

WITHOUT KU'U

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Introduction

you will be undarkened

by me led astray

to native waters

sunned until

old mango hills

rise leafless you will come

long and flowing

poured slowley

through the gourd of laughter

spring of weightless

yearning you will swell

at eventing's light

rivers of you

flooded apart and you will

beg me so

in you momentous showing

to keep you translucent

forever

–Haunani-Kay Trask, “You Will Be Undarkened,” *Light in the Crevice Never Seen*

Personal & Academic Background

Diaspora ruptures and disconnects Native peoples from their ancestral homeland. My diasporic experience goes three generations back and cuts deep. My Kanaka Maoli great grandfather, Grandpa Joe, moved from Wahiawa to San Mateo, California, married a haole woman, and bore three children, Joe Jr., Ku‘ulei and Ku‘ulani, the latter two whom I'm named after. Ku‘ulei had three children with Andrés Portillo, a Honduran immigrant, and their youngest is my father, James Portillo. He then met my first generation Filipina mother and had three children. I am the middle child. In 2000 my mother left my father, for good reasons, and married a white man. We moved in with his mother and son by the end of the year. I was only six years old but knew my life was going to change. Every one of my aunts and uncles ended up marrying outside of their race and having biracial children and so every family gathering I was used to diversity. But moving into a white household proved suffocating. My voice was silenced. I wasn't believed by my stepfamily when I would tell of physical abuse by my stepbrother and I became resentful.

I moved to Hawai'i to go to college. I have never set foot on the islands and didn't expect I would get the chance. My mom was the one who convinced me to come to Hawai'i. Or more like she made the decision for me. I had only applied to four colleges—three of which were out of state. I was rejected by Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, accepted into a school in London but couldn't afford it, and didn't hear back from the last two. I was processing having to go to community college after graduation because the only school that had accepted me was too expensive. I was frustrated that all my hard work in

high school with straight As, extra-curricular activities, and doing all the things teachers told me to do in order to get school paid for meant nothing. On the day of my graduation I received an envelope from University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) and my mom opened it for me and read the “Congratulations!” Before I could say anything she told me “You’re going.” This collection wouldn’t exist if it weren’t for my mother’s unwavering support and love for me to grow and most importantly be happy. She made me coming here work even if it meant we are both in debt. She sacrificed a lot for me to be here and stood by my side as I became undarkened by Haunani-Kay Trask, as I began an intimate relationship with a revolutionary Hip Hop artist, as I began to find a community away from California, and as I began to fight for my people. She may not be Hawaiian but she is responsible for my existence and for pushing me to follow my heart even if it means Hawai‘i is my new home.

Moving to Hawai‘i definitely was a culture shock. I wanted to leave multiple times and return to California but I told myself: just push through for one more semester. In the first few years in Hawai‘i I made friends with a group of haole, or white, U.S. marines and latched on. I was desperate for friends and afraid of solitude. This period of my life was about complacency and how ignorance can really be bliss. I was blind to the military’s atrocities and used these friendships as an excuse to ignore them. Once I had asked a friend, in Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) at UHM, what the meaning behind the “Defend Hawaii” shirts was and he explained how Hawaiians were mad because the U.S. is stationed here and that they should just get over it. I believed it. I was already scared of being looked at as less than by Hawaiians because Filipinos have made me feel that way for being “half” and not speaking the “language.” And so I clung to

whiteness. And amidst my ignorance, I took ENG 273 with No‘ukahau‘oli Revilla which changed the course of my academic and creative career and life.

The theme of the class was poetry and place with a focus on home. In retrospect, I don't know why I took the class because I have always had a complicated relationship with home. I felt isolated in the city I was born in, my parents moved around the Bay Area in California in the 1990s and even after my mom married my stepfather, we moved every three years up until my sophomore year in high school in 2009. While my family has actually been in that house the longest and still live there today, my move to Hawai‘i was another complicated layer to my conception of home. This class challenged my idea of home and lead me to really hang more onto those haole marines. My home became people. While this might be an embarrassing time in my life, No‘u cultivated a safe space for the class which made me feel safe and shameless about my relationship to these marines. As she emphasized craft and community in Hawai‘i, I became inspired to continue on in poetry. And as she conducted herself as unapologetically Hawaiian, I became inspired to learn Hawaiian language.

My Hawaiian language teacher, Kumu Kawehi Lucas, inspired me in the same ways that No‘u has. Kumu Kawehi emphasized how learning Hawaiian language would be about practice and putting in work. As my classes with her continued, I began to understand how language and culture are intertwined and reflections of each other. She believed enough in me to work towards a certificate in Hawaiian. This required a few 300-level courses conducted in Hawaiian and for one of them I chose her Ma Ka Hana Ka ‘Ike course that focuses on hana no‘eau Hawai‘i, or Hawaiian art. We learned lauhala weaving and how to string a lei hulu but were also given the chance to teach, with a

partner, another hana no‘eau not covered to the class. While this project turned out stressful and complicated because of lack of communication between another pair and my pair, this was the first time I was exposed to haku kaula, or making rope.

All while I was learning Hawaiian language, I was able to take ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui’s first Native Hawaiian Literature in English course that served as a reminder for me to continue in the creative writing track. There were so many examples of Native Hawaiian literature that I was exposed to and this class really encouraged me to pursue graduate school. The representation of Hawaiian authors inspired me to try to write for the first time about contemporary Hawaiian Hip Hop. I thought this was going to be a new field but ho‘omanawanui pushed resources my way to help get me started on analyzing a Kanaka ‘Ōiwi hip hop artist. I never imagined to have this freedom in high school to research a music genre that has influenced much of my life.

At the same time, I was taking Craig Santos Perez’s 400-level Eco-Poetry course which introduced the idea of eco-justice to me. I was still growing into my Hawaiian identity and was only scratching the surface of what that means and what my kuleana to Hawai‘i is. But Santos Perez emphasized the importance of cultivating a community within the classroom and being able to give constructive criticism (and taking it). While I was still quiet and reserved, I had asked both ho‘omanawanui and Santos Perez about graduate school and both were encouraging and provided my letters of recommendation to this department for the Master’s program.

I realized that the last two years in undergrad was the most influential for my academic and creative work. The fall semester before I graduated I took Hawaiian Composition with Kahikina de Silva. In this I was introduced to the article “Ke Aloha

Aina, Heaha Ia?” by Joseph Nāwahī written in 1895. I had a hard time understanding and translating this piece but in class we had gone around the room line by line to discuss the meaning. de Silva really helped me grasp what Nāwahī meant. He states “O ke Aloha Aina, oia ka ume Mageneti iloko o ka puuwai o ka Lahui, e kaohi ana i ka noho Kuokoa Lanakila ana o kona one hanau ponoī” (Nāwahī 7). I was confused about why certain words were capitalized and assumed (wrongly) that they were names. But de Silva had informed me that it wasn’t necessarily names but that possibly the author was emphasizing these words. So as I worked through the translation with her, I understood that this first line was talking about how aloha ‘āina is the magnetic pull inside the heart of the lāhui, controlling the victorious independent living of their own birth sands. I was taken aback at first because I was becoming more involved and learning about settler colonialism and the occupation of Hawai‘i and I didn’t expect to learn this in the classroom.

Imposter syndrome hit when I started graduate school and I became terrified of my own voice and my own poetry. Even in the poetry course I was able to take, I felt like a failure. I struggled to understand my kuleana and how I fit within the grandeur scheme of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. Along the way I was able to be in the Nā Ko‘oko‘o Program run by Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua. While this was an undergraduate course, I asked if I could take the class. In some ways, I felt weird because I had gone so far in my academic career without taking on Hawaiian Studies class (I took Languages of the Pacific for the HAP requirement) and had only learned about Hawaiian history outside of the classroom. However, this class proved to really create a foundation for this thesis and inspired my statement and critical sample for the PhD program.

In the beginning of the semester, my cohort took a trip to Kānehūnāmoku Voyaging Academy for the weekend. During this we learned about the importance of community and how to work in a community. We learned about Papa Mau and his sacrifice to teach Hawaiians navigation, how to work together on a wa‘a, how to debark wood to make ko‘oko‘o, or support staffs, and we also learned how to haku kaula, or braid rope. For the braiding workshop, Uncle Umi Kai, a Hawaiian master weapon maker, stayed with us during the weekend to teach our class different styles of braiding. He taught us 3, 5, 7, and 4, 6, 8 strand. Since one of my undergraduate degrees is in Studio Art, I was immediately drawn to this part of the weekend. Kai first taught us the different strands on large rope because it's easier to see and then has us choose a shell that acts as a toggle and we decide which strand we want to braid for a bracelet or anklet. I like to challenge myself and immediately chose the eight strand braid but also because of the significance behind it. Kai had told us that the eight strand braid was made for ceremonial use like for the lei niho palaoa and I immediately knew how to braid with 8 strands. I took this trip and activity with me throughout the rest of the semester. I was able to continue braiding to make necklaces and bracelets outside of class but as I began to become comfortable with these braids, I realized how much this made everything make sense. I was constantly told that Hawaiians never had a ceramics culture by non-Hawaiians (as if I am not a Hawaiian ceramic artist), or that I was taught to separate genres, art forms, subjects, etc. I was feeling inauthentic but continued to immerse myself in this braiding art. I began to think in what ways I could incorporate this into my work in general. I began to push myself to think how the metaphor of braiding, especially eight strand, could translate into my work. I ended up taking a few more workshops with ‘Umi

Kai. One was another braiding workshop and the other two were weapon making where a small group of us made leiomanō. These art forms and workshops have really made me feel grounded as a Hawaiian, as an artist, and as a writer.

