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**Home/land Security:**

**Asian Settlers, Native Hawaiians, and Claims to Belonging in “Hawaiian” Fiction**



Alice Shinn

Submitted to the Department of English of Pomona College in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Senior Exercise

Spring 2022

Faculty Readers:

Kevin Dettmar | Char Miller

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For Aidan: you rock.

For Emily Chao: I hope this is articulate enough for you.

## Preface and Positionality

*Statement by my friend Kaira Ka'aihue:<sup>1</sup>*

The annexation of the Hawaiian Kingdom came as a result of the United States' constant thirst for power. As Hawai'i welcomed American businessmen, wives, and children, these very people they welcomed decided to try and claim Hawai'i for themselves, all the while stripping away Hawai'i's land, culture, language, religion, and monarchy. The overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani catalyzed a never-ending war between the Native Hawaiians and the U.S. government. We haven't stopped our fight.

Many people know that Hawai'i is a part of the United States. But what they don't know is how white men imprisoned our Queen (Lydia Lili'u Loloku Walania Wewehi Kamaka'eha Lili'uokalani—her full name) within her own castle to force her to surrender her throne, her land, her people. When she gave up her throne, it was to protect her people. Yet the opposite happened...these men forbade all Hawaiians from speaking *'Ōlelo Hawai'i* within schools, churches, homes, and even when just walking down the street. Hawaiians were forced to learn English. The Americans would beat kids if they were overheard speaking *'Ōlelo Hawai'i*. They murdered Hawaiians in cold blood for showing support to Queen Lili'uokalani after her throne was stolen.

In her autobiography *Hawaii's Story By Hawaii's Queen*, Lili'uokalani wrote about her travels throughout the islands to visit her people. She recalled staying in a plantation home cared for by my mother's side of the family. My great-great-grandmother Emmalia Keawe lived on Kaua'i in Waimea. Her father, Lawai Keawe, owned all of the land in Waimea, from the mountain to the sea. They were farmers and caretakers of many, many acres and would fish, hunt, and farm for all of those who lived in Waimea to share communally.

When the U.S. took over, they stole my family's land. They ripped out all documentation of Hawaiian peoples' land and water rights from the Hawai'i State Archives. They went to each family to have them give up their rights, and when my family tried to fight back, there was no longer documentation of who owned the land. To this day, the pages are still missing, and their torn remnants remain buried in the Archives. It's an illegal act and yet...no one can do anything. My mother's family continues to try to gain back their land today. On my father's side we are the Ka'aihues. "Ka"=the, "'aihue"=protector. We were the protectors of the ali'i (chief) bones. When an ali'i or a member of the royal family would pass away, the Ka'aihues would prepare a proper burial and protect their bones from sunrise to sunset. What they did to my mom's family, they did to my dad's in Hana, on the island of Maui. It breaks my heart. Writing this makes me cry. What

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<sup>1</sup> Kaira is the reason that I am focusing on Native Hawaiian/Asian settler relations in Hawai'i and has been one of my best friends since we were four. I recently learned that her family was one of the first kānaka families whose land was stolen by the United States government. I want to offer her an opportunity to share her story in her own words.

the U.S government did was WRONG, and NEEDS to be set straight. It truly brings pain to all Hawaiians. We fight constantly and our voices aren't heard.

Listen to Hawaiians sing "*Mai Wakinekona a Iolani Hale.*" Lili'uokalani anonymously wrote the song's lyrics and published them in a weekly Hawaiian language newspaper, surreptitiously announcing how she came to be imprisoned and how much she loves her people. It still brings tears to everyone. After the Queen wrote her *mele*, someone published a response coded in song lyrics: "We have heard you, oh heavenly one, our ruler, and we support you." Lili'uokalani responded: "My love for you will never be broken."

We protest peacefully, and we beg for what we deserve. It's not in our nature to fight or show violence. It's not what our Queen wanted from her people. We live our lives loving because of her. And she went down with a long fight.

*Na kaula e pale.* We shall defend. We will continue to defend.

- Kaira Ka'ahue

*Personal positionality:*

Given the historical and cultural content of this thesis, I feel the need to explicitly acknowledge my own identity and positionality. I write as a privileged part-time resident on O'ahu and as a Japanese-American settler of Hawai'i. I do not identify as Native Hawaiian, nor do I claim to speak for *Kānaka Maoli* or Ka Lāhui, the Native Hawaiian sovereignty movement. I was raised by adoptive parents in a second home in Hawai'i, one that they purchased to act as a bridge between Tokyo and New York City, the two places that my parents primarily grew up. Embarrassingly enough, until this past summer I had never interrogated my own role as a non-Native resident of O'ahu and as a naïve perpetuator of settler colonialism. I had never thought about the brutal history of the settlement of Hawai'i or my role as passive consumer of the islands.

