

DISRUPTING AMERICAN IDENTITY THROUGH THE LENS OF THE PACIFIC:
ESSAYS FROM HAWAI'I ON BELONGING, INVADING AND SURVIVING

by

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DEDICATION

To the Hawaiian land, ocean, and people for helping me to grow my ideas and teaching me about the intricacies of the world and my responsibility to place.

To Josh for your unconditional support and love. To Juliana for love, for listening to my stories and pushing me to think further. To Ethan for love, always asking about my project and encouraging me to keep going. To Alexandra for love and for your strident support as I neared the finish line of this project.

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ABSTRACT

The cooptation of Native Hawaiian Culture along with colonialism, settler privilege and distorted perceptions have reshaped the lands of Kānaka creating what activist and scholar Haunani-Kay Trask calls “a postcard image” of the place. Through a series of case studies that draw on feminist, Indigenous, and historical sources and using auto-theory as a method to examine personal experiences of place, this project analyzes the danger of fantasy as it plays out in geography, culture, family, and what it means to be American. In doing so, this dissertation foregrounds the complex relationship between the US and Hawai’i, moving beyond the popular fantasy of a tropical vacation destination to reveal how settler desires are often informed and shaped by larger nation building practices. Weaving together memoir with academic scholarship, this project examines the way in which settlers in the 1970s often depicted Hawai’i as a paradise that provided them the means for developing an “extraordinary” life, regardless of whether they were welcome there or not. This dissertation is multifaceted, highlighting the counterculture of the 1970s, the complex stories that tell about various families that worked and made lives for themselves in Hawai’i and the risk of using an imagined place to construct an idea of self that relies on notions of authenticity. To counter these misunderstandings, this dissertation foregrounds the autonomy and the resistance of Hawaiian sovereigns in the 1800s and what Kānaka are still doing today to combat the rampant spread of tourism and exploitation of the islands’ resources by outside entities.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Islands are deemed to be paradisaical. The blue ocean. The beaches. Palm trees swaying in a balmy breeze. Soft white sand underfoot. The temperate climate.”

– Christine Gerhardt, *Sea of Change: An Atlas of Islands in a Rising Ocean*

I grew up on an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Flying there for the first time as an eight-year-old in 1974, I was struck by the expanse of ocean under me and the clouds I seemed to float in. As far as I could see there was blue water and blue sky. I stared out the airplane window and imagined this was what heaven looked like. It was the first time I remember flying and it seemed like a dream. My dad had disappeared from my life six months earlier. I was told he went to Hawai'i for a two-week vacation from which he'd never returned. My parents were separated, and both had agreed to live in Northern California and split custody of me and my little brother. But then my dad complicated things by moving to Hawai'i. My mom was flying with us kids to drop us off with our dad and to see if she could possibly live in Hawai'i too. She couldn't and, after a couple of months, she returned to Northern California without us. The new arrangement was six months with each parent, flying back and forth from Hawai'i to California.

I had never seen my dad so excited as when he met us at the gate as we disembarked, putting sweet smelling plumeria leis around our necks – me, my mom, and my little brother. I would eventually learn that giving a lei was a tradition of the ancient Hawaiians that had been adopted by most everyone in Hawai'i. Leis marked almost all celebrations: birthdays,

graduations, arrivals, or departures, and even deaths. They symbolized love or aloha. My dad explained that he'd picked the flowers and made the leis himself, stringing them together with fishing line. I would learn to make and give many leis in my time in Hawai'i and would receive many as well. Waiting for our luggage, I inhaled, and the sweetness engulfed me. This place seemed perfect. I clung to my dad, so happy to hug him again after six months of him just disappearing from my life. The delicate petals of the lei tickled my face. The soft breeze kissed my skin. The airport had no walls, it was just open to the outside. The coconut trees swayed in the dark sky as if performing a languid dance welcoming us.

When we arrived at our new home from the airport, my brother and I ran out to the backyard to see the ocean glowing under the light of the moon. We fell asleep hearing the waves lap the shore. When I awoke in the morning, the plumeria lei my dad told me to hang on the window handle had wilted. The flowers were sad and droopy. The fishing line exposed. I remember being disappointed that the lei's smell was disappearing, the petals already browning at the edges. Christina Gerhardt argues that we all experience different things on an island, depending on where we are situated. If you live on an island, it can only be paradise for so long. Gerhardt argues the reality of island-life sets in, food is costly and must be shipped from elsewhere, housing is expensive and, in Hawai'i, racial tensions run high.¹ Eventually my brother and I would learn all these things. We would have to go to school and meet new friends. But for that summer we lived in a kind of space that felt like we were in-between our old life and our new. I was too young to read signs like the warning of the wilting lei. Every day my heart felt

¹ Christina Gerhardt, *Sea Changes: An Atlas of Islands in a Rising Ocean* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2023), 8.

like it would burst as we discovered snorkeling and jumping from high rocks and swimming far out into the water that looked like glass.

People create islands in their minds by inventing myths of a place and the person it will allow you to be. My dad believed Hawai'i was the answer to his dreams of who he imagined himself to be. Living in Hawai'i though was complicated, and I've worked to undo this myth of my childhood and the place I still call home. In the settler colonial imagination, Hawai'i is often figured as larger than life, filled with beauty and mystery. Settler colonialism is a "system of oppression based on genocide and colonialism, that aims to displace a population of a nation (oftentimes Indigenous people) and replace it with a new settler population."² Though we didn't realize it at the time, we were settlers. Patrick Wolfe writes that settler colonialism is always about land and that "land is life" so "contests for land, often are—contests for life."³ So in our imagining of what our lives would be like living the dream of Hawai'i, we were also blindly eliminating the Indigenous people that came before us.

We couldn't see the implications of our actions because the discourse of tourism portrays Hawai'i as a place where the "aloha spirit" welcomes visitors to vacations that recreate a fantasy of a place, rather than the place itself. But Hawai'i is more than the tropical façade. It is complex, further compounded by the myth that is attached to it. To complicate this myth, the Hawai'i viewed from the fanciful resorts that line the beaches, keep the gaze of visitors and residents alike from the interior of the island where the military practice for war.

² LII, Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, May, 2002, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/settler_colonialism.

³ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8, no. 4 (2006): 387.

Hawai'i, in all its complexity, is hidden by the things not shown. Pierre Macherey writes that everything spoken always has something unspoken behind it. He asks, "Can we make this silence speak?"⁴ What is behind the luxury resorts and smiling hosts? When my dad speaks of the way Hawai'i makes him feel complete, should I investigate the silences to understand why he didn't feel complete living in the continental US? Macherey argues that "Speech eventually has nothing more to tell us: . . . for it is the silence that's doing the speaking."⁵ There are many silences about how my dad made Hawai'i his home. These silences are secrets. My dad told me and my brother the mythic version of his story. He was an Olympic gold medal swimmer and world record holder from the 1968 Olympics who became disillusioned with a conventional life and moving to Hawai'i was the answer. He framed it as a paradisaical life that he gave me and my brother. His version of our story didn't allow for the reality of how we landed in the islands or what he had to do to keep us there. His story didn't include his years of listlessness, wandering, losing jobs, and getting his car repossessed. His version was a kind of fairy tale.

People construct stories to make sense of the messiness of life, but the messiness can't always be explained away. The direction I look, the perspective I view things from, the way I see affects what I see. When I look at my childhood in Hawai'i from the view of an adult, I see a different story. The silent spaces appear. Macherey believes that "the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, without, which it would not exist."⁶ These absences appear as I untangle the stories I was told. In the unspoken, new things appear. As I

⁴ Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978), 86.

⁵ Macherey, 86.

⁶ Macherey, 85.

examine the mythos of my dad along with the lore of the Olympian and the influence of American culture in the 1950s to 1970s, I can see how we ended up in Hawai'i. I can see the road that led us there with its promised dreams of the nuclear family and greatness that never became a reality. There are many stories American culture tells us about ourselves that must be dispelled. "A knowledge of a book," Macherey argues, "must include a consideration of this absence."⁷ The question that could be asked was what was culture hiding in the absences? Being a child of the 60s, I know that "free love" didn't feel free and was rarely about love. But the story my parents were told about the nuclear family as the path to happiness also wasn't true for them and many like them. New stories must be listened for. Myths can't make for a happy life. That must come from some place deeper within us.

Where I Write From Today

Though I've lived in Montana for 25 years, I am fascinated with my childhood and early adulthood in Hawai'i. I want to know how we and others like us ended up there because we viewed this place as a paradise. Many of the questions and ideas I had about Hawai'i have changed from when I was a kid to when I graduated from college on the continental US and returned there to work as a public relations executive, got married and started a family. They also changed when I moved to Montana 25 years ago and ruminated about leaving Hawai'i, yearning to be near the ocean. Many of these different perspectives become further explained and fleshed out through my research and writing. Kānaka or Native Hawaiian scholars have repeatedly

⁷ Macherey, 85.

reconceptualized ideas of the way I now understand nation and history, settler colonialism and borderland studies in Hawai'i.

As I write from my home office, I can see the Bridger Mountains in Montana. Though I live on Cree Street, named after Native Americans who first lived on this land, there are few visible glimpses of Indigenous people in my daily life. I am far from the ocean and the place I still refer to as home, though across the street I have Kānaka neighbors from the Big Island. Perhaps it was necessary for me to leave to provide space and perspective to know Hawai'i differently. Combining stories of my family and others along with scholarly voices, I examine the cultural representation and coopting of a people through colonization and settler colonialism, privilege and perception shaping what Hawaiian activist and scholar Haunani Kay Trask calls “a postcard image of Hawai'i.”⁸

Perspective

We all carry our stories with us from the perspective of where we stand. These ideas shape who we are and the way we see the world. Donna Haraway calls this “situated knowledge,” an awareness that it is impossible to see from an unbiased standpoint. This is an idea the discipline of American Studies engages by questioning how we know anything. Whose voices have we been exposed to? Do the stories we've been told come from only a white, patriarchal perspective? What happens when America is examined from the perspective of Hawai'i and the ocean that surrounds it? How does the story change?

⁸ Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 91.

Gerhardt writes that American Studies scholars call this shifting of perspective “decontinentalizing the study of American Culture.”⁹ This changes the purview of the US from looking always towards the states within the continent for direction, to turning the gaze towards these islands in the Pacific. In Hawai’i, the continental US is often referred to as the “mainland,” a connotation that people’s lives are centered around this faraway place. Many high school counselors encouraged me and my friends to go to the “mainland” for college, so we could have a broader experience of the world. In the 70s and 80s, before the internet, television shows aired two weeks after they aired in the continental US. It was mutually acknowledged that as a collective state, Hawai’i was behind – in fashion, music and what the characters on television shows were up to. This gaze ultimately decentered Hawai’i from my view. Instead of looking inward to the place called home, the “mainland” dictated what was fashionable or newsworthy. This view tethered Hawai’i to the continental US.

Words matter. Hawai’i residents unconsciously referring to the continent as the “mainland” commands the angle that we saw ourselves from without examining what those words implied. *Main* meaning the most important land was the land I didn’t live on. That my island viewpoint wasn’t valued. Gerhardt argues that “The continental gaze not only blocks islands from view” but also “impedes a more robust knowledge about islands.”¹⁰ This made island knowledge, Hawaiian knowledge, and Indigenous knowledge less important. According to

⁹ Gerhardt, *Sea Changes*, 12.

¹⁰ Gerhardt, 13.

Haraway this is “a doctrine of embodied objectivity” that “allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see.”¹¹

Learning from Kānaka scholars and the way they analyze the unconscious use of the term “mainland” made me realize that I was using something faraway to legitimize or qualify the place I lived. In this work, I seek to decenter this perspective and make island and ocean knowledge of equal importance. Because of this, like Indigenous scholars, I adopt the term continental US in this project instead of mainland to allow me to see Hawai’i centered upon itself and the ocean it is a part of.

Methodology

For my personal story that I attach to the academic, I “learned how to see” from a lens of public-school education in a curriculum that did not include Indigenous voices. Though I was educated in Hawai’i, I was taught to see from the patriarchal, white, settler colonial perspective. Today, American Studies, feminist and Indigenous scholarship change the way I see my story. Because my understanding of Hawai’i is deeply personal, I can’t uncouple my research from my own experience.

Using Haraway’s concepts, I see how my story is important as part of the narrative sitting alongside theory and bodies of critical knowledge to tell a new story of my time in Hawai’i. I work to push against traditional ways I’ve gained knowledge, which Haraway describes as “tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy” that “distance the

¹¹ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science of Question in Feminisms and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 581.

knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power.”¹² Situating myself from the space of my knowing is a move of strength that isn’t always accepted in academia. Writing about myself in the context of Hawai’i from an academic setting pushes against these power structures. Haraway explains that “vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful.”¹³ Traditionally history has been presented as fact even though it came from a patriarchal, Western point of view. Haraway calls this “the God trick.” Using Haraway’s ideas, I realize how my version of the story of Hawai’i came from sources that were tied to colonialism. It is only in questioning the things I thought I knew about my childhood and the place I was raised that I begin to learn a more complex story that includes more voices. I acknowledge that my story of Hawai’i comes from my privilege of being a settler, white, cis-gender woman. But it also comes from being a child moved about at the whim of the adults around her, watching from below the platforms of power.

My methodology for this dissertation is also informed by the work of Lauren Fournier. In her book *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, Fournier writes that to separate “art and life, theory and practice, work and self, research, and motivation is illusory.”¹⁴ Autotheory combines “theory and philosophy with autobiography--as a mode of critical artistic practice indebted to feminist writing and activism.”¹⁵ Fournier relies on the work of American literary critic Barbara Johnson who writes that personal experience has historically been encoded as ‘feminine’ and therefore devalued in ways that have justified its exclusion from the discourse

¹² Haraway, 581.

¹³ Haraway, 583.

¹⁴ Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory As Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2021), 3.

¹⁵ Fournier, 15.

of knowledge.¹⁶ Like Fournier, I believe that autotheory can be transformative in its ability to subvert normative power structures by resisting the customary academic voice and instead using memoir as a vehicle of resistance. I follow other scholars who use autotheory to “reconfigure what constitutes legitimate knowledge in the academy,”¹⁷ thus avoiding the trope of memoirists as navel gazers and instead embracing the power that reflection provides.

Dismissing the Myths of Hawai’i

Parallel to my own story sits the story of Hawai’i. It is a place filled with natural beauty that has deep meaning and significance to Kānaka Maoli or Indigenous Hawaiians. In the spirit of Hawai’i, I also use elemental forms like water and mountains and the various ways that knowing those forms work to change perspectives that challenge the dominant white settler story. Hawai’i is sometimes more fantasy than reality for the people that use it to remake themselves. This work points out the absences in our American story regarding Hawai’i. It explores the implications of adopting a master narrative through colonization and statehood. By examining Hawai’i, I hope to better understand how this space exposes several problems in dominant white conceptions of American identity.

Hawai’i’s location in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, as a non-contiguous US state often means it is easily dismissed as unimportant and non-American or misrepresented as only a vacation spot for “mainland” Americans. But switching the perspective from a focus on a land-

¹⁶ Fournier, 15.

¹⁷ Fournier, 12.

based viewpoint to an ocean outlook can raise awareness about the reality of US interests in this region and what this entanglement tells America about itself.

Epeli Hau'ofa coined the term "Oceania" to describe what Europeans and Americans have called the Pacific Islands. Pacific Islands, explains Hau'ofa "denotes small areas of land sitting atop submerged reefs or seamounts."¹⁸ But Oceania more accurately represents the vast and expansive way ocean people saw themselves before European contact. "Hau'ofa writes, "The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves."¹⁹ Hau'ofa's perspective allows brings attention to the way that America uses the Pacific while at the same time dismisses the people and countries as insignificant. But a Oceanic perspective changes the place we look from by valuing the ocean and the land, instead of just "tiny" islands.

George Dvorak in his 2015 essay *Oceanizing American Studies*, writes about growing up in the Marshall Islands and then returning to New Jersey in fourth grade to realize that no one knew where the Marshall Islands were located. Dvorak says, "I was shocked to realize that none of my new classmates had even seen or thought about the Pacific . . . to them and their families, Pacific islands were fictional and fantastic places of pleasure or peril located somewhere beyond California."²⁰ As an American Studies scholar, Dvorak continued to experience a lack of knowledge about American involvement in Oceania from graduate students and American Studies colleagues from other countries. He writes few "rarely have any awareness about how

¹⁸ Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (Spring, 1994): 153.

¹⁹ Hau'ofa, 153.

²⁰ Greg Dvorak, "Oceanizing American Studies," *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2015): 610.

much the United States is involved and indebted to the Pacific Islands”²¹ as “the Pacific Ocean is always already available to serve US interests.”²² Focusing awareness from the space of the Pacific gives a more complete picture of America. This perspective asks the white settler to change their point-of-view by looking at issues from an outlier of America, an island 2000 miles from the continental US, to explore the ways our views shift when looking to the water or other islands within Oceania instead of towards empire. This story changes where we see from: it could be from the water or from the mountains or from framework laid out by an Indigenous perspective or from a little girl who moved there from California and grew up on the shores of Hawai’i.

Drawing on feminist, Indigenous, and historical sources along with poetry, memoir, short story, film, music, critical theory, government documents and personal criticism and using auto-theory as a method to include personal experiences as a haole or white settler who grew up in Hawai’i, this project examines the danger of fantasy in place, culture, family and what it means to be an American in this context.

Oceania in the American Imagination

J. Kēhaulani Kauanui teaches a class to undergraduates at Wesleyan University called “The United States in the Pacific Islands.” One the first images the students see is a map with the Pacific Islands in the center of the frame. This move is intended to convey the vastness of

²¹ Dvorak, 610.

²² Dvorak, 611.

Oceania in direct contrast to other maps that split the Pacific down the middle relegating Pacific Islands to the right or left margins as if they don't matter.²³



Figure 1 A map of the Pacific with the Pacific Islands in the center.

Kauanui's class engages with the Pacific "as a device for thinking about pedagogical approaches to a subject all too often obscured by World War II, that has left Oceania cast as 'the Pacific theater,' along with the tourist-industrial complex, which perpetuates the myth of the Pacific as 'island paradise.'"²⁴ Decentering the continental US in the map and then examining US interests in the Pacific is intended to expose how the version of this region most Americans

²³ J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Imperial Ocean: The Pacific as a Critical Site for American Studies," *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2015): 626.

²⁴ Kauanui, 626.

know about obfuscates the real imperialism and settler colonialism that has actually shaped this area. Kauanui writes that “Students are always struck by just how little they are taught in the American educational system about and have to continuously confront the myths and stereotypes about the islands and the Hawaiian people.”²⁵ Perhaps it’s easy to dismiss the complexity of the US when a visitor is on vacation in Hawai’i or imagines a life living near the ocean every day. But when Americans take the time to learn the deeper story of a place, it’s easy to see how important it is to understand a fuller and fairer version of the real issues the US may want to forget.

Hawaiian historian Hokulani K. Aikau writes that “when the history of US imperialism and settler colonialism in Oceania and Hawai’i are placed at the center of analysis, we learn that ‘democracy’ has been a rallying cry of white supremacy, capitalist greed, and heteropatriarchy all along.”²⁶ American Studies continues to push against US ideals of capitalism and empire because they are racist structures. Hawai’i is a location from which to turnaway from the colonial and settler colonial perspective. Jodi Byrd contends that the entire “story of America (is) a crime”²⁷ and the inclusion of Indigenous people into the American way of life was a site of trauma. Hawai’i has been framed as a site of multiculturalism, but this frame hides the fact that Hawai’i was stolen from the Hawaiian people by the US.

Falsely portraying a place where different ethnicities “get along” in harmony extends this crime by demonstrating that the US did Kānaka a favor by “civilizing” them and creating an

²⁵ Kauanui, 627.

²⁶ Hokulani K. Aikau, “Centering Hawai’i: Lessons on Beyond the United States. *American Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2021): 868.

²⁷ Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire : Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xii.

idealistic mixing of ethnicities. A 1945 photo essay titled “Hawai’i: A Melting Pot” states that Hawai’i is an example of “the world’s most successful experiment in mixed breeding . . . unmatched in today’s world for interracial affection and tolerance.”²⁸ The article is composed mostly of photos. The first section shows sexualized photos of beautiful mixed-race women. The caption reads, “The charming faces seen here, though of many bloods, compose the new mixed race Hawai’i – tolerant, healthy and American.” Selling Hawai’i as a spot where everyone lives in harmony and paradise hides the true nature of life there for Kānaka. My work demonstrates how when we look at Hawai’i as an outlier state, we disrupt the idea of what it means to be an American. These essays follow themes that include belonging, invading, and surviving told from my perspective as a haole (or white person) growing up as a settler in Hawai’i in the 1970’s and 1980’s, unaware of the structures in place that dictated and allowed my experience.

The Fiftieth State

Viewing America through the lens of Hawai’i decenters the perspective from which we see American empire. One example of how Americans have been denied this perspective is through the logo map of the United States. In his book *How To Hide An Empire*, Daniel Immerwahr writes that Hawai’i and Alaska aren’t properly represented on the logo map. They aren’t in the correct location and the scale with which they are depicted is much smaller than the actual states.

²⁸ Eliza Berman, “The Beautiful Half Truths of the Fiftieth State,” *Time*, August 21, 2015, <https://time.com/3985733/hawaii-melting-pot/photo/00644733-jpg/>



Figure 2 Logo map with an accurate size scale for noncontiguous states and territories.

Immerwahr points out that if Hawai'i were viewed from island to island (not just the main islands) and the Pacific Ocean were included, the state would stretch from California to Florida.²⁹ The logo map implies that Hawai'i and Alaska are afterthoughts and there is no spot to place them, so they are randomly thrown out into a space that doesn't match their physical location. Few Americans understand the geography, the scale, the full history, and current issues of Hawai'i. Immerwahr argues that this is not only problematic for the residents of Hawai'i, but also "carries a cost for mainlanders, too. It gives them a truncated view of their own history" because it excludes part of the United States.³⁰ Many Americans living in the continental US have been sold a story about Hawai'i wanting to become a US state, and that locals and Kānaka

²⁹ Daniel Immerwahr, *How To Hide An Empire: A Short History of the Greater United States*, (UK: Penguin Random House, 2019), 19.

³⁰ Immerwahr, 19.

welcomed visitors and transplants with open arms. This “truncated view” doesn’t allow residents of the Continental US to know their own country and the violent history of its incorporation. To understand a place is to truly see it in all its complexity not just as a utopia for a destination vacation. Seeing Hawai’i for what it is, instead of tiny shapes incorrectly placed on a map, changes the experience of the place, giving it more context and depth by describing it in its reality.

Immerwahr says that for Hawai’i (and Alaska), “The logo map has relegated them to the shadows, which are a dangerous place to live.”³¹ In these shadows lie many of the nation’s military bases. The US has at least fifty-two military bases or installations on islands in Oceania with Hawai’i as the location for ten of these.³² Living beside and amongst the world’s great military force is a dangerous place to exist. This is another way these islands live in the shadows.

The signs of past wars and present military are everywhere in Hawai’i. At the end of my childhood street there is a dead end for cars, but an obscured footpath continues. As kids, we would weave our way through the hau trees and thick growth to come out onto a deserted beach. It was called Police Beach because the Honolulu Police Department owned it, but once it had been an airstrip during World War II called Haleiwa Airfield. As kids do, we explored, digging in the dirt under the trees and the crumbled old runway just on the other side of the beach. My brother and his friends found military rations buried and left there for at least 25 years. They chewed the mint-flavored gum. They ate tins full of peanut butter.

³¹ Immerwahr, 19.

³² Gerhardt, *Sea of Change*, 9.

At least once a week during my childhood I walked, ran, or rode my bike on this old airstrip, feet or tires pounding over what once was. This area was so creepy in its quiet. I rarely saw another person. Unlike the way that Pearl Harbor is recognized as a major site of America's engagement in WWII, this airstrip was forgotten. There were weeds growing up between the cracked cement. I now wonder what else was there, hidden under crumbling cement. Was I running over layers of history?



Figure 3 The Haleiwa Airfield of my childhood.

During the strike on Pearl Harbor, the Haleiwa Airfield was the only place Japanese fighters weren't attacking. Two P-40 pilots realized this, and without orders to do so, called for the jets there to be fueled up. The pilots then drove from the Wheeler Air Force base 15 miles

away, jumped into their planes and shot down six of the Japanese planes.³³ Because there was no plaque on the abandoned airstrip, I had no idea of this history that sat at the end of the street I played on as a child. But these facts were somewhere. As an adult I could easily search the internet and information appeared. But the history of Indigenous people in this area is not easily searched. Some Kānaka history is in layers, buried never to reappear. Who lived there before the airstrip was put in? What layers of Indigeneity were covered in the cement and progress?



Figure 4 Haleiwa Airfield as it appeared during WWII.

Ironically, the popular television series *Lost* was filmed on Police Beach from 2004 to 2010. The basic premise of the show was that an airplane full of people crashed on an island in the Pacific. Strange things began to happen there, and their perception of reality slowly warped. The premise of *Lost* reminds me of how in Hawai'i things aren't always as they seem on the

³³ "Haleiwa Field," Hawai'i Aviation Restoration Society, accessed June 27, 2023, <https://hiavps.com/haleiwa.htm>.

surface. In the show, the paradisaical island slowly reveals a monstrous security system, along with hidden, underground bunkers and a group of survivalists who live in the shadows. This measured unveiling reminds me how the striking beauty of Hawai'i, coupled with the tourist industries representation of paradise works to hide the violence and destruction done to the Hawaiian people by the US takeover of the islands.



Figure 5 The crew of the TV series Lost on Police Beach.

If my brother and his friends dug deeper, what other stories would they find? The beach parallel to the air strip was an oasis for us kids. There was a cave that you could swim through from the beach to the ocean, but only if you got the tides just right. If you didn't you could drown in the cave. This happened to a pair of newlyweds who went into the cave at low tide and when the tide suddenly got higher, one partner drowned. I remember the police and ambulance parked at the end of our street as they retrieved the body. Once the emergency crew disappeared,

we were back at the exact location playing King of the Mountain on a little strip of coral at the exit of the cave, pushing one another off into the ocean. During high tide we jumped from a small cliff into the pool of water below. This area was our playground, but the violence of the ocean on one side and the old airstrip on the other side was always there, if we had looked for it. As Immerwahr says, “the shadows are a dangerous place to live”³⁴ Not asking what was there before us or why we often heard sonic booms as fighter jets reached a certain altitude, or we saw convoys and military trucks filled with men carrying weapons traveling to the interior of the island to perform “maneuvers” creates a silence in which violence hides.



Figure 6 The Police Beach of my childhood.

³⁴ Immerwahr, *How To Hide An Empire*, 19.

Voices in the Room: 2019 AMST Conference in Hawai'i and Regenerative Refusal

Attending the American Studies Association (ASA) conference in Hawai'i in November of 2019 deepened my understanding of the underlying violence that works within the guise of progress. It also helped me see the place my work would fit into an American Studies scholarship. In his conference address, ASA president Scott Kurashige spoke about the origin of American Studies and how it had developed up to that time. He argued the origin of the discipline was important but that it represented only a very small group of people and did not provide a broad picture of the American experience. Kurashige highlighted the ASA of today with the emphasis on the importance of multiple voices in the conversation that were not just from tenure-track professors or academic institutions, voices that perhaps wouldn't have been considered reliable are important sources for perspective in American Studies. Kurashige also spoke of the attack from academic institutions on American Studies because it was too radical, too activist, too controversial. He asked questions about "academic rigor" and exactly what that means in an institution because rigor is a form of measuring – a neoliberal idea of who is allowed a voice in the academy and who is deemed unworthy due to their education, the color of their skin, academic degrees, or the organization they are affiliated with. In American Studies, relevant voices include community members that may not be educated, incarcerated people, undergraduate students taking over the University of Hawai'i's administrative building to protest the Thirty-Meter-Telescope project proposed for the top of Maunakea and more. Kurashige advocated instead for humility in American Studies and for asking what can be learned from sources that don't necessarily publish peer reviewed articles. Kurashige's address helped me see how my own work with its emphasis on autotheory could add to American Studies scholarship.



Figure 7 "Build As We Fight," the 2019 American Studies Association Program.

Each year the ASA states that they work with “local organizers in order to highlight issues of discrimination and fair practice specific to that site.”³⁵ In the ASA reflections of the conference, the organization stated that meeting in Hawai’i was “at the forefront of our collective consciousness” because the location demonstrated “the vital ways that Kānaka Maoli epistemology and Indigenous social movements for land, water, and resource justice inform the most cutting-edge work in American Studies and model practice for the future of our field.”³⁶

The conference coincided with a Kānaka protest group called Aloha ‘āina who organized to

³⁵ “Site Selection,” American Studies Association, accessed July 5, 2023, <https://www.theasa.net/annual-meeting/about-meeting/site-selection>.

³⁶ “2019 Reflections,” American Studies Association, accessed July 26, 2023, <https://www.theasa.net/annual-meeting/past-meetings/2019-reflections>.

block construction of the Thirty-Meter Telescope (TMT) project on the top of Maunakea on the Big Island of Hawai'i. The Aloha 'āina protest group had made a camp on the road leading to the top of Maunakea where dozens of telescopes already stood. Kānaka people were doing the unimaginable – questioning western definitions of science and turning down money for their communities. The Aloha 'āina group instead chose an Indigenous way of knowing over the prescribed western way of scientific capitalism. Part of this humility and questioning, Kurashige said, was also about science. Who decides that a western idea of science is the most important conversation we're having in the room? What about Indigenous voices who have been living with a deep connection to the land since time immemorial?³⁷

Feminist Kānaka scholar Maile Arvin calls this “regenerative refusal” which builds on an idea that Iroquois scholar Tiffany Lethabo King calls “refusal.” King argues that refusal may be seen in the actions of the Iroquois lacrosse team who qualified for the Lacrosse World Cup in England but were denied access at the airport because England wouldn't accept their Iroquois passports. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton provided temporary US passports for the team only to have them reject this form of validity because they insisted upon entry into England under the passport of their own country, the Iroquois nation. They forfeited the opportunity to play in the World Cup because refusal to operate under the settler colonial guise was more important than the competition. Arvin sees this similar refusal happening at the site of Maunakea. By protesting and blocking the road for the construction of the TMT, Kānaka are refusing money for their communities in the name of science. In the process of Kānaka coming together in this refusal, something beautiful happened – a community was formed on that dark, lonely, cold road heading

³⁷ “2019 Reflections,” American Studies Association, accessed July 26, 2023.

to the top of Maunakea. To block the road, the *Aloha ʻĀina* protestors had to camp on the mauna or mountain. They ended up living there in community with one another united against an idea of what it means to be Hawaiian. For them, it wasn't about science or money or jobs; it was about standing up for a way of life that had been stolen from their ancestors over 100 years ago. What they were doing was choosing a different humanity, a different way of being than what settler colonialism had taught them was the way to live. On the mauna, they had jobs, ancient Hawaiian ceremonies every morning, at lunch and in the evening that marked the passage of time and showed gratitude. They started a virtual university called Pohakuloa. They had a daycare set-up for children. They lived, slept, worked, and worshipped on the ʻāina (land) and on the sacred mauna.

This kind of regenerative refusal is a way to reframe and question the practice and history of settler colonialism. It lines up with the ideas that Walter Mignolo examines in his book *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*. Mignolo describes the devastation that has come from considering only one Western way of knowing that delegitimizes any other people who don't adapt or adhere to that way as being savage, uneducated, and ultimately dispensable. Mignolo uses the Andes term "pacha" as the Indigenous way of knowing and argues for a recentering of the way we think about knowledge to include pacha ideas.³⁸ This is what was happening on Maunakea. Kānaka decided it was no longer worth it to continue to allow the ʻāina to be desecrated in the name of extraction or progress. Arvin contends, "settler ideologies often dismiss Kānaka Maoli epistemologies as primitive and backward-looking" but regenerative

³⁸ Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 157.

refusal, Arvin explains, is Indigenous people “envisioning and enacting different futures that are suffused with more love, humor, connection, and freedom.”³⁹ Indigeneity tells a different story of time and connection than the story told by capitalist structures. This is a story that includes love and respect instead of a monetary value. The TMT protests named themselves *Aloha ‘Āina* which loosely translates to love of the land. According to the National Parks Service “To live with the value of *aloha ‘āina* is to exist as a part of the *‘āina*; to have the understanding that all things within and around this world are part of an interconnected fabric that makes up our realm.”⁴⁰ To Kānaka, connection to the land is vital for who they are as people. This intimate connection is not something a western way of living focuses on or deems important. But to Hawaiians this is the most important thing about their culture. Everything is connected from their bodies to the piko or belly button of Mother Earth. This means that it is the responsibility of the people to take care of the land.

The prelude to my dissertation is titled “We Came Because We Could.” It is written in the form of a free-form poem or chant and explores the responsibility of the settler in Hawai‘i, more specifically the surfer/settler. This section demonstrates the long-held beliefs in the US that any person has the freedom to remake themselves, to start with a clean slate, to erase an uneasy past. Touching upon manifest destiny, the Inter Caetera of 1493, the idea of the American Adam and Eve, and Fredrick Jackson Turner’s Frontier thesis, this chapter lays the foundation while using a

³⁹ Maile Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai‘i and Oceania* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 226, 228.

⁴⁰ “Hawaiian Values: Aloha ‘Āina,” National Park Service, April 21, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/values-aloha-‘āina.htm>.

free form to demonstrate the ideas that allowed my dad and people like him to make Hawai'i their home in the 1970s.

Chapter One is called "Touching Greatness," and traces the collapse of my family and demonstrates how we ended up in Hawai'i. Because the 1960s and 1970s cultural revolution was in direct conflict with the 1950s myth of the happy nuclear family, I explore how the culture of the time both required my parents to get married and led to their divorce. Our lives followed the trends of the time and the false promises of the American Dream and the Olympics, led us to Hawai'i. Through personal experiences and research, this chapter follows the themes of greatness. It explores the 1968 Olympics as named "the games of discontent" as well as who my dad was at those games beyond the stories, he told me of himself. This chapter displays a trajectory of my parents moving back and forth across the country and how my dad finally settled in Hawai'i.

Chapter Two is called "Looking Back to See Forward." Growing up in Hawai'i, I was never educated about the state where I lived. Though I knew Hawai'i had been stolen from Kānaka people, I didn't realize the extent that the ali'i or royalty of Hawai'i worked strategically and tirelessly using western tools to ensure their kingdom remained intact. Constructing a timeline through a myriad of resources allowed me to understand how Hawai'i was positioned as a paradise that my dad felt was his to claim. I sought out Indigenous resources for this timeline to show how colonization worked to overcome the Kānaka people, but also to demonstrate Kānaka agency. I examine how Hawai'i came to be recognized as a paradise for people to visit. How Kānaka had been protesting the exploitation of their culture. The commercialization of Hawai'i as "paradise" is something that's been carefully curated and crafted to position Hawai'i as a place

to escape to. This has mostly been done without the permission of Kānaka. In the early 1990's Hawaiian scholar and activist Haunani-Kay Trask began arguing that Hawai'i had become a "a racial paradise with happy Natives waiting to share their culture with everyone and anyone is a familiar global commodity."⁴¹ This chapter looks at how and why Hawai'i became this "paradise" to the world. How far did this Hawaiian image travel beyond America? How Kānaka were fighting for their own survival?

Among other resources, I use logs of Captain Cook, World's Fair archives, and Mark Twain's letters from Hawai'i and excerpts from his traveling show about Hawai'i to show that the cultural representation of Hawai'i has been proliferated and altered without Kānaka permissions or accurate representations.

Mark Twain's four-month speaking engagement promoted the islands through his stories with the "characterization of the future Aloha State as 'the loveliest fleet of islands that lies anchored in any ocean.'"⁴² Twain called Hawai'i "Sunday land," a place one could go to forget their worries, a "land of indolence and dreams, where the air is drowsy and things tend to repose and peace, and to emancipate from the labor, and turmoil, and weariness, and anxiety of life."⁴³ Twain spent four months in Hawai'i and then he spent the rest of his life trying to return there. These kind of images of Hawai'i have had lasting effects.

Chapter Three, "Claiming Paradise," explores how and why my family made Hawai'i our home and the implications of that because we were settlers. I discuss our responsibility while

⁴¹ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 18.

⁴² Mark Twain, *Letters from Hawai'i*, ed. A. Grove Day, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1979), vi, xiii.

⁴³ Twain, 4.

also showing that even though we knew we were not wanted in Hawai'i, it was our so-called "right" to move there, so we did. After the discussion of our place in the islands, I discuss other residents who moved to Hawai'i from somewhere else and what they hoped to find there. TJ Neal moved to the island of Kaua'i in the early 70s. Like my dad, her dad also wanted to check out and live a more relaxed, low-pressure life. Unfortunately for her and her sisters, Neal's parents lived in rundown shacks, tents in the rainforest and often didn't have enough food for the family. But, to Neal's father, this was always worth it, at all costs.

This chapter also discusses Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, a Marshallese poet who moved to O'ahu in her early teens. Jetñil-Kijiner's family came to Hawai'i in part, because there was no work or opportunity for her parents in the Marshall Islands. Through an analysis of Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry and her master's thesis, I examine US imperialism through the nuclear testing of the Marshall Islands, specifically the Bikini Atoll and the long-term repercussions. This section also explores what it is like for Jetñil-Kijiner on O'ahu as a Marshallese immigrant and the racism she faced.

The final analysis looks to a Kānaka woman, Kristiana Kahakauwila to understand what it is like to be Hawaiian but raised on the continental US. Through an analysis of Kahakauwila's short stories, I explore what it means to feel like she doesn't belong in the place she is from. As an Indigenous woman with deep familial connections to Hawai'i, Kahakauwila stories show a struggle with what the Hawaiian diaspora means for the narrator. This section also connects the work of Mahealani Ahia and Kahala Johnson in their essay "A Breath of Ea: Submergent Strategies for Deepening the Hawaiian Diaspora." These authors trace the cosmogonic genealogy chant *He Kumulipo* to identify the way Hawaiian ancestors were not defined by place but instead

found in the ways they used the stars, the ocean and land to navigate a different strategy to identify indigeneity besides judging whether a Hawaiian lives on or off-island.

Chapter Four examines the Hawaiian term “haole,” what it meant for me growing up in Hawai’i, and the larger implications of race and culture in Hawai’i. Using personal narrative and academic work on the racial construction of haole, this chapter explains how the islands approach race differently than the continental US, where white normativity prevails. It is uncomfortable for white people to have their race and responsibility called out in Hawai’i because white settlers are often not used to having labels placed on us because of the color of our skin. This chapter explores the genealogy of the word haole and talks about the different kinds of haole in Hawai’i. I outline the ways race is classified there and always called out. I discuss the long racist relationship the US has had to Hawai’i.

Then I offer a deeper analysis of the way haole is constructed on the surfing beaches of the North Shore of O’ahu, where I grew up. By examining the ocean as a borderland – boarderland - this section uses the site of the surf to examine the role of settler colonists and what this term means when thinking of belonging and responsibility. The ocean and, more specifically, surf breaks are a great equalizer in Hawai’i. Skill and prowess in the ocean is not defined by the color of your skin or your personal wealth. Hawaiians use the surf as a place of protest and expression. But haole settlers also used this site to assert themselves and to gain belonging and acceptance from Hawaiians. The relationship between settler and Kānaka can get blurred in the surf line-up. The surf is a place where what kind of haole you are can be proved. The surf is both a place of protest and a proving ground for belonging. There is a certain respect gained by an outsider who can handle the nuances of the ocean with grace and humility. Isaiah Helekunihi

Walker calls the Hawai'i ocean a "boarderland," a place in-between, where Kānaka Maoli are elevated above haole. He notes, "it was a place where Hawaiians felt free, developed Native identities and thwarted foreign domination."⁴⁴ Because Indigenous surfers dictated the parameters of belonging in the surf, it also became a place where haole surfers could belong if they showed respect and the ability to see and understand the ocean.

The story of surfing in the 2021 Olympics is also relevant to this chapter. Two Hawai'i surfers John John Florence (who is not Kānaka but born in Hawai'i) and Kānaka surfer Carissa Moore petitioned the Olympic committee asking to compete under the Hawaiian flag instead of the American flag. This very idea of separating Hawai'i in Olympic competition, in the sport that Hawaiians invented, is significant because it forces a re-examination of Western conceived boundaries and ownership of a sport as well as a place. It is also another example of regenerative refusal, by rejecting the US and instead wanting to surf for the country of Hawai'i. Epeli Hau'ofa contends that "Europeans and Americans – drew imaginary lines across the sea, making the colonial boundaries that confined ocean peoples to tiny spaces for the first time."⁴⁵ To ask the Olympic committee to disregard these lines and allow Hawai'i surfing competitors to represent Hawai'i rather than America complicates Western ideas of belonging and boundaries.

Chapter Five called "We Are Not Americans Still," uses the statement by Haunani-Kay Trask to decolonize Hawai'i. The American Studies Association recently issued a "Call for Papers" using Trask's famous words to examine why this is true of Hawai'i, and if those who

⁴⁴ Isaiah Helekunihi Walker, *Waves of Resistance : Surfing and History in Twentieth-Century Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 2.

⁴⁵ Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 153.

don't live in Hawai'i, are also not American. This chapter includes regenerative refusal as defined by Maile Arvin and examples of this in different artist interpretations.

A closer study of the protests of the Thirty-Meter-Telescope on the Big Island in 2019-2020 is used as an example of western ideas of science and Indigenous ways colliding. Kānaka decolonized the space of this mountain by occupying it in 2019 until the Covid epidemic in 2020. Using Kānaka ideas of place and responsibility these peaceful protests were directed by a concept called Kapu Aloha. This chapter argues that the social construction of Maunakea reflects the resurgence of a Hawaiian Renaissance. As Westerners we have been trained to always look forward, but Kānaka remind us we must also look elsewhere. Indigenous practices can help us move forward through the Anthropocene. What is happening on Maunakea is reminding us of something Kānaka always knew: we are all connected.

Chapter Six, "Mother, Father, Daughter, Water" returns to my personal story. I use water here as a healing balm and a way to understand different perspectives when intellectualizing is no longer working. Drawing on the way many academics discuss water and the view it allows; I relate this to trying to understand my father and estrangement. I point out the way my mother isn't in my story and what this means. I further work to untangle the myth of my childhood, bringing it back to the water, again and again.

This project concludes with the idea of educating and re-examining Hawai'i's role in American Studies by decolonizing the way we view Hawai'i. I examine how transpacific studies, which offers a different perspective of the Pacific, disrupts American Studies' relationship to empire in the ocean. I use transpacific material as well as Indigenous authors who call this region Oceania reiterating the importance of telling different stories of the past. By using the story of

my family's search for paradise alongside the history and story of Hawai'i, each section of this project dissects the myths and meanings of family and place. The personal gives me a broader perspective into the layers of history and culture that shaped me. It also helps me to see my responsibility and the implications of the way I call Hawai'i my home.

CHAPTER TWO

WE CAME BECAUSE WE COULD

It was 1974 and we came to Hawai'i because we thought we could. We came because we'd heard of a paradise in this fiftieth state. Home of uncrowded surf and quiet beaches, sugar cane and pineapple, plumerias and orchids, hula dancers and puka shells. No matter our white skin. No matter the colonial history that preceded us. We came for a dream – for a way of life. To experience this aloha spirit and this ethnic melting pot. We came to embrace a way of life better than what we left behind.

We came because we'd watched the 1966 surf movie *Endless Summer* -- with the quest for the perfect wave, where it was summer every day. We came because we'd missed the sixties, but that scene was still around, asking us to check out. We came because we were leaving something behind -- trying to shake off a bad feeling, a bad trip -- trying to make a special life, designed just for us. We came for a way of living only glimpsed in dreams. Something so different from what the continental United States offered with its nuclear family, nine to five job, business suit and briefcase. We wanted to feel alive with the ocean, the sand, the shells, the sugar cane blowing in the trade winds, the sleepy towns, the Japanese women who measured us for surf trunks and corduroy shorts at H. Muira store. The Seaview Inn where we could order sashimi with white rice, hamburger fried steak and onions and feel a bit like we belonged here, like we were locals. And this island, this state, we believed was ours because we were Americans, and this was the United States of America.

We came because we thought we could. But what place did we really enter? All of us white men with our perfect teeth, tan skin, blonde hair, and smiles. We charmed the ladies and

demurred to the men. We knew to show respect to Kānaka Maoli – Hawaiians – and the locals, especially in the surf. But we could do that – walk the tightrope of charm and humility. We could plop ourselves in the middle of a contested borderland – the ocean. We could rent a house on Sunset Beach, so our blonde children could eat their Sugar Smacks, Corn Flakes, and peanut butter toast while watching the ocean like it was Saturday morning cartoons. We could do this because we believed it was our right in this fiftieth and final state. We chose to see what we wanted and ignored the rest.

We white women came because we followed our men with dreams of leaving all our stuff behind and living on a sailboat. That stuff weighed us down, but this new life was groovy. Without our stuff, in this place so far away, we could sail between islands, swim in the salty water, shop at the local thrift stores. We didn't need much, except some Hawaiian island.

We white children came because we had no say, but we weren't complaining because, for a while, it was an adventure. Surfing and swimming every day. We played with the other white children on the beaches in front of our houses – king of the mountain pushing each other down the slippery slide – a mossy piece of reef at the edge of the water. We placed our feet wide, bent legs and tried to be the last kid standing, as the waves broke, tumbling us off and down, sucking us back into the water. We swam all day and then dried our bodies by laying in the warm sand. Only babies needed towels to dry off. We were tougher than our mainland cousins that came to visit. We walked barefoot on the rocky street and the hot sand of the beach. At night we sat on our parents' lawns and watched for the green flash as the sun dropped into the water. Grass poked into our bottoms, as we scooped sashimi into our mouths with wooden chop sticks,

picking the fleshy fish up from a bed of cabbage on a Styrofoam tray and dipping it into wasabi and soy sauce that burned the inside of our noses.

We haole surfers came because we thought we could. All glory and red, white, and blue. We wanted to stick it to the Man. We didn't need that nine-to-five job, that cartoon wife, those stick figure kids. But we couldn't just leave them all behind because the old lady wouldn't let us shirk our duty to the kids. We brought them along on this psychedelic journey. Kids were resilient. Kids would understand.

With our ragged hair, cut-off shorts, bare feet, and wide eyes we were hippies, and we thought what we were doing was radical. It could have been all that pakalolo – marijuana – or maybe it was just shortsightedness. But we weren't behaving differently, in fact our actions were predictable. History even had a name for us – what R.W.B. Lewis named American Adams and American Eves.¹ Folks had been trading one way of life for another since the Puritans landed on the shores of the land they made “America.” As if there was no one living there before them. We were living a myth that ran deep in our country -- that a white person could remake themselves, looking only to the future and forgetting the past. Lewis described it as an “individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with aid of his own unique and inherent resources.”² In his seminal essay “Native American Novels: Homing in,” William Bevis writes, “American whites keep leaving home . . . a considerable number of American ‘classics’ tell of leaving home to find one’s fate farther and farther away.”³ Bevis goes

¹ R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1955), 5.

² Lewis, 5.

³ William Bevis, “Native American Novels: Homing In,” in *Recovering the World: Essays on Native American Literature*, ed. Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 581.

on to explain that in white America, the individual is the most important and that “the stories we tell our children is of lighting out to these territories.”⁴ We were special. We were the heroes of new adventures and stories we invented. Bevis writes, “The individual advances, sometimes at all costs, with little or no regard for family, society, past, or place. The individual is the ultimate reality.”⁵ This was easy to do in Hawai‘i in the 1970s because we felt disconnected from any past.

We believed being so far from continental America, separated by all that water, allowed us that. In 1865 Horace Greeley said, “Go West, young man, go West and grow up with the country.”⁶ That’s what we did. We moved past the frontier Fredrick Jackson Turner imagined had closed in 1893, leap frogging over the West and the Pacific Ocean, landing in Hawai‘i, where the missionaries had pushed Hawaiians aside over a hundred years ago. Like the virgin lands Turner talked about being “more and more American,”⁷ we believed Hawai‘i was waiting for us to inhabit it. We “strip(ed) off the garments of civilization”⁸ and cast them aside like the closed-toe shoes we tossed in our closets and never wore. Instead, we put on “rubbah slippahs” -- the word the locals used, and we borrowed -- for flip flops. Our canoes were surfboards, and our “West” was a seven-mile stretch of the best surf in the world -- the North Shore of O‘ahu.

There we sat thousands of miles from our former selves, on the most remote land mass on the planet, legs straddling our surfboards as we scanned the horizon for the next set. White men

⁴ Bevis, 581.

⁵ Bevis, 582.

⁶ Elizabeth Knowles, *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* 5th ed (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1999), 351.

⁷ Fredrick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 1893, Chicago World Colombian Exposition (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin).

⁸ Turner.

in baggie surf trunks, conquering waves, renaming ourselves – watermen. California was 2,500 miles to the east. Japan was 4,000 miles to the west. Positioned so far from who we used to be; we could fantasize about becoming someone else. We could remake ourselves, because that was the myth that had been nudging at us our entire lives. Bevis points to the *Letters from an American Farmer* written in 1782 by St. Jean de Crevecoeur who “defined Americans as a people who leave the old to take the new.”⁹ In that leaving, Bevis explains “The home we leave, to Crevecoeur, is not only a place; it is a past, a set of values and parents, an ‘ancien regime.’”¹⁰ This idea shaped us. It is an American promise that scholar Nina Baym describes as “deeply romantic,” where “a person will be able to achieve complete self-definition”¹¹ if they believe in the fantasy of America as a place where the individual is more important than the collective. If America, with its vast space, its pioneer spirit and self-made-man mentality helped perpetuate that myth, then Hawai‘i, with its fairy tale aura, its isolation from the continental US, its wild sea, brown-skinned people, its pidgin English dialect, helped cement the idea that a white man or woman could realize their genius, live their dreams, change their destiny.

We came because we thought we could, and we didn’t bother ourselves with what came before us. We didn’t think about what was buried beneath our houses except to say that sometimes the cesspools dug into our yards spilled sewage into the surf because there were lava tubes under those manicured lawns. We didn’t think about who came before us except to know

⁹ Bevis, “Native American Novels,” 581.

¹⁰ Bevis, 581.

¹¹ Nina Baym, “Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors.” *American Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1981): 131-132, accessed October 12, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712312> .

that once Hawaiians ruled these lands but now they taught us the hula, and their language was on the street and city names with so many vowels jumbled in our mouths. Though we called them Hawaiians, it was hard for us newcomers to tell who were Hawaiians and who were locals, the names used for all the other brown skin, brown hair, brown eyed ethnicities that filled the island. We were haoles, which meant foreigners, a name thrust at us like an insult. Malihini – newcomers -- seemed a kinder word. Many of us had white hair, white skin, blue eyes announcing our presence like sirens on a quiet beach. Most everyone else was brown – Hawaiian or Kānaka Maoli were the people white colonizers pushed aside. But the rest of the people who didn't look like us were locals -- Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Samoan, Tongan, Filipino and Chinese, many arrived in Hawai'i to work on the plantations in the early 1900s.

There were other islands in the Hawaiian chain that people like us went to, other places our kind inhabited. We weren't the first. In fact, we arrived fourteen years after statehood. Still, we felt like the first -- if you didn't count the Hawaiians and they could share. They had to share because this island didn't belong to them anymore. In 1959 it became the last state of the fifty, the last star on the flag, the last hurrah of US territorial expansion. We felt like discoverers, negotiating a world so different from the continental US that it felt surreal.

We thought we were special, but we couldn't escape all that history that came before us. I see this now. The idea that we could remake ourselves, the American Adam, counterculture, Olympic dreams, nuclear families, *Endless Summer*, they were all there with us as we dove into the surf, searched the beach for puka shells. There on that island, the past was hidden in plain sight. We didn't look for it. We didn't want to understand. We faced forward moving through our lives, not feeling that all our selves were with us, the past and the future. All we saw was sun and

surf. All we saw was now. Manifest destiny paved our way, and the idea of an American Adam or an American Eve played us. As if we, or anyone, could ever flee their past.

CHAPTER THREE

TOUCHING GREATNESS

“I was supposed to have a script, and had mislaid it. I was supposed to hear cues, and no longer did. I was supposed to know the plot, but all I knew was what I saw.”

—Joan Didion, *The White Album*

In the summer of 2018, after more than 40 years, I connected my dad back to the Olympic rings and jewelry he won when he swam for the US in the 1968 Olympics. Once, long ago, he'd left these treasures behind in an old girlfriend's attic when, in 1974, he took off for a two-week vacation to Hawai'i from which he never returned. He claimed, back then, that she was a witch who cast on spell on him, and only if he believed himself that he was going on “vacation” would she let him go.

Joan Didion writes in “The White Album” that she lost her script in the 1960s and 70s because “I began to doubt the premises of all the stories I had ever told myself.”¹ This is also true of my family. As Didion writes, “We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”² But when everything around you is different from the story you told yourself to make sense of the world, you begin to doubt, to lose your way. Reuniting my dad with these mementos of who he used to be symbolized to me the way the Olympics are the story our family keeps turning to and away from. Instead of looking at the Olympics as this beautiful moment or this image of a fairytale life, I've come to see them as signaling the unraveling of my family's life.

¹ Joan Didion, “The White Album,” *The White Album*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 11.

² Didion, 11.

That my dad touched greatness and then had to settle into normal is a theme that resonates throughout my life. America was built on the idea that we can all achieve greatness. But then what? Olympic hardware was showered on him in the guise of medals, pins and rings but there was no paycheck for a former Olympic swimmer who broke and then held the World Record in the 100 freestyle for a year in 1967. All those medals and rings didn't pay the bills.

For my dad the Olympics were more let down than triumph. For our family they were a turning point we didn't know was coming. The Olympics were the pivot where we turned from being one kind of a family to another. As if the direction of our lives was flung out into the ether with each stroke my dad felt against his skin, with each air bubble and splash — water reaching to sky, turning to air and then to fate. In the Olympics — coming in second didn't matter. Silver was losing, and my dad lost. He was out touched at the wall in his individual event the 100 freestyle. He won two golds in the 4x100 relay and the 4 x100 medley relay, but relays didn't matter in 1968 when it came to sponsors and swimming as a career. He turned away from life as a hero and a champion, and he turned toward something much more mundane — a life with a wife, two children and a nine-to-five job.

Like his Olympic memorabilia left behind in an old girlfriend's attic, the idea of our family was also tossed to the side of the road, forgotten. All the things that seemed to be important to us once, were gone, until in 1974 when my dad found himself again in Hawai'i.

An Unplanned Pregnancy

All roads lead back to my conception. I always knew I was a mistake, that my mom was in high school and my dad a rising swimming star. I assumed my mom must have told me when I was young that I was unplanned, but that seemed so unlike her. My mom doesn't talk about her

life. I must press her to get any information. I mentioned this once to her younger sister, my Aunt Susan. And Susan said, “Oh. Shit. I must have told you.” My mom’s two younger sisters, Susan, and Marcia were 12 and 16 when I was born. I spent a lot of time with them because my parents were young, and we lived with my mom’s parents a lot while my dad traveled for swimming.

