did all of this genealogically, calling upon all her different ancestors (“speaking through her” as a few folks remarked afterward) as well as recounting historical moments, like Queen Liliʻuokalani being racialized and ridiculed as a Black savage in the US newspapers. The connections that Joy traced, according to Jamaica, helped kuleana to emerge that created more commitment to more peoples.

When I asked them to share more about the idea of solidarity, Jamaica responded with insight about the mechanics of “movement building”:
[M]y biggest thing is just trying to offer opportunities for people to think about these issues. And a lot of the ways that’s through writing and getting them to push through this stuff. I also for a very long time and continue to this day believe in the power of discomfort. And providing safe places to make people uncomfortable, in a way that doesn’t traumatize them. That doesn’t alienate them per se, but forces them—because I think you’re [Joy] right, discomfort is a generative place because it pushes you off balance. And you either need to fall or readjust. You either fall flat on your face or you readjust. So it inspires motion, action, change. And so that’s really what I’m interested in.

Transformation is not an easy, pleasant experience, Jamaica reminds us, but the space that calls out risk, discomfort, and a push off-balance is one that is generative. Ready for hua to grow. Joy continues, reflecting on how the diversity of issues and people in Nā Hua Ea create the push and pull for the motion of change:

JE: Nā Hua’s great because you have a room with Native Hawaiians and Chamorros and Filipinos. And not just asking folks to be in solidarity with Hawaiians but asking Hawaiians to be in solidarity with their struggle.

JO: Word.

JE: That solidarity does not have room for guilt. That’s a waste—guilt is like . . . obviously we can’t do enough for each other. The world is such a place where you can’t do enough. But we show up. Once you show up and you actually . . . if you know about what happened in Lumad, for example, in the Philippines, you can’t not talk about it again. You can’t not do something about it or say something
about it or interrupt somebody talking shit about the Philippines. And that’s true for all those issues.

So the art that Nā Hua produces allows for that solidarity to come from a more organic place, or from your na‘au I guess. And you can bring your baggage in a different way. I don’t know how to say it. It’s like it allows people to be uncomfortable and safe, and look at their kuleana. And see where they have to go. New issues are introduced every year at that [Nā Hua Ea event]. It was fascinating to watch how many people showed up for Mauna Kea last year. Because we didn’t have something as physical as a mountain to draw around [this year] it wasn’t the same kind of people; a lot of people showed up, but it was just different, you know what I mean? And it was interesting when you don’t have something like a physical body, a physical feature on the landscape—

JO: That we can go to.

JE: That we can go to, people don’t know what to go to. And so I feel like Nā Hua is like a place to go to. To create a body. To create, for solidarity. Because there are so many different things to worry about. You’ve got the Lumad, you’ve got West Papua, I mean I could just go on and on and on. You’ve got Black Lives Matter. You’ve got all these different things. All of them need our attention. And we’re still teaching, and we’re still going to school, and we’re still doing these things. And we still have to educate our family. Where does the solidarity begin exactly?

Here I note the critical distinction Joy draws between solidarity growing from your head or reason or logic, and solidarity “coming from your na‘au.” A seat of knowledge and feeling,
ancestral and individual, the na‘au is a partner that is activated in the creative process and in deep human sharing. When the na‘au is fully engaged and addressed, powerful energy can flow into relationship, kuleana, ea.

I asked both Joy and Jamaica to define “ea” based on our experiences, and they answered:

JE: Ea for me is solidarity with the Pacific. Removing any kind of Hawaiian exceptionalism, which absolutely irks me. And to prepare to govern. And all that entails. That means food—it’s not just running shit. It’s food, and it’s building, and it’s healing. Healing is probably at the top of that. And it’s . . . for me it would be living without fear.

[. . .]

JO: In beginning with the last thing that Joy said, in living without fear. That’s absolutely at the center of what I believe ea is: for all of us to live without fear. Fear of our own race, walking around with the color of our skin. Fear of being a woman walking down the street. Fear of being not manly enough of a man. Fear of being queer. Fear of being alone. Fear of not being able to afford a place to live. Fear of hunger. All those fears. A life without fear for us, that’s totally in the center.

I also believe ea—the vision of ea that I want and pray for—includes complete and free access to quality intersectional education. It means access to quality health care. Mental health care.

And of course on top of all of this, I hope we can achieve ea before the US and ourselves, and the way that we are implicated in this, completely destroy our ‘āina
and our ocean. Because those other things—education, the lack of fear, the physical and mental health—to me, cannot be completely achieved if our ʻāina is destroyed.

The foundation of ea is ʻāina, the experience of ea is living without fear. The fears Jamaica names, the fears that drop away, span government, gender and sexual freedom, basic human needs and dignities. But how does fear disappear? Fear disappears when we grow our own courage. Fear disappears when we feel trust, connection, and understanding in our community. Later in the interview, Jamaica describes a safe space as “those moments of affirmation when someone gets up on stage and puts language to these things you’re really afraid of.” This is safety created by collective daring—the ground where hua can grow.

JO: And then to see—you know I was so excited to have Joy work with our Bridge students for Native Hawaiian Student Services, in their linocut and their postcard workshop. And those seeds being planted. I knew Joy would be impactful and inspirational, but I didn’t know what exactly Joy would do. But the seeds that she planted in them have really started to flourish. And now Noʻu decided to do her entire zine workshop series on Black Lives Matter in the Hawaiian Kingdom.

So again this speaks to the power of this intimate, safe space of Nā Hua Ea. It really is about seeds. Joy had been thinking about these things for a long time, feeling these things for a long time, but she planted the seed there, and look at all these other things that are growing out of that. Growing in our lāhui, the garden of our lāhui. And understanding that these aren’t contradictions, these aren’t concessions, these aren’t sacrifices we’re making. This is us building a lāhui! This
is ea. And this is so fucking affirming because I just can’t sit and listen to another man tell me how important it is that deoccupation happen. We understand that deoccupation has to happen. But I need so much more to happen in relationship to that. And Nā Hua Ea lets me believe that that work can happen. That there are people invested in that work. And then we see those beautiful children there who are gonna hopefully benefit from that work. And their children will benefit from that work. So I feel so good. Just full.

This interview attests to how a safe space can be a part of the “terrifying” work of decolonization. Jamaica was recounting a metaphor Kasha Ho had shared that night, about holding onto a vine while hacking away at weeds on a hill—how scary it is to realize how we are trying to change all these systems that we live in and depend on, and how we have to brave through that fear of deep change. When our na‘au are open and responding to each other, being pushed off-balance is what softens the ground for planting new ideas and new feelings.

Decolonial community must invite and hold the space to fall. We need so much more to happen. [When people are so moved by their love for something that they stand up against this whole training that they’ve had for their whole life.]

One of my favorite memories of our first Nā Hua Ea in 2014 was the transformation and debut of Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada—from a hulking, kolohe Kanaka historian and translator who hated public speaking, into a powerful performer and poet. His deep resonant voice filled the warehouse that evening as the rain poured down outside, and many folks gleefully repeated his line “there is no. fucking. bucket” from his poem for months afterward to him (Bryan’s turn of phrase that overturned the derogatory stereotype of Hawaiians fighting like crabs in a bucket).

After this interview, he spent time as a photographer and media maker for Kanaeokana, telling
stories about Hawaiian charter schools, and writing science fiction stories and poems. He now works as an Assistant Professor at the Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies at UH Mānoa. I have learned so much from him about ‘ōlelo Hawaiʻi, the power of creative language, and the steadiness of deep abiding love.

Bryan described the purpose of the 2014 Nā Hua Ea gathering as “more of a celebration than a protest. Where we were affirming something. ‘Cause so often we have to be responding to something, and it’s like in outrage that we have [events] and in anger.” In contrast, Nā Hua Ea was “to support the cause and the movement and each other. To make these connections with other folks.” In the following excerpt, Bryan describes our rehearsal day at Papahana Kuaola, where a small group of us arrived to find Papahana Kuaola staff ʻIlima Long unboxing Kūʻē Name Signs—a project began by Ka Lei Maile Aliʻi Hawaiian Civic Club in 2010 to visibly honor the over 38,000 kūpuna who signed petitions in the late 1890s opposing the annexation of the Hawaiian Kingdom (Hui Aloha ʻĀina). ʻIlima invited us to help her set the name signs into the ground, asking us to care for the signs as if they were the kūpuna themselves. Bryan describes the impact of this experience on his poem:

And then one of the things that I really liked when we actually went out to Papahana Kuaola was putting out the signs of the names from the petitions. And that was neat because it was like repopulating the land with our ancestors. And sure, that’s what everybody kinda says about it, but it was still powerful. Even though that’s probably what everybody feels when they do it. It was neat! And one of the things that I really liked about it was I would read everybody’s name out. And I feel like probably those names didn’t get read out for a long time. I guess that would be over a hundred years, well some of them. So it was neat to
read out their names and try to feel where they wanted to be in the land. And it probably wasn’t really where they wanted to be, because it all ended up in this general same area of the lo‘i, but, it was like oh I think this person wants to be by this person, because their name means this. Or, the person whose name is this probably wants to look at this part of the land. I kinda was picturing all the signs as kind of embodiments of the person.

And so that was neat. That really helped feel a connection to the land, which is something that I think came across in the [my] poem too. That remembering our history and people who worked for independence, and I always like to bring up the fact that all kind of folks worked for the nation. Not just Hawaiians. But yeah, it was fun and it was neat because all kinds of cool stuff with the land, but there were also the reminders to be humble, like my shorts ripping when I jumped across the little thing. Or getting to see that spring and just how the land is so alive. And that there’s always things to learn and there’s stories to rediscover, and new stories to make on the land.

Bryan’s story, like some of the others interviewed here, emphasizes the importance of collaborating not just with people, but with ‘āina and ancestors.

During the interview with Bryan, I was noticing how much response and reciprocity and exchange seemed to be the source of his creative work. The experience with ‘āina and the kūpuna names from the kūʻē petitions inspired his rehearsal and performance. His poem was written in response to a speech for ea given by Davida Kahalemaile, which I discuss later in this section. His courage to try and write in the first place came in response and gratitude to working (at the time) as a Hawaiian-language coach with youth Pacific Tongues poets. And on the day of
his performance, he went last and that was supposed to be the end of the show, but then our emcee Mehana was moved to share her own poem, which she framed as a response to Bryan and everyone. In this way, Nā Hua Ea and its mana grew and grew in these moving reciprocations. Like the other interviewees, Bryan found that the experience of collective and growing response and reciprocity inspires both creation and courage to speak:

BK: Everybody had these relationships with each other. And I think we all owe each other so much and we all give each other so much. There’s so much flowing back and forth that that’s how it was able to make this event happen. Everybody kinda called on their networks, and got people who were not mostly poets, right? Some of you guys perform a lot, but a lot of us were like, what the hell are we doing? These were all like fragile things, or we thought they were fragile things I think, until we actually performed them. We were holding them up and we were like, “oh I don’t want to break it,” or “I don’t want you to break me.” So yeah, I think the whole thing came from that reciprocity. And that’s why I had that line in the poem about that’s not things that people care about as much anymore, but when there is reciprocity, then you see what comes out of it. That’s another cool thing about it being at Papahana Kuaola was that there is that care for the land, and getting fed from the land. And so I think that was a cool kind of modeling that people did. That if we feed each other, this is the kind of thing we can do—bring the community together. Talk about issues. Get educated about stuff. I learned a lot of stuff about different things while we were there. So yeah, I think that was the motivating thing and the thing that you guys kind of planned to have happen. That was where it was going.
Bryan uses a mālama ʻāina framework to describe our feeling of decolonial community—where we were caring for the land, being cared for by the land, and each other. We fed each other, or, “we all owe each other so much and we all give each other so much.” When this flow was activated, Bryan could see his own voice and poem as a gift he had kuleana to contribute:

I’ve been given this—it’s a loud fricken voice, or whatever it is—and that I should be using it to . . . speak out, and to help people however we can. Instead of always hiding it, you know? I still am kind of convinced that I’m shy, but nobody believes me anymore. Because that’s how I always was. I hunched down. I tried to keep quiet. You keep all your feelings inside. Everything’s all bottled up. That was me for, I mean it’s still me sometimes, but that’s for my whole life, you know? And to kind of be shown, no actually, that should be going the other way. Don’t just face everything inward; it should be going out. Still be reflective on everything of course, but I need to contribute to this. And it should be not just through quiet academic writing. It should be through public presentations, and talking to people, and trying to get them to feel a certain way. So yeah, that has been, and especially coming from this performance, that has been kind of a revelation for me. That it’s possible for me to do something like that. And it’s possible for a bunch of us to do that. I wasn’t the only one who had not written and performed before. So many people were just like, I’m nervous about this, but I care about it, so I’m gonna do it. I’m gonna get up in front of all these people and risk falling on my face. But I’m gonna do it. Now that I think about it, that was one of the most powerful things for me.
And that’s what I love about the community and being in the community. We see that all the time. People who have maybe never been to a march or a hearing, but there’s this one particular issue, and it could just be like they’re gonna close this park by their house or something. But they go out and they speak up about it because they need to and they care about it and it’s important. I think that’s one of the most amazing things about seeing those connections, with that idea of ea. That’s what our community is. When people are so moved by their love for something that they stand up against this whole training that they’ve had for their whole life. That’s so powerful.

Bryan’s story of doing something brand new and scary for him is an important one to capture the spirit and character of Nā Hua Ea. As an organizer, I want to continue to think about how we can continue to invite new voices to contribute, find new confidence in this space.

Based on his experience with Nā Hua Ea, Bryan found a new way to define and understand ea:

I’m tempted to, because my poem is about ea, and I always give that quick description of it as life, breath, to rise. So then because I’m used to defining in that way, it’s easy to slip into it. But I think from the whole event, I think what ea seemed to be was like what we were talking about: those relationships between people. The desire, the reciprocity between people. That moves people to do things. That moves people to get involved and to work on the land or to learn Hawaiian or to learn the stories. There’s all of these things . . . I feel like we don’t recognize those connections and those obligations that we have. Well I don’t
mean “we” but that’s a general kind of thing. And that the more you understand that, the more we build up the ea.