Then luckily in Craig Howes' graduate course on Hawaiian Literature in the 19th century, he pushed me to really think about this idea and speak about hana no'eau and Hawaiian scholarship. He had first suggested to talk about kapa but it didn't feel right for me, as I have no relationship with kapa, and I ended up choosing haku kaula. What ended up happening was me writing a paper trying to develop a methodology in how I approach my work using the metaphor of haku kaula and specifically eight strands. This essay was made possible by the works of Māhealani Dudoit, Kanalu Young, John Dominis Holt, and 'Īmaikalani Kalāhele. In Māhealani Dudoit's article "Carving a Hawaiian Aesthetics," she explains the concern over a lack of a Hawaiian word for "art" but goes on to explain that "while aesthetic quality was most decidedly important to ancient Hawaiian sensibilities, it always functioned in conjunction with a practical, spiritual, or symbolic capacity, whether secular or sacred" (23). This helped me piece together how Hawaiian artists operate and in ways I tried to move towards my work. The idea that art always has a function other than aesthetically has been something I struggled with as an emerging artist since the Art Department has taught me along the lines of making "art for art's sake." Kanalu Young also offers a similar explanation in his piece for a Hawaiian Studies 107 (HWST 107) course titled "Mea No'eau" where he describes that hana no'eau "is a Hawaiian language phrase that expresses a Hawaiian sense of the two qualities—function and aesthetic values within a single object" (3). Both Dudoit and Young's explanation of hana no'eau allowed me to get over my anxieties I had about

feeling inauthentic and pushed me more to think of how all the art forms I participate in enhance my work and how they can overlap. John Dominis Holt's *On Being Hawaiian* exemplified this for me again as he states "that art was important to the Hawaiians as was their knowledge of the stars, and their skills as fisherman, famers, canoe makers, and house builders" (17). Holt speaks on how art is important to Hawaiians just as much as other professions and throughout this book he has pictures of ki'i, pahu, fishhooks, and lei hulu showing his own affinity with art. As I learned about how integral art is to a Hawaiian worldview and as I kept at thinking of haku kaula, I read the poem "Make Rope" by 'Īmaikalani Kalāhele which helped me think more about braiding or making rope:

The Kaula of our people
 is 2,000 years old
 boy
 [...]
 one by one
 strand by strand
 we become
 the memory of our people
 and
 we still growing
 so
 be proud
 do good

and
make rope
boy
make rope.

This helped me think how haku kaula is a way for present generations to connect with our ancestors while also creating something for our future generations to continue. Craig Howes pushed me and inspired me to think about the ways in which this idea is contributing not only to these artists but artists generations after.

The model of the eight strand braid and its significance to creating a pa‘a, or solid, foundation for me is reflected in this thesis. I decided to have eight sections that each reflect a period of my life and reflects my journey to returning to Hawai‘i. I’ve decided that each section would be one word titles in Hawaiian that reflects this part of my life. I struggled with whether to start in English and then switch to Hawaiian when I made the switch to learn the language, have it all in English or to have it all in Hawaiian. Ultimately I decided to keep all the title sections in Hawaiian because the point of this thesis to show how, even though I was lost for so long and disconnected for so many generations, that at the heart and core of my work and myself, I am Hawaiian and it is important for me to assert this part of my identity right now.

This decision was also inspired by Noenoe Silva’s introduction to her book, *The Power of the Steel Tipped Pen: Reconstructing Native Hawaiian Intellectual History*. I was struck by how Silva described Joseph Moku‘ōhai Poepoe and Joseph Ho‘ona‘auao Kānepu‘u’s common motivations and philosophies. Silva describes them as “a deeply ingrained commitment to our people and land: aloha ‘āina; second, acceptance of the

kuleana to teach through writing and publishing; and, an ethic and orientation to the world I am calling mo‘okū‘auhau consciousness” (3-4). When I was first introduced to this work, I was expecting a heavy theory on what mo‘okū‘auhau consciousness is and actually ended up missing the meaning of it the first time I read it. But having a second go at it, it really is as simple as Silva puts it in the quote above. The great thing about this is that I realized these were concepts I was already practicing as I grew into my Hawaiian identity.

All while coming into my Hawaiian identity and figuring out my kuleana, I also studied ceramics. My growth as a ceramic artist mirrors that of my poetry growth. I became attracted to clay in high school when I took a ceramics course my senior year. This class changed my college course because before I had already decided (in 8th grade) that I would become an architect or engineer. But my AP Calc AB teacher instilled such a sense of fear and anxiety that I fell out of love with math, which was (and a little still) my favorite subject. But ceramics was there to calm my nerves and I found solace in the feeling of clay and how satisfying it is to see the different stages my work went through. At University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa when I took an intro course my second semester, I decided to major in art. It was hard, like with any craft, and I hated my work for the first 4 years. But like I said, my growth in ceramics mirrors my growth in poetry. As I continued learning about my history, my stories, and felt a sense of community in Hawai‘i, my ceramics finally started to mean something. The problem with UH’s ceramics program is the lack of identity interrogation. I made things just because I “liked” them and was barely cultivating a critical voice. As I began to think of ways I can fuse my Hawaiian identity, my poetry, and ceramics, I began to see the true nature of the

Art Department at this school. I have been motivated by several comments made to me about “well, Hawaiians never had a ceramic culture” and other microaggressions as I was trying to push the ceramics department to cultivate a better community and a safe community for all of us especially all wāhine. I have only been successful once in writing a poem that reflects my knowledge of ceramics with my physical work. By the time the poem was started in Spring 2018 and subsequently finished and in a show in Chinatown in Fall 2018, I had left the department because of its toxic environment and lack of acknowledging any of the Indigenous history of these islands. The same issues that faced Herman Pi‘ikea Clark in 1996 is still happening in 2019.

In Karen Kosasa’s article “Pedagogical Sights/Sites: Producing Colonialism and Practicing Art in the Pacific” which is specifically about University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa’s art department during the mid-1990s. During a discussion in an art theory class, the students found that of the 23 tenured faculty, 20 of them are white (Kosasa 52). Currently, the Art Department’s website has a list of 19 faculty (not including adjunct or lecturers) and of those 19 listed, 17 are white (“People”). As I think back to all my teachers I took in the art department, two were not white and both were lecturers or adjuncts. In Kosasa’s article, she mentions that there are only a few teachers that students said would bring up issues concerning identity in the context of growing up in Hawai‘i (Kosasa). While she explained the small examples, of all the teachers I have had in the art department, none of them brought this up. I felt lost in my identity. I wasn’t born and raised here. I’m a multiracial Hawaiian woman. I grew up in a white household after my mom married a white man. So as I was learning more about my Hawaiian side, I constantly questioned how I can express this in my art. What I noticed also was that, as

Kosasa observes too, the “discussions of gender, race, and minority issues are not pertinent to art and belong to courses in other departments” (Kosasa 51). This is exactly how I had discussions of these topics. It was not in the art department, it was in the Hawaiian Language and the English department.

Then in October of 1996, Herman Pi‘ikea Clark, a Native Hawaiian graduate student had a group exhibition in the Commons Gallery at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. He and 23 other members of Ka Maka O Ka Ihe, an art group organized by Clark in 1994 “to provide academic and cultural support for Native Hawaiian university students” installed photographs and their statements (Kosasa 53). The text opening in the gallery states:

[...]In this my graduate thesis exhibition, I, along with the members of Ka Maka O Ka Ihe, request that the University of Hawai'i take steps to end its colonist practices by hiring Native Hawaiian teaching faculty and develop courses in Native Hawaiian Contemporary Art and Design. For the first time in the history of the University of Hawai'i Art Department, Native Hawaiian artists have gathered to speak out. In this our first expression of Hawaiian sovereignty and art, we challenge you who are in power to respond.