There are two different stories I’ve been told about my conception. The first my dad told me as we sat in his car outside my dorm at the University of Hawai’i, where I was a freshman. I remember feeling special that he was opening up to me. My dad’s version was that my maternal grandmother Clare trapped my dad. My mom flew from Florida to Michigan to visit my dad while he was away at college. He told me my grandma bought my mom sexy lingerie for the trip. After she found out she was pregnant, my dad said my grandma barraged him with letters guilting him into “making things right” with my mom. This story didn’t fit with the grandmother I knew and loved. She was my favorite always taking special care of me. I remember sitting next to her playing paper dolls, being wrapped in her arms after she took me swimming, and always feeling safe when she was around. I can’t remember if I asked my mom about this story. Probably not because it sounded so awful and out of character for my grandmother. I believe she would have sent my dad letters asking him to fulfill his obligation, but I don’t think my grandma would have bought my mom lingerie for the trip. My dad told me that he was a catch, a rising star, a future Olympian and my grandmother knew that. I can’t see my grandma being so calculated with her daughter’s life.

My mom told me her version of the story when I was in my 50s. She flew to Lansing, Michigan to visit my dad at Michigan State University for a weekend. She was a senior in high school back in Jacksonville, Florida, where both my parents grew up. She told her parents she

was staying with a woman friend of his in the female dorms. My mom never made it to the dorms or even the university. She and my dad had sex in a motel the first night. He left her alone there for the rest of the weekend. When I first heard this story it broke my heart, picturing my young mom so hopeful, going to visit her boyfriend, having sex and then he disappears leaving her in a strange hotel, in a strange city. A friend of his came and drove her to the airport at the end of the weekend. She says by the time she got on the plane she was done crying and was over my dad. I hate this story. It makes me mad at my dad and sorry for my mom.

My mom went home and forgot about my dad until she found out she was pregnant. Once she told my dad, and they told their parents it was decided that they must get married. Because my mom was so young, my parents went over state lines to marry in Georgia, driving with their parents in separate cars, and then leaving in separate cars. They didn't speak for weeks after the wedding. This is the time when my maternal grandma wrote my dad letters making him feel guilty. My mom went back to high school, wearing baggy clothes and big sweaters so the school administrators wouldn't find out about her pregnancy and expel her. Other than school, my mom says she stayed in her room all the time and wrote depressing poetry until one day my dad called and asked her if they should try to make it work.

Getting married after an accidental pregnancy was common for the time to avoid the shame associated with of an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. In the 1960s "birth control, sex education and abortion were taboo"³ writes Gabrielle Glaser in her book *American Baby*. Out-of-wedlock births more than tripled between 1940 and 1966.⁴ I was born in 1965. Because of the

³ Gabrielle Glaser, *American Baby: A Mother, A Child and the Shadow History of Adoption* (New York: Viking, 2021), 5.

⁴ Glaser, 5.

stigma attached to unwed mothers and illegitimate children, people were forced to marry because of an unplanned pregnancy. I hear this story from so many people of my parents' generation. My husband's father got his girlfriend pregnant in high school, apparently the first time they had sex. They got married, had three children in quick succession, and then divorced by the time he was thirty. The same thing happened to my father-in-law's brother. It was a trap for everyone based on unrealistic cultural norms about sex and responsibility while giving people no tools to avoid pregnancy. No one could win in this situation.

Looking back, I think that both of my parents tried to the best of their abilities to work within the parameters of a situation they didn't choose. Scholarship demonstrates that the effect of early parenthood has worse consequences for the parents if the pregnancy is unplanned, the family unit is not established at conception and when young parents are at a critical juncture of their lives which may exacerbate and strains and deprivation of having children.⁵ All three of these factors were in play for my parents. It has also been shown that parents coming from favorable family situations had a harder time adjusting than young parents of low socioeconomic status because a child often brings hope and structure into these parent's lives.⁶ These facts give me more perspective of what shift my parents had to make in their lives to suddenly have a child. I can see the challenges for both, especially when their ideas of themselves did not include becoming parents or even a couple. They aspired to become themselves by their own definitions, and then suddenly that was no longer a choice.

⁵ Eva R. Johansen, H. Nielsen, M. Verner, "Long term Consequences of Early Parenthood," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82, no. 4 (2019): 1286-1303, accessed October 29, 2023. <https://doi.org/in.1111/jomf.12634> .

⁶ Johansen.

The 1968 Mexico City Olympics

To understand my story, I must fill in the spaces between the 1968 Olympics and my dad's 1974 move to Hawai'i to see why my dad went searching for paradise and in the aftermath lost track of his Olympic memorabilia and the idea of our family. This story fills pages. We lived in Florida, Alabama, North Carolina, Northern California, back to Florida, back to Northern California. My parents drifted to other partners, back to each other, away again like driftwood bobbing in the rough California surf. The stories show how our lives unraveled. Stories of communal living, stinky health food stores, alternative schools, nude swimming holes, drugs, alcohol, child molesters, being forgotten at bars, people who were nearly stepparents and stepbrothers, libraries, and witches. Stability, loving aunts and grandparents, a pink canopy bed and sanity were washed away like rushing water in a river. There was no stopping the current once it began.

Growing up, my dad was always the hero of my story and the Hawai'i ocean was the happy ending. What my dad had done by winning medals in the Olympics seemed godlike to me. He seemed famous before I ever had real consciousness. In the 1950s my dad grew up in, American swimmers represented the American Dream. Charles Sprawson describes this era of swimmers as having "an extraordinary glamour" as if nothing could tarnish someone like my dad.⁷ No messy marriage forced upon him, no affairs or girlfriends who cast spells on him.

I was almost three when he swam in the Olympics in October of 1968. There's a full-page article in the *Jacksonville Chronicle* featuring pictures of me watching my dad compete late

⁷ Charles Sprawson, *Haunts of the Black Masseur: The Swimmer as Hero*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 13, 14.

into the night titled, “Ho hum, Daddy’s on TV.” The 1968 Olympics marked the first time a live event could be seen worldwide. For us it aired late at night. It was seen by 600 million people, the largest TV audience for any event up to that date because of the invention of geostationary.⁸

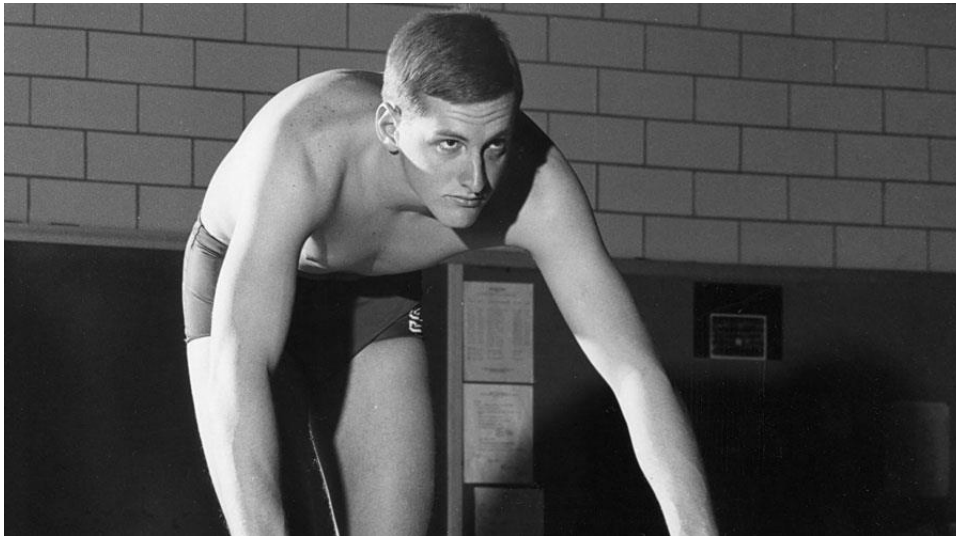


Figure 8 Ken Walsh on the starting block.

I grew up worshipping the Olympics and I also felt like my dad hadn’t been given his due fame. Now I look at it differently. Sprawson writes that the story of the swimmer is often the story of a person more sensitive to the “promises of life.”⁹ He points to the Loman brothers in *Death of Salesman* who leave the office in the middle of the day to swim “as a gesture of defiance” to the intolerable world of “keeping stock or making phone calls.”¹⁰ For my dad nine-to-five was a prison sentence, an unbearable, endless repetition.

⁸ Harry Blutstein, *Games of Discontent: Protests, Boycotts and Politics at the 1968 Mexico Olympics*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2021), 4.

⁹ Sprawson, *Haunts of the Black Masseur*, 238.

¹⁰ Sprawson, 238.

My dad contended that the difference between gold and silver in the 100 freestyle made his athletic prospects disappear. There were no more sponsors but there was a family to support. The story he told my brother and me was that he wasn't done swimming. He thought he could swim faster. Break more records. Win more medals, but he didn't have endorsements. He cast about for five years, finding then losing jobs -- moving our family from state to state and eventually leaving my mom for another woman. Tracing my life backwards, I can see my dad's pattern of running and seeking. He learned growing up that if he swam hard in the pool he could become the best swimmer in the world, but he didn't find that kind of success in the world of corporate America.

My dad periodically told me stories about his Olympic experience. He described not being able to psych himself up. He said he had stomach issues. He qualified last in the semi-finals, just making it into the final. When the race started, he was in a gutter lane and breathing towards the wall, so he didn't have a good view of the rest of the swimmers. When he touched the final wall, he thought he had won. When my dad told this story, his disappointment somehow became my disappointment. I felt responsible. I wished the outcome had been different. But I found that my dad's story wasn't so unique. As the Wide World of Sports tagline declared every Sunday when we'd watch it in the early 1980s, sports were "The thrill of victory . . . and the agony of defeat." Sprawson writes that for swimming competition, "Chance plays a considerable part even at the highest level."¹¹ So many factors can come into play, "A swimmer can be far ahead at the finish, yet mistime his final stroke."¹² Other factors also came into play like the

¹¹ Sprawson, 15.

¹² Sprawson, 15.

isolation of the swimmer always being in their own lane with water, not air, between them. What my dad experienced was disappointing but not unusual.

A different perspective of the 1968 Olympics emerged for me when I began my research. First, the Olympic men's 100 freestyle contenders were stacked. I thought my dad was the fastest, but he was just one of many very fast swimmers in the event. The 100 freestyle is a thrashing, splashing, all out sprint. Anyone of his caliber had the chance to win. Another perspective the research gave me was my dad's fraught relationship with Mark Spitz. Spitz lived large in our lives because my dad didn't like him. Maybe my dad thought he could have also been a multiple gold medal swimmer if he'd gone to the 1972 Olympics, but Spitz swam a lot more strokes. My dad's reason for never getting me and my brother into competitive swimming was that he saw the way Spitz was pressured by his own father and didn't want that to happen to us. He recalled witnessing Spitz's dad berating him behind the bleachers after a poor showing at the Olympics.

In the book, *Mark Spitz: The Extraordinary Life of an Olympic Champion* by Richard Foster, I found my dad's name in the index. In research I'd done in the past, my dad's name was always listed in race results, but he was never talked about in books. I was surprised that Ken Walsh was listed on multiple pages in the index. The chapter that he's mentioned in the most is titled, "The Olympic Cabal." Foster explains that Spitz wasn't popular on the team. At the Olympic training camp in Colorado, he was teased incessantly and left out socially. Each swimmer on the American team would be competing against two of his teammates, so there was a fine line between being teammates and competitors. But, the author explains, Spitz was also cocky, bragged a lot, young, a fast swimmer, the focus of a lot of media attention and he was sick

the first two weeks of training camps so the other swimmers were resentful when he didn't come to practice.¹³ Foster writes, "Two swimmers – Russell and Walsh – appeared to be the leaders of the unofficial anti-Spitz cabal."¹⁴ I was shocked to see that my dad made up one half of the cabal.

The teasing today would be called harassment. Spitz was called "Jew-boy" by unidentified swim team members. My dad and Russell came up with a plan that played upon Spitz's fear of needles. All swimmers needed a vaccination before competing in Mexico City. Russell and my dad talked about how big the needle was and said that it was square. When Spitz joined the shot line, my dad was laid out on the floor, pretending he'd fainted because of the shot. Spitz hid in a bathroom stall, standing on the toilet. When he was finally carried out and brought in to receive his vaccination, my dad and Russell photographed his naked butt and shocked face and then put the photo up outside his room. Other swimmers wrote crude comments around the photo.¹⁵

My dad appears to have been interviewed for the book, published in 2008 and doesn't apologize for his cruelty to Spitz. Instead, he said, "The team's treatment of Mark had nothing to do with competition. He was easy to kid."¹⁶ My dad was my hero throughout much of my life, though his friends would sometimes tell me he was "prickly." This gave me a different impression of him, but also tuned me into the intense pressure that would create this kind of

¹³ Foster, Richard J., Mark. Spitz, and Keith. Jackson, *Mark Spitz : The Extraordinary Life of an Olympic Champion* (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2008), 46.

¹⁴ Foster, 62.

¹⁵ Foster, 64.

¹⁶ Foster, 62-64.

atmosphere. Gary Hall, another team member, said of the three Olympic camps he attended, Mexico City was the most divisive.¹⁷

Harry Blutstein calls the 1968 Olympics “The Games of Discontent.” Tommie Smith and John Carlos famously each raised a fist, adorned with a black glove as the Star-Spangled Banner was played in a salute to Black Power. Because the Olympics were globally broadcast, people everywhere saw the demonstration. In his book *The Games of Discontent*, Blutstein writes that political protest was not what the International Olympic Committee intended for the games in Mexico City. Viewers were supposed to be “transported to the global Olympic space – an oasis, an island, a ‘sacred Fortress.’”¹⁸ But instead there was controversy; the black salute, the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico of protesters ten days before the games began, inequality for women at the games, Rhodesia prevented from competing because of British protest to the newly formed country. Blutstein contends Smith and Carlos’ salute was “one of the quietest moments in 1968, which writer Paul Aster described as, ‘the year of craziness, the year of fire, blood and death.’”¹⁹ Richard Hoffer contends it “would have been naïve to think the events of the year would not somehow penetrate the Olympic ‘dream state.’”²⁰ Hoff also argues that a level of sportsmanship was expected, especially in the Olympics where “a cadre of old white men redolent of their privileges, were accustomed to a tremendous level of compliance, of submission

¹⁷Foster, 60.

¹⁸ Blutstein, *The Games of Discontent*, 9.

¹⁹ Blutstein, 6.

²⁰ Richard Hoffer, *Something in the Air: American Passion and Defiance in the 1968 Mexico City Olympics*, (New York: Free Press, 2009), 14.

even, from the athletes they paraded in front of the world.”²¹ The year 1968 seemed to be when the world was exploding, while our own family was headed to imploding.

Eventually our family became a part of the counterculture but not by protesting. Instead, my parents tried on different ways of being like communally living with another family. We shopped in health food stores before it was trendy. We got our clothes out of free boxes instead of department stores. My dad grew and sold pot. He wasn't protesting things like the Vietnam War; for him, the counterculture movement was an opportunity to turn away from conventionality.

Life After the Olympics

Swimming had defined my dad since he began at six-years-old. It was his identity. Now he had to become someone else and that someone couldn't be built by facing the monotonous lines at the bottom of a pool. That someone couldn't be built by swimming faster or training harder. That someone would best be built by facing himself. But that wasn't what was done in 1968. Demons were better covered up, and so he shoved them down to the deep-end of the pool.

My life seemed black and white as a kid. How did my family fall apart and go from what looked like the American Dream to living on welfare? For my whole life, I've chased the story of the impact the Olympics had on our lives. I've tried to understand why things happened the way they did. I've carried around articles about my dad's Olympic career. When I read them now, I notice the things written, in retrospect, as signposts leading to my family's demise, my dad's unhappiness and his searching that changed all our lives. “Fletcher's Proud: Phones Keeping

²¹ Hoffer, 18.

“Ringing Congratulations” is an article in the country club newsletter about the proud-parents and in-laws getting phone calls because Ken Walsh qualified to make the 1968 Olympic swim team. Though I once read this article as evidence of the amazing things my dad achieved, now I note the mention of me and my mom, “Mrs. Walsh and young daughter, Deborah were to arrive today with her parents for three months.”²² Then a sentence near the end, “The team is then to travel to Africa, Europe and Hawai’i before Ken returns home to continue his work as a sales trainee.”²³ My dad never did travel with the team to Africa, Europe and Hawai’i. Instead he began work as a sales trainee. I can’t imagine what it felt like to become a sales trainee after spending years training for a goal as glamorous as the Olympics.

Another country club newsletter recounts a day after the Olympics, in December 1968, when my dad spoke to kids at the club, letting them touch his medals. It said, “Ken walked into the room, and we were immediately impressed by his air of quiet dignity.”²⁴ But this part stands out to me “In closing, Ken stated that his competitive swimming days were over and that, henceforth, he will concentrate on his position in sales with the Phillips Petroleum Company.”²⁵ He was 23 and already his swimming career was over. I see the future and wish I could reach through time and stop him from taking the job. Looking back, it seemed like my mom settled into this time like it was the beginning of their real married lives together. My parents were doing what people did in the 1960s, they were making a family together, forging their own version of

²² Thelma Keith, “Fletcher’s Proud: Phones Keep Ringing with Congratulations,” *Beaches*, (Ponte Vedra, Florida: 1968).

²³ Keith, 1968.

²⁴ *The Island Ninth*, (Ponte Vedra, Florida: 1968).

²⁵ *The Island Ninth*.

the patriarchal bargain. My dad stopped traveling all over the country for his training and they were expecting my brother in June.

The patriarchal bargain was all my parents knew, though they didn't have a name for it. Deniz Kandiyoti didn't coin the term until 1988 in the article "Bargaining with Patriarchy," to explain the idea of what the nuclear family was built on. Kandiyoti writes "that women strategize within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define the blueprint of what I will term the *patriarchal bargain* of any given society."²⁶ The "concrete constraints" both my parents were operating within were that my dad would provide financial support and my mom would have children and provide emotional and domestic support. This is what was done in the 1950s and 60s. This is the kind of family my mom was raised in. There was no question that my father should be the breadwinner for the family and my mother should raise us kids and keep the house running. These were the roles they were meant to fill. If my dad didn't take that sales job, it would have been some other job like it. It didn't matter if a couple's personalities didn't fit into the bargain, it was a prescription for a happy life.

Or as Malvina Reynolds puts it in her 1962 song *Little Boxes*,

And the boys go into business

And marry and raise a family

In boxes made of ticky tacky

And they all look just the same²⁷

²⁶ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 02, no. 03 (1988): 275.

²⁷ Malvina Reynolds, "Little Boxes," Genius, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://genius.com/Malvina-reynolds-little-boxes-lyrics>.

Reynolds' song questions middle class values and the homogenization of American society. This kind of life where every person was part of a big cog in a wheel would never have worked for my dad. He grew up thinking he stood above other people because he was an Olympian. He was raised to be extraordinary, not to end up living in a tacky house that looked like all the other houses on the street.

Atlantic Beach, Florida 1968 – 1970

Following the Olympics, in the fall of 1968 to 1970, we lived as a family in a small, one-story house in Atlantic Beach, Florida. Before we reached this point, our homes were a blur of impermanence – Michigan State married housing, Florida in the summers and holidays and then Oklahoma and Los Angeles where my mom taught me to swim in a little apartment pool. But in Atlantic Beach we were near both sets of grandparents. This was the home where memory took hold of me. Cinnamon toast with my maternal grandmother during a hurricane. A drive in my Aunt Marcia's convertible to get candy and bubble gum, me in the back trying to blow bubbles as my Aunt Susan leaned through the seats to show me how. This new house settles around my shoulders like a warm blanket. If a child thinks of the future, I would have thought that was my forever life. We were a family. On my birthday there is a photo recording the time, I sat on my dad's motorcycle in a frilly purple dress, white tights, and a boater hat to match with a tight elastic band that cut into my chin. When I look at that photo now, I see the innocent grin of a little girl who has no idea of the twists and turns her life will bring her. My feet are kicked out, my mouth open as if the camera caught me mid-laugh, frozen in a moment that will soon end.

Before Atlantic Beach I didn't remember discipline. But in that house my dad hung wooden paddles on the doorknobs of my parents' bedroom and the living room to remind me to

be a good girl. There, I hid under the covers hoping my dad wouldn't find me and paddle me for being a bad girl, though I never remember getting paddled.

Though the television in our living room flashed scenes of the Vietnam War, pictures of bodies piled high, jungles and guns, American flags draped over coffins, I felt safe. Every evening the TV was on. Walter Cronkite explained the blood and death in his calm, even voice. I sat on the floor playing while the grown-ups watched.

Outside the walls of our house the world was going mad. In Joan Didion's essay about that time, "White Album," she writes that she was hospitalized for anxiety. "By way of comment I offer only that an attack of vertigo and nausea does not seem to me an inappropriate response to the summer of 1968."²⁸ Both Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy were assassinated that year. Race riots broke out in large cities. The Vietnam War was ongoing. In January of 1968 Vietnam Communists launched the Tet Offensive bombing villages throughout South Vietnam. Richard Nixon became president. Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. The Beatles gave their final live performance on the roof top of their recording studio in London with no announcement or fanfare. It was also the summer of Woodstock, the biggest love-in concert of an era. Charles Manson's cult, the Manson Family, brutally murdered nine people over an eight-week period. Didion writes, "Many people I know in Los Angeles believe that the Sixties ended abruptly on August 9, 1969, ended at the exact moment when word of the murders on Cielo Drive traveled like brushfire through the community, and in a sense this is true. The tension broke that day. The paranoia was fulfilled."²⁹

²⁸ Joan Didion, "The White Album," 11.

²⁹ Didion, 47.

Didion writes about losing her own script of life during the years 1966 to 1971, and maybe my family lost our script too. Or maybe my parents realized that the script they were given was the wrong script. I know nothing of this time except from my childlike perspective. Years later my mom tells me that my dad lost a couple of jobs because he was always leaving work to surf. I don't remember if his Olympic medals hung in our house, or if he wore any of his Olympic jewelry. I do know that an entire room of his parent's house was dedicated to his swimming medals and trophies from childhood through the Olympics. My grandparents called it the Florida room.

Though I knew nothing of the world going on around me, in this house I had nightmares and woke in the dark terrorized by the shadows I saw in my room. A vampire blocked the door. A witch sat in the chair in the corner watching me. I gathered all my courage and ran through the vampire in the door to my parent's room. My dad never wanted me to sleep with them, so I went quietly to my mom's side, held her hand, whispered into her ear. She made me a bed on the floor next to her.

In this house my brother was born but I remember none of it, only that he was suddenly there in our lives. My mom loved my brother in a different way than she loved me. She seemed "in love" with him. He was beautiful, brown eyed baby with black eye lashes and lots of hair. She said everyone thought he was a girl; he was so pretty. Whereas when I was a baby everyone thought I was a boy because I was bald and had white eyelashes. With no hair and a big tummy, my parents nicknamed me Buddha. When my brother was old enough, we went bike riding to the beach just a few blocks away. Me on the back of my dad's bike which I hated. He did wheelies, jumps, and hopped the curbs and I screamed, so jealous of my brother safely on my mom's bike.

In that house, my dad had back surgery and he blamed all those countless flip turns he did as a swimmer.

A lady who lived near the beach watched me and my brother sometimes. She was sweet to my brother, talking to him in a singsong voice, but she yelled at me for not wiping well enough when I went to the bathroom. She made her teenage son watch me wipe each time, and I was afraid of them both. Though my mom always threatened to wash my mouth out with soap, she never did. But this woman did. The soap tasted like perfume as she rubbed it on my tongue and inside my cheeks. As I choked and coughed, I thought that you're not supposed to eat perfume.

One day, my grammy, my dad's mom, called to have my dad bring me to her house to see an alligator sunning on their lawn. We rushed over in time to see the alligator lumber across the yard and disappear back into the lagoon. My grammy and grandad's home was not warm and welcoming like my mom's parents' house where I spent most of my time. My dad's childhood home was too clean, too sterile. In that house I sat in the kitchen with Jessie Mae, their housekeeper and drank ginger ale and ate dry Ritz crackers while the grown-ups had cocktails together in the Florida Room, decorated floor to ceiling with my dad's swimming trophies and medals.

At my maternal grandparent's house, I had my own room. Whenever I visited my grandma bought me a new book of paper dolls. She took me to the pool, made me Coca-Colas on ice and potato chips. My grandpa called me The Great De-bor-ah and took me armadillo hunting. We drove on backroads with the headlights off, then we stopped the car, turned the lights on and there were the armadillos caught in the glare, scales glistening in the headlights. During the day

we walked on the beach and collected shark's teeth together. They were black, shiny, and lay in piles with broken shells. In the evenings I sat on the floor and watched *Family Affair* while my grandma got dinner ready. I could smell the steaks my grandpa grilled on the barbecue. When my parents came home late to pick me up, I hid under the covers of my grandparents' bed, so I never had to leave. I scrunched down by my grandparents' feet sure my mom would never find me.

In August of 1969 when my brother was three months old my Aunt Marcia died. My grandma watched me while my mom and dad went to be with my maternal grandparents. When she brought me home that night our dog had wrapped its chain too many times around the pole and strangled itself. I don't remember my Aunt Marcia's funeral, only the stories around her death and the fact that whenever I drove with my grandma after this, she frantically made sure I had my seatbelt on because Marcia would have lived if she'd worn her seatbelt. The story my mom told me was that my grandma woke in the middle of the night to the phone ringing, but she already knew Marcia was dead before my grandpa answered. My aunt was a flight attendant and she died in another city, driven in a car with by a man who wasn't her fiancé and who took a sharp turn too fast. The man survived. My aunt did not. My grandma visited Marcia's grave every day for a year, until finally my mom said she went go back to work to get her mind off my aunt.

Were we happy there? Was my dad already looking for something new? My mom says after he couldn't keep his first job, her dad got him a job as a stockbroker. He traveled to New York one summer to do the training. But then that job didn't work out because he left early every day to go surfing.

Montgomery, Alabama 1970 – 1971

When I think back to this time of my family's lives, I wonder about how things fall apart. How our lives are all strung together by the most delicate of threads, and if one thread breaks, often the rest go too. The Olympics were over. My favorite aunt was dead. My grandma was filled with grief and my dad was fired from his job in Florida. And so, we moved away from family, away from people who loved and supported us, away from what we knew and who we were. My parents probably thought we would come back someday, that this was temporary, but we never moved back there as a family. From that time until I was 12 years old, I lived in 30 different houses in four different states. I went from growing up with my maternal grandparents as a constant part of my life, to seeing them half-a-dozen times between the time I was five until they passed away when I was in my twenties.

As we traveled away from stability and familiar things, America had long been changing its ideas about itself. The nuclear family was in tatters. Divorce rates were at an all-time high. In 1970 divorce rates were 3.5 per divorces per 1,000 but by 1979 that number jumped to 5.3 per 1,000 Americans.³⁰ Even being employed was at odds. People like my parents weren't buying into the idea of the American Dream anymore. They wanted something else, something more, something different. As we moved from the safety of Florida I wonder if these ideas of difference were already brewing in their minds – or in my dad's mind.

We moved to a little house on the outskirts of Montgomery, Alabama for my dad's new job as salesman for Farmbest dairy products. Puffy cotton fields lined the road and our dirt

³⁰ Frank Olito, "How the Divorce Rate Has Changed Over the Last 150 Years," Insider, June 30, 2019, <https://www.insider.com/divorce-rate-changes-over-time-2019-1>.

driveway had honeysuckle bushes that filled the air with sweet smells. The school bus dropped me off and I'd pick the flowers and suck the honeysuckle from the stems, honeyed taste and scent filling my mouth and nose. I went to a private school so I could begin kindergarten as a four-year-old. No black students were allowed in our school. I didn't really know what this meant, but I knew this fact. I also knew that our pet German Shepherd, War, had former owners who trained him to attack black people. My mom told me that if the water meter guy came to check the meter War would break out of the house to attack him but that War let my 1½ year old brother pull his tail.

There we were in the middle of the South in a way that we didn't feel like we were living in the South when living in Northern Florida. This was acutely obvious to me, but I wasn't sure why. Down the road in Montgomery history happened. It was where in 1971 the Freedom Riders were attacked, where the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches of 1965 took place and where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "How Long, Not Long Speech."³¹ Driving to town I could see the cotton fields still there with black bodies still working the rows.

Our house was part of a bigger farm owned by a woman who lived in a trailer across the field from us. Between us was a barn, filled with haystacks where I played pretend, always being careful of snakes hiding in the hay. The woman who owned the farm was older and scared me. She babysat me and my brother until some people told my mom she was an alcoholic and we shouldn't trust her.

³¹ Martin Luther King Jr., "How Long, Not Long," Timeline of Montgomery, Alabama, Wikipedia, accessed April 10, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Montgomery,_Alabama.

In my dad's version of this story of our lives, he was training for the Olympics even though he worked full-time. My dad says his coach mailed him workouts and he was doing them at pools when he could fit swimming into his schedule. My mom says she doesn't remember that. What I learned later was my mom, my baby brother and I mostly lived in Montgomery alone. My dad was on the road as a salesman and gone for weeks at a time. My parents had one car and my dad needed it for his work it, so my mom rode her bike to town with my brother on the back to get groceries. In that house she sewed all our clothes. In that house we waited while my dad was on the road. My mom later learned he had an affair with a nameless, faceless woman in Atlanta.

A big oak tree towered in our yard and my dad built a swing and nailed small pieces of wood on the trunk so I could climb up and nestle in a nook between the branches. There I could see across the farm and into the fields. I hated when my dad pushed me on the swing because he pushed too high. I screamed, "stop" repeatedly but he laughed and kept pushing. I remember falling off onto the roots under the tree and skinning my entire side.

But mostly I don't remember my dad in that house. My mom later told me that while we lived there my brother's toys kept disappearing from his crib. Finally, she pulled some panels off the wall and there were packrat nests in the walls filled with my brother's baby toys.

In that house some of my parents' friends came to visit one weekend – my Aunt Marcia's former fiancé and his girlfriend. We took a trip to the capital and my dad used his Olympic clout to get us a photo with Governor George Wallace. In the picture my dad has long hippy hair, and sideburns, my mom and I wear matching chokers with medal circles. We went together to get the new "shag" haircut and I hated mine. My brother's pants matched my shirt because my mom

sewed them both. My mom said my dad and his friends were drinking wine and smoking pot on the drive there even though it was 9 am. She said the photo with Governor Wallace was a joke that worked out. I'm not sure what that meant except that we were on our way to looking like hippies, and Wallace was a racist and conservative wearing a suit.



Figure 9 The Walsh family and friends with former Alabama Governor George Wallace.

Wallace stands next to my dad in this photo. It is before he was in a wheelchair. In a way the photo records two before and after stories. Two parallel lives briefly touching for a moment. There is our family beginning to look the role of the hippy, but we were still intact. We hadn't done anything radical yet except get shag haircuts. Later our family would dissolve. And there was Wallace, also starring into the precipice of his future. He was shot and paralyzed from the

waist down in the following year as he campaigned for president on the ticket of “Segregation Forever.” Eventually one of the most openly racist governors changed his philosophy, asking for forgiveness from Civil Rights leaders, and going on to become the Alabama governor who elected more African Americans to office than any other before him.³²

One weekend our family visited the local mall, and my mom bought the Adele Davis cookbook *Let's Cook It Right*. After that we didn't eat Wonder bread anymore and I missed its softness, the way it soaked up the peanut butter and jelly and that I could roll it into balls between my palms. Instead, my mom made her own bread with whole wheat flour. It was hard and scraped the roof of my mouth. Instead of sugary peanut butter we ate oily peanut butter that had to be stirred. We walked into the mall as middle America, soft white bread folk but when we walked out, we transformed into dry, brown bread hippies. Anything could happen once we gave up the Miracle Whip, Twinkies, and Wonder Bread. And anything did happen. It wasn't a quick metamorphosis. It was slow, like the mixing of our new healthy peanut butter with oil spilling down the sides.

Our connection with our past and my dad's Olympic career began to unravel. Why did we do these things? Who were we becoming? Was my dad unstable? Was his mental health suffering as he left us for weeks at a time selling dairy products and having an affair? How could he not feel like the life of an Olympian promised him more than this run-down house, this household with one car and never enough money? My mom complained that he spent too much on his

³²“Alabama Governor George Wallace Shot,” *This Day in History*, May 15, 1972, accessed April 19, 2021 <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/governor-george-wallace-shot>.

clothes when we needed the money to eat. His mother spoiled him, she said. Always buying him the nicest things.

I picture my dad as he drove away from us each week searching for a different version of himself. In Alabama my dad didn't have surfing to disappear into instead of work, so his distraction became another woman. My mom, me and my brother waited for him to return from his job on the road each week, to get the car back, to be a family again. And yet what was he thinking? Did he feel free driving away from us? Did the road transform him, so when he arrived in Atlanta to this other woman, he was already someone else? An Olympic swimmer who imagined he still was training for the Olympics with workouts his coach sent him. Who could still possibly make the next Olympics because on the road his family didn't exist. That in visiting another woman, he became a different person.

The dream of possibility allows room to create a different story of yourself, even if it never comes true. Sprawson contends that much of "a swimmer's training takes place inside his head" and that a swimmer is "in a continuous dream of a world under water."³³ As a swimmer myself, I understand this world. Water is fluid and allows us to remake ourselves. Under the water the outside world is muffled, and a new existence can be made-up. Was the air my dad drove through as he left us, a kind of water allowing him to take on a new life he controlled. In this different life away from us perhaps greatness wasn't something he'd already touched, but instead something waiting to be discovered. Maybe when he hit the road, he left behind the mundane having a family represented and instead saw possibility. All around him culture was shifting, and he must have heard the new voices. Questioned the establishment. Subverted

³³ Sprawson, *Haunts of the Black Masseur*, 17.

expectations. Thumbed it to the man. Refused to be a good little American. Was my dad working his mind around this as he drove away? Or was it simpler – he wanted what he wanted, and he felt he was entitled to get it.

In *Bobos In Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* David Brooks writes that to people like my dad the “bohemia was a lifestyle most people would choose to live if they got wise to themselves”³⁴ With subversive ideas about how a person would choose to live came freedom. This, coupled with the shattered dream of an Olympic structure that expects greatness from their athletes but doesn’t have the means to support them, could have pushed my dad closer to counterculture ideas. My mom who had the responsibility of raising me and my brother wasn’t subverting the narrative of our lives perhaps because she didn’t have time.

In *Hippies and American Values*, author Timothy Miller writes that “The hippies were mainly children of privilege . . . the movement came from a prosperous, white, male-defined segment of society.”³⁵ Maybe my dad felt he was entitled to a different life, a better life and so he began to search for it.

But my story also follows the trajectory of the social revolution taking shape outside our home. Brooks quotes Paul Goodman who wrote *Growing Up Absurd* in 1960 in which he describes the Beats (or hippies) this way. “They will explain that ‘good jobs’ are frauds and sells, that it is intolerable to have one’s style of life dictated by Personnel, that a man is a fool to work to pay installments on a useless refrigerator for his wife.”³⁶ As I look at this story from the

³⁴ David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 77.

³⁵ Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), xxiv.

³⁶ Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, 76.

perspective of time and history, I can see all the pieces working to pull our family apart. I can see my dad looking for something or someone else. He certainly couldn't go on having affairs and losing jobs for his entire life. He had been great. He knew what the moment felt like, what life could be. But the Olympic promise of greatness, let him down. Now he needed to look for it somewhere else.

Durham, North Carolina 1971-1972

Our next home was Durham, North Carolina where my dad now worked as salesman for Gallo wine and my mom went back to college. This house was neat and pack rats didn't live in the walls. There was a white picket fence around the front yard. There were three bedrooms, one for each of us. In that house I slept in my Aunt Marcia's old pink canopy bed with matching nightstands and dressers. My window looked out onto the street. A tree grew next to my bedroom window, and I could look up into the branches. I thought we were happy there. It was where I lost my first tooth. I lay in bed and wiggled the tooth when I was supposed to be asleep. I twisted and twisted. Then it was out, laying in my hand. My tongue found the bloody place where the tooth used to live, and it felt the flap of skin still left there and tasted the salty blood. I walked into the light of the kitchen where my parents were discussing something serious. I heard their raised voices. They were arguing. I'd walked into something forbidden and grown-up.

"I lost my tooth," I say.

"Oh, Debby that's great," says my mom.

"What are you doing?"

"Just paying bills,"

“Well, you better quick put that tooth under your pillow so the tooth fairy can come.”

Then my mom and dad walked me back to my bed and tucked me in. Later in my teens I went back to this one evening and wondered: was this the moment? They were arguing over bills. Is this what caused the divorce?

In that house I gained my independence. My dad ran with me up and down the street as I tried to balance on my two-wheel bike. I'd fall and cry. Get back up and try it again. Finally, I rode on my own. Then I took off exploring our neighborhood by myself. I met a friend who lived down the street. Her name was Robin Hood. She lived in a bigger house than us and it was up on a hill. On our bikes the world was ours for the taking. We explored an old junkyard at the end of the street. We made houses with all the old stuff. In the worlds we created we lost track of time. Our parents were searching for us. When I returned, I was grounded, which felt so mature and better than a spanking.

There was a pond in our backyard that froze in the winter. The ducks swam in this little hole in the middle. In summer we paddled a little raft around and got dangerously close to the waterfall that drained the water of the pond down to the stream below.

Then things changed. One day we rode our bikes to these people's house I think we met at a concert one night. They lived in a big Victorian house on a busy street with lots of traffic. Duke University was across the street and a low stone wall surrounded it. Only the mother Toni was home and her baby son Jason. Her husband, Richard and older son Eli weren't home. I sat on the front porch and watched the busy traffic go past as the grown-ups talked.

The next thing I knew we had moved out of our little white house on the street where Robin Hood lived and we'd moved into Toni and Richard's house. Now we were four parents

and four children. Everything changed at this new house. My canopy bed disappeared, and I slept on a foam mattress in a bedroom with Eli and my brother Michael. I didn't even know Eli. Eli got a lot of cuddling and reassuring from his parents about how nice it was of him to share his room. I wondered about me and Michael. Where was our reassurance? We had to give up our rooms, our house, our lives to share a room with this kid.

Communal Living Duke University 1972-1973

My mom slept with Richard and my dad slept with Toni in some free love situation. I didn't know whose room to run to at night when I had a bad dream. It's hard not to look at this switch to permissive sexual attitudes from a lens of presentism and from being the child of this family. My mom is ashamed of this period in her life. My dad tosses it up to the time, but he is not a woman and sexual shame doesn't permeate our culture for men like it does for women. Miller writes in *The Hippies and American Values* that "The point of the sexual revolution was, disproportionately, male pleasure"³⁷ Moving in with Toni and Richard was my dad's idea. My dad found Toni and, I suspect, was already having an affair with her.

I wonder what this kind of sexual freedom felt like for my mom. Did she enjoy it? Had she given up on the marriage by this point and surrendered to the inevitable? Was she still in-love with my dad? Had she ever been? Toni and my dad found one another – "star-crossed lovers" as Richard put it in one of his emails to me. But my mom and Richard were thrown together. I want to give my mom some agency here. I want to know that she had a choice in this. But I will never know how this all went down. I will never hear the conversations they had, the decisions they

³⁷ Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 26.

made. Thomas Hearn writes that the hippies “set out to demystify, objectify, and rationalize sex.” He calls this free love attitude “a cultural war on all of the traditional sources of authority”³⁸ This turning away from repressive sexual attitudes changed my family. We never turned back from this moment. We never became our family of four again.

Humboldt County, California 1973

Our next move was to California. Perhaps North Carolina was too repressive. California, on the other hand, was hip. It was where it was happening. Beginning with the Gold Rush of the 1800s, California had long been considered an oasis. For the counterculture it became a place to rediscover yourself. With the Gidget movies, songs by the Beach Boys, and images of golden beaches and tanned, white people, California attracted surfers, like my dad, who could imagine themselves there. John J. Bukowczyk says, “California was a land of becoming.”³⁹ And that The Beach Boys’ writer Brian Wilson “didn’t sing about who he was, he sang about who he wished he might become.”⁴⁰ For me, California was the last straw when all the vestiges of a middle-class life fell away. Our family was splitting up. My mom and I were leaving with Richard and his son Eli. My dad was going to come later with Toni, her baby son Jason, and my little brother Michael. To me, this felt like the end of something.

We sold everything we couldn’t carry in the trunk or on the roof of the Richard’s dirty, white Plymouth. We sold my pink canopy bed, our Tommy by The Who and Jesus Christ

³⁸ Thomas K. Hearn, “In the 1960s There Was No Free Love—In the 1990s There is No Safe Sex,” *Journal of American College Health* 42, Vol.6, (1994), <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.1994.9936362>.

³⁹ John J. Bukowczyk, “California Dreamin’, Whiteness, and the American Dream,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 35, No. 2 (2016), 92.

⁴⁰ Bukowczyk, 92.

Superstar albums. Eli and I made signs with broken crayons, “For sale.” We sold our old lives, my matching clothes and saddle shoes. We sold our stability. We became hippies, and drifters.

In the photos of the day, I drove away with my mom, I’m leaning on my dad, hugging him, holding him for one last time. I remember forcing him to listen to me count to 100 so I could delay our departure.

As my mom, Richard, Eli, and I drove away, I clasped my Charlie Brown coloring book and crayons in the back seat of the car as I watched my dad and Michael get smaller and smaller until we turned a corner, and they were gone. They were supposed to come later with Toni and Jason – but they didn’t come. My dad left Toni and took my brother back to his hometown in Florida.

As we traveled across America, Richard nicknamed me Wildflower. He continued to call me Wildflower throughout our lives together. And sometimes I really felt like a wildflower; beautiful, colorful, not domesticated, free spirited. We drove, the four of us, every day, all day. We pitched a tent a night and stayed at a campground. There are pictures of me and Eli at the Grand Canyon. My Mom and Richard took us shopping at one of those Western Souvenir shops. I remember buying a red, faded denim jacket and jeans that matched. Photos show me and Eli sitting on rocks overlooking a wasteland in our new western clothes. My messy blonde hair is pulled back in a bandana. I am not smiling but peering intensely into the distance as if I can see something there that no one else can see.

The California we arrived in wasn’t the Southern California of sun and dreams. It was Northern California with its Redwood tree groves, pot growing hippies and naked swimming holes. I had culture shock. My friend’s mom owned a pot farm and some of her workers came back one night

and murdered her mother when she caught them stealing her plants. Richard and my mom's friends were bearded with long hair and the women wore skirts to their feet and no make-up.

Florida Again 1973

My mom and I stayed in Humboldt County, California that summer with Richard and Eli. But at the end of the summer, we flew back to Florida to be with my dad and brother. My parents were trying out their marriage again. But it didn't work. My mom traded me for my little brother and away they flew back to California.

In Florida it was just me and my dad. We lived in a little white house in a cluster of white houses owned my dad's sister's in-laws. My dad worked at Howard Johnson's doing something that involved the swimming pool. On weekends I hung out and played in the water, games he organized for guests. Quarters were thrown in the pool, and we all dove to scoop them off the bottom. Daughter of an Olympian, I was a good swimmer. I dove deep. Held my breath for a long time and grabbed lots of quarters.

At night my dad read Nancy Drew books to me, closing the book at the end of each chapter which always ended in a cliffhanger. I fell asleep wondering how Nancy and her cousin George would get out each successive predicament.

Northern California Again 1973

In a blink of an eye, my dad and I retraced the steps my mom and I just took across the country. Away we went again, back to California. Once again, I was hauled all the way across the US as one parent or another tried to figure their lives out.

I think my dad felt lost in California. I started my second school beginning third grade again. But by November, my dad decided to leave. He didn't seem to be able to settle, to sit still with our new living situation. This time he took a surf trip to Baja, California with his buddies. Again, I was made to go with him on another road trip. I'm not sure why I had to go. I suspect my mom was trying to make a point. We kids weren't just her responsibility and if my dad wanted to end the marriage, he had to be a parent too. Michael was too young to leave alone on the beach of Mexico while my dad surfed but I guess they figured I wasn't.

Each morning as my dad surfed, I played on the beach. Mexican women collecting a kind of shell or mussel on the beach seemed concerned, but I only knew how to count to ten in Spanish. I didn't understand their words so pointed to the ocean where my dad was when they questioned me. After surfing he'd take me into the nearest town and we'd buy Mexican donuts that weren't at all like the donuts I was used to. Instead of glaze, they were sprinkled with sugar. We shopped together at the open-air markets and my dad bought me a leather purse and an embroidered dress.

At night I sat around the campfire with my dad and his friends. They passed their joint back and forth. Inhale hold exhale. Inhale hold exhale. The sweet smoke wafted around my head as I listened to their stories of other, nameless surfers who landed in Mexican prisons, left there to rot because the Federales caught them with pot.

The final night of our trip three Federales appeared out of the dark. They walked towards our campfire. I knew my dad had a joint in his hand he was just about to light. I panicked. What would happen to me if they took my dad away? I pictured him living in a Mexican prison.

The minutes dragged past as the Federales searched the van. I held my breath. I didn't know if there was pot in the van. I didn't know what they would find or how this would end. They spoke Spanish to one another as they pointed flashlights under the seats. My dad and his friends were quiet. The air stiff with fear. Then suddenly it was over and the Federales left just as abruptly as they'd arrived. They hadn't searched my dad and his friends.

My dad pulled the joint out of his pants where he'd hid it. "Looks like it was our lucky day," he said. I wanted to cry, to hold him, to ask why he took chances but instead I went back to coloring or reading.

After Mexico, my dad and I headed back to Northern California in time for Christmas. Suddenly he was living with Toni again. And my mom was still living with Richard. My dad and I arrived bearing gifts from Mexico, stiff embroidered dresses and leather purses with flowers etched on them.

I imagine Mexico wasn't an option for my dad to move to. It had surf but we didn't speak the language. All this back and forth seems to me now like a pendulum swinging from one extreme to another. My dad was the pendulum. My mom accepted that we'd moved to Northern California. But my dad couldn't seem to settle. He must have felt there was some place else out there that would make him happy. And so, he moved further away from our origins in Florida and our conventional family.

As we lived in California we drifted farther and farther from my grandparents. My mom's parents helped take care of me a lot when I was little, and they still sent presents and cards, but I didn't hear from my dad's parents. I wonder if he was estranged from them at the time, too embarrassed about the kind of life he was leading.

For a while my dad disappeared. Maybe my parents traded kids. I have a newspaper clipping of my dad and Michael hitchhiking in Northern California from that time. My mom and I lived with Richard in a little house near the beach. I was eight. The house was really a shack. It leaned as if the wind blew it to the left. It was shoved into the side of a sand dune. If I walked over the sand dunes there was the Pacific Ocean moody and windy. Our beach was a walking with shoes on kind of beach. The sand was hard and firm. The water numbingly cold. There were pine trees around our house and as we walked the path to the sea, the trees were replaced by scrubby little plants trying to make their way in the sand. In the front of our house was a road, another row of houses, then a bigger road, then marshes and then the Eureka Bay. The bay was also the sea but to me it didn't count because the water didn't move much. I wanted the sea to move, the waves to crash or lap my ankles, the water to throw its salt spray and smell up into the air for me to breathe it in.

I came home from school one day and there was a strange man in front of the house. This man looked scary. His hair was slicked back, and he wore a black, stocking cap. But my mom and brother were talking to him and he turned and said, "Hey sweetie" when he saw me and he smiled. "Dad?" I said, as if my dad was a question. "It's me honey," he said. And I don't think I ran to him because I still wasn't too sure about him. "It's okay sweetie, it's just me and I love you," he said. He grabbed me and lifted me up in a giant hug and everything was okay in his arms even though he didn't smell like my dad but like some man who had funny crème in his hair. He explained that he looked funny because he was trying to fool the government.

My family moving to Northern California didn't meet my dad's expectations. He called it gloomy and wet, and he was correct. It was the counterculture without the glamour of California's

southern beaches. It rained a lot. My dad was often the lone surfer in the grey Pacific bobbing among driftwood. The hippies we joined in Humboldt Country wore long skirts, flannel shirts and hiking boots. Not an outfit I could imagine my sun-kissed, Florida dad ever wearing. But if not California, where?

Joan Didion writes that when people seek refuge in California, “things had better work here, because here, beneath that immense bleached sky, is where we run out of continent.”⁴¹ My dad’s continent had run out, so I guess the move to Hawai’i was inevitable.

Like many hippies of his generation, my dad knew how to fleece the system. Going on disability was part of my dad’s path to Hawai’i. If he was going to move to paradise to surf, he needed to figure out how to pay his expenses. He qualified for disability by pretending he couldn’t work because he was mentally unfit. I didn’t realize this until much later. In a 1974 letter he wrote my mom he asked, “What have you done with welfare?”⁴² In the same letter, he asked my mom twice about his disability check from Social Security, “Did you call Mrs. Ford from S.S. and what happened?”⁴³ And as a P.S. he wrote, “Please send my check airmail.”⁴⁴ I’m not sure how my dad justified defrauding the government. Did America let my dad down? He wasn’t fighting a war for our country. He wasn’t putting his life on the line. He was sacrificing a different kind of life. We’ve never talked about it, so I don’t know if he thought in some warped way that America was paying him back for representing our country in the Olympics. Maybe there’s something about being the best in the world that makes you think you deserve certain

⁴¹ Joan Didion, “Notes from a Native Daughter,” 172.

⁴² Didion, 172.

⁴³ Ken Walsh personal correspondence to Diane Walsh, 1974.

⁴⁴ Ken Walsh.

things, are owed certain things. Which, I suspect, is how we ended up in Hawai'i because living there wasn't ordinary. In his constant quest for gold, he never learned what it was like to live normal, to be mundane. Every moment was filled with the quest, the swimming, the purpose of working out and taking splits. Hawai'i also allowed him to live an extraordinary life.

The Olympics and Mental Health

What was this thing that was missing in my dad that he needed Hawai'i and the ocean to fill? In my fifties, I came across stories about Michael Phelps and his struggles with anxiety and depression. He was arrested for two DUI's, and I was humbled by his honesty. He said, "Vulnerability is strength," and I wished my dad realized that it's never too late to recognize we are all just humans doing the best we can. The Olympics promise a dream of the hero. Win and you will have a happy life. Win and you will be remembered. America is number one. The Olympics is the stuff of myth, and so must my dad live his entire life in myth in order to perpetuate the dream? The Olympics is part of the patriarchal structure of our country. Be the best. Swim the fastest. And fame, money, happiness will follow. Unless they don't.

In another article about Phelps and Australian Olympic swimming star Grant Hackett, both Phelps and Hackett openly talked about how they will explain to their children "the shambles of their post-swimming lives."⁴⁵ The article says that Hackett already spoke to a child psychologist about it, "'There will be conversations that need to be had,' Hackett said, 'and a

⁴⁵ Karen Crouse, "A Golden Shoulder to Lean On," *The New York Times*, Sept. 21, 2017, accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/21/sports/michael-phelps-grant-hackett-tiger-woods.html> .

certain strength you'll have to find.”⁴⁶ Hackett struggled with substance abuse which resulted in divorce and being kept from his children for a while. Both have been advocates for mental health openness in athletics. The article explains that they both believe “The more they give voice to their vulnerabilities, the easier it is to imagine one day explaining their worst moments to their children. Yes, they messed up, but nobody is perfect.”⁴⁷ Maybe this is what this quest to understand my life in connection to my dad's life is about, admitting that none of us are perfect. Maybe that's where the understanding and awareness come in, to taking stock of mistakes made, owning them, and then healing. As an American and especially as an Olympic athlete, admitting vulnerabilities isn't part of the mantra of the US. To claim that the US is the best country in the world takes hubris that doesn't leave room for weakness or reality. As individuals in this country, this is an inherent truth of who we are. I think this was probably especially true for my dad and his generation.

Was what my dad went through a result of a mental health crisis, a post-Olympic depression or were the ways his life had turned out by the time he fled to Hawai'i as a 29-year-old just too much for him? Would things have been better if he'd been able to compete in another Olympics? Or did it have more to do with the fact that he had a family, not by choice, but because of cultural pressures of the time?

Recently studies of Olympic athletes and depression have found that they suffer “significant depressive symptoms as they struggle to adapt to ‘regular life’ following their return

⁴⁶ Crouse.

⁴⁷ Crouse.

from the Olympic Games.”⁴⁸ Cassie Patten, a bronze medalist in the 10k swimming event at the Beijing Olympics in 2008 says, “In the year after the Games, I felt lost. I got really depressed, I was really unhappy. I would come swimming and just sit on the poolside and just cry.”⁴⁹ The study found that these depressive episodes are especially apparent in athletes “who have a strong athletic identity,”⁵⁰ which was very true for my dad. I think being an Olympic champion meant everything to my dad and he didn’t know how to be anything else.

Hawai’i 1974

And so, my dad left for Hawai’i in 1974, leaving his Olympic memorabilia behind in Toni’s attic. A few years ago, my mom sent me a letter she’d kept since 1974, my dad wrote to her after living in Hawai’i for a few months. The letter reads, “I am extremely happy and peaceful in this setting it is great.”⁵¹ He couldn’t wait for my brother and me to come live with him. He continued, “Hey you guys let me tell you something – I’ve got some roots going down here and they feel wonderful and I want to share it with you.”⁵² My dad did love sharing it with us. He was so stoked about the little house we rented on the beach at Sunset Beach. He was happy, which made me happy. He didn’t work and was always there for us. Every day when we came home from school, he’d be there sitting in the front yard with our dog Jojo waiting for us to get off the bus. We’d tumble onto him and cuddle, not realizing that to make his move to

⁴⁸ Karen Howell and Mathijs Lucassen, “Post-Olympic blues – The diminution of celebrity in Olympic athletes,” *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 37, (July 2018), 68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2018.04.008> .

⁴⁹ Howell and Lucassen, 68

⁵⁰ Howell and Lucassen, 68.

⁵¹ Ken Walsh, Personal Letter to Diane Walsh, 1974.

⁵² Walsh.

paradise my dad broke the law committing social security fraud. For years he received disability checks from the government so we could live carefree in paradise.

It was like Hawai'i was always there waiting for us to arrive. I couldn't believe my good fortune, living on the ocean and being able to swim every day. As a kid, I also believed it was paradise.

Relics and Reality

The route to getting the long-lost Olympic memorabilia back to my dad was circuitous and complex, much like the twists and turns our lives took after the Olympics when he was striving for happiness and my mom, my brother, and me were dragged along for the ride. Richard was the man who found and returned the Olympic memorabilia. He had once been Toni's husband and once been my mom's partner and my almost stepfather. He surfaced from a time in my parent's life I think they'd rather forget.

Despite the chaos of our lives, I always loved Richard. I wanted him to become my stepfather, but my mom ended up leaving him for my stepdad when I was ten or eleven. When I was old enough to have my first period, Richard celebrated me even though he wasn't in my mom's life. He took me shopping at a boutique where I chose a 1970s Gunne Sax dress that cost \$50, something my mom would never splurge on. He took me out to dinner, and I spent the night with him and his boys in the house where I once lived.