A lot of times I feel people see responsibility as shackles. Like this extra weight that you get put on you. And in certain ways it can be. But I feel like the real ea is when you see that you are in this web of responsibility, but you can also draw sustenance from it. And help other people with it. Because kuleana is a responsibility but it’s also a privilege. So you awaken people to that privilege of that connection. ‘Cause those are not shackles, they’re connections. And I think that’s what that event really drove home. Even with the picture that Justin [Takaha White] did. We see ea is this rebirth, it’s this birth, it’s this piko that goes between the mother and the child, and the land. I would say ea is connection. And that when we connect people back to the right things, or show them their connections to these things more, then ea as sovereignty grows more. That’s kind of the connection there I guess. Because then we have more collective power, we have a stronger foundation to build from. Kind of mundane and practical-sounding stuff, but all really amazing to see.

Bryan’s use of the words “desire” and to “awaken” people to connection I understand as an experience of the fullness and intensity and transformation of decolonial love. In this experience, we find ea—the ability to rise—by more fully knowing our own complex kuleana as a web of sustenance and privilege and energy to act.
Bryan’s poem “To Ea: In Response to David Kahalemaile, August 12, 1871” itself captures much of this movement of ea as growing and building through connections. He takes his form from Kahalemaile’s 1871 speech (shared by Noe at that very first Nā Hua Ea workshop) as starting lines for his own stanzas. He also builds each stanza by referring to metaphors from older moʻolelo—whether it be warriors leaping from Nuʻuanu Pali like ʻanae, or the wondrous land of Mānā—thus claiming unbroken connection with these histories and past sources of wisdom. These references quietly and without fanfare build the world of this poem. They act as kaona in the way Kanaka literary scholar Brandy Nālani McDougall theorizes, as a decolonial pathway of hiding and finding meaning across time and space (Finding Meaning). The final and most famed few lines of Bryan’s poem defiantly proclaim this connection:

There is no fucking bucket—

But we have always been crabs

Paiʻea, Kapāpa‘iaheaehe, Kaʻa‘amakualenalena

Holding fast to the stones, fighting against crashing waves

Each struggling breath between sets reaffirms our ea

And what they refuse to recognize

Is that when we yell, when we shout

We do it not in anger

But to reassure our ancestors

That we are still here

Bryan’s poem commits to a connection with ancestors and moʻolelo in its web of kuleana. These connections have to remain alive, and flowing in multiple directions, leading to powerful voice.

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43 See his article in American Quarterly for Bryan’s own writing and reflection on his poem.
In reflecting on decolonial solidarity and community, Bryan stresses the multi-directional flow of kuleana in relationship: “it puts us in that web of responsibility too. Because if you commit yourself to us, we should commit ourselves to you too.” Different than a quid-pro-quo or transactional logic of solidarity, Bryan elaborates on the power of the imagination:

I think that some of the way that people get to that commitment is just to see the relationships, making that visible. Showing up for people. Seeing other people show up for them. These are all ways that we reaffirm our connections to each other. Our ea, our sovereignty.

And then, my favorite Scott Richard Lyons quote: “the pursuit of sovereignty is not the pursuit of restoring our past, but to restore our possibilities.” And I think that idea, if you show people the possibilities. If you engage their imagination.

And I think that’s why the poems were so important. We interspersed poems with more kind of prosaic presentations of issues. But I feel like the poems are really what prepared the ground for the seeds. There were seeds in the poems, and then the seeds in the speeches, but the fact that they were presented as poems and engaged people’s imaginations, that made people think and feel things. I think that really was fertile. That’s what made it a fertile ground. So whenever we can engage people’s imaginations and show them the possibilities, then that’s really where they can see their way to making commitments. [ . . . ]

There’s so many things, and so many really powerful forces and groups of people working to obscure our vision. And to keep us from seeing each other, and our connections to each other, and the shared struggles that we have. If we engage the imagination, you can make some of these things fall away. You can see farther,
you can see clearer. And I feel like the decolonial relationship thing is not just so that people see they need to support Hawaiian independence, but that Hawaiians see that they need to support these other folks and their struggles too. Especially when we talk about like the Micronesian health care stuff going on right now. I was reading on Facebook one time where people were using Hawaiian sovereignty as the reason why we shouldn’t help Micronesian people. And that is the dumbest fricken thing I’ve ever heard. To use something like that to deny people rights. And rights discourse gets critiqued too. To deny people the care they need is so against any kind of understanding of Hawaiian sovereignty that we should have. So yeah, that’s part of building those relationships, is we need to be able to see. We need to know that we should be trying to see deeper, and farther, and more clearly.

According to Bryan, to grow ea and kuleana we need imagination, poems as “fertile ground” for tiny seeds and untold growth. Ea is fed by this feeling of potential, the leap of imagination into this vast thrumming web of kuleana—across time, across stories, toward each other.

_$hū wale ka hā, ke ea_

The final poets I want to discuss in this chapter are Mehanaokalā Hind and Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua. I interviewed them together in August 2016, where we reflected on the 2016 Nā Hua Ea workshop and performance. Both are mana-ful wāhine Kanaka leaders, loved and respected for their community work and aloha. Noe was raised in Kalihi and Heʻeia. Her community organizing for ea and aloha ʻāina—including political demonstrations, the cofounding of a charter school and building its curriculum, oral history research, and dedicated mālama ʻāina work—is closely knotted to her work as a kumu of Indigenous Politics at UH Mānoa, and her
beloved kuleana of being a mother. She has helped to conceive and organize every Nā Hua Ea since its inception. For our workshops, she often does a mini teach-in on ea, or shares stories about the lives of the kūpuna that Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea is honoring that year. In performances she always shares honest and brilliant poems. I have learned so much from Noe about the revolutionary love of a mākuahine, how to tell your truth, what it means to live your kuleana as backbone to a full meaningful life. Mehana was raised in Pālolo, and is a tremendous kumu, kumu hula, and community advocate with the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. She is dedicated to uplifting the leo and mana of her people, from keiki to kūpuna passed—through oli, mele, poetry, hula, testimony, speeches, through showing up and being there. She has the gift of listening carefully and generously to many sides of every story, and the grit to fight for what is right. She holds her power with deep humility and passion for life, even through the ups and downs, and I am always grounded by the stories she shares about being a mother, a daughter, and a student. Mehana has been the emcee for the past four years at the Nā Hua Ea held at Papahana Kuaola. She brings warmth and energy to this role, bringing us together, threading stories together, famously even composing poems on the spot to gift back to the performers and audience.

Both Mehana and Noe reflected on the character of the performance space at Nā Hua Ea, as marked by, as Mehana put it: “a genuine kind of openness of wanting to hear, not just your creativity, but what we all have in common. Like our common struggle and how we find that.” Mehana continued:

We don’t know everything about each other. We might disagree on some stuffs if we get down to the nitty gritty. But we all know that we like being around each other. And that’s enough to get us into a space where if and when time to do
anything else, we can connect with each other. At least I feel comfortable. I feel comfortable reaching out to any of the people that was there, participating in that, if I had something that I wanted to do or a resource that I wanted to see was available. And that’s huge. That’s huge to create . . . it’s beyond networking. We’re not just knowing who each other is. I actually genuinely feel aloha for these people that I’ve met. And then over the years to just kind of grow that community.

And that community has diversified. It’s trippy to me how I’m so used to having Hawaiians be passionate about Hawaiian issues. Not so used to, with the equal amount of confidence I guess, on non-Hawaiians who are there, but they know so much. The non-Hawaiians in that space that are not only supportive of Hawaiian issues, they’re leading their own communities, bringing their own communities along, to understand what’s going on here in Hawai‘i, is amazing to me [. . .] whether it’s things going on in the Philippines, things going on in the continental US. People were not only willing to speak about it, were willing to kōkua each other, when each other needs it. I know if any of those people had asked me to do something, like, “I think Mehana can help us with this,” I would! I would. And that’s not always the case.

NGK: You can tell me if I don’t address the question, but just going off of what Mehana said, that aloha, is something that I really feel there. I think it has something to with the listening. The way that people listen, or are present. I think about it like how when you’re having a conversation with someone and you can tell if they’re really actively listening to you or if they’re just thinking of the next
thing they’re gonna say. Or just waiting ‘till you’re done talking so that they can say something. I dunno, there’s just something about the space where people are really trying to listen to each other. And I can’t really put my finger on exactly what it is that makes me feel that way or that I’ve observed that would bring me to that observation. But I think that’s where, for me, I really feel that aloha and that support: seems like people from all these different backgrounds are really listening to one another, and really wanting to hear.44

Mehana and Noe’s reflection present an integral part of the exchange happening in Nā Hua Ea. More than the performer on stage, this gathering needs to cultivate people deeply listening, being fully present. Beyond networking, this creates a deeper relationship and feeling of aloha.

Another theme that emerged in their interview was the power of different generations creating that space of listening and aloha together. In the following excerpts, Mehana and Noe reflected on what performances were most memorable to them:

MH: [. . .] the babies, the kids. That was so cool. And watching them practice: watching the babies practice outside and just how mākaukau they were. How ready they were. And I was just like: Daammn! Ho, if I was . . . there’s so much things for the kids now that didn’t exist when we were young. That was, to me, that stuck out; I was so happy. And that story. I love that story. And I’ve only seen adults play that story. That was a play before. So when they did that and they chose like these really funny parts of that story, the Kamapuaʻa story, I was like oh my god, I was like, yes, yes, yes! And they said it—I don’t know if they truly

44 I left out discussion of the poem that Noe wrote and shared that night, for her beloved kumu Haunani-Kay Trask. In the interview, Noe shared how meaningful it was for her to express her sadness about her kumu’s illness, and to feel like that expression was carefully witnessed and held.
know what they were, like the embodiment, but they sure as hell convinced me that day, when they were talking about it, I was like wow, that’s the attitude. That’s Lonoka’ehu’s attitude and that’s Kamapua’a’s attitude right there. They got it. [. . . ] to get them [the keiki] to understand over their lifetime all the different layers of our mo‘olelo and be able to express it in that form [ma ka ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i], to me is a form of ea. Definitely.

NGK: The two things that stand out most to me are Kapili Na‘ehu’s poem and the way that Lani Girl distilled these couple of hashtags out of it. “Show your ‘e‘epa” was one of them. So I don’t remember if that was a line from her poem or if that was just the distillation of some of the mana‘o from it. But I really appreciated that—

MH: Yeah, that was good.

NGK: Knowing that as a 14-year-old young woman, just to have that kind of confidence to be who you are, fully. Be different. Yeah, there was just a lot of mana wahine in that. I really appreciated that. And also just knowing her and her ‘ohana. She just wrote that poem like within the week prior. And knowing the context in which she wrote that, going through some different struggles, it was just really amazing [. . .] And then the other was Joy’s, which was not a poem, but it was in so many ways. The way that she started off saying that she was gonna share some genealogy with us, and then really just felt like she was calling her kūpuna. And then all of her kūpuna into the room! And then yeah, she was just flowing. It was amazing. Super powerful, so relevant. I really appreciated how right from the beginning she had everybody do this call-and-response “Black
Lives Matter,” and then right after that said to us, “if you hesitated at all, that’s colonization.” You know, bringing that accountability, even in that loving space. And that following on with that by showing all of our connections. So it’s accountability but not in a us-them kind of way. Like in a “we need to all carry each other” kind of way. So those were the two moments that really stood out for me.

Each generation (keiki, ʻōpio, kūpuna [via Joy]) provided inspiration to these two mākua. They expressed feelings of awe and admiration to behold these different voices and perspectives all together. This intergenerational conversation is revealed as a vibrant and memorable part of Nā Hua Ea.

As the interview progressed, we talked a lot more about Mehana’s unique role as emcee to facilitate all the exchanges happening at Nā Hua Ea. When I asked her to describe her emcee experience and process, she shared the following:

MH: So when I’m sitting on the side, I’m paying attention to [the show] but I’m also paying attention to the crowd. To kinda see how people are reacting, because that will set up the next thing. The in-betweens. And watching the crowd as they are being impacted by what’s being said, is a whole ‘nother experience too. Which I’m fortunate, I get to enjoy. I’m having multi-experiences, because everybody’s facing one way, but I always try to face myself in some kind of corner where I’m angled or in front of the crowd. Even though I can hear and watch, every so often, I’m watching the crowd and watching their reaction and how they’re feeling. They cry, they laugh. They make confused faces sometimes when they don’t understand different stuffs. You can see them thinking. You can
see them being very thoughtful about stuff. Yeah, it's awesome. [...] there [at Nā Hua Ea] the role is to me, I always walk in there, the role is to make everyone feel safe. Feel . . . that their leo is honored. And then it becomes easy. It becomes easy to play around. It becomes easy to get serious. It becomes easy to express, however.

Mehana’s sharing is so important to uplift the labor of the emcee or other facilitators to create community space, to help set up all the parts of the Nā Hua Ea experience described by all the interviewees. Toward the end of the interview, Noe shared her appreciation for Mehana’s embodied leadership of listening generously and enthusiastically:

> I really so appreciate the energy you [Mehana] bring to it. Both lifting people up and affirming. You’re so good at really affirming. I think that actually does have a lot to do with what I experience—that listening—because you model that. Not just on the front end of like hyping people up, “oh get ready to hear to this person!” But affirming what’s been said after. Both immediately after and the way you did that poem this year that tied so many things together, and drew on . . . I mean, it’s such an important part of that process of reaffirming our ea.

Mehana replied that while she was creating this space for all of us, she was also getting gifted something back.