At the end of Kosasa’s articles she states that the department has “accepted a class on Hawaiian art and culture that Clark proposed as a 400-level special projects” and has “sought ways to integrate indigenous perspectives by setting up an advisory board of Native Hawaiians, appointing a Hawaiian community scholar-in-residence, and offering a fellowship to a scholar/artist from the Pacific to teach in the department for a year” (Kosasa 54). But since I was a student of the art department since 2013, I have seen one

class offered in regards to Native Hawaiian contemporary art and that was in Spring of 2017, my last semester in undergrad, that would have been taught by Marques Marzan but was eventually dropped due to lack of enrollment. Clark and other's experiences resonate deeply with mine and this led to me coming to the English department to really be able to explore what it means to be a contemporary Kanaka Maoli artist. I have been given the freedom to figure out ways to incorporate and write about how a Kanaka Maoli world view doesn't separate genres but believes in the importance and value of being involved in different disciplines at the same time.

Literary & Cultural Influences

I credit Haunani-Kay Trask with challenging the way I look at my relationship with Hawai'i and pushing me into *returning* to Hawai'i. At the time, I felt entitled in some ways to be here and yet be complacent and even participate in settler colonialism. Her article "Lovely Hula Hands: Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture" was assigned in my ENG 320 class and I remember the discomfort I felt after reading it. I felt attacked for coming to Hawai'i, even though I knew I am Hawaiian, and that Haunani wasn't *necessarily* talking about me. But I also knew that I didn't know anything about the struggle of Hawaiians in Hawai'i. I wasn't raised with any knowledge of Hawai'i or Hawaiians but knew that my great grandfather was Hawaiian. I took a step back and asked myself why I felt uncomfortable with this article and why I felt defensive. I never discussed this in my class but sat with it for a long time. In conjunction with this article, we read an excerpt of Edward Said's *Orientalism* which also

had a huge influence on my intellectual awakening and in many ways radicalized me in thinking about structures of power and stereotypes.

I'm grateful to have had *Kānaka 'Ōiwi Methodologies*, edited by Katrina-Ann R. Kapā'anaokalāokeola Nākoa Oliveira and Erin Kahunawaika'ala Wright, assigned to me in one of the first courses I took in graduate school to really help ground my writing and research for papers. It was amazing to practically see blueprints of how to research from the perspective of Hawaiian faculty and researchers. I especially appreciated Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua's article "Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance" which ended up helping me think through this project and also try to build off of it for future scholarship. Her four aho in her piece are "*lāhui* (collective identity and self-definition), *ea* (sovereignty and leadership), *kuleana* (positionality and obligations), and *pono* (harmonious relationships, justice, and healing)" (2). She explains that "these four principles could also be seen as aho, single cords, that when braided together form what political scholar and poet, Haunani-Kay Trask, describes as a 'rope of resistance'" (2). Everything always came/comes back to Haunani-Kay Trask and it was time I delved into her scholarship and poetry. After being in Nā Ko'oko'o, I was able to audit a course Noe taught titled "Indigenous Feminism and Haunani-Kay Trask." When I read *From A Native Daughter* before this class started, I was in awe of Trask's work and how accessible it is. My favorite essay out of the whole collection is titled the same as the book, "From a Native Daughter" in which she writes a beautiful account of the differences between Western culture and Hawaiian culture but also how she found her way back. Trask writes:

To know my history, I had to put away my books and return to the land. I had to plant taro in the earth before I could understand the inseparable bond between people and ‘āina. I had to feel again the spirits of nature and take gifts of plants and fish to the ancient altars. I had to begin to speak my language with our elders and leave long silences for wisdom to grow. But before anything else, I needed to learn the language like a lover so that I could rock within her and lie at night in her dreaming arms. (3)

When I first read this passage, I cried. I cried because I understood what she meant. I cried because touching the dirt and trying to heal the land made me rethink my purpose. I cried because Hawaiian language is what brought me to pursue creative writing. I cried because I remember that she is a poet and I am a poet. It always came back to Haunani-Kay Trask. I didn't directly learn or take class from Haunani Kay-Trask but I took classes from her haumāna and those who got the chance to take a few classes before her retirement. I've heard her influence on many wāhine I aloha and respect as Hawaiians and scholars. I have heard stories of her work convincing wāhine to come back to Hawai'i. And while I was in Hawai'i when I found Haunani-Kay Trask, she brought me home.

I am fortunate enough to take Jamaica Osorio's graduate course and she was gracious enough to let us read her dissertation that was published by ProQuest and discuss it as a class. *(Re)membering 'Upena of Intimacies: A Kanaka Maoli Mo'olelo Beyond Queer Theory (2018)* that was published by ProQuest was life changing for me and has really helped me think more about relationship and pilina. Osorio's poetry was one of the things that has influenced me as a poet and to read this dissertation regarding

pilina I have been able to understand and think about my pilina and different pilina in Hawai'i and beyond. She mentions that "kuleana is something practiced rather than something held or owned as property" (153). This was in regards to Sarah Nākoa's *Lei Momi o 'Ewa* on why she has the kuleana to tell the stories of 'Ewa. But thinking more about pilina and kuleana, I will continue to move through the world thinking about the ideas in relation to land as well. Even as a diasporic Hawaiian, Osorio has given me so much insight for how I cultivate a pilina to Hawai'i even if my genealogy is lost to me right now. She let me know it's possible to create pilina to place and kuleana to place from our intimate relationships.

Not only has Osorio's scholarship influenced me but, of course, her spoken word has inspired me. I came across her poetry when I was just beginning to learn Hawaiian. Heoli Osorio's "1893" performance from *Brave New Voices* has educated me about the history of Hawai'i and the sovereignty movements that classrooms didn't at the time. While struggling to cultivate my poetic voice, I had begun to think about the power words have and the importance of truth telling. As I listen several years later to Osorio's voice recounting the illegal overthrow and how history has gone through time until her current time, I realize and understand things that I might have missed before. But this poem really set the foundation for my poetry even if I have yet to cultivate my performance voice.

A few other Oceanic spoken word artists I have been influenced by are Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Serena Ngaio Simmons, and Craig Santos Perez. Jetñil-Kijiner's poem/performance video "History Project" opened up my eyes in several ways (Jetñil-Kijiner). I was introduced to this piece in Craig Santos Perez's undergraduate Eco-Poetry

course and had realized how Indigenous Pacific folx are affected by larger oppressive systems like in Hawai‘i. Jetñil-Kijiner conveys powerfully the atrocities of nuclear testing done in the Marshall Islands by the U.S. The way she frames the piece with her research project for high school and ends up having 3 balding white judges not understand her irony in her title is such a great representation of how marginalized people aren’t taken seriously. I also respect the amount of research that went into this piece as you can tell with the different scenes she paints like in the hospital, newspaper articles, mistaking radioactive fallout for snow, and so on. I try to put in this much research into my work, especially my poetry.

Serena Ngaio Simmons has also been someone I look up to. I’ve heard and seen her perform before and each time I have heard her perform “Diaspora” I cry. She speaks about the struggle of being born and raised in Hawai‘i but being Māori and raised away from Aotearoa, New Zealand. She sets up the feeling of diaspora with:

Diaspora

is Hawai’i wondering why

you sound like that

is Aotearoa wondering why

you sound like that

While we come from different backgrounds, our experiences and proximity to diaspora are so similar. Language becomes important for both of us as we both are still navigating our diaspora’s and are working on our reconnecting to our respective cultures. I also appreciate her conviction and her anger throughout her performances because her anger is

valid, her feelings are valid. Each time I hear her perform, I aspire to find my performance voice.

Craig Santos Perez's poetry and performance has also helped me. A lot of his work involves interrogating U.S. imperialism, militarization, climate change and its effects on CHamorus. The short film with his poem titled "Praise Song For Oceania," is an example of how Santos Perez's craft has influenced my work. Not only the repetition, as with the other spoken word artists but in also how the language is sounds with scarce prepositions. For example, within "Praise Song For Oceania," there is a line that goes "praise your capacity to endure the violence / those who claim dominion over you / who map you empty ocean to pillage" (Santos Perez). Especially the last line "who map you empty ocean to pillage," reminds me most as an example of how the spoken is employed in this poem. I have gone through a few of my poems to look over and edit these prepositions to create more of an impact with the spoken word. For example, in "makua smiles back," I had originally had the line "she screams from leftover shrapnel" and changed to "she screams leftover shrapnel" to evoke a different sense and feeling. The feeling changed and the image changed to the subject "she" screaming the actual shrapnel and provides a starker image.

Punahele and his music has also been one of my biggest inspirations and influences. When I was first introduced to him, I saw him perform a song called "Turn My Music High" where is a perfect blend of being relatable to a larger audience in the hook and then having little hints of kū'ē throughout the verses. Punahele says "the hottest fire creates the hardest steel, Kanaka killing genocide and now its hard to feel / in 1896 they banned Hawaiian language so now I be spittin flames this music is my fucking

language” (Punahale). I have a great love for Hip Hop and was blown away to hear this line being performed in the club, The Republik. I was only just budding in my awakening and having this pilina with Punahale has been so generative and fruitful as we constantly discuss politics and are always engaging each other’s work. As our pilina has formed over the years, my poetry has been heavily influenced by his music. For example, another song titled “Ho‘omau ke Ola” on his debut album *From Beneath Mt. Ka‘ala* has an amazing verse that is packed with Hawaiian history yet is in the constraints of bars in a rap song. The second verse goes:

The cops locked up my kupuna for speaking Hawaiian
 And teachers beat up my kupuna for speaking Hawaiian
 They tried to kill our culture by killing our language
 I ka ‘ōlelo no ke ola, i ka ‘ōlelo no ka make

These lines directly influenced a few of my lines in my “We are Maunakea” poem, especially in the second part:

[...]They have severed my tongue to kill
 our culture, but you, you have awoken, you have become my
 wildest dreams, you have bit back hard and spit out their
 indoctrination.