I reconnected with Richard in my 50s. We'd begun an email friendship. He answered questions about my past I couldn't ask my parents. He always addressed the emails to "My dear

Wildflower.”⁵³ We discovered we were both writers and began exchanging our stories. He told me I had a certain way of seeing the world as a little girl and that I often said, “You better accept the facts.” Of my dad and his relationship with Toni, or Rose, he wrote, “And yes. Ken was 23 when the music stopped. And Rose was beguiling.”⁵⁴ But beguiling and being a witch are two very different things. Though my dad must have believed the “witch” story to leave his Olympic jewelry there for over 40 years. To never ask for his things, even after she died 20 years after he’d left her. To essentially leave behind those mythical, lost treasures of a former life when he touched greatness.

One day after reading one of my essays about my dad’s lost Olympic memorabilia Richard sent me this message,

Jason recently finished cleaning out the storage unit in which he'd piled all Toni's stuff after she died of breast cancer in 1994. He found a stash of Ken's pins and rings from MSU and Olympics. I've thought of sending them to you, or to Ken if I had an address, or digging a hole in my back yard and putting it all to rest.⁵⁵

This epic stuff sat in a storage space for over 20 years waiting for me. In letters my dad sent my mom from Hawai’i, in 1974, he asked her to get his stuff back. “Toni is sending me hateful letters. Can you get my Olympic stuff from her?”⁵⁶ Though they were divorcing, my mom insisted on keeping his Olympic gold and silver medals safe herself. As if she couldn’t trust my dad with his own legacy. But the rest was left in Toni’s attic –Olympic rings along with jewelry from his college career at Michigan State University, where they painted a larger than life-size mural of him after the Olympics. Though my mom lived near Toni in Northern

⁵³ Richard Kramer, Email message to author, August 13, 2018.

⁵⁴ Kramer, Email message to author, August 11, 2018.

⁵⁵ Kramer, Email, August 13, 2018.

⁵⁶ Ken Walsh, Letter to Diane Walsh, January 1974.

California at that time, she did not go get my dad's stuff – ever. Maybe she was angry he left us all in Northern California and moved to Hawai'i under the guise of a "vacation." That hadn't been the agreement in their do-it-yourself separation. As they'd subverted many things in their marriage, they also chose their own style of separation. Today we'd call it something fancy like a "conscious uncoupling," but then it was just a hippy ideal. The plan was they would both live in Northern California, close to one another, so they could raise me and my brother equally. Though the divorce papers said my mom had full custody of me and my brother, my parents ignored that. My brother and I were free to choose who we wanted to live with, even though we were four and seven respectively. We could go and back forth to each parent's house, though when we all lived in Northern California, my dad was adrift and never had his own house. He was in and out of Toni's house.

My dad disappearing to Hawai'i complicated things with distance, planning, airline tickets and different schools. I don't know if my dad considered any of this because Hawai'i was his dream. It was there he seemed to come back to the person he believed he was meant to become after getting married too young, after the Olympics, after settling for jobs he hated and a life that didn't fit his idea of himself.

In 2018, when I told my mom about retrieving my dad's things she said, "I'm sad your dad didn't get to wear his Olympic ring for all these years and so no one knew he was an Olympian." Because, of course, this is what being in the Olympics comes down to –all those years of staring at the bottom of the pool and racing against a clock and ordinary people would recognize my dad when he reached for his beer while out to dinner, or for the salad tongs at the all-you-can-eat buffet bar, Olympic ring sparkling on his finger. My mom still worried about

him, protector of his medals and proud of his accomplishments even though they hadn't been married for decades. My reaction was more pragmatic and accusatory. My dad chose to flee California all those years ago. He chose to leave the symbols of who he once was behind. I'm not sure if his mental health suffered after the Olympics because those things weren't talked about in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I do know that as his daughter, my life took an unconventional and tumultuous turn once my dad lost the structure and goal of training to swim in the Olympics.

In an email from 2016 when we first reconnected, Richard wrote, "I put it this way. Ken and Rose were star crossed lovers, Di and Richard did the best they could to pick up the slack. But to be truthful we were all flailing and unemployed, so we hit it out to California."⁵⁷

Richard's realism reframed the story into more concrete terms – my parents were hippies. They were poor and not working by choice. California was a promised land, until it wasn't, and then my dad traveled further west to Hawai'i.

We don't tell the stories of today where my dad and I barely speak, and he never knows that I'm writing so many stories about him. Clearly my dad struggled with something for all those years of searching. In recent studies it has been determined that "it can be challenging for athletes to discuss their mental health concerns, due to the dominant narrative in elite sport that reiterates an expectation of 'mental toughness' in athletes."⁵⁸ My dad refuses to talk to me about anything. When I've asked him why certain things happened in the past he said, "I'm sorry sweetie, I don't remember much of your childhood because I was so stoned."

⁵⁷ Richard Kramer, Email message to author, August 1, 2016.

⁵⁸ Howell, "Post-Olympic blues," 248.

Olympic memorabilia left in an attic for 40 years can symbolize a forgotten dream. For some people, families are also dreams. Many people fight for families. For others, families are forced upon them. Like so many families in the 1970s, my family fell apart. Then we came back together in a different form. Today we've fallen apart again. But I got the symbols of my dad's forgotten dreams back to him so many years later. Maybe someday my dad and I will find our way back to one another again as well.

CHAPTER FOUR

LOOKING BACK TO SEE FORWARD

“We are not what you think. To you who come on airplanes, who descend upon us, we are invisible as air. We are the ‘āina and the sum of its parts. Mauka and makai, past and present. Born of its waters, we are haumana and kupuna, ageless and ancient. The keepers of the stories, the watchers, the listeners. You think you’ve been here, you think you know us, you have pictures to prove it. The pictures are wrong. You’ve seen nothing at all. We are not here for you. We were before you, and we will be here when you leave.” – Jasmin Iolani Hakes from *Hula*

When my dad, brother and I arrived in Hawai’i, American culture and capitalism had already transformed the islands. Colonialism had brought many things that came before us: Captain Cook, disease, hundreds of invasive plants, Christian missionaries, Catholic missionaries, Mormon missionaries, eleven US military bases, high rises and luxury hotels, rats, automobiles, freeways, overpasses, trains, the Hawai’i Tourism Bureau, the Honolulu International Airport, pollution, plastics, traffic, congestion, sugar cane and pineapple plantations, orchids, grass skirts, battleships and bombs, helicopters, tour guides, prisons and universities. Huge swaths of the interior of the island were owned by the military.

These all laid the foundation, so white people felt at home while also feeling like they lived in a kind of exoticized America. To me Hawai’i felt like another country but wasn’t another country. The grocery stores had the brands of peanut butter and cereal I had in California with my mom. All my favorite TV shows were in English. We got the best of all worlds, the comforts and the beauty and exoticism that comes from living on an island in the middle of the ocean. Though this place didn’t feel like America, it was America, and the law said we were allowed to move there.

To know how a place became a representation of something instead of its true self, is important to deconstruct the myth of Hawai'i. What is at stake is the perspective knowing allows. As Epeli Hau'ofa writes in his essay "Our Sea of Islands," to know about history is empowering. And that when the history of a place is obscured by the colonizer's view of the inhabitants it has "a lasting and negative effect on people's views of their histories and traditions."¹ To be called savage or barbarian, to outlaw the practices of Kānaka traditions such as the hula and surfing, to suppress speaking of the Hawaiian language, to assimilate Kānaka to European and American history instead of their own history is an example of this subjugation.

In 1959, within days of Hawai'i's proclaimed statehood, commercial flights began making the trek from California bringing tourists to this fantasy island of America. With air travel, Hawai'i was now open to the middle classes. By the time my dad arrived in 1974 to the North Shore of O'ahu, a scattering of haoles lived there. The closest town to the North Shore was a sleepy place called Haleiwa. It was dark by 8 pm, but that was okay because it was a surfer's heaven and serious surfers woke up early. Many of the haoles that lived near us were not like those that preceded us – the descendants of missionaries who went to private school in Honolulu and were members of the Outrigger Canoe Country Club, that once only allowed white people to join. We were hippies looking for an alternative way of life to the nuclear family. We were white in a sea of brown. You could pick our kids out of every school picture in a split second.

In a letter I wrote my mom from Hawai'i in April of 1975 I said, "The library's here have the little house on the prairie books. I'm already on *The Shores of Silver Lake*."² I lay on a

¹ Epeli Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 28.

² Debby Walsh, Personal Letter to Diane Walsh, 1975.

hammock in our yard reading about Laura being tough and not complaining on some dry and desolate prairie so far from my new ocean. I'd look up and check on the surf, the sky, the sun, the wind – all of it moving through and around me. Years later when my mainland cousins would visit, I'd compare my toughness to Laura's. My cousins were babies in the water. They needed a towel to dry off. I was tough – walked barefoot everywhere, stubbed my toes, and didn't cry. The waves pounded me into the shore, and I came up laughing. What I couldn't do as an eight-year-old was notice the similarities between what Laura's family was doing in homesteading the land of Native Americans, and what we were doing in moving to Hawai'i when Kānaka Maoli had been working against and protesting American occupation for the last 150 years.

The thing is, we didn't really know Hawai'i. We didn't know the history. Didn't understand, or think we needed to understand the complexity and hierarchy. We arrived in a place without learning the story of the people that came before us. Though I knew I had to negotiate my whiteness in this place, I didn't wonder how I could have also been complicit in the story that shaped the place we now claimed as our home.

This not knowing can extend even to the way people on an island get their food, use water, or dispose of their trash and waste. In her book *A Small Place*, Jamaica Kincaid describes her home in Antigua as a place that tourists visit but don't know. Kincaid's story is universal but often ignored. What the tourists see isn't the real Antigua and it would ruin their ideal vacation if they thought about where their water came from with all the beautiful, sunny days, never realizing that the people who live there must measure each drop because of constant drought. Or that the food is shipped from Miami. Or that when the tourists flush the toilet, they don't realize

there are no sewage systems, and the contents go into the ocean.³ On the North Shore we weren't and still are not on a central sewer system either. Holes were dug in backyards and septic systems were put in that needed to be pumped out when they got too full. But Hawai'i is an island that came from volcanic activity lifting the land up out of the ocean. There were lava tubes that could interfere with the backyard septic systems and sometimes took the sewage and dumped it into the sea. As an adult on an open ocean swim team, I knew that around the Rocky Point surf area, I smelled the sewage and swam out farther to avoid it. When a visitor is passing through, basic needs are hidden in plain sight and questions not asked about the infrastructure of a vacation spot. When a white settler thinks living in an exotic place will complete them, they don't necessarily dig deeper or wonder why they can smell sewage while they're swimming.

This colonized place took on all the things that made me feel comfortable as a kid because America had claimed the islands. We were in America and everyone around us spoke English. Colonization turns a place into the home the colonizers left with plants, language, customs, concrete, white supremacy and much, much more. When speaking of the English who first colonized Antigua, Kincaid writes, "they should never have left their home . . . a place they had to leave but could never forget. And so everywhere they went they turned it into England; and everyone they met they turned English."⁴ This is how Hawai'i felt to me, a place and people turned into something they were not. Kincaid says, "I met the world through England, and if the world wanted to meet me it would have to do so through England."⁵ Kānaka also experience this because their language and traditions are dismissed, their land stolen and replaced with another

³ Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 14.

⁴ Kincaid, 24.

⁵ Kincaid, 33.

nation's language, traditions, and culture. This is a violence that forces the conquered to meet the world through something they are not. Kincaid expounds, "the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime."⁶ I met Hawai'i through a white settler lens but what I would soon come to understand was that Kānaka would not allow America to completely erase their country and people. Kānaka refused to disappear.

What we didn't know about Hawai'i surpassed what we did know. We didn't know that American businessmen stole the country by imprisoning Queen Lili'uokalani in her own palace for over a year because she was about to pass a constitution that would give Hawaiians more power and Americans less power. She continued to fight for her country, while held hostage, by communicating with her people through writing meles -- or songs -- on slips of paper and sneaking them out to give Hawaiians hope. We didn't know about the sicknesses that decimated the Hawaiian people reducing the population from nearly one million to 55,000 in a little more than 100 years. I never thought about who played on the reefs in front of our house before I did. In school I was taught the hula, performing it to Westernized songs like *Pearly Shells* and *We're Going to the Hukilau*. I knew this was a dance created by ancient Hawaiians, but I didn't understand the meaning of the hula and that it was an ancient art playing homage to all the things important to Kānaka including their histories and the significance of the natural world, which was not separate from them.

At first, I didn't know any Hawaiians, except that when we didn't make our own leis, we'd stop at my classmate Leilani's flower farm and buy premade leis from her parents. I can see now that a stronger foundation of knowledge about the place we made our home would have

⁶ Kincaid, 31.

given me a broader perspective of the place I would spend my formative years. All these things I didn't know shaped the Hawai'i that I found myself in. It was both the reason we arrived there and the reason we were never going to find paradise, there or anywhere.

As I grew up in this place, I would learn that all around us were so many different stories of how people came to Hawai'i. In high school I had a friend whose parents were Christian missionaries. My best friend was a hapa-haole girl, part Samoan and part European descent. Her family was Mormon. I was surprised to learn that the most popular girl in our class, who had all the most expensive clothes, was the only child of Filipino sugar cane field workers. The stereotype I had of the plantation workers I saw toiling around the clock in the fields, didn't line up with this girl and her brand-new car and fancy clothes.

Everything was organized around a plantation style of life. My high school was in the town Waialua and every day at sunrise, lunch, and sunset the sugar cane factory whistle blew calling people to work. The factory belched a thick, syrupy smoke, a smell I will never forget for its burned sugar-like aroma. Many of my local classmates lived in houses around our high school organized by their ethnicities: Japanese camp, Filipino camp, Chinese camp. All of this gave order to the Hawai'i we were stepping into but that we didn't necessarily notice or bother ourselves with. This was a different world away from the beaches and surf that made up our world.

Looking Back to See Forward: Kānaka Resistance to Colonization

We distanced ourselves from the story that allowed us to make Hawai'i our home, never thinking of ourselves as colonizers because, to us, that was ancient history. Without realizing it,

we capitalized on a kind of imperialist wistfulness, what Renato Rosaldo calls “a mood of nostalgia that makes racial domination appear innocent and pure.”⁷ Our lives there were based on a paradox we didn’t see ourselves in. “A person kills somebody,” he explains, “and then mourns the victim.”⁸ By moving to Hawai’i, we were pushing faceless others out by buying land, claiming this place as our own while also being remorseful that others, like us, were moving there and doing the same. My dad was so possessive of the “secret” surf break in front of our house that he took the air out of haole surfer’s tires who parked on our street to surf. Rosaldo notes it’s like when “people destroy their environment, and then they worship nature.”⁹ He calls this move “a pose of ‘innocent yearning’ both to capture people’s imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination.”¹⁰ My family could pretend we were removed from the original colonizers of Hawai’i, but were we? Perhaps years and events shaded our responsibility. This was America we had moved to, but we were still settlers. Indigenous people didn’t invite us to come. Our own ignorance stretched through Hawai’i’s history to 1974, when we arrived, and yet they all laid the foundation that gave us the permission to build our lives on without feeling responsible.

To understand the Hawai’i we arrived in, it is important to know how colonization and resistance shaped it. Kānaka worked to incorporate the world and adopt western norms into their culture to keep their nation intact. The nation of Hawai’i wasn’t looking towards the US for

⁷ Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia.” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928525> .

⁷ Rosaldo, 69.

⁸ Rosaldo, 70.

⁹ Rosaldo, 70.

¹⁰ Rosaldo, 70.

support, but was, in fact, a nation of its own. Treaties were made with European countries, America and with other Oceanic nations. As Hawaiian historian Noenoe Silva writes, “Kānaka ‘Oiwi often took the tools of the colonizers and made use of them to secure their own national sovereignty and well-being.”¹¹

This is a story of perspective and directionality. David Chang points out that Hawaiians weren’t only looking toward the west but were also invested in relationships with people from other Pacific Islands and around the world.¹² Once Hawaiians realized missionaries would teach them to read, and that they carried stories of other places, Kānaka were eager to learn themselves. Chang argues, “Kānaka made a home for Christianity in their society because they wanted to learn things from missionaries . . . and they gave Kānaka the access they wanted to knowledge about the world.”¹³ Chang reads history from a different perspective than western scholars by looking out from Hawai’i to the world.

White history has portrayed Kānaka as a savage people who were happy to have their lands taken so they could be taken care of by the empire of America. We now know this is not true. Changing the stories of history to highlight the oppressed rather than the oppressor is necessary to create a full account of the past.

In Noenoe K. Silva’s book *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*, Silva writes, “One of the most persistent and pernicious myths of Hawaiian history is that the Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians) passively accepted the erosion of their culture and

¹¹ Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*, Duke University Press 2004, 15, 16.

¹² David A. Chang, *The World and All the Things Upon it: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration*, University of Minnesota Press, 2016, 81.

¹³ Chang, 80.

loss of their nation.”¹⁴ Silva’s work decolonizes history because she reads the historiography of Hawai’i against the grain. Silva asks “How do a people know who they are? When the stories told at home do not match up with the texts at school, students are taught to doubt their oral traditions.”¹⁵ To turn one’s back on their own history because the accepted stories about the place an Indigenous person lives don’t line up with the stories told at home is gaslighting a culture.

Silva recounts how in 1998 Bishop Museum in Honolulu displayed for the first time the 556 page, 1897 antiannexation petition proving that Kānaka Maoli were united in their opposition to the American government. Silva writes, “I was then deluged with telephone calls every day from strangers thanking me . . . The petition, inscribed with the names of everyone’s kupuna, gave people permission from their ancestors to participate in the quest for national sovereignty.”¹⁶ Not knowing this information or any of the history of colonialism and opposition is also harmful for the colonizer. It gives them an innocence that doesn’t line up with reality. Or as Silva puts it when quoting from James Baldwin, “If I am not what I’ve been told I am, then it means that *you’re* not what you thought you were *either!*”¹⁷ In other respects, the colonizers haven’t benefited from the distorted view of themselves constructed from a history told from only one side. Understanding the true history of a place presents a broader perspective from which to live from, especially when moving to Hawai’i because of its isolation and continuous fight for sovereignty as compared to the states within the contiguous US.

¹⁴ Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 1.

¹⁵ Silva, 3.

¹⁶ Silva, 4.

¹⁷ Silva, 4.

For the last forty years, Kānaka and other scholars have worked to rewrite history to include an Indigenous version of the past. When tourists visit Hawai'i, they often don't crack the surface and learn about the history. It is easy to lay on the beach or go to a luau and hula show without connecting real authenticity and stories of the island to these things, never asking why a luau or why the hula? Many tourists don't visit Iolani Palace or realize that there was a Hawaiian a monarchy that ruled for 60 years, adopted European dress, and living styles and fought to keep their nation intact. This lack of curiosity about the history of a place is also true for transplants in Hawai'i from other places. My research elucidated for me the intelligent, planned, and purposeful process in which Kānaka monarchs worked to secure their island from being taken over. It also demonstrated to me the ways in which it was almost impossible for Kānaka to win over a power like the US, as disease killed the Hawaiians in enormous numbers and capitalism stripped the island nation of their way of life and set it up for take over from a hostile US.

The questions I wanted answered when I began researching the history were: What was the process by which Hawai'i became a "paradise" to the US and the world? What were the original intentions of the American government regarding Hawai'i? How far did this Hawaiian image travel beyond America? What has this paradise portrayal of Hawai'i done to the Indigenous population and the way the Hawaiian culture has traditionally lived in close connection with the environment that is also being destroyed? How did Kānaka resist?

Four-thousand years ago humans set out from Asia and across the Pacific in ocean vessels. Along with Hawai'i, they settled Aotearoa (New Zealand), Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Micronesia, Rapa Nui and more. The exploration of the ocean world continued and contact with Hawai'i and the other Pacific nations was ongoing. This history demonstrates how Kānaka were

actively moving about the world and exploring. Scholars think direct contact ceased in Hawai'i around 1300, perhaps because the people had established autonomy and self-reliance. Hawai'i is believed to have been out of contact with the outside world until Captain James Cook arrived in the late 1700s.¹⁸ It is not known why contact with the outside world ceased. Perspective, Chang explains is important to consider because it is where we see from. Hawaiians were looking out to the rest of the world from their islands. They weren't sheltered or "discovered," their songs and stories passed down for generations included knowledge of the wider world.

When Cook set foot on the islands, Kānaka had already developed complicated methods of farming that used the natural assets of the land called ahupua'a. This system was complex traversing the landscape from the mountains down to the sea. It provided the Hawaiians with everything they needed to live comfortably. Their farming and fishing practices were so advanced that they were afforded much leisure time to invent surfing and the hula.

Before the arrival of Captain Cook, Hawai'i's population was estimated to be 600,000 to one million. Captain Cook knew his men had venereal disease and yet journal entries show that Cook couldn't or didn't keep his men away from Hawaiian women. In his journals he commented about how upon arrival to the Hawaiian Islands there seemed to be no disease and the people were healthy. Upon his return almost a year later, he wrote that venereal disease had spread to every island. This was followed by cholera (1804), influenza (1820s), mumps (1839), measles and whooping cough (1848), smallpox (1853), and leprosy (1869).

In *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, Gananath Obeyesekere refutes the myth that Cook was considered a god to Kānaka Maoli and was there to

¹⁸Chang, *The World and All the Things Upon it*, 4.

domesticate the “savage.” Obeyesekere argues that little analytic attention has been paid to the enduring myth that “Cook is the civilizer, bringing a new vision of the world to the savage lands of the South Seas.”¹⁹ Each of Cook’s ships carried English plants and domesticated animals that were released without Indigenous knowledge, essentially for their own good to help them find their way away from savagery.²⁰ For Hawaiians who lived with a sophisticated system of farming and irrigation, these plants and animals wreaked havoc on the endemic plants and native birds. A memorial statue erected at Kealahou Bay in remembrance of Cook provides additional insight to the precedence of European culture over Hawaiian culture. It is a 27-foot white obelisk marking where Cook died. Ironically behind it are the ruins of the ancient Hawaiian village Kaawaloa without a memorial marking this site.

Noenoe Silva sees resistance to colonialization in every facet of the way she reads history including the depiction of Captain Cook. Instead of looking to Western accounts of Cook’s landing, Silva looks at the first Hawaiian account written down in the mid 1800s from oral histories. She then connects this information to other oral chants to give a more nuanced version of Cook’s encounters with Kānaka. Silva writes that, “historiography is one of the most powerful discourses that justifies the continued occupation of Hawai’i by the United States today.”²¹ The final part of the Hawaiian depiction of Cook’s visit translates to “The fruits and seeds that his [Cook’s] actions planted sprouted and grew, and became trees that spread to devastate the people of these islands.”²² This included “1.Gonorrhoea together with syphilis/2.Prostitution/3.The false

¹⁹ Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 12.

²⁰ Obeyesekere, 12.

²¹ Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 9.

²² Silva, 22.

idea that he was a god and worshipped./4.Fleas and mosquitoes./5.The spread of epidemic diseases./6.Change in the air we breathe./7.Weakening of our bodies./8.Changes in plant life.”²³ Silva’s reading of a Hawaiian source dismissed by Western academics researching Hawai’i, gives voice to Kānaka impressions of the encounter, which changes the perception of the incident.

Colonialism is insipid and worms its way into the ways of thinking and interpreting history that we don’t always question. Looking for missing stories is important to understand all voices. Chang retells Kānaka encounters with Cook from an Indigenous perspective by naming the Hawaiians who greeted Cook on Kaua`i and the Big Island. The story traditionally told, as taken from Cook’s journals, never mentions Kānaka by name. Chang writes, “Kānaka went into the world and actively engaged it.”²⁴ Chang argues that Kānaka didn’t wait for Cook’s crew to come to shore, instead they paddled out to greet the ship. Chang says that because Cook could only see Kānaka as nameless, faceless “Indians,”²⁵ history also saw Hawaiians this way. Chang contends that this set the precedent for other haole that followed because Cook “could not see the Kānaka at Kaua`i clearly, as Western fantasies of discovery and superiority obscured his vision.”²⁶ Chang presents a broader perspective to western knowledge of Kānaka Maoli and their history by bringing attention to the voices silenced by colonialism.

King Kamehameha I united the islands in 1795 and ruled until 1810. From this time through the next 100 years it is important to look at the ways in which Kānaka ruled and demonstrated their own autonomy through the adoption of western ways that sat beside their

²³ Silva, 22, 23.

²⁴ Chang, *The World and All the Things Upon it*, 26.

²⁵ Chang, 27.

²⁶ Chang, 27.

traditional culture. Kamehameha the first used western weapons, advisors, and fortresses to unite the islands. Without the unification, foreign interests had the potential of taking control of individual islands.²⁷ In 1802 Kamehameha built the Brick Palace in Lah‘āina, Maui. It was the first official royal residence. The first three Kamehameha’s ruled from there until 1845 when Kamehameha III moved the court to Honolulu.²⁸ This construction of a palace early in the 1800s gives a different perspective of an image of barbarian Kānaka living in shacks and adds legitimacy to the reign of Hawaiian royalty to the rest of the European and American worlds.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s Hawaiians began traveling the world, working on whaling and merchant ships that came to the islands. Lah‘āina, Hilo, and Honolulu were the major ports for whaling ships. By the late 1820s more than 150 whaling ships were stopping in Hawai‘i annually. Chang points out that “this global engagement is almost altogether missing as a theme in the historical literature of Kānaka Maoli.”²⁹ The Kānaka who explored the world also introduced Hawai‘i to the missionaries of New England. The first ship to carry missionaries to Hawai‘i arrived in 1820 and included seven white settler couples and three Hawaiians who were returning home. Most importantly to the Hawaiians, missionaries brought books and the printing press. Though this worked to colonize their language, the Hawaiians also used these to gain literacy to secure their kingdom from the many outside forces working against them.³⁰

²⁷ King Kamehameha, “The Hawaiian Islands,” accessed July 30, 2023, <https://www.gohawaii.com/culture/history/king-kamehameha>.

²⁸ Lah‘āina Historic District, *National Park Service*, accessed July 31, 2023, [https://www.nps.gov/places/lah‘āina-historic-district.htm](https://www.nps.gov/places/lah%27aina-historic-district.htm).

²⁹ Chang, *The World and All The Things Upon it*, x.

³⁰ Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 30, 31.

By the late 1830s, 90% of Hawaiians were literate. Chang describes how Kānaka people were educated and prolific writers, “by the late 1830s, most Kānaka adults were literate . . . they generated tens of thousands of texts (from letters to chants, from newspaper articles to books, from songs to broadsides) that allow us access to indigenous perspectives.”³¹ Instead of Kānaka being thought of as savage, they adopted European ideas because they were concerned with their place in the world with English, American and Russian forces trying to take over the islands. Kānaka aliʻi (or royalty) worked to educate themselves about the world outside of Hawaiʻi. They also educated their people, first adults and then the children. In 1840 a national school system for educating children was established. By 1842 there was a law requiring an elementary education in reading, writing, geography, and math to marry or hold high office.

According to Chang the education of children in Hawaiʻi was a Kānaka and haole project with both parties having different ideas of what this education looked like. Kānaka wanted education to “separate schools from church affiliation, promoting literacy in Hawaiian, and working to ensure that the common schools received adequate funding.”³² The goal was also to educate working-class Hawaiians and Asian children. Chang points out that haole goals for education were to focus on an industrial education, phasing out the Hawaiian language, “preparing Kānaka for subservient status in the sugar dominated economy.”³³ However, Hawaiians continued to educate on their own terms, focusing on the Hawaiian language taught by Kānaka teachers until the Hawaiian government was overthrown by white plantation owners and businessmen in 1893. By 1896 the Board of Education had outlawed the teaching of

³¹ Chang, *The World and All The Things Upon it*, ix.

³² Chang, 106.

³³ Chang 106.

Hawaiian in schools. In 1892 48% of teachers had been Kānaka and by 1899 there were only 24% Hawaiian teachers. Chang argues that this decline came at a time when Hawaiian children needed the support of Hawaiian leaders to help them through the occupation of America. The new books used were American-centric and racist.³⁴

Despite what white settler history initially conveyed, Kānaka were agents of their own change and worked to keep their autonomy. Chang writes that, Kānaka, “in the nineteenth century . . . placed themselves strategically in the understandings of global geography they created.”³⁵ This is apparent in the way that the Hawaiian nation engaged with other nations. Between 1826 until Queen Lili‘uokalani’s overthrow in 1893, the Hawaiian nation had various treaties and agreements with the US, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Tahiti, Denmark, England, Samoa, Germany, Russia, and Japan.

In 1824 King Kamehameha II and one of his five wives, Queen Kamamalu traveled to London to visit King George IV, who had sent King Kamehameha a schooner as a gift.³⁶ King Kamehameha II intended to ask King George to put the islands under his protection because Russians were trying form settlements there.³⁷ King Kamehameha also went to study the English constitution to get ideas for a Hawaiian constitution. Though the London press called the Hawaiian party “a bunch of savages,”³⁸ *The Times London* also wrote “It was impossible for any persons to be more tractable or adapt themselves with more good temper to the usages of this

³⁴ Chang, 154.

³⁵ Chang, vii.

³⁶ Shannon Selin, “When the King & Queen of the Sandwich Islands Visited England,” *Imagining the Bounds of History*, Last modified October 2018, <https://shannonselin.com/2017/04/king-queen-sandwich-islands-visited-england> .

³⁷ Selin.

³⁸ Selin.

country than the whole party.”³⁹ The press also questioned if the Hawaiians were really royalty as John Bull wrote in *The Times* “there is no King of the Sandwich Islands – it is a matter of history and matter of fact that ‘the islands are not united under one sovereign’ – this person is therefore a chief.”⁴⁰

King George never met with King Kamehameha II and within one month both he and Queen Kamamalu were dead from the measles. But while alive in London the Hawaiians couldn’t go anywhere without curious onlookers trying to peek inside their carriages and the hotel where they stayed. These early trips by Hawaiian royalty helped establish a perception of Hawaiians beyond their country. The Hawaiian Ali`i dressed liked European royalty, the only difference was their dark skin, something the Europeans couldn’t explain.

Hawaiians had many outside forces that were vying to claim the nation. Prior to 1839, Catholic priests landed in the islands and attempted to start a mission but were sent away by Calvinist advisors of the Ali`i. But by July 1839 the French had a sent a warship to Honolulu demanding that French priests could start a mission, that they’d be given land and that the government pay \$20,000 as a guarantee on the demands. The threat of war by the French was given if the demands were not met. Noenoe Silva writes that “This incident impressed on Kamehameha III and his advisers that Hawai’i was vulnerable to the ‘Great Powers. . . .”⁴¹ However, again in 1843 the British attempted to seize temporary occupation of Hawai’i. Once Hawai’i was reclaimed King Kamehameha III established the first national holiday of the Hawaiian Kingdom. Lā Ho‘iho‘i Ea (Restoration Day) marks the return of political power to the

³⁹ Selin.

⁴⁰ Selin.

⁴¹ Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 36.

government of King Kamehameha III. This holiday was celebrated annually with great pride throughout the 19th century.⁴² Sliva writes that Kamehameha III also declared the motto of the kingdom, “‘Ua mau ke ea o ka ‘āina k pono’ (roughly, ‘The sovereignty of the land has been continued because it is pono’).”⁴³ Pono means balance or could also be translated to meaning “justice . . . or what is good or beneficial for the people.”⁴⁴

These incidences emphasized how important it was that Hawai‘i be recognized as a nation by European countries and the US. King Kamehameha’s advisors set sail for Europe and America to secure recognition of Hawai‘i’s independence.⁴⁵ They received a verbal agreement from President John Tyler to respect Hawai‘i’s independence. They then went to Europe where they negotiated with France and England. On November 28, 1943, France and England signed a joint proclamation recognizing Hawai‘i as an independent nation and “a member of the family of nations.”⁴⁶

Because of the threats from other nations and claims that Kānaka were uncivilized, by 1852 Kānaka had adopted a constitution fashioned from European and American laws. They did this to preserve sovereignty and adopt western ways of governing. This was an act of resistance to colonization.

Christine Bacchilega in her book *Legendary Hawai‘i and the Politics of Place*, argues that Kānaka abandoned some of their ways and embraced a Christian religion because of disease.

⁴²Welo Ka Hae Hawai‘i – Celebrating La Ho‘iho‘i Ea, *Bishop Museum*, last modified July 31, 2023, <https://www.bishopmuseum.org/calendar/welo-ka-hae-hawai%ca%bbi-celebrating-la-ho%ca%bbiho%ca%bbi-ea/>.

⁴³ Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 37.

⁴⁴ Silva, 37.

⁴⁵ Silva, 35, 36.

⁴⁶ Silva, 37.

From Captain Cook's first arrival in 1776 to 1800 the Hawaiian population went from one million to 50,000.⁴⁷ But David Chang argues that Kānaka were not so eager to embrace the Christian religion, initially. For example, Chang writes that when Christian missionaries arrived in the 1820s, the religion didn't appeal to many Hawaiians. But when Tahitian missionaries arrived a couple of years later, Christianity began to spread. Chang claims that Tahitians demonstrated how they'd learned to read and thus learned more about the world around them through literacy. Chang writes, "Kānaka Maoli engaged Christianity sincerely, but strategically with their eyes wide open."⁴⁸

Eventually Kānaka embraced the religion of the missionaries and worked to become more like the powers that were infringing upon their islands in order to keep their nation under Hawaiian rule. It seems it would be harder for white people to call Kānaka savages when they dressed just like American and Europeans. The kings and queens lived in a palace, not in thatched huts or teepees. When the dowager Queen Emma traveled through Washington, DC on her way home from Europe, Jodi Byrd writes that President Grover Cleveland told her, "you will have none but Queens to associate with."⁴⁹ Kānaka Ali'i purposely used European ways as an act of resistance, to make it harder for their nation to be conquered by an outside force. In 1882 King Kalakaua completed the Iolani Palace, which still stands today as a museum. It is the only royal palace in the US. Kalakaua wanted it to rival the palaces he saw when visiting Europe.

⁴⁷ Cristina Bacchilega, *Legendary Hawai'i and the Politics of Place: Tradition, Translation, and Tourism*, (Philadelphia, PN: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 2011), 5.

⁴⁸ Chang, *The World and All the Things Upon it*, vii.

⁴⁹ Byrd, *The Transit of Empire : Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, 180.

It was furnished with the finest furniture, portraits of Hawaiian royalty along with flush toilets, a phone that connected the rooms of the palace and even had electricity before the White House.

The Great (Overthrow of the Land) Mahele

Despite the efforts of the Hawaiian ruling class, disease continued to kill Hawaiians. Patrick Wolfe writes, “So far as Indigenous people are concerned, where they are is who they are . . . As Deborah Bird Rose has pointed out, to get in the way of settler colonization, all the native has to do is stay at home.”⁵⁰ This means that Indigenous people will die. It is not an event that happens, but rather a slow process in which one day all Indigenous people will be gone.

The Great Mahele was the change of land tenure moving from public to private property. Jonathan Osorio calls this, “The single most critical dismemberment of Hawaiian society.”⁵¹ Before the Mahele the land was owned by the Ali`i or rulers in a reciprocal relationship with the people. The people farmed the land and provided for the Ali`i and the Ali`i took care of the people. The Mahele introduced the western concept of land ownership to Hawaiians, and it also meant that foreigners could own land. One problem was that the Kānaka people didn’t show up to claim their land because private ownership wasn’t a well-known concept. Osorio writes, “All and all, Maka’āinana (the people) secured 28,658 acres under this legislation, leaving the king, government, a few chiefs, and a growing number of capitalized haole with most of the land.”⁵² Osorio explains that the original purpose of the Mahele was to address the collapse of the

⁵⁰ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.

⁵¹ Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo’ole Osorio, *Disremembering Lahui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 44.

⁵² Osorio, 46.

traditional land tenure system due to “the great dying off of Hawaiians.”⁵³ This was due to the repeating epidemics and low birth rates.

Around this time Hawaiian royalty were dealing with the devastating effects that came from western diseases. King Kamehameha III established the first Board of Health before England, or even the US even had a board of health. In 1859 Queen Emma and King Kamehameha the IV established Queen’s Hospital which provided free health care for Kānaka. However, sickness kept killing Kānaka. Because of their great concern for the health of their people in 1869 King Kamehameha V established a quarantine station on an island off Honolulu. Despite their efforts by 1870 Kānaka Maoli population estimates were as low as 50,000.

When Mark Twain visited in 1866, he also wrote about the population decline and how Hawaiian lands were being passed to white people after the Mahele. When talking about the Kānaka population decline because of exposure to Westerners he said, “Forty years ago they were reduced to 200,000, and the educational and civilizing facilities being increased they dwindled down to 55,000, and it is proposed to send a few more missionaries and finish them off.”⁵⁴ He also noticed that missionaries were buying up Kānaka land and then reselling it, making a hefty profit. He wrote, “the best of the lands on all the Islands appear to be fast going into foreign hands.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Osorio, 47.

⁵⁴ Mark Twain and A. Grove (Arthur Grove) Day. *Mark Twain’s Letters from Hawai ‘i*, (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1978) 1.

⁵⁵ Twain, 211.

Early Reflections of Hawai'i in the US Popular Imagination as a Place to Lose Oneself

William Ellis, 1826

Fantasies about Hawai'i were evident in many early written records of the Islands.

William Ellis was a missionary who lived in Hawai'i in 1823. Ellis published a book in 1826 called, *A Narrative of a Tour Through Hawaii, Or Owhyhee: With Remarks On the History, Traditions, Manners, Customs, And Language of the Inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands*. In the book, Ellis catalogues the plants, the people, customs and makes suggestions of things he believes white people can do with the “Large tracts of fertile land (that) lie waste in most of the island.”⁵⁶ In a section titled *Commercial Advantages of Hawai'i* he writes that sugar cane, cotton and coffee “might be easily raised in considerable quantities . . . when the natives become more industrious and civilized.”⁵⁷ This statement demonstrates a complete disconnection between Ellis and the Kānaka way of life. Ellis was single-minded wanting only for Kānaka to become more like Americans instead of taking the time to understand the intricate way Hawaiians farmed the land and the sea that was sustainable and left Kānaka a lot of leisure time.

The book also includes logs from Captain Cook's expeditions in 1778 with portrayals of Hawai'i that sound like they come from guidebooks or tourist brochures today. Ellis writes that Captain Cook's descriptions were “enchanting”⁵⁸ fueling readers to believe Cook had found “a sort of elysium, where the highly favored inhabitants, free from the toil and care, the want

⁵⁶ William Ellis, *Journal of William Ellis. Narrative of a Tour of Hawaii, or Owhyhee; with Remarks on the History, Traditions, Manners, Customs and Language of the Inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands*, (Honolulu: Advertiser Publishing Co. Ltd., 1963), 34.

⁵⁷ Ellis, 34.

⁵⁸ Ellis, 34.

disappointment, which mar the happiness of civilized communities, dwelt in what they called a state of nature, and spent their lives in unrestrained gratification and enjoyment.”⁵⁹ Already in the late 1700s Captain Cook positioned Hawai‘i as a place to forget your woes, to lose yourself, to emulate another culture. Ellis’ book is available on Amazon today and has been reprinted many times. It was also included in the Hawaiian Exhibit at the 1889 World’s Fair in Paris.

Christina Bacchilega, *Legendary Hawai‘i and the Politics of Place*

Christina Bacchilega offers visibility and awareness to the issues of Indigenous Hawaiian historical misrepresentation in her book *Legendary Hawai‘i and the Politics of Place: Tradition, Translation, Tourism*. By engaging with “lost” Hawaiian language documents, Bacchilega asserts that in the mid 1800s Hawaiian stories were being taken and repacked for consumers outside Hawai‘i and “a *legendary Hawai‘i* was being produced for . . . prospective tourists and settlers.”⁶⁰ By presenting a mythical place, westerners were appealing to white people on the continental US, trying to convince them that this new territory of Hawai‘i was for them. Bacchilega’s work points out an important fact about the way places are portrayed without Indigenous perspective. By analyzing seemingly harmless posters, books, and advertisements, Bacchilega illuminates a “rupture”⁶¹ that happens when a people’s own stories are taken and repackaged from a white perspective to sell the islands. Bacchilega says that this rupture hurts Indigenous people because, “it others them; at times it violently seeks to erase them; but even in

⁵⁹ Ellis, 19.

⁶⁰ Bacchilega, *Legendary Hawai‘i and the Politics of Place*, 62.

⁶¹ Bacchilega, 2.

doing so it represents them.”⁶² This paradox negates a culture while at the same time selling the traditions, ideas and stories without permission. Bacchilega quotes from an early Kānaka Maoli Resistance to Annexation document that states, ““We have been ousted by trespassers who entered our house and who are telling us to go and live in a lei stand.””⁶³ This is like the symbol of the dashboard hula girl, taking an image of a culture and freezing it in time, not allowing any human characteristics or voices to be heard.

Christine Bacchilega’s scholarship also brings awareness to the message Hawaiians wanted the world to know about their nation. She argues that King Kalakaua was concerned with “reviving Hawaiian culture and securing his kingdom its rightful and respected place among other sovereign nations.”⁶⁴ Kalakaua published *Legends and Myths of Hawai‘i : The Fables and Folk-Lore of a Strange People* in 1888. Early missionaries had worked to eliminate Hawaiian traditions like the hula and surfing. King Kalakaua, witnessing his people’s customs dying, began to revive traditions like the hula because he “recognized the nation-building power of tradition and ‘folklore,’” that would “protect to keep Hawai‘i for Hawaiians.”⁶⁵ Bacchilega argues that “Kalakaua saw the political currency of divulging the *mo‘olelo* (stories) of Hawai‘i beyond the shores of his kingdom.”⁶⁶ However many Americans dismissed “Kalakaua’s authorship” of this book and instead gave the credit to his white editor. Already King Kalakaua and other Hawaiians were witnessing how their culture and land was being taken and then misconstrued by the colonialists, and they worked to change that perception and to give themselves agency.

⁶² Bacchilega, 2.

⁶³ Bacchilega, 2.

⁶⁴ Bacchilega, 64.

⁶⁵ Bacchilega, 64.

⁶⁶ Bacchilega, 64.

In direct conflict with Kalakaua's portrayal of Hawai'i to the public Bacchilega argues the magazine *The Paradise of the Pacific* worked to represent tourist interests and dismiss Hawaiian interests. The first issue was published in January 1888. By 1900 (just two years after annexation) the magazine had a circulation of 5,000 copies and "only 500 subscribers lived in the Islands."⁶⁷ The magazine advertised Hawai'i as "Americanized" and that the "gentle natives have dwindled in numbers from 100,000 to 30,000 to 8,000 part-whites."⁶⁸ What a great place to visit, the magazine articulated, where one can happily dwell with other white people and not feel afraid of savages because they've all been killed off. Instead, the magazine promoted "soft-primitivism" with "stories of 'superstitious natives'" that offered an entertaining but safe glimpse into the fascinating 'strangeness' of Hawai'i."⁶⁹ This same idea of Hawai'i being a "safe" place to experience the exotic is still prevalent today.

Mark Twain

Mark Twain was another writer who helped construct a vision of Hawai'i as a utopia. In 1866, Twain was hired to report from Hawai'i by the *Sacramento Union* newspaper to promote travel to the islands and to increase interest in Hawai'i's sugarcane industry. Though Twain became close with Princess Kaiulani and grew to understand the plight of Hawaiians, his letters from Hawai'i and subsequent tour contributed to the vision of Hawai'i as an exotic paradise. After Twain's four months in Hawai'i he returned to California and began to promote the islands

⁶⁷ Bacchilega, 68.

⁶⁸ Bacchilega, 68.

⁶⁹ Bacchilega, 69.

through his stories. He called his lecture series “Our Fellow Savages of the Sandwich Islands.”⁷⁰ Twain arrived in Hawai’i on March 18, 1866, by the steamer *Ajax* and promptly fell in love with the islands. In *Mark Twain’s Letters from Hawai’i* the editor, A. Grove Day, who compiled the letters into a book, says that Twain’s time in Hawai’i is what “gave him a start on a new and lucrative profession – that of lecturer; and provided material for a series of popular travel accounts.”⁷¹ The most famous Twain quote associated with Hawai’i is the “characterization of the future Aloha State as ‘the loveliest fleet of islands that lies anchored in any ocean.’”⁷²

In Twain’s lecture series he framed Hawai’i as a place to lose yourself. He called it “Sunday land.”⁷³ He described it as “dreamy, beautiful, charming, fairy-like.”⁷⁴ He called the people “a gentle, indolent, careless race.”⁷⁵ And like Cook he also thought it was a place one could go to forget about their worries writing, “The land of indolence and dreams, where the air is drowsy and things tend to repose and peace, and to emancipation from the labor, and turmoil, and weariness, and anxiety of life.”⁷⁶

Twain spent four months in Hawai’i and then he spent the rest of his life trying to return there. In 1895, almost 30 years after his initial visit, he sat on the deck of the *Warrimo* at the mouth of the Honolulu Harbor as his dreams of visiting Hawai’i were ruined because of a cholera outbreak that closed the harbor. He could only look at the islands. In a letter late in his life Twain wrote, “What I have always longed for was the privilege of living forever away up on one of

⁷⁰ Twain and Day, *Letters From Hawai’i*, xiii.

⁷¹ Twain, xi.

⁷² Twain, vi.

⁷³ Twain, 35.

⁷⁴ Twain, 71.

⁷⁵ Twain, 71.

⁷⁶ Twain, 40.

those mountains in the Sandwich Islands overlooking the sea.”⁷⁷ Day writes that Twain was the “patron of those who want to unwind and to enjoy the simple art of living,”⁷⁸ calling him “the prototype of the beachcomber, the dropout.”⁷⁹ Twain paved the way for the idea that being in Hawai’i would somehow heal all that was so hard about living on the continental US, a theme repeated many times throughout the decades.

Amy Kaplan describes Twain as one of Hawai’i’s first travel writers. Kaplan says that Twain demonstrated an “imperialist nostalgia” for Hawai’i, as defined by Renato Rosaldo. Twain expressed a “longing to salvage an imagined pristine pre-colonial culture by the same agents of empire –missionaries, anthropologists, travel writers – who have had a hand in destroying it.”⁸⁰ Imperialist nostalgia can be defined as the inability for Twain to see how he was complicit in empire by promoting his idea of Hawai’i as a kind of nirvana. Kaplan’s reading of Mark Twain’s time in Hawaii presents a broader perspective to the influence Hawai’i had on Twain’s development as a cultural critic. Kaplan argues that Twain could only have written *Huckleberry Finn* after visiting and writing about Hawai’i (as well as Europe and the near East and that “Hawai’I in fact Americanized Mark Twain.”⁸¹ This experience enabled Twain to view the imperialist actions of the US in Hawai’i as an outsider and then to view the southern slavery structure he grew up with from a new perspective.⁸²

⁷⁷ Twain, 13.

⁷⁸ Twain, xvi.

⁷⁹ Twain, xvi.

⁸⁰ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire In the Making of US Culture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 52.

⁸¹ Kaplan, 56.

⁸² Kaplan, 52.

By looking at Twain, one of America's most beloved white, male writers, in the context of Hawai'i, Kaplan demonstrates "how the anarchy of empire created an American Mark Twain."⁸³ Kaplan contends Twain's Hawai'i letters "reveal conflicts between the colonial preconceptions he brought with him to Hawai'i and the tumultuous social changes he found there."⁸⁴ Being away from his home and an observer of the imperial framework of Hawai'i, allowed Twain to find "uncanny parallels to slavery at home"⁸⁵ that he engaged with in *Huckleberry Finn* years later. Twain's talks about Hawai'i ridiculed what the missionaries were doing to Hawai'i. Kaplan explains, that in Hawai'i, "Twain honed the lenses – blind spots – that he later turned on the legacy of slavery and race relations within the United States."⁸⁶ But Twain also added to the allure of Hawai'i with his own public yearning for and portrayal of the islands. He wrote "No alien land in all the world has any deep strong charm for me but that one, no other land could so longingly and so beseechingly haunt me sleeping and waking, through half a lifetime, as that one has done."⁸⁷

Kānaka Agency and World's Fairs

When looking at the spread of Hawaiian culture and images throughout the world through the lenses of World's Fairs, it was evident there was a divide in Hawaiians promoting their culture and then white businessmen promoting Hawaiian culture. Hawai'i at World's Fairs is represented by the Hawaiian monarchy in the 1883 Foreign Exhibition. King Kalakaua and

⁸³ Kaplan, 52.

⁸⁴ Kaplan, 19.

⁸⁵ Kaplan, 19.

⁸⁶ Kaplan, 52.

⁸⁷ Twain, *Letters From Hawai'i*, xiv.

Queen Kapiolani are both listed as exhibitors in the program displaying things like koa wood, “ladies’ hats and fans, made by native girls, from the fibre of sugarcane and squash-plants, ‘hapa’ or native cloth, stone poulder in making ‘hapa’ or native cloth, woods and barks used as drugs.”⁸⁸ The items described are more congruent with tools and plants Kānaka had used for centuries representing the image Kānaka wanted the world to know about their culture.

At the World’s Exhibition in New Orleans in 1884, Hawai’i’s exhibit also includes many items that represent Kānaka culture such as a wall Map of the Hawaiian Islands, three Kapas (bed quilts) made from the bark of the Wauke, wood samples from trees indigenous to Hawai’i like Ohia and Hau. There was also an explanation of the structure of the government with a monarch and legislature that meets twice a year. Other items included a listing of industry and jobs available and samples of schoolbooks.

Six years later at the 1889 World’s Fair in Paris the Hawaiian Exhibit is a mix of Hawaiian items and colonial ideas of what Hawai’i could offer Americans. This World’s Fair still features Hawaiian royalty including King Kalakaua and Princess Lili‘uokalani (who later became queen) but there are also many American businessmen and white companies collaborating on the exhibits. Exhibitions listed in the program included examples of “sugarcane, coffee, taro, tobacco; books in English that included school books, bird books, song books (meles) translated from Hawaiian; books printed in Hawaiian that included many editions of Bibles, maps by government surveys; school exhibits from elementary, high schools and colleges and newspapers from the Board of Education; and paintings in oil, paintings in watercolors,

⁸⁸ American Exhibition of Foreign Products, Arts and Manufactures, *Official Catalogue, Foreign Exhibition, Boston, 1883: Compiled by C. B. Norton*, published by George Coolidge, 1883, *Smithsonian Collections Online*, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://link-gale.com> .

photographs, drawings and specimens of lava and coral sandstone.”⁸⁹ Because this date is only four years before the overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani, I can see a difference in these records with more white settlers and their interests represented.

After the overthrow it seems only white businessmen from Hawai‘i are listed in World Fair’s brochures. At the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis there is an entire Hawai‘i building in the shape of a cross. The publicity around it in a February 1903 World’s Fair Bulletin article titled “Hawai‘i is Coming” features pictures of five white businessmen who are all on the board of the Exposition Association of Hawai‘i. The article states that Hawaiian representation at previous World’s Fairs was “never adequate” but now that will change with “Hawaiians capable of appreciating their possibilities” and that “sugar cane planters of Hawai‘i are very enthusiastic about the Exposition.”⁹⁰ In the article it is clear that the “Hawaiian” businessmen are positioning Hawai‘i as a tourist destination and using the World’s Fair as their vehicle touting “the immense increase of great steamship lines” and “a climate making it all the year round health resort for those who would escape both the heat of the summer and the cold of winter.”⁹¹ They go on to write that “In the eight large islands the tourist experiences the most wonderful transformations of scenery.”⁹² They also promote the availability of cheap land, saying that the “natural resources

⁸⁹ John A. Hassinger, Exposition Universelle de 1889, *Catalogue of the Hawaiian Exhibits at the Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1889: Prepared for the Hawaiian Government by John A. Hassinger*, Hawaiian Gazette Company, 1889, *Smithsonian Collections Online*, https://link.galecom.proxybz.lib.montana.edu/apps/doc/AGYBZM544914626/SMIT?u=mtlib_1_112&sid=SMIT&xid=cf25c8d1.

⁹⁰ “Hawaii Is Coming,” *World's Fair Bulletin*, February 1903, *Smithsonian Collections Online*, <https://link-gale.com>, accessed May 3, 2020, 4.

⁹¹ “Hawai‘i Is Coming,” 4.

⁹² “Hawai‘i Is Coming,” 4.

of the islands would richly reward the industry of millions of people.”⁹³ Like the West before it, this statement appears to be encouraging white settlers to come to Hawai‘i to live, implying that white people would be more industrious than Kānaka. In a little more than ten years, Hawaiians seemed to be replaced in the World’s Fair arena with white businessmen demonstrating how to correctly promote Hawai‘i and selling it to US citizens.

Hawai‘i’s section in the Alaska/Yukon Pacific Exposition in 1909 was supplemented by funds from the Pineapple Growers’ Association. This exhibit appeared even more elaborate with the Hawai‘i Building entrance showing “a relief map of the islands set in a 50-foot tank of ‘real water.’”⁹⁴ The exhibit featured a “model in brown sugar of the palace of Hawai‘i’s pre-annexation royalty.” The irony of this is the way the exhibitors display Iolani Palace as just something of the past now modeled in sugar, an industry that Kānaka Ali‘i didn’t support and also the motivation for the overthrow of the Hawaiian nation so the sugarcane planters could control the government and make more money. Iolani Palace was also where Queen Liliu‘okalani was imprisoned while white settlers took over the nation.

At the exposition Hawaiian music which was touted as “one of the most popular attractions... ‘the amiability of the singers in courteously acceding to frequent requests.’”⁹⁵ Hawaiians were there to perform their music for others – cheerfully and willingly. Kānaka were on display, portrayed as a happy people who enthusiastically accepted the overthrow of their country and now available to play their dirges for the white fairgoers.

⁹³ “Hawai‘i Is Coming,” 4.

⁹⁴ *When The World Came to Campus*, University of Washington Digital Collections, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.content.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/aype/alaska.html>.

⁹⁵ “When the World Came to Campus,” 1.

The article describes an evening where Hawaiians sing “Aloha ‘Oe” a song they call a Hawaiian dirge, as if it is just some quaint song made up by these happy people. In fact the song was written by Queen Lili‘uokalani who was a prolific song writer and accomplished musician trained to play the guitar, piano, organ, autoharp, and zither.⁹⁶ “Aloha ‘Oe” was originally a love song and is translated as “Farewell to Thee.” As many of Lili‘uokalani’s songs, this instead became a protest song. It was a love song from the Queen to her people as their nation was taken from them. She wrote the words and music down on a piece of paper while imprisoned and snuck them out through one of her attendants. Lili‘uokalani writes in her biography that three songs, “found their way from my prison to the city of Chicago, where they were printed, among them the ‘Aloha‘Oe’ or ‘Farewell to Thee’”⁹⁷ However, instead the song was already being coopted by white settlers and instead presented as a love song sung by Kānaka sitting in boats and canoes in a manmade pool at the Exposition. The coverage explains that “The Moon light’s song & crowd made a delightful evening.”⁹⁸

In her analysis of the legacy of the song, Evelyn Chow writes, that “Indeed, the whitewashing of “Aloha ‘Oe” and its narrative perpetuates racial erasure and US imperialism to this day.”⁹⁹ Perhaps none of the exhibition attendees and the organizers realized the significance of the song, but certainly the Kānaka singing it did, effecting resistance to colonial forces even in

⁹⁶ Jane Recker, “How the Music of Hawai‘i’s Last Ruler Guided the Island’s People Through Crisis,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, (March 26, 2019), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-music-hawaiis-last-ruler-guided-islands-people-through-crisis-180971783/>.