> MH: You know how in slam and stuff like that, you gotta bring it, right? But the “bring it” in that arena for me, in Nā Hua Ea, is: bring something genuine to the table. Bring something that is uniquely you, but that we can identify with. I can see that in the different people and how they articulate what it is that they want to share. And you don’t get that everywhere. Usually when you walk into a room to
talk about movements and politics and stuff like that, you’re instantly strategizing. You’re instantly you know, come with an agenda—that it’s your job from the time you step in the door to influence others to believe in what it is that you believe. I don’t ever feel that at Nā Hua Ea. It’s about stand on your own integrity, and just genuinely share with everybody. That’s what’s, to me, special about that place, in this time and day. Everyplace else is just highly contentious. Not that contention is bad, ‘cause I think conflict can spark really a jump forward or a fall back. It has that potential. But at Nā Hua Ea, it just doesn’t, I dunno, it just doesn’t have to. You don’t feel that when you walk in. Your challenge, in that room, is to be creative about it. It’s not to have to influence anybody about any particular agenda, which is what the norm usually is, whether you walk into a classroom, you walk into a hearing, you walk into a board room. In that space, it’s not about strategy.

It’s almost like, for me, a freedom. Because I’m so almost, um, politically mute nowadays, because of my role [as a community advocate]. My role is for “the everybody.” So the me doesn’t matter in that. What matters is that I’m able to let the everybody say what it is that they have to say, rather than impress my own stuff, right. So I’ve chosen to be, with my tongue cut off, almost. But in Nā Hua Ea, I can bring that out, if and when and how I want to. That’s rare for me, to be able to do that.

Again what is stressed here is that powerful relationships get built when “being genuine” is more valued than strategy, agenda, or convincing everyone to think the same thing. The sincerity and emotion of poetry alters expectations we might have about political voice. Diverse ideas may be
more welcome in a creative political space, or at least more heard. The challenge is not to debate or convince others, but to be honest and full in your own expression. Thanks in no small part to the facilitator, the community recognizes the value of this kind of voice.

Toward the end of the interview, after a long and beautiful back-and-forth, both Noe and Mehana offer these definitions of ea:

NGK: Well what you [Mehana] said earlier about the stories and these moʻolelo being told generation after generation. And the new ones bringing their particular interpretation and attitude to it, but still being faithful to the moʻolelo. Yeah, there’s definitely that sense to me of ea. That intergenerational sharing of hā and breathing life into the new, and then that exchange, and then the next generation carries it on, and passes it to the next. That is what I heard in what you said.

MH: Kumu Lake taught us this chant. And in two of the lines of the chant, it says “hū wale ka hā, ke ea ka leo.” And then it goes “kani ka hā, kani ke ea, kani ka leo.” So the hū wale is like to swell up. Just like Noe was saying, the hā. So it’s hū wale ka hā. First you need this deep inhale. This breath into me. The inhaling part is like bringing together the people. Putting all those people into the belly of the space.

And then hū wale ka hā, ke ea. And the ea is like right before the leo. To me, what that meant—usually people use ea and leo, in chanting terms, almost interchangeably. But I was thinking about it and to me, hū wale ke ea. That point right before you release it. Where your naʻau and your brain, what you feel and what you know, come together. To me, that’s the ea of that space. It allows for a connection to happen that’s incomplete, outside of that. It becomes complete
when those pieces get put together. So not saying that’s the only space that this kind of expression can happen. But that’s what it does.

And then the last part is hū wale ka leo. Finally. Put that voice out there. Then it’s kani ka hā. Put a sound to the breath. Kani ke ea. Put a sound to that ea. Kani ka leo. Put a sound to that voice. Just reflecting back to when you asked that question, and in this case, that’s what Nā Hua Ea does for me. That definition of ea I think is what plays for me.

It sounds kinda weird because it sounds like, “Mehana, but that has nothing to do with terms like self-determination and all those kinds of things that layer and layer and layer upon.” But it’s those foundational steps. That building of all those layers of ea, one on top the other. This particular space [Nā Hua Ea] can allow that process to happen. The swelling of the breath, of that intention I guess could be one word that I can describe ea with. And then the leo part. In this space we’re actively . . . Even though there’s writing involved, that’s not a necessary part of the process. We have people who haʻi moʻolelo right there. They’re just speaking. Like Joy. Just speaking, from their mind. And that’s a unique part about this space, because it does all that in one. And that love, just that multi-layered understanding of ea. It’s a very physical process that happens. And it’s a very intellectual process, a very passionate-driven process. It has historical context. It has future aspirations. All piled into that. And it just depends how that leo comes out, on what people get to experience at any one time there. I don’t know if that makes sense, but it made sense in my head before I let it out.
Ea is a convergence and breathing and exchange between all these spaces—our own naʻau, our kūpuna, our keiki, our ʻōpio, our witnessing of each other’s full and different voices. Ea happens when we gather with listening presence and honesty. Ea happens when space is created for all to express themselves and be generously heard. Ea happens when our ever-moving connections become clear to us. Mahalo piha to both of these women for this dynamic description of ea.

Conclusion:

More than a transient or transactional solidarity, these interviews from Nā Hua Ea testify to the creation of decolonial community. This community is characterized by care for each other, commitment to Hawaiʻi, and the courage to explore difference and other hard things. I highlight these characteristics through the term decolonial love. Based on these interviews, what is the experience of decolonial love, and what does it inspire us to do? Noʻu’s interview reminds us of the intimate experience of bodies with bodies, bodies with ʻāina. That knowing someone means to be able to hold their name and their genealogies in your mouth. That ʻāina activates aliveness and desire, and that we can follow these pathways in our poems. Grace’s interview reminds us of love and belonging over generations. That decolonial love makes the threads visible, and asks for commitment through the pain and uncertainty of creating something new. Noʻu and Reyna’s interview teaches us to treat different bodies and different stories as sacred, and to create space where these differences can meet and be honored. Lyz’s interview challenges us to be puʻuhonua, to protect who and what we love. Justin’s interview asks us to find care through gratitude and through strengthening our ability to remember and make connections.

What did we learn about ea and how to create spaces for ea to flourish? Dawn and Logan’s interview tells a story of a dynamic reciprocity that can happen when people feel enough trust to share meaningful stories with each other. In the sharing and reflection, they can
see their own stories differently. Ellen’s interview asks that we create safe spaces to break open. That performance and ‘āina both have the ability to call you to bring your whole self. Jamaica and Joy’s interview maintains safety is not about comfort, but about being able to get thrown off-balance. The fall can soften the ground for ea to emerge. Bryan’s interview focuses on the kuleana flowing between people, ancestors, and ‘āina, and how this kuleana inspires people to transform. Mehana and Noe’s interview speaks to the power of the emcee or facilitator to create a generous listening space. The kind of space that helps make exciting connections, thereby stirring up ea.

Through writing poems together and listening to each other, we were challenged to wake up ea and kuleana in each other, across different places and memories. Though we couldn’t huaka‘i to our different ‘āina and ancestors, we practiced carrying them into a shared space, introducing them to each other. We shook up the maps, creating new connections through space and time. We learned how to mourn and celebrate together. We gave each other courage and determination. I want to remember the coursing, multitudinous exchange of ea.

Hū wale ka hā, ke ea
To come from a naʻau place
Being able to be broken
Put my mother’s name in your mouth
Make this a memory
We belong to each other
So that the people I love are safe
What happens when your sacred and my sacred touch?
An island chain reaction
When people are so moved by their love for something that they stand up against this whole training that they’ve had for their whole life.
CHAPTER 4. GROWING NĀ HUA EA

This dissertation shares stories of growing ea and decolonial community-building through community-engaged poetry projects. In Chapter 1, I genealogize Nā Hua Ea in a longer history of Oʻahu-based poetry projects and a larger field of community-engaged poetry, and poetry for social justice and collective action. These historical connections bring new mana and possibility to future work, and share ea with our literary histories. In Chapter 2, I differentiate and explore decolonial community-building in Hawaiʻi with other theories of social justice and histories of Hawaiʻi settler colonial multiculturalism. I offer a solidarity based on huakaʻi—courageous traveling that transforms us, that connects multiple experiences of colonization and of ea. I argue that building decolonal community across difference is strengthened by the presence of decolonial love. Decolonial love is centered in Indigenous and queer aliveness, and explores belonging and desire. In Chapter 3, I offer poems and interview excerpts from the poets and organizers of Nā Hua Ea, and so much waiwai contained in them about writing poetry for decolonial community. I hope to show that in a diverse decolonial community, ea comes from the kuleana and exploration of many voices.

“O ke ea ke kanaka, he makani.” This line became a hua for me after returning from a gathering of directors of state and territorial humanities councils in Washington DC in March 2019. Ironically or not, and over the years of working on this dissertation project, in January 2019 I was given the kuleana of becoming the new executive director of Hawaiʻi Council for the Humanities, the same organization that helped to plant and grow Nā Hua Ea in 2014. As a new ED in Washington DC, I facilitated conversation about ea and our unique responsibilities as conveners of public humanities. How do we build community and civic engagement among diverse voices?
How is the ea of the person the wind? In a letter I wrote to a colleague and friend after that retreat, I said:

The wind that greeted me as I stepped off the plane, the wind shaking the trees, the green leaves I know and love—coconut stretched hands, high, lāʻī, the safest shine, kukui, fuzzy and silver, everyone moving. The definite wind. And to feel the air of this beloved place...what an embrace!

How breathing is an exchange with this place, a leaning on each other.

How I could still hear (not so much anymore. it's fading) the timbre and pitch and rhythm of your voice (very distinct and I think my favorite summation?metonym?kinolau? of you) and how voice is really such an intimate thing. An air that rises up through your body, touching everything on the inside before emerging.

We said "voice" a lot at the retreat; our humanities councils give voice, uplift voices, amplify voice, etc. How voice becomes a stand-in for perspective or identity. It becomes a political word, an idea word. As if it comes out whole and set and sure, instead of an experience or a kind of wind feeling through, exploring, shifting, changing.

How is the ea of a person their voice?

Not as something known but as something always emerging and in touch with or directed toward another...

And how to create experiences where we (all the different we's) can feel that together?
To conclude, I want to offer more hua—some poetry pedagogy, from and for Nā Hua Ea, to inspire others to create together and with ʻāina. My questions are: How can we create decolonial community spaces like Nā Hua Ea? How can the research and reflection in this dissertation help to grow future directions of Nā Hua Ea? In this final chapter, I will share personal journal entries from more recent Nā Hua Ea writing workshops and offer some hua (seeds) for activities along three themes: weaving our stories together, centering decolonial love, and bodies trying together. Seeds will always grow differently depending on where they are planted, when, and how they are cared for.

**Weaving Our Stories Together**

*NHE Process Journal, July 6th, 2018*

*Reflection on NHE poetry workshop from July 1. The power of bringing groups together! Had Decolonial Pin@y connections, WVWS connections, Nā Koʻokoʻo connections, LHE connections. 15 or 16 people? Wow, little bit overwhelming yeah. Kisha led us in creating an altar together, remembering people who have gone through or are going through violence. Then we remembered Aunty Moani and Aunty Nani, through stories by Noe. Lyz led us in a word bank activity for genuine security and peace. We used the words later: joy, possibility, strength. My prompt was inspired by David Kahalemaile and Noe and Bryan, asking folks to list the ea of all these things in the word bank. Kisha led us in letter writing (Aunty Terri wrote to Uncle Kekuni, and to all the enlisted soldiers, asking for their story too) to the person we were thinking of for our altar, or to someone who taught us about peace. Lyz asked us to write into the future: what story do we need to hear, or what story do we need to tell? I led us in a sharing circle in the grass outside. I remember letters to grandmothers and baby Moku in Noe’s armpit. I remember*
Noʻu writing: the ea of daughters is enough. I wrote the ea of language is tongues trying. And then I tried. E mau ke ea.

The journal above captures a sketch of a poetry workshop led by four women: Kisha Borja-Quichocho-Calvo, Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, Lyz Soto, and myself. In our collaboration, we created a two-hour experience of learning to listen to many voices—past and future ancestors, those we mourn, teachers, each other. We increased our attentiveness to the largeness of the circle that day. This is a good example of one element of NHE workshops: the practice of weaving our stories together.

Foundational to this is believing that our ea grows the more we ask for and activate our relationships. As Bryan describes in his interview, ea is about apprehending a strong and complex web of relationships, and drawing kuleana and strength from that greater understanding. Critical to this is creating dialogue and connection with ancestors past and future, beyond the physical bodies present in the writing workshop. Each year of Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea honors kupuna, one who has passed on and one who is still with us. It has become an important part of our poetry workshops to share stories about them. We might share short videos where we can hear their leo and admire the way they move, or read parts of speeches or testimony or poetry that they had written. As Noe and Bryan foreground in “Making Rope,” and as Grace talks about in her interview, it is critical to reach for kupuna, for history and archives, and for those just born or not yet born, all as sources for our ea.

In weaving our stories together, we must make space for our differences—finding connection, not sameness. Included in this are settler ʻāina kupuna and genealogies. Being in relationship with Kānaka ʻŌiwi and Kanaka practices teaches us that a value of mālama ʻāina is at the center of this weaving and relating. The way we ask how we are connected then changes.
For example: “how can we have right relations among our different ‘āina that are not about warmaking or exploiting/exporting people and resources?” Or “how do we honor and nourish ‘āina and ea across our diverse genealogies?” (Cachola et. al, 81). In sharing our different stories, we gain a better sense of the global forces that connect us and how we can take agency over our impact. As Noʻu puts it in her interview: my ea is bound to yours. In a poetry workshop, we can write in many directions, to many different sources of our ea, activating a flow of energy among us.

The energy that comes from weaving our stories together and discovering new and unexpected connections leads to new understandings of our kuleana—or how we can put our ea into action. As Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua explains in The Seeds We Planted, the space of questioning kuleana was the most productive, instead of having the answers set (154–55). She offers the question: “Given my and my family’s relationship to history, to this specific ‘āina, and to the other people who exist here, what is my kuleana?” (155). She goes on: “By placing the question, what is my kuleana? at the center, HKM community members moved beyond unproductive oppositions between settler and Indigenous participants without collapsing difference or leaving the importance of positionality behind. That is, kuleana was seen as a process of discovery rather than a prescription” (155). In a poetry workshop, we might pose questions about kuleana at the beginning and end of a workshop, allowing time for people to explore and share and listen and shift. As Hoʻomoʻomoʻo taught us, a poem might be a safer way to express stories and explore kuleana in a multiethnic colonized space. We might also explore what kind of kuleana speaking a poem creates or strengthens. As Pacific Tongues pedagogy taught us, the act of speaking poems grows leadership and civic engagement, asking you to stand for words that you mean.
Nā Hua Ea:

- Pair up with someone. Share stories of an ancestor you are carrying. Write down three salient memories of your own ancestor (e.g., something they often said, them in the middle of doing something they often did). Trade memories. Write a poem where your ancestor talks to your partner’s ancestor. Share.