Not only is the influence obvious the whole second part was influenced by these lines while I was trying to cultivate and evoke a voice of a kupuna talking to their mo‘opuna about the importance of the fight for Maunakea because of the history of the banning of Hawaiian language but have the promise of the future generations and the power in our voices whether it’s via poetry or Hip Hop. A lot of this stems from my love of Tupac

when I was growing up. My father introduced me to Tupac through a yellow walkman. This moment has followed me throughout school and inspired me to write an essay on Tupac but when I couldn't do that I moved into the content of some of his music and picked the topic of the freedom riders.

As I've said before: it always comes back to Haunani-Kay Trask. Delving into her poetry only happened last semester. Her poem "You Will Be Undarkened" sounds really sensual and directed towards a lover but as I read it, past the sensual connotations, I saw it as a wake up call for other Kānaka. I open this collection with this poem because I weep every time I read through it. It may be sensual and about a love but to feel undarkened by Haunani-Kay Trask evokes the feelings she describes through the metaphor of 'āina. This made me think of the poem many of her haumāna, students, quote. She *is* slyly reproductive, she *is* reproducing the rope of resistance through her ideas, books, history, and politics. She has undarkened me and has given birth to me as I 'auamo kuleana for future generations and other diasporas as well. This collection is indebted to Trask's life and influence whether directly or indirectly to me.

Summary/Aesthetics of Creative Thesis

With the exception of "We are Maunakea" and "#luckywelveHawaii," I keep the aesthetics of having the poem written in all lowercase including the pronoun "I". In "just pray" I play with the idea of capital G, God, and leave the list of Hawaiian akua capitalize to reflect that these gods are just as important (and more important to me) as God. In "in a name" I purposely capitalize my name in the beginning of the poem but then end with my name in lowercase following in the footsteps of bell hooks in which the

shift of importance goes to the work instead of the name attached (Quintana). Also as I had once heard in class and as she reminded me, ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui explains that her choice to have her name in all lowercase reflects ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i and not English since English emphasizes the importance of the subject as with the subject “I” (ho‘omanawanui). In regards to Hawaiian words throughout the collection, while I keep place names lowercase throughout most of my poems, I use diacriticals when I am evoking a specific meaning but in “makua smiles back” I leave the place name of Mākua without diacriticals to open up the interpretation while using diacriticals on the other Hawaiian words used in the poem. The open interpretation reflects how kaona, or multiple meaning, operates. This is also especially from learning from Kahikina de Silva in class on not adding diacriticals to quoted material from Hawaiian language newspapers because Kānaka in that time period operated with a deeper understanding of kaona and for later generations to not impose their own interpretations by adding diacriticals (de Silva). I also intentionally keep this manuscript single spaced for my poetry because of my use of the page throughout and believe this use has more impact for readers than if this collection were double spaced. As for the craft of this collection, I want to start with the structure and the eight sections I decided to create. These eight sections reflect the eight strand braid, mentioned before, that I have become pili, or attached, with over the last year. Each section reflects a period in my life throughout my journey back to Hawai‘i.

The first section I’ve decided to name moku which the various meanings include: severed, broken, district, island, ship, vessel. While I lean more onto the meaning of severed, I do think about the ways moku speaks on division but also to mean an island

and refer to ko Hawai‘i pae ‘āina, or the Hawaiian archipelago, as being an isolated island chain. This section is really to describe my time before I set foot in Hawai‘i which was before August of 2012. I was brought up with little knowledge of my Hawaiian ancestry (only that my (great) Grandpa Joe is Hawaiian). I wasn’t originally going to come to UH Mānoa because I received my acceptance letter the day of my high school graduation. But this section has a lot to do with my prior upbringing having a severed (moku) connection to Hawai‘i. I begin this section with a poem titled “i am the rosary.” This is actually the first piece of an “i am” poem I wrote in Susan Schultz’s ENG 613 course. I split this piece up into 3 sections and planted them in different sections while also adding a newer “i am” poem to have 4 “i am” poems keeping with the multiples of four. I decided to do this to have this collection be weaved with one poem that has the anaphora of “i am” but also reflects my familial genealogy and then the newer poem to reflect my decision and active pilina, or relationship, to my Hawaiian ancestors and Hawai‘i. I also have decided to name these poems with part of the first line so as not to be confusing why I have four “i am” poems and also didn’t want to make it obvious by having the parts of the poem marked.

The second section I mark malihini which means stranger, foreigner, guest, and so on. I had trouble with this section because this reflects the first few years of my time in Hawai‘i where I didn’t know the history of Hawai‘i or anything about Hawaiians. My closest friends were U.S. marines and I was complacent in Hawaiian issues at the time. But I was inspired to name this section malihini based on Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio’s dissertation *(Re)membering ‘Upena of Intimacies: A Kanaka Maoli Mo‘olelo Beyond Queer Theory*. While this dissertation was published through ProQuest just last

year, this text has deepened my understanding of aloha ‘āina, of intimacy, of kuleana and of pilina. What struck me most was how Osorio walks us through how Hi‘iaka is a malihini to many places as she travels to fetch Lohi‘au in the mo‘olelo o Hi‘iakaikapoliopole (Osorio). But, as Osorio asserts throughout, that Hi‘iaka develops a pilina to these places and therefore has a degree of kuleana to these places. She states “today, more than ever, we must recognize the consequence of choosing to remain a malihini in our own land: complicity in maintaining oppressive structures such as settler colonialism” (Osorio 165). This section speaks on this statement or how my relationship to Hawai‘i during this time was as a malihini and in upholding settler colonialism.

For the third section I decided to use the title of haumea which refers to an akua wahine. This section was the hardest to write and the hardest to get through. This section reflects the months (of summer) after I was sexually assaulted. I had first wanted to use the word haumia because of its dictionary definition of defiling but after having a conversation with ho‘omanawanui I had to rethink this. While I feel this word may reflect this time accurately for me, she brought up the point of if I want to ho‘omana this word especially given its connotations. She had also suggested that she can see ways this word can be used as a reclamation against what happened to me but also what this has tended to reference which is also menstruation. As a last thought, ho‘omanawanui reminded me of Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa’s book *Native Lands and Foreign Desires* and how Kame‘eleihiwa rethinks the way people think about the ‘Aikapu. I sat with this for a while, I also had a discussion with Jamaica Osorio about this section especially considering we had started her POLS 684 course with reading parts of Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa’s book. Kame‘eleihiwa’s states “notice that the word *haumia* (defiling) is

very close to the name Haumea, the ancient *Akua wahine* of childbirth, source of all life” (34). I began to realize more the power in the use of haumea for this section instead of haumia. Because of the trajectory of my life and the timeline of events that led before and after this moment, I think haumea is the more appropriate term to reflect a different type of rebirthing. I end this section with a poem dedicated to two of my hoaloha from ceramics who unknowingly saved my life through their aloha and compassion. Their company is what also made me decide to stay at UH and in this realm.

For the fourth section I chose ho‘i. In very literal terms, I chose this because I had started learning ‘ōlelo the semester following my assault. Two of my ceramic hoaloha weren’t only what I attribute to saving my life. I also acknowledge the start of my journey to learn ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. As I learned ‘ōlelo, I was understanding more and more a Hawaiian perspective and epistemology of approaching the world. And so in this section the poems reflect the small shift in my life where I start embodying these knowledges.

I named the fifth section kupu. I was contemplating whether to use the term kupu or kūkulu instead. The idea I had were these poems were how I was building up myself and my poetry to best reflect my Hawaiian identity. But the conversation with Kumu ku‘ualoha also pushed me to rethink the word for this section. The essence of this section is growth, which kupu denotes. I contend with my identities and how I try to bridge together all parts of me, including my pottery.