⁹⁷ Queen Liliuokalani, *Hawai‘i’s Story by Hawai‘i’s Queen*, (Honolulu: Liliuokalani, 1898), 46.

⁹⁸ “When the World Came to Campus,” 1.

⁹⁹ Evelyn Chow, "The Sovereign Nation of Hawai‘i: Resistance in the Legacy of ‘Aloha 'Oe’," *Seattle University Undergraduate Research Journal* 2, Article 15 (2018): 110, accessed September 13, 2023, <https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/suurj/vol2/iss1/15>.

the guise of an exhibit executed by white businessmen who now ruled Hawai'i. Though the idea of how Hawai'i was portrayed to audiences on the continent was out of the hands of Kānaka, opposition was still evident if you knew where to look.

1900 Myths & Legends of our New Possessions & Protectorates

The idea of Hawai'i as a place in the settler imagination instead of a “real” place with problems and people who were exploited by the US government and tourist industry continued to be perpetuated by white settler versions of life there. Bacchilega traces this image back in history to a book written by Charles Montgomery Skinner called *Myths & Legends of our New Possessions & Protectorate* published in 1900.¹⁰⁰ Bacchilega explains this book came out of a bigger “‘*New Possessions*’ volume” that Skinner wrote covering America’s recently obtained territories including “Cuba, ‘Porto Rico,’ and Hawai'i and the Philippines.”¹⁰¹ Skinner draws from ancient Hawaiian myths and couples them with European myths calling them things like, “‘The Hawaiian Iliad,’ ‘The Hawaiian Orpheus and Eurydice.’”¹⁰² Bacchilega says this was done to “assert universality and brotherhood”¹⁰³ between Americans and their new conquests.

Skinner framed Hawai'i as a place to lose oneself in the imagination of the past. “‘It cannot hurt us to live in a fairy age a little longer,’ Skinner nostalgically pleads, ‘to keep away from the screech of trains, the jar of factories.’”¹⁰⁴ It’s useful to think about this idea of the paradisaical past to examine how Hawai'i has always already been portrayed as a place to use for

¹⁰⁰ Bacchilega, *Legendary Hawai'i and the Politics of Place*, 62.

¹⁰¹ Bacchilega, 62.

¹⁰² Bacchilega, 63.

¹⁰³ Bacchilega, 63.

¹⁰⁴ Bacchilega, 62.

Americans to return to some “fairy age.” Simply referring to fairies along with myths infantilizes Hawai’i while also making it a blank slate in which a person can imagine a life without the rigors and distractions of modernity.

1902 Hawai’i Tourism Inception

The cultural representation and commercialization of Hawai’i as “paradise” is something that’s been carefully curated and crafted to position this small state in the middle of the Pacific Ocean as a culture to co-opt and a place to escape. Early Kānaka ali’i (or royalty) attempted to steer their own destiny for their nation by traveling throughout Europe, participating in World’s Fairs, and educating their subjects and children in English. In American Studies cultural representations matter because they change perceptions and knowledge without consent. The cultural representation of Hawai’i matters when it has been ultimately spread and changed without Kānaka permissions or accurate representations.

The formal idea of promoting Hawai’i to visitors by white settlers in Hawai’i dates to 1902 when W.H. Weedon convinced some Hawai’i businessmen to pay him to travel around the continental United States to promote Hawai’i as a destination through telling stories and showing pictures. In 1902 Hawai’i had 2000 tourist visit the islands. Weedon spoke to packed houses on the West Coast. “At every point I go, I find people ready and eager to learn more about Hawai’i.”¹⁰⁵ He needed more information to leave with people, so the bureau began to make

¹⁰⁵ “History,” *Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau*, accessed April 10, 2020, <http://www.hvcb.org/corporate/history.htm> .

Hawai'i tourist brochures to promote "the advantages of our islands for rest and pleasure seekers."¹⁰⁶

Hula: Cultural or Commercial?

Hula troupes began to travel throughout the US and Europe in the late 1800s, peaking in the late 1950s. Hula has been synonymous with Hawai'i to American audiences. However, the commercialism that came from America has stripped white settler understanding of the hula from what it really is. In Jasmin Iolani Hakes' fictional book *Hula* she says this about the ancient dance:

Learning hula was studying a new language and a new way of moving, but it was also learning about the "āina, about the environment and the relationship of the elements, about how to treat the planet and how to appreciate the forces at work. Hula was a way of seeing the world . . . You became it."¹⁰⁷

There is a car parked in front of my house displaying a plastic hula dancer swaying on the dashboard. This symbol is synonymous with some version of Hawai'i was culturally presented and then not understood in the way it was intended. As the car moves, the female, sexualized hula dancer's hips sway from side to side. This figurine takes an ancient custom and cheapens it for all to stare at while driving in the cold, snow covered continental US and dreaming of a Hawaiian vacation far from the worries of everyday life.

In Adria L. Imada's book *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the US Empire*, she states, "Hawai'i has been personified through the figure of the female dancer during more than a

¹⁰⁶ "History," *Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau*.

¹⁰⁷ Jasmin Iolani Hakes, *Hula*, (Honolulu: Harper Via, 2023), 19.

century of American colonization.”¹⁰⁸ Imada describes that synonymous with the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy was the “commodification of the Hawaiian culture”¹⁰⁹ as hula tours became popular in the continental US and beyond from the “late nineteenth century and peaking in the late 1950s.”¹¹⁰ These hula circuits clearly solidified the fantasy of Hawai’i in the minds of Americans and Europeans.

Imada says that “the ‘hula girl,’ the ‘luau,’ and ‘aloha’ became a part of the everyday American vernacular.”¹¹¹ Hula dancers were, in a sense, ambassadors reaching beyond the islands to introduce Americans to this new colony that the US claimed; a place that did not include many white people and their customs. This exoticized version of Hawai’i began to work its way into the white imagination by introducing Hawai’i as a place where brown women swayed their hips and wore clothing that exposed their skin. The original missionaries who came to Hawai’i in the 1820’s shamed hula practitioners for what they perceived was the dance’s sexualized nature. It wasn’t until King David Kalakaua’s reign in 1874 that many Hawaiian culture practices, like the hula, were revived.¹¹² King Kalakaua wrote, “Hula is the language of the Heart. Therefore the Heartbeat of Hawaiian People.”¹¹³ Having the missionaries disparage the hula as shameful demonstrated a lack of vision and understanding about the ancient custom. To instead look at something sacred to Kānaka and label sinful shows a complete disconnect between the two cultures. The hubris of these first settlers is apparent.

¹⁰⁸ Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the US Empire*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 4.

¹⁰⁹ Imada, 5.

¹¹⁰ Imada, 5.

¹¹¹ Imada, 5.

¹¹² Imada, 29.

¹¹³ Hakes, *Hula*, 1.

My encounters with hula began in elementary school where we were taught Westernized versions of the hula and we'd perform them for our parents on holidays. After high school, I worked one summer as a tour guide at Waimea Valley. Once home to thousands of Kānaka Maoli, by the late 1800s the land was sold because of debt. Pieces were auctioned off. Eventually Castle & Cook pineapple and sugar company gained control of the land. By the time I lived there it was a tourist attraction called Waimea Falls Park. Hundreds of buses a day brought tourists to the valley so they could see Hawaiian history reenacted from the comfort of shuttles with tour guides that narrated the story in 15-minute snippets. In a big meadow, hula dancers performed at 10 am, noon, 2 pm and 4 pm. At the end of the trail, cliff divers dove from a waterfall in some Hawaiian cliff diving ritual. Kānaka Maoli shared ancient basket weaving practices and tours of old village ruins. All the while you could hear the peacocks' may-awe call echoing through the valley from the giant monkey pod trees that surrounded the gift shop, snack bar and restaurant. Though peacocks were originally from India and monkey pod trees from Mexico, both being introduced to Hawai'i in the mid 1800s. So much of Hawai'i is from somewhere else.

Imada refers to the kind of hula on display at Waimea Falls Park, at hotel luaus, and even during the hula circuits as "tourist hula or hapa haole hula (part foreign)."¹¹⁴ She writes that there isn't much history about this kind of hula because "it was seen as tainted by tourist markets and removed from Native self-determination and nationalist causes."¹¹⁵ This gap in the research is interesting because it demonstrates how hula was "hypervisible in popular culture"¹¹⁶ but invisible in the archives. It didn't give names or faces to the woman who performed. As a result,

¹¹⁴ Imada, *Aloha America*, 20.

¹¹⁵ Imada, 20.

¹¹⁶ Imada, 21.

Imada looked for sources by examining “low-ranking knowledge” that included “women, whose lives have been particularly illegible in colonial repositories and have seemed marginal to the practice of history.”¹¹⁷ A lot of Kānaka history is being excavated in this way to change the story of a sacred practice like the hula.

Tourism in Hawai’i During Covid 19 Pandemic

During the global pandemic, Hawai’i tourism came to a screeching halt. Webcams of Waikīkī Beach, Ala Moana Shopping Center and Hanauma Bay showed cement structures standing stoically with no hordes of people coming and going. These views were juxtaposed with the ocean lapping or crashing onto the shore, depending on the swells and the wind.

Any tourists that arrived in Hawai’i were encouraged to get on the next plane and leave. For a state that saw well over ten million visitors in 2019 alone, this was a huge shift. Though this lack of tourism was a huge economic burden for Hawai’i, many in the state had been trying to manage the fact that, for a long time, Hawai’i has been overrun by visitors. The islands are small. Reefs, fish, and eco-systems are fragile. Native Hawaiians continue to protest the exploitation of their culture.

An example of rethinking tourism came from one of the biggest promoters of surf contests to the North Shore in the 1970s until today, Triple Crown of Surfing promoter Randy Rarick. In 1970s Rarick introduced the professional surfing circuit to Hawai’i by incorporating contests on the North Shore of O’ahu to the tour. Rarick ended up in a violent fight with Kānaka

¹¹⁷ Imada, 22.

who resisted the contests because of what it would do to the North Shore and the surf breaks they frequented.

As the COVID-19 crisis unfolded many Hawai'i residents had time and space without visitors in their state to ask questions about tourism. Randy Rarick was one of those people. An article in the April 26, 2020, *Honolulu Star Advertiser* titled "COVID-19 Pause Gives Hawai'i Chance to Restore Tourism Balance" discussed limiting the number of visitors to Hawai'i by going back to 1989 when there were 6.5 million visitors to the islands. Looking back on the impact of surfing contests on the North Shore, Rarick said that he and others should have seen the future impact of surfing and tourism would do to the islands. "For years and years, I've promoted the destination of the North Shore for people to come see the big surf . . . but that changed in the last five to eight years. The influx of tourists was overwhelming."¹¹⁸ Hawai'i will most likely always be considered a tropical paradise by many, but perhaps with questioning tourism and the appropriation of a culture, Hawai'i can find a more ecological approach to tourism that includes a realistic look at what has been done to the Hawaiian cultures and how some of that can be reclaimed.

Haunani-Kay Trask was at the forefront of fighting for fewer tourists in the 1980s. Trask was blunt and didn't skirt over the issues. Her message to tourists was, "If you are thinking of visiting my homeland, please do not. We do not want or need any more tourists."¹¹⁹ Trask blamed the tourist industry for "environmental degradation, low wages, land dispossession, and

¹¹⁸ Allison Schaefer, "Covid-19 pause gives Hawai'i a chance to recover tourism balance," *Honolulu Star Advertiser*, April 26, 2020, <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2020/04/26/hawaii-news/covid-19-pause-gives-hawaii-a-chance-to-restore-tourism-balance/> .

¹¹⁹ Trask, *From A Native Daughter*, 146.

the highest cost of living in the United States.”¹²⁰ She said that “the myth of happy Hawaiians waiting to share their culture with tourists was invented to lure visitors and to disparage Native resistance to the tourist industry.”¹²¹ Today there are over ten million visitors to Hawai’i per year. Though tourism means money and jobs, Trask challenged the industry by examining it within a framework which conveys the true violence tourism does to the Kānaka culture.

In 2018 business owners in Hawai’i began to receive cease and desist letters from a Chicago restaurant chain that trademarked the word “aloha” for its Aloha Poke Co. business. Hawai’i business owners and residents were up in arms. How dare a Chicago business stop Hawai’i businesses from using the word aloha in their company names. How dare a man who wasn’t even from Hawai’i, let alone Hawaiian, co-opt the Hawaiian word for keeps. Yet “aloha” is there to be used and even trademarked by some Chicago entrepreneur. The term that has been synonymous with Hawai’i forever has been commodified and just another example of the culture of Hawai’i being treated as a kind of fantasy on loan to all. Trask calls this “The cheapening of Hawaiian culture,” when, “the traditional value of aloha as reciprocal love and generosity (is) now used to sell everything from cars and plumbing to securities and air conditions.”¹²² Trask demonstrates how coopting a culture from a people is a violence. She calls it a “grotesque . . . theft of things Hawaiian.”¹²³ The word aloha and the concept of aloha is a fraught idea for Kānaka people since it’s been taken and used against them to position Hawaiians as a culture of people who are always happy to show love and allow others into their communities, no matter

¹²⁰ Trask, 144.

¹²¹ Trask, 42.

¹²² Trask, 3.

¹²³ Trask, 3.

who the others are – as long as they pay the correct fee or airline ticket or hotel tax. Trask argues, “Hawaiians exist in an occupied country whose hostage people are forced to witness (and, for many, to participate in) our own collective humiliation as tourist artifacts for the First World.”¹²⁴ This image is radical and yet correct. How does it feel for Kānaka to see themselves and their culture represented on posters and advertisements?

Scholars in the last thirty years have built on Trask’s ideas further challenging the visitor industry and asking for a different kind of Hawai’i in which indigenous people have a voice in the process. At the time, Trask’s ideas seemed radical, but today even the visitor industry questions how to limit the amount of people coming to the islands especially as residents feel the infiltration of tourists in their neighborhoods with the advent of Airbnb’s and people off-island investing in properties they rent out by the day, week, and month.

I can see the resistance of Hawaiians and the absolute futility of trying to fight against a force like the US. And yet, of course Kānaka and their allies must continue to resist. I write this and I think I didn’t belong in Hawai’i and yet there I was. Should we have ever moved Hawai’i? Was it what we thought it would be? Naka Nathaniel writes that Hawai’i is not a place “to retreat from the world. Hawai’i is the world, under duress from unfolding climate catastrophes and inequality in too many forms.”¹²⁵ The “deeper truths” about Hawai’i are hard and can’t be fixed in a day. It took 150 years to get us to this place and now we must try harder, not just expose injustices but remedy them.

¹²⁴ Trask, 17.

¹²⁵ Naka Nathaniel, “Here Are The Deeper Truths About Maui,” *Civil Beat News*, August 16, 2023, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2023/08/naka-nathaniel-here-are-the-deeper-truths-about-maui/>.

Today, Hawai'i represents many things to many people. To surfers it is the ultimate place to conquer the big waves. To tourists it is a chance to take off their shoes and walk their bare toes through the sand, imagining they are someone else – someone more carefree in a different, imagined life. For adventurers, Hawai'i is a place to hike, swim, snorkel. And the culture – the hula dancers, the flower leis at the airport, the coconut trees swaying in the wind, the perfect climate, the green and blue colors everywhere. These are all our fantasies of Hawai'i. How do Hawaiian people claim and correct the misconceptions about the Kānaka culture that includes decolonizing history to portray a more accurate version of Kānaka representation? Or as Silva asks, “How do a people come to know who they are? How do a colonized people recover from the violence done to their past by the linguicide that accompanies colonialism?”¹²⁶ Awareness is the first step to undoing the violence.

I don't have the answer, but when I search for how I can stand with Kānaka, I hope that this dissertation will elucidate ways I acknowledge my own responsibilities and how I strive to do better. To be an ally to Kānaka can mean to listen with empathy, to become aware of my implicit biases and the ways in which my privilege is part of a system of oppression, and to continue to educate myself by listening and learning from Indigenous people.¹²⁷ It also means that, as 'Imaikalani Kalāhele states on the Maunakea syllabus on allyship “If to help us is your wish then stand behind us. Not to the side and not in front.”¹²⁸ It can also mean that from afar, I can pass on the knowledge I've gained by talking about Hawai'i as well as teaching about it.

¹²⁶ Silva, *From a Native Daughter*, 3.

¹²⁷ “Anti-Oppression Resources: Allyship/Activism,” Windward Community College Library Research Guides, September 19, 2023, <https://library.wcc.hawaii.edu/anti-oppression/allyship> .

¹²⁸ 'Imaikalani Kalāhele, “Cultivating Allyship,” accessed October 29, 2023, <https://www.maunakeasyllabus.com/units/cultivating-solidarities/allyship> .

Lah‘āina Fires

As I write this, fires have decimated the westside of Maui. The town of Lah‘āina is gone, turned to ash. The death toll keeps rising – first 36, then 40, then 60, then 88, today 106. It’s been a week and only two names of victims have been released to the press. Identifying the bodies is painstaking because there is only ash. Officials work carefully not to disrupt the ash. A furious wind swept through Lah‘āina fueling the inferno caused by years of colonization.

Governor Josh Green said the Lah‘āina Fire was “likely the largest natural disaster in Hawai‘i’s state history.”¹²⁹ But a *New Yorker* writer asks, “Was it natural?”¹³⁰ Sugarcane eliminated the traditional system of farming that would have kept that side of the island wet. Sugarcane plantations drained the water because the crops are needy, like the destroyers of Hawai‘i are needy. Water was diverted, sugarcane production moved elsewhere, replaced by invasive grass that have evolved to burn and when sugarcane was no longer a feasible crop, water wasn’t rediverted back to the natural source.¹³¹ Other news outlets are asking about the tourists: Where will they go? What will Lah‘āina do with the loss of tourist income? Numbers are the great equalizers in a Western way of looking at the destruction.

As reporters clamored for information, the police chief of Maui has been remarkably candid. John Pelletier has shamed reporters for going into Lah‘āina against instructions to stay out. As quoted by the *Civil Beat News*, at a press conference Pelletier said, “We pick up the

¹²⁹ Carolyn Kormann, “Living Through Maui’s Unimaginable Wildfires.” *The New Yorker*, August 11, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/living-through-mauis-unimaginable-wildfires>.

¹³⁰ Kormann.

¹³¹ Kormann.

remains and they fall apart. So when you have 200 people running through the scene yesterday, including some of you, that’s what you’re stepping on.”¹³² Pelletier has shown bluntness and reverence for the dead, something perhaps unexpected from this former New York and Las Vegas police captain, who was unexpectedly chosen to lead the Maui Police Force, Reporter Lee Cataluna calls, “an insular organization.”¹³³ When Pelletier explains for the third or fourth or fifth day in a row why reporters can’t go into Lah‘āina he said, “Understand this: Lah‘āina town is hallowed, sacred ground right now because our iwi are in that ground. It’s not just ash on your clothing when you take it off. It’s our loved ones.”¹³⁴

As I read these quotes and more about the fire in Lah‘āina, I keep coming back to what is buried and what we can’t see – like the ash of “loved ones” on clothing. Or the misuse of Hawaiian land that led to the fire. The awful tragedy of this fire has removed the veil of a fictional place shrouding a clear vision of Hawai‘i, revealing much of what is gone, forgotten, lost but what could be revealed again using a careful lens, education, and facing reality. Naka Nathaniel of the *Civil Beat News* calls the fire a catalyst to reveal the “deeper truths” about Maui and all Hawai‘i. Nathaniel claims the fire was not a natural disaster but “a human-made disaster generations in the making.”¹³⁵ Like other writers, Nathaniel points to almost two centuries of colonialism and capitalism that have made Hawai‘i vulnerable to “natural” disasters. He writes that the “imported education and religious systems suppressed Hawai‘i’s language and culture.”

¹³² Lee Cataluna, “Maui’s Quotable Police Chief – And The Quotes You Might Have Missed.” *Civil Beat*, August 16, 2023, www.civilbeat.org.

¹³³ Cataluna.

¹³⁴ Cataluna.

¹³⁵ Nathaniel, “Here are the Deeper Truths About Maui.”

The result of this suppression, Nathaniel argues is “The deeper truth is this deprived us of the knowledge of how to live here on these islands.”¹³⁶

Early Kānaka understood how to live on the islands, especially on a side of the island with a town called Lah‘āina that translates to cruel sun. Nathaniel says the islands are interdependent. Kaho‘olawe (or the target isle) sits off the westside of Maui, you can see it from Lah‘āina. It was once called the “most shot island in the world.”¹³⁷ The military claimed it during WWII, and continued to bomb it until the late 1970s when Hawaiian groups began to occupy the island in protest. Nathaniel writes that before it’s devastation, vegetation and forests would trap moisture and produce rains for Maui. Today there is little to no vegetation on Kaho‘olawe. Nathaniel says, “Our islands are not ‘islands.’ Our islands are interconnected.”¹³⁸ This seems so apparent today as the death toll rises. I hope a reckoning will happen and Hawai‘i will not go back to status quo where Nathaniel argues “the ideal in Hawai‘i is . . . ALOHA. However, we know that the most important five-letter word here is MONEY.”¹³⁹

In a 2020 article Alexandria Neason wrote about climate change and Hawai‘i for the *Columbia Journalism Review*. Like me, Neason is a haole who grew up in Hawai‘i, though her dad was in the military. She repeats the question one of her interviewees asked of her ““Who is Hawai‘i for?”” Was it for the people who live here? For the military? For the tourists? Climate change puts everyone at risk. The question of how to confront the crisis will be a matter of whose

¹³⁶ Nathaniel.

¹³⁷“Kaho‘olawe: “The Pacific’s Battered Bullseye,” The National WWII Museum, November 20, 2021, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/kahoolawe-island-us-navy>.

¹³⁸ Nathaniel, “Here Are The Deeper Truths About Maui.”

¹³⁹ Nathaniel.

story is at the forefront, whose survival is deemed the most important.”¹⁴⁰ This is a question we should all be asking. Unfortunately, settler colonialism and capitalism system ensure that marginalized people will be the ones most effected by the fires and subsequent climate change episodes. Kānaka are the most incarcerated and unhoused people in Hawai‘i. To compound the significance of the fires in Lah‘āina is the fact that the town was the first seat of Hawaiian royalty when King Kamehameha the first built his famous Brick Palace. This is gone. So much is gone. There is no bringing these artifacts back. Judy Rohrer writes about failing forward as a way that capitalism ultimately never works. Unfortunately, marginalized people will suffer the effects of failing forward while people with resources and power will continue to work under the guise of capitalism.

¹⁴⁰ Alexandria Neason, “Greeting from Hawai‘i : How Tourism Drives Climate Change,” Columbia Journalism Review, Spring, 2020, https://www.cjr.org/special_report/greetings_from_hawaii.php.

CHAPTER FIVE

CLAIMING PARADISE

“When these sails go up
Mountains fade away
Stars come out
I’m finally free
Its only the ocean and me”
– Jack Johnson, “Only the Ocean

My dad arrived on the North Shore of O`ahu poor, separated from my mom, and fleeing a girlfriend he accused of being a witch. He’d left most of his stuff behind, including his Olympic memorabilia stored in her attic. For a while, he slept out on a friend’s sofa until he was able to get some money together and set up a life for himself. He was searching for a different kind of experience for his life, and he thought Hawai’i was the answer. As a white, middle-class American he grew up believing he was entitled to certain things including the privilege of remaking himself. As a golden boy on the shores of the Florida beach town of Jacksonville, he was raised to believe he could be anyone -- his own version of an American Adam. He had imagined himself to be “the hero of the new adventure,” and like R.W.B. Lewis explains, he imagined himself “emancipated from history,”¹ at least a history that wasn’t serving him at the time.

Lewis used the idea of the American Adam to define the shaping of an American person in the early 1800s when America and its people were just beginning to define themselves and Lewis identified this through literature of the time. “The American myth,” explains Lewis, “was

¹ Lewis, *The American Adam*, 5.

not fashioned ultimately by a single man or genius. It was and it has remained a collective affair.”² But the culture my dad embraced was about the individual with sayings like “do your own thing” or “turn on, tune in and drop out.” To the people who followed the message of the counterculture, America’s shining new age of opportunities had become tarnished. The counterculture questioned every belief they’d been fed. So, they headed out as their own men, forging their ways as if no one before them ever did the exact same thing.

Lewis was theorizing about a time in our nation’s history when things were just beginning and to be an American was hopeful in the New World. Lewis wrote that Americans were “divinely granted a second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in the darkening Old World.”³ But for my dad, what American culture taught him would make him happy, didn’t. He was disillusioned and searching, like many of his generation. As Cecil F. Tate wrote, “Man’s sense of his environment in the New World was contingent on his sense of the Old World and of the past.” This past for my dad wasn’t, of course, the Old World but it was a world in which the hopes he had for himself weren’t what he believed he’d been promised.

At 29, his life wasn’t turning out as he’d hoped. Yes, he won Olympic gold medals. But then he found and lost many jobs. His marriage failed. His car was repossessed at least once. He looked for solace in other women. He had two young children to support, and he was lost – drifting like a palm frond on the ocean after a big storm. Being an Olympic medalist wasn’t enough. He was looking for more from his life and he believed Hawai’i was the place he’d find

² Lewis, *The American Adam*, 3.

³ Lewis, 3.

it. Lauren Berlant defines this problem as “cruel optimism” when the thing that society described as making you happy, doesn’t. She writes, “A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing . . . it might be a fantasy of the good life.”⁴ The things that are supposed to make people happy are not tangible.⁵ My dad believed what he was missing was out there – somewhere – he just had to find it. Berlant questions why “people stay attached to conventional good-life-fantasies . . . when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear costs abound?”⁶ Looking back, I can see how my dad’s fantasy of achieving the Olympic dream, the job and the family hadn’t given him what it promised. Instead, he searched elsewhere, as if the dream were hidden, waiting for him to discover it on some Hawaiian island.

Perhaps leaving everything and moving to Hawai’i wouldn’t have been for just anyone but I don’t think my dad ever doubted his ability to recreate himself. In 1969, he was only 23 and he’d already won his medals and retired from swimming, became a stockbroker, settled down with me, my mom, and my little brother, who was born that year. As an American, my dad was looking out for himself. It is a long-held American belief that you can take what you want, use what you want, become what you want at any cost. At the end of the road of my dad’s fantasies was Hawai’i – waiting for him.

The North Shore of O`ahu in the 1970s was both a sleepy and industrious space. It was sleepy in that modernity hadn’t seem to come for it yet. Tourists didn’t often venture out that far from Waikīkī in the 70s. There were stores in the middle of neighborhoods where entire families

⁴ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

⁵ Berlant, 2.

⁶ Berlant, 2.

worked, selling homemade rice and hot dogs, spam musubi, crunchy almond cookies along with beer, candy, and chips. Sugar cane farming went on around the clock. Coming home late at night we saw the lights in the middle of a field as workers harvested the sugar cane or there were fires burning the cane. Our new home was a clash of cultures with haole surfer families converging on this plantation community and moving in next door to local families who had lived there for decades. In the early mornings people were out watering their yards and plants, surfers drove past with their cars loaded up with boards to catch the early glassy waves before the wind came up. The North Shore was called “the country” and Honolulu was “town.” The closest actual town was Haleiwa, and it was miles from the commercialism of the imagined Hawai’i of advertising. There were fields of sugar cane and pineapple lining a little two-lane road called Kamehameha Highway.

It was like an Eden and had all the elements that could make my dad happy – sun, surf, the ocean, and the space to figure out who he was. In her book *Surfer Girls of the New World Order* Krista Comer argues, “Surfers brought up the rear guard in the battle to solidify Hawai’i as the outer reach, the far hegemonic horizons of US western geographic imaginations.”⁷ In Hawai’i my dad could imagine himself as someone different. Unlike living on the continent, on the North Shore of O’ahu he didn’t have to worry about a prescription for success. He could drop out of life for a while without judgement. Hawai’i was so far removed from my dad’s parents, his old jobs, and ideas of who he was supposed to be. Because Hawai’i was such an amalgam of different races, cultures and lifestyles, there wasn’t one prescriptive way to live. This gave him

⁷Krista Comer, *Surfer Girls in the New World Order* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010) 62.

the freedom to find himself. Comer describes this freedom as an “enormous unaware privilege” that surfers possess in “their Cold War innocence and arrogance” seeing “the world as their legitimate playground.”⁸ Other surfers on the North Shore told my dad about the amazing surf and lifestyle they’d found in Hawai’i. These friends paved the way for my dad. There was a sofa to crash on until he got some money together. Comer goes on to note that, “Instead, the unspoken logic went: if waves are unridden, nobody is stopping me, and if I am bold enough to figure it out, why shouldn’t I?”⁹ That’s what my dad and others like him did. My dad knew the dangers of angering the locals in the surf, of growing and selling marijuana out of his home and what me and my brother would need to negotiate with our white skin, but he figured the vision of this new life was worth it.

One of my dad’s favorite things was having his clothes sewed by the women who worked at the H-Muira store. They used soft corduroy for shorts with coconut shell buttons and subdued aloha print material for his shirts. They were also known for the surf trunks. My dad would go to be measured by two tiny sisters Jane Oda and Katherine Kawaguchi, reaching their arms up to gauge the width of his 6’2” swimmer shoulders. The women, descendants of the original owners of the store who came to Haleiwa from Yamaguchi, Japan to work in the sugar cane plantations, wrote his measurements down in a big book along with many other people. The store opened in 1912 and closed in 2005. These kinds of authentic experiences cemented the idea that we were living in a world that time forgot, an oasis where clothes weren’t purchased from a department store but sewn by Japanese immigrants who’d been sewing clothes there for decades.

⁸ Comer, 62

⁹ Comer, 62.

Out there in paradise surrounded by water my dad began to dream again after he failed to win that individual gold medal in the 100- freestyle. It gave him the freedom to fling off social constraints imposed by his parents and society. Perhaps what my dad and the others that called Hawai'i their new home didn't realize is that no one can ever truly lose their past. No one can ever truly remake themselves. A place without a past doesn't exist. We all carry the stories of our pasts with us. Our white skin, our haole presence alone displayed that Hawai'i didn't carry our origin story. We settlers didn't begin there. Life wasn't like a chalkboard in which we could erase all former traces of we used to be. Hawai'i would show us that.

And yet, these white settlers believed that Hawai'i was a new frontier for them. Comer explores the colonization of surfing and its obsession with Hawai'i as "recent enactments of an older set of western characters."¹⁰ Surfers like my dad were newer versions of cowboys setting out to conquer and inhabit a new west. Instead of horses they rode surfboards. Instead of riding across prairies they rode mountains of waves. They had stories like my dad's. They were searching for an alternative way of life. Comer writes that the "subculture's early claim to Hawai'i was "the structuring features of surfing's political unconscious."¹¹ These American Adams and Eves were using a place "by claiming a space often initially without much of a second thought."¹² Comer calls this attitude of surfers in Hawai'i discovering their own paradise a "belligerence of the claim on Hawai'i"¹³ that was "possession by unconscious presumption."¹⁴

¹⁰ Comer, 12.

¹¹ Comer, 62.

¹² Comer, 62.

¹³ Comer, 62.

¹⁴ Comer, 62.

Of course, these white settlers believed they could do anything because they'd been raised to believe the world was theirs.

There was the dad who sailed solo across the Pacific Ocean from California, his family meeting him in Hawai'i by airplane. They lived on their sailboat in the Ala Wai Boat Harbor before heading out to the North Shore to a real house. One of his sons went on to become a famous musician featuring photos of his dad on one of his record covers.

There was the dad who made his living with the dangerous job of diving deep for black coral. He disappeared on one of those dives in a deep cavern off Maui, never to return to his wife and four children.

There were the brothers who made a name for themselves as "big wave" surfers paddling out where the waves were bigger and more daunting.

There was the other single dad who wore Aloha shirts barely buttoned up to reveal his chest hair and gold necklaces. Eventually he went to jail for dealing cocaine.

There was the single mother who did drugs while her two boys took care of her and themselves -- smart boys who did well in school.

There was the woman who became my stepmother who dropped out of Ohio State with a group of friends to live on a sailboat and sail the islands, their ultimate destination was Tahiti, though they never ended up leaving Hawai'i on that boat.

Hawai'i was a dream land for all these settlers and transplants. They weren't like the locals who came to work in the sugar cane and pineapple plantations. Those immigrants who came from mostly Japan and the Philippines shared a comradery with Kānaka because of the work they did together on the plantations and often they were united against the haole overseers.

People like my dad were a generation of privileged white people who had the means to choose to live without a lot of resources. They had family money, or they knew how to work the welfare system. They all had what Comer calls “Surfing’s love affair with Hawaiian native manhood and islander ‘Aloha’ spirit.”¹⁵ They could imagine that Hawai’i was a melting pot in which their priorities of an alternative way of living were paramount – being outside and communing with nature without work as the central aspect of their lives. Comer explains that the white, Hawai’i surfer transplant was a “border crosser” to “critique normative WASP discourse.”¹⁶ In this way, my dad used the counterculture as permission to find a different way of life. Comer writes, “White surfers have usually been in search of much more than perfect waves; they’ve been in pursuit of fundamentally better ways of everyday living.”¹⁷ This better way of living resulted in many of these transplants fleeing to Hawai’i to escape the day-to-day reality of living in a city in the Midwest or on the mushy waves of Florida, or the overcrowded beaches of Malibu, California.

But just because my dad, and others like him, could move to Hawai’i, it didn’t mean they should move to Hawai’i. To move someplace to find a new version of life is a kind of extraction. Macarena Gomez-Barris defines an extractive zone as “the colonial paradigm, worldview, and technologies that . . . reduce life to capitalist resource conversion.”¹⁸ This term is used to refer to the colonial capitalism that began in the 1500s and extends through “the recent forty-year

¹⁵ Comer, 20.

¹⁶ Comer, 20.

¹⁷ Comer, 21.

¹⁸ Macarena Gomez-Barris, *Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), xvi.

neoliberal privatization and deregulation process.”¹⁹ Though surfers would have never considered themselves as part of the problem of colonial capitalism, they were. They changed the face of the North Shore of O`ahu making it a surfer’s paradise that is often referred to as the “seven-mile miracle.” Once uncrowded and quiet, the one-lane road today can’t handle all the traffic in the winter when the waves are big and spectacular. Gomez-Barris calls what my dad and others like him were doing in colonizing the beaches of Hawai’i, “spiritual tourism . . . whereby the region becomes a projection of romantic spatial imaginaries, an idyllic escape from the toxicity” of the modern world.”²⁰ Alexandria Neason recalls a friend visiting Hawai’i and wanting to move there because she felt a connection to the place. The friend asked Neason, who spent some of her childhood in Hawai’i, “How can I move there without feeling like a colonizer?” Neason replied, “Just don’t.”²¹ But the answer isn’t so simple. If told not to go to Hawai’i, most still would because people want what they want, and if they have money and privilege they will go because “everyone else is doing it too.” This became apparent when Hawai’i shut down during the worldwide Covid-19 quarantine and still people defied the law and traveled there, many turned away at the airport and sent back home.

The Hawaiian fantasy of paradise had been promoted since the late 1800s by the missionaries who became the white businessmen who overthrew Queen Lili‘uokalani and the Hawaiian monarchy. Hawaiian scholar Haunani-Kay Trask says, “To most Americans, then, Hawai’i is *theirs*; to take, and above all, to fantasize about long after the experience.”²² Add surf

¹⁹ Gomez-Barris, xvi.

²⁰ Gomez-Barris, 43.

²¹ Alexandria Neason, “Greetings from Hawai’i,”

²² Haunani-Kay Trask, *From A Native Daughter*, 136.

to the fantasy and hippies, like my dad, began to migrate there. What is it about a place that will make someone want it so bad? Comer writes that it is a kind of “white western protagonist of so many cultural tales (who) co-opts features of indigeneity (he ‘goes native’).”²³ Trask further explains, “Just five hours away by plane from California, Hawai’i is a thousand light years away in fantasy. . . Hawai’i is the image of escape from the rawness and violence of daily American life.”²⁴ Before my parents got divorced, they had applied for visas to move to Venezuela. My dad was seeking something to make his life complete and continental America, with its nine to five ideals, didn’t seem to have what he was looking for.

Comer also adds that surfing settlers had an environmental awareness of the natural world. People like my dad were not coming to Hawai’i to build more hotels or even to make money. Many were willing to just get by financially to have the privilege to enjoy the water and a simpler life. Comer writes “It makes no sense to condemn people for the contradictions they face” because though surfing “is associated with a privileged form of whiteness,” surfers also show “an openness to alternative lifeways” and live in “compatibility with the nonhuman world.”²⁵ I would agree that my dad and others liked him loved this new way of living and they also knew that it could be destroyed if too many people like them moved to Hawai’i.

TW Neal Growing Up in Hawai’i

The writer TW Neal describes her childhood in ways that resonate with my own. Her 2018 memoir, *Freckled: A Memoir of Growing Up Wild In Hawai’i* begins with her as a naked

²³ Neason, 21.

²⁴ Trask, 136.

²⁵ Comer, 21.

four-year-old learning to swim on the North Shore of O`ahu. For Neal’s family, Hawai`i is a paradise they continually chase from the North Shore of O`ahu to the North Shore of Kaua`i and then back and forth, again and again, from California to Kaua`i as her parents battled addiction, mental illness, and poverty. Both of Neal’s parents were surfers searching for the perfect wave and the perfect uncrowded surf break. They were willing to do anything to find this paradise including often being homeless with their children, having nothing to eat as well as encountering floods and dangerous circumstances. In an interview, Neal describes her experiences as “the story of a *haole* girl on Kaua`i and always being an outsider. . . It was a story about the times, the ’70s hippie lifestyle as it played out in the Islands.”²⁶

For much of their time on Kaua`i, the Neals lived adjacent to a hippy enclave called Taylor Camp. A kind of 1960s commune and utopia, “Taylor Camp began in 1969 on Kaua`i’s North Shore, when Howard Taylor, brother of actress Elizabeth, posted bail for thirteen men, women, and children arrested for vagrancy.”²⁷ The foreword to Neal’s book is written by John Wehrheim, who began photographing the people of Taylor Camp in 1971. He went onto make a documentary and a book about the camp. Wehrheim writes, “For these young *haole* fleeing the continent, Kaua`i wasn’t America. It was Polynesia and felt like another world, another time, another place.”²⁸ Wehrheim places Taylor Camp and hippies like my dad and TW Neal’s family in the context of the time. This context is useful to my story because it links the social and

²⁶Jeremiah Cahill, *Freckled: A Memoir of Growing Up Wild in Hawai`i*, by Toby Wilson Neal,” *True Stories Well Told*, December 2, 2020, <https://truestorieswelltold.com/2020/12/02/freckled-by-toby-wilson-neal/>.

²⁷ John Wehrheim, Introduction to *Freckled: A Memoir of Growing Up Wild In Hawai`i*, ed. Toby Neal, (Honolulu: Neal Enterprises, 2018), vii.

²⁸ Wehrheim, vii.

cultural structure families like mine moved to in Hawai'i in the late 1960s and 1970s. Wehrheim explains that locals had never seen haoles like this before, "poor, ragged, and shiftless."²⁹ Before this, Wehrheim explains, haoles were "plantation owners or managers, bankers, doctors, lawyers, publishers, and wealthy businessmen . . . that had dominated Hawai'i's society and economy for over one hundred years."³⁰ This analysis presents a broader perspective on the cultural structure of Hawai'i during that time. The plantation lifestyle was being phased out. Jobs were scarce. Wehrheim writes that "the ruling white upper class—deeply despised the hippies and surfers."³¹ With attacks on haoles a part of the social structure of Hawai'i, these moneyed whites didn't want to be associated with the listless hippies who didn't wear clothes or pay rent and often lived on welfare. Wehrheim argues that the hippies were seeking refuge in Hawai'i from a framework of violence on the continental US that shifted from the "'leave-it-to-Beaver' illusions of the 1950s"³² to the mayhem of the assassinations of "the Kennedys and Martin Luther King"³³ to the killings of student protestors at Kent State and the Vietnam War.³⁴ Wehrheim's perspective is useful because it presents a broader perspective on the atmosphere Neal and my own family fled and moved into when seeking Hawai'i as a place to escape the prescriptive life offered white families on the continent.

In Neal's memoir her family first lives on the North Shore of O'ahu, where I grew up, but by 1971 the family moves to the North Shore of Kaua'i because "Rocky Point's getting too

²⁹ Wehrheim, vii.

³⁰ Wehrheim, vii.

³¹ Wehrheim, viii.

³² Wehrheim, vi.

³³ Wehrheim, vi.

³⁴ Wehrheim, vi.

crowded . . . the locals are getting gnarly with fights on the beach over waves.”³⁵ Soon Neal’s father drops out of college, buys a van and fits it with beds and storage, and the family moves to Kaua`i to escape the crowds and violence of O`ahu. Living out of the van, the family settles at a beach park called Tunnels Beach “with running water and toilets.”³⁶ This becomes their new paradise. “Mom and Pop declare they’ve found Rocky Point – only better, because there are hardly any other surfers out at the perfect, peeling break beyond the reef where we fish and dive.”³⁷ Within their first month on Kaua`i, the family runs out of food so six-year-old Neal and Pop go looking for fish for dinner. While her mother is feeding the baby in the van and her dad is out spearfishing, Neal reaches her hand into a hole in the reef and pulls out an octopus. As she struggles with it, she looks around the beach for help, but her dad is far out in the water and there is no one else around. Neal is motivated by hunger and the pride her parents will feel for her if she catches dinner. Later, as he cuts the octopus up for dinner, Pop shows Neal the octopus’ bill, “‘Don’t let the bill get you,’ he says. ‘They have a mean bite.’”³⁸ Neal didn’t realize she could have been injured, pulling the octopus out of its hole. “My eyes bug out in delayed fright, and the red marks on my arms burn and sting.”³⁹ This is the introduction of the life Neal, and her family will live as they pursue her parent’s idea of paradise. For Neal though, Kaua`i can feel dangerous as the family live in the van, then a shack in the forest with no running water or electricity and then when they are threatened by locals at their front door trying to take their marijuana from

³⁵ TW Neal, *Freckled: A Memoir of Growing Up Wild in Hawai`i*, (Honolulu: Neal Enterprises, 2018), 23.

³⁶ Neal, 25.

³⁷ Neal, 25.

³⁸ Neal, 28.

³⁹ Neal, 28.

them. Neal writes, “I’m not sure why people keep saying this is paradise.”⁴⁰ Paradise doesn’t look like never having enough food to eat and worrying about violence.

When Neal is eight, her mother has a psychotic break and the family moves to La Jolla, California with their grandparents so Toby’s mother can be treated in “The Best Facility.”⁴¹ Though when Toby asks Pop what’s wrong with her mom, he replies, “she took too much acid and peyote. . . She tried to kill herself three times.”⁴² Toby and her little sister Bonnie go to ballet and real school in La Jolla. They attend dinners at their grandparent’s country club and get “lady lessons” from their Grandma Gigi. They also live in a house with running water, electricity, toilets, and showers and have enough food to eat. Despite this as Mom gets better, Kaua`i calls to the parents. “‘I hate this place.’ Mom’s crying. ‘It’s killing our family. Our spirit. Who we are. We have to go home to Kaua`i.’”⁴³ Instead of feeling safe and comforted by the security of the continental US and the comforts of wealth, Neal’s parents crave Kaua`i as if it is a drug.

Neal notices how different her parents are compared to the other parents in La Jolla who have elevators in their homes and pick their kids up from school “right on time in their Mercedes and BMWs.”⁴⁴ Pop picks Neal up from school in the white van they lived in on Kaua`i. Neal writes, “The van’s battered and rusty now, and the bright curtains are faded and patched with mold.”⁴⁵ Neal suddenly realizes that though she fits in at school in La Jolla because of the color of her skin, her parents and her family are different. She overhears her Grandpa Jim telling her

⁴⁰ Neal, 62.

⁴¹ Neal, 90.

⁴² Neal, 100.

⁴³ Neal, 101.

⁴⁴ Neal, 93.

⁴⁵ Neal, 93.

Pop, “‘You need to get off your duff, son,’ he booms. ‘There’s no free lunch. Get that hippie wife of yours cleaned up and get a real job.’”⁴⁶ Neal begins to echo the same sentiment and asks her dad, “Why don’t you have a job? Why can’t you be like the other dads and wear a suit? Why don’t we have a regular car?” As Neal says, “I really want to know, because Mom and Pop raised me to Question Authority. That used to be something they believed in.”⁴⁷ Counterculture families, like my own and Neal’s were fleeing convention and didn’t think the establish could tell them how to live, even though their children were suffering. Though this kind of life may have seemed essential for Neal’s parents, as a child, Neal instead craves the stability that comes from a regular job, food on the table and a working car. The parents who were making a statement by defying societal norms, weren’t always thinking about their children. The insecurity Neal felt was typical for my childhood as well. For me it was the fear that my friends would know my dad was a drug dealer, or that the police would bust him, and he’d go to jail.

Neal’s parents aspire to a different set of values, though their drug addictions and mental illness prevent them from fully manifesting that life on Kaua`i. Even though her grandparents buy her family a home in La Jolla, they decide to head back to Kaua`i. In David Brooks’ *Bobos In Paradise*, a book about the 1960s, he says that hippies, “will explain that ‘good jobs’ are frauds and sells, that it is intolerable to have one’s style of life dictated by Personnel, that a man is a fool to work to pay installments on a useless refrigerator for his wife.”⁴⁸ Neal’s parents turn their backs on the home purchased for them in La Jolla and once again take a chance on Kaua`i. Neal writes, “Kaua`i matters more to them than anything I’ve seen them care about, except

⁴⁶ Neal, 91.

⁴⁷ Neal, 94.

⁴⁸ Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, 76.

surfing—and Kaua`i and surfing are tied together.”⁴⁹ The idea of Kaua`i tethers itself to the family. Even Neal feels the pull. As they land at Lihue Airport, she writes, “Deep cobalt sea, crinkled like metallic wrapping paper, wraps around green velvet mountains and makes me realize I was more homesick than I let myself be.”⁵⁰ For this moment the abuse by Pop, the living in a tent and van, the lack of food, the cruelty Neal receives at school because she’s a haole are all forgotten. Neal says, “Kaua`i *does* feel like home, and I realize how much I didn’t let myself remember.”⁵¹

By the end of the chapter, however, Neal’s parents are at a party drinking and smoking marijuana. Eight-year-old Neal is supposed to watch her four-year-old sister Bonny at the beach. Bonny gets swept out to sea in the rip current and almost drowns. Neals begs the first grown-up she finds to save Bonny, but he doesn’t believe that the little head bobbing far out to sea is a child. When Neal finally finds her mother, instead of thanking Neal, she whacks her with a big piece of driftwood and scolds her for almost letting her sister die. Kaua`i is home but home has a violent underside.

As they settle back into life on Kaua`i, the family become caretakers on an estate the 2011 film *The Descendants* was based on. The house the family lives in has running water and electricity. The girls have their own rooms. But the 40-hour work week taking care of the property is too much for Neal’s dad. He assigns Neal, an 11-year-old, ten hours a week of his work. Neal’s mother 15, and her seven-year-old sister five hours so Neal’s father will have more time to smoke pot, surf and not be so angry. Neal’s mother reasons, “That way your dad will be

⁴⁹ Neal, *Freckled*, 110.

⁵⁰ Neal, 120.

⁵¹ Neal, 120.

able to surf and be in a better head space.”⁵² As part of Neal’s job, shoveling manure on the estate, she begins to sell “Magic” mushrooms”⁵³ to the local drug dealer named Doug, who the kids call “Drug.”⁵⁴ Neal negotiates with the drug dealer to make .25 cents per mushroom and uses the money for “forbidden sugary treats”⁵⁵ because Neal isn’t allowed to eat candy but she has the freedom to collect and sell drugs.

Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Marshallese Poet

The story that Marshallese poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner tells offers additional insight into the diverse story of families who came to live in Hawai’i. Jetñil-Kijiner moved to Hawai’i when she was nine in the late 1990’s. Jetñil-Kijiner has a very different story of coming to Hawai’i than myself or Neal. She also came in Hawai’i in a different era. Looking at her body of work, it is important to understand different perspectives of what Hawai’i offers as home. In her book of poetry, *IEP JĀLTOK: Poems From A Marshallese Daughter*, Jetñil-Kijiner offers generative insights for how growing up in Hawai’i is different for someone coming from the Marshall Islands versus a haole. Many Marshallese move to the United States to find better jobs and economic opportunities not available in their home country because of the nuclear destruction caused by atomic testing by the US. The Marshall Islands were the site of 66 atomic tests during the Cold War. The Compact of Free Association Act (COFA) of 1985 made it a right of a citizen

⁵²Neal, 186.

⁵³Neal, 189.

⁵⁴Neal, 189.

⁵⁵Neal, 191.

of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) to “live, study, and work in the United States.”⁵⁶ Bikini Atoll was the location of the largest US nuclear test ever exploded in 1954. “By missing an important fusion reaction, the scientists had grossly underestimated the size of the explosion. The predicted yield was 5 megatons, but, in fact, “BRAVO” yielded 14.8 megatons.”⁵⁷ Rebecca H. Hogue demonstrates how Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry “rehistoricizes these imperial narratives of radiation by evoking Indigenous ecological knowledges to promote intergenerational healing.”⁵⁸ Hogue juxtaposes US propaganda that “obscures the casual relationships of their nuclear detonations”⁵⁹ by “normalizing” them with Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry that gives voice to Indigenous Marshallese and their experiences in the past 60 years living with the fallout of nuclear radiation. Hogue writes, “*Nuclear Normalizing* is the obfuscation of causal relationships, which render nuclearization and its effects as innocuous.”⁶⁰ US imperialism forced Jetñil-Kijiner and other Marshallese to Hawai’i because their home could no longer sustain them.

The Marshallese didn’t choose Hawai’i, the US chose for them. In her poem “Flying to Makiki Street,” Jetñil-Kijiner writes of trying to comfort her older cousin as they leave the Marshall Islands on the plane flight to their new home in Hawai’i. “Night lights peer into your oval window/and you, cousin, are sobs buried/beneath the cover of an itchy airplane

⁵⁶“The Compacts of Free Association,” *Congressional Research Service*, August 25, 2023, <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/fact-sheets/FactSheetVerifyFASCitizens.pdf> .

⁵⁷ “The BRAVO Test,” Atomic Archive, accessed October 1, 2022, <https://www.atomicarchive.com/history/cold-war/page-6.html> .

⁵⁸ Rebecca Hogue, “Nuclear Normalizing and Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s ‘Dome Poem,’” *Amerasia Journal* 47, No. 2 (2021): 208.

⁵⁹ Hogue, 208.

⁶⁰ Hogue, 212.

blanket./Leavemealone!/stings/my palm from your shoulder.”⁶¹ Hawai’i is not a paradise that Jetñil-Kijiner’s family use to find themselves. It is instead a forced diaspora, replacing home –for opportunity. The poem juxtaposes what Jetñil-Kijiner and her cousin have lost with what they will gain, “we could find some way/to peel apart the loss/of your old home,/your house by the reef./Do you mourn that reef?”⁶² Instead the cousins will have “homework, classes,/schedules with tennis practice,/band practice/ROTC,/college preparatory.”⁶³ All these things speak to Western values that measure success. Jetñil-Kijiner writes that their lives “will be just like that:/folded/starched every/bare night–so nice and/and neat.”⁶⁴ But what they will lose in Hawai’i will be the things that they mourn. Things that aren’t defined by work, schedules, neatness, or opportunity. “Do you mourn the sun/burning like coils on a rusted stove?/Do you miss Rita’s tin roofs,/its unpainted walls and the children/who know the joy of rainstorms in heat?”⁶⁵ Jetñil-Kijiner juxtaposes the western way of judging the value of a life that is well-ordered by asking her cousin if she mourns the apparent poverty that “tin roofs” and unpainted walls” depict?

In Hawai’i her cousin works at McDonalds with “your McDonalds uniforms/folded/starched every/bare night–so nice and/neat.”⁶⁶ Jetñil-Kijiner repeats the lines of “starched every/bare night”⁶⁷ to mean her cousin’s McDonalds’ uniforms and their new lives in this new country. McDonalds represents America and, perhaps, opportunity. Now their nights

⁶¹ Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, *IEP JÁLTOK: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017), 34.

⁶²Jetñil-Kijiner, 34.

⁶³Jetñil-Kijiner, 35.

⁶⁴Jetñil-Kijiner, 35.

⁶⁵Jetñil-Kijiner, 34.

⁶⁶Jetñil-Kijiner, 34.

⁶⁷Jetñil-Kijiner, 35.

will be “bare” but also “nice and neat” questioning what matters in a life. Is it structure and rigor that leads to education and a way out of poverty? Or is it the pure joy of a “rainstorm in the heat?” Unlike my family, or TW Neal’s family in *Freckled*, Hawai’i is not an escape from the rigors of American life, but a way into that life that can guarantee a good job and a better future. Jetñil-Kijiner doesn’t have the chance to choose. She is thrust into a different life away from her home which includes racism in Hawai’i because of where she comes from. American Studies scholar Greg Dvorak writes that the Marshallese come to Hawai’i because of the “Lack of jobs, good health care, and quality education at home, resulting in part from the legacies of American Empire.”⁶⁸ Marshallese have nowhere to go and so come to America because they are forced out of their home country.

According to Dvorak, “Marshallese and other Compact migrants have been greeted with extreme racism when they migrate to the States, especially Hawai’i, where taxpayers perceive these new settlers as an unjustified burden on health, education, and welfare systems.”⁶⁹ Jetñil-Kijiner begins her poem “Lessons From Hawai’i” with “*Fuckin Micronesians!!*that’s my seventh grade friend” then later in the poem, “*You know,/you’re actually/kinda smart/for a Micronesian/*And that’s my classmate/who I tutor through the civil war/through the first immigrants/through history that’s always/seems/to repeat itself.”⁷⁰ Jetñil-Kijiner pushes back against that stereotype and is met with what is supposed to be a compliment disguised by racism.

In Jetñil-Kijiner’s master’s portfolio she quotes from her mother’s dissertation. “After years of colonization, many Marshallese see themselves as they are seen by Westerners - as,

⁶⁸ Dvorak, “Oceanizing American Studies,” 613.

⁶⁹ Dvorak, 613.

⁷⁰ Jetñil-Kijiner, *Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*, 45.