- Create a huakaʻi of two places important to your ea, and a short writing exercise at each one. At each place, you might share histories and futures of ea. For a month leading up to the final Nā Hua Ea performance, have a half-day huakaʻi every weekend, each one led by a different person. Look for diversity. Different people will end up coming to each one. Make a chapbook of all the huakaʻi. Invite them all to Nā Hua Ea.

- Share stories in the circle about a place or a person you are indebted to—they helped create you or do something you deem very important. They gave you a huge gift. What was it? Why is it important? Why did they do it? Write their names together on a big piece of paper, to create a giant net. After listening to everyone, reflect together on what this teaches us about kuleana.

Centering decolonial love / committed care and connection


Reflection on Genuine Security Quilt workshop on July 8th, led by Sierra Dew.

Women came together in a circle. I shared our prayer from WVWS as an opening pule. We shared our name, home, ancestors, and a way of “being romantic to yourself.” This is how we learned from VWA, from G and her deep lifeshaking sharing, from her girls even though they all forgot and went to church today. More than self-care, the practice maybe reminded us of falling
in love with ourselves, and how to show up in long-term relationship to that. We shared sage and oli from H and Aunty Terri. We scattered in the Haupe’epe’e wind to find a being that feels strong. We took all the colors, just in case, and drew and journaled, Aunty Terri gathered flowers. We moved to the hale pili to share what we discovered.

What unraveled there were insights cocreated with ‘ulu, bamboo, mountains, papaya, hala, kī, lehua, and pōhaku. It is no accident that our mana‘o came in collaboration with mea kanu, ‘ōiwi to Hawai‘i.

We talked about being enough, and movement, and exchange between self and community. We talked about pathways, and birthing and dying and healing, the function of beauty, and the nonviolence of stones, about growing and roots and ancestors. We teased and laughed a tiny bit. And when we forgot the old stories or forgot a word, we asked another in the circle to help us. We were “an ecosystem of friendship,” beginning and inviting trust at “the speed of stones.”

The visual art was a way to bypass some of the words and logic and thinking. Levels of head, heart, hand, levels of breath. The quiet exploration of ourselves in relation to more-than-humans helped us to enter more deeply into relationship with each other. Helped us open toward interdependence. There was still shyness and uncertainty and protective walls. You cannot rush trust. All you can do is bring fruit to share, plant seeds, and see what will rise.

The visual eco-art workshop described above was led by community artist Sierra Dew at Ho‘oulu ‘Āina, with kōkua from me. For the past few years, Sierra has been contributing her extensive gifts and time to Nā Hua Ea and Lā Ho‘iho‘i Ea as an artist and healer centered in women’s experiences of trauma and strength. Sierra’s workshop experience invited us to open
through creating relationship with plants and ‘āina. As a group I remember feeling us shift from uncertain strangers to a group with a shared experience and willingness to share more. This example helps me ask the question: how do you create a space of care and connection throughout the entire process of a poetry workshop?

As No’u and Reyna’s interview elucidates in Chapter 3, it is critical to create the space where our words, bodies, and stories are seen as a gift. The poet facilitator can set the tone of this, which makes space for more vulnerable sharing, that in turn creates increased trust and vulnerability in the group.

In a decolonizing context, where colonial and sexual trauma are always already present, turning to ‘āina can help to create safety in a group of people who don’t know each other well. As Ellen shares in her interview, the experience of mālama ‘āina at Papahana Kuaola helped her to express difficult and uncomfortable feelings in her poem. Turning to ‘āina is a safe way to explore our own feelings and experiences hard to share with each other. ‘Āina as a source of healing and nonjudgment. As No’u shared in her 2016 interview, turning to ‘āina can also awaken the erotic, as Audre Lorde describes it—fullness and overflowing aliveness (not limited to “happiness”). No’u’s experience with the stream and mud at Papahana Kuaola led to a surge of creativity and dialogue with ‘āina.

The physical embodied practice with ‘āina is very helpful to the Nā Hua Ea workshop. Many Kānaka have explained aloha ‘āina as more than a feeling, but an action. As Maya Kawaiulanaokeawaiki Saffery describes:

Aloha ‘āina is love for the ‘āina (land), love for your kūpuna (ancestors), love for your culture, love for your lāhui (people, nation). But it is more than a feeling or a

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45 To learn more about Sierra Dew’s work, see her Instagram @sierradewhawaii.
belief. Aloha ‘āina needs to be acted upon and practiced over and over in different spaces and contexts so that we are constantly reminding ourselves and others that we as ‘Ōiwi (Indigenous peoples) have been here, are still here, and will always be here caring for our places, peoples, practices, languages, and knowledge systems. Aloha ‘āina can reveal itself through large-scale movements but also through everyday acts by individuals and communities that may appear on the surface to be small or insignificant but can in fact have huge impacts on the healing, revitalization, and resurgence of a community. (Saffery)

Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua terms pedagogies grounded in aloha ‘āina as “sovereign pedagogies.” In The Seeds We Planted, she writes: “by grounding pedagogies in the theories and practices of aloha ‘āina, kuleana, and hoʻomana, Kanaka and settler educators are expressing forms of contemporary Hawaiian independence and sovereignty that are not solely based on Western statist models” (245–46). Being with ‘āina in these ethical ways hold space for diverse perspectives to connect to Kanaka values and practices. She goes on: “Sovereign pedagogies cultivate land-centered literacies that attend to the health of the environmental systems of which we are a part. They create the space and give Indigenous and settler participants the intellectual tools to reckon their genealogies and postionalities in relation to history, land and the diverse peoples with which one lives” (246).46

As Saffery and many others assert, aloha ‘āina and decolonial love are deeply about commitment and action. The kiaʻi at Maunakea are teaching us this, with their willingness to get arrested, lose their jobs, spend time away from their families and other kuleana, and risk difficult physical conditions to protect a sacred piko from development. And what Maunakea continues to

46 For an important and deeper discussion of kuleana as a reciprocal and sustained act, see Aikau, Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, and Silva, “The Practice of Kuleana.”
teach us is that act of aloha ʻāina is deeply transformative for the people involved. As Aunty Pua Case says frequently: we are not saving the Mauna. The Mauna is saving us.

Nā Hua Ea:

- Spend time with plants important to Kānaka and your own ancestors. Ask an expert (lāʻau people, mahi ‘ai, weavers, lei makers) to share appropriate moʻolelo. In the workshop, share stories with each other about these plants—what you know, your memories, who in your family had a relationship with them. Sit in physical presence with the plant and write to it. It could be a letter of love or gratitude. It could be questions that you are struggling with. Share. This could also apply to fish.

- Write to Maunakea or another ʻāina important to you. What would you do to mālama and protect this ʻāina? What does it do to mālama or protect you? Option: draw your manaʻo. Share.

- Bring stories of queer Indigenous love to the foreground in every workshop. Love that crosses heteronormative and patriarchal boundaries, human-nonhuman boundaries.

Bodies trying together

NHE Process Journal July 7, 2019

One week out from Nā Hua Ea. It feels so good to organize with Hanale. He is so powerful and such solid ground. We handmade a flyer at the market, with the market. All the colors, the river and mud flowing, the apu ʻawa glowing, everything green and growing. We have something of a lineup, and an invitation from Noe to “bring a love letter to ʻāina to share.” So many people help with this event, so many solid people. I think I will find it easy to show up and enjoy together—what a growth for me.
Today, Sunday, Hanale hosted a workday art day at the farm. I arrived uncertain, trying to bring lots of kinds of food—bright purple slaw variant (thank you, CJ), and a cut-up pineapple. At first it was just the two of us, then Kalama came with her family, and a visiting Cherokee midwife from Standing Rock and her family. Later, Aunty Gwen appeared with her cane, needing help balancing, with her sister’s grandkids visiting from Las Vegas. Then neighbors stopped by to sit on the grass and play some music before leaving for the next engagement. I remember “Ku’u Home o Kahalu’u,” and the mountains majestic at the back of the farm. People brought so much food—chow funn, turkey tails, pineapple, hibiscus iced tea, ‘ulu and avocado, veggies, poke, sandwiches. Everyone played in the river and then laughed and talked in the lo‘i. The mud was cool and the water was running. Everyone’s feet aerated the patch, and then walked on Hanale’s white-painted board. “Go with muddy feet.” Write your name, he said. Then do another print and write the name of an ancestor. Baby River loved sitting butt-naked in the lo‘i, while Māmā and her chatted about her kohe. What a beautiful way to be clean, I thought, floating nearby.

We were easygoing, flowing clear with the water, enjoying the green and the mud. We were well-fed. At a certain point, I felt people were waiting for something (Aunty Gwen kept trying to impress upon her ʻōpio the name of where we were: Waiāhole). I gathered a handful of them around a table and asked for their help writing a poem for Nā Hua Ea. “Love like ʻāina,” I said. What’s ʻāina? someone asked. We stumbled a little. A place you love. That feeds you. That you have relationship with, that you go to visit, talk to, it talks to you. That you go over and over.

I told Meghan a little that I was worried about Dad—that he is not eating, losing weight, unable to talk. The hardest thing is that he doesn’t seem to want to get better, and doesn’t want to talk about how he is feeling. I am feeling helpless and worried. The night before I cried to
Wayne a little. I couldn’t remember him happy. It had been so long. I wondered if I would ever see him happy again.

Meghan reminds me that a big part of healing is meeting people where they are at.

The ʻōpio. They were a little nervous, a little uncertain, but you could see their spirits pushing at their ribs. I talked to each, joking a little, coaxing feelings out. That it’s OK to write that, it is not wrong. Walking under the Las Vegas sky. Being with ‘ohana at Waimānalo. The thrill and then relief. They were proud, they wanted to write more after they got the hang of it.

Aunty Gwen grew up in loʿi, in Waiheʻe. I didn’t know that. While she was working, while she was taking care of family, she didn’t have time to be in the loʿi even though it was a passion for her. She was the last one in the mud, fully with herself, squelch squelch, and I could see her memories holding her, helping her balance.

Aunty Gwen finished the poem, and I scribed for her. She talked about Mauna a Wākea, so certain. The mauna makes her feel safe. We all read our parts and were proud of being connected, and making.

After everyone went home, Meghan and River and Hanale finished the poem. They wrote about the river, they wrote about love. They sent me home with tomatoes and squash.

What did I learn today. The work wasn’t achieving a predetermined goal, rather, the work was being together, making room for every person, and enjoying the refreshment and mana of the loʿi, of the mountains, of the river. A memory of ea for these ʻōpio and keiki, for the kūpuna, for the mākua, for me. We revolved around the joy of muddy feet—letting the ʻāina, and time with ʻāina, open us, relax us, connect us. The worry of Maunakea continues, and I will think about my father, and everyone else has problems too, I know. But for a little bit we put all that down, for love like ʻāina. ##
The journal above helps to illustrate the third guiding principle of Nā Hua Ea poetry pedagogy: to take time for bodies to physically be together—performing, sharing, interacting in ways we can’t foretell. We were brought together by musician and kalo farmer Hanale Bishop, to his farm in Waiāhole. Hanale has been a part of Nā Hua Ea since our first event—lugging his speaker and microphone to our warehouse performance, writing new songs every year in celebration of Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea, and more recently, helping to organize the lineup and Nā Hua Ea workshops. Hanale and his ‘ohana bring a grounded grace to everyone they meet.

When we share ground, muddy feet, we deepen our relationships with each other and with ʻāina. Through creative writing and sharing our words, we create courage that in turn proliferates connection and kuleana. Collective response and reciprocity calls more ea into being.

Leanne Simpson has written about the importance of shared performance space and experience to energize Indigenous resurgence:

Historically Indigenous and Black artists have been visionaries in our struggles and movements. They have also affirmed our presence—created temporary spaces of joy and freedom, and enabled me to go on. In the academy I think about things, and lecture about things, but in performance I can set up space together with an audience to share something different. I really liked creating these islands of freedom, little glimpses of freedom where we stand together and we get to feel, just for a second maybe, what freedom might be like, and to get that feeling into our bones. These spaces open up different possibilities. These spaces are not just spaces of refusal, they are also generative. They are also spaces of joy and possibility. (Simpson and Brand)
We multiply possibility when we push for these creative writing spaces to be for multiple generations. The younger folks in the story above, compared to Aunty Gwen, all played different roles and saw different things. For Aunty Gwen, being in the lo‘i awakened a memory. For her young ones who live far away from Hawai‘i, being in the lo‘i was making a memory. For the younger ones, it was also important to feel engaged and have fun. Because both generations were there, memories were connected across past and future, strengthening and broadening identity. Because the younger ones were there, we were reminded of the importance of play and laughter to activate us.

Sharing, or “performing,” saying the words at the end—was critical to bring ceremony and kuleana to the space. We gathered together, quieted down, and listened to each other. Took each person seriously, young and old. Each person was nervous before sharing, feeling the kuleana of speaking. As Lee Kava maintains in her Pacific Verse examples, keeping this element of embodied performance in the workshop space is what builds our collective ea. We practice being brave, and practice respecting and listening to each other. Because our na‘au are activated, what we share means something to us. We hold each other’s stories as if they are gifts too.

When doing body-centered play, it is important to value trying more than getting it perfect. Exploring rather than knowing. Questions more than answers.