Hawai'i is still home for me; it's where my dad always tells me I first opened my eyes to see the world in color. Honolulu remains the one place in my life that contains a majority of people who look like me (although this, too, is evidence of settler colonialism), a place where I

don't constantly have to tear apart and reconstruct my Asian-Americanness for those around me. I spent my summers and winters there blissfully ignorant: I went to preschool at the Unity Preschool on Monsarrat Avenue, where I learned the alphabet ("A is for Aloha") and was bused to swimming lessons where I hopped from foot to foot because the pavement was too hot and I refused to wear shoes. I graduated from preschool to summer school at Punahou, where I learned hula and tennis and Japanese and how to make soy-braised kalbi short ribs with gochujang sauce.

My knowledge of Native Hawaiian culture unfolded slowly. I am grateful to have been doubly rendered *hānai*, adopted with open arms, by Kaira and her family. I went to large family barbecues on the beach with her grandmother, who was my babysitter, eating poi and kalua pig and chicken long rice. I witnessed the raucous, joyous closeness of her family firsthand as they talked in pidgin for hours. I cannot claim to be a part of her family and often felt an uncomfortable distance when navigating Kaira's family events, but I have only ever been treated as a welcome new addition to her home in the fifteen or so years that I have been lucky enough to know the Ka'aihues and the Meyers.

*Notes on the first half of my thesis:*

For the first Environmental Analysis-focused part of my thesis, I examined tropes in postcolonial ecocriticism and how they bleed into literature written by Asian settlers of Hawai'i. While postcolonial ecocriticism seeks to understand how colonialism and its legacies interact with humans' natural and built environments, I am interested in how postcolonial ecocriticism navigates and conceptualizes newer states such as Hawai'i (if you could call it a postcolonial state). To reiterate the most salient points of the first half of my thesis—and to contextualize what will follow: in the fall, I investigated how the United States' violent legacies of

colonization linger throughout the Islands today. For Native Hawaiians, or *Kānaka Maoli*, material loss is pretty straightforward: land, water, energy are all commodified and sold back to them at unaffordable prices. Thus, I am now more interested in looking at the immaterial: the cultural production and mainland imaginary of Hawai'i, how these processes reproduce and reify the islands' colonial history, and how fiction by and for Hawai'i can function as a worldmaking vehicle that allows for de- and postcolonial futures.

While Captain Cook (the first “discoverer” of the Islands), the whaling industry sailors, the missionaries, and the agribusiness owners that rapidly followed in succession post-contact were mostly white men, to reduce the pre-, post-, and neocolonial history of Hawai'i to a simple white/not-white binary is reductive and displaces guilt from Asian settlers onto white settlers. Indeed, complicating the kānaka-white (or “*haole*,” in '*Ōlelo Hawai'i*') binary is the presence of Asian people, from plantation laborers to tourists, who have settled in Hawai'i. Settler colonists have historically been white men, so implicating and monolithicizing “Asians” as a whole feels awkward. However, looking at who has accumulated social, financial, and cultural capital in Hawai'i, East Asians—particularly the Japanese and the Chinese—also have profited directly at the expense of Native Hawaiian dispossession. Clearly, settlers aren't always white men wielding guns and germs and steel: I, too, am a settler. Learning to *unsettle*, sit with, and rebuild my conscience plays into one of my goals as a student and thesis-writer to “stay with the trouble,” as Donna Haraway titles her 2016 book. Perhaps selfishly, by turning to fiction by and for people of color in Hawai'i, I hope to make sense of my own place within the Islands as a Japanese American settler.

Thus in my entire thesis I critically examine works from and about Hawai'i to understand how, within the confines of an isolated archipelago, nonwhite and non-Indigenous people have



become the dominant and dominating racial, ethnic, and cultural (REC) group. Fiction written by Asian residents in Hawai'i, such as *Language of the Geckos and Other Stories* by Gary Pak, or *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* by Lois-Ann Yamanaka—and the presses that brand themselves as champions of the “local” author—have the potential to either combat the commonly held view that Hawai'i is a post-racial paradise, or to further entrench this neoliberal multiculturalism through the erasure of or cooptation of Native Hawaiian characters, values, and voices.

## Prologue: An Incomplete History of Hawai'i

*Waves of settlement of Hawai'i, from Captain Cook to Asian laborers to tourists*

*First contact and “first contact”:*

Polynesians first discovered and colonized the Hawaiian Islands between 1000 to 1200 C.E., sailing in double-hulled voyaging canoes and navigating by the stars until they landed on new shores. Until contact with white settlers, Hawaiians had no concept of privately-owned land or water; rather, land was divided up into *ahupua'a*, units of land based on watershed boundaries, where people worked and lived. The population of Native Hawaiians pre-contact is estimated to be around 800,000 people (Trask, “Hawaiian Sovereignty” 162).