‘lazy, impoverished and undisciplined’ (Heine 2004, 19).”⁷¹ Jetñil-Kijiner takes this thought further, “When Marshallese continue to be bombarded by this perspective, that we are nothing but lazy and undisciplined, that we are merely problems that need to be fixed - then we are bound to begin to believe that perspective, to doubt ourselves and then to drown in a fatalism that confines us as a people.”⁷² Not only were the Marshallese islands used by the US for nuclear testing, but the perception of them by people in Hawai‘i keeps them stuck as victims that are unworthy of assistance.

“Lesson Number 2” in the poem begins with, “Micronesian/MICRO/(nesian)/as in small./tiny crumbs of islands scattered/across the Pacific Ocean./Too many countries/cultures/nations no one/has heard about/cares about/too small/to notice./Small like how/I feel.”⁷³ Her experience of growing up in Hawai‘i as the victim of racism is magnified because it is not just against her as a Marshallese immigrant but instead she is grouped together with other Micronesian immigrants. Jetñil-Kijiner isn’t allowed to have her identity in Hawai‘i because her island country is just one of many that are too small and unimportant for Americans to know about. In his seminal essay “Our Sea of Islands,” Epeli Hau‘ofa writes, “The idea that the countries of Polynesia and Micronesia are too small, too poor, and too isolated to develop any meaningful degree of autonomy is an economistic and geographic deterministic view of a very narrow kind that overlooks culture history. . .⁷⁴ By judging the people of Oceania according to a Western view of success, they succumb to a very narrow focus of themselves. Hau‘ofa

⁷¹ Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, “IEP JSLTOK: A HISTORY OF MARSHALLESE LITERATURE” Masters Portfolio, (University of Hawai‘i , 2014): 13.

⁷² Jetñil-Kijiner, 13.

⁷³ Jetñil-Kijiner, *Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*, 45.

⁷⁴ Epeli Hau‘ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, No. 1 (Spring, 1994), 151.

continues to argue “Belittlement in whatever guise . . . may lead to moral paralysis, to apathy, and to the kind of fatalism that we can see among fellow human beings . . . confined to reservations or internment camps.”⁷⁵ If a people is away being told they are less than, they begin to believe it.

Jetñil-Kijiner fights against this “belittlement” in her poetry. In “Lesson Number 6” she writes, “Its actually/NOT Micronesian/It’s Marshallese/Chuukese/Yapese/Pohnpeian/Palauan/Kosraen/Nauran/Chamollo/Kirabati/but when Hawai’i insists/on lumping us/all together//when they belittle us and tell us we’re small.”⁷⁶ Jetñil-Kijiner speaks the individual names of the Pacific Islanders that Hawai’i doesn’t differentiate between. She gives voice to individual countries and nationalities rather than calling them all Micronesians. There is an inhuman factor that comes into play when a group of people are all called the same name when they don’t speak the same language or have the same customs or country as one another. It disappears them. Jetñil-Kijiner writes in her master’s portfolio, “When many of us first came to Hawai’i, we were bombarded with ignorant questions and ideas which grouped us together as one. I am often asked if I am Micronesian, but I am never asked what type of Micronesian.”⁷⁷ Jetñil-Kijiner ends the poem with “Lesson Number 7,” “That’s how I learned/That’s how I learned/That’s how I learned/to hate//me.”⁷⁸ Jetñil-Kijiner furthers these idea in her master’s portfolio when she writes, “Marshallese have lost our islands, our land, due to a nuclear race, and to militarization – forces to which we never belonged to and which we have no part of. We have

⁷⁵ Hau’ofa, 152.

⁷⁶ Jetñil-Kijiner, *Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*, 48.

⁷⁷ Jetñil-Kijiner, “IEP JSLTOK: A HISTORY OF MARSHALLESE LITERATURE,” 14.

⁷⁸ Jetñil-Kijiner, *Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*, 49.

been confined and herded to smaller islands – a metaphor of the smaller mentality we have also adopted. A mentality that tells us that we are vulnerable, we are victims.⁷⁹ Through her writing, Jetñil-Kijiner defies being told she is “small” and insignificant.

In “Lesson Number 5” Jetñil-Kijiner directly addresses headlines in Hawai’i newspapers that perpetuate the small mindset and racism against Micronesians.

Headline: NO ALOHA FOR MICRONESIANS//MICRONESIANS RUN UP HEFTY HEALTH CARE TAB//MICRONESIANS FILL HOMELESS SHELTERS//We shoulda jus nuked their islands when we had the chance!//You know, they’re better off living homeless in Hawai’i //Eh, eh–why did/the Micronesian man marry/a monkey?//Because all Micronesian women are monkeys!//What?//Can’t you take a joke? 80

These kind of newspaper articles and overheard comments dehumanize a people. Jetñil-Kijiner writes that what it makes her feel like is “different.”⁸¹ Greg Dvorak argues that too few US residents know “about the United States’ many trespasses, histories, and messy attachments in Oceania.”⁸² In his book inspired by his time growing up in the Marshall Islands as a white kid of engineers who worked on the military base, he says that upon returning there as an adult he was, “frustrated to see the ways the Marshallese were still marginalized in their own country.”⁸³ This marginalization comes from the years of bombing, nuclear testing and occupation by Japanese and then Americans. Jetñil-Kijiner’s work is generative. She writes that we, “are bigger

⁷⁹ Jetñil-Kijiner, “IEP JSLTOK: A HISTORY OF MARSHALLESE LITERATURE,” 18.

⁸⁰ Greg Dvorak. “PRELUDE: The Middle of Now-Here Introducing Kwajalein.” *Coral and Concrete: Remembering Kwajalein Atoll between Japan, America, and the Marshall Islands*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2018),14.

⁸¹ Jetñil-Kijiner, 47.

⁸² Jetñil-Kijiner, 614.

⁸³ Greg Dvorak. “PRELUDE: The Middle of Now-Here Introducing Kwajalein.” *Coral and Concrete: Remembering Kwajalein Atoll between Japan, America, and the Marshall Islands*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2018),14.

than the smallness so many of us have come to believe in.”⁸⁴ Rather than silence, she presents Marshallese as “agents of change, even in a world that tells us otherwise,⁸⁵ forcing her readers to think through their pre-conceptions of a small and voiceless people.

Part of countering the perceived smallness of Micronesia is to bring awareness to the area that has been a big part of US empire and military interests for quite some time. When Dvorak left the Marshall Islands in fourth grade and moved to New Jersey, he was surprised at what his classmates didn’t know about the region. “I was shocked to realize that none of my new classmates had even seen or thought the Pacific . . . To them, Pacific Islands were fictional and fantastic places of pleasure or peril . . .”⁸⁶ In her poem “Tell Them,” Jetñil-Kijiner asks people to see the Marshall Islands through the items created there. She describes sending her friends in the US things made by Marshallese like “dangling earrings” and “baskets/sturdy, also woven.”⁸⁷ In the poem she writes, “And when others ask you/where you got this/you tell them//*They’re from the Marshall Islands*/Show them where it is on a map/Tell them we are a proud people/toasted dark brown as the carved ribs/of a tree stump.”⁸⁸

Jetñil-Kijiner shows her people to the reader of the poem through their art, the color of their skin, and by locating the Marshall Islands on a map. Her poem forces her readers to conceptualize her people with the repetition of the lines “tell them.” The poem places Marshallese in the sea and then Jetñil-Kijiner demonstrates how the sea is rising because of climate change, “Tell them what it’s like/to see the entire ocean___level___with the land//But most

⁸⁴ Jetñil-Kijiner, “IEP JSLTOK: A HISTORY OF MARSHALLESE LITERATURE,” 14.

⁸⁵ Jetñil-Kijiner, 14.

⁸⁶ Dvorak, “Oceanizing American Studies,” 610.

⁸⁷ Jetñil-Kijiner, *Poems From a Marshallese Daughter*, 64.

⁸⁸ Jetñil-Kijiner, 64.

importantly you tell them/we don't want to leave/we've never wanted to leave//and that we//are nothing//without our islands.”⁸⁹

Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes in *Silencing the Past* that, “the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production.”⁹⁰ Though Jetñil-Kijiner “never wanted to leave” her country, the paradox is that, in moving to Hawai'i, she now has a platform that Americans can hear because she is not so far away, on an island in the middle of the Pacific. Jetñil-Kijiner's explains in her master's portfolio that she writes for, “an ignorant audience. . . Perhaps by showing our humanity they can understand us as a people.”⁹¹ Jetñil-Kijiner presents a broader perspective of the Marshallese people, giving them a human face and portraying who they are beyond the nuclear testing and the headlines in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* newspaper.

Additionally, Jetñil-Kijiner's work reveals more complexity about race in Hawai'i. Because of Hawai'i's colonial history, Marshallese are not respected for their culture or traditions. Instead, they are made fun of especially when they don't adhere to the white supremacy narrative by dressing the way that they would in the Marshall Islands. The white culture of Hawai'i demands they observe the cultural norms by dressing like “Americans” and discarding their culture. This is a double insult to a people that are forced to move from their country because the US used and destroyed it.

⁸⁹ Jetñil-Kijiner, 66, 67.

⁹⁰ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, (1995), xix.

⁹¹ Jetñil-Kijiner, “IEP JSLTOK: A HISTORY OF MARSHALLESE LITERATURE,” 118.

Kristiana Kahakauwila, The Hawaiian Diaspora

In her book of short stories, *This Is Paradise*, Kānaka Maoli writer Kristiana Kahakauwila explores what it means to be an Indigenous Hawaiian when you are born and grow up on the continental US. The Hawaiian diaspora is the direct result of settler colonizers making Hawai'i unaffordable for Kānaka people; however, there is also a stigma that “on-island” Kānaka are more legitimate than “off-island” Hawaiians. In their article “A Breath of Ea,” Mahealani Ahia and Kahala Johnson discuss the Hawaiian diaspora, “the mere existence of the diaspora is often contemplated as the result of a successful settler displacement and/or the evidence of Native failure to persist on the land.”⁹² The authors argue that this mindset results in “channeling the logics of elimination against our off-island kin.”⁹³ As if the off-island Kānaka are less Hawaiian and that it is some kind of failure on their part that resulted in them leaving the islands.

Examining Kahakauwila’s short stories within the framework of Ahia and Johnson’s article is useful to understand the way in which “on-islanders can drag the Hawaiian diaspora beneath the undercurrents of a struggle that privileges permeance in the homeland as the grounds for Hawaiian indigeneity.”⁹⁴ Kahakauwila poses the question of what it means to belong to a place through her fiction. She asks if one is forever connected to Hawai'i because of their indigeneity.

In her short story “Road to Hana” a Kānaka woman and haole man discuss their relationship as they drive the windy road to the remote area of Hana, Maui. The woman, Becky,

⁹² Mahealani Ahia and Kahala Johnson, “A Breath of Ea: Submergent Strategies for Deepening the Hawaiian Diaspora,” *Shima Journal* v16n1, (2022): 145.

⁹³ Ahia and Johnson, 145.

⁹⁴ Ahia and Johnson, 155.

is Kānaka but was born and raised in the Continental US. The man, Cameron, is haole but was born and raised in Hawai'i. Becky's entire family has moved to Las Vegas, and yet she considers Hawai'i her home. She tells Cameron, "It's just you and your parents here, but for me there's an entire ancestry. . . This is my real home."⁹⁵ Later Becky tells Cameron that for her, Hawai'i is within her, that she is deeply connected to her ancestors. "My cousin can chant back twenty-five generations. That's what it means to be from a place."⁹⁶ Their discussion continues, and Cameron thinks to himself, "And yet, he wondered what Honolulu was if not *his* real home. He had been born there, raised there. . . Just because his parents were born in Minnesota didn't mean Hawai'i wasn't his."⁹⁷

Through fiction, Kahakauwila addresses questions of belonging that Indigenous off-islanders and haoles grapple with. Both Becky and Cameron feel belonging in Hawai'i is their right. Later the two discuss how Becky's extended family all live in Las Vegas. Becky says, "But I tell them, Vegas isn't home. It's not where I'm from."⁹⁸ Cameron replies, "But you were born there. That doesn't make you less Hawaiian, but it does make you something else, in addition."⁹⁹ Becky resists this idea that she could also be from Las Vegas. She says, "But in some ways, I think it was harder growing up Hawaiian and *not* being here. That sense of displacement, of never quite fitting in."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Kristiana Kahakauwila, *This is Paradise* (New York: Crown, 2013), 88.

⁹⁶ Kahakauwila, 92.

⁹⁷ Kahakauwila, 88.

⁹⁸ Kahakauwila, 91.

⁹⁹ Kahakauwila, 91.

¹⁰⁰ Kahakauwila, 91.

Ahia and Johnson challenge the tension that plays out between Hawaiians raised in Hawai'i and those raised on the continent as the result of colonization. The authors cite J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's work on the Hawaiian diaspora that "places Hawaiian on-islanders and off-islanders in an umbilical relationship that defies the racial, gendered, domesticated, and settled notions of indigeneity prescribed by colonization."¹⁰¹ Both these authors and Kahakauwila decolonize the ideas of which Kānaka belong by refusing settler ideas of what it means to belong. Being Kānaka cannot be determined by a settler framework. Ahia and Johnson argue that "the cementation of Hawaiian identities by settler colonialism . . . demands an indigeneity based on an inert, rigid, rootedness to land."¹⁰² But instead the scholars argue for an identity based on feminist and "submergent strategies of islandness."¹⁰³

To these scholars this looks like using the Hawaiian creation myth chant *He Kumulipo* to view what it means to be Kānaka and live away from Hawai'i. This myth foregrounds "the submergent strategies and adaptations our pre-human ancestors used to navigate the sea, land, and sky for millions of years."¹⁰⁴ This fluid approach refuses land as a definition of where one belongs. The ocean and the sky also connect all Kānaka, wherever they are living.

We can also see this idea in Kahakauwila's short story. Becky and Cameron's concept of history is different. When Becky explains the significance of Hana to ancient Hawaiians, Cameron thinks, "She always spoke of history in the present tense, which never failed to unsettle him. To him, history was not available for reintroductions and reliving but accessible only via

¹⁰¹ Ahia and Johnson, "A Breath of Ea," 147.

¹⁰² Ahia and Johnson, 145.

¹⁰³ Ahia and Johnson, 144.

¹⁰⁴ Ahia and Johnson, 143.

Careful and protracted study. For Becky, however, the past and present existed in the same moment.”¹⁰⁵ History is not stagnant to Kānaka, nor is it stuck in dirt as the only expression of belonging. Instead, it is fluid and circular. Kahakauwila, through the character of Becky, demonstrates this flowing view of history that pushes against settler ideas of history being set in books and unchanging. “For Becky, however, the past and present existed in the same moment. In her memory the two met, and through their meeting, she layered them, until the past and present were like ocean and sky, without noticeable boundary.”¹⁰⁶

Ahia and Johnson describe belonging and connection as the opposite of “assimilation and approximate loss.”¹⁰⁷ Instead they write that, “The diaspora has gills, the diaspora has fins, the diaspora breathes sovereignty in the saltwater fathoms flowing beneath Indigenous connections to land.”¹⁰⁸ For Kānaka, to be Hawaiian is fluid. They carry their identity wherever they travel. It moves with the ocean, the sky, and the wind. To be *of* a place for Kānaka is not static.

In another short story called “Thirty-Nine Rules for Making a Hawaiian Funeral into a Drinking Game” Kahakauwila describes the main character being of two worlds, a hapa haole, which is half white and half Hawaiian. She writes, “After all, you were not born on Kaua`i. You weren’t even born in Honolulu. No, you were raised a California girl, like your mother before you. She is haole. White. A foreigner. This makes you hapa haole. Half white. Half foreign.”¹⁰⁹ The main character doesn’t fit in with her cousins and Hawai’i relatives at her grandmother’s funeral. Kahakauwila writes, “You cannot hula or play the uke. You do not speak pidgin. You

¹⁰⁵ Kahakauwila, *This Is Paradise*, 95.

¹⁰⁶ Kahakauwila, 95.

¹⁰⁷ Ahia and Johnson, “A Breath of Ea,” 148.

¹⁰⁸ Ahia and Johnson, 148.

¹⁰⁹ Kahakauwila, *This Is Paradise*, 113.

never add the right proportion of water to poi. But you can summarize your grandmother's life in a five-paragraph essay, complete with thesis and topic sentences."¹¹⁰ The "haole" side of the character in the story has been taught how to write a five-paragraph essay but the "hapa" is the part that wants to be recognized in the same way that her cousins are accepted. But instead, she feels apart, not Hawaiian because she can't do all the things that would allow her to pass like speak "pidgin" or make poi with the correct amount of water.

At the end of the story Kahakauwila writes, "grandmother is in heaven now."¹¹¹ The heaven the narrator of the story pictures is a heaven with "Heineken, poi and dried ahi, your uncles' teasing and your aunties' cooking and your cousins laughing when you talk."¹¹² Heaven is a place where the narrator fits with her grandmother. Kahakauwila continues, "Heaven is them acting like this is where you belong, and if that's what haole pastors call hell, then thank God you finally got here."¹¹³ Given the choice between haole and Kānaka, the narrator chooses Kānaka. She is greedy to be a part of her Hawaiian family and to forget her haole side.

Ahia and Johnson mirror how the Hawaiian on-islanders impose this articulation of belonging to the diaspora that makes off-island Hawaiians feel they don't belong. They argue, "The fear, anxiety, dismissal, and distrust felt toward the Hawaiian diaspora by on-islanders augments what Lisa Kahaleole Hall (2009) calls settler strategies of erasure."¹¹⁴ To leave the islands, as a Hawaiian, is considered a failure. Ahia and Johnson again quote J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's by arguing that these "patriarchal preconceptions of the off-island Hawaiian . .

¹¹⁰Kahakauwila, 113.

¹¹¹Kahakauwila, 124.

¹¹²Kahakauwila, 124.

¹¹³Kahakauwila, 124.

¹¹⁴ Ahia and Johnson, "A Breath of Ea," 146.

harmfully reduce off-islandness to experiences of abandonment and absence.”¹¹⁵ Kahakauwila demonstrates this in her fiction when she writes that the narrator’s Hawaiian father left Hawai’i for the continental US and so when her on-island family tell stories at her grandmother’s funeral “your dad is not part of these stories. . . He was not like *any* of your uncles. . . He was the one who left.”¹¹⁶ Ahi and Johnson point out that in viewing the Hawaiian diaspora as other, on-islander Kānaka are appropriating colonizer views of Indigenous people. The Hawaiian diaspora struggle with belonging and rejection. Grappling with the idea of belonging directly related to a physical space allows a way to think about how ideas of who belongs are a colonization of the mind.

There are many more stories of people and belonging in Hawai’i that are not addressed here. The islands are not a melting pot if that term means a place where everyone lives in harmony. But they are a space to examine settler colonialism, Indigeneity and belonging, and racism against new immigrants because Hawai’i is a community of difference in an isolated space – an island – miles from the empire that inhabits it.

¹¹⁵ Ahi and Johnson, 146.

¹¹⁶ Kahakauwila, *This Is Paradise*, 119.

CHAPTER FOUR

HAOLE GO HOME

“Unless you are indigenous to some other place on the planet, you will always be on colonized ground. This is certainly true on the continent, where brutal colonial histories are buried just a little bit deeper in time and where there is a relatively smaller native population entreating us to remember.” – Judy Rohrer, “Haoles in Hawai’i”

My experience moving to the North Shore of O‘ahu in the 1970s shaped my life and identity. My family and I believed Hawai’i was our paradise. That first summer we moved to our new home, we hadn’t been immersed in any of the struggles of being white in Hawai’i yet. My dad turned from his Olympic past, instead becoming a surfer and pot-grower. He used Hawai’i to remake himself. Now as a scholar of American Studies, I see that the idea of coopting a different way of life is problematic. As surfers and hippies, we distanced ourselves from the story that allowed us to make Hawai’i our home, never thinking of ourselves as colonizers because, to us, that was ancient history. But we were working within the framework of settler colonialism under the guise of self-discovery. Without realizing it, we capitalized on imperialist nostalgia, Renato Rosaldo’s term that describes our innocence until further examined. In what follows, I investigate the idea of haole, or white person, in Hawai’i and what it means to inhabit, belong, and confront responsibility, violence and reckoning.

As a haole Hawai’i, I knew I didn’t belong. I remember my dad teaching me three things to remember in Hawai’i to stay safe: check your bed every night for centipedes, they like the hide under the covers and bite us while we sleep. The surf is dangerous, as he threw us into a breaking wave on the shore break to warn us about this saying, “this is the washing

machine. Don't get stuck in it." The last was that we were haoles and we were not welcome here. We needed to be especially polite and respectful of the people around us, and, for some reason, I remember him telling us not to look locals in the eye.

As a kid, I heard the ocean lapping the shore from my bedroom at Sunset Beach on the North Shore of O`ahu. In the summer the waves kissed the sand rhythmically – kiss, turn away, kiss, turn away. In the winter the waves pounded the shore. The surf boomed. Salt spray filled the air. The waves slammed boulders down onto the ocean floor as if the water had picked a rock up and hurled it through space. This is the place that entered our veins and we fell in love with it – us white kids who knew we didn't belong because our dad told us this. We were labelled haole in a way that didn't sound like it was a good thing to be. Despite this, it is the space I am compelled to keep exploring.

How is my haole story of Hawai'i important to the conversation of race and belonging when white businessmen stole Hawai'i from Kānaka Maoli and turned it into a paradise vacation spot as well as a giant military base for America? How important is it to frame the conversation about whiteness in the continental US by looking at Hawai'i and the way in which whiteness is called out there?

America's relationship to Hawai'i is fraught. Because Hawai'i is the most isolated land mass in the world and not contiguously connected to the continental US it is viewed as different. Hawai'i is othered from the contiguous United States for several reasons. The Pacific Ocean stands between Hawai'i and the western coast. To travel there requires a plane flight. Hawai'i is not a state an American would happen upon and drive through on their way to somewhere else. Distance creates isolation. The US invaded and stole Hawai'i from Kānaka people in the late

1800s and the people have not forgotten that. Very real efforts are being made every day to stop progress as defined by the colonizers. Bacchilega writes that Hawai'i's long history of being portrayed as a paradise is a "rupture" that is damaging to Hawaiians because it uses Hawai'i's "connected (hi)stories that . . . served—like raw materials—to imagine and market."¹ Instead, she writes, Hawai'i has become "a space constructed for non-Hawaiians (and especially Americans) to experience . . . a Hawai'i that is exotic and primitive while beautiful and welcoming."² This can be seen in the way tourists often dress and act differently there. They walk barefoot on the beach, wear aloha attire, attend luaus and learn the hula. Then they fly back to their homes on the mainland and become themselves again. It is a place that no matter how many times my father-in-law visited from Wisconsin, he asked if American money worked there. Hawai'i is also different because of the multi-racial population. White people are not the predominant race.

Three Categories of Racial Construction in Hawai'i: Kānaka, Local, Haole

To understand the intricacies of race in Hawai'i, it is important to know how race is constructed there. My discussion here addresses three areas of ethnicity as socially constructed throughout the islands. Kānaka Maoli or Kānaka refers to Indigenous Hawaiians. According to Kānaka scholar NoeNoe Silva, "'Kānaka' means 'person,' and 'maoli' means 'real; true; original; indigenous. 'Kānaka' by itself means 'Hawaiian' especially when used in contrast with 'haole' which meant 'foreigner.' . . . Maoli is cognate with Māori an Aotearoa and Ma'ohi of Tahiti. It reminds us that the Hawaiian Islands are centered in the Pacific (and not an appendage of the US

¹ Bacchilega, *Legendary Hawai'i*, 5.

² Bacchilega, 5.

West Coast).”³ This idea of Hawai’i not being tethered to the West Coast is also the reason I follow Kānaka Maoli scholars in using Continental US instead of the more popular “mainland” when describing the contiguous US. Part of decolonializing is questioning and then eliminating this word from the Hawai’i lexicon. I use Kānaka Maoli here to identify native Hawaiians to mirror the way Kānaka scholars discuss Hawaiians.

Trask writes, “As the indigenous people of Hawai’i, Hawaiians are Native to the Hawaiian Islands. We do not descend from the Americas or from Asia but from the great Pacific Ocean . . . the lesson of our origins is that we are genealogically related to Hawai’i, our islands, as family.”⁴ Rather than owning the land, to Kānaka the land is them and they are the land. This is different from a settler view of the land. Maile Arvin furthers this idea by explaining that one way settler colonialism maintains power is “through the economy (the turning of land and natural resources in profit).”⁵ Kānaka call the land the *‘āina*; it is not something to be conquered, but instead a relation. The *‘āina* is family. Like many Indigenous people, Kānaka Maoli have suffered at the hand of colonialism and Western contact decimating their numbers with disease. In Hawai’i, today, many Kānaka are fighting for sovereignty, for the US to release their islands back to them.

Local means any other brown-skinned immigrant to the islands. Many locals have a long history in Hawai’i. According to Rohrer, “In Hawai’i, local identity and culture emerged primarily from the experience of laborers on sugar and pineapple plantations and is primarily a mix of Portuguese, Asian, native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Island cultures.”⁶ Locals are also

³ Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 12-13.

⁴ Trask, *From A Native Daughter*, 1,2.

⁵ Maile Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai’i and Oceania*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2019), 15.

⁶ Judy Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai’i*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 3.

settlers but because of their history of working in plantations, they are accepted in a way that haoles are not. Though scholars such as Haunani-Kay Trask argue that “‘locals’ have no indigenous land base . . . only Hawaiians are Native to Hawai‘i. Everyone else is a settler.”⁷ Trask clarifies that “ideologically, Asians cannot abide categorization with *haole*. Their subjugation at the hands of *haole* racism, their history of deprivation and suffering on the plantations, demand an identity other than settler.”⁸ Thus, locals generally distance themselves from haoles or the *haole* stereotype.

Locals are settlers but feel they belong in Hawai‘i. Locals are not called out for the color of their skin like haoles. At the 1997 Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States Conference (MELUS), Trask identified Asians as a group that benefitted from the subjugation of Kānaka.⁹ She said that by calling themselves “locals” they gloss over the fact that they are immigrants but also settlers.¹⁰ More recently, academics have begun to examine the way in which locals also work under the guise of settler colonialism. Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura argue that “ethnic histories written about Asians demonstrate an investment in the ideal of America democracy that is ideologically at odds with indigenous critiques of US colonialism.”¹¹ Jodi Byrd names these immigrants as arrivants, building on the term that originally was used to identify enslaved African Americans brought to America against their will.¹² Roxanne Dunbar-

⁷ Haunani-Kay Trask, “Settlers of Color and ‘Immigrant’ Hegemony: ‘Locals’ In Hawai‘i,” *Amerasia Journal*, 26:2, 2000, 6.

⁸ Trask, 6.

⁹ Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai‘i*, 3.

¹⁰ Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai‘i*, 3.

¹¹ Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai‘i*, 3.

¹² Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai‘i*, 3.

Ortiz explains that because America demands patriotism, it is easy for arrivants to be complicit in the settler colonial paradigm without being conscious of the pull.¹³ Locals may demonstrate a kind of passivity of participating in the settler condition, thus working against Kānaka, but also think they are fighting for Kānaka because of their dislike of and distance from haoles.

Haole depicts a white person and is always a settler. Maile Arvin writes that “white settlers feel a natural ownership of a place. Within the structure of settler colonialism . . . possessing indigeneity is in fact a form of self-actualization for white settlers. . . white settlers in Polynesia use this form of passing to steal Indigenous land and power.”¹⁴ Because the structures of America favor whiteness, haole is called out in Hawai’i and is a word that “can be merely descriptive or hold a pejorative implication, though its original meaning is simply ‘foreigner.’”¹⁵ To be haole is to be constantly proving that there is distance between skin color and responsibility. Rohrer calls this “to haole,” turning the noun into a verb. Rohrer argues that we can choose how to “haole.” She writes, “we are called ‘haole’ because we have acted out our haoleness, violating local cultural norms. . . by being arrogant, rude, oblivious, greedy, talking too loud or too much, or taking up too much space.”¹⁶ For me, presenting as haole in any space was followed by acting socially acceptable to diminish my haoleness, as if I could shed my skin.

¹³ Rohrer, Haoles in Hawai’i, 3.

¹⁴ Arvin, Possessing Polynesians, 27.

¹⁵ Arvin, 27.

¹⁶ Rohrer, Haoles in Hawai’i, 3.

Genealogy of Haole

In contrast to the function of whiteness in the continental US, it is socially acceptable in Hawai'i to decenter white people. It is different than the continental US where othering often refers to people of color including Indigenous people who first inhabited North America. In Hawai'i my family and I were haoles because our white skin signified that we didn't belong in this place. According to Judy Rohrer in *Haoles in Hawai'i*, the definition of haole is "white person, American . . . foreigner."¹⁷ For many, me included, to be called "haole" was the first time I confronted the color of my skin. On the continental US my white skin was accepted, or deemed the norm in most spaces, and so required no acknowledgement of its color. This wasn't true in Hawai'i. Rohrer writes, "There would be no whiteness if there were no others who are excluded from the privilege of whiteness. In Hawai'i, there would be no haole without native Hawaiians and locals."¹⁸ Yet in Hawai'i whiteness is still a privilege because the same capitalist systems are in place. However, the cultural structure of Hawai'i forces haoles to confront these systems and their own responsibility to colonialism and its reach.

There are many conflicting sources about how the term haole began to be used to refer to white newcomers to the islands. *Surfer Today* claims that the term haole came from a pre-European contact chant in which a land is described where no people live except the foreign kind (he haole).¹⁹ The Hawai'i Tourism Authority defines haole as "a non-Native Hawaiian,

¹⁷ Rohrer, 109.

¹⁸ Rohrer, 42.

¹⁹ "The Origin of the Word Haole," *Surfer Today*, accessed August 22, 2023, <https://www.surfertoday.com/surfing/the-origin-of-the-word-haole>.

especially those of Caucasian ancestry (a sensitive word, however not derogatory).”²⁰ Other sources claim that haole means “no breath” (“ha” meaning breath of life and “ole” meaning without) and refers to the way most Polynesians would greet one another by breathing in one another’s breath. It is believed that when the English originally settled Hawai’i, they did not return the typical greeting shared by Kānaka and so were referred to as haole or without breath.

Rohrer discusses the construction of haole in relation to Hawaiians and locals. She contends that anxiety on the part of the Ali`i and the haole determined the construction of haole. “Haole anxiety about being engulfed by “the savage” caused larger-than-life self-representations.”²¹ These exaggerated personas caused fear in the Hawaiians resulting in resentment and caution in dealing with haole.

Many scholars wondered why Hawaiian Ali`i had haoles as advisors. Rohrer cites work by Jonathan Osorio who writes that ““If it was haole power that mattered in the world, then it was up to the Ali`i to mediate that power.””²² Kānaka were being strategic in trusting haoles to show them the ways in which Hawaiians could approach the world to keep their nation. Following Trask, Rohrer continues says, “Haoles are ‘interlopers,’ colonizers and occupiers who have succeeded in making Hawaiians ‘strangers in our own land.’”²³ However, Trask also says that there is room for haole allies if they support Hawaiians and “do so without loud pronouncements

²⁰ “Glossary of Common Hawai’i Vocabulary,” Hawaiian Tourism Authority, accessed August 22, 2023, <https://www.hawaiiitourismauthority.org/media/1682/maemae-glossary-of-common-hawaiian-vocabulary.pdf>.

²¹ Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai’i*, 50.

²² Rohrer, 49.

²³ Rohrer, 50.

about how *they* feel what *we* feel or how they *know* just what we *mean*.”²⁴ As stated in an earlier chapter, for me this means continuing to listen, learn, and stand behind but along with Kānaka.

The local representation of haole comes from the white supremacy of the plantation system. The laborers, now called locals, of the plantation system were immigrants from Asian countries. The overseers were white and lived in large houses. The managers, who were also haole, lived in nice bungalows. The locals lived in subpar housing. The two groups – haole and local didn’t mix.²⁵ These racial constructions were pointed out to me by my dad as soon as I arrived in the islands. I didn’t have time to make my own impressions; this was simply the way it was. Rohrer defines the characteristics of haole in local culture as “arrogant, aggressive, ignorant of island cultures and histories, greedy, loud, and rude.”²⁶ This was the haole I tried not to be while in Hawai’i, always working to run away from the reputation of haole that preceded me.

Different Kinds of Haole in Hawai’i

There were different categories of haole. We knew that haole men who were in the military were referred to as grunts and they were more likely to get beaten up than any of us other haoles. We knew we didn’t want to be mistaken for a grunt. The military are everywhere in Hawai’i, but at the same time seem to occupy a different world, living on their bases. But when they venture out to the surf of the North Shore or to the bars of Waikīkī, they can be targeted by locals because they don’t show proper respect for their environment. I’ve seen military men

²⁴ Rohrer, 50, 51.

²⁵ Rohrer, 51.

²⁶ Rohrer, 54.

paddle out to big surf at the break near our house without knowing anything about the ocean or their surfboard. Many drown. Many were saved by my dad and other surfers like him.

We knew the Hawai'i of Waikīkī, with its convenience stores selling plastic leis and tiki torches wasn't our Hawai'i. We would never want to be mistaken for a tourist who wore their haole like a badge, mispronouncing Hawaiian words, street, and city names, and asking me odd questions like, "Sweetie how did you ever come to live here? Is your daddy in the military?" As if they couldn't fathom why a white-hair, blue-eyed girl was swimming alone in the middle of Sunset Beach. They could only make sense of me in that location if my dad was in the military and was stationed in Hawai'i. They couldn't comprehend that he chose to leave white America and move there. I always defiantly gave them the same answer: "My dad moved here to surf." Tourists would unload at our beach from huge, air-conditioned buses like herds of cows branded by their matching muumuus (for the women) and aloha shirts (for the men). I'd look up from the water and wonder how they could experience a place from a bus without ever taking off their shoes and wiggling their toes in the sand and the water.

In *Beyond Ethnicity: New Politics of Race in Hawai'i*, Paul Spickard writes, "There are four kinds of White people in Hawai'i."²⁷ These include tourists, military and their families, long term residents from the continental United States that make Hawai'i their home and finally white people Spickard calls "local haoles – people who grew up in the islands, who practice local culture, who speak pidgin . . . and who, though White, are part of the everyday fabric of island

²⁷ Paul Spickard, *Beyond Ethnicity: New Politics of Race in Hawai'i*, "LOCAL HAOLE? Whites, Racial and Imperial Loyalties, and Membership in Hawai'i," (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 179.

life.”²⁸ Spickard argues that “White people in Hawai’i. . . are all indisputably heirs to the colonial imposition of early generations of White Americans,”²⁹ however the different kinds of white people in the islands experience this differently. Tourists and military are never going to be considered local – “they are not a part of Hawai’i.”³⁰ But for the other two kinds of haole, those choosing to make Hawai’i their home and those born there, the experience of belonging is more complex and is based on the behavior of the haole along with acceptance and judgement from locals and Kānaka people.

America’s Racist Relationship with Hawai’i

It’s interesting to note that as people in Hawai’i call out haoles, history shows that the American government worked long and hard to convince Americans that Hawai’i was worthy of being a state, despite its predominantly Asian and Kānaka population. Hawai’i was the last state to be named and colonized by America. It didn’t become a state until 1959. According to *How to Hide an Empire* by Daniel Immerwahr, the South opposed accepting Hawai’i as a state because of the lack of white people. Hawai’i was so far away that white Americans in the continental US didn’t think about it.

Immerwahr argues that prior to America’s entrance into WWII, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was tasked with making America care about the bombings at Pearl Harbor without a personal connection to this territory because a lot of white people didn’t live there. Most

²⁸ Spickard, 179.

²⁹ Spickard, 181.

³⁰ Spickard, 181.

Americans had never been to Hawai'i. It wasn't yet a state. Would Americans really consider it America? Immerwahr states, it wasn't just Pearl Harbor that was bombed, but also relentless attacks and invasion of the Philippines, as well as Guam, Midway Island, and Wake Island.

FDR rewrote his famous "Infamy" speech because he doubted that the American public would see the legitimacy of attacks so far away from the United States. Immerwahr argues, "Were Japan's targets considered the 'United States'?"³¹

Hawai'i was FDR's best hope for validity in the eyes of Americans because "it was closer to North America and significantly whiter than the others,"³² though the Philippines suffered much worse damage and were invaded by the Japanese. FDR made a change right before his speech to read "the Japanese squadrons had bombed not the 'island of O'ahu,' but the 'American Island of O'ahu.'"³³ According to Immerwahr, suddenly Hawai'i became "An *American* island, where *American* lives were lost . . . Hawai'i was being rounded up to 'American.'"³⁴

The bombing of Pearl Harbor is now considered an American event. Today, thousands of patriotic Americans flock to the Pearl Harbor War Memorial to pay homage. However, even after WWII and the Americanization of Hawai'i, Southern states resisted making Hawai'i a state. Immerwahr calls statehood for Hawai'i a "serious blows against racism. For the first time, the logic of white supremacy had not dictated which parts of the Greater United States were eligible for statehood."³⁵ This statement frames Hawai'i as the exception to the prevalent racism in

³¹ Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 6.

³² Immerwahr, 6.

³³ Immerwahr, 6.

³⁴ Immerwahr, 7.

³⁵ Immerwahr, 241.

America and points to the multi-cultural depiction of Hawai'i as an example of a "melting pot." But this point of view is idealistic and incorrect. It is a view that hotel corporations and the tourist industry pitch to promote Hawai'i as a paradise to be enjoyed.

The "Statehood for Hawai'i," document presented to the 86th congress in 1959 describes Hawai'i residents as "Americans through and through."³⁶ Though Hawai'i residents comprise a "melting pot" of ethnicities "they've learned to live together, work together, play together and study together . . . that is Americanism too."³⁷ The document argues that Hawai'i is worthy of statehood because Hawaiian residents are Americans despite their skin color. They do all the things that qualify them as Americans. "Hawai'i residents yell themselves hoarse at football games, eat hot dogs, attend church services, watch television . . . and read the funny papers."³⁸ The 88-page document is a plea for statehood with sections explaining that there is no opposition to statehood by Hawaiians. That the islands are financially sound and have all the things that make a great American city – patriotic residents, schools, universities, sports, modern roadways, art, and entertainment, agricultural and hotels.

Is Hawai'i Really a Melting Pot?

In her discussion of understanding race in Hawai'i, Lori Pierce addresses the work of sociologist Romanzo Adams who conducted studies at the burgeoning University of Hawai'i

³⁶ Hawai'i Statehood Commission, "Statehood for Hawai'i : the case for a half million Americans at the threshold 1959," accessed July 14, 2023, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.li2jg5&seq=38>.

³⁷ Hawai'i Statehood Commission, 38.

³⁸ Hawai'i Statehood Commission, 38.

from 1920 to 1942. Adams and his graduate students argued that Hawai'i was an example of how different races could live harmoniously together especially as compared to the continental US and the Jim Crow south. Pierce wrote, "In 1925, Adams' *The People of Hawai'i* opened with this astonishing paragraph: 'There is abundant evidence that the peoples of Hawai'i are in the process of becoming one people.'"³⁹ Adams believed that different races would continue to intermarry and "Ethnic identity would fracture to the point where it was meaningless."⁴⁰

However, plantation structure changed that. Other ethnicities were intermarrying, but whites were no longer included as compared to earlier Hawaiian history. Pierce contests, "what was happening on the plantations was not the fracturing of ethnicity, but the gradual consolidation of ethnicity around class lines – 'locals' versus Haole."⁴¹ This is interesting to me because it makes me wonder what would have happened without the plantation structure, with Kānaka continuing to rule and make decisions. Would Hawai'i have become a true "melting pot." But once the white settlers took over, and a plantation economy prevailed, there was no hope of stopping the kind of ethnic hierarchy that is there today.

Pierce says to understand race in Hawai'i is to view it through "a variety of lenses."⁴² These include the tourist vision of paradise and the idealistic melting pot concept. However, Pierce argues, "Hawai'i was not a racial paradise, but there was a deep desire to believe that it was so."⁴³ Believing Hawai'i had solved the race problem would also put a different slant on "the

³⁹ Lori Pierce, "Creating a Racial Paradise: Citizenship and Sociology in Hawai'i," in *Race and Nation: Ethnic Systems in the Modern World*, ed. Paul Spickard, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 78.

⁴⁰ Pierce, 83.

⁴¹ Pierce, 83.

⁴² Pierce, 84.

⁴³ Pierce, 84.

American experiment” says Pierce. If Hawai’i was considered a “racial paradise” then the overthrow of the Hawaiian government and subsequent “imposition of Western language, culture, religion, and government in Hawai’i was not an assertion of White supremacy but the natural progress of a nation from the primitive to the modern.”⁴⁴ It was important to the “project” of Hawai’i that America seem blameless and that moving from “savagery” to civilized was beneficial for all involved. However, America is not blameless and with this blame comes a reckoning for haoles who make Hawai’i their home.

In addition, in the US in the late 1960s and early 1970s liberals were responding to social demands of equality. The multicultural propaganda was strategically used to hide the reality of the US. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz writes that “Given attempts to offset an exclusive emphasis of white settler history and the winning of the West as the national triumphant narrative, ‘a nation of immigrants’ fit the multicultural agenda.”⁴⁵ Hawai’i was the perfect place to demonstrate this false narrative. Ortiz continues, “The nation of immigrants myth erases the fact that the United States was founded as a settler state from its inception and spent the next hundred years at war against the Native Nations in conquering the continent.”⁴⁶ This is another way myths hide the reality of a place. When this multicultural idea is examined further, many holes appear.

When an immigrant enters a new country there is a period of assimilation before they are accepted into the greater society. Pierce describes this when she’s writing about Asian immigrants coming to Hawai’i to work in the sugar cane plantations, “Eventually, as immigrants dropped their language, institutions, and other practices, which made them objectionable to the

⁴⁴ Pierce, 84.

⁴⁵ Dunbar-Ortiz, *Not a Nation of Immigrants*, xviii.

⁴⁶ Dunbar-Ortiz, xxii.

outside community, they were accommodated by the larger society.”⁴⁷ This kind of assimilation seems very similar to what white people must go through when they arrive in Hawai’i. Haoles assume that moving to Hawai’i will be like moving to any other state within the 50, but it’s not. Hawai’i is different and whites will never be accepted at face value in Hawai’i regardless of adhering to a strict social hierarchy.

My family was not interested in assimilating to local ways completely. My dad didn’t want us speaking the vernacular of pidgin English that the locals and Hawaiians often spoke. We did not eat rice with every meal like many of my friends. We adopted the things we felt were useful for ourselves, while also believing that the white way in which we were raised was the correct way.

Chad Blair, the politics, and opinion editor for *Civil Beat*, an online Hawai’i newspaper, writes that before haoles can be considered local they must live in Hawai’i, “One year. Twenty years. Never. . . understand Pidgin . . . begin using Pidgin . . . favor Zippy’s over California Pizza Kitchen . . . marry a local . . . have a child born in Hawai’i.”⁴⁸ Though Blair’s article is meant to be funny, it is also factual. Pidgin is the language born of immigrants from different countries coming together on plantations and creating a mash-up languages to communicate. It is commonly used in Hawai’i by anyone other than haoles. Zippy’s is a favorite Hawai’i fast food restaurant known for its saimin, Portuguese sausage and eggs, chicken katsu with rice and pork adobo along with other local favorites. Knowing Hawai’i and feeling like you belong in Hawai’i

⁴⁷ Pierce, 79.

⁴⁸ Chad Blair, “Haole? The Unbearable Whiteness of Being,” *Civil Beat News*, June 19, 2012, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2012/06/haole-the-unbearable-whiteness-of-being/> .

is appreciating the local foods. But no matter how hard a haole tries, assimilation is never complete for haoles.

When the Observer Isn't White

White people who live in and visit Hawai'i are called out for the responsibility and the characteristics their white skin entails. Hawai'i is a space of questioning, resistance, and protest to colonialism through the unwillingness to accept white privilege as a given. Rohrer writes,

. . . understanding any form of whiteness requires looking at it from the perspective of people of color. . . Hawaiian constructions focus on haole as colonizer, whereas local constructions originate in the experience of haole as plantation owner and oligarch. . . In this way we can think of local and Hawaiian constructions of haole as a way of talking back to white supremacy.⁴⁹

The act of simply assuming all spaces will accept a white person is white supremacy because it naturally believes that the world centers around white people. Exposing this can only happen when perspectives from people of color are also understood.

On the continental US, whiteness is mostly the dominant position, so white people are not forced to see themselves through the eyes of a person of color. Hawai'i is different. Hawaiians continue to resist colonization and many locals have a history of working on plantations owned by haoles. This resistance to whiteness is a way of saying "no" to the structures that show precedence over white people. In addition, the way race is viewed in Hawai'i versus the continental US provides a powerful example of what Michael Omi and Howard Winant term "racial formations." "Race is socially constructed," the authors argue, "and varies depending on

⁴⁹ Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai'i*, 35.

time and place.”⁵⁰ As haole in Hawai’i I learned that my race showed up before I did. Omi and Winant write, “Human bodies are visually read, narrated, and understood by means of symbolic meanings and associations.”⁵¹ White people were perceived to be loud and disrespectful. I learned to show proper respect for the spaces I entered, and this required humility, noticing and care. I had never been thoughtful about the spaces I’d entered before but the first thing my dad taught me and my brother was respect. He taught us that we were white, something I hadn’t thought about.

Though I needed to change my behavior in this space, I continued to have representations of myself in the Barbie, Ken, and Skipper dolls I played with in the tidepools in front of our house. I also saw myself in the *Little House on the Prairie* books I was excited to find at the local library. Though I didn’t belong in Hawai’i, my belonging was validated on television and in books. My white skin, blonde hair and blue eyes were reflected back to me in the media but not in my new home. And still, I yearned to also belong in Hawai’i because my dad made it our home and I had fallen in love with the ocean, the soft breeze on my skin, the sand under my bare feet.

According to Rohrer,

‘Haole go home’ was a popular slogan in the 1970s for a number of reasons... clearly marking haole as not at home in Hawai’i. In contrast, white American visitors and newcomers to the islands are often surprised when they are called ‘haole’ ... From their point of view, Hawai’i is the fiftieth state and they have just as much right to be here as any other US citizen. They believe they can even move

⁵⁰ Michael Omi, Howard Winant, *Racial Formations in the United States*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 13.

⁵¹ Omi and Winant, 13.

to Hawai'i and call it 'home' if they want. The United States is after all a 'free country.'⁵²

My dad moved to Hawai'i because he believed it was his right. He had friends who were already there who warned him to be careful. I was taught how handle myself in this space. But our white privilege also entitled us to never consider not moving to Hawai'i. There were new rules for keeping my little brother and me safe. Where we went to school mattered. Some school districts were considered safer than others for haoles. Many haoles didn't move to the North Shore of O`ahu but stayed in Honolulu or moved to more white places like the wealthy areas of Kahala or Kailua. They sent their kids to private schools started by the haole descendants of the white missionaries. But my dad wasn't going to do that. He would make sure we were relatively safe going to public schools on the North Shore. He hadn't come to Hawai'i for a career move. He didn't have the money to send us to private school or to move us to Honolulu. He came to Hawai'i to shun all those American dreams that required him to work a career-oriented job. My dad was living on the fringe of society and the margins of legality. He believed we would cope if we could get into school districts where there was less local-on-haole violence.

Rohrer's family moved to Kaua`i in 1974, the same year as we moved to O`ahu. She recounts her introduction to the word haole and how she learned that this word described her. She was standing in line for lunch, "The boy behind me gives me a push and says with complete disdain, 'Fucking haole!' I have no idea what this means, but I know it can't be good."⁵³ Like Rohrer, I learned that haole is sometimes derogatory and sometimes just stating that, "race

⁵² Judy Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai'i*, 11.

⁵³ Rohrer, 1.

operates differently in the islands.”⁵⁴ But no matter what the meaning it labels me as “other” and reminds me that I don’t belong.

Though living in Hawai’i was filled with the potential violence my white skin presented for me, my dad taught us that it was worth the risk. I loved living there. My dad loved it. My brother loved it. Even though we felt it was our right to be there, many things didn’t want us. It felt like the underside of this beauty was ugly and jagged like the *wana* or sea urchins hiding in the colorful reefs that stabbed their quills into the tender undersides of my feet. Who I am was always announced and judged by my white skin and hair every time I entered any space – a classroom, a store, a restaurant. This perception of me based solely on what I looked like is something I constantly tried to hide from. And yet, how could I hide from what my appearance announced? I was experiencing racialization. Omi and Winant argue that this happens not because of any real biological differences, but instead, “sociohistorical practices such as conquest and enslavement classified human bodies through for purposes of domination.”⁵⁵ The opposite was true when the dominated wanted to resist domination.⁵⁶ This was the racial formation of Hawai’i. Rohrer argues, “many haoles today seek to be ‘anything but haole.’”⁵⁷ My goal was to disappear these traits in myself especially in the space of public school. When I asked my dad why people didn’t like me in our new home, he explained a vague story of haoles being cruel managers on plantations and stealing the land from Hawaiians. As a nine-year-old, I wondered why people were mad at me because I didn’t personally steal the land or abuse

⁵⁴ Rohrer, 5.

⁵⁵ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formations in the United States*, 13.

⁵⁶ Omi and Winant, 13.

⁵⁷ Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai’i*, 8.

fieldworkers. Later, I learned that I was a settler, riding on the coattails of the colonizers who came before me. As Patrick Wolfe states “settler colonialism is a process not an event.”⁵⁸ Sure, we weren’t the missionaries that came after Captain Cook happened upon Hawai’i, but we were unconsciously participating in the slow, unfolding process of Indigenous elimination.

When Rohrer told her hippy mother that the kids at school called her “haole,” her mother told Rohrer to “tell my classmates I was Swedish, Swiss-German, Mexican, and Greek.”⁵⁹ When Rohrer explained this to the kids on the playground they replied, ““So? You still one haole!””⁶⁰ Like me, Rohrer learned to make herself small by disappearing into the background. Throughout public elementary, middle, and high school, I also learned to “diminish my haole quotient.”⁶¹

To negotiate my white skin, I needed to behave with respect but sometimes I messed up. As an eighth grader, one day I went to the local grocery store with my stepmother. I had just come up from the beach and wore a two-piece bathing suit with a thin towel wrapped around my waist. In the produce isle, my social studies’ teacher Mrs. Ishii rushed up to me, “Debby never go to the store dressed like that again,” she tsked. “It is disrespectful. You must cover yourself up.” I left the store embarrassed and sat in the car waiting for my stepmother. Because we were hippies the way we behaved didn’t line-up with the values of local and Kānaka Maoli cultures. Any time my Mormon or Christian missionary friends came to my house I hid any evidence of my dad’s pot smoking. We never walked to the side of our house where his pot plants grew. He kept his

⁵⁸ Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” 389.

⁵⁹ Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai’i*, 1.

⁶⁰ Rohrer, 2.

⁶¹ Rohrer, 2.

rolling tray in the living room on a table next to his chair, and I'd hide it under a pile of magazines. I didn't have to do this when most of my other haole friends came over.

Proving myself continued in post-college in my professional career as a publicist in Honolulu. My blonde hair and white skin need to be qualified and explained away. "Debby grew up here," my boss told the general manager of the Kaua'i hotel we represented. "She's a local haole." When I represented a Hawaiian musical trio, my haoleness was explained away as the fact that I went to Waiialua High School and was not "really" haole. Waiialua High School is a local public school whereas many haoles attend private high schools that are mostly haole. This belonging was important in Hawai'i where it is impossible to move to the state and have any idea what it is like. You need to live it on a deeper level.

My family could pretend we were removed from the original colonizers of Hawai'i, but were we? Perhaps years and events shaded our responsibility. We lived in America. We were basically following most laws by moving to Hawai'i, but we didn't give much thought to who we were displacing by moving there or what more haoles on the North Shore would ultimately do to the island. We were operating from this deeply held assumption that we couldn't see, but that white people held from when we first began conquering America. It was called "the vanishing American," and assumed that taking Native American lands was okay because Indians were doomed to extinction anyway. All we knew was we loved this place and didn't want to leave. We wanted a piece of it. A piece of our own idea of paradise. It was better not to think about who, in our yearning, we were displacing.

Reverend Jim's Ten Commandments for Growing Up Haole on O`ahu

In Liz Prato's book *Volcano, Palm Trees & Privileges: Essays on Hawai'i* there is a chapter titled "Reverend Jim's Ten Commandments for Growing Up Haole on O`ahu." Jim moved to Hawai'i with his widowed mother as a six-year-old. Commandment one states, "I am white, not haole, and I have to keep proving that I'm not haole all the time."⁶² Reverend Jim's point is that no matter how unfair it seems, proving that you're not haole, but instead white will never end in the space of Hawai'i. Jim writes that haole, "Doesn't mean white person – it means 'other.' It just means, 'You're not like us.'"⁶³ Even if you were born in Hawai'i, you must prove you are not haole again and again. You must do better and prove that you will not repeat the same mistakes other white people made before you. Jim writes, "You shall have no anger that you're blamed for the shitty things other haoles have done."⁶⁴ This is a hard thing to reckon with and yet this is the way it is in Hawai'i. Rohrer argues, "I think the moment at which white people who move to Hawai'i are first racially marked as haole is pivotal."⁶⁵ This moment is important because, Rohrer explains that this is the first time white people are forced to confront their whiteness. Whereas "whiteness in Hawai'i is always marked and often challenged."⁶⁶

⁶² Liz Prato, *Volcanos, Palm Trees and Privilege: Essays on Hawai'i*, (Oregon: Overcup Press, 2019), 52.

⁶³ Prato, 52.

⁶⁴ Prato, 52.

⁶⁵ Prato, 2.

⁶⁶ Prato, 2.

Racial Division Is Acknowledged in Hawai'i

Before moving to Hawai'i my whiteness had never been named before. I was never described as a "White American" because the color of my skin dictated the parameters of the systems in our country. In America I am simply American, not African American, or Native American, or Asian American. No preface to America is needed to describe me. In his book *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* George Lipsitz writes that "As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations."⁶⁷ Though white people in Hawai'i are named and racial division is not hidden, race in Hawai'i still works like it does in the continental US in terms of Lipsitz's idea that white people are working under a racist system that favors them. In the twentieth anniversary of his book, Lipsitz says much hasn't changed in the last twenty years for people of color. He writes, "David Walker emphasized how the rewards of whiteness corrupt white people. Once group identity makes people used to exploiting the labors of the others, they become blind to the evil acts they perform."⁶⁸ Even in Hawai'i, though haoles are called out, systems of white supremacy favor them.

Hawai'i Japanese author Lois-Ann Yamanaka explains "In diverse, stratified Hawai'i, we all designate each other by race, using references that evolved from sugar plantation pidgin dating back to the late 1870s." Growing up she "was the *Japanee* girl with the big mouth and the

⁶⁷ George Lipsitz. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018), 1.

⁶⁸ Lipsitz, xxv.