Nā Hua Ea:

- Create writing workshops for families. Breakout sessions where kūpuna get together, mākua get together, ʻōpio get together, and keiki get together. Work with different poet facilitators to explore a similar age-appropriate prompt around ea. Come back all together at the end to share. Make sure there is food too.
• Create short writing workshops in collaboration with mālama ʻāina workdays. There could be a short writing or art question at the beginning and at the end. Create a space (like a large posterboard or wooden board) for responses to be shared collectively and displayed. At the end, make a quiet time to give these words back to that ʻāina and to each other.

• Collaborate with dancers, chanters, and other performers to do more body-centered activities as part of creative writing workshops. Reflect on the feelings of ea, kuleana, aloha ʻāina, in our bodies. Connect to the bodies of ʻāina too. What does ea, kuleana, aloha ʻāina look like on the bodies of ʻāina?
CODA

On May 5th, 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home order, I defended this dissertation in an online Zoom “room” filled with 60 other friends, teachers, mentors, collaborators of Nā Hua Ea. My dissertation committee asked beautiful questions about ancestors and huaka‘i and decolonization and histories of being community together in Hawai‘i. Jon Osorio sang “Easy To Be Hard,” for us—a wholehearted and risky gift in the context of the academic dissertation “defense.” When I think about what “PhD” means, I want to remember the generosity and connection in that Zoom room, and what it felt like to have people show up for two hours for me, for us. And here, I want to talk more about a few of those committee questions, as a coda to this work and as an invitation to grow these hua ea.

*How might this idea of huaka‘i solidarity translate into public school education in Hawai‘i?* I think one thing huaka‘i solidarity requires is relationship and aloha with ʻāina. The public school system can learn a lot from Hawaiian culture-based charter schools, who have innovated ways to learn science, math, history, literature, through mālama ʻāina work. ʻĀina and Kanaka cultural understandings of aloha ʻāina would be just as important as the classroom or computer, as a practice to build kuleana and aloha for Hawai‘i. Another thing huaka‘i solidarity would invite is multilingualism. Requiring students to more deeply explore their diverse genealogies would necessitate learning other histories and world views. Language learning is critical to that, and how exciting it would be to have public school be a place that pushes us to become fluent in diverse epistemologies, and learn how all our different peoples are connected with each other. Making families more central to education would also be central to students exploring their own identities and historical contexts. Families would be seen as an important source of knowledge, instead of outsiders to the education happening in school. Overall, a
huakaʻi solidarity curriculum would be about rooting in mālama ʻāina and kuleana in order to more deeply explore yourself and your connections to the larger world.

Why is it important to talk about love? As a graduate student for over ten years, I have read many important and inspiring critiques of colonialism, militarism, and settler colonialism. I have read analyses about solidarity and resistance and allyship and ethics. However, I often felt that reading this scholarship, especially the pieces written by settlers, did not reflect my experiences of social justice and aloha ʻāina in the non-university community. Did not speak to the surge in my chest, the tears in my eyes, the togetherness. The “I got you, I’m here.” In my experience, love is at the base of decolonial community-building. Love for our home, love for each other. Love is the reason we show up for difficult struggles and stay over lifetimes. Love is what moves us to dare to change our world. As Lyz Soto puts it beautifully in her interview, “so that the people I love are safe.” I think settlers in the academy have had good reason to shy away from the rhetoric of love, to create a respectful boundary, to make sure to not claim what is not ours. But we then miss out on stories of the deep transformation that happens in caring relationship with each other. We need these stories. If this dissertation does anything, I hope it testifies to the amazing power of these relationships, that it is valuable to talk more about love together.

Who is this dissertation for? There is some ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi in this text, without translation, I replied to this question. Rather than seeing this as a barrier to understanding and access, I think this dissertation would be a lot richer if I was much closer to Hawaiian language, and if it shaped my thinking even more. Maybe this writing is for that future self, I joked, who has progressed that much further in the path of personal decolonization. This dissertation is for the people in it, I followed up with. This tremendous diverse decolonial community. The next day this question
continued to turn in me, restless, until I realized I hadn’t answered it fully. I began my
dissertation defense by sharing a question I have heard over and over from family and friends,
the people I grew up with: why do you care about Hawaiian sovereignty if you are not
Hawaiian? I explained that this dissertation began as a way to explore this powerful question so
common in local culture in Hawai‘i. I did not say that the heart of this dissertation is inspired by
the countless examples I have found in history and in my life of people who are not Hawaiian,
who have cared deeply for this place, for ea. I hope the mana‘o shared here can help to grow this
life-changing aloha for Hawai‘i nei.
APPENDIX

This chapbook of poems from Nā Hua Ea was designed by Justin Takaha White and self-published by us in 2014, thanks to funding from the Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities and Office of Hawaiian Affairs. The cover features artwork from our first poster, also designed by Justin Takaha White. It continues to be distributed for free at various community events.
BrYAn kAMAOLI kUwADA now has a pants-and-shoes job, but still spends his days dreaming about the green valley walls of Pālolo and the wonderful woman he lives there with.

But we’ve never forgotten how to navigate
How to draw our fingers across the face of a passing wave
The sun strains as our sail, while birds lift our hulls
Koa has always grown on this sea, in our masts, our hulls, our hearts
Leaving only the question of crew
We accept only those who will step bravely into darkness
For we have the generations to light our way

Ke ea o ko Hawai’i Pae ‘Āina, ‘o ia nō ka noho Aupuni ‘ana
E ka lāhui ē, ‘o kāu hana nui, e ui ē
They tell us that they have seen the wonders of Mānā
But it is only heat rippling on sand
And we are angry that they are pushing a mirage
There is no fucking bucket—
But we have always been crabs
Pa‘iea, Kapāpa‘iaheha, Ka‘a‘amakualenalena
Holding fast to the stones, fighting against crashing waves
Each struggling breath between sets reaffirms our ea
And what they refuse to recognize
Is that when we yell, when we shout
We do it not in anger
But to reassure our ancestors
That we are still here

This poem is a response to a speech printed in Ka Nupepa Kuokoa on August 12, 1871. It had been given by David Kahalemaile on the occasion of Lā Ho‘iho‘i Ea, and in it he describes ea as an essential part of what makes everything live, from the world itself to the fish in the sea. The first line of each stanza of this poem is a line from the opening of Kahalemaile’s beautiful speech.
To Ea: In Response to David Kahalemaile, August 12, 1871
By Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada

Ke ea o ka i’a, he wai
Lu’u a ea, lu’u a ea
Breathe deep, O breath-stealing ocean
You offer much but exact a toll as well
Our friends and our land swallowed by your hungering mouth
Too many mistake your surging power for invulnerability
And your injuries wash up broken and rotting upon our shores
Yet your tattooed knees show that you too have been ignored
Sides heaving, coral ribcage expanding, contracting
Breathing, an exertion made difficult in this age
This era of disrespect, of not honoring reciprocity
And those closest to you are those who suffer
Until we rise again from your depths
Yearning, reaching, crying for ea

Ke ea o ke kanaka, he makani
Hali mai ka makani i ka hanu ea o ka honua
Wind called from our lungs
‘Anae leaping from the pali, two minutes at a time
Some lifted on the shoulders of the wind
Others clawing for breath as they fall
We are taught never to call them back
The wind returns, but they do not
Mouths stretched open until jaws crack
Used as fishhooks, drawing forth our connections from the sea
Circular and round, soft and untenable
Wind sweeps infinitely into night

‘O ke ea o ka honua, he kanaka
‘O au nō na’e kāu kauwā
In your presence, I count by fours
Carrying a breath in each space between my fingers
Each palm drawn towards the ground
Called close by your fertility
Our noses touch
Nothing but the ea held in our manawa
Cartilage, skin, and bone connecting to rock, earth
And young, smooth stone
The hā of genealogical age passes between us
And I know the weight, the measure, the depth
Of my connection to you

Ke ea o ka moku, he hoeuli
‘O ka hōkū ho’okele wa’a ke a’a nei i ka lani
Familiar stars and swells etch a map in our aching bones
Remembered pain is how we find our way to you
Frenzied waves whip the ocean to a bitter froth
Craig Santos Perez is a native Chamoru from the Pacific Island of Guåhan/Guam. He is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at the University of Hawai’i, Mānoa, where he teaches Pacific literature and creative writing.

DEIS Public Comment #65: “And I still find it hard to wrap my head around everything”

DEIS Public Comment #68: “I feel scared because no one can tell the future” —

DEIS Public Comment #75: “NO ACTION! But I do believe Guam needs change”

DEIS Public Comment #79: “The online comment box is too limiting”

DEIS Public Comment #80: “Why are we only limited to 2500 characters in our comments?” Do the blank spaces between words count as characters? Does silence give our words character?

DEIS Public Comment #81: “Where are the comments to these issues sent? Who sees them? Will the public see any of these comments?”

DEIS Public Comment #82: “This document really needs to discuss how bad traffic is going to be” — Increased traffic is the only issue that everyone is united against — Though I’m sure there’s one ultra-colonized out there who will argue that more traffic will boost the economy and preserve our culture — Parking offers structure, after all —

DEIS Public Comment #83: “Lao pa’go na ha’ane nisisita ta fanachu put i tano’ta, para i famagu’on-ta (Now is the time to stand up for our land for the future of our children)”

DEIS Public Comment #99: “I feel like the ko’ko’ bird. My nest was on the ground. I was a flash in the forest. I took to the water.”
On July 2nd, 2014, in the lime-green hale/warehouse at Papahana Kuaola in Waipao, He'eia, we cried, laughed, shouted, whispered, sang these poems as part of our community celebration of Nā Hua Ea: Words of Genuine Security and Sovereignty. Over a hundred of us gathered that evening to learn about what was happening on the frontline of many important community issues: increasing militarization and RIMPAC exercises, DOI hearings and Lili‘u’s red ribbon letter, grassroots resistance to development in Ko‘olauloa, and the continuing pain borne by the ‘ohana of Kollin Elderts and other parents of murdered children.

Many of these poems were written for this event. A group of diverse poets gathered together over the space of a month, to learn about ka Lā Ho‘iho‘i Ea, to encourage each other to write, to visit and reconnect with ‘āina and each other. Our intention was to celebrate the ho‘oilina kūpuna (ancestral legacy) of, and put our collective mana toward, aloha ‘āina: independence based on our love for this place and for each other. These poems are a record of our imagination and resilience to create strong and hopeful alternative futures.

Nā Hua Ea educational community events on July 2nd and 17th, 2014, were made possible with the support of: The Value of Hawai‘i; Hui Mau ke Ea; Papahana Kuaola; Nā Mea Hawai‘i; Women’s Voices Women Speak; MANA movement for aloha no ka ‘aina; Center for Biographical Research; and the Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities.

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DEIS Public Comment #28: “In short, will Guam residents be relegated to ‘dial-up’ speeds as the military usurps the majority of available bandwidth?”

DEIS Public Comment #29: “Strange that no mention was made of windsurfing”—The dredging of apra harbor will destroy a windsurfing area—Will it also destroy the wind?

DEIS Public Comment #30: “I am totally against the military taking over the land at the Race Track located in the Pågat area”—Craig, Is this an experimental translation project?—Not exactly, I read Volume Ten of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the military buildup on Guam. Volume Ten contains almost all the 10,000 comments that people submitted in response to the DEIS during the official 90-day comment period—I copied and pasted phrases, sentences, words, passages from the comments of the people—Now I am posting these comments as my Facebook status—Sometimes I comment on the comment—When I am done, I’ll make it into a poem—Does that sound boring?

DEIS Public Comment #32: “That’s a terrible thing to do on sacred, holy ground, and I know this because I go to Catholic school”

DEIS Public Comment #33: “Shame on you”

DEIS Public Comment #34: “Please don’t take my grandpa’s farm land away”

DEIS Public Comment #35: “I am a 9-year old girl and I don’t want you to do this because I love dolphins and turtles and want them to be here when I have my own kids”
This poem is dedicated to Haumea, goddess and shape-shifter, who bathes in the waters of Ha’aako‘elea.

When I was a baby girl I was bathed in the sink chrome mountains rising around me faucet water fall lukewarm gurgle of tap water & Jergens I had a pond & up above in the sky of my mother’s chest a necklace gold pendant flash of fire quick enough to catch the name HAUMEA my father’s name engraved in black passed down to him by his grandmother who gave birth in a cave passed on the backs of lizard women who bathe in po’owai HAUMEA shape shifter HAUMEA seaweed seeker HAUMEA crab catcher kukui nut fists that protect prosperous impenetrable pōhuehue hips wet with Ha’aako‘elea HAUMEA vanishing HAUMEA birthing may I sit w/ you shape shifter may I drink w/ you wai o Kapuna my kūpuna swam in the currents of your voyage from Kahiki swam in the stomach of this vast & dark moana opened their wombs I am mo‘o puna mo‘o woman obey rocks slime & wai wai wai HAUMEA may I bathe w/ you wai bathed w/ you my mind is a pond you po’owai cleansing these now bitter waters these mountains this sky HAUMEA many bodied many named I ask your permission.

NO‘U REVILLA is a Kanaka Maoli poet from Wai‘ehu, Maui.

From Fatal Impact Statements

By Craig Santos Perez

DEIS Public Comment #2: “This is a huge document to digest”

DEIS Public Comment #4: “It doesn’t matter what we gain from the buildup; it’s what we lose”

DEIS Public Comment #5: “Buenas. First off, thank you for the false sense of participation created by the comment period. The opportunity to vent, while completely meaningless, is at very least cathartic”

DEIS Public Comment #6: “The destruction of the land is a sign of disrespect to our ancestors”

DEIS Public Comment #7: “How much sewage and solid waste can our island expect?”—Many comments address how full of ______ our colonizer is, but the real concern was where our colonizer was going to put all that ______, especially with 80,000 more ___ holes coming to Guam

DEIS Public Comment #9: “Military peeps please hear me clearly. I don’t want no trouble but just believe me things will go down if you mess up. Just don’t start no bull like on Okinawa. Guahan soldier for life”—Hahahaha that was one of my students at the first hearing—Craig! Had my students comment in class one day and I received a torn paper, with red ink and large letters that said: FUH-Q MILITARY. Then a tiny little post it attached that said “Sorry, That’s all I could think of because I’m really mad”

DEIS Public Comment #10: “My main reason for being against the military buildup is for what happened in Okinawa. A girl got raped”

DEIS Public Comment #12: “The lives of the native ocean inhabitants are more important than a parking lot for war ships”

DEIS Public Comment #17: “They can’t even pronounce the names of the villages right for God’s sake!”—Pronunciation before colonization!