Hawai'i's first contact with white settlers ushered in enormous cultural upheaval: after British explorer Captain James Cook first landed in Hawai'i in 1778, Hawai'i became another station for the sandalwood, fur, and whaling trades in the northern Pacific (Papacostas n.p). White missionaries soon began to journey to the Sandwich Islands (as Hawai'i was then called) to spread Christianity starting in 1819. They went on to found Protestant mission schools, introduce English to Hawaiians, and develop a written Hawaiian language, '*Ōlelo Hawai'i*, starting in 1820. By 1826 Native Hawaiians had a working alphabet of twelve letters, *kahakō* (macrons), and '*okina* (glottal stops). Missionaries and sailors didn't merely bring language, goods, and “progress”— they also brought diseases that decimated the *Kānaka* population. In 1831, the first official all-island census counted only 130,000 Native Hawaiians (a half-century decline of almost 85%); in 1850 there were less than 85,000 Natives; by 1890 the number of *kānaka* had dwindled to 40,000 (Fujikane 5).

*Asian labor, plantations and agribusiness:*

Settlers introduced a capitalist economy, privatizing and commodifying natural resources at the direct expense of Native Hawaiian land and water rights. The Hawaiian Islands, full of lush vegetation, rushing waterfalls, chirping tropical birds, and balmy temperatures, practically ensured that crops would thrive (which would, in turn, guarantee profit from these “untouched” lands). The Kōloa Plantation, established in 1835, became the first large-scale sugar plantation on the islands (Davis 17). The success, in capitalist terms, of the Hawaiian Kingdom closely aligned with the success of the sugar industry; thus, more and more water was privatized and diverted by the government for sugar as the number of plantations throughout the islands increased to a peak of eighty (Wilcox).

Finding the *Kānaka Maoli* “insubordinate and ungrateful”—and also rapidly diminishing in number, thus unable to meet demand for labor—plantation owners began to contract laborers from China, Japan, Korea, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in 1852. By 1890, Hawaiians made up less than half the population (45%) while *haoles* and Asians made up 55%; by 1910, around 43,000 Asian immigrants worked on white plantations (Trask, “Decolonizing” 9). Plantation managers segregated workers into ethnic enclaves, staggering wages and relying on nationalist tactics to divide laborers and to incentivize work; Filipinos received the lowest pay while Eastern Asians earned (incrementally) higher wages (Cachola 287). Despite these tactics, workers first protested along lines of “blood unionism,” or shared ethnicity, striking, leading work stoppages, and sabotaging facilities (Najita 112). Later realizing that protests were more effective when organizing on a larger, interethnic scale, laborers developed a new sense of class awareness, communicating in burgeoning Pidgin English and sharing food (Takaki 289). Yet this interethnic organizing markedly did not include Native Hawaiians.

*Politics and the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy:*

During the period of privatization of natural resources and the sociopolitical and economic growth of American plantations, the United States government began to strip the Hawaiian monarchy of much of its power. In 1887, King David Kalakaua was forced to sign “The Bayonet Constitution” at gunpoint by an anti-monarchist, pro-capitalist American militia, transferring power from the kingdom’s government to American government officials. Later, in 1893, the U.S. military overthrew the (much reduced, but still standing) Hawaiian kingdom under the rule of Queen Lili’uokalani by placing her under house arrest until she ceded her rule to Sanford Dole of the Dole Plantation. The U.S. finally annexed the Hawaiian Islands in 1898 (Trask, “Hawaiian Sovereignty” 73). Finally, Hawai’i became American property in 1900 with the U.S. Organic Act under President McKinley, which granted U.S. citizenship to all citizens of the Republic of Hawai’i. Asian immigrants were not granted citizenship given legislation such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Gentleman’s Agreement of 1907, and the Immigration Act of 1917. Hawai’i became a state in 1959. It goes without saying that, once again, Native Hawaiians did not have any voice regarding the terms and conditions of their own subjugation.

*Selling bodies, selling products, selling paradise*

The intentional cultural production of Hawai’i in the U.S. *haole* imaginary has forced Native Hawaiians to participate in their own dispossession to serve the tourist industry. The grotesque exploitation of *Kānaka* bodies—I use “bodies” explicitly to emphasize the fetishization and objectification of Native Hawaiian women—erases the history of colonization while contributing to the reestablishment of Hawai’i as a sensual playground of fantasies for the

wealthy visitor. The whaling industry's exploitation of *Kānaka* women beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century repeats itself in a contemporary, more insidious iteration.