Dorothy Hamill hairdo. (*Japanee* is pidgin English for Japanese). And the white guy who ate Rice-A-Roni with butter was the *haole* who didn't speak pidgin or eat *real* rice."⁶⁹ This calling out is exactly why I think looking at whiteness in Hawai'i is an important project because it gives a white settler the perspective of the legacy of repression we benefit from every day in most spaces.

Charles Mills developed the concept of "white ignorance" in *The Racial Contract* to describe how the system that assumed white people will rule over nonwhite people is "taken for granted," meaning white people don't see it and are thus ignorant. Mills' book is based on the claim that "white supremacy exists and has existed for many years."⁷⁰ In Hawai'i we haoles are forced to see ourselves, and even then, it is hard not to fall victim to feeling that bigotry is about you personally; to not think that some great injustice is being done to you, and to instead learn from this idea. Being labeled haole makes me put a lens on myself. It makes me see myself in a sea of people that don't look like me. It makes me check my behavior. It makes me feel small and at the same time it makes me feel like I stand out. I can't hide my blonde hair and white skin. I can't act like someone I am not. Haole allows me the smallest glimpse into people of color's lives. The tiniest glimpse. And though my race is identified and examined in Hawai'i, it still gives me advantages, even in a place where haole is often a derogatory term.

Author Keiko Ohnuma writes about her experience of first going to Hawai'i as an Asian-American and instantly being accepted as "local." She writes, "I arrived, like any mainlander, carrying all the Western mythic baggage about paradise and new beginnings – but without the

⁶⁹ Lois-Ann Yamanaka. "This Man Is An Island," *New York Times*, January 17, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/18/opinion/18yamanaka.html> .

⁷⁰ Charles Mills. *The Racial Contract*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) 2, 7.

stigma of white skin.”⁷¹ Instead of feeling like she belonged, Ohnuma was “blending in and being mistaken for ‘local’ –when what I felt more than ever was white.”⁷² Because Ohnuma looked like the other locals who first immigrated to Hawai’i to work in the sugar cane and pineapple fields, it was automatically assumed that she’d lived in Hawai’i her entire life. She was not marked as other. Ohnuma writes,

“From about the mid-1960s, the discourse of ‘local vs. haole’ began to subsume – together with the history of colonization, impositions of Christian (Western) values, theft of land, overthrow of the monarchy, and indentured servitude on the plantations – contemporary loss of control through rapid urban development and the attendant competition for jobs, land and resources, and other restraints of a tourist-based economy.”⁷³

This created an “us vs. them” mentality and put the blame of all these wrongs on one group of people. However, Ohnuma points out that the whites that were relocating to Hawai’i, weren’t necessarily moneyed. They were very similar financially to the locals they were joining in neighborhoods and schools. Ohnuma says, “the bulk of *haoles* who make Hawai’i a permanent home . . . are neither extraordinary wealthy nor privileged; as a group, they report to striving to fit in and aspire helplessly to local status. . .”⁷⁴ Ohnuma explains that these haoles weren’t “descended from missionaries or plantation owners.”⁷⁵ Because of this, haoles were joining locals and Hawaiians in their neighborhoods. This created a competition for resources and housing, exacerbating the race issues.

⁷¹ Keiko Ohnuma. “Local *Haole* – A Contradiction of Terms? The dilemma of being white, born and raised in Hawai’i,” *Cultural Values* 6, no. 3 (2002), 273.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1362517022000007211> .

⁷² Ohnuma, 273.

⁷³ Ohnuma, 274.

⁷⁴ Ohnuma, 275.

⁷⁵ Ohnuma, 275.

Hawai'i is complex and different from most places on the continental US that haoles have most likely lived before. Like all ethnicities in Hawai'i, haole is marked. But feeling a sense of belonging is difficult when your white skin labels you as other before you can prove otherwise. Is difficult bad? Is difficult wrong? Many haoles claim it is hard. I agree that it was hard, especially as a kid, when I didn't understand the complexities of race in Hawai'i. But by my junior and senior years of high school, I had found my footing. I had a group of friends that included haoles along with locals that had ethnic backgrounds of Japanese, Samoan and Filipino.

That changed for a short time when in my senior year of high school, a group of women began calling my house telling me they were going to "give me lickins" (or beat me up) for some offense I can't remember committing but included being a "fucking haole bitch." I was afraid to go to school. They said they'd jump me at the bus stop. I peered out the bus windows, scanned the bushes to see where they were hiding. One night my stepmother answered the phone when they called and met their fierceness with her own. I was sure the next day they would kill me for her harsh words. But instead, they went away. Never called again. Never showed up at my bus stop. Being a haole in Hawai'i was scary when my presence in a space or the way I conducted myself, down to looking someone in the eye, could lead to physical violence. It felt like a catch 22; I couldn't change how I looked. Ohnuma argues that to be a haole is a dead-end, "Localism, which constructs '*haole*' at that moment of theft/rape/colonization, denies the local *haole* any route out of history . . . He can only travel back, to a time before the breach. . ." ⁷⁶ I think there is a route out of history, though, it comes from acknowledging the legacy of settler colonialism and trying to do better. Looking back I don't think there is anything wrong with having to prove

⁷⁶ Ohnuma, 280.

myself because of my white skin. Lots of people of color have these experiences every day. My dad chose to live in a place that wouldn't naturally accept us. Many people don't have a choice. Being labelled a haole made me aware of myself and my agency in a way that I wouldn't have learned if I'd grown up on the continent. Part of accepting the legacy of my skin color, is what belonging in Hawai'i as a white person was about. It is something to sit with and examine, instead of trying to fix it.

Always contending with the history that preceded you is a hard pill for many haoles to swallow. This can be especially true for those who live and work in Hawai'i and feel they are contributing to the fabric of the community, in allegiance with Kānaka. Failing to contend with this history, however, is an instance of what Charles Mills calls "white ignorance." He says that whites benefit from a "white normativity" that "manifests itself in a white refusal to recognize the long history of structural discrimination that has left whites with the differential resources they have today."⁷⁷ I see this in the way that whites want to move to Hawai'i, even though they know they aren't wanted there. If they have the resources to do it, they often come despite knowing that haoles aren't automatically welcomed in , then they're surprised when they're labelled haoles and it feels derogatory.

Paul Spickard is dismissive of those that take issue with being called haole. "No one is attacking them by calling them haoles. They need to get over it."⁷⁸ Spickard writes that white people are "unused to having their Whiteness marked, so apparently they feel threatened by that

⁷⁷ Charles Mills, "White Ignorance," *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 28.

⁷⁸Spickard, *Beyond Ethnicity: New Politics of Race in Hawai'i*, 183.

marking when it happens locally.”⁷⁹ This is the struggle between wanting to live in a place, going there because of your white privilege, and then being surprised when met with resistance from others who don’t want white people there. Moving to Hawai’i and pushing up the prices of homes is also a kind of white supremacy.

Mills points out that white people have a kind of amnesia about the history that preceded them and laid the foundation for the support and privilege that allows them to live a life of choice, much like my dad. Mills says, “The erasure of Jim Crow make is possible to represent the playing field as historically level, so that current black poverty just proves black’s unwillingness to work.”⁸⁰ This can be seen in the way that Hawaiians were called lazy or were accused of being on welfare because they chose not to work. Amy Ku‘uleialoha Stillman writes that for her parents who were part-Hawaiian, born after Hawai’i was annexed to the US, they lived through “decades in which they had Hawaiian language punished out of them, and ‘lazy’ and ‘dumb’ become common epithets applied to people of Hawaiian ancestry.”⁸¹ But the playing field is not equal and few Indigenous and people of color have the same opportunities as white people.

Stillman also writes that “educators held no expectations for educational, economic, or social achievements by Hawaiian children and those attitudes carried through to (her) own generation.”⁸² This lack of expectation is difficult fight against, especially when the framework is not in place to support Kānaka. Though my dad was a hippie and lived off the government for a

⁷⁹Spickard, 183.

⁸⁰ Mills, “White Ignorance,” 31.

⁸¹ Amy Ku‘uleialoha Stillman, “Beyond the Coloniality of Authenticity,” *American Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2021): 161. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2021.0012>.

⁸² Stillman, 161.

time, I also believed I was smart enough to go to college. There was no question as to whether I would. The white amnesia Mills refers to is a belief that all Americans have the same basic rights and the means to achieve their goals. But, as Trask points out, Hawaiians suffer the same fate of many indigenous groups in the US. They are a people with “high unemployment, catastrophic health problems, low education attainment, large numbers institutionalized in the military and prisons, occupational ghettoization in poorly paid jobs, and the increasing outmigration that amounts to diaspora.”⁸³ When the true history is erased and Hawai’i is represented as a melting pot with great opportunities for all people, then the above facts about Kānaka can easily be blamed on the Hawaiian people themselves. White settlers have the opportunity to be allies to Kānaka by countering this amnesia by learning the history of Hawai’i and understanding the implications of over a hundred years of white settler occupation.

Haoles Expect to be Welcome in All Spaces

Haunani-Kay Trask, a Kānaka Maoli professor at the University of Hawai’i (UH), responded to an editorial by a haole UH student from Louisiana who complained about being labeled as haole. He wrote about being chased and attacked by locals. In response, Trask wrote,

Mr. Carter could examine his own presence here, and how things haole, including the English language, the political and economic systems, and the non-self-governing status of Native Hawaiians allows him and live and work in my country when so many of my own people have been driven out. . .⁸⁴

⁸³ Trask, “From a Native Daughter,” 17.

⁸⁴ Rohrer, Haoles in Hawai’i, 183.

It is important to be aware of the privilege you hold as a white person and the history that precedes you. Colonization is a violent act. Rohrer uses Donna Haraway's theory of becoming "answerable for what we learn to see' . . . In Hawai'i, for haole, this necessarily means becoming answerable for the history of colonization."⁸⁵ Though my family was not the first wave of colonizers, we were working from a colonizer state of mind. This state of mind had been creating the world we lived in since Europeans set out to map the world into four continents, to decide that Western ways were the only way, to proclaim that science reigned supreme over all other knowledge.

Walter Mignolo writes that western civilization acted as saviors, God's chosen ones who would "save the rest of the world from the Devil" and that this would make people happy "for all and forever."⁸⁶ In my dad's dropping out of life on the mainland, we were striving for happiness as defined by the Western way of measuring things. We wanted a piece of that place. We wanted land in Hawai'i. We wanted a permanent place to call our home. We wanted a place safe from local or Hawaiian prejudice. We wanted to curate our paradise. Take what we wanted of Hawaiian tradition and keep our European/American ways. We wanted to be accepted as locals but not considered locals. We were never going to work on plantations or speak pidgin-English. As my dad's kids we would have the opportunity to go to college. We wanted the beachfront house. We wanted the safe school. We wanted the private surf break where my dad would let the air out of the tires of other haole surfers who paddled out there. We wanted to be white but not be white. We wanted to be known as locals, not confused as tourists because of our white skin.

⁸⁵ Judy Rohrer, "Mestiza, Hapa Haole, and Oceanic Borderspaces: Genealogical Rearticulations of Whiteness in Hawai'i." *Borderlands e-Journal* 9, no. 1 (2010), 19.

⁸⁶ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 28.

Around tourists we walked with a kind of swagger, like we knew this place. We threw around the Hawaiian and pidgin words we deemed appropriate to show our acceptance into a culture that didn't invite us. We even developed a kind of twangy, lilting accent. Asking questions at the end of statements by adding the word "yeah?" saying things like, "The surf's good today, yeah?"

So much has been written about how settler colonialism is a powerful force disrupting Indigenous culture. If you'd asked us, we wouldn't have known what you were talking about. The missionaries who stole the Hawaiian's land, the abusive *haole* overseers of the sugar cane plantations, the diseases the white man brought that killed most of the Hawaiians weren't things we felt responsible for or things we considered Hawaiians should despise us for because of our white skin. Settler colonialism seems like such a big, old, academic word for our experience in Hawai'i, but we were enacting a different flavor of settler colonialism that used Hawai'i as an extension of the 1960s counter cultural movement.

By framing our experiences through these ideas, I can see our blindness and our lack of accountability in our curating of a Hawai'i that would fit us. We were complicit. We were what Trask calls the "parasitic foreigner." Rohrer writes we shouldn't "pretend to be Hawaiian," and we didn't, and we did. We used what worked for us to fit into the environment. We loved what we loved about Hawai'i, and we tried to distance ourselves from the places and situations that threatened us or made us feel unsafe. We took what we wanted and disregarded and even showed disdain for the things we didn't want.

We were living a dream state in Hawai'i. The way we've produced the idea of Hawai'i is also a dream state. In this fantasy, the fact that Hawai'i is the most militarized and touristed state in the nation is obscured. Trask writes that, "To Hawaiians, *haole* Americans seem to cherish

their ignorance of other nations (especially conquered peoples who live wretched lives all around them) as a sign on American individualism.”⁸⁷ We wanted the authentic experience, the real people, the ocean away from Waikīkī that had powerful waves. Rohrer explains, “Whatever else it does, ‘haole’ continues to mark otherness, being of foreign origin, or not of a place.”⁸⁸ We tried to resist this. We wanted to fit ourselves into the real Hawai’i too, but our white skin would always locate us as colonizer. It would always identify us as outsiders.

Rohrer writes, “Haole resistance to being labeled ‘haole’ is partly fueled by the desire to belong.”⁸⁹ Even today when I fly to Hawai’i, I yearn to belong. I want the rental car agents, the flight attendants, the waiters, and waitresses to recognize me as a haole who grew up in Hawai’i, not to be confused with a haole tourist. I notice that as soon as I board the plane my Hawai’i accent starts pushing its way out of me. My haole words take on a sing song quality that rarely surfaces in my new home in Montana. It is like some part of me is reaching up and out, saying notice me – I am not as haole as I look. Rohrer writes, “The slogan ‘haole go home’ still has salience no matter how hard haoles try to imagine, and convince everyone else, that we are in fact home.”⁹⁰ Haoles are never home in Hawai’i.

And though I know it is disrespectful, I fell in love with Hawai’i. When people ask where I’m from, I say Hawai’i. I consider it my home. That first summer in Hawai’i began my love affair with this place. Our dad wanted to show us everything. How to read the water. How to surf. The best places on our beach to swim where the water was calm. How to swim out deep

⁸⁷ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 18.

⁸⁸ Rohrer, “Mestiza, Hapa Haole, and Oceanic Borderspaces,” 11.

⁸⁹ Rohrer, 11.

⁹⁰ Rohrer, 14.

through the sand channels lined by the reefs. For that summer we stayed mostly in our little haole enclave at Sunset Beach. We didn't experience prejudice against haoles, though our dad warned us about it.

In a way, we were like tourists. We'd drive to Honolulu through a series of two lane, country roads until we finally met a freeway. Sugar cane and pineapple fields stretched towards the mountain range where the Japanese fighter planes slipped through undetected during WWII. Plantation workers bent over pulling the pineapple or processing the sugar cane through remote machines, but we gave them no mind except to maybe feel sorry for them.

I read each sign asking my dad how to pronounce the Hawaiian words -- Kapiolani, Waikīkī, Likelike, Ala Moana, Wahiawa, Waialua, Kalihi, Kalakaua, Kamehameha. Some of the words were strong in my mouth and others twisted my tongue with all those vowels. I read them determined to speak the language, to not sound like an outsider. Though we were expected to learn how to pronounce the Hawaiian words, my dad told us we weren't allowed to speak pidgin English, the vernacular most of the locals spoke that sounded to me like water dancing over rocks. My own words sounded clunky compared to pidgin English. But I also knew the local dialect wasn't mine to adopt, that it would be strange if I started speaking like a local. The acceptable thing was to adopt other words to sit beside my English words but to never change my accent purposely. Instead, I started saying *mahalo* instead of thank you, *pupu* instead of appetizer, *opala* instead of trash, *keiki* for children, *ono* when something was really good, *pau* when I was done with something, *kapu* instead of keep out, *makai* if the direction we were heading was towards the ocean, *mauka* if we were heading towards the mountains, *honu* for

turtle, *lanai* for porch, *‘āina* for land, *kuleana* for responsibility. Learning all these words made us feel like we were part of the culture. It folded me right into Hawai‘i and gave me legitimacy.

When you’re a haole who’s lived in Hawai‘i for a long time, the undercurrent of violence becomes very difficult to contend with every day. It can be hard for haole kids in school especially. I remember my stepmother explaining to me that Hawai‘i was a melting pot and the spirit of aloha was everywhere. I visibly laughed. Clearly, she didn’t attend public elementary and high school in Hawai‘i. She worked as our town’s dental hygienist and her experiences were very different than mine and my brother’s experiences. Her patients came to her with a need and treated her with kindness and respect. I feared for my safety as an eighth grader in PE where a group of girls promised to beat me up in the showers. This threat suddenly stopped when a Samoan/haole girl befriended me because, “I looked so sad.” We are friends to this day. Because my father was a hippy surfer, we were not civilizers. We lived on the fringe. Before he met my stepmother, my dad sent me to school with snarled hair and wrinkly clothes. In addition, my dad exposed us to violence because he grew and sold a small crop of marijuana from our home. He was breaking the law but also putting us in the purview of the police and local thugs who took it upon themselves to monitor haoles on the beach and surf break where we lived.

Haole and the Surf on the North Shore of O`ahu

I can’t discuss haole without also attaching it to the ocean, especially on the North Shore of O`ahu, because this was my vantage point. According to Isaiah Helekunihi Walker in his book *Waves of Resistance* the surf zone was a borderland for Kānaka. He writes that the surf, “has attributes similar to the theoretical concept of a borderland, which is a place where differences

converge and social norms are often fluid.”⁹¹ This gives context to the scene my family moved into on the shores of Sunset Beach, O`ahu. Walker writes, “In the 1950s and 1960s this haole surf culture drew from images of Hawai’i not only to distinguish itself from mainstream American society but also to rebel against it.”⁹² Walker writes that the 1959 *Gidget* movie was an example of this where “Gidget’s Malibu surfer friends find an escape from postwar American society through surfing.”⁹³ My dad grew up on the Florida beaches, where the seed of the dream to escape to Hawai’i was planted.

Walker points to the depiction of haole big wave surfer Greg Noll, a Californian, who in 1957 is credited with “discovering” the North Shore surf breaks. The 2004 seminal surf movie *Riding Giants* begins with the words, “Before mankind ever walked on the moon. A few young men stepped off the edge of the earth. And carved out a new way of life.”⁹⁴ Walker argues that this movie and most surfing history ignored Hawaiian surfers who’d been surfing the North Shore for 2000 years and instead glorifies one haole surfer, Noll (and his friends), who the movie compares to “astronauts of their era.”⁹⁵

Noll describes surfing and living on the North Shore in 1950s as, “No watch. No money. Just shorts and a t-shirt.”⁹⁶ The idealistic life Noll portrayed must have been appealing to my dad, and other white surfers like him, as an answer to their own disillusionment with America. Walker writes that for Noll and his friends, “Life on the North Shore for these exploring

⁹¹ Isaiah Helekunihi Walker, *Waves of Resistance: Surfing and History in Twentieth-Century Hawai’i*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), 10.

⁹² Walker, 40.

⁹³ Walker, 40.

⁹⁴ *Riding Giants*, directed by Stacy Peralta, (2004; New York, Sony Pictures Classic), 2004.

⁹⁵ Peralta, *Riding Giants*.

⁹⁶ Peralta, *Riding Giants*.

Americans was reminiscent of eighteenth-century imaginations of Pacific places – where men enjoyed a Rousseau-like, carefree, noble-savage existence of sleeping under the stars and surviving on fish, papayas, and surf.”⁹⁷ This brand of settler colonialism allowed surfers, like my family, a way to blind ourselves with an illusion of who we could be while also dismissing any responsibility. It shared many similarities to good old-fashioned settler colonialism which Veracini describes as “a fantasy emanating from a painful perception of growing contradictions and social strife,” that “needs to disavow any foundational violence.”⁹⁸

White people moving to Hawai’i were enacting the same idea of early Americans going west for a different way of life. As Noll says in *Riding Giants* “What are you going to do when you graduate school? I’m going to the North Shore and ride big waves to find out who I am.”⁹⁹ Surfers live in a settler colonial state because they distance themselves from colonialism. As Veracini writes “he is not responsible for colonialism and its excesses . . . the settler enters a ‘new empty land to start a new life’; indigenous people naturally and inevitably ‘vanish’; it is not the settlers that displace them.”¹⁰⁰ But in Hawai’i, the Indigenous people (or their representatives in the locals) don’t let the haole forget. Walker argues (when referencing *Riding Giants*) “they had ‘discovered’ nothing but a place already occupied by ocean experts.”¹⁰¹ The movie doesn’t mention Hawaiian surfers who were already there expertly riding the waves. Instead, it credits the haole surfer for resurrecting the lost sport of surfing. This is a very haole perspective.

⁹⁷ Walker, *Waves of Resistance*, 33.

⁹⁸ Lorenzo Veracini, “Introduction: The Settler Colonial Situation.” In *Settler Colonialism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 76.

⁹⁹ Peralta, *Riding Giants*.

¹⁰⁰ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 14.

¹⁰¹ Walker, *Waves of Resistance*, 33.

In 1976 a group of Kānaka, locals and others concerned about professional surf contests coming to the North Shore formed the Hui O He'e Nalu (Club of Wave Sliders) and, "Their primary goal was to preserve Native Hawaiian control over the waves of the North Shore."¹⁰² Walker explains that they "developed tactics to offset what they saw as exploitation—in fact, virtual colonialism—by the surfing industry."¹⁰³ As a borderland, Walker explains, the surf was a "Native Hawaiian realm" where Kānaka, "felt free, developed Native identities, and thwarted foreign domination."¹⁰⁴ Imagine a professional surfing association arriving on the North Shore featuring competitors from places other than Hawai'i, in a contest for the "best surfer." There was no representation by Hawaiians, who invented the sport and did it for the pure love of the sport instead of for money and fame.

Kānaka were marginalized in a space where they'd always demonstrated their power. Surf contests were another version of colonialism under the guise of sport. Walker argues that "On land, many Hawaiians were marginalized from political, social, and economic spheres . . . Yet in the ocean Native surfers secured a position atop a social hierarchy."¹⁰⁵ These subtleties weren't apparent to me and probably many others when the Hui began to "police" the surf. As a nine-year-old we'd moved to a location where we had front row seats to this in our little house at Sunset Beach.

What I noticed was the violence, not the true reason for the violence. The ocean was a place for us haoles that had different measures of safety where we needed to be aware of our

¹⁰² Walker, 1.

¹⁰³ Walker, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Walker, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Walker, 2.

whiteness. For me, the ocean right outside my front door was safe because I didn't venture out to the surf breaks. I played in the shore break with my friends. But for my brother it was different when he surfed at Vowel's Reef. It was close to the shore but right in front of our house. He had to show respect as he got closer to the main surf breaks even though he was only a five or six-year-old kid. For my dad the space of the surf breaks he paddled out to -- Sunset, Velzyland or Sunset Point -- were places where his safety was always suspect. There he had to negotiate his whiteness around the waves and local or Kānaka Maoli surfers being aware of hierarchy and respect. He had to give wave precedent to more established locals and never confront them if they pulled out in front of him on a wave. He also needed to know when to paddle in and come home because the vibe in the surf break was too heavy.

Our story of being in the Hawaiian surf was different than the story of Kānaka Maoli around us. We were trying to escape their violence, but we weren't asking how our presence contributed to that violence. Walker writes, "Most people today see violence in the surf as one-sided, where dehistoricized haole surfers play the role of random, innocent victims guilty only of the arbitrary crime of disrespect."¹⁰⁶ The word Walker uses, "dehistoricized," is key to how we viewed ourselves on the North Shore. We were freed from our own history, reinventing our surfer family identity while disregarding the fact that the ocean was the last place many Hawaiians had to claim as their own. Walker writes, "The stories of . . . Hawaiian surfers are interwoven with a larger story of conquest and occupation in Hawai'i. . . born and shaped from

¹⁰⁶ Walker, 42.

the colonial violence that preceded them.”¹⁰⁷ Suddenly here were all these white people claiming a Hawaiian sport and over-running surf breaks.

Western laws don’t allow outright violence, but they allow exploitation. A surf organization can apply to have a surf contest in Hawaiian surf and not much can be done to stop it because the organizers are going through the proper channels. Walker writes “Hawaiians saw the professional surfing industry itself as an exploitative enterprise that marginalized Hawaiians and colonized their remote countryside.”¹⁰⁸ Patrick Wolfe writes that “Settler colonialism destroys to replace.”¹⁰⁹ This is violence. Colonizers strove to “use the land better than they could.”¹¹⁰ In Hawai’i this also meant the ocean. Western logic and capitalism dismiss the Kānaka idea of the surf as part of their identity. Instead, the surf is meant as a money maker, status builder, and career for mostly haole surfers.

This colonization is mostly complete as luxury, second homes line the North Shore beaches, sitting empty most of the year. In Rohrer’s book, *Staking Claim: Settler Colonialism and Racialization in Hawai’i*, she writes that the influx of haoles to Hawai’i, “is a contributing factor in the creation of a huge Hawaiian diaspora living on the continent (40 percent of native Hawaiians in the ‘United States’ live outside Hawai’i). . .”¹¹¹ Rohrer argues that though the media depicts “haole victimhood . . . that has not stopped the haole influx.”¹¹² The fact is that no matter what a haole moving to Hawai’i desires, there will be resistance to white hegemony.

¹⁰⁷ Walker, 42.

¹⁰⁸ Walker, 136, 137.

¹⁰⁹ Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” 388.

¹¹⁰ Wolfe, 389.

¹¹¹ Judy Rohrer, *Staking Claim: Settler Colonialism and Racialization in Hawai’i*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 11.

¹¹² Rohrer, 10.

Hawai'i will always be a space of protest to colonization, in one form or another. Haoles can say it is unfair, but this is the way it is. Indigenous people have had to accept many awful truths throughout United States history and whites must also accept an unpalatable truth that Hawai'i is not an automatically welcoming space to them. This doesn't seem to have deterred haoles from moving to Hawai'i.

And yet, Kānaka and their allies continue to fight for justice, especially in the surf. Journalist Chas Smith writes about the North Shore of O'ahu surf culture in his book *Welcome to Paradise, Now Go to Hell*. Once captured by terrorists in Lebanon, Smith explains that the North Shore is scarier because it is America and “the scene never wraps. The intensity never ends.”¹¹³ Smith explores this paradox of the North Shore being Hawai'i, so it is America and yet, he writes,

There is simply no remove on the North Shore. Anyone related to the surf world, including a fabulous surf journalist, is fair game in this war. It crawls inside in a way that nothing I have ever experienced does. It is so completely ‘other’ even though it is also completely ‘American’ and thus ‘me.’ The Middle East is only ‘other’ but the North Shore is not and this otherization of one’s own self is horrifying in the same way that Colonel Kurtz was horrifying in *Heart of Darkness*. And I kid you not, it is a war. A brutal, brutal war.¹¹⁴

Because Hawai'i is America, and we white people are Americans, we don't expect the spaces we inhabit to be unwelcoming to us. Though Smith is not talking about simply being socially shunned, he is talking about violence. Smith writes that on the North Shore “every day held more potential for danger than any place I had ever been.”¹¹⁵ I wonder if this is how people

¹¹³ Chas Smith, *Welcome to Paradise, Now Go to Hell : a True Story of Violence, Corruption, and the Soul of Surfing*, (New York, NY: It Books, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2013), 15.

¹¹⁴ Smith, 15.

¹¹⁵ Smith, 32.

of color feel in the town where I now live. Bozeman, Montana is very white. I've heard stories of black athletes purposefully wearing their Montana State logo wear so they can better avoid violence when hanging out in public.

Smith writes, "The image of Hawai'i? Paradise? Relaxation? No worries? It is all a lie. The North Shore, very much against its idyllic stereotype, stands for rough brutality."¹¹⁶ If Americans don't know their own history, then they don't know the true stories of the places they inhabit. If Hawai'i is only portrayed as paradise where white people are sometimes unwelcomed by savage locals, then there isn't room for a third story, a middle ground that includes the why and true history of the place. Smith quotes a man called Kaiborg who is a kind of "bouncer" for one of the many surf label houses that inhabit the North Shore. Kaiborg explains Hawai'i like this, "We're isolated. We're two thousand miles away. We have our own little trip. . . we're different. We're not following the codes of anybody. We're our own tribe . . ."¹¹⁷ Hawai'i is different but the North Shore is especially different because the clash of haole and local and Kānaka is so apparent in this sacred and small space of the best surf breaks in the world. Smith calls the North Shore specifically a "Wild West. It is a frontier."¹¹⁸

Very few places in the United States of America retain any sort of berserk cowboy-and-Indian energy . . . The North Shore is different. Men know how to throw punches. And surfers or soldiers learn how to take them. . . The only real law on the North Shore is physical force. . . It is the Wild West. . . It is a frontier.¹¹⁹

Maybe all Hawai'i is a wild west that resists colonizing. Daniel Immerwahr writes that originally, "The western territories were the frontier, the leading edge of the country's growth. . .

¹¹⁶ Smith, 14.

¹¹⁷ Smith, 75.

¹¹⁸ Smith, 75.

¹¹⁹ Smith, 73, 74.

once they were ‘settled’ (i.e., populated by whites), they were welcomed fully into the fold of states.”¹²⁰ Like the haole being civilized in Hawai’i, the state itself resists empire in a kind of guerilla warfare against the domination of America one haole at a time.

On the North Shore it is not only the people but also the ocean that is the civilizer. These are intricately connected. The ocean doesn’t see color and doesn’t judge. But on the North Shore the ocean is a beast. Waves pummel the shore, the reef, houses, and people. Rip tides suck inexperienced surfers off to sea. Huge walls of white water hold swimmers under and shove them to the bottom.

When I was young, fun could change to terror in a flash as I scraped at the water, paddling to get over the huge waves before they broke in front of me. And then when I didn’t make it, holding my breath and diving deep while praying I didn’t die. Coming up for a quick breath before the next wave in the set broke on my head and I had to do it again, four, five, six times. Novices shouldn’t venture out into the North Shore surf alone and many residents rescue people all year long. If you are a water person, you will have rescued someone. If white people are never in a situation that makes them question how they enter a space, then inevitably many haoles think they are invincible in the surf. Smith says, “It is easy in most of our Western lives, to lock out nature. . . . But on the North Shore it is impossible to lock nature out. It is always there, absolutely exploding, and all it takes is a glance to know that these waves will, without malice, kill a man.”¹²¹ In Hawai’i, the surf is a space you can’t enter without showing proper respect because it is a matter of life and death.

¹²⁰ Immerwahr, *How To Hide An Empire*, 8.

¹²¹ Smith, *Welcome to Paradise, Now Go to Hell*, 73.

The settler's place on all these stolen lands is always tenuous, and though the settler may not admit that we can feel it. I know this deep within me. In Montana it is easier to ignore because reminders aren't at the surface. In Bozeman, I live near no Native American reservations. I am surrounded by mostly white people. But in Hawai'i, it is acute.

Judy Rohrer writes that “*Where* the US settler state declares we are living has everything to do with its insistence on violent cartographies—geographic lines/borders/walls.”¹²² Rohrer contends that the massive sea wall at former President Barrack Obama's windward O`ahu home demonstrates settler colonial instability. Rohrer writes that settler colonialism “fails forward” because of the ways that it claims “domination and mastery over the environment”¹²³ keeping human and non-human at bay but never achieving this goal. Sea walls in Hawai'i are common but they damage the shoreline, animals, and restrict access to beaches that are all public property in Hawai'i. Using sea walls is called shoreline armoring or shoreline hardening, and Rohrer writes that their use is “epitomizing a domineering, oppositional, and fearful colonial approach to the natural world.”¹²⁴ Sea walls will never ultimately keep out the natural world and they can be breached by humans as well. But Rohrer argues that walls give settlers an “‘American Dreaming’ of a benevolent settler state.”¹²⁵ In order to ensure the settler project, Rohrer writes that, “the forward-failing, unsustainable US settler state . . . will always side with capital and not Kānaka Maoli or the ocean.”¹²⁶

¹²² Judy Rohrer, “Imperial Dis-ease: Trump’s Border Wall, Obama’s Sea Wall, and Settler Colonial Failure,” *American Quarterly* 74, no. 3, September 2022: 738.

¹²³ Rohrer, 741.

¹²⁴ Rohrer, 743.

¹²⁵ Rohrer, 739.

¹²⁶ Rohrer, 747.

This is could also be true in the way that haole is always named and never trusted on face value alone. Haole presence epitomizes the settler state. The erection of sea walls is haole entitlement. Building walls around any property is always keeping something out or something in. It is always a form of entitlement that the owner gets to choose who belongs and who doesn't.

As the older residents who lived in the houses on the oceanside street of my childhood neighborhood died, their houses were bought up by new haoles coming to the islands. The first thing they did was to build a series of high rock walls blocking out the street from their view. As kids, we had the run of the neighborhood, playing in these yards with their expansive lawns and open space. Passing quietly and respectfully through them to access the beach. Soon the neighbor rights-of-way that were always there for the non-beachside residents were fought in court and our side of the street was forced to purchase a right-of-way for our access. Today our street is more alleyway than road as the walls block out what the owners don't want in their purview.

Dean Itsuji Saranillio writes that "settler colonialism often functions . . . in order to replace Indigenous peoples with settlers who are discursively constituted as superior and thus more deserving of these contested lands and resources."¹²⁷ Building a sea wall is also a judgement of who deserves the beach, the home or even life as sea walls kill limu (seaweed) and disrupt turtle habitats. They also take sand from beaches that could perhaps be accessed by the public.

Rohrer writes that "Clearly, the biggest other-than-human actor resisting the sea wall is the ocean."¹²⁸ The ocean will never be kept out. Rohrer argues that "settler colonialism cannot

¹²⁷ Dean Itsuji Saranillio, "The Insurrection of Subjugated Futures," *American Quarterly* 67, no.3, Special Issue: Pacific Currents, 2015: 640.

¹²⁸ Rohrer, "Imperial Dis-ease," 752.

hold water. There is no way to state a claim, to mark off a boundary, to grab and horde.”¹²⁹ But grabbing and hoarding will happen. The settler will not resist the opportunity. The settler always wants one last house, one last beachfront property, vacation, or uncrowded beach one last American Dreaming. The settler will never be satisfied; the settler hunger is insatiable because it is fearful.

To Kānaka Maoli the ocean provided sustenance, recreation, and life, and yet outsiders continue to wall it off, crowd the surf breaks, claim the public rights-of-way making it harder for Hawaiians to access. Today when I see bumper stickers that say, “North Shore - Haoleland,” I realize we epitomized the “winner-take-all project” of settler colonialism.¹³⁰ We replaced Hawaiians, and locals, on the North Shore. We priced them out. Today the North Shore is a safer space for haoles because we own much of that space. But even haoles like me whose families moved there in the 1970s are bewildered because our old neighborhoods are filled with vacation rentals or second, third or fourth homes for the wealthy. During the slow season, there are no lights on in the other homes because no one is home. Hawai’i has a huge homeless population, and yet there sit all those empty houses lining all those beautiful beaches.

Rohrer writes, “We are the set of stories we tell ourselves, the stories that tell us, the stories others tell about us, and possibilities of new stories.”¹³¹ In order to tell new stories, we must learn the true stories that preceded our white skin. Are the stories we learn about a place reality or are they stories of fantasy? The story that Hawai’i is for everyone is a fantasy. Hawai’i is different for someone with white skin versus someone with brown skin. This is the reality

¹²⁹ Rohrer, 753.

¹³⁰ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 14.

¹³¹ Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai’i*, 189.

whether we like it or not. Hearing more stories of the true Hawai'i and the Indigenous experience is an important place to start. Realizing our own complicity because our white skin is also important to sustain humility and openness to seeing a different way forward. Rohrer quotes Jodi Byrd who recommends we, “ask that settler, native, and arrivants each acknowledge their own positions within empire and then reconceptualize space and history to make visible what imperialism and its resultant settler colonialism and diasporas have sought to obscure.”¹³² This is especially important as climate change affects the places least responsible for it.

Maybe what locals and Kānaka have always done in Hawai'i by calling out haoles for their responsibility in the colonization of their islands is like what Xine Yao calls “disaffection.” Yao contends “that white feelings produce and maintain structures of domination.”¹³³ My dad made Hawai'i his home because it allowed him to feel better about his life and it didn't matter that the Indigenous people who lived there didn't want him. White feelings are prioritized because in the continental US we live in a white normative world. Yao declares, “No more business with white sentimentality. Withhold from those colonial intimacies. Be disaffected.”¹³⁴

Yao quotes Son of Baldwin who publicly pronounced that he didn't “Give a fuck about Justine Diamond” referring to the killing of an unarmed white American woman by a black police officer.¹³⁵ Baldwin was met with hatred and death threats, but he points out that black and Indigenous women who are the victims of police brutality don't get the kind of sympathy a white woman receives. Yao writes that *Disaffected* is an idea used “to rethink the ongoing racial and

¹³² Rohrer, 189.

¹³³ Xine Yao, *Disaffected: The Culture of Politics and Unfeeling in Nineteenth Century America*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 2.

¹³⁴ Yao, 2.

¹³⁵ Yao, 2.

sexual politics of unfeeling not as oppression from above but as a tactic from below.”¹³⁶ This unfeeling could also be considered when we look at the disdain and disinterest of Kānaka and locals towards haoles in Hawai’i. The fact that haoles will always be questioned in Hawai’i demonstrates the ways that Hawai’i will never be a space of total colonial dominance. Then perhaps, as Yao suggests, “we may consider disaffection to be the unfeeling rupture that enables new structures of feeling to arise.”¹³⁷

Thirty years earlier, in 1993 Trask also spoke about disaffection in her speech *We Are Not Americans*. She declared, “I am not interested in feelings. I have my own feelings, they break my heart. . . Nationhood is government, it is not a feeling.”¹³⁸ If colonizers cared about the feelings of the people they disenfranchised, they wouldn’t have disenfranchised them in the first place. For new things to arise, feelings must be turned into action.

What I feel about Hawai’i isn’t important. I care deeply about Hawai’i still. My dad and stepmom still live in Hawai’i, in the house on the street I grew up on. My brother and his family also live on O`ahu. A part of me will always be in Hawai’i because of them. Hawai’i will never be for me or belong to me, but I hope to be for Hawai’i and belong to it.

¹³⁶ Yao, 2.

¹³⁷ Yao, 6.

¹³⁸ Haunani-Kay Trask, “We are not American,” Hawaiian Voice, January 17, 1993, video, 9:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwWNigoZ5ro&t=4s> .

CHAPTER SIX

WE ARE NOT AMERICANS – STILL

So on the morning you wake to the end of the world/Remember, we have lived this ending before/Each bomb of history its own strike/The coming of ships/The spreading of death/The taming of industry/The carving of land, crosses, and cultures/Until all that was left/Is what could be packaged and sold back at a premium – Excerpt from Jamaica Osorio poem “Notes on Surviving the End of The World Again.”

My research and writing works to dismantle the power and pervasiveness of American myths, in my own personal story as the daughter of an Olympian but also as a haole who grew up in Hawai’i. I am working to understand my responsibility and to be an ally to Kānaka in their fight for sovereignty. In chapter two I wrote about Kānaka agency as they worked within the framework of western values to assert their own independence. This chapter focuses on efforts to decolonize through art, protest, museum exhibits, tourism, and scholarship.

On the morning of January 13, 2018, at 8:10 am the people in the state of Hawai’i woke up to a message on their phones that read, “BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAI’I. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.”¹ This message wasn’t cancelled for 38 minutes. It would take a missile from North Korea 30 minutes to reach the islands and 12 minutes for residents to seek shelter.² This message was sent at the height of rhetoric exchanged between former US President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un

¹ Adam Nagourney, David E. Sanger, Johanna Barr, “Hawai’i Panics After Alert for Incoming Missile is Sent in Error,” *New York Times*, January 13, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/13/us/hawaii-missile.html>.

² Nagourney, et al, NYTimes.

and had already led to elevated tensions in Hawai'i. Because of the number of US military bases on the island, one of the many things Hawai'i residents must be prepared for is a nuclear missile from North Korea. This is in addition to tsunamis, high surf, and more recently wildfires. This threat further unmasks the myth of Hawai'i that tourism works to hide, exposing the precariousness the US occupation, along with its capitalism and colonialism, has drawn to the islands.

Hawai'i is at the center of climate change and rampant militarization, and the facades that have hidden the destruction this has caused are being exposed. The power and pervasiveness of American myths can blind me if I allow them. Or I can look the reality full in the face. The myth of Hawai'i, the myth of my childhood and the Olympics, can only last so long. Eventually the glamour is pulled away and the truth is always right there, below the surface. As I write this, wildfires have just decimated the town of Lah'āina on the island of Maui. More lies were burned away with this awful tragedy, revealing what happens when the US takes and takes, burning down an entire town and uncovering the precarious nature of colonialism.

Hawai'i has received a triple whammy in the recent years, the mistaken missile threat, the Covid 19 epidemic that disproportionately affected Kānaka, and now the wildfire in Lah'āina. As Jamaica Osorio writes in her poem *Notes on Surviving the End of the World Again*, "Call out the names of all the violence that has come/While calling itself protection/All the ways we have been left/To gather the shattered pieces."³ Osorio captures the insidiousness of empire and how it

³ Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, "This is Not a Drill: Notes on Surviving the End of the World, Again." In *The Value of Hawai'i 3*. Ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'opua, Craig Howes, Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo'ole, Aiko Yamashiro. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020.

hides under the guise of “protection” by the patriarchal force of the US. Osorio further exposes the violence that colonialism brings for Indigenous people, that instead of protection it is a destruction. When analyzed from the perspective and long history of Indigenous people, it is evident that this is not a new story. But with climate change and Kānaka activism, the real story of the US occupation of Hawai’i and the devastation it brings is being laid bare. There is no turning away from what has happened in Lah‘āina.

Part of decolonization is poets, scholars and activists speaking out by giving the public an altered story of Hawai’i and the chance to see a different perspective. Osorio made a short documentary about the mistaken missile attack called “On the Morning You Wake (To the End of the World).” The advertisement for the movie reads, “Although nothing happened that day, everything changed.”⁴ Sometimes it takes a big event for perspective to change for white settlers who don’t have the same experiences of Hawai’i, as Kānaka. After the wildfires, some national news outlets began reframing their coverage to focus on the ramifications that led to the fires instead of putting their focus on tourists and lost vacations. News sources like *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Civil Beat News* and the *New York Times* instead wrote stories that traced the history of Hawaiian occupation by the US that led to the inevitable destruction of the land. These include sugar cane plantations diverting water in the early 1900s, the bombing of Kaho‘olawe beginning in the 1940s, the proliferation of luxury resorts and their need for water, and the effect of climate change on islands. Osorio says, “The Aina will outlive us. She will outlive every colonial scar that has been inflicted on her. That is the Hawai’i that is currently buried under all

⁴ <https://www.onthemorningyouwake.com/#story>, accessed August 30, 2023.

the tourist BS.”⁵ For now, at least, that “BS” is being uncovered and written beyond Hawai’i. For decades Kānaka scholars and activists have worked towards a different way of living that includes decolonization. It’s tragic that it took a wildfire for the American media to listen and begin discussing an altered story of Hawai’i that doesn’t just include a list of the best beaches.

“My tutu (grandmother) had told my mother, who had told me, that at the time of the overthrow a great wailing went up throughout the islands, a wailing of weeks, a wailing of impenetrable grief, a wailing of death.” – Haunani-Kay Trask

Decolonizing Hawai’i is a complex and difficult process because colonization is insidious. Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu works on “decolonizing the mind”⁶ which “leads to decolonizing the heart.”⁷ In her work to teach young Native Hawaiians about their culture and history “she perceives that some remain colonized by American values in the way they think and feel.”⁸ To decolonize a mind is to question accepted values and traditions including the 4th of July. Hawaiian historian Jonathon Osorio writes, “Hawaiians should observe the 4th of July as the day in 1894 when the Haole who conspired with the US to remove our Queen declared themselves to be the government of Hawaii.”⁹ Rather than glorify the American Independence Day, Osorio says it is a day to remember the nation Kānaka lost.

⁵ <https://www.onthemorningyouwake.com/#story>.

⁶ Shafkat Anowar, “We are not American! We will die as Hawaiians, we will never American!,” *Ka Leo*, University of Hawai’i, March 10, 2021, https://www.manoanow.org/kaleo/we-are-not-american-we-will-die-as-hawaiians-we-will-never-be-american/article_71f72884-be58-11ea-9984-ef5b951616bb.html .

⁷ Anowar, “We are not American!”

⁸ Anowar, “We are not American!”

⁹ Anowar, “We are not American!”

“We are not American”

Hawaiian activist, scholar, and poet Haunani-Kay Trask proclaimed on January 17, 1993; “We are not Americans.”¹⁰ Trask’s speech marked the commemoration of the one-hundred-year anniversary of the overthrow of Queen Liliu’okalani by missionaries turned businessmen, in front of Iolani Palace where the Queen was held captive. Trask declared six times, “I am not American,” that instead as an Indigenous Hawaiian, she “was born a colonized woman of color oppressed in this colony of the United States of Hawai’i.”¹¹ These were true but radical words in 1993. Trask changed the conversation in Hawai’i, challenging prevailing notions of colonialism and what it means for a Hawaiian to be forced to become an American. Trask’s ideas included the premise that progress for Indigenous meant nothing more than death. She called America “a death country,”¹² rallying support for a sovereignty movement in Hawai’i that is still going strong today. Not shy about pretending the US takeover of Hawai’i was anything but violent, Trask said, “The intention was to kill every one of us and we are still here.”¹³ Trask rallied Hawaiians around a political call-to-action by laying bare the reality of what colonization has meant to Indigenous people. The reality Trask exposed counters the myth of Hawai’i as always welcoming, a place where visitors are presented with a flower lei upon arrival and where Kānaka embody the aloha spirit towards everyone. Trask forces us to see the US as a colonizer with imperialist gains who stole Hawai’i. This view poses a problem for America because it makes us

¹⁰ Trask, “We are Not American,” 9:40.

¹¹ Trask, 10:58.

¹² Trask, 4:30.

¹³ Trask, 4:45.

rethink so many of the ways in which America claims innocence and higher morals and values than other countries.

Ironically, Trask passed away on July 3, 2021. On that night, a group of activists, including Hawaiian historian and dean of Hawaiʻi inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, Jonathon Osorio, projected the words “WE ARE NOT AMERICAN”¹⁴ onto the state seal of the capitol building, sharing the photo on social media the following day, the Fourth of July. In a 2020 article in the University of Hawaiʻi newspaper, *Ka Leo*, Osorio issued a statement on the Fourth of July holiday that instructed Kānaka to commemorate the holiday as remembrance of the overthrow of the Hawaiian nation by haoles “who conspired with the US to remove our Queen.”¹⁵ Osorio and his family do this by hanging the Hawaiian flag upside down in protest and sharing their family stories about their own history. Osorio argues that independence means that Americans are separate from others, but Kānaka see this as “disconnection” and “isolation.”¹⁶ The Hawaiian idea of being part of a nation is that each person has freedom of thought but are acting as part of the Ohana or family.

¹⁴ “Call for Papers: “2024 Special Issue: ‘We are Not American’ Still,” Submit, American Quarterly, accessed July 12 ,2023, <https://www.americanquarterly.org/submit/cfp.html> .

¹⁵ Anowar, “We are Not Americans.”

¹⁶ Anowar, “We are Not Americans.”



Figure 10 Hawaiian flag upside down signifying distress.

What it means to be an American depends on where you see from, how and where you were raised, what you were taught and told, what culture deemed important and where you were born. Indigenous people, immigrants, and people of color often have very different experiences of being Americans than citizens of European ancestry. Hawai'i especially subverts the idea of a what it means to be an American.

In a special “Call for Papers” generated by the “American Quarterly,” the final issue of the publication in Hawai'i has the theme “‘We Are Not American’ Still.”¹⁷ The issue will examine ways that many people “Are Not American,”¹⁸ but most importantly will frame being Kānaka in a country that has been “invaded” by America. The call for papers asks writers to “challenge the legitimacy of US claims to Hawai'i”¹⁹ while focusing on how to protect Hawaiian

¹⁷ “Call for Papers,” American Quarterly.

¹⁸ “Call for Papers,” American Quarterly.

¹⁹ “Call for Papers,” American Quarterly.

“lands, waters, communities, and culture against settler colonialism, tourism and militarization.”²⁰ The enduring power of Trask and the movement for sovereignty is evident in the focus of this edition of the “American Quarterly.” In the first issue of the “American Quarterly” published in Hawai‘i in 2016, co-editor Paul Lyons wrote that focusing the gaze of American Studies on the middle of the Pacific was “anticolonial” work because “colonialism and occupation in the Pacific Islands have not ended and continue to exact devastating tolls on Island peoples and environments.”²¹ This hasn’t changed and this last issue of the “American Quarterly” in Hawai‘i again focuses on what and how the Western invasion of Hawai‘i is still largely ignored by the greater public as well as and how tourism, the military and settler colonialism continue the fantasy that Hawai‘i is always happy to accept visitors and open for business. In that 1993 speech, Trask called Hawai‘i a “prostitute because if you have the money then you can buy Hawai‘i.” She continued, “You can have her as a developer, a tourist, a multi-national corporation.”²² But like a prostitute, “The more you pay, the more you get, the longer you can stay with her.” So much of what Trask argues is that Hawai‘i is there to serve a purpose for others that are not Kānaka. And this service comes in the name of progress as defined by the US.

The AQ Call for Papers extends the phrase “‘We are not American’ to suggest that ‘Maybe you aren’t American either.’” This is a productive exercise in examining how without the constraints of being American, all people can subvert the ways we are also not American. For the

²⁰ “Call for Papers,” *American Quarterly*.

²¹ Paul Lyons and Ty P. Kawika Tengan, “Introduction Pacific Currents,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3, (2015), 545, [doi:10.1353/aq.2015.0033](https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2015.0033).

²² Trask, “We are Not American,” 11:49.

last ten years I've extensively studied Kānaka scholars and what they say about Hawai'i, learning different perspectives and gaining a deeper understanding of this place that won't leave my heart. I feel more connected to Hawai'i than America. Though I am white and now live on the continental US, I can't deny my connection to Hawai'i. I don't claim this place as mine, but my relationship to it is important to me.

Maybe You Aren't American Either

To not be an American for me could be to rethink my ideas of Hawai'i from an Indigenous perspective and then to stand in solidarity with Kānaka. One idea I've had to rethink is the celebration of the 4th of July. Like a white American, I thought the Fourth of July was a big deal. But instead, Osorio and Trask remind us, America's birthday celebrates that the fact that the US stole and colonized a country that wasn't theirs. Like many Indigenous and people of color on the continental US, to Kānaka the 4th of July is a protest holiday to have parades about sovereignty and to remind people that Hawai'i does not legally belong to the US. However, I wasn't taught Hawaiian history in school primary or high school. The message to Kānaka, locals and haole by not including the history of Hawai'i on the curriculum was that the history of Hawai'i didn't matter. What was most important was to learn American and European history. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes in *Silencing the Past*, "At best, history is a story about power, a story about those who won."²³ I didn't consider the insult Independence day was to Hawaiians. I looked at the 4th of July as a celebration of America's freedom from England, but in Hawai'i it meant so much more than I was aware of. Trouillot argues that "We are never as steeped in

²³ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 5.

history as when we pretend not to be.”²⁴ There was power in my ignorance, the power to ignore the reality. But my challenge and the challenge of all who want to learn about the places we call paradise is the “exposition of its roots.”²⁵ To expose the how and why of what I know and don’t know is the path to becoming not more or less American, but more questioning and less knowing. To be an American is more than pledging a blind allegiance to a flag or a country without working to see and then undo many of the injustices.

As a kid, for me the Fourth of July meant going to Waimea Bay for an across the bay swim race, watermelon eating contests and tug-of-war. It meant seeing friends and the boy I had a crush on but went to a different high school. Every white person on the North Shore of O`ahu would most definitely be at Waimea Bay for the Fourth. People swam out to the boats anchored there and jumped off the rock. Once we had to leave early because the tug-of-war between some military men and locals turned into an all-out fist fight, traversing the beach and into the water. It was violent and scary and didn’t make sense to me at the time. I didn’t understand the irony of the military representing America and the locals representing Kānaka. Decolonization could sometimes take a violent turn in our community during the 1970s into the early 1980s. These kind of brutal fist fights between white and brown people happened a fair amount. They still happen today on the very territorial surf scene of the North Shore of O`ahu. Hawai’i is known for its aggression towards haoles but this focus on aggression works to hide the death and decimation of Indigenous people including stealing their country. This is violence under the guise of progress and opportunity.

²⁴ Trouillot, xix.

²⁵ Trouillot, xix.

To Kānaka, the Fourth of July is another example of American Exceptionalism in that Kānaka were expected to be happy to be brought under the umbrella of this great country. The idea of American Exceptionalism hides the truth of our country in a fantasy that ignores racial injustices, the effect of rampant capitalism and other ways of governing and being. Eric Foner writes that American Exceptionalism portrays a “national hubris and closed-mindedness and offers an excuse for ignorance about the rest of the world.”²⁶ Ignoring Kānaka and other local people’s values and ways of life is a very white or haole way of approaching the world. My Kānaka and local neighbors where I lived as an adult with a family countered this idea of blindly accepting America as a great nation of celebrate by filling metal trash cans with firecrackers and igniting them. Thousands of firecrackers exploding echoed through the neighborhood as they burst, hitting the sides of the metal can. This is what decolonization looks like – turning your back on time honored American celebrations and instead blowing something up. If these firecrackers had words, they would be decrying the centuries of Kānaka losing their lands, their traditions, their way of life and their voices. And there we were, haoles who’d mostly grown up in Hawai’i, sure that we also had a right to these lands and a right to celebrate this most American of holidays. Now I look back at my lack of awareness at the insult our celebratory spirit conveyed to our neighbors. At the luxury resorts owned by nameless, faceless corporations the Fourth of July was a big deal with huge firework displays and celebrations. But not on Pikai Street in Haleiwa.

²⁶ Eric Foner, “What is American Exceptionalism,” *Ethics and International Affairs*, The Journal of Carnegie Council For Ethics in International Affairs, August 8, 2013, accessed October 11, 2023, <https://www.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/online-exclusives/what-is-american-exceptionalism> .

Regenerative Refusal: Maile Arvin

In her book *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai'i and Oceania* Maile Arvin introduces the term regenerative refusal. This refusal, Arvin argues is demonstrated in the way “Native Hawaiians would want to hold onto their Hawaiianess, that they seemed to refuse the offer of nominal entry into whiteness. . .”²⁷ Arvin describes this conscious choice by Hawaiians as “baffling to scientists and the larger American public.”²⁸ Given the choice to become more white and carry the proposed privileges of whiteness, some Kānaka and other Indigenous instead embraced their own culture rejecting western ideas. A way to assert regenerative refusal would be to reject tourism simply because it is a way to make money, and to instead rethink it. Westerners perhaps couldn’t understand why Kānaka would turn away from the allure of money. Arvin says that refusal is “a mode of promoting more life and joy to Indigenous communities . . . especially in the face of seemingly insurmountable settler colonial power.”²⁹

Adrienne Keahi Pao: Hawaiian Cover Ups

Arvin argues that regenerative refusal sometimes happens in the location where tourists expect to just have their typical tourist experience. Upon arriving in Hawai'i, it's traditional to receive a lei. There is a special row of lei stands at the Honolulu Airport to purchase leis to greet visitors. Part of regenerative refusal, explains Arvin, is Kānaka artist Adrienne Keahi Pao's series

²⁷ Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians*, 22, 23.