DEIS Public Comment #18: “On behalf of the outrigger Guam Resort, OHANA Bayview Guam and OHANA Oceanview Guam representing a combined total of 939 rooms and almost 350 employees. I hereby submit testimony in support. The buildup will offer our industry an increase in the number of visitors and additional customer diversity”

DEIS Public Comment #20: “This bothers me so much that I am typing this response at midnight with my cellphone”

DEIS Public Comment #21: “I don’t think I’m allowed to say that I’m against the military buildup because both of my parents are for the build up, and my dad is in the Air Force”

DEIS Public Comment #25: “Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of serving in and support of the US military”—Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of cancer and diabetes in support of the US military—Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of dying in wars in support of the US military—Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of our land being taken in support of the US military—Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of being relocated throughout the world in support of the US military—Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of forgetting in support of the US military

DEIS Public Comment #27: “We were here first and I don’t care if you own us. We still have a voice to say what we feel”
The first gift of Western civilization was disease. The second gift of Western civilization was violence.

— Haunani-Kay Trask

I have no mercy or compassion for a society that will crush people and then penalize them for not being able to stand up under the weight.

— Malcolm X

For over four generations they have said we are a people with a history of violence, accustomed to the dark, cold cell, remedial in mind and body. They write of how we killed infants, sacrificed humans, practiced incest, how our kings and queens were alcoholic, inept dictators, how we owned slaves, how disease comes with darkness, how they must save us from ourselves.

And we take the new tongue and its historical revisions, the low test scores, the longer sentences, the water shortages, the paid-off politicians, the third part-time job, the cancers and the radiation, diabetes and amputations, eminent domain and adverse possession, the overruling of all our objections because now their violence is all we know.

— Malcolm X

Violence is more than lodging bullets into brown or black bodies, but also burning sacred valleys, stabbing tunnels into mountains, damming streams, dumping poisons into oceans, overdeveloping ʻāina, bombing and buying islands. Violence is Arizona jail cells, GMOs, and unearthed iwi waiting under a Wal-Mart ramp, in boxes, in museums, in a church basement. Violence is what we settle for because we’ve been led to believe green paper can feed us more than green land.

Violence is what we’re used to as they measure our blood to wait decades for a dollar-a-year lease, when we forget how we once fed and healed ourselves, how our mouths hold life and death. We are no longer shocked by raids on what is left in the pitched tents and tarps, our evictions from beach to beach and park to park, the poverty of unfurling fists open only to the smallest of handouts.

Violence is what we’re used to as they measure our blood to wait decades for a dollar-a-year lease, when we forget how we once fed and healed ourselves, how our mouths hold life and death.

And we take the new tongue and its historical revisions, the low test scores, the longer sentences, the water shortages, the paid-off politicians, the third part-time job, the cancers and the radiation, diabetes and amputations, eminent domain and adverse possession, the overruling of all our objections because now their violence is all we know.

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— Malcolm X

Violence is believing you are in the United States driving on a highway built over the sacred, carrying artillery to scorch the sacred so more sacred lands can become the United States through violence.
Don’t let anybody tell you not to be angry. We have every right to be angry—This is our country.

— Haunani-Kay Trask

You were born into captivity, a native in a racist, anti-Native world; yet, they call you racist. They hate you like they have hated every warrior before you.

This helps them bear the weight of dominion; helps them keep their vacation houses, golf courses, hotels, and bases; helps them feed their children denial, so as adults they, too, can say, “Don’t blame me for what happened a hundred years ago.” They must keep believing that the United States is our country and not just the country that occupies our country, Hawai‘i.

4
It always seems impossible until it’s done.

— Nelson Mandela

You tell us: “You are not a racist because you fight racism. You are a warrior,” and you train more warriors, show us how to sharpen and land words like spears, how to catch their spears and hurl them back. You call us the spears of our nation, assure us “Decolonization is all around us.” You guide us to the rope of resistance so we can weave the newest strands together under a sovereign sun.

And so we tell our children, our children tell their children, and their children tell their children until our words become the chattering winds of hope that erode the hardness of violence from the earth, and we are sown back into and born from Papahānaumoku green and tender once again.

stripped of their homelands, their names, and now we call them Johnny, Jenny, and my personal favorite, Britney not judging anyone’s assimilative tendencies and need to be American But some of us didn’t have a choice

Wahi a kahiko

No ke aha ia mea e mau nei
I luna o ko kakou?
No ke aha ia mea e ae ia nei la
I luna o ko kakou?
Kela hae la
Huki ia la i lalo
O kela hae e la, wahi hae e la
Huki ia la i lalo

Ma hea hou ae e welo ai
Ua hae alii o kakou?
Ma hea hou ae ku pono a e hoi
Ua hae aloha o kakou?
O kakou la
Huki ia la i luna
O ko kakou hae la
Huki ia la i luna

Again, not judging anyone’s assimilative tendencies and need to be American But some of us didn’t have a choice

Yet we were all there Our parents trying not to make us feel the despair Of conflicted spaces and economic races That were spinning out of control in the ’70s, ’80s, and ’90s It was like we lived in a bubble that the rest of the world just let float tagging our names on the number 9 bus, swimming at the park pool, Volleyball at the gym, and playing Chinese jump rope All the while having hood dreams and high hopes

Growing up in the Housing was not an immigrant experience for me I thought naïvely that my life was as normal as can be There was actually a time in my innocence that I really believed that the whole world was between the sun’s path Wilhelmina rise to the East, Waahila in the West, and Waikiki to the South That was the whole world to me.

From Kula, Maui, BRANDY NĀLANI MCDougall is a Hawaiian poet and scholar teaching Indigenous Studies in the American Studies Department at UH Mānoa.
The Housing
By Mehanaokala Hind

Did Marshall Hind and Jade Ferguson know
Almost 42 years ago
That which they sowed
Would have a voice

I am
The love child of ’70s RnB and KCCN AM1420
Dressed from head to toe in glitter and gold by the finest pack of mahus Honolulu has ever known
Cultivated from the scanty streets of Palolo
Where growing up as a child was like a cross of growing up Samoan and Popolo
Even though my blood ran thick Hawaiian and Haole
In Hind-sight I am amazed by all the refugees that surrounded... Me and my family
First the Vietnamese, then Cambodians, then Laotians, now Micronesians, sprinkled throughout this time were some of the other Polynesians (mostly Samoans, but also Tongans and Fijians)
But little did I know that I was growing up in an American war zone
Or at least were surrounded by the refugees of American foreign “diplomacy”
My hood beginnings were anything but ghetto fabulous
It was a city of refuge for those innocently affected by man, I mean men, huh, yeh, most appropriately, big-dick foreign policy
And unlike the Kingdom of Judah or Israel
The faces I grew up around weren’t those of manslaughtering felons,
Instead they were the children of parents whose lives were torn apart and there was no sight of heaven
And whether seeking freedom or salvation
Or medical treatment for islands devastated
By nuclear bombs that made black snowflakes that children played in...
You see growing up Housing, in Hawaii wasn’t just about being poor we all shared a common history “his” story dominated our modern mythology trauma in the DNA of mass death due to men eager to explore, without bounds of morality, ethics, and simple human decency they ended up here

Invocation
by Ellen-Rae Cachola

Guide us like the curve of the coast
Sharpen us like the tip of a summit
Build our courage to stand
Like mountains that prevent armies to pass
Inspire us like wind that breathe across divisions
Fill us with will to create different relations
Sustain our connections as peoples

Mōkapu
I’ll remember your story of place
Built as a Marine Corps base
There is a hill where spring water trickled
To a people’s village below
The dead thirsty for rest
iwi into sand for cement
Built a settlement for Marines with PTSD
Desecration upon desecration
Layers of misinformation
The lie of annexation justify
The lie of recruitment
Can there be sovereignty
When neighbors defend
Military security?
Papahana Kuola
Ancient Rocks arranged
Energy circulates
Can it flow?
From the headlands to below?
Does settler oppose indigene?
State calculating
To feed its machine
How can we free us
from relations of the matrix
Courage in the walk to
Uncharted places
Identities formed by stream’s
Rhythm consoling hardened edges
Tender hands cultivate
fertile hearts in pain

When the song is known
Unblock the damming flow
Like the little stones
Shining at the bottom of the stream
Dive deep in freezing waters
Feel the smooth ones
amidst the sharp ones
These words build ways
Across muddy paths
Faith is slippery
Trust is the journey
Dig and break
Through

Like hands clearing the weeds
Uncertainty, assumptions, guilt, binaries
Let the shoots of medicine grow
Recognize there’s a task for each
Answer to your question
Quietly buried
Pluck from the root
Tendrils of truth emerge

Like the wave that crests,
Then splash on our feet
Sink us deep into the sand
Root us to your place
To feel the tide underneath
Rhizome defies the garrison state
Memory traverses the exclusive gate
Patterns of us against them,
Lines designed,
Melt in the current.
Linked, we have always been
From this to other shores

Guide us like the curve of the coast
Sharpen us like the tip of a summit
Build our courage to stand
Like mountains that prevent armies to pass
Inspire us like wind that breathe across divisions
Fill us with will to transform relations
Sustain our connections as peoples

This poem is a documentation of the Women’s Voices Women Speak Retreat June 7-9, 2014.
ELLEN-RAE CACHOLA is Ilocano and was born on Maui.
Do you remember when you were 18 and you had come to talk to me about failing Biology about failing Economics? You felt like a failure. School had promised you a new, shiny future. Instead, you found yourself inspected and dissected by teachers and scantrons.

You told me:
I wanted to help my mother: B-
She's struggling: maybe a C+
So I majored in business: F
We were homeless for 3 months before, and I never want to go back to that: D/D-

I remember all the doors and windows wide open.
I remember seeing every empty room in you, in that drafty light.
And I heard your voice echo in that lonely house.
Most of all, I remember how shitty it felt to see you hold on to that story, like a good girl,
as if it were the only story you had.

Do you remember our literature class? How you were worried you weren’t good enough, pretty enough, smart enough, to write a poem? You wrote one anyway.

And breathe the salt air, your dark hair, The story you are, the one we could never write.

--

This poem is dedicated to a student who taught me a lot about what it means to be strong and to love through obstacles. Her story reminds me how small and unsafe many of our students feel within our current educational system, and inspires me to think about how to create “genuine security” in these fragile spaces.
Love One
For Aiko / By Lyz Soto

Seven years four months and fifteen days ago we read love as a hopeless practice. We defined affection as horizontal alignment when we slept and memories of good sex. In our arms we cradled fear as a twin to love and confused them with towers.

Today love wrings us dry. We blink too often, but finally sit, a table between us. Between four hands rests courage on a platter, an offering we cannot pass off as jackass punking or chalk down to artless youth.

Five years ago we called love stupid.

Yesterday almost happened between our four fists on a platter when we stretched our heart globes to elliptical shadows—risked holding hands with the wounded and called them namesakes.

Yes, we are large enough for this table sitting among white beards who confuse faith with invasion and sanctuary with anxious greed.

Yesterday we put naïve on a table after almost drowning. In a mouth of water we drink salt and dare to imagine the brackish without suffocation and homelands without fear.

In those moments I felt whole and courageous and protected.

Did I absorb enough of her love during my first short year to steel me for the life to come?

To love is a transformative gift. With the power to heal, so too the power to steal the bitter melon of the crippled soul and steel the vulnerable against hurt.

LYZ SOTO is co-founder of Pacific Tongues.

Gramma Stories
by Dawn Mahi and Logan Narikawa

I scoured the poetry books of my favorite revolutionary ladies, looking for something to share. Something new. A succinct moment of sovereignty, of the fight. But all the poems were about love.

[make this a memory]
On grey days, I sometimes stare out of the rectangular glass windows that front my house. And I am called back to a time when it was my grandmother who did this. She hugged me, often. And grasped for my hand whenever we waited on other people—this also happened often. And it felt natural and normal. In a family that rarely embraces, it is strange to think that she could have been so affectionate without making me uncomfortable.

Yesterday I can’t remember her except through my mother’s stories and the pictures of her smiling face. I lost her before I could say her name. All day she took care of me while mom was at work and I know that somewhere in my cells I am her beloved granddaughter.

In those moments I felt whole and courageous and protected.

Did I absorb enough of her love during my first short year to steel me for the life to come?

To love is a transformative gift. With the power to heal, so too the power to steal the bitter melon of the crippled soul and steel

Gramma was a cook Mitsuba. Millie’s.

With her hands she crafted delectable love searing with salt, she fed her neighbor’s souls with the sweet sting of sacrifice. through satisfied stomachs she turned strangers to neighbors to friends.

Baba had a restaurant. Mitsuba. Millie’s.

With her cooking she shared love with her community long hours red coins in the juke box pipikaula, sashimi, lomi salmon, huakai sirloin steak with rice and a tomato slice on lettuce na’au lū’au, crispy skin (mom says she was fat back then) North American and Hawaiian cuisine feed your neighbors, take them in, Chinatown way back when community was something to believe in.

And I believe to love is hard, hard work. did she understand something that we cannot? in her gentle touch the love communicated is it too hot to hold? can we be the ones to pass it down, unadulterated is that for us?

We handle these legacies like our first fish Slippery and slimy and covered in fluid And we are astonished at how familiar every line seems Every shape we trace with our eyes and our hands Scared that our grasp might fail with a drop on the floor

It is so easy to be afraid. we received anger, loss, anxiety but this is not who we are
Transition
For Brandy, Craig, and Kaikainali’i Håleta / By Grace Alvaro Caligtan

In the transition
Just as the sun makes its descent
Just hours before baby’s head crowns

We find that breath
The one that is
Slow, deep, and inside

Over amniotic waves, in the wa’a that is your
Body
Your little one paddles with mighty surges

Tiny shoulders, feet, hands, and legs push
Everything out below heart and lungs

Round belly tightens. You hold it steady.
You rise and meet the pull of life.