For the sixth section, I chose the name of hopohopo to evoke the feeling of anxiety. These poems have to do with my broken relationship with my father which is the rupture in my genealogy and the feelings of being from/in the diaspora. I don’t have strong relationships with that side of my family and that is the side with Hawaiian

ancestry and even with that some poems reflect the issues of blood quantum and the anxiety I had around that. But one poem titled “punahēle” works as a transition poem in which this poem is about my partner, Punahēle, and how I came to understand the meaning of his name through his work as a music artist and educator in his community. This idea is based off of E. S. Craighill Handy and Mary Kawena Pukui’s *The Polynesian Family System in Ka ‘u, Hawai ‘i* instead of the dictionary definition of punahēle. Handy and Pukui define punahēle as “meaning favourite or precious child, one chosen by a *kupuna* for strict rearing and special training in traditional arts and lore” (Handy and Pukui 46). I tried to weave the story of how Punahēle started to think of his name as a burden and untrue because his family doesn’t treat him like a favorite. But I began to realize that if he look at his work and what his kuleana is, that in a lot of ways he is fulfilling the idea that he was chosen to carry on in “traditional arts and lore” as Handy and Pukui state. This poem acts as a transition also because I attribute a lot of my growth as a Hawaiian to our relationship.

The seventh section is named hānau for an obvious reason and refers to birth. This section is about another (re)birthing and really about being comfortable enough in myself and my Hawaiian identity. It’s an assertion of this identity and how pa‘a I feel within this identity now. It’s about how I’ve cultivated and practice Silva’s “mo‘okū‘auhau consciousness” and have finally reoriented myself within a Hawaiian worldview and finally feel more in tune with my Hawaiian ancestors. While the poem “forgiveness” may seem like it belongs in the ‘hopohopo’ section, I put it here because it has a lot to do with my anxiety not knowing my genealogy exactly but it ends with the feeling I have with being okay currently. If I were to dwell too much on this I wouldn’t be able to help the

lāhui in many ways. This section also reflects my understanding of kuleana in Hawai‘i and how, thanks to Kaleikoa Ka‘eo’s speech at Lā Ho‘iho‘i Ea 2017, everyone has their own kuleana within the lāhui. I had the anxieties of not being enough or being able to be on the front lines fighting for our ea, but Ka‘eo’s speech saying that there are different roles that people can do and that not everyone has to be a leader or on the front lines really calmed these anxieties. This made me realize the different layers of kuleana and really helped me become more spiritually in tune to find out what my kuleana is within the lāhui.

The eighth and final section is titled haku which means to create or compose. This has to do with how the (re)birthing of myself has allowed me to finally haku, or create, poems in which reflects my identity and my current self. It is also titled haku because of the term “haku kaula” which is to make rope and which the structure of this collection is greatly inspired by. I embrace becoming a haku in contemporary times and take on the kuleana of being a contemporary Hawaiian haku/artist. I leave this collection open as a way to invite more creations to follow from not only me but any future Hawaiians that need it.

Lastly, my title “without ku‘u” references my “i am my mother’s” first stanza:

i am my mother’s decision to name me
 after ku‘ulei and ku‘ulani, to save
 pain without ku‘u

While the title is directly from within this collection, I have thought about the multiple meanings “ku‘u” has and not just the endearment aspect, as for ku‘u ipo (my dear lover). Ku‘u also means to release, let go, abandon, and so on. Several thoughts have been

floating about the meaning behind this title and I like the ways in which there can be different interpretations. Quite literally I was named without ku‘u but what does it then mean for me to be without release, or without abandonment? In many ways, I found my way to Hawai‘i and I am choosing to stay in Hawai‘i whereas my two siblings choose to their communities in California. The mana of my name coming from both my grandmother and my great aunt means a lot even without the ku‘u. Even with the abandonment of my father’s side of the family, too, I have found solace and found my way to a community I am proud to be a part of.

‘A‘ole i pau.

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moku

i am the rosary

i am the rosary wrapped between my filipino grandma's
fingers but around my mother's neck

i am the prayers they recited in english and the tagalog
slipping from their mouths

i am the bread of christ my papa handed out
in the palms of believers at st. andrews church

i am the vanilla ensure he used to give
me when my mom wasn't looking

ruthless / rootless

ruthless
 like the daggers that spill
 from my mouth
 drenched in the blood
 of my ancestors
 [de]colonization is a violent event

rootless
like "home"
meaning nothing if
you live on stolen land &
descend from immigrants
colonization is a violent structure

ruthless
 in this skin i bear
 no longer recognizable
 [un]comfortable to be
 too pale to be brown
 & too brown to be white

rootless
like shame coloring my face when
i can't answer grandpa andres or tia nelly
or move my hips
to the sounds of
suavamente

ruthless
 like the rejection
 passed unto me from my mother
 "our father's" and "hail mary's"
 restrict our throats
 the rosary suffocating us while
 the mother tongue was severed
 and then mocked by *real* filipinos

rootless
like self hate in the body of christ-
ina. my confirmation taught me one thing
maybe god never liked
brown women like us
who prayed in english and
abandoned any hints of
ancestry

ruthless
 like colonizers
 shooting joseph kahahawai
 and sipping champagne
 in an office to celebrate
 another hawaiian n*gger dead

rootless
until the day i learn my language
and claim who i am
the 'āina
the mo'olelo
the kaumaha
are my mo'okū'auhau

porcelain

a thick blanket of bleached fog descended on the brown hills of the peninsula
good morning sunshine ! my mother sd the purest clay is pacifica white
porcelain : 25% silica (the highest content of any other clay) yeah it's
annoying silence engulfs dried porcelain strips of clay from leather
hard to bone dry maybe call just add water or fire i.e. cone 10 for
functional work (2400 degrees f) so if i leave at the pier the sun strips pink
painted in the sky slowly the walls are pulled up to create (i.e. make live)
cold surf raging sea of ca i hurt too my mother said

silicosis

a woman was born
into many cultures
but grew up suffocated
by the white dust posing as
pure porcelain.

when the dust settled,
all that was needed was
a little dirt and salt water
creating a beautiful shade of brown
to be comfortable in.

a return to the dirt
was the perfect relief
to the growing silica shards
in her lungs.

the cancer,
although irreversible,
has created
a vessel.

malihini

white america raised me

what is it like to fraction yourself
up, to be legible to others?
when others scrunch faces
can't fathom nothing more than halves?
but how easy is it to blend in
 when white america raised you

because white america will raise you
 a hyphen
 to think multiculturalism
 is the perfect state

white america will raise you to
 love your country,
 love your troops, and
 love unquestioned authority

white america will raise you
 an individual,
 believe hard work
 overcomes systemic oppression

white america will raise you to
 take tests, memorize not
 retain, stress yourself out for
 arbitrary grades

white america will raise you to
 pledge a flag
 responsible for the murder
 of your ancestors

white america will raise you to
 fight for your country
 but leave you houseless

white america will raise you to hate yourself

lost in honolulu

#1 bus ride

to

doris duke

theatre

for some greek music no

one remembers

it was sunset

when i left the university

google maps

told me

right

left

down

the stairs

music filled theatre

seats

bored freshman

waiting

to go home

it was dark

when i left

doris duke

google maps

told me

left

right

right

there

take #4

google maps

said

except i saw

no pole

no bus sign

no bench

concrete buildings blend

-ed

together

sidewalks melted roads
where was this bus stop?
i tried refreshing
i just needed
to find the
#1 bus stop
going
the other way
i tried calling
my mom
in california
asking her what to do
she tried to
help but
i couldn't see any
signs
as i started to
panic
separation
anxiety
filled
my eyes
i have only
been away from
my mom for
two months
and i wanted to go
home
a bench marked this stop
i got on
#4 hoping
i was going to UH
3 stops into the ride
i ask the

bus driver

he tells me wrong bus
but i'll show you

he pointed the stop

and i waited

i finally got to the dorms

before midnight

and cried

wanting to leave hawai'i

for home

home?

is home daly city, ca?
the town on my birth certificate

is home pacifica, ca?
where i graduated high school

is home tracy, ca?
where i cultivated a
a passion for volleyball

is my home hawai'i?
where i contemplated leaving
because i was uncomfortable

is home people?
the marines who became
my first friends in hawai'i

is home the ceramic studio?
where i spent late nights
improving my craft

is home the english department?
where i strived to be a poet
at arms length

is home wai'anae?
the bonfires i knew
before and now the mountains
i know intimately

is home my partner?
who taught me
what sovereignty means
through rhythm and poetry

is home nowhere?
only meant to last
3 years in one place

maybe i am home
where solitude becomes
a lover, knowing true
boundaries.