²⁸ Arvin, 22.

²⁹ Arvin, 23.

Hawaiian Cover-Ups (2004-5),³⁰ who uses her body to force tourists to see themselves as complicit in the problem of co-opting a culture and a place. The artist lays in front of one of the airport lei stands, appearing to be naked, but covered in the purple orchid leis that most tour companies purchase for visitors because they are most durable. In the background is a lei seller, sitting at a table covered with leis and making a lei as she waits for customers.



Figure 11 Adrienne Keahi Pao with her living art titled “Hawaiian Cover-Ups.”

Pao says that as a Hawaiian who grew up in California, she is both an “object and subject, I both question and participate in the commodification of this land.”³¹ In another photo the artist is on Waikīkī Beach. Her body is covered with plastic beads and all around her other tourists sunbathe, as if she isn’t there. One knee is bent to mirror the outline of Diamond Head Crater in the background.

³⁰ Arvin, 215.

³¹ Arvin, 216.



Figure 12 Pao's photo on the shores of Waikīkī Beach.

Arvin explains that “diasporic Native Hawaiians (are) in a particularly difficult position in that their desires to return to and reconnect with the homeland are often mediated by tourism.”³² In a way they enter their own land as tourists which can make them question their identity.

In another photo the artist lies within an ancient birthing place of Kānaka. It is also the site of a former sugar cane plantation and the artist’s body is covered in bright, white pure cane sugar from Hawai’i.

³² Arvin, 216.

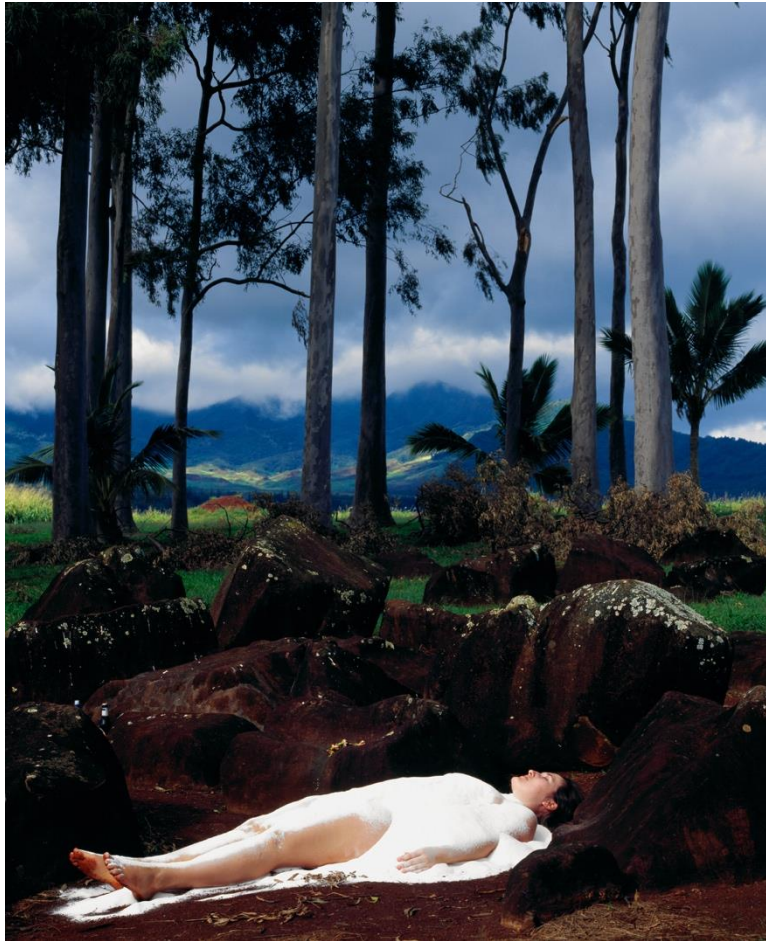


Figure 13 Pao poses in an ancient birthing site for Kānaka with an abandoned sugarcane plantation in the background. Her body is covered in white sugar.

A regenerative refusal isn't only a refusal, it is a refusal and a recentering. Arvin explains that Pao, "reclaims and reinhabits the space with a Native Hawaiian body."³³ This disrupts settler power, "that assumes Indigenous power is gone and Indigenous bodies have died."³⁴ These acts of regenerative refusal put Kānaka people back into the picture in a way that "challenges the certainty and finality of the settler colonial process of possession through whiteness."³⁵ These

³³ Arvin, 218.

³⁴ Arvin, 218.

³⁵ Arvin, 218.

images engage the viewer with the effects of tourism and illicit a different response while giving space for people to think about their own place in the settler colonial project.

Detours: A Decolonial Guide to Hawai'i

A 2019 tourism guide called *Detours* conveys another way that regenerative refusal can interrogate standard ideas of tourism. The editors write that the book “is meant to redirect you from the fantasy of Hawai'i as a tropical paradise toward an engagement with Hawai'i that is pono (just, fitting).”³⁶ *Detours* works as a decolonial tour guide that is meant to be an “unsettling assertion of sovereignty a demand to think critically about your relationship with Hawai'i.”³⁷ The editors explain that Hawai'i is offered up as “tropical playground” but does in fact have real people who “struggle with the problems brought about by colonialism, military occupation, tourism, food insecurity, the high costs of living, and the effects of a changing climate.”³⁸ Though many visitors may not want to engage with reality on vacation, the editors say this kind of engagement “is meant to unsettle”³⁹ by being a “guide to Hawai'i that does not put tourist desires at the center.”⁴⁰ The essays in the book ask the reader to reimagine different places in the islands and to engage with the culture in a different way rather than just as a voyeur. The editors also ask tourists to question their motivations for visiting. They write “Instead of looking at what Hawai'i can offer you (and it has much to offer beyond sun and sand), you might think instead of

³⁶ Hokulani K. Aikau, Vernadette Vicuna Gonzalez, *Detours: A Decolonial Guide to Hawai'i*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2019), 1.

³⁷ Aikau and Gonzalez, 1.

³⁸ Aikau and Gonzalez, 2.

³⁹ Aikau and Gonzalez, 2.

⁴⁰ Aikau and Gonzalez, 2.

how you can learn from and contribute to ongoing efforts toward sustaining ea.”⁴¹ Ea, they explain, is “a way of life” that “was for Kānaka like water is for fish. It is the air we breathe.”⁴² The *Hawaiian Dictionary* defines “ea” as “sovereignty, rule independence.”⁴³ It is an important step towards a different direction for Hawai’i, when tourists consider their own responsibility to a place they visit. This can look like beginning to understand where the materials came from that built Waikīkī. One essay tracks the significance of the Pa’ia lime kiln on the island of Maui explaining how sand was taken from other islands to make concrete to build on O`ahu. Sand from the Maui sand dunes was brought on barges to O`ahu. It may not seem like a crime to bring sand from one island from the other, but what the author points out is that “Native Hawaiians buried the iwi (bones) of their ancestors in the sand dunes throughout Hawai’i. They believed a person’s mana lived in the bones . . .”⁴⁴ Mana is defined as “Supernatural or divine power . . .”⁴⁵ Removing this sand, turning it into cement and using it to cover up the land or ‘āina or Hawai’i, for Kānaka is like literally building on the bones of Hawaiians. In “1989 over one thousand Native Hawaiian remains were removed to build the Ritz-Carlton Kapalua resort.”⁴⁶ Who knows how many undetected Kānaka remains have gone into building the countless hotels on the islands? This is what colonization does, makes the Indigenous invisible and yet their bones were foundation on which luxury hotels were constructed.

⁴¹ Aikau and Gonzalez, 3.

⁴² Aikau and Gonzalez, 4.

⁴³ Mary Kawena Pukui & Samuel H. Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary: Hawaiian-English, English-Hawaiian*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1986), 36.

⁴⁴ Kapulani Landgraf, “Ponoiwī,” *Detours*, 38.

⁴⁵ Pukui and Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary*, 235.

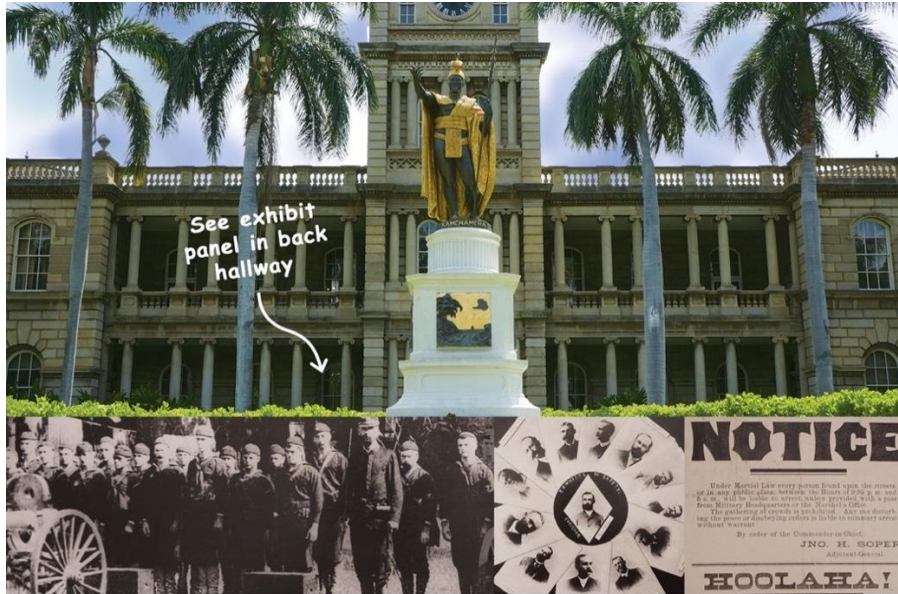
⁴⁶ Landgraf, “Ponoiwī,” 38.

Each part of this books asks tourists to reimagine Hawai'i by looking past the tourist guise. In "Settler Colonial Postcards" the artists subvert the typical postcard that a visitor sends home from their vacation to "counter the ubiquitous 'wish you were here' sentiment of postcards."⁴⁷ Instead Karen K. Kosasa and Stan Tomita, third-generation Japanese American settlers in Hawai'i, design replicas of postcards that "highlight the invisibility of settler colonialism in Hawai'i."⁴⁸ One postcard is called "Scene of the Crime: 1893 Overthrow of Hawaiian Monarchy" and features a modern-day picture of Iolani Palace super-imposed with a black and white photo of "US Marines mobilized to 'protect American lives and property,'"⁴⁹ by imprisoning Queen Liliuokalani in her own palace. These postcards force tourists to look beyond the fantastical and to see the reality of Hawaiian history.

⁴⁷Kosasa and Tomita, 147.

⁴⁸Kosasa and Tomita, 147.

⁴⁹Kosasa and Tomita, 149.



SCENE OF A CRIME: 1893 OVERTHROW OF HAWAIIAN MONARCHY

Figure 14 Didactic Detour Postcard project, "Scene of a Crime."

Kosasa writes that the postcards are used by teachers as prompts for classroom conversations “to show a simple format for speaking back to the world.”⁵⁰ With little to no room for a visitor to write a message on them, instead the image on the front is enhanced by an explanation of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, the question of when is an apology enough, settler colonialism and a century of conquest and the invasion of alien plant and animal species to the islands.⁵¹ These postcards take a seemingly harmless form and show the harm being done to Hawai’i through the vehicle of tourism.

Detours goes deep into what it means to be a tourist and how we can be better travelers in the world. As the introduction to the book explains, “Behind the image of the smiling, gentle and seductively beckoning icon of the hula girl – meant to invite, reassure, welcome”⁵² that instead it

⁵⁰Kosasa and Tomita, 152.

⁵¹Kosasa and Tomita, 148-151.

⁵²Aikau and Gonzalez, *Detours*, 9.

asks the visitors to enter with awareness and attention and leave their entitlement behind, and to get curious. Though I think books like these are imperative because they encourage visitors to think about their place in this harm, I'm not sure a book like *DeTours* could stop people from coming to Hawai'i.

Detours Reexamined

Kyle Kajihiro, a contributor to the *Detours* guidebook began the Hawai'i DeTours Project in the 1990s as “a critical education programme which promotes a decolonial history and geography of Hawai'i.”⁵³ After years of leading the tour, Kajihiro asks “Can meaningful transnational solidarity be fostered through these kinds of practices?” or are the tours only being used for visitors who still want to come to Hawai'i but have it be a “guilt-free experience.”⁵⁴ Kajihiro explains that because “tourism and militarism within capitalist and colonial relations are inherently ex- tractive and violent, then a more “woke” (hip and socially aware) tourism can never be a real alternative.”⁵⁵ People are going to always justify a vacation in Hawai'i, just as my family as white settlers justified moving to Hawai'i, it was our right. It was legal. But maybe taking a tour to see the way Hawai'i used to be before the military and tourism dominated the island could make visitors feel less guilty about contributing to degradation these structures promote.

⁵³ Kyle Kajihiro, “DeTouring the empire: Unsettling sites and sights of US militarism and settler colonialism in Hawai'i ,” *Socialising Tourism: Rethinking Tourism for Social and Ecological Justice*, eds. Freya Higgins-Desbiolles, Adam Doering, and Bobbie Chew Bigby, (London, England : Routledge, 2022), 145.

⁵⁴ Kajihiro, 145.

⁵⁵ Kajihiro, 145, 146.

This privilege is further exasperated by the kind of tourist Kajihiro deems the *nomadic settler*, that appeared during the Covid-19 lockdown. These tourists have the means and the freedom to move and work anywhere. They imagine that they become a part of the fabric of a society, but instead, Kajihiro explains, they have a “superficial openness to new cultures, places and experiences” that comes from “a deep sense of entitlement, where cultural difference, novel experiences and moral validation are commodities to be discovered, collected and worn as trophies of conquest on *Instagram*.”⁵⁶

After a scathing review of the DeTours Project by a San Francisco travel writer Jeanne Cooper, who lives part-time in Hawai‘i, Kajihiro has had to rethink DeTours and who it is for. Of the tour, Kajihiro quotes Cooper who wrote, ““Loss of indigenous sovereignty? Check. Militarization? Check. Cultural and environmental degradation? Well, you get the picture.””⁵⁷ With these words Cooper belittles the history of Hawai‘i and the importance of tours like Kajihiro’s. These nomadic settlers claim to care about a place but, Kajihiro explains, travelers like Cooper seek “the unrestricted freedom to move, to see, to listen, to enjoy and to consume any persons or places she pleases, because, after all, Hawai‘i is *for her*.”⁵⁸ Because Hawai‘i is for everyone else. Kajihiro goes onto explain, “It seems it is just too easy to be a tourist in Hawai‘i without having to be accountable.”⁵⁹

After reading the book *Detours*, *Columbia Journalism Review* writer, Alexandria Neason traveled to Hawai‘i to take a tour with Kajihiro. However, the tour never took place because, at

⁵⁶ Kajihiro, 155.

⁵⁷ Kajihiro, 154.

⁵⁸ Kajihiro, 155.

⁵⁹ Kajihiro, 155.

the time, Kajihiro had suspended it as he grappled with the problem of his tour becoming a commodity like so many other things in Hawai'i. "People want to come here, and now that they know that there's some problematic aspect of tourism in Hawai'i, they want to come here guilt-free,"⁶⁰ Kajihiro explained. He didn't really know what to make of this. He designed the tour, Neason writes, because after growing up there and returning following college on the continent, Kajihiro observed his friends "including academics and activists, politically progressive people" and when they arrived in Hawai'i "something switched off in their brains . . . they became sort of like giddy teenagers and they just thought of Hawai'i as a playground."⁶¹ But then once the book *Detours* was published, Kajihiro was inundated with requests for tours. Neason quotes Kajihiro as saying, "It's the incessant nature of capitalism to always commodify and fetishize everything . . . even a tour like ours that is now seen as something people want to consume."⁶²

I can see this push to want Hawai'i and the way it makes people feel and so by going on a tour like Kajihiro's the tourist can go through the rest of their vacation blindly believing they did their due diligence and now Hawai'i is theirs. When I was writing my master's thesis, I had two different experiences that remind me of this urge to vacation in Hawai'i guilt-free. One of my colleagues was taking a trip there with his family. He knew a lot about the history of the place and the way that tourism has scarred it from reading my work. However, he really wanted to go. He wanted to know how he could go without contributing to the bleaching of the reefs or the exploitation of the people. I couldn't answer that without saying to him, "Don't go." Because

⁶⁰ Neason, "Greetings from Hawai'i.

⁶¹ Neason.

⁶² Neason.

how could I say that when there were 10 million other tourists going to Hawai'i in the same year as him?

He returned after the vacation elated. He snorkeled every day, he told me, and the reefs were still alive. The ocean was teeming with colorful fish and turtles came right up to him. It was his paradise for a brief time and no more was said about the guilt he carried going into the vacation.

Another colleague went to Hawai'i for her honeymoon. She did not ask me to assuage her guilt. She knew just as much as the previous colleague, but also went with the knowledge that she may not be welcome outside of her hotel property. She returned with a different view. Yes, she enjoyed the ocean and wearing flip flops all day because it felt so free. But as she drove around the island she saw a plywood, spray painted sign that said, "Haole Go Home." And she got it. It didn't make her feel bad. She just knew it was true. She didn't belong there. And yet, she still went and so did he.

Until the government and people of Hawai'i figure out how to manage tourism, there is always going to be this catch-22. It is evident today after the wildfires in Lah'āina. First tourists were told not to go to Maui because of the danger, consideration for the survivors and the dead, and because it just wasn't a considerate or compassionate move. Once the disaster seemed to be mitigated, Maui needed visitors because people needed to keep working. The media showed acres of fields filled with unrented rental cars. In a capitalist society, money must keep coming in and the tourism industry is a huge generator of income. Until different structures are put in place, this is the way it will continue to be.

Unreal: Hawai'i in Popular Imagination

It is still important to tell the stories of Hawai'i and the way it has been sold to the world. In 2019 an exhibit at Honolulu's Bishop Museum titled "Unreal: Hawai'i in Popular Imagination," took this myth of Hawai'i and by lining the walls of the exhibit with travel posters and memorabilia dating from the early twentieth century that showed what the curator coined an "unreal" Hawai'i fabricated by travel companies. When the curator of the exhibit saw the memorabilia (a private collection) he realized it all signified some trauma of the Hawaiian people. "There's not a single one of them that has any sort of integrity and does not signal something is wrong. . .the whole idea of selling Hawai'i is fucking gross."⁶³ To counter the "selling of Hawai'i" five Kānaka O'iwi artists painted a mural, "āina Aloha" which roughly translates to "love of the land." The mural was used to "paint away pain."⁶⁴ The mural has two sides, one is filled with greens and "tells a story of ancient voyages, elders and ancestors building community, ritualizing ceremonies."⁶⁵ The other side is covered with "jostling shapes tearing against one another; brown hands and small patches of green are caught between jagged, overlapping layers of red, black and white."⁶⁶ The mural is there to show the trauma caused to Indigenous people by selling Hawai'i. There are also questions on the mural written in Hawaiian and English asking, "Whose children are you? What place claims you? Does the foreigner have

⁶³ James Charisma, "Native Hawaiians Deconstruct the Misleading Narrative as Hawai'i as Paradise," *Hyperallergic*, January 14, 2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/479819/unreal-hawaii-in-popular-imagination-bernice-pauahi-bishop-museum/> .

⁶⁴ Charisma.

⁶⁵ Charisma.

⁶⁶ Charisma.

responsibilities?”⁶⁷ One of the artists says that she’d like the tourist to think about Hawai’i a more real way. “It’s great you’re visiting, hello, but it would oblige us for you to learn more. I hope people leave the exhibit and ask, what else do I need to know about Hawai’i?”⁶⁸ This exhibit demonstrates ways in which Kānaka are reclaiming Hawai’i and people’s perception of the island and their culture through the site of tourism. As Arvin explains, decolonization doesn’t happen quickly, but instead, “will be a long-term practice that may not have any clear end in sight. Yet daily imagining and building decolonial futures is key to sustaining life, desire, and love within our Indigenous communities.”⁶⁹ All of these regenerative refusals begin the process of unearthing the subaltern voices and experiences in Hawai’i. As a white settler myself, I see my responsibility to listen to and learn from these voices. Then I hope to encourage others to do the same.

A Close Case Study of Regenerative Refusal: Maunakea and the Protest of the Thirty Meter Telescope Project

Every space in Hawai’i is contested – the oceans, the mountains, and the sidewalks. The beach parks where the houseless fly the Hawaiian flag from their flimsy tarp shelters in front of the multi-million-dollar condominiums and beach homes owned mostly by people who don’t live in Hawai’i. Every space in Hawai’i asks us to observe from it, to understand its significance and what’s at stake.

⁶⁷ Charisma.

⁶⁸ Charisma.

⁶⁹ Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians*, 238.

The dormant volcano Maunakea on the Island of Hawai'i is one of these contested spaces. It stretches down 18,900 feet to the ocean floor. Most of this mountain sits where the human eye can't see it. It's neighbor, Kilauea spews lava in spectacular shows mowing over houses and progress. Off its coast Loihi, a new island, forms. Maunakea rises 13,790 more feet out of the ocean stretching towards the stars.

Maunakea is the highest mountain in the Pacific Ocean. It is the highest in the world if you measure it from the sea floor to the summit. This mountain is many things – it is one of the best places to observe the stars in the universe, it is a scared place for Kānaka Maoli, it is an anomaly with snow on its peaks in a place where it often feels like summer all year long, it is home to animals, birds and insects found only on the Island of Hawai'i. It sits on the youngest island in the chain. Locals call it the Big Island because all the other Hawaiian Islands fit into the Island of Hawai'i. There are few beaches because there hasn't been time for the coastline to erode. Instead, there are fields of lava -- pahoehoe the smooth stuff that looks like black soft serve ice cream, and a'a that it is sharp on your feet and looks spiky and broken. Maunakea looms large over luxury resorts that brought sand in to create their own beaches for guests. Towns dot its lower hills. An airport brings some of the ten million visitors to the state of Hawai'i per year.

Maunakea sits in the center of the Pacific Ocean and at the center of a controversy that asks: who gets to decide the story and the purpose of a mountain? Kānaka protestors who call themselves "Protectors" of the mountain have been fighting the construction of a Thirty-Meter Telescope (TMT) there since 2015. After a battle in the Hawai'i Supreme Court that overruled the protestors, construction on TMT was set to begin in July 2019. Kupuna or Hawaiian elders

along with other Maunakea Protectors blocked the road, locking themselves to cattle guards. For a while, before the Covid 19 pandemic shut down the world, a group of Protectors lived on Maunakea. They made a community for themselves on the road to the top, blocking access to the telescope sites. The community they created included with a code of conduct, rules for engaging peacefully called Kapu Aloha, a mission called Aloha ‘āina (love for the land). Hawaiian ceremonies or protocols were performed three times a day, and there were practical things like a cafeteria and a daycare. They developed a pop-up university called Pu’uhonua O Pu’uhuluhulu University.⁷⁰ This Hawaiian community on top of Maunakea brought Kānaka together igniting a new Hawaiian Renaissance with protests for causes spreading down the mountain and to other islands reigniting Kānaka indigeneity and rights to their lands.

There are two sides in the fight for Maunakea and both sides have a different idea of Maunakea’s identity. To Kānaka, Maunakea is sacred, considered the piko or belly button of their creation story. For millennia Kānaka had a close relationship with this mountain until westerners arrived in Hawai’i. It is appropriate then, that Kānaka return to Maunakea, the place of their spiritual beginning to move forward and reimagine what reclaiming their land could look like. What does it mean to look at a place from the perspective of the vertical? How can giving a mountain an identity like Kānaka and the TMT backers are doing, that it brings to the forefront ideas of settler-colonialism and indigenous voices that have been silenced throughout American’s invasion of first-people’s land.

⁷⁰ “Pu’uhuluhulu University,” Pu’uhonua O Pu’uhuluhulu, accessed November 25, 2019. <https://puuhuluhulu.com/>.

The controversy over the Thirty-Meter-Telescope on Maunakea also forces a different perspective for Hawaii. Michael Reidy writes in a book review titled “The Most Recent Orogeny: Verticality and Why Mountains Matter” that “mountains have a geological history” and “they also have a human history, created through our ideas and imaginations.”⁷¹ So, if mountains are “socially constructed” by “ideas and imagination” then the opposing ideas of what purpose Maunakea serves brings bigger issues to the forefront of a greater conversation happening in Hawai’i about whose imagining of this mountain we’re going to believe. This forces a confrontation of ideas about indigeneity, land use, decolonization, and even climate change.

Early westerners constructed and mapped Maunakea and the mountains of Hawai’i, erasing indigenous knowledge. Over 200 hundred years later, Kānaka are decolonizing the space of this mountain with their own ideas of place, responsibility and peaceful protests directed by a concept called Kapu Aloha. As westerners we have been trained to always look forward, but Kānaka remind us we must also look back. Indigenous practices can help us move forward through the Anthropocene. What is happening on Maunakea is reminding us of something Kānaka always knew: we are all connected.

Once Hawaiians had a mountain, the spiritual birthplace of their civilization and when westerners arrived in *Hawai’i* they lost much: their culture, their language, their land, and their mountain. In a NASA Final Environmental Impact Statement from February 2005 on the Maunakea Science Reserve the authors wrote, “Contact with the Western world, beginning with

⁷¹ Michael S. Reidy., et al. “The Most Recent Orogeny: Verticality and Why Mountains Matter.” *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2017, pp. 578–87. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26413662>. Accessed 18 Nov. 2023.

the arrival of Captain James Cook in 1778, altered in significant ways the relationship of the Native Hawaiians with Maunakea.”⁷² Kānaka became disconnected from the mountain and from themselves. The NASA report goes on to say that “disease, the abolition of the kapu system in 1819, the arrival of Christian missionaries” all contributed to the elimination of cultural practices, so “new shrines were probably no longer erected” on Maunakea.⁷³ Essentially huge changes to the existence of Kānaka forced them to abandon Maunakea. In *Disremembering Lahui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887* Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo’ole Osorio writes, “The church became an institution promising life when death was everywhere, and the eventual conversion of Hawaiians by the thousands must be understood in the context of a time when their own religion, akua (gods) and Ali`i (royalty) could not prevent them from dying.”⁷⁴ Reconnecting with Maunakea at the precipice of possibly one of the most successful Hawaiian Renaissance movements is profound. It is Kānaka coming home to their origins but now they are protectors of the mountain.

To understand what Kānaka are fighting against, it is important to look at how Hawai’i’s mountains were constructed during colonialism. Looking back in history Hawai’i was set-up to be exploited from the first time Captain Cook landed in Kealahou Bay in the late 1700s. He brought a western way of knowing that dismissed all other ways. This fascination with the large mountains of the Island of Hawai’i mirrored the way Europeans were looking at mountains across the world. They were places to discover in the name of science as well as places to

⁷² “Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Outrigger Telescopes Project,” National Space and Aeronautics Administration, February 2005, Volume I, v, <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/mk/files/2016/10/FEIS-Outrigger-Telescopes-VOL-1.pdf> .

⁷³ “Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Outrigger Telescopes Project.”

⁷⁴ Osorio, *Disremembering Lahui*, 12.

experience the sublime. The sublime was a feeling, close to fear when a person puts themselves in a dangerous position, but then escapes it. Suddenly nature for European was to be embraced to capture that sublime rush. Nature was seen as being separate from culture. Mignolo writes, in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* that the “*Novum Organum* (1620)” determined a “reorganization of knowledge” so “‘nature’ was ‘there’ to be dominated by Man.” This allowed Christian’s control over knowledge thus “disqualifying all coexisting and equally valid concepts of knowledge and by ignoring concepts that contradicted their own understanding of nature” this coupled with “an economy of brutal resource extraction”⁷⁵ guaranteed that Kānaka knowledge would be disregarded by contact with the western world.

This idea of nature “over there” was obvious in the way westerners spoke and wrote about Hawai’i. Mountains, land, everything about Hawai’i was there for westerners to discover, to chart, to map, to put a value on. Kānaka were in the way. Westerners didn’t care about them except to convert them to Christianity and to change their heathen ways. Mignolo writes, “Western civilization emerged not just as another civilization in the planetary concert, but as the civilization destined to lead and save the rest of the world from the Devil.”⁷⁶ Westerners wanted Kānaka to put some clothes on, to show modesty, to stop dancing the hula, to stop surfing and to stop worshipping pagan gods.

Books and Hawai’i newspapers from the 1800s chronicle the exploration of Hawai’i’s mountains. In Charles H. Hitchcock’s 1911 book *Hawai’i And Its Volcanoes*, he reprints accounts of explorers who summited the volcanoes (mostly Mauna Loa which is connected to Maunakea

⁷⁵ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 11.

⁷⁶ Mignolo, 12.

and the second highest peak on the island). John Ledyard explored Mauna Loa when Captain Cook was anchored at Kealahou Bay in 1779. On his way up the mountain, Ledyard encountered an “Indian” he’d met before who “belonged to the order of their Mida or priesthood” and when the man heard where they were going “he disapproved of our intention, told us that we could not go as far as we had proposed, and would have persuaded us to return” but Ledyard and his companions “were determined in our resolves.”⁷⁷ The slopes of Maunakea and Mauna Loa, as well as the areas of Kilauea were sacred to Kānaka, though that was given little regard from the colonizers, they simply ignored the priest and did what they pleased.

Captain George Vancouver visited Hawai‘i in 1793. Hitchcock reprinted the journals of Vancouver’s botanist Archibald Menzies who climbed Mauna Loa. King Kamehameha, I sent Menzies “Rookea the Chief” as a guide.⁷⁸ This journey reads more like an expedition in the Himalayas where the Sherpas provide food and carry everything. However, no money seems to exchange hands, instead the villages they come upon provide the explorers with food because they are accompanied by a representative of the King. Hawaiian history or knowledge is scarcely mentioned except an account of a civil war Menzies writes, “as we advanced the natives pointed out to us, on both sides of our path, places where battles and skirmishes were fought in the late civil wars between the adherents of the King.”⁷⁹ Menzies summits Mauna Loa and writes, “I regretted much not having a spirit-level or some other instrument to ascertain whether this mountain or Mowna-Kaah is the highest, though from the Peak of the latter being this time

⁷⁷ Charles H. Hitchcock, *Hawai‘i and its Volcanoes*, (Honolulu, Hawai‘i, The Hawaiian Gazette Co., Ltd., 1911), 59.

⁷⁸ Hitchcock, 65.

⁷⁹ Hitchcock, 68.

whitened over with snow, I am inclined to think it would have the pre-eminence in this respect to Mowna-roa.”⁸⁰ Here we see Maunakea from a whiteman’s perspective, and he is concerned with learning which mountain is higher.

Though Maunakea is considered sacred to Kānaka Maoli, the early explorers never mention this. Chances are they didn’t know the mountains were sacred. Their goals were to explore and to survey. Hitchcock himself ascends Maunakea where he observes several old lava flows and snow in July. He writes, “I never saw snow of a more dazzling white than what fell with in connection with thunder showers on July 23, 24, 25, 1905.”⁸¹ These early explorers were concerned with mapping these volcanic mountains for science and to measure them by western ideals. Hitchcock’s book includes “plates” or photos from an 1892 US Coast and Geodetic Survey but there aren’t questions posed to Kānaka about what they knew about Maunakea or Mauna Loa. Their knowledge wasn’t relevant. Hitchcock writes, “Because the natives possessed no written literature, it has been generally understood that their oral traditions transmitted from generation to generation had no scientific value.”⁸² Hawaiian royalty were buried on Maunakea. There are heiau’s scattered (ancient temples) about but these things aren’t what Hitchcock’s story of the mountain is about.

What is mentioned is one reference to a Hawaiian priestess who visits Maui to warn foreigners that Pele, the goddess of the volcano was angered by all the foreigners coming to visit this sacred place. From the journals of William Ellis 1833 *Polynesian Researches*, “The apprehensions uniformly entertained by the natives of the fearful consequence of Pele’s anger

⁸⁰ Hitchcock, 79.

⁸¹ Hitchcock, 50.

⁸²Hitchcock, 162.

prevented their paying very frequent visits to the vicinity of her abode.”⁸³ The priestess warns the chiefs of Maui that, “in a trance or vision, she had been with Pele, by whom she was charged to complain to them that a number of foreigners who had visited Kilauea; eaten the sacred berries; broken her houses, the craters; thrown down large stones, etc.”⁸⁴ She continues to warn that “if these foreigners weren’t banished from the islands, Pele would certainly in a given number of days, take vengeance by inundating the country with lava, and destroying the people.”⁸⁵ What is significant about this story to Hitchcock is that the Kānaka chiefs didn’t believe the priestess and sent her away thus supporting the Christian religion they’d adopted from the missionaries. The story continues with “Kapiolani, a royal princess” determined to defy her people’s “old” gods and visit the volcano herself. “Devotees of Pele . . . try to dissuade her from her purpose; assuring her that though foreigners might go there with security, yet Pele would allow no Hawaiian to intrude.”⁸⁶ Kapiolani ignores them and goes into the crater and since Pele doesn’t react, she asks the followers to “renounce their attachment to Pele and join with her . . . in acknowledging Jehovah as the true God.”⁸⁷ Later Lord Alfred Tennyson wrote a poem about her titled *Kapiolani* in which he describes Kapiolani eliminating Pele. The final line reads, “And drove the demon from Hawai’i!”⁸⁸

In *Hawaiian Volcanoes* published in 1841 Clarence Edward Dutton writes about his exploration of Maunakea where he found traces of ancient Kānaka, “This light-colored rock of

⁸³ Hitchcock, 172.

⁸⁴ Hitchcock, 175.

⁸⁵ Hitchcock, 175.

⁸⁶ Hitchcock, 176.

⁸⁷ Hitchcock, 176.

⁸⁸ Hitchcock, 177.

Maunakea . . . was used by primitive Hawaiians for making their stone implements. . . Hard by are abundant vestiges of the work of manufacturing weapons and tools; and incomplete products in all stages of manufacture.”⁸⁹ In a 1905 article in the *Sunday Advertiser* titled *Scaling the Great Peaks of Hawai’i Island* describes a “remarkable mountain climbing expedition recently participated in by a number of well-known gentlemen” where “few white men have ever passed.”⁹⁰ The article reports “On the summit of Maunakea were found quarries where the old native stone axes were made” the article also chronicles the men seeing “Hawaiian geese, plover, quail and wild cattle and dogs”⁹¹ but no Hawaiian people are mentioned. Here Kānaka are a culture that used to exist and now their tools are scattered about and incomplete. Again, Kānaka are not consulted in this article, instead the writers say, “a great lake was found on Maunakea . . . native tradition has it as fathomless.”⁹² It is as if the white men are discovering all of this for the first-time disregarding Kānaka who lived in an intimate relationship with these islands for millennium.

In a *Star Advertiser* review of Hitchcock’s book on September 19, 1909, at the end of the article an unnamed writer includes a heading *Ancient Volcanic Tradition*, in which they write, “The table on page 271 entitled ‘Eruptions from Kilauea previous to 1820’ is a good illustration to the marked contrast between modern scientific records and ancient history according to

⁸⁹ Clarence Edward Dutton, *Hawai’i Volcanoes*, (Washington, D.C., National Park Service, US Dept. of the Interior, 1997), 167.

⁹⁰ “Scaling the Great. Peaks of Hawai’i Isle,” *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, August 20, 1905.

⁹¹ “Scaling the Great Peaks of Hawai’i Isle.”

⁹² “Scaling the Great Peaks of Hawai’i Isle.”

folklore.”⁹³ Native Hawaiians are sources of unreliable information or “folklore,” incapable of any kind of scientific knowledge even though they used the stars to navigate and find the most remote land mass in the world. They were in close relationship with the cycles of the earth in a way that westerners weren’t. For Kānaka nature wasn’t a separate thing.

These westerners erased Indigenous knowledge by mapping the area in a western way, traveling every inch of the islands, including up Maunakea, Mauna Loa, and Kilauea. If Hawaiian history was a piece of paper with words written on it, colonization would have been a computer that made x’s through each letter. Kānaka knowledge wasn’t important to colonizers. Kānaka are changing that by erasing the x’s and uncovering their history.

The ways these early writers organized the mountain spaces without Kānaka voices demonstrates how important the fight to stop TMT and other projects are for Kānaka, and how these omissions are deep silences of missing Kānaka voices. What if it had happened differently? What if Kānaka and western voices were blended to make a new understanding of place? Or what if western civilization showed respect and appreciate for Indigenous knowledge. If we think about the space of the mountain as a new identity forming for Hawai’i from the colonized to the decolonized then we are doing what Professor Michael Reidy calls, “Thinking not just about these spaces, but *through* them. . . they actually guide the imagination.”⁹⁴ This imagination happened on Maunakea in the form of a Hawaiian cultural practice called Kapu Aloha, a

⁹³ “Mountain Climbing on Big Island has many Inviting Possibilities, *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, September 19, 1909, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/data/batches/hihouml_jade_ver01/data/sn82014682/0021247132A/1916090201/0057.pdf.

⁹⁴ Reidy, “The Most Recent Orogeny,” 587.

peaceful protest and unifying vision that was “first brought to the public sphere on Maunakea.”⁹⁵

According to professor of Hawaiian epistemology, Manulani Aluli Meyer, Kapu Aloha is “a multidimensional concept and practice inspired by our *kupuna* (elders). . . of compassion for all to express aloha for those involved, especially those who are perceived to be polar to our cause. Kapu Aloha helps us intentionalize our thoughts, words and deeds without harm to others.”⁹⁶ A Kupuna (elder), Dr. Hokulani Holt, living in the Pu’uhonua O’ Pu’uhuluhulu Community on Maunakea defines Kapu Aloha as, “Always thinking about place, about relationships. It is behaving well with each other and with the place we are in.”⁹⁷

The idea of Kapu Aloha is spreading throughout Hawai’i with other protestors borrowing from it by showing love and compassion as Kānaka and their supporters say “no!” (Kapu literally means “no” or “keep out.”) Michael Reidy writes that, “A view from the vertical is also a way to get beyond the questions of center and peripheries.”⁹⁸ Kapu Aloha does this by taking a protest situation that is potentially violent and turn it into a kind of love. During the Maunakea protests family members and friends were sometimes on either side of a dispute facing off against one another because many Kānaka work for the Hawai’i County Police Department or the Bureau of Land and Natural Resources. Kapu Aloha is peaceful yet firm and could be the way that Kānaka get the attention of the western world asking government to do more, to notice and ask before always moving forward with projects that are in direct conflict with indigenous

⁹⁵ Manulani Aluli Meyer, “Manulani Aluli Meyer: Kapu Aloha for Maunakea, a discipline of compassion,” UH Hilo Stories, April 13, 2015, <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/chancellor/stories/2015/04/13/kapu-aloha/>.

⁹⁶ Meyer.

⁹⁷ “Defining and Living Kapu Aloha,” Learn, Pu’uhonua O Pu’uhuluhulu, accessed December 1, 2019. <https://puuhuluhulu.com/learn> .

⁹⁸ Reidy, “The Most Recent Orogeny,” 587.

traditions With ideas like Kapu Aloha, perhaps Maunakea can be what Reidy refers to as a “liminal zone where different cultures, ideas and technologies meet,”⁹⁹ a space between two worlds and two ways of understanding. Maybe Maunakea “can change our understanding of what to look for.”¹⁰⁰ Kānaka protests against western colonialism have been happening since before Queen Liliuokalani was imprisoned in her palace. It has been a long, uphill battle but with Kapu Aloha and with this mountain – Maunakea – things seem to be shifting. Kānaka are uniting in a way that hasn’t happened before, and the world is watching.

The Thirty-Meter-Telescope consortium recently stated, “what is happening today in Hawai’i isn’t just about the construction of TMT on Maunakea. Among those who remain opposed are many who see TMT as a platform for what they believe is the wrong side in the much larger political issue of Hawaiian sovereignty and past injustices.”¹⁰¹ This is true. TMT isn’t getting at the systemic problem of development in Hawai’i but it is a result of the problems in Hawai’i. Issues like “Hawaiian sovereignty and past injustices”¹⁰² could force Hawai’i to question every structure, rail project, new freeway, or resort proposal.

Science often appears innocent in colonization because the field is gathering important facts. But authors Denis Cosgrove and Veronica Della Dora see this differently. In *High Places: Cultural Geographies of Mountains, Ice and Science*, they write, “Finally, science making in high places is inflected by ethnographic encounter . . . the role of polar scientists today as the unintentional inheritors of the colonialist and sometimes racist attitudes that governed the

⁹⁹ Reidy, 586.

¹⁰⁰ Reidy, 586.

¹⁰¹ Ed Stone, “Understanding the Past, Navigating the Present, Embracing the Future,” TMT International Observatory, August 9, 2019. <https://www.tmt.org/page/our-story-in-hawaii>.

¹⁰² Stone.

encounter between temperate and Intuit peoples well into the late twentieth century”¹⁰³ This is the bridge between early scientists mapping Hawai’i and today’s astronomers using Maunakea as colonizers on land that was stolen from Kānaka and then given to the State of Hawai’i during statehood and leased to the University of Hawaii. The name of science and progress doesn’t get you a hall pass out of colonization or even operating under settler colonialism’s claimed innocence and guise of naivete. The first four telescopes put on Maunakea in the 1960s were done so without any kind of permitting process. When Kānaka sued the University of Hawai’i, the university obtained permits after the telescopes had been up and running for years.¹⁰⁴

In Hawai’i the land is called ‘āina. But land, nature, the environment is not separate from Kānaka, everything is interconnected. The Protectors of Maunakea practice Kapu Aloha but another concept Aloha ‘āina defines the Hawaiian people. In a book of essays called *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty* editor Noelani Goodyear-Ka’opua explains Aloha ‘āina by describing the way that Kānaka have a “genealogical relationship to the lands and waters of our islands and distinguish us from other residents.”¹⁰⁵ Kānaka believe “our land are in fact living ancestors.”¹⁰⁶ Leon No’eau Peralto writes that the legend of the birth of Maunakea, “resulted not only in the birthing of ‘āina, but also in the ‘birthing of a unified Hawaiian consciousness – a common ancestral lineage that forges links between the genealogies

¹⁰³ Denis E. Cosgrove and Veronica Della Dora, *High Places: Cultural Geographies of Mountains, Ice and Science*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 15.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Emerson and Becky Ferreira, “A Battle Over a Telescope on Hawai’i’s Sacred Mountains is Just Beginning,” *Vice*, July 26, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8xzzz3/the-battle-over-a-telescope-on-hawaiis-sacred-mountain-is-just-beginning.

¹⁰⁵ Noelani Goodyear-Ka’opua, *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty* (Duke University Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁰⁶ Goodyear-Ka’opua, 23.

of both land and people.”¹⁰⁷ Basically, in Hawai’i you don’t get one (a people) without another (the land, nature, animals, the elements). Everything is connected. Peralto continues, “Mauna a Wākea, as the highest peak, can thus be viewed, symbolically, as the highest potential of human consciousness.”¹⁰⁸ This human consciousness, he explains is “Like the piko on our own bodies, Mauna a Wākea represents our physical and spiritual connection to past, present and future generations.”¹⁰⁹ This is how being on a mountain like Maunakea awakes a consciousness of a people. Mitigating climate change is going to require humans to look at the planet in a different way, not as a resource for obtaining more – whether it be resources in the name of profit or resources in the name of science.

In their article “Pacific Islands in the Anthropocene,” Peter Vitousek and Oliver Chadwick say understanding indigenous cultures is a way forward to learn to protect precious resources like the Pacific Islands from rising seas and climate catastrophes. The authors argue that “Polynesian societies largely developed within the resources of their islands.”¹¹⁰ Kānaka and other Pacific Islanders understood that their mere existence was connected to keeping the earth thriving and healthy. In Hawai’i it’s called pono or balance and it is a human kuleana (or responsibility) to malāma (take care) of one another and the planet we live on. The authors continue, “Polynesians had no access to stored energy from the past (fossil fuels), and their institutions, culture and values did not recognize

¹⁰⁷ Leon No’eau Peralto. “Portrait. Mauna a Wākea,” in *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty*, ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka’opua. (Duke University Press, 2014), 233.

¹⁰⁸ Peralto. “Portrait. Mauna a Wākea,” 235.

¹⁰⁹ Peralto. “Portrait. Mauna a Wākea,” 238.

¹¹⁰ Peter Vitousek and Oliver Chadwick, “Pacific islands in the Anthropocene,” *Elementa Science of the Anthropocene*, December 04, 2013, <https://online.ucpress.edu/elementa/article/doi/10.12952/journal.elementa.000011/112331/Pacific-islands-in-the-Anthropocene>.

borrowing from the future.”¹¹¹ Kānaka developed fishponds along the coast where the fresh water from the interior of the island and the ocean water met and fish thrived. The fishponds also protected the shoreline from erosion. Kānaka main source of vegetable was taro farming. It didn’t deplete the soil like the sugar cane plantations that the missionaries brought to Hawai’i. The authors say, “We believe that precontact Hawaiian society did not face the challenge of sust‘ainability” that instead Kānaka “innovated new production systems” with ideas like “rainfed agricultural systems, intensive reef-flat aquaculture, upland irrigation systems . . . to bring water and nutrients to infertile upland soils.”¹¹² The authors use words like “creativity” and “innovation” to describe the way Hawaiians approached their farming practices. That was, until “the arrival of Europeans and with them the world’s diseases, devastated the Hawaiian population and society.”¹¹³

Though science as a western ideal is important, Euro-centric culture lost so many ideas and opportunities when it dismissed indigenous ways. Kānaka are working from Maunakea down to decolonize their island. According to Walter Mignolo, “Decoloniality . . . means both . . . unveiling the logic of coloniality and . . . to build a world in which many worlds will coexist.”¹¹⁴ This is what the western world hasn’t done in Hawai’i, or in any indigenous place for that matter.

A February 1998 Audit of the Management of Maunakea and the Maunakea Science Reserve stated that the University of Hawai’i mismanaged the land and was “inadequate to ensure the protection of natural resources.”¹¹⁵ The land in which TMT is proposed already houses 13 telescopes

¹¹¹ Vitousek and Chadwick.

¹¹² Vitousek and Chadwick.”

¹¹³ Vitousek and Chadwick.

¹¹⁴ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 54.

¹¹⁵ State Auditor of Hawai’i, “Audit of the Management of Maunakea and the Maunakea Science Reserve: a report to the Governor and Legislature of the state of Hawai’i, February 1998, <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/maunakea/library/reference.php?view=89> .

in different phases of operation, some decommissioned by never cleaned up. Most are leased to the University of Hawai'i. The report explains, "The university focused primarily on the development of Maunakea and tied the benefits gained to its research program."¹¹⁶ UH didn't seem to care about natural resources, the report calls them "piecemeal" and says, "The university neglected historic preservation, and the cultural value of Maunakea was largely unrecognized."¹¹⁷ The report goes on to state that UH's lack of stewardship almost eliminated the Weiku Bug (an insect only found on Maunakea) and "Trash from construction was cleaned up only after concerns were raised by the public. Old testing equipment constructed in the early years of development has not been removed as required by the lease agreement."¹¹⁸

This state of environmental deprivation doesn't seem to have changed on Maunakea in the over 20 years since the above impact statement was released. The website for the protest organization of Pu'uuhuluhulu is a bit harsher in a press statement released after the Hawai'i Supreme Court ruled in favor of TMT, "The outcome is that 'one of the most sacred resources of the Hawaiian culture loses its protection because it has previously undergone substantial adverse impact from prior development of telescopes,' or in other words, the ruling 'violates norms of environmental law,' said dissenting Justice Michael Wilson."¹¹⁹ The statement goes on to compare this reasoning with other arguments such as, "And there's no point in stopping plastics from entering the ocean. The Pacific Garbage Patch is already double the size of Texas."¹²⁰ The fact

¹¹⁶ State Auditor of Hawai'i, 6.

¹¹⁷ State Auditor of Hawai'i, 6.

¹¹⁸ State Auditor of Hawai'i, 6.

¹¹⁹ "Supreme Court Ruling," Pu'uhonua o Puuhuluhulu, <https://www.puuhuluhulu.com/learn/supreme-court-ruling>, accessed December 1, 2019.

¹²⁰ Supreme Court Ruling.

that University Hawai'i mismanaged Maunakea is apparent from many years of environmental impact statements.

The question of TMT on Maunakea is complex and linked to settler colonialism and the dismissing of indigenous views since the late 1700s. Yet despite all of this, what happened at the protest site on Maunakea is exciting in terms of thinking in a different way about what the vision of Hawai'i's future could be, and how to engage with Kānaka in a meaningful way rather than building what corporations and investors want to build while basically paying off Hawaiian culture by giving money to communities for education or community centers. The TMT webpage has a section titled "Engaging the Community" in which they write about all the ways they contribute to the Island of Hawai'i providing "\$1 million a year for STEM education fund," nicknamed the THINK Fund for "The Hawai'i Island New Knowledge."¹²¹ The name alone colonizes a people and dismisses indigenous knowledge all for progress. The website also states that, "TMT will most likely revolutionize our understanding of the universe."¹²² Protestors have been portrayed as anti-science and anti-progress. Each week the *Honolulu Star Bulletin* released an article that tallied how much the State of Hawai'i government spent because of the TMT protestors permanent camp and protest site.¹²³

¹²¹ "Engaging the Community" section, <https://www.tmt.org/page/our-story-in-hawaii>, accessed November 29, 2019.

¹²² "Our Story in Hawai'i," section <https://www.tmt.org/page/our-story-in-hawaii>, accessed November 29, 2019.

¹²³ Kevin Dayton, "Hawai'i County Spends \$5 Million on TMT Protests, Mostly on Police," (Honolulu Star Advertiser, November 19, 2019), <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2019/11/19/breaking-news/hawaii-county-spends-5-million-on-tmt-protests-mostly-on-police/>.

According to an article on Vice.com “There’s a certain fatigue that the Native Hawaiian community has about outreach. You talk to a few consultants that will be sympathetic, incorporate names and stories, do a blessing and cut some ti leaf when you groundbreaking, and all is good. But I think that era is coming to a close.”¹²⁴ It is common practice in Hawai’i to throw money to some cause as a sort of public relations stunt to convince opponents to certain projects, that the telescope consortium or hotel developers will become dedicated community members that care about Hawai’i. But instead, Kānaka seem to be wising up to this. The era that seems to be dawning because of the protests over Maunakea is one where, “We want significant leadership in designing and crafting our vision for the future of Maunakea and Hawai’i for that matter.”¹²⁵

Kānaka coming together to “craft” their “vision of the future of Hawai’i” is already happening on Maunakea with the Kapu Aloha protests. When you visit the protectors of Maunakea website, Pu’uhonua O Pu’uhuluhulu, the first image you see is the code of conduct which states:

1 Kapu Aloha Always. 2 NO weapons, NO smoking of any kind and NO alcohol.
3 MĀLAMA (take care of) each other. 4 Ask consent for any pictures or video. 5
Pick up ‘ōpala you see. 6 BE PONO (balanced and good).”¹²⁶

This community and idea of Kapu Aloha is defining how Kānaka would like to shape the future for Hawai’i. A popular sight in Hawai’i currently is the Hawaiian flag flown upside down (because it a colonial flag) along with a new Kānaka Maoli flag to “show solidarity for a

¹²⁴ Emerson and Ferreira, “A Battle Over a Telescope on Hawai’i’s Sacred Mountains is Just Beginning.”

¹²⁵ Emerson and Ferreira.”

¹²⁶ Protocol section, Pu’uhonua O Pu’uhuluhulu accessed December 2, 2019, <https://puuhuluhulu.com/learn/protocol> .

mountain Kānaka hold sacred.”¹²⁷ What’s happening at Maunakea is a resurgence of community and understanding of what it means to be Kānaka. Each day at 8 am, noon and 5:30 pm the protestors conduct “Protocol” or Hawaiian rituals that include “Mele, Hula, Ola and Pule.”¹²⁸ At the University of Hawai’i’s Bachman Hall student protestors do the same.

The idea of Kapu Aloha is resulting in more peaceful protests throughout the state. In a recent article titled “How Maunakea Could Lead us to Higher Ground: Kapu Aloha Could Be the Very Fabric of How We Build Community in Hawai’i” in the *Hawai’i Civil Beat* newspaper, community member Joe Miller wrote, “The passion of Greta Thunberg, these young people and the community and guardians of Maunakea indicate a hunger for a new ground, another mode of being in this place we call Hawaii.”¹²⁹ Miller says he would like to see a Hawai’i where the, “conversation . . . includes more than realtors and real estate investors and money changers who get to make decisions about this ‘temple’ we call Hawai’i.”¹³⁰ He compares what was happening on Maunakea spreading to the rest of the state as “passion of the young bubbling up from below the ground on which the university and the governor, and the rest of our state institutions stand resembles the shaking of the earth in Puna when the fresh lava buckled streets on its way to the sea.”¹³¹

¹²⁷ Alexandria Ng, “Here’s Why TMT Protestors Fly a Hawaiian Flag Upside Down,” *Hawai’i News Now*, July 25, 2019, <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2019/07/25/heres-why-tmt-protesters-fly-hawaiian-flag-thats-upside-down/>.

¹²⁸ Protocol section.

¹²⁹ Joe Miller, “How Maunakea Could Lead us to Higher Ground: Kapu Aloha Could Be the Very Fabric of How We Build Community in Hawai’i,” *Civil Beat*, October 14, 2019, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2019/10/how-mauna-kea-could-lead-us-to-higher-ground/>.

¹³⁰ Miller.

¹³¹ Miller.

In other areas of the island Kapu Aloha protests are happening over wind turbines placed too close to schools and homes in Kahuku on O`ahu. This movement argues that though they support wind energy, rural and under-served areas are being forced to bear the brunt of Hawai'i's goal of renewal energy and self-sustainability by 2050. The wind farm protestors credit "the movement on Maunakea" as "motivating citizens beyond the Big Island to assert collective power over land-use decisions."¹³²

It seems everywhere you go in Hawai'i something is being challenged and questioned. In addition to the *Detours* guidebook that "redirects readers from the fantasy of Hawai'i as a tropical paradise and tourist destination toward a multilayered and holistic engagement with Hawai'i's culture and complex history,"¹³³ other innovative tour companies are popping up. One offers solidarity tours where guides work to uncover what is beneath actual spaces in Hawai'i. One takes guests to the showroom of a recently built condominium complex where units sell for \$36 million each and there are never lights on in the building because no one lives there. The guests hear Hawaiian music piped into the showroom and notice the Hawaiian murals on the walls. Then they are taken directly across the street to meet a representative of the houseless that line Ala Moana Boulevard to hear about another story of Hawai'i, for those that don't have housing.