Longing to bring this island close,
It feels too far in the distance.

So we breathe. We find another. Exhale.
So we breathe. We find another. Exhale.
We breathe. We find one another. Together
Exhale.

The midwives lean into your ear. They whisper,
“Talk to her, tell your baby, you are ready.”

She sees the silent thoughts
that almost hull your ama against wind and
wave.

The clenching pain makes it feel that you
Have been gestating “ready” in the canoe for
too long...too, too long.

Too, too long to hāpai this kuleana.
Too, too long for beloved Ea to come

She is coming. She is coming. We promise she
is coming.

Still there is doubt. Every surge seems to bring
more. So you close your eyes.

Here in the bottom of the deep swells, there
is only surrender. There is only leaning into
the wind. This, which is birthed, is bigger
than what any one of us can know.

Your legs quake
Red blood trickles down your inner thigh

Your insides shake free. Your love beyond
love holds you...
Shows you evidence of opening.

Another fierce gust blows through the
room
An utterance from coconut fronds, tī, and
pua kenikeni

In the distance, a neighbor’s toy piano keys
sing:
“Happy Birthday to you!”

The future ancestors already know. They
celebrate Ea.

She is coming, she is coming. We promise
she is coming.

---

The poem “Transition” speaks to the liminal
moment when every laboring mother and
family stand at the threshold. Open and
vulnerable, they are ripened by ever
anything
that has gone before them and are ready to
receive their newborn child. At this turning
of Hawai‘i and Oceania’s emergent story, I
offer this poem as way to bear witness to
spirit and ancestors coming together for Ea.

---

yes, we have suffered,
but we are more than this,
the next revolution, we are her gift.

I scoured history books and recipes, looking for something new.
From someone else’s ingredients, I searched how to be.
But in the end, I found myself when I found her. (I found me.)

With love
as the sovereignty we wield
might we be revolutionaries?
[Let this be our memory]

if not us, then whom?
if not you, then her?
if not her touch, then who would we be?
you are revolutionary.

---

Our poem, centered around [memories] of our grandmothers,
evolved over a series of in-person and email exchanges. A call-and-
response method with our prose helped us to discover that both
of our grandmothers had restaurants; their stories shared much in
common and seemed to be responding to each other. Cooking and
sharing food came to be a metaphor we saw as symbolizing the
nourishment and care that grandmothers provide. We believe that
it is this kind of humble unconditional aloha and kūpuna wisdom
that can guide us through current and future discussions and
expressions of ea.

DAWN MAHI weaves community connections over tables of
good food with good people. She believes that unconditional
love and connection to the ‘āina can transform communities
one heart (and na‘au) at a time.

Born and raised in Honolulu, LOGAN NARIKAWA traces his
genealogical roots to the islands of Honshu and Kyushu, Japan.

Descendent of Kankanaey Igorot
and Ilokana midwives,
GRACE ALVARO CALIGTAN is an
apprentice midwife at Hale Kealaula and
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Just as the sun makes its descent
Just hours before baby’s head crowns

We find that breath
The one that is
Slow, deep, and inside

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Your little one paddles with mighty surges

Tiny shoulders, feet, hands, and legs push
Everything out below heart and lungs

Round belly tightens. You hold it steady.
You rise and meet the pull of life.

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It feels too far in the distance.

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The poem “Transition” speaks to the liminal moment when every laboring mother and family stand at the threshold. Open and vulnerable, they are ripened by everything that has gone before them and are ready to receive their newborn child. At this turning of Hawai‘i and Oceania’s emergent story, I offer this poem as way to bear witness to spirit and ancestors coming together for Ea.

Descendent of Kankanaey Igorot and Ilokana midwives, GRACE ALVARO CALIGTAN is an apprentice midwife at Hale Kealaula and serves as a birth attendant and full spectrum doula.
Love One
For Aiko / By Lyz Soto

Seven years four months and fifteen days ago
we read love as a hopeless practice.
We defined affection
as horizontal alignment when we slept
and memories of good sex.
In our arms we cradled fear
as a twin to love
and confused them with towers.

Today love wrings us dry. We
blink too often, but finally sit, a table between us.
Between four hands rests courage
on a platter, an offering we cannot pass off
as jackass punking or chalk do
wn to artless youth.

Five years ago
we called love stupid.
We thought scaling the ragged peaks of moun-
tains
in a hailstorm
the smarter choice
as if thinner air and falling skies might
make our grief weightless, but without gravity
our hearts became spheric
al as satellites,
peripheral to our bodies.
Inside us we shrank our wishbones to nothing,
jumped on heady winds and forgot
about landing.

Three years ago
love was still stupid
still commitments to badlands,
foolish dives into mirages
or battles against uninhabitable masses.

Two years ago love
was a rose by any other name
and red for the first time.

Yesterday
almost happened
between our four fists
on a platter when we stretched our heart globes
to elliptical shadows
—risked holding hands
with the wounded

and called them namesakes.
Yes, we are large enough
for this table sitting among white beards
who confuse faith with invasion
and sanctity with anxious greed.

Yesterday
we put naive on a table
on a platter
between hands
placed closer to hope
than to fear.
We promised to be naive
to be sweet
so we might hope
we could be better
we could do better
than we have done.

Today love wrings us dry
after almost drowning.
In a mouth of water we drink salt
and dare to imagine the brackish
without suffocation and homelands
without fear.

LYZ SOTO is co-founder of Pacific Tongues.

Gramma Stories
by Dawn Mahi and Logan Narikawa

I scoured the poetry books of my favorite revolutionary ladies, looking for something to share. Something new. A succinct moment of sovereignty, of the fight. But all the poems were about love.

[make this a memory]
On grey days, I sometimes stare out of the rectangular glass windows that front my house.
And I am called back to a time when it was my grandmother who did this.
She hugged me, often. And grasped for my hand whenever we waited on other people—this also happened often.
And it felt natural and normal.
In a family that rarely embraces, it is strange to think that she could have been so affectionate without making me uncomfortable.

[make this a memory]
I can’t remember her except through my mother’s stories
and the pictures
of her smiling face.
I lost her
before I could say her name.
All day she took care of me
while mom was at work
and I know that somewhere in my cells
I am her
beloved granddaughter.

In those moments I felt whole
and courageous
and protected.

Did I absorb enough of her love during my first short year
to steal me for the life to come?
[Perhaps this is their legacy]

To love
is a transformative gift.
With the power to heal, so too the power
to steal
the bitter melon of the crippled soul and steel
the vulnerable against hurt.

Gramma was a cook
Mitsuba.
Millie’s.
With her hands she crafted delectable love
searing with salt, she fed her neighbor’s souls
with the sweet sting of sacrifice.
through satisfied stomachs
she turned strangers to neighbors to friends.

Baba had a restaurant.
Mitsuba.
Millie’s.
With her cooking she shared love with her community
long hours
red coins in the juke box
pipikaula, sashimi, lomi salmon, huakai
sirloin steak with rice and a tomato slice on lettuce
na’au lū’au, crispy skin (mom says she was fat back then)
North American and Hawaiian cuisine
feed your neighbors,
take them in,
Chinatown way back when
community was something to believe in.

And I believe
to love is hard, hard work.
did she understand something that we cannot?
in her gentle touch
the love communicated
is it too hot to hold?
can we be the ones to pass it down,
unadulterated
is that for us?

We handle these legacies like our first fish
Slippery and slimy and covered in fluid
And we are astonished at how familiar every line
seems
Every shape we trace with our eyes and our hands
Scared that our grasp might fail with a drop on the floor

It is so easy to be afraid.
we received anger, loss, anxiety
but this is not who we are
Do you remember when you were 18 and you had come to talk to me about failing Biology about failing Economics? You felt like a failure. School had promised you a new, shiny future. Instead, you found yourself inspected and dissected by teachers and scantrons.

You told me:
I wanted to help my mother: B-
She's struggling: maybe a C+
So I majored in business: F
We were homeless for 3 months before, and I never want to go back to that: D/D-

I remember all the doors and windows wide open.
I remember seeing every empty room in you, in that drafty light.
And I heard your voice echo in that lonely house.
Most of all, I remember how shitty it felt to see you hold on to that story, like a good girl,
as if it were the only story you had.

Do you remember our literature class? How you were worried you weren’t good enough, pretty enough, smart enough, to write a poem?

You wrote one anyway.
And memorized it.

About brave love bleeding, about an ocean of feeling, about speaking.
And on that last day of class, when you stood in front of all of us I remember how you rose like the wind storming through our houses.
Loud enough to make us stop.
And listen.

Aiko Yamashiro was raised in Kāneʻohe and is co-editor of The Value of Hawai‘i 2: Ancestral Roots, Oceanic Visions.
The Housing
By Mehanaokala Hind

Did Marshall Hind and Jade Ferguson know
Almost 42 years ago
That which they sowed
Would have a voice

I am
The love child of ’70s RnB and KCCN AM1420
Dressed from head to toe in glitter and gold by the finest
pack of mahus Honolulu has ever known
Cultivated from the scanty streets of Palolo
Where growing up as a child was like a cross of
growing up Samoan and Popolo
Even though my blood ran thick Hawaiian and Haole
In Hind-sight I am amazed by all the refugees that surrounded…
Me and my family
First the Vietnamese, then Cambodians, then Laotians,
now Micronesians, sprinkled throughout this time were
some of the other Polynesians (mostly Samoans, but
also Tongans and Fijians)
But little did I know that I was growing up in an
American war zone
Or at least were surrounded by the refugees of American
foreign “diplomacy”
My hood beginnings were anything but ghetto
fabulousity
It was a city of refuge for those innocently affected by
man, I mean men, huh, yeh, most appropriately, big-dick
foreign policy
And unlike the Kingdom of Judah or Israel
The faces I grew up around weren’t those of
manslaughtering felons,
Instead they were the children of parents whose lives
were torn apart and there was no sight of heaven
And whether seeking freedom or salvation
Or medical treatment for islands devastated
By nuclear bombs that made black snowflakes that
children played in…
You see growing up Housing,
in Hawaii
wasn’t just about being poor
we all shared a common history
“his” story dominated our modern mythology
trauma in the DNA of mass death
due to men eager to explore, without bounds of
morality, ethics, and simple human decency
they ended up here

Invocation
by Ellen-Rae Cachola

Guide us like the curve of the coast
Sharpen us like the tip of a summit
Build our courage to stand
Like mountains that prevent armies to pass
Inspire us like wind that breathe across divisions
Fill us with will to create different relations
Sustain our connections as peoples

Mōkapu
I’ll remember your story of place
Built as a Marine Corps base
There is a hill where spring water trickled
To a people’s village below
The dead thirsty for rest
Iwi into sand for cement
Built a settlement for Marines
with PTSD
Desezecration upon desecration
Layers of misinformation
The lie of annexation justify
The lie of recruitment
Can there be sovereignty
When neighbors defend
Military security?

Papahana Kuola
Ancient Rocks arranged
Energy circulates
Can it flow?
From the headlands to below?
Does settler oppose indigene?
State calculating
To feed its machine
How can we free us
from relations of the matrix
Courage in the walk to
Uncharted places
Identities formed by stream’s
Rhythm consoling hardened edges
Tender hands cultivate
Fertile hearts in pain

When the song is known
Unblock the damming flow
Like the little stones
Shining at the bottom of the stream
Dive deep in freezing waters
Feel the smooth ones
amidst the sharp ones
These words build ways
Across muddy paths
Faith is slippery
Trust is the journey
Dig and break
Through

Like hands clearing the weeds
Uncertainty, assumptions, guilt, binaries
Let the shoots of medicine grow
Recognize there’s a task for each
Answer to your question
Quietly buried
Pluck from the root
Tendrils of truth emerge

Like the wave that crests,
Then splash on our feet
Sink us deep into the sand
Root us to your place
To feel the tide underneath
Rhizome defies the garrison state
Memory traverses the exclusive gate
Patterns of us against them,
Lines designed,
Melt in the current.
Linked, we have always been
From this to other shores

Guide us like the curve of the coast
Sharpen us like the tip of a summit
Build our courage to stand
Like mountains that prevent armies to pass
Inspire us like wind that breathe across divisions
Fill us with will to transform relations
Sustain our connections as peoples

This poem is a documentation of the Women’s Voices
Women Speak Retreat June 7-9, 2014.
ELLEN-RAE CACHOLA is Ilocana and was born on Maui.

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Don’t let anybody tell you not to be angry. We have every right to be angry—This is our country.

— Haunani-Kay Trask

You were born into captivity, a native in a racist, anti-Native world; yet, they call you racist. They hate you like they have hated every warrior before you.

This helps them bear the weight of dominion; helps them keep their vacation houses, golf courses, hotels, and bases; helps them feed their children denial, so as adults they, too, can say, “Don’t blame me for what happened a hundred years ago.” They must keep believing that the United States is our country and not just the country that occupies our country, Hawai’i.

It always seems impossible until it’s done.

— Nelson Mandela

You tell us: “You are not a racist because you fight racism. You are a warrior,” and you train more warriors, show us how to sharpen and land words like spears, how to catch their spears and hurl them back. You call us the spears of our nation, assure us “Decolonization is all around us.” You guide us to the rope of resistance so we can weave the newest strands together under a sovereign sun.