yoks

the most western tip of o'ahu
lit fires
palettes burned midnight
nails
the only warmth from the sea
was coke & rum

ignorance becomes
bliss
when your best friends
are marines

bottles cup sand
shivers spread
behind eyelids
until the sun peaks over
perched golf balls
people scatter
picking up bottles cans nails

we drink, make mistakes,
and pretend we slept
we ride in traffic:
 the right postcard perfect beaches
 the left ignored

haumea

enough questions

how many times
 did you tell him no?
 before he still went ahead
 at what number did
 you give up and
 let him get away with it?
 at what point did you realize
 he could overpower you
 and you were trapped in your
 own apartment?
 what went through your head
 as you showered right after
 when you felt disgusting
 and violated?
 how did you go to work that same
 morning? not stopping
 at kapi'olani medical center
 when you lived just one block
 away
 how did you feel
 when you joked about it
 to your manager
 and lit your first cigarette?
 how was it to hear
 that faint knock on your door
 at 3am? to wake up
 to that light tap? survive
 threats and stalking?
 unknown phone calls and
 text messages?
 how did you find the strength
 to walk to the police station
 and tell the officer
 you're here to report a
 sexual assault? especially since
 it happened a week ago now
 you were asked to write your
 statement?
 then told to stop and
 wait for a call from
 the detective on your case
 what did it feel like
 to be asked by a man
 to recount the events
 knowing this will be recorded?
 what went through your head
 as he asked you
 what you were wearing
 and what position you were
 in?
 how did it feel
 to recount a sexual act
 that was consensual the night before
 but not in the morning?
 what did it feel like to lose your
 mind? to get off one bus stop
 earlier, walk to the next bus
 stop? carry a knife in your hand
 as you walk home?
 what did it feel like to trace that
 same blade across your skin?
 wanting to never be desirable
 again?
 what did it feel like to close your
 door and keep the lights off
 so no one thinks you're
 home?
 what did it feel like when you
 were physically alone and
 wanted to die?

 what was it like when

we rage

we are combustible
light our fire and
 feel free
cleanse earth
 flow in oceans
we survivors will burn villages
 burst red orange blue
left raw—
 raw
 skin
 raw
 flesh
soft &
 vulnerable

what does it mean to heal from this?

we rise from ashes
but b u r n
 burn islands & oceans
 burn rivers & mountains
 burn groves & ridges
 burn all those who have wronged us
 and never believed us

we'll be left with charred skin
 peeled raw peeled soft

our flesh becomes battleground
shrapnel becomes landscape
 the aftermath of desecration
when we see our reflection
 we grow gardens in places
 we don't want to see
 fill lakes in parts of our bodies
 that need just a little more love

we rage we burn we break

just pray

God will hear you,
my grandma told me.
reflect outside and talk with God.
ask him for forgiveness, always.
He'll help you,
my confirmation teacher said.
if only you pray, you will feel him.

just pray

you've never felt him.
he never answered you.
why must you always ask for forgiveness?
is existing sinning?

just pray

the universe feels what you put out there.
there is some higher power but
you can no longer believe in (a) God.
you can no longer pray.

just pray

maybe your assault will turn you
to God. was that young woman
who walked up to you at the campus
starbucks a sign? was God going to
be your salvation from suicide? will this
finally make your grandparents proud?

just pray

praying doesn't always mean
you pray to one god
 (or to God).
you can pray to kūpuna,
you can ask for guidance,
you can pray
 to the old gods
 to Hina
 Kū
 Kanaloa
 Kāne
 Pele

Laka
pray to all of them.
they are waiting to hear your voice

just pray

in all this aftermath

to kaitlyn and ashley,

in the aftermath of menthol cigarettes filling my lungs for the first time and draining my paychecks, in the aftermath of looking over my shoulder and gripping pocket knives on my walks home from work, in the aftermath of sleepless nights and contemplating suicide, you both showed me compassion. You refused to let me walk a mile home late at night, giving me rides as if it was normal, refused to take my money when buying food knowing i only worked for 7.25\$ an hour at wahoo's. it was then i began to believe in the value of living again. when summer was spent tracing my roommate's pocket knife across my skin in the middle of the night, wondering how deep i should go this time, wondering if i could break skin this time, i wanted to drop out of school and leave hawai'i behind. but when the semester came around, you both were, simply, human.

thank you for encouraging me to pursue ceramics, for sharing your passion and knowledge with me. thank you for midnight memories of pizza and hiding our angry orchards from security when they passed through. thank you for being there even if you never knew this. thank you for giving me a reason to live just because you are kind. never underestimate yourself and your impact because, without you, i wouldn't be here writing this letter to you. i wouldn't sit here and acknowledge how you two embody aloha and not in that tourist, corny, cliché way but in a way that literally saved someone's life, saved my life. in all this aftermath, i thank you two for picking me up in my darkest times without expecting anything in return.

with my deepest love,
leilani

ho'i

in a name

my name is
Leilani Portillo.
i stem
from histories
severed
from aunts and grandmothers
from an absent father
from countries unknown to me
from an assimilated genealogy

from daly city–
little manila
a town where
rice cookers
make fog

from pacifica–
famous for
a taco bell on
the beach,
a pier for
fishing,
and fog fest

from san francisco
when no one knows
where pacifica is
when it's easier to name
a landmark in unknown
territory

i am
leilani portillo.
my name stems
from wahine embracing
teasing.
i received endearment

conceived as a child
of the heavens
a gift from above

i am from bay area,
also known as ohlone territory.
i name
an occupied territory
awaken to
acknowledge which
land my family settled

i search
for severed
branches
severed
aho of my 'upena
i search for blood
histories silenced
histories forgotten
i search for myself
in a name.

'o au nō leilani portillo

whispering sea

the distinct smell of salt dancing in the air
and the calming sound of the waves crashing
and kissing the shore.
the whispering sea
invites me in

the murky green
waves
of my old home were
always cold
always distant
pushing me away.

the sea-foam green
waves
of paradise are
always warm
always welcoming
drawing me in

i've claimed my new home
as i hear the sea whispering in my ear
urging me to enter
and just like eddie,
i would go

can't you see

can't you see i am dying? i am dying among this grey landscape. not the color between black and white. not a mix of black and white but of my ancestors grinded bones within the spine of this rail. it is the color of colonialism still injecting poison into this 'āina. it is the color of the ships and military stationed at pu'uloa. reminding me that we are a target, always. it is of layers of grey in the sky waiting to burst and pour acid upon me. can't you see i am dying? i am dying from the greys reflecting the rails in the bay area. it is a reminder of the death and erasure of natives. it screams progress but forgets that the muwekma ohlone were the first peoples of those lands just like many forget kanaka maoli are the first peoples of these lands. i am dying, can't you see?

i am the hawaiian islands

i am the hawaiian islands my grandpa joe left to
raise his children in san mateo, california

i am the untold histories of my grandma helen
but unknowingly of her love for clay

i am the broken english my grandfather spoke to
me as he lay taking his last breaths

i am the teasing and bullying my grandmother and
great aunt suffered because their names
were ku'ulei and ku'ulani

hopohopo

dear father,

i remember the walls of every hotel and
motel we moved through,
the red minivan we lived out of,
and the yellow walkman that was only playing
tupac.

i remember the warm and clear day you
and mom separated. you forgot you had
daughters and only fought for your
son.

i remember the clear skies during papa's funeral,
hearing you showed up.
i realized then that he wasn't coming back and
neither were you.

i remember the visitations with rite aide's pistachio ice cream,
the phone call of you questioning my sexuality and
me crying thinking you wouldn't love me regardless.
i was only 10.

i remember when the visitations stopped.

i remember your father's death and
your spineless choice to not show up to his funeral.
i cried and screamed.
my heart broke that day and hatred began to seep
into the cracks.

i remember not caring if you were in jail
or dead,
telling myself you or anyone else won't
walk me down the aisle if i ever got married.

i remember when the hatred turned to indifference.

i remember moving to hawai'i with my

hawaiian lineage lingering,
meeting my first mo'owahine,
and moving towards my kūpuna.

i remember 'ōlelo replacing
every thought of you, and
finding that my power lies
 in the lines i write,
 the words i speak,
 the art i make, and
 the culture i claim/am.

i ka 'ōlelo no ke ola, i ka 'ōlelo no ka make

i remember skipping
in my mo'okū'auhau. my memories of grandpa joe
filled my na'au when
people ask if i am hawaiian.

i remember finding out grandpa joe was
still alive and still smiling.
almost two decades of answers
flooded my eyes.

uē ka lani, ola ka honua.

i remember your cousin told
you about my visit with
grandpa joe and you
wanted to show up. i never believed
you'd show since you're
known for standing up your own children.

i remember what the air felt like the moment you entered the room.
time didn't stop and the AC kept going.
your hug felt secure and safe but
i knew it was full of all the empty
words you told your children.
the times you said you wanted to see us
 but didn't,

the times you told my mom you changed
but didn't,
the excuses and lies you told her to pretend like you still wanted to be
in our lives.

i remember graduating
high school without you,
knowing i'd graduate college
without you.
most of my life was going to be done
without you.

i remember my 'imi noi'i about
ku'u one hānau but since
i wasn't born and raised here
i chose grandpa joe. your aunt
just said honolulu not understanding
that everyone was born
at queen's hospital.

i remember the response you gave me
when i asked for your birth certificate.
you told me you had no
children and to not text you again.

i remember to never get
my hopes up when it comes
to you. all your choices were
deliberate and you never wanted children
so my mom raised her children by herself.
we turned out fine without you.

i remember hearing of grandpa joe's death and
feeling more far apart from him,
no one told me but my mom.
i gave a hō'ike'ike on his one hānau.
when i talked about his age
i started crying because
he was gone.

i remember walking across the
stage to receive my diploma.