Other ways Kapu Aloha is flying off the mountain and giving voice to Kānaka is protesting the military storage of oil in an area called Red Hill (above Pearl Harbor) that has

¹³²Christina Jedra, "'This is our Maunakea:' O`ahu Wind Farm Opponents Say They're Inspired by Big Island Protests," *Civil Beat*, September 12, 2019, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2019/09/this-is-our-mauna-kea-oahu-wind-farm-opponents-say-theyre-inspired-by-big-island-protests/> .

¹³³ Aikau and Gonzalez, *Detours*, 2.

already leaked into O`ahu's water source. Asking the military to stop bombing parts of Hawai'i for military maneuvers like sacred Makua Valley, and the list goes on.¹³⁴

While Hitchcock and the others were exploring Maunakea and Mauna Loa for scientific purposes in the 1800s, Emalani Kaleleonālani Nae Rooke, a Hawaiian princess traveled up Maunakea for a bathing ceremony in the waters of Lake Waiau. According to Peralto, this was a time of great unrest for Hawai'i and Kaleleonālani. She lost her father, Kamehameha IV, her son, her relative David Kalākaua was elected ruler over her but had left Hawai'i on a world tour, and Hawai'i's power was being taken by Americans of whom she was "a staunch opponent." Peralto writes, "Kalakaua went around the world; Emma countered by going to the piko of the Hawaiian world."¹³⁵ Kaleleonālani traveled up Maunakea getting lost in the mist and snow to essentially rebirth herself in the waters of Lake Waiau.

Peralto argues this is also what the TMT protestors are doing. "The generations before us who engaged tirelessly in this struggle have essentially led us to the edge of Waiau's sacred waters. As we gaze at our own reflection on her placid surface, just as Kaleleonālani did over a century ago, we are confronted with a timeless reminder of where we came from, who we are, and who our grandchildren will grow to be become."¹³⁶

When looking at the rest of Hawai'i from the perspective of Maunakea the earth seems to be shifting. This is what this moment in time and space does, thrusts us into a different perspective, an alternative way to see the world. Kānaka ways do this too. Maybe no one gets to

¹³⁴ Debby Greene, Personal Notes, American Studies Association Annual Conference, Honolulu, Hawai'i, November 2019.

¹³⁵ Peralto, *Mauna a Wākea*, 238.

¹³⁶ Peralto, *Mauna a Wākea*, 239.

decide the identity of a mountain. But we do need more diverse voices in the conversation asking questions like: What kind of world do we want to live in? How can we stop exhaustive resource extraction and inequitable wealth? Who came before us? Do we really need more development? What was underneath that airport runway, that shopping mall, that hotel? How many visitors to the islands are too many visitors? Ten million? Fifteen million? How do we restore bleached out reefs? How do we plan for ocean rise because of global warming? Can we look back at indigenous practices to help us through climate change?

Office of Hawaiian Affairs trustee Carmen Hulu Lindsey said in an editorial about Maunakea, “These demonstrations are showing all of us that another world is possible, another way of being with one another and the earth grounded in kapu aloha.”¹³⁷ Despite these questions Maunakea will withstand all the human comings and goings on its flanks. It is tall and proud and unbothered. Maunakea will be here when humans are all gone. What do you see from the slopes of Maunakea? You see it all: the stars above, the human and more than human world below, and all the options in between.

Neason interviewed a Hawai’i union representative of the hospitality industry, Ikaika Hussey, who asked, “Who is Hawai’i for?”¹³⁸ Hussey explained, “The idea of tourism as a main economic driver for Hawai’i is an incredibly new idea. . . We’ve had an economy here for like two thousand years. Anyone who says that we have *only* this, that there is no alternative, lacks imagination.”¹³⁹ Hussey believes that figuring out who Hawai’i is for means “restoring the

¹³⁷ Carmen Hulu Lindsey, “Civil Disobedience Over TMT Is About Justice Overdue,” *Civil Beat*, December 3, 2019, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2019/12/civil-disobedience-over-tmt-is-about-justice-overdue/> ..

¹³⁸ Neason, “Greetings from Hawai’i.”

¹³⁹ Neason.

economy that has sustained Hawai'i for centuries." What this looks like is "Feeding our people, housing our people, educating, enlightening our local folks."¹⁴⁰ Neason writes that this is "a mindset that's more about sustainability than temporary visitors. . . it's the one that clearly asserts who Hawai'i is for."¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Neason.

¹⁴¹ Neason.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FATHER. MOTHER. DAUGHTER. WATER.

“These things you keep
You better throw them away
You wanna turn your back
On your careless days
Once you were tethered
Now you are free
Once you were tethered
Now you are free
Well that was the river!
This is the sea”
That Was the River, The Waterboys

Water is like time; it folds upon itself. Not linear but layered, stacking moment on top of moment. I can stand in the creek across from my house in Montana and if I tap into the memory of water, I can see myself at eleven years old standing just there — on one shore in Hawai'i looking across the Pacific Ocean to another shore in California. As a child, I had two parents who lived on two shores. My brother, and I flew back and forth to them every six months. My parents divided me and so I was half of a child. Part of me always missing the parent I'd left behind. One half living with the knowledge that I would have to leave the other parent too soon. If I looked hard enough from my Hawai'i shore, could I see my mom trudging on the hard sand of Northern California in her boots and flannel shirt. Was that her walking away, back over the sand dunes to our house? And when I was on my mom's side of the Pacific was that my dad, there, in Hawai'i, surfing, playing with our dog Jojo or checking out the waves from our yard? Could I force these two oceans together? Could I fold time and distance to fill this space inside

me? Could I bring mother and father, Hawaiian island, and California shore together? Could I stop being divided and become whole again?

Though the water divided me and the shores I called home as a child, it is the water that I love. Walking on the grey beaches of California, my eyes held the ocean. In Hawai'i I immersed myself, water and me becoming one.

I don't know why I keep telling this story of my dad and betrayal, of Hawai'i and witches, of rivers and oceans. It is like I can't tell any other story because sitting in Montana, all these years later I am still trying to make sense of the dreams and the delusions. I'm trying to figure out which is real, and which is fantasy. And the constant that runs through it all is the water. I can't turn from the water.

If you asked me, I would tell you I have thousands of stories of water within me. I have stories of love and of violence. Mythical tales that could bring you to your knees. Joyous stories of dolphins and the freedom that comes from swimming long and far. Water can hold you like a newborn baby or spit you out so hard and fast you gasp on the shore clinging to earth. As a lifelong swimmer, water grips me like a fist around my heart. I can't pass it without wanting to be submerged.

I can't hold water in my hands. It flows and changes. The swimmer and scholar, Steve Mentz writes that "the great waters open up a dynamic environment" in which "Our bodies and imaginations register the shift from familiar *terra* to alien *oceanus*."¹ Living in the mountains I've learned that it isn't just the ocean but all water that opens me up to possibility, that allows

¹ Steve Mentz, *Ocean (Object Lessons)*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), xv.

my imagination to shift. In water I lose my gravity and with that the edges of my understanding blurs. Different worlds emerge and I learn new things.

In my Montana neighborhood I am a creek walker. Each afternoon of summer I put my water shoes on, leash my dogs and begin our creek walks. We never walk on the shore. A creek walk is about being in the water. My feet hit the cool and instantly calm washes over me. I head upstream or down. It doesn't matter which direction as long as I am in water and water is in me. If it is warm enough, I swim. I find a deep place in the creek and immerse myself. Head under, floating, seeing the world from a watery perspective. I call my creek spots swimming holes, but they are so small. They hold only me.

In his Object Lessons book *Oceans*, Mentz writes that the impermanence of water shows spaces “where new things become visible.”² This watery perspective gives me a different way of seeing things beyond my feet on dry earth, because it changes the direction I'm gazing — from sea towards shore. Mentz says that this changed perspective allows “stories of swimmers and sailors” to gain importance over those of “warrior and pilgrims.”³ When I first arrived in Hawai'i as an eight-year-old I woke up each morning to the ocean out my bedroom window. When I swam out each day, I not only got to see my house from the perspective of the sea, but I could look inside the water seeing fish and hearing whales call and the churn of waves breaking. The ocean contained mystery and made me into a dreamer. Water put me at eye-level with the earth I've left to plunge myself into this place where I don't feel my weight. Water lifts me. It holds me. I want water to help me see my story differently. I want it to heal me.

² Mentz, xvii.

³ Mentz, iii.

In Montana it is the creek or a river that provides my point of entry to a different perspective. On creek walks I measure the dams the beaver's build. I see the hay fields next to our house from a water level view. In the fields deer graze. Sandhill cranes pick for food. Ducks flee, skittering over the surface, wings flapping. Birds are busy everywhere, chattering all around. I look up and the aspens and cottonwoods reach fingers towards the sky. I place my hands on their trunks wanting them to give me something — wisdom, peace, relief. I touch the stones my feet walk over and observe the ways the sticks lay strewn about from when the creek was high. I love the little eddies and where the creek breaks off in another direction. I wonder why there are pebbles in one channel and mucky mud in another. I can hear our neighborhood. Dogs bark. Voices arrive, grow louder, and leave, but I'm hidden from view amongst brambles and tall trees. There is no trail that accesses this water. The only path is through the water.

Robert MacFarlane writes about the intersection between nature and humans. In *Underland* MacFarlane describes a human connection to the dark places beneath us, the places we can't see. MacFarlane says that in those space we can find trace fossils which are “the sign left in the rock record by the impress of life rather than life itself.”⁴ MacFarlane is talking about a stamp, a symbol, an imprint of what was here before us. But what's interesting to me is the way that MacFarlane takes this idea of something that made a mark and then we are only left with the mark, not the thing. We have the dinosaur footprint but not the dinosaur. Then MacFarlane contends that humans also hold trace fossil. He writes, “We all carry trace fossils within us – the marks that the dead and the missed leave behind” and that these kinds of traces wear a “groove in

⁴ MacFarlane, *Underland*, 79.

both air and mind.”⁵ My fossils sit in a spot just beneath my left breast where pain juts and grief lives. They are folded beneath my skin. “Sometimes,” McFarlane continues, “all that is left behind by loss is trace.”⁶ For me these are memories. The trace fossils war inside me: the myth of my idyllic Hawai’i childhood fist fights with the reality of secrets, violence, and injury. “Sometimes,” he says, “empty volume can be easier to hold in the heart than presence itself.”⁷ Water does this, fills me with empty volume when the memories overwhelm me.

In Montana, I miss the ocean. It is a wound that scabs over again and again, but that never heals. When we first moved to Montana, my five-year-old daughter pictured the ocean was just over the mountains. Being raised surrounded by the sea, she couldn’t imagine that it wasn’t still close by. If my daughter pretended the ocean was still near, was it easier to hold the loss of it? If I pretend that the myth of my childhood was the reality, can I also live easier? But the trace of loss for me has teeth. Imagining smooths the sharp edges down like a piece of beach glass tumbled in the surf. I pretend that my creeks and lakes connect to the ocean and that I will someday grow the capacity to hold all the warring stories inside me.

As a child, I was raised on the myths of the ocean. We were swimmers, water people, surfers, and lovers of the sea. When my dad moved us to Hawai’i in 1974 he introduced us to his dream come true. This place was what he’d been searching for. This little house on the shore of Sunset Beach was his fantasy realized.

We moved to Hawai’i because my dad had an empty place inside him that needed to be filled. He believed Hawai’i would heal this missing space for him, with its crunchy sand beaches,

⁵ MacFarlane, 79.

⁶ MacFarlane, 79.

⁷ MacFarlane, 79.

trades winds that brushed our bodies and blue-green water all around. Lauren Berlant calls the idea that a way of life can heal a human, “cruel optimism.” Berlant’s research on affect theory led her to name cruel optimism as a pursuit “that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying *something* that you cannot generate on your own. . .”⁸ My dad couldn’t generate his own happiness and so he sought it out in a place that advertises joy. The reason this idea is cruel, according to Berlant, is that these fantasies are based on vulnerable circumstances like “enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work. . .”⁹ The cruelty is that when the *something* doesn’t make you happy, then you blame it on yourself. It’s like being in Hawai’i in the sun and surf and having an awful time. When the fantasies don’t add up, Berlant argues the result can be “depression, disassociation, pragmatism, cynicism.”¹⁰ My dad believed Hawai’i was “meant to be,” a term used often in our family. We were deserving and so these good things came to us. Framed this way, Hawai’i is simply there, waiting for him to arrive so it could make him happy. And at first it did. To get there he constructed a story with a villain, a hero and a happy ending. When my dad fled his girlfriend in Northern California for the North Shore of O’ahu, the girlfriend was the witch, my dad the hero and the Hawai’i ocean was the happy ending. But the story didn’t end there.

In a 2019 New Yorker article about Berlant by Hua Hsu, the writer asked, “What stories do we tell ourselves in order to stay afloat?” For my dad the fantasy continued from the move to Hawai’i and then meeting the woman who would become my stepmother. He looked at the trajectory of his life as divine order. That it all eventually imploded doesn’t seem to be something

⁸ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1, 2.

⁹ Berlant, 2.

¹⁰ Berlant, 2.

he can see. Hsu writes, “We dream of swimming toward a beautiful horizon, but in truth, Berlant evocatively observed, we are constantly ‘dogpaddling around a space whose contours remain obscure.’”¹¹ My dad’s move to Hawai’i was the first good-life fantasy and the second was my stepmother. He thought life had thrown him a cruel joke when he had to marry my mother because she was pregnant with me. In Hawai’i he met the woman he believed was his sexy, blonde surfer girl. The woman he was meant to be with all along. When she didn’t meet his expectations, when the passion died down and the cruelty of working every day in paradise to pay the mortgage settled in, my dad still clung to the fantasy.

Though Berlant’s ideas were about “older state-liberal-capitalist fantasies,”¹² I can see how they also apply to lives shaped by dreams because as humans we want to make meaning of all that happens to us. As Berlant argues “Fantasy is the means by which people hoard idealizing theories and tableaux about how they and the world ‘add up to something.’”¹³ This is why we take our lives and turn them into stories. But fantasies are never real. Berlant writes that as real life frays our imagined lives, “the power of the good life’s traditional fantasy bribe”¹⁴ doesn’t stop “the need for a good life.”¹⁵ My dad clung to the fantasy of who he wanted my stepmother and his life to be, long past it was apparent to everyone around us that the imagined woman was never a real person, and the imagined life was a dream.

If I look at the trajectory of my childhood, I blame the Olympics for setting up impossible expectations. In *Haunts of the Black Masseur*, Sprawson explores the “peculiar psychology of the

¹¹ Hua Hsu, “Affect Theory and the New Age of Anxiety,” *The New Yorker*, March 18, 2019.

¹² Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 7.

¹³ Berlant, 2.

¹⁴ Berlant, 7.

¹⁵ Berlant, 7.

swimmer, and his ‘feel for water.’”¹⁶ Sprawson argues that because of the way a swimmer trains where there is no contact between teammates, each in their individual lanes, separated by a lane line and the barrier of water, a swimmer “is in a continuous dream of a world under water”¹⁷ where “he becomes prey to delusions and neuroses beyond the experience of other athletes.”¹⁸ My dad constructed a story of his life with him as both victim and hero.

This myth of redemption through water and place, is the story my dad told when he moved us to Hawai’i. There my dad he slept with a clay mask on the wall of his bedroom. Our house-sat right-on Sunset Beach, and I could see the forever blue of the ocean out my bedroom window. Even with the sea so close, I had nightmares. Charles Manson. The Exorcist. Breast cancer and centipedes threaded their way through my sleep. My dad comforted me by explaining the power of the mask. Two cords hung below the face attached to each ear lobe. The cords were knotted, and the knots kept bad people out. Leg pressed against mine on my twin bed, my dad explained that no one could hurt us because if they tried, they’d get lost in the knots. A warlock made it for him, he explained. It’s magic.

What compelled my dad to visit a warlock and ask him to fashion a clay mask for him filled with spells? What was my dad so afraid of that he needed an enchanted mask to protect him, me, and my little brother sleeping in the bunk above me? Just in case the mask wasn’t enough, my dad also gave me a flashlight to sleep with to illuminate the dark spaces, and bring the light back in. I held on to two things at night to feel safe, one was real and the other imagined.

¹⁶ Sprawson, *The Haunt of the Black Masseur*, 17.

¹⁷ Sprawson, 17.

¹⁸ Sprawson, 17.

If Hawai'i was paradise and my dad was the hero, then the girlfriend he left behind was the witch. He believed she cast a spell on him. He couldn't leave rainy old Northern California where he surfed in that grey ocean because of the witch. There they lived in a little house right next to the Mad River. Did the mad mean crazy or angry? All my dad's Olympic treasures were stored in her attic. He left for a two-week vacation to Hawai'i with a single suitcase and never returned. His Olympic jewelry and treasures left with the witch.

I learn there is danger in telling a different story. Once my dad was my hero. He was my hero long past the time when I should have been grown up enough to realize he was no hero. That's the problem with stories we believe for too long — they can become like fossils in rock. Unyielding. When I challenge my dad's story I am in my fifties and his reaction is three-fold: he stops speaking to me, speaks to me sometimes with the boundary that we're never to talk about our secrets, and sporadically sends me violent and offense texts disowning me. My dad is the fossil in the rock. He is the father in the Cinderella story — he disappears, and all the women are left to do the emotional work. Though he was in my childhood physically, he was not always present. Though I remembered him smoking a lot of pot, I didn't realize that he was stoned most days. Today when I ask him to explain choices he made in my childhood, he says that he's sorry but he doesn't remember because he was too stoned. Poof. Disappeared. Is this true or is it something he hides behind to avoid facing the truth?

When I was 11, my dad met the woman of his dreams. She was not the witch. She was not my mother who got pregnant, and he had to marry. She was who he was meant to be with. When I was 12 she moved in with us, When I was 16, she and my dad got married. Though she called me and my brother her kids, my stepmother would fly into verbally abusive rages. My dad

protected us from her fists but not her words. And after when she peeled out of the driveway, slammed the door, left us alone with her words flying in the air all around, my dad said nothing. He was frozen. I sobbed in my bedroom, hyperventilating, snotty, ugly crying and I was alone. My little brother was alone in his bedroom. My dad would not come and comfort either of us. Later she returned, crying, and begging for our forgiveness. This went on and on and on. Until finally, when we are so old, my brother and I both separately decided we couldn't take it anymore. But we didn't get our dad without our stepmother. We didn't get our dad unless we believed his story. His story was that she is our mother. That she sacrificed for us. Helped raise us. That we are her children, and we are breaking her heart. He doesn't see how in not listening to us, my dad is also breaking our hearts.

What is this thing that was missing in my dad that he needed Hawai'i and the ocean to fill it? Why did he need stories of witches and magic to flee it? Why did he need to be constantly stoned? To grow and sell marijuana. Must he spend his entire life perpetuating a particular dream he imagined for his life? To me, this is cruel optimism. When there is no space for reality, there is no space for redemption or forgiveness.

The ocean is a giver and a taker of things. As a child of the ocean in Hawai'i I learned young, how fast a calm surf with friends could turn to terror. The ocean will take your life. It doesn't care. In the ocean I had friends who drown. I could die too. In the ocean we lose pieces of ourselves, surfboards and stray swim fins, wedding rings, skin from a pounding on the reef, teeth, and courage. But we find things too. Ourselves mixed with beautiful shells we pluck from the sand as we float there in this space between shore and sea. Waves tumble me and I scan the swirling sand for that whole cowry shell unbroken or the pink and yellow hue of the Sunrise

Shell or the part of myself that isn't injured. Within me live the traces of those shells, the traces of a little girl floating in a Hawai'i ocean that remembers the rhythm of my strokes.

Mentz says that "Swimming means feeling the hyperobject ocean against bare skin."¹⁹ After all those years of practice, my dad despised swimming in a pool. Swimming competitively and swimming for the love of being in water are two very different things. He craved ocean against skin. When he introduced us to our new home in Hawai'i, I found that craving of the ocean in myself too. Swimming there allowed me to see the world differently. That great expanse of ocean out our front door every day, those sandy channels where I could follow schools of fish, cracked the world open for me. People would ask me if I felt claustrophobic living on a "rock" and I looked at them not quite understanding. The world was vast to me with the ocean right there. Hau'ofa writes, "the sea is our pathway to each other and to everyone else."²⁰ The sea wasn't a stopping place marking where the land ended, it led us, was always leading us to something better. The sea was the thing. The way. The remedy.

Historian Timothy LeCain writes that our material world engages with human physical bodies in way that shapes us as much as we think we shape it. Our creativity and imagination shifts. In this way, water changes me. When I'm in water something in my brain and my being shifts. Water and I are "entangled," or as LeCain says, "We are always a 'we,' even when we are alone."²¹ My body is "two-thirds saltwater"²² and so when I am in water, water is also in me. My story emerges from my enmeshment with water. Water and father.

¹⁹ Mentz, *Oceans*, 129.

²⁰ Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 119.

²¹ Timothy LeCain, *The Matter of History: How Things Create the Past*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 22.

²² LeCain, 22.

In Olympic competition swimmers shave their bodies to move faster through the water. My dad, an Olympic gold medal swimmer and world record holder did this in the 1960s. He took razor to chest and back – sharp blade moving up his arms and legs. All visible hair disappeared down a shower drain turning him more fish, less human. Swimming is about moving through the water with grace and power, but removing human hair is more is for “psychological effect.”²³ Sprawson argues shaving is more about feeling than time on a clock. It is being “united with the element” — water.”²⁴ It is like being a dancer — skin moving through water becomes poetry. It is about trading one world for another. Former Olympian Murray Rose says you must have that relationship with water to be a fast swimmer. You must “feel for water.”

My dad taught us water was balm. We immersed ourselves to “wash off the day.” It changes perspectives. It heals. It is God. In Bonnie Tsui’s book *Why We Swim* she describes “swimming as liturgy.” I picture chanting in a church we don’t attend. A liturgy is a rite, a ceremony, a road map for worship. By calling swimming a liturgy she is comparing the movement of our bodies through water to something as holy as the liturgical Catholic service where Eucharist of wine and crackers, symbolizing the blood and body of Christ, are offered to the religious. Tsui says that our swimming liturgy allows us to be resilient through a “communal call-and-response.”²⁵ Stories do this, she says. Maybe that’s why I come back to the water again and again.

In the winters where I live now in Montana there is snow on the ground in October, and I trudge through the parking lot to my master’s swim team practice Tuesday nights and Sunday

²³ Sprawson, *Haunts of the Black Masseur*, 14.

²⁴ Sprawson, 14.

²⁵ Bonnie Tsui, *Why We Swim*, (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2021), 43.

mornings. In the water I work and play. I perform my liturgy of stroke, stroke, stroke, breath with instinct instead of thought. Something about the rhythm brings me back to myself, and I leave elated. Growing up with my dad, we surfed on Sundays instead of sitting on a hard church pew listening to someone else tell us about spirituality. The sky was endless above us as we carved up and down the small waves in front of our house. We hooted and hollered for each other when someone got a great wave, was tubed, or took off deep. Turtles emerged grabbing big, audible inhales. Colors were everywhere – above and below and within as we dove deep, and the soft liquid held us close.

In *Underland*, MacFarlane escribes his exploration of the places we don't see, writing about the transitions as the author goes from known world and slips beneath into the catacombs under Paris, a starless river in Italy, a burial site in England known as Aveline's Hole. In each transition out of a world where he can orient himself by the sky to below, MacFarlane wants to make "some sign to the world"²⁶ he is leaving as if he's saying: notice me as I slip below to a place where I can't see the stars and darkness prevails. When he returns to our known world, he points out the small things "snowfall . . . grey light . . . sea in shattered pieces."²⁷ These small things are what I notice as a paddle out to the surf and watch the shore as I bob up and down on the waves. I dive off my board and touch the reef below with my fingertips. The green and blue moss is smooth, the sea-urchin spines poke. As I am below, I look up and there is the other world that I mostly inhabit. I see the skin of the water and then the sky. Sometimes I don't want to

²⁶ MacFarlane, *Underland*, 79.

²⁷ MacFarlane, 79.

leave the watery world, but I must. I am an air breather, and the promise of oxygen urges me toward the surface.

In our house on the shore of Sunset Beach, we liked to tell the good stories. We didn't talk about the pot plants my dad grew or that if we heard police helicopters, we must warn him and help drag the plants inside, so he didn't get busted. We didn't talk about the locals who rented the house next to us and demanded the use of our surfboards or they would beat our dad up. We didn't talk about being "fucking haoles" and how at school I tried to disappear, to not call attention to myself. We don't tell the story of why our dad doesn't work like other dads, because he's defrauded the government of money by claiming disability. We don't talk about the that if anyone calls or comes to the house asking where our dad is, we can never say he is at work. If we mess this up our dad could go to jail.

We don't tell the story of our dad trying to train our dog Jojo to be a guard dog. I could hear him beating Jojo with a rolled-up newspaper, for what? Not barking? Not being vicious enough? I plugged my ears with my fingers to block out Jojo's yelps. He was supposed to be a full-blooded Doberman Pinscher, my dad explained later, but a Dalmatian somehow messed up the breeding. We got him from my dad's drug-dealer friends down the road. But Jojo was not a guard dog. He was sweet and submissive. It was not his nature to protect our pot plants, or us, from the violence that surrounded us.

We never spoke of my stepmother's "freak outs," though our neighbors heard her. She screamed and hurled insults at us and I didn't know what would set her off. I tried to be good. To behave. To anticipate. To not be a spoiled brat or a daddy's girl, but nothing worked. Her words lodged under my ribs and it hurt to breath. Afterward she told us she was sorry and that she was

our mother. Each night she kissed us goodnight and tucked us in, loving us between her rages. She called us her kids. In the world of secrets my “real” mom was a secret too.

But when I swim the ocean rocks me and the rhythm soothes me. Stroke, stroke, stroke, breath. Repeat. In the ocean I pretended I was a different girl who didn’t miss her mother living on another piece of land across the ocean, who wasn’t afraid of the police or her dad getting arrested, or men knocking on the door or a stepmother who called herself my mother.

Here’s another story about the water. Before we knew our stepmother, she lived on a sailboat moored in the Ala Wai boat harbor in Honolulu. One day she was sailing between O`ahu and Kaua`i. Kaua`i was straight in front of our house at Sunset Beach. When I was young, I could sometimes see the outline of the island jutting above the clouds. I can’t see it anymore because of pollution. The channel between O`ahu and Kaua`i is called the Kaieiewaho Channel. It is 72.1 miles long and 1089 feet deep, the deepest of Hawai`i’s channels. How deep is 1089 feet? The Empire State Building is 1250 feet tall. The tallest building in Honolulu is 426 feet tall. Mount Ka`ala that I can see from our house is 4026 feet tall. Somewhere in the middle of that deep channel, on a dark night, my stepmother slipped off the sailboat and into the dark water. She yelled as she watched the light of the boat disappear in a heartbeat. It was so dark. She hoped someone saw her fall — heard her yell. She took off her clothes to make herself weightless. She was alone in that vast dark ocean. It was cold. She lay on her back and floated. She kept yelling. And somehow that boat turned around and found her. It was like looking for one piece of sand on a beach of sand. The story is she survived and lived to tell the story.

In my forties I discovered the writer, Lydia Yuknavitch. I loved reading her work because she is a fellow swimmer and traveler in the waters of family dysfunction. And yet she didn’t

drown. Yuknavitch scraped her way to a swimming career in college and then ruined it all with alcohol and “fuck yous.” But she found her way back to the water on her terms because it is always about the water, “here is water again, saving my life.”²⁸ But if water is father, it is also mother because, as Yuknavitch says, all of our “first waters were mother waters.”²⁹ I swam in the womb of my teenage mother as she wrote dark poetry, hid me growing in her belly to avoid getting expelled from school and waited as her life took a direction she didn’t expect.

Though my father is the Olympic swimmer, it was my mom who taught me to swim. As we traveled with my dad training with his Olympic coaches, my mom spent afternoons with me in a small apartment complex swimming pool in Los Angeles. I picture sitting on the shallow-end steps. Her teaching me to blow bubbles, my small face in the water, bubbles tickling my skin. And then she steps back first one foot, then two feet — further and further from the stairs as I swim to her again and again. This is how swimming becomes my superpower – with gentle mother lessons, forgiving water and tickly bubbles. Swimming is still my superpower even though now I live far from the ocean.

My mom tells stories of me walking to the diving board in the deep end as a three-year-old climbing up and then jumping off and freaking the other adults around the pool out. I shouldn’t remember this, but I do — the feeling of all those eyes on me; my leap through air that didn’t hold me; the smack of the water on my skin; the way I let myself be pulled to the bottom before bending knees, toes pushing up to the surface to climb out and do it again. And again. And again.

²⁸ Lydia Yuknavitch, “I Will Always Inhabit the Water: On Living a Swimmer’s Life,” *Lit Hub*, April 12, 2017, <https://lithub.com/lidia-yuknavitch-i-will-always-inhabit-the-water/> .

²⁹ Yuknavitch.

Somehow, I always knew I was an accident, an unexpected baby to a mother in her senior year of high school and a father in his sophomore year of college on a swimming scholarship at Michigan State. I always knew that my being born almost stopped my dad from realizing his Olympic dreams. My dad told stories of having to “tie steel” in the summers to support a family, instead of swimming. My mom never told the story of returning to work when I was two-weeks old, or what she sacrificed. Why did I never ask her? I who swam in her waters. When I was 54, my husband asked my mom at a family dinner. “Had you been accepted to college when you found out you were pregnant with Debby?” My mom said, “Yes. The University of Florida. My parents had put down the deposit for the dorm. They were so mad at me.”

What kind of feminist am I? Never asking what my mom sacrificed? How my mom’s life changed? Grief flooded my arms, my legs, and I asked my mom if she’d ever considered aborting me. I pictured my young mother with an expectation of what her life would be and then those ideas were shattered — by me. By my arrival. What that felt like — to give up your chance at college, to marry a selfish man who only told stories of what my birth cost him. But I never heard this story of my mom because she didn’t regale me with myths of her life, of her what ifs.

When I first learned the proper strokes of swimming, I was 12. My brother and I were in California with our mom, and she’d signed us up for official swim lessons at the Benbow Lake State Recreation area in the South Fork of the Eel River. A few mornings a week my mom dropped us off and we swam back and forth from shore to shore, across the lake practicing the proper freestyle stroke. The water was freezing but the sun beat warm on my back. When my brother and I returned to Hawai’i it was my dad’s girlfriend, my future stepmother, who signed us

up for swim team. I swam in the waters of mothers — real or imagined — but my father held my heart. It is my father that is like the water, I think he can be trusted but I'm wrong.

For my final research paper in eighth grade, I wrote about the ocean. I argued that we should stop putting all our resources in space exploration and instead focus on the secrets the ocean is hiding. My teacher didn't buy my argument, but I got an A anyway. But this is the idea that many scholars of the blue humanities argue for — that we land-based humans can't know the ocean because we can't access it on the ocean's level. We are not fish or mollusk or octopus. The ocean makes sure we know that there are many things we don't know. Stacy Alaimo says it's an "epistemological humiliation" of the things we have "not figured out."³⁰ The ocean is vast and hidden. There are places within the ocean we cannot go. Animals we can never know about. There are depths that humans cannot mine. Is that why I need to be in water always? Because I try to figure out but never do. Does water give me a different view?

The story of our family was not that different, we just wanted to think it was. Ours is an American story. Man entrapped by woman must strike out to the wilderness to remake himself. Add in Olympic gold medal swimmer and Hawai'i, and the story takes on a more mythic quality. It is the American story. What Nina Baym calls, "Melodramas of beset manhood." Unhappy former golden boy goes west to California to seek "the promise offered by the idea of America."³¹ The promise that should have been a guarantee as an Olympic athlete. California

³⁰ Stacy Alaimo, "The Anthropocene at Sea," in *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, ed. Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2017) 155.

³¹ Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," 134.

didn't deliver. California was too filled with hippies like my dad. He wanted some place where he could be more of an individual — more special. Hawai'i was that place.

None of us ever questioned my dad's choices. In my dad's quest to do what the American story told him was the formula of happiness, he fled the "entraper and domesticator" (my mother and the witch girlfriend) for the landscape of Hawai'i that he portrayed as "compliant and supportive."³² There again lies the power of myth. Because though we loved Hawai'i, though we loved the ocean — it came at a great cost to all of us. Especially me and my brother. Growing up in Hawai'i for white kids came with danger and violence. It came with negotiating our bodies in the ocean, at school and in all public spaces. But, mostly living in Hawai'i came with missing our mom. Because my dad was "stable" (my mom's words) and eventually owned a house, me and my brother lived mostly with him. Not having our mom day in and out left a hole in my heart that I'm still trying to fill. Summers and Christmas were not enough time to be with my mom. We missed growing up with my sisters, the second set of kids she had with her new husband. All so we could live in paradise with our dad.

As an adult I question the story of Hawai'i as paradise my dad told us, and we believed. William Cronon writes about America's fascination with wilderness is a made-up story. That in removing Indigenous people from their lands so Americans could pretend that the land they were visiting or living on was wilderness "in its pristine, original state."³³ This idea that Hawai'i was a natural paradise, waiting for our family to inhabit it, to give us back our joy, to fill up our empty spaces was a "cultural invention" that tried to cancel out the history there before we arrived. But

³² Baym, 143.

³³ William Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 13, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/13/magazine/the-trouble-with-wilderness.html>.

we weren't allowed to forget our whiteness on the North Shore of O'ahu in the 1970's, especially since my dad grew marijuana in our backyard, and sampled, measured it out and sold it from the living room of our house. I had to be aware of the color of my skin everywhere I went.

What we learn from the ocean is also what we learn about life. The land is more concrete and visible, but the ocean is mystery. Today, my dad and I barely speak. There is so much we haven't figured out and now he is nearing the end of his time on this planet. The questions gnaw at me, and I don't want to be stuck in this story anymore. What I trust more than anything is the water. I go back to the water again and again, looking for, as Mentz writes "new things" to become "visible."³⁴ But some days it just feels like being stuck in the rip current in the surf in front of our house. Getting out of the rip defied logic. My dad taught me not to swim towards the shore and to instead swim parallel to the beach until the rip let me go. If the rip current is like a river carrying me out to sea, then my relationship with my dad is like a brick wall I slam myself against over and over. I search for the way to swim out of this stunted relationship with my father. Where is the sideways logic of escaping the rip of mistrust and loss? No matter how much I swim, I can't seem to find it. I no longer trust my dad enough to be honest with him and when I am honest with him, he can't hear me.

I thought the unspoken agreement I had with my dad was that we were a team and that he would always love me. I grasped that for so long until I realized it was a fantasy. We were not united against my stepmother's cruelty. He had gone to the other side and my brother, and I were left with nothing to hold onto. The fantasy I lived out in my head shattered the day my dad sent me a text calling me a "stone cold bitch" and disowning me. He signed the text "Ken" instead of

³⁴ Mentz, *Oceans*, 207.

“dad.” Coming back from that has been an exercise in living in “what is” rather than the dream of what I thought we had together.

This is the thing I do not understand: how a father can abandon a daughter? I go to the water searching for answers. I dive from the world of air to the depth of liquid searching for a new way forward. Mentz writes, that when we swim, we see “above and below the water’s skin.”³⁵ I have skin and the water has skin and in between it all is where I swim. I am the explorer. I look for answers on the edge of the worlds I inhabit — the terrestrial one I’m meant to live in and the aquatic one from where I am born.

In 2020, I haven’t seen my dad in years. Our conversations are sporadic and punctuated by hurt feelings and years of resentment and unprocessed pain. My dad won’t talk about any of it. Our bland phone calls are sometimes interspersed by cruel texts he sends me and my brother about disowning us, about how much our stepmother has done for us and that we should love her, and how we’ve failed him. The texts lead to months of no communication, and then something happens, a beloved uncle dies, a global pandemic descends, and we find our way back to one another again.

Over five years ago when the estrangement officially started, I began masters swimming again. I think it was a way to reach out to my dad even though he didn’t want to speak to me. As I stared at the bottom of the pool, grasping water, and turning my head to breath, I fantasized about breaking records at the master’s national swimming competition and my dad hearing about it through the swimming grapevine. I wanted to make him proud.

³⁵ Mentz, 130.

In the summer of 1974, my dad introduced me and my brother to the Waimea Bay jump rock. We walked down the long beach or swam in the flat, summer ocean, making our way towards the rock on the far side of the bay. We climbed up and sat on the lowest part. Legs tingling. Butterfly stomachs. The rock slanted towards the ocean as if it wanted to tip us off into the water. We sat, stared, and watched. Kid after kid jumped, climbed back up, and jumped again. Finally, I stood. My dad said, “Don’t look down. Don’t think. Just jump.” And I did. Flying through the air, the water seemed so far below and then my feet hit hard. I sank to the bottom and pushed off from the sand to the surface. I laughed. Waved to my dad and yelled, “I did it.” I swam to shore and jumped again and again.

In 1975 when I turned ten, I told my dad I was ready to jump off the highest part of the rock called The Tower. My dad takes me to Waimea Bay, but he doesn’t climb up the rock with me anymore. He sits on the beach and watches. Locals’ hangout around the Tower and I am a haole, neon, white-haired little girl. I know to be polite. I walk up to a group of teenagers. They’re in a circle surrounding the Tower I must climb up on to fling myself off this side of the rock. They do suicides off the Tower, belly flops from so high up, one after the other, so close that they may hit the person in front of them. That’s the chance they take.

“Excuse me,” I say. “Are you going to go?”

“No why you like go?” a boy says in Pidgeon English. They all laugh.

“Yes please.”

They move aside and I climb onto the tower. It feels so high, but I have to go. No time to hesitate or doubt. I push hard with my feet and aim for the sand in between the coral and before I

know it my body arches through the air, my feet slap the water hard as the Earth pulls me back to it and I land in the soft, sweet sand on the bottom of the ocean.

Each time, year after year jumping off the Jump Rock is like coming home to myself. I jump when I am 8 and when I am 50. I know the hand and foot holds by heart. My body naturally leads. I love the feeling of jumping from rock to air to water. The water catches and embraces me like the father who once loved me. The water is uncomplicated, warm, and soft. I want to stay at the bottom in the sea's embrace. I want that rock and that water to rebirth me. I want to feel my dad's love again, but I am trapped in another story with a dad that no longer cares to understand me. I pray and look for a different way to spin this story, but the reality keeps slamming me in the face. I can't unsee it.

The world loves an Olympic swimmer. That's the world my dad grew up in — a world where he thought he got to choose the story he wanted to live — where he thought he chose life, and life didn't choose him. Despite all the evidence to the contrary. Maybe he believed that his story was supposed to be the story of the hero. Maybe he set out to Hawai'i to find the story of himself, he thought America had guaranteed him — especially him — an Olympian. And maybe the five years between the 1968 Olympics and that flight that brought him to Hawai'i, he was trying to escape an emptiness inside him. Maybe he felt some gnawing inside because he couldn't parse the dream, the life he was supposed to be guaranteed with the reality. It was an angst he couldn't escape. At first, he escaped the marriage to my mom with affairs and lost jobs and being so unreliable. And then he escaped the witch and grey, Northern California. But there's only so far you can travel, and all the songs say it. You can't run away. Your problems will always follow. For years my dad blamed my mom for saddling him with a family. For many

more years, my mom hid who my dad really was from me and my brother. For years myth ruled our lives but ask me today, and I will tell you I'm done with myth. I want reality. Ask me today and I will tell you that you can go searching for something to fill that empty space inside of you, but it is never out there, or over there. It is never away. It is never the next wave or lover or uncrowded beach. What ails us all can only be filled by looking within. For me that's what swimming does. If my parents gave me any gift, it was the joy of swimming to know myself.

When my dad turned sixty and I was forty I wrote him a poem for his birthday exploring the story of the impact the "mistake" of me had on his life. It was called "Ode to My Dad on His 60th Birthday." I reimagined the story of me being the thing that prevented his greatness, and speculated that having me was the reason he became the fastest swimmer in the world?

I always thought you achieved such amazing things –
 Olympic medals and world records
 Despite having a family to support, despite having me
 But then I had another thought –
 What if you achieved all of your greatness not despite me but because of me?³⁶

What if I had never come along, would my dad have taken a different road where he dropped out of school and became a surf bum? Maybe. I will never know.

As an adult, in Montana, I swim in the Yellowstone River, lakes, ponds and the indoor community pool. I submerge myself in a world where water holds me. My feet don't touch the ground and I get to lie on my belly like a bird in the sky.

What does it mean to immerse yourself in water? When I was pregnant with twins it was too much for my body. The ocean was my refuge. I tried to swim a mile a day in the shallow safe bay in front of my house in Haleiwa, Hawai'i. When my twins were born by C-Section my

³⁶ Debby Greene, Ode to My Dad on His 60th Birthday, February 11, 2005.

doctor had her interns come close. “Look at these stomach muscles I’m cutting through,” she said. “They’re from swimming.” A few weeks before that C-section birth I floated in the water at the first Hawai’i beach I ever swam at when I was eight years old. Over twenty-five years later I let that water hold me up as I floated on my back in two worlds, ears under the water, hearing sand rustling in the gentle shore break and seeing the sky bright blue above me. The ocean lulled me, and I felt free of my lumbering body that had gotten so big at just 30 weeks of pregnancy that I wasn’t able to walk from one side of a grocery store to the other. In the water, lightness permeated my fingertips, my toes. Placed there on my back in the water was like straddling two worlds. Why go back to land? There in the ocean I could be something else as if my skin, my blood remembered where I came from. Plasma is, of course, much the same as ocean water and we humans came from the sea.

Bonnie Tsui tells the story of Kim Chambers, “the sixth person in history to complete the Oceans Seven, the open-water swimming equivalent of the Seven Summits.”³⁷ These are long and treacherous swims, 30-miles in distance and filled with challenges like great white sharks, cold water and jellyfish stings that sent Chambers into toxic shock. And yet, Chambers calls the water her teacher, “It is my sanctuary. You can have a shitty week, but then you come to the water and feel cleansed. You’re naked – all the artifice is stripped away.”³⁸ Chambers and Tsui understand this feeling of immersion in water -- to swim is to live. “*Buoyancy, floating, weightlessness. Freedom.* These are the worlds we use to talk about swimming. . . this is also the language we use to talk about the lightness of being, the wellness of being.”³⁹ The swimmers

³⁷ Tsui, *Why We Swim*, 65.

³⁸ Tsui, 65.

³⁹ Tsui, 74.

Tsui writes about are drawn to the water because of illness and heartbreak, and the water gives them something back of themselves. Tsui delivers stories of swimmers and divers and surfers and the difference between swimming in a pool versus the ocean.

It is as if swimming is a religion and the people in Tsui's book were once atheists and now, they believe. Tsui tells about a spear fisher from O`ahu Kimi Werner who "swims calmly with a huge shark, holding on to its dorsal fin" while always remembering "her dad telling her if she ever got scared: *Just relax – and remember how to swim.*"⁴⁰ Or Lynn Cox, fabled open water swimming record holder and pioneer says, "that she equates being in the ocean with 'an acute awareness of your life in the moment.'"⁴¹ Swimming can be a kind of celebration, a reminder of the present or it can be both, as it is for Australian surfer Dave Rastovich "'meaningful play'" and also grieving. "'When my dad died, I just kept going in the ocean.'"⁴² I understand this idea of the ocean and swimming to move through everything life throws at you. When Hawai'i surfer and recording artist, Jack Johnson lost his dad to cancer he wrote the song *Only the Ocean* "When's the world's too much/It will be/only the ocean and me."⁴³

Cox calls swimming, "*sea-dreaming*. The rhythm of swimming lulls your body – which, well-trained, seems to keep moving on its own – and your brain is allowed to go wherever it wants."⁴⁴ The stroke, stroke, stroke, breath cadence of swimming moves us into transcendence, and all of life is flow. That's what swimming does on a visceral level. We immerse ourselves; we

⁴⁰ Tsui, 104.

⁴¹ Tsui, 105.

⁴² Tsui, 105.

⁴³ Jack Johnson, "Only the Ocean," record June 1, 2010, track 13 on *To The Sea*, Brushfire Records, compact disc.

⁴⁴ Tsui, *Why We Swim*, 223.

float, we move in another world. Temporarily we are taken away from gravity and land. We move back towards ourselves.

When I am in my early thirties and about to move from Hawai'i to Montana for a very long time, I visit Waimea Bay with my sister. We sit on the beach and suddenly there are dolphins far out in the bay. I throw my goggles on and swim out. The dolphins surround me. Spinning and twirling and zooming past my toes as I look down. I imagine they are here to say goodbye – to send me off with something to hold onto as the days inland unfurl in front of me, and I wonder how I will survive living so far from the sea. A man on a surfboard is out there too. He looks for my board. “How did you get here?” he asks, surprised. I tell him that I swam.

Timothy Morton says there is never an Away, and though he's discussing this in terms of the trash we reproduce and the irreparable disaster our human ways have created climate change, the “No Away” can also be applied to the way we humans (or maybe just Americans) think we can always look for the relief of our pain, grief or emptiness somewhere else outside of ourselves. And that really this is part of the “illusion” Like our waste is never away but always floating in the atmosphere of our planet, our emptiness is also always within us. Unless we deal with what's inside of us, we will never reckon with our grief, never find a surf break uncrowded enough, a paradise ideal enough to cancel out what we carry within us. The answer has always been and will always be within.

My dad taught me when I was stuck in the impact zone and a huge wave broke in front me my only option was to take a big breath, dive deep and wait until I could see the white water move over me and away. Then swim up, take another big breath, and do it again until the six or

more-wave set wore itself out. I sometimes use the same philosophy for life on land – breath, watch and wait and then breath again.

In writing about her mother and Alzheimer’s and stories, Rebecca Solnit notes that stories teach us and “tell us.” But the growth, the trick with stories and life is that we must “question them, to pause and hear silence, to name them, and then to become the storyteller.”⁴⁵ I want to become the storyteller.

In his essay “From ‘The Ocean In Us,’” Epeli Hau’ofa writes that the sea inspires us to “make new songs and verses about how wonderful and terrible the sea is, and how we cannot live without it.”⁴⁶ I once thought I could never survive without living next to the Pacific in Hawai’i and yet for over 25 years, I’ve lived inland in the mountains of Montana. Jagged peaks now hold me in their gaze. I have made “new songs and verses” that helped me learn to find solace in water from the creeks, rivers, and lakes of Southwestern Montana. I tell myself; it is water — all of it.

Bonnie Tsui says that swimming guided her, “out on the other side of a difficult time” because “To swim is to witness metamorphosis, in our environment, in ourselves.”⁴⁷ Maybe all I need to do is keep swimming. Keep going to the water. If I can’t be with my dad in this reality, maybe I am always with him in the water. Water connects us. If I’m swimming in the Yellowstone River and he’s swimming at Waimea Bay, maybe we are together in the water. If we can’t speak of our hurts and our pains, maybe we can float through them. Maybe we can find a different way through, in the water. Maybe, someday, we will tell a new story

⁴⁵ Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 4.

⁴⁶ Epeli Hau’ofa, “The Ocean In Us,” 177.

⁴⁷ Tsui, *Why We Swim*, 209.

CHAPTER EIGHT

VOICES OF OCEANIA

“If just for a day our King and Queen
 Would visit all these islands and saw everything
 How would they feel about the changes of our land?
 Cry for the gods, cry for the people
 Cry for the land that was taken away
 And then yet you’ll find Hawai’i .”

– *Hawai’i* 78 Israel Kamakawiwo’ole, song and lyrics by Mickey Ioane

When I think about the most urgent questions of American Studies today, I look to Hawaii and the Pacific Rim. Though I am remiss to call the vast region of the Pacific a “rim” because it is home to many nations and people. Pacific rim connotes smallness, which the Pacific and their people are most definitely not. In the book *Transpacific Studies*, the authors remind us that it “wasn’t until the 1990s that American studies in the US began to pay attention to the issue of US domination in the Pacific as an imperial exercise.¹ Before this time the imagining of the Pacific was focused on the voices of European, American, and Asian powers as “a space of exploration, exploitation, and expansion.”²

American Studies coming to Hawai’i and moving the publication of the *American Quarterly* to the University of Hawai’i is important because it decenters the continental United States in looking at American ideas. In Hawai’i the continental US is most often referred to as the “mainland” an idea that Kānaka scholars are working to change because the wording centers the

¹ Janet Alison Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2014), Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/book/67050, 3.

² Hoskins and Nguyen, 3.

continental US as the most important place of knowledge and ideas. This centering of the “mainland” as the most important producer of information is the way that the entire transpacific has been portrayed.

Today there is another vision of the Pacific that sees it as a “contact zone; its history defined not only by conquest, colonialism, and conflict, but also alternate narratives of translocalism, oppositional localism and oppositional regionalism.”³ The editors explain that it is the combination of these two interpretations of the Pacific, that transpacific studies can open up different possibilities and “alternate narratives” that come from “collaborations, alliances and friendships between subjugated, minoritized, and marginalized people who might fashion a counterhegemony to the hegemony of the United States, China, Japan, and other regional powers.”⁴

This transpacific scholarship is in line with Indigenous scholars like Epeli Hau’ofa who remind us that to Pacific people “the sea was more of a highway between places than a barrier.”⁵ The idea that islands were “remote, isolated, and dependent” was a Eurocentric view of the Pacific. Hau’ofa argues that we should call this region “Oceania” instead of the Pacific Islands or Pacific rim because it sounds grand rather than the smallness that comes from small islands in a vast sea.⁶ Hau’ofa writes, “‘Oceania’ denotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants . . . Theirs was a large world in which peoples and cultures moved and mingled, unhindered by boundaries of the kind erected much later by imperial powers.”⁷

³ Hoskins and Nguyen, 3.

⁴ Hoskins and Nguyen, 3.

⁵ Hau’ofa, *We Are The Ocean*, xv.

⁶ Hau’ofa, 32.

⁷ Hau’ofa, 33.

This positionality aligns with the way Hoskin and Nguyen describe transpacific studies as “focusing less on the limits of a particular place or a people and stressing the movements of people, culture, capital, or ideas within regions and between nations.”⁸ Hau’ofa describes the way ancient residents of Oceania sailed from one island to another “to trade and to marry, thereby expanding social networks for greater flow of wealth.”⁹ Hau’ofa also argues that borders and boundaries invented and policed by imperial countries “led to the contraction of Oceania.” He writes that “People were confined to their tiny spaces, isolated from each other.”¹⁰ This isolation is what leads to a people’s denigrated view of themselves which allows imperial powers the license to do nuclear testing in this area or to not notice when the sea rises because of climate change and swallows these islands.

Hoskins and Nguyen argue that transpacific studies should not be “contained and fixed in place,” that instead they hope it “can achieve some of the same fluidity as the ocean after which it is named.”¹¹ This is an important point as there is much change that has and will come to the Pacific in the form of climate pressures, pollution, sea rise, the deadening of coral reefs and the extinction of sea life essential to human survival.

The authors hope transpacific studies serves “as an analytic that can be used to historicize, contextualize, and illuminate the transpacific circulations of peoples, cultures, commodities, and ideas.”¹² Hau’ofa also agrees that the stories of the people of Oceania need to be analyzed from an Indigenous perspective because without that perspective, he writes

⁸ Hoskins and Nguyen, *Transpacific Studies*, 27.

⁹ Hau’ofa, *We Are The Ocean*, 33.

¹⁰ Hau’ofa, 34.

¹¹ Hoskins and Nguyen, *Transpacific Studies*, 28.

¹² Hoskins and Nguyen, 24.

“Oceania has no history before imperialism.”¹³ The endgame, Hau’ofa explains is to “reconstruct our remote and recent pasts in our own images.”¹⁴ The way that the Pacific has been viewed and historicized in the past has prioritized the colonizers and relegated Oceanic people “to the roles of spectators, and objects for transformation into good Christians, democrats, bureaucrats, commercial producers, cheap labourers, and the like.”¹⁵ The role of transpacific studies is to see differently, bringing the gaze to the disregarded of this region instead of the powerful along with changing the perception of this region as marginalized in and of itself.

Changing the gaze has resulted in Indigenous scholars of the Pacific working to present alternative ways of thinking, of being, and of operating. These perspectives will continue to be more and more important as our planet gets warmer. Questions that need to be examined are: How we can change the trajectory of climate change by getting away from a settler colonial idea of time and resource extraction? How do we create a more equitable world where the poor aren’t dying because of the choices of the rich? What does it mean to stop the religion of capitalism, an idea that Scott Kurashige addressed in his 2019 ASA speech. American Studies, in its interdisciplinary and emphasis on action and activism is moving toward what Walter Mignolo calls a “pacha existence” or Arvin refers to regenerative refusal.

American Studies has much important work to do in these unprecedented times. Because American Studies takes action to solve problems, more must be written about the ways that capitalism, resource extraction and a winner takes all project, as defined by Patrick Wolfe, are not working anymore. The work of Indigenous scholars is about the fact that Indigenous people

¹³ Hau’ofa, *We Are The Ocean*, 62.

¹⁴ Hau’ofa, 63.

¹⁵ Hau’ofa, 63.

are still here, they are still fighting and questioning the hegemonic prescription for how to live a good and happy life. Educating is important. Questioning is important. We are all in this together. Working to point out the absences in our American story is important in understanding how to move forward in a more responsible way.

As I think about ending this project, I realize there are no endings. We are all swimming in the grey of uncertainty. There is no black or white answer to the questions being asked and the problems being examined. All I can do is swim in the waters of discovering something different – for my relationship with my dad and the ways I can be an ally to Kānaka. I can open my ears and close my mouth and learn something different. Nick Estes writes that “colonialism is not only a contest over territory, but over the meaning of life itself.”¹⁶ Pulling the veil off the hidden could be a first step. The horrors that marginalized people have suffered are awful but what is equally awful is the way white settlers still pretend that it *was all/is all* being done under the guise of America and freedom. Estes writes, “When confronted with science and hard facts that deny its mythology, the United States chooses hallucination.”¹⁷ We all should be on our knees overcome with grief at the legacy our whiteness has perpetuated. We all should be asking what we can do to stop the insanity so we can all live in a better world.

There is a Hawaiian word I learned growing up: kuleana. It is defined as a “responsibility to people and place” I was taught by my dad that it meant my own personal responsibility to the world around me. For me to be a haole is to attempt to move through the world realizing my own kuleana -- to be quiet until I know what to say -- to observe – to listen – to learn -- to not rush in

¹⁶ Nick Estes, “The Empire of All Maladies,” *The Baffler*, no. 52, 2020, 92.

¹⁷ Estes, 92.

– to hear other sides of the story. Hau’ofa writes, “those who make the ocean their home, and love it, can really claim it as their own. Conquerors come, conquerors go, the ocean remains, mother only to her children. This mother has a big heart though; she adopts anyone who loves her.”¹⁸ My wish is to be adopted by the ocean and my hope is that my kinship to Hawai’i is constructive instead of destructive. All I can do is continue to work toward that. Mahalo.

¹⁸ Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” 34, 35.

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