And so we tell our children, our children tell their children, and their children tell their children until our words become the chattering winds of hope that erode the hardness of violence from the earth, and we are sown back into and born from Papahānaumoku green and tender once again.

stripped of their homelands, their names, and now we call them Johnny, Jenny, and my personal favorite, Britney not judging anyone’s assimilative tendencies and need to be American But some of us didn’t have a choice

Wahi a kahiko

No ke aha ia mea e mau nei I luna o ko kakou?
No ke aha ia mea e ae ia nei la I luna o ko kakou?
Kela hae la Huki ia la i lalo
O kela hae e la, wahi hae e la Huki ia la i lalo

Ma hea hou ae e welo ai Ua hae ali o kakou?
Ma hea hou ae ku pono a e hoi Ua hae aloha o kakou?
O kakou la Huki ia la i luna
O ko kakou hae la Huki ia la i luna

Again, not judging anyone’s assimilative tendencies and need to be American But some of us didn’t have a choice

Yet we were all there Our parents trying not to make us feel the despair Of conflicted spaces and economic races That were spinning out of control in the ’70s, ’80s, and ’90s It was like we lived in a bubble that the rest of the world just let float tagging our names on the number 9 bus, swimming at the park pool, Volleyball at the gym, and playing Chinese jump rope All the while having hood dreams and high hopes

Growing up in the Housing was not an immigrant experience for me I thought naively that my life was as normal as can be There was actually a time in my innocence that I really believed that the whole world was between the sun’s path Wilhelmina rise to the East, Waahila in the West, and Waikiki to the South That was the whole world to me

From Kula, Maui, BRANDY NĀLANI MCDougall is a Hawaiian poet and scholar teaching Indigenous Studies in the American Studies Department at UH Mānoa.
The First Gift of Western civilization was disease. The second gift of Western civilization was violence.

— Haunani-Kay Trask

I have no mercy or compassion for a society that will crush people and then penalize them for not being able to stand up under the weight.

— Malcolm X

For over four generations they have said we are a people with a history of violence, accustomed to the dark, cold cell, remedial in mind and body. They write of how we killed infants, sacrificed humans, practiced incest, how our kings and queens were alcoholic, inept dictators, how we owned slaves, how disease comes with darkness, how they must save us from ourselves.

And we take the new tongue and its historical revisions, the low test scores, the longer sentences, the water shortages, the paid-off politicians, the third part-time job, the cancers and the radiation, diabetes and amputations, eminent domain and adverse possession, the overruling of all our objections because now their violence is all we know.

— Haunani-Kay Trask

Violence is more than lodging bullets into brown or black bodies, but also burning sacred valleys, stabbing tunnels into mountains, damming streams, dumping poisons into oceans, overdeveloping ‘āina, bombing and buying islands. Violence is Arizona jail cells, GMOs, and unearthed iwi waiting under a Wal-Mart ramp, in boxes, in museums, in a church basement. Violence is what we settle for because we’ve been led to believe green paper can feed us more than green land.

Violence is believing you are in the United States driving on a highway built over the sacred, carrying artillery to scorch the sacred so more sacred lands can become the United States through violence.

MEHANAOKALA HIND is from Palolo and Aliamanu, Oahu. She is the mother of Kalahikiola, daughter of Marshall and Jade, Kumu Hula, amateur poet.
**Bath Water**

By Noʻu Revilla / July 2nd, 2014

This poem is dedicated to Haumea, goddess and shape-shifter, who bathes in the waters of Haʻakōlea.

When I was a baby girl I was bathed in the sink chrome mountains rising around me faucet water fall lukewarm gurgle of tap water & Jergens I had a pond & up above in the sky of my mother’s chest a necklace gold pendant flash of fire quick enough to catch the name HAUMEA my father’s name engraved in black passed down to him by his grandmother who gave birth in a cave passed on the backs of lizard women who bathe in poʻowai HAUMEA shape shifter HAUMEA seaweed seeker HAUMEA crab catcher kukui nut fists that protect prosperous impenetrable pōhuehue hips wet with Haʻakōlea HAUMEA vanishing HAUMEA birthing may I sit w/ you shape shifter may I drink w/ you wai o Kapuna my kūpuna swam in the currents of your voyage from Kahiki swam in the stomach of this vast & dark moana opened their wombs I am moʻo puna moʻo woman obey rocks slime & wai wai wai HAUMEA may I bathe w/ you my mind is a pond you poʻowai cleansing these now bitter waters these mountains this sky HAUMEA many bodied many named I ask your permission.

NOʻU REVILLA is a Kanaka Maoli poet from Waiʻehu, Maui.

**From Fatal Impact Statements**

By Craig Santos Perez

**DEIS Public Comment #2:** “This is a huge document to digest”

**DEIS Public Comment #4:** “It doesn’t matter what we gain from the buildup; it’s what we lose”

**DEIS Public Comment #5:** “Buenas. First off, thank you for the false sense of participation created by the comment period. The opportunity to vent, while completely meaningless, is at very least cathartic”

**DEIS Public Comment #6:** “The destruction of the land is a sign of disrespect to our ancestors”

**DEIS Public Comment #7:** “How much sewage and solid waste can our island expect?” —Many comments address how full of ______ our colonizer is, but the real concern was where our colonizer was going to put all that ______, especially with 80,000 more ___ holes coming to Guam

**DEIS Public Comment #9:** “Military peeps please hear me clearly. I don’t want no trouble but just believe me things will go down if you mess up. Just don’t start no bull like on Okinawa. Guåhan soldier for life” —Hahahaha that was one of my students at the first hearing —Craig! Had my students comment in class one day and I received a torn paper, with red ink and large letters that said: FUH-Q MILITARY. Then a tiny little post it attached that said “Sorry, That’s all I could think of because I’m really mad”

**DEIS Public Comment #10:** “My main reason for being against the military buildup is for what happened in Okinawa. A girl got raped”

**DEIS Public Comment #11:** “I don’t think I’m allowed to say that I’m against the military buildup because both of my parents are for the build up, and my dad is in the Air Force”

**DEIS Public Comment #20:** “This bothers me so much that I am typing this response at midnight with my cellphone”

**DEIS Public Comment #21:** “I don’t think I’m against the military buildup because both of my parents are for the build up, and my dad is in the Air Force”

**DEIS Public Comment #25:** “Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of serving in and in support of the US military” —Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of cancer and diabetes in support of the US military —Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of dying in wars in support of the US military —Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of our land being taken in support of the US military —Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of being relocated throughout the world in support of the US military —Hafa Adai! My family has a long history of forgetting in support of the US military

**DEIS Public Comment #27:** “We were here first and I don’t care if you own us. We still have a voice to say what we feel”
On July 2nd, 2014, in the lime-green hale/warehouse at Papahana Kuaola in Waipaoa, He‘eia, we cried, laughed, shouted, whispered, sang these poems as part of our community celebration of Nā Hua Ea: Words of Genuine Security and Sovereignty. Over a hundred of us gathered that evening to learn about what was happening on the frontline of many important community issues: increasing militarization and RIMPAC exercises, DOI hearings and Lili‘u’s red ribbon letter, grassroots resistance to development in Ko‘olauloa, and the continuing pain borne by the ‘ohana of Kollin Elderts and other parents of murdered children.

Many of these poems were written for this event. A group of diverse poets gathered together over the space of a month, to learn about ka Lā Ho‘iho‘i Ea, to encourage each other to write, to visit and reconnect with ‘āina and each other. Our intention was to celebrate the ho‘oilina kūpuna (ancestral legacy) of, and put our collective mana toward, aloha ‘āina: independence based on our love for this place and for each other. These poems are a record of our imagination and resilience to create strong and hopeful alternative futures.

Nā Hua Ea educational community events on July 2nd and 17th, 2014, were made possible with the support of: The Value of Hawai‘i 2; Hui Mau ka ‘Āina; Papahana Kuaola; Nā Mea Hawai‘i; Women’s Voices Women Speak; MANA movement for aloha no ka ‘āina; Center for Biographical Research; and the Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities.

DEIS Public Comment #28: “In short, will Guam residents be relegated to ‘dial-up’ speeds as the military usurps the majority of available bandwidth?”

DEIS Public Comment #29: “Strange that no mention was made of windsurfing”—The dredging of apra harbor will destroy a windsurfing area—Will it also destroy the wind?

DEIS Public Comment #30: “I am totally against the military taking over the land at the Race Track located in the Pågat area”—Craig, Is this an experimental translation project?—Not exactly, I read Volume Ten of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the military buildup on Guam. Volume Ten contains almost all the 10,000 comments that people submitted in response to the DEIS during the official 90-day comment period—I copied and pasted phrases, sentences, words, passages from the comments of the people—Now I am posting these comments as my Facebook status—Sometimes I comment on the comment—When I am done, I’ll make it into a poem—Does that sound boring?

DEIS Public Comment #32: “That’s a terrible thing to do on sacred, holy ground, and I know this because I go to Catholic school”

DEIS Public Comment #33: “Shame on you”

DEIS Public Comment #34: “Please don’t take my grandpa’s farm land away”

DEIS Public Comment #35: “I am a 9-year old girl and I don’t want you to do this because I love dolphins and turtles and want them to be here when I have my own kids”

DEIS Public Comment #36: “You are forcing us to choose between the destruction of our race, our homeland, and our culture, or to rise up against you in the hope that we may preserve something for our children and the generations to follow”—hoi...I love reading these quotes you’ve been putting up—Gives me strength and reminds why we do the work that we do—Guaia hao, p.s. gonna start stealing ur quotes and reposting

DEIS Public Comment #39: “I cannot sit back any longer. We, as a whole, need to stop being shoved around, and push back”—The revolution will not be on Facebook—or will it? —Yeah, if it isn’t on FB, it means it probably wasn’t very successful—Or it was so successful that there is no more FB

DEIS Public Comment #43: “What scares me is that I am a young female that is a target to those men who will be arriving”

DEIS Public Comment #45: “Thousands of horny GIs running around the island is not going to make the night life too fun, and will definitely increase the number of prostitutes on island”

DEIS Public Comment #49: “What if the people on Guam gets out numbered?”

DEIS Public Comment #53: “I request an extension of the public commenting period”

DEIS Public Comment #57: “And if they do take the lands that they want, then what will the meaning of Guam be?”

DEIS Public Comment #58: “Why Guam? Why does it have to be us?”
DEIS Public Comment #65: “And I still find it hard to wrap my head around everything”

DEIS Public Comment #68: “I feel scared because no one can tell the future”

DEIS Public Comment #75: “NO ACTION! But I do believe Guam needs change”

DEIS Public Comment #79: “The online comment box is too limiting”

DEIS Public Comment #80: “Why are we only limited to 2500 characters in our comments? Do the blank spaces between words count as characters? Does silence give our words character?”

DEIS Public Comment #81: “Where are the comments to these issues sent? Who sees them? Will the public see any of these comments?”

DEIS Public Comment #82: “This document really needs to discuss how bad traffic is going to be”—Increased traffic is the only issue that everyone is united against—Though I’m sure there’s one ultra-colonized out there who will argue that more traffic will boost the economy and preserve our culture—Parking offers structure, after all—

DEIS Public Comment #83: “Lao pa’go na ha’ane nisisita ta fanachu put i tano’ta, para i famagu’on-ta (Now is the time to stand up for our land for the future of our children)”

DEIS Public Comment #99: “I feel like the ko’ko’ bird. My nest was on the ground. I was a flash in the forest. I took to the water.”
To Ea: In Response to David Kahalemaile, August 12, 1871
By Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada

Ke ea o ka i'a, he wai
Lu'u a ea, lu'u a ea
Breathe deep, O breath-stealing ocean
You offer much but exact a toll as well
Our friends and our land swallowed by your hungering mouth
Too many mistake your surging power for invulnerability
And your injuries wash up broken and rotting upon our shores
Yet your tattooed knees show that you too have been ignored
Sides heaving, coral ribcage expanding, contracting
Breathing, an exertion made difficult in this age
This era of disrespect, of not honoring reciprocity
And those closest to you are those who suffer
Until we rise again from your depths
Yearning, reaching, crying for ea

Ke ea o ke kanaka, he makani
Hali mai ka makani i ka hanu ea o ka honua
Wind called from our lungs
‘Anae leaping from the pali, two minutes at a time
Some lifted on the shoulders of the wind
Others clawing for breath as they fall
We are taught never to call them back
The wind returns, but they do not
Mouths stretched open until jaws crack
Used as fishhooks, drawing forth our connections from the sea
Circular and round, soft and untenable
Wind sweeps infinitely into night

‘O ke ea o ka honua, he kanaka
‘O au nō na’e kāu kauwā
In your presence, I count by fours
Carrying a breath in each space between my fingers
Each palm drawn towards the ground
Called close by your fertility
Our noses touch
Nothing but the ea held in our manawa
Cartilage, skin, and bone connecting to rock, earth
And young, smooth stone
The hā of genealogical age passes between us
And I know the weight, the measure, the depth
Of my connection to you

Ke ea o ka moku, he hoeuli
‘O ka hōkū ho’okele wa’a ke aʻā nei i ka lani
Familiar stars and swells etch a map in our aching bones
Remembered pain is how we find our way to you
Frenzied waves whip the ocean to a bitter froth
But we’ve never forgotten how to navigate
How to draw our fingers across the face of a passing wave
The sun strains as our sail, while birds lift our hulls
Koa has always grown on this sea, in our masts, our hulls, our hearts
Leaving only the question of crew
We accept only those who will step bravely into darkness
For we have the generations to light our way

Ke ea o ko Hawai‘i Pae ‘Āina, ‘o ia nō ka noho Aupuni ‘ana
E ka lāhui ē, ‘o kāu hana nui, e ui ē
They tell us that they have seen the wonders of Mānā
But it is only heat rippling on sand
And we are angry that they are pushing a mirage
There is no fucking bucket—
But we have always been crabs
Pa’ea, Kapāpa‘iaheha, Ka‘a‘amakualenalena
Holding fast to the stones, fighting against crashing waves
Each struggling breath between sets reaffirms our ea
And what they refuse to recognize
Is that when we yell, when we shout
We do it not in anger
But to reassure our ancestors
That we are still here

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This poem is a response to a speech printed in Ka Nupepa Kuokoa on August 12, 1871. It had been given by David Kahalemaile on the occasion of Lā Ho‘iho‘i Ea, and in it he describes ea as an essential part of what makes everything live, from the world itself to the fish in the sea. The first line of each stanza of this poem is a line from the opening of Kahalemaile’s beautiful speech.
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