5 years,

2 majors,

and a hawaiian language certificate later,
you still meant nothing to me.

i remember my struggle with my hawaiian identity

led me to grad school. you can't take

any of my accomplishments

away from me. there may be a gap

in my mo'okū'auhau

but i remember where i come from

doesn't mean where i was born

but where my kūpuna come from,

where *your* kūpuna come from.

diluted

my
families stem
from countries colonized

they
fucked the
indigenous blood out

construing
and creating
a muddled countenance

my
ancestors' noses
are harsh mountains

my
nose is
a delicate hill

their
skin comes
from the earth

my
skin has
become too diluted

‘a‘ole lawa ke koko

in 1896,
 ‘ōlelo hawai‘i was
 banned, nearly
 lost. english became
 the language for instruction
 in the interest of the
 hawaiians.

this decline may be a loss,
 a regret sure but
 the hawaiians will thank
 us one day for we came to
 save them.

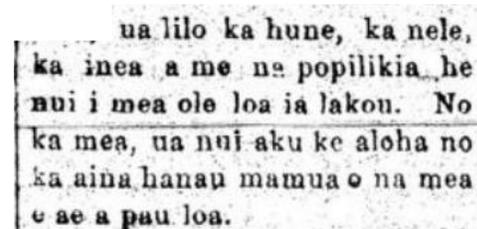
this viscous poison
 trickles down generations.
 a culture almost lost
 a language almost lost
 and traditions almost lost.

in 1920, any
 descendent of not less than
 one half of the blood
 of the races who
 inhabited these hawaiian
 islands pre-contact
 are native hawaiian.

hapa hawaiians are born
hapalua
hapahā
 and *hapawalu* hawaiians.
 hawaiians that aren‘t even
 considered hawaiians
 are born.
 how can a hapa hawaiian
 prove to be hawaiian enough
 if even the government is
 defining them?

ke aloha ‘āina,
 the love for the land as
 a magnetic pull,
 guides us to these islands
 whether we were born here
 or not

blood quantum
 can cause pain and bring death
 but ‘ōlelo hawai‘i
 can breathe life
 into those
 who are lost.



-Nāwahī, Joseph. “KE ALOHA AINA: Heaha ia?” *Ke Aloha Aina*, 25 Me 1895, pp 7.

punahele

punahele - nvs. A favorite or pet; to treat as a favorite (children were often treated as favorites; they might be carried on the grandparent's shoulders, and songs were composed for them)

in 1991

a set of twins were born dead
to a mother going blind and having pains she couldn't explain.
she was pregnant

and didn't even know it.

a tragic miracle wrapped in a hospital blanket
ke akua breathed life into only one.
he was given his hawaiian name: punahele

growing up in the raging heat of mākaha
punahele experienced the first hand effects
of uncle sam's chokehold on hawai'i

he paid for his sibling's mistakes and incompetence
gave up \$2000 to bail him out
all because

“remember he threw you one grad party”

he continues to pay
pay a mortgage that wasn't his
pay bills for fighting chickens that aren't his
he sacrificed his life for his mom
promised to take care of his braddah
promised to not lose the house or fight over it

he gave up his dreams
his dreams of going to college
his dreams of making music
his dreams of being able to leave his hood

he works for the very people that displaced his
the very same people that think twice when they look at his skin color

his skin is brown
not a generic brown or chocolate brown
not almond or caramel
the shade of brown that makes a white woman say:
“oh my gosh, you look like a native hawaiian prince”

the shade that gets you followed in a supermarket or corner store
 the shade that scares me when there's a police presence
 not because i'm scared of the color but because i'm scared of what the police will do
 the shade that gets you judged
 maybe as some dumb hawaiian
 maybe as a moke
 maybe as an addict or chronic

his skin is brown like his people
 his people who knew how to tend the land
 his people who were displaced from mākua beach, from kea'aus, from
 his people who had to witness the bullets and metal poison
 take over their mountain
 his people who faced the constant reminder of occupation
 his people who found ice to cool the dry heat of wai'anae
 his people who stole from their siblings, cousins,
 grandmothers
 his people who beat their partners and threatened their
 mothers
 when ice wasn't enough

but his skin is also brown like the earth mixed with blood of his ancestors
 the deep color of kauila wood
 the brown you think of when tupac says:
 "the darker the flesh and the deeper the roots"
 his skin is the brown that fights
 military recruiters in wai'anae high school
 those recruiters making empty promises to young brown bodies
 promises that their only future is in the barrel of a gun
 promises that respect and glory comes from killing other brown
 bodies
 promises that in order to succeed you need to leave the hood
 and walk with uncle sam abroad

his skin is the brown that fights
 development in mākaha valley
 development in 'ōhikilolo

his shade of brown is a counter narrative
 his shade of brown is the teacher he never had

the guiding voice he always wanted
the representation he always needed
this shade of brown is now his kuleana

the kuleana to be there for the keiki of wai‘anae
to be their teacher who knows them inside out
to be the light that ignites their love for their culture
his kuleana to perpetuate and carry the traditions of his people
is punahele

kupu

ka mauna

my pounamu skin turns brown

turns yellow

turns fierce

my 'ōiwi bare sun with me

anger rises their voices

their eyes

their skin

my ridges are sharp

they will cut bodies

into pieces

shed blood on my shores

i strike awe in malihini

they flee

they fear

they buy

me up

in pieces

to rid me of

my 'ōiwi

they destroy homes

break families

shoot me up

with metal poison

my 'ōiwi try to protect me

but still

my waters don't flow

and still ka'ena rages

compartmentalize

one compartment is for myself as a poet. where i try to vomit beautiful words to make sense of who i am. where i want to scream and yell about big words like colonialism, racism, and why i deserve to exist. this is where i struggle to even find words in a language that took everything from me. a language that took my identity with it and replaced it with a star spangled banner. this is where i struggle to speak the first language of this land. to understand how my kūpuna fought back against us imperialism.

one compartment is for myself as a diasporic hawaiian. i come from many cultures but only want one. i reject everything else because nothing else felt right. and to be unsure of myself as a hawaiian is terrifying but it is better than blending in. it is better than assimilating into american culture and being proud of the erasure of my people. it is better than believing that the us won and hawaiians should shut up already. it is better than believing i will be treated like an american when they will always see me as a hyphen. it is better to learn the language my kūpuna spoke and the language this land first heard. i am trying to be okay.

one compartment is for myself as a ceramic artist. a space where i am constantly reminded i don't belong. a place where hawaiians never had a culture and teachers think diversity exists because there are asians. i try to produce work to reflect my hawaiian identity to bring voice to indigenous voices in ceramics. i find no one to help me reconcile with the fact that my ancestors didn't bring pottery with them when they crossed the pacific but literature taught me they brought the visuality of those designs in forms of tātau and tapa. i want to fight back against the constant reminder that native voices aren't welcome. i want to see the destruction of settler colonialism and the creation of native processes.

one compartment is for myself as a [queer] woman. label after label with a little confusion. discovering my sexuality came easy to me, it only ever made sense. but my bisexuality always lay invisible unless i shave half my head, have purple/green hair, and have my septum pierced. then i scream it. i am bisexual except i am not because i stopped dying my hair and let it grow, because i am in a hetero relationship now. if i am queer why don't i say so? if they want queer poets why not say something? the only queer thing about me is my sexuality and not my work.

the art of marbling

after you've explored different clay bodies — even if you've spent more time figuring out the fragility and volatility of porcelain, trying to master its muscle memory to your touch, being mesmerized by the pure white, smooth texture—more than you have explored any other clay bodies that reflect you better, when you decide to experiment with what it means to be multi. you are ready to delve into the art of marbling. first is wedging—the process of awakening the molecules in the clay bodies and releasing any trapped insecurities you may have.

step 1: to create a beautiful—but distinct—mix of clay bodies to form a vessel, you need to weigh out your bodies right down to the perceived blood quantum everyone wants to cut you up in. with more experience, you can weigh out your bodies however you feel and never have to explain yourself to anyone again.

step 2: smash all the bodies together. don't be afraid to use force, smack each side, smash all pieces, throw them down, let gravity help you combine them.

NOTE: this initial combining is important. different bodies don't like being mixed together. they may tear apart from each other and form unwanted rifts in your vessel. those trapped insecurities may still be there but the smashing is to help lessen the amount and the wedging is to help push them out.

TIP: speak to and pray for your vessel. your mana flows from your hands to the clay. the clay will feel everything you feel.

step 3: once you have your combined bodies, start slapping and shaping them into what resembles the shape of your hips, the roundness of your breasts, and the fullness of your thoughts.

step 4: cup those hips and push down but away from you. the form you will create will resemble your power to birth nations.

step 5: bring the bodies back towards you

step 6: repeat the pushing and pulling of those hips over and over again. stop when the bodies make peace with themselves and each other but be careful not to assimilate.

NOTE: step 4&5 are to be done on a plaster table with stretched canvas over it to absorb unwanted moisture and harden the bodies.

you can begin molding your piece to your liking. as you create, remind your vessel of its purpose, whisper kindness, and don't forget the clay is you. even if rifts form in the end, your vessel still has the possibility of being functional. and if it's not, continue to work and better your vessel(s) along the way.



the ea of healing is consent

breathe in

feel papa in your heels

breath out

send your prayers to hina

once you can imagine
 an independent hawai'i
allow yourself to heal

unwind helixes of trauma
 mend historical mutations
with the touch of lepo

each time you tend to 'āina
 your dna reweaves itself
so future generations grow

when you help heal land
 your heart fills with tenderness
only aloha knows

hānau

i am my mother's

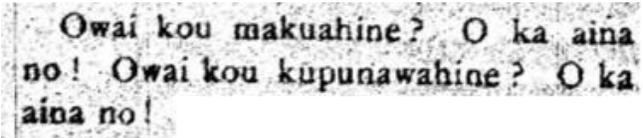
i am my mother's decision to name me
after ku'ulei and ku'ulani, to save
pain without ku'u

i am the scars left from a hyphen
the screams for belonging
and community from the philippines

i am the last name of my father who texted
me back telling me he had no children

i am his shame and refusal to show up
for his kids at his dad's funeral

believe me

A scan of a document with Hawaiian text. The text is arranged in two lines. The first line reads "Owai kou makuahine? O ka aina" and the second line reads "no! Owai kou kupunawahine? O ka aina no!". The text is in a serif font and appears to be a reproduction of a historical document.

Owai kou makuahine? O ka aina
no! Owai kou kupunawahine? O ka
aina no!

- Nāwahī, Joseph, "O KE ALOHA I KA AINA" *Ke Aloha Aina*, 8 Iune 1895, pp 4.

when i say
the land is my
ancestor
believe me

when i say
the land is my
mother
believe me

when i say
the land is my
grandmother
believe me

believe me when i say
my ancestors
are with me
mountains and all

forgiveness

your mo‘okū‘auhau is patient
your time to know your direct kūpuna & ‘āina will come
as tsunamis and lava flows rock your body,
 papahānaumoku is reminding you where you come from
 that this dirt is of your ancestors
 this land is of your ancestors
 this ocean is of your ancestors

ke aloha ‘āina is your refuge
you must remember your aloha is brown
 your mana is brown
 your kuleana is brown
 & your piko is brown

because brown is the power of earthquakes,
 the fierceness of tides and sacrifice
 brown is the mo‘olelo of your people,
 your destiny and warmth
 brown is consistency and connection

as you navigate the vā of diaspora
 your body is sprinkled across daughters and lands
the oceans in your eyes conquer those hurricanes of doubt
and you never let anyone forget your bitter sweetness

your pule and pane are your kūpuna
your strength lies in your faith and resilience

the next time you question if you are even hawaiian,
remember

your identity is forgiveness.

#luckywelveHawaii

currently 1.8 million posts (& counting)

sunsets bleed together

smearing shades of pinks and purples
with sprinkles of paradise blue waters
and harsh green mountains
all masking the mirage of selfies, hikes
& flyers

lava flows grey & red

pele slowly creeping
on tourists in
an aloha state of mind

sandy butts in bikinis make great

props on beaches
and great models
on instagram

*tag someone you think should have a Hawaiian wedding
at Olowalu Plantation House*

top posts include:

- white guy w/ username: IslandNinja
- an octopus suctioned to a woman's (vaginal) mound
[captioned: mermaid chastity belt]
- a video of a waterfall in Iran
- a fisherwoman with her mentor and a big catch
- a white woman holding her baby (who's wearing an Asian rice hat)

and has in her bio:

raising babies in a 1925 Hawaiian plantation dream

a 1925 Hawaiian plantation dream

haku

We are Maunakea

I.

Telescope after telescope after failure. Thirteen times wasn't enough to hack this mauna using telescopes like machetes to harvest greed to satisfy your pockets and feed your egos.

Spectacular images of the universe will benefit all of mankind with ethnocide. People with no culture still decide if our land is sacred but when will the value of our lives be worth more than the value of science? How many times will this government decide that land means nothing to a culture? Desecration translates to body until healing is no longer possible, prayer circles form, ending in violent arrests, scarring so deep it travels through blood. We will get to decide what is sacred and how those places should be protected.

See you on the mauna.

II.

Take me to the mauna, i ka piko, i ka piko kaulana o ka 'āina. E ho'omoe ia'u ma ke kapa hau o Poli'ahu. When my last breath leaves my body, mai maka'u. They have severed my tongue to kill our culture, but you, you have awakened, you have become my wildest dreams, you have bit back hard and spit out their indoctrination. Just know that the sea will return to the land and give birth to a new era and our kūpuna will be right there, walking beside you. Don't stop fighting until our mauna is free, until our people are free, a hiki i ke aloha 'āina hope loa. Maunakea stands behind you, Maunakea stands with you, Maunakea is you. Mai poina, mai poina, *Maunakea needs you.*

III.

When you are lost, pray to your kūpuna for guidance. Know that you can do something, know that everyone has their own kuleana for this fight. Pray to ke Akua and the akua before even if you stopped believing when you were a child. They will answer. Channel your inner Kū & Hina. You need balance and harmony when you prepare for war. When the ocean seems too rough for you, when you feel the waves replace the air you so desperately want to breathe, remember you were born from it, the waters are cleansing you, purging your fears, and rebirthing you into the aloha 'āina warrior this pae'āina needs. As the fighting begins, know where you stand. ***Kū Kia'i Mauna.***

makua smiles back*what would you hear makua say?*

before contact
 kapa beaters make rhythm under rising suns
 beat beat beating wauke thin, smooth, soft
 stone against kalo against wood mixed with water
 reverberate valleys
 the streams flow, kiss ocean, for
 abundant fish
 but now
 she screams leftover shrapnel
 –holes they dug into her flesh
 she cries basins of unexploded ordnances
 toxins seeping into her core
 gates ropes fences bridge kapu
 to keep hawaiians at bay, her silent

what would you see in makua?

before contact
 kanaka work lo‘i kalo
 throw net in water
 feed families mauka to makai
 keiki would play streams
 keep their parents company
 fill air with laughter
 kū dictates war
 lono brings harvest
 hina controls bodies
 kaula loops generations
 weaves keiki with kūpuna with mākua
 waiting for mo‘opuna
 but now
 ka makani blows against alien greens
 kiawe roots deep in her,
 spread by british cattle
 two times a month kānaka are allowed
 to visit ‘ahu and pōhaku
 but can’t leave ho‘okupu

(unless it's on the itinerary)

yellow ropes bind
 inaccessible gravel paths,
 separating artifact from kin
archaeologists decide what is historical
 what we leave, what we touch
 and how we love our 'āina

what parts do you wish to share with makua?

i ask makua to receive my unknown genealogies
 my kūpuna from the philippines
 my kūpuna from japan
 my kūpuna from honduras
 and my kūpuna from hawai'i
i share with her my tears
 breathe her in as
 she holds my ea close
 feel her breath beneath my feet
 i bear her 'eha in my bones

what do you wish to carry from makua?

i carry the mist that descended from the valley
 caressing my skin as
 she soaks in the leo of her 'ōiwi
i hold her histories
 when i enter her waters
 feel free as
 makua smiles back

after days of being in her,
 i felt safe and loved.
 my blood remembers
 my ancestors' memories of
 this same body.

when i try to remember my first moment with moananui,
 mākaha valley guarded me with
 generations of histories and
 mauna ka'ala watched over me with
 millennia of wisdom
 as i felt which waves carried
 my trauma
 to shore,
 which ones absorbed
 my fears
 and the ones that replaced
 my panic
 with kuleana.

when i try to remember my first moment with the ocean,
 with moananui,
 she always kissed my wounds
 from the west shores of o'ahu
 to the west shores of ohlone territory
 to remind me that
 she is me and
 i am her.

when i try to remember my first moment with moananuiākea,
 i remember where i come from,
 where my people come from, and
 where we are always going.
 i surrender myself to
 her whispers.

when i try to remember my first moment with moananuiākea,
 she is my first,
 my second,

my third,
and my last memories.
they all crash
together as she heals me again
and again.

to moananuiākea — from your depths to my depths i thank you for my lifelong hugs

i am salted rocks

i am salted rocks along wai‘anae &
powdered waves in keawa‘ula

i am the vast blues of kaiwi &
the depthless greens of ko‘olau

i am nu‘uanu witnessing genocide &
kaho‘olawe surviving the u.s. navy

i am the last drop of rain in mānoa &
the first breath of lava in kīlauea

i am navigating this genealogy within
mountains, islands, and oceans