And the numbers of wealthy visitors are perhaps equally as grotesque and unimaginable: in 2019, the 10,424,995 visitors spent \$17.75 billion, generated \$2.07 billion in state tax revenue, and supported 216,000 jobs (“Hawai'i Visitor Statistics”). At the time of statehood in 1959, Hawai'i's residents outnumbered tourists by more than two to one. By contrast, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, tourists outnumbered Hawaiian residents by six to one and Native Hawaiians by thirty to one—the ratios continue to skew as the number of tourists increases each year (Trask, “Hawaiian Sovereignty” 138).

Hanauni-Kay Trask aptly labels the tourist industry's exploitation of Hawaiian values as “cultural prostitution” in her collection of essays *From a Native Daughter* (17). Malia Akutagawa echoes Trask, writing that “Cultural prostitution...means being on display and looked upon with fascination” (153). From the beginning of Hawaiian tourism-in-earnest in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, aspects of *Kānaka* culture—from language to traditions such as *lū'au*s and *hula*—are (com)modified, cheapened, and glamorized, cleansed of any traditional significance. The traditional value of “*aloha*” as reciprocal love, gratitude, and generosity has been co-opted to sell everything from plane tickets to shirts to cars. Put pithily, “Aloha has been seriously fucked with” (Revilla and Osorio 126). Similarly, the *hula*, an ancient form of *Kānaka* dance with complex religious meanings, has been rendered mere exotica and erotica. Despite a resurgence in Hawaiian culture, Hawaiian women are “marketed on posters from Paris to Tokyo promising an unfettered ‘primitive’ sexuality” (Trask, *From a Native Daughter* 17). Sure, *hula* has not been eliminated—but it *has* been distorted for gawking tourists and continues to reductively define Hawai'i to its visitors. The combination of (neo)colonialism, global corporate tourism,

militarization, and heteropatriarchy has led to the creation of “an occupied country whose hostage people are forced to witness (and, for many, to participate in) our own collective humiliation as tourist artifacts” (Trask, *From a Native Daughter* 17). The 216,000 jobs supposedly “supported” by the tourist industry likely came at the expense of the perversion of Hawaiian culture and the exploitation of Native Hawaiian laborers.

The waves of settlement in Hawai'i, from Polynesian voyagers to twenty-first century tourists, have all (intentionally or not) contributed to the creation of Hawai'i in the global cultural imaginary to sell bodies, products, the idea of paradise-on-Earth. Given the brutal history of the Islands, it is easy to think of Hawai'i as completely fabricated by the rest of the world, garnished for foreign consumption: Hawai'i as the innocent prey, the world as the leering predator. While this is true to an extent, a fair amount of writing from the Islands plays into and off of these stereotypes in order to appeal to the mainstream and achieve financial and social capital in the mainland United States. On a more hopeful note, and in a converse sense, a fair amount of writing from the Islands offers up de- and anticolonial solutions that seek to undo centuries-old constructions of Hawai'i. It is these works that I seek out in my thesis.

Donna Haraway, in a lecture entitled “Making Oddkin: Story Telling for Earthly Survival,” states that “It matters what stories tell stories. It matters what thoughts think thoughts...the job...is to somehow inhabit the troubled contact zones...and undo and redo each other.” Fictional stories, especially those with the perhaps-hyperbolized stakes of “earthly survival,” implicitly require “undo[ing] and redo[ing]” our world by virtue of their being fiction. Fiction challenges us to contemplate the alteration of our current existences, to (purpose)fully if not permanently inhabit an imaginary space, and to reject our own immediate experiences of the world that are so often rooted in a sensationalist media cycle and selectively canonized historical

texts. History is supposedly objective, but in the case of Hawai'i (as is the case with many colonized places), Carmen Nolte-Odhiambo writes that Hawai'i's millennia-long history has been condensed intentionally in a way that “foregrounds the ways in which foreigners have shaped the islands while minimizing Native presence and connection to land” (380). To Nolte-Odhiambo, the history of Hawai'i can neither be told from a distance nor rely on (white, male) constructions of Hawai'i's history: *Kānaka* must be given the opportunities to tell their own stories in creative, subjective, imaginative ways.

Fiction, in essence, encourages readers to do what Poyner labels “making scalar connections,” playing with storylines across time and space to think across different spatio-temporal scales (55). T.J Demos, in his essay “Beyond Despair: Potential Worlds and Eco-Fictions,” writes that “Eco-fiction constitutes nothing less than a radical futurity” (78). Radical in the etymological sense of Latin's *radix*, reaching both *to* the root to connect the Earth's exploitation to our current societal ills, and also *from* the past to the present in order to draw connections between past violence and present conditions. Māhealani Dudoit, *Kānaka Maoli* poet and essayist, corroborates Demos' claim in an interview with her peer ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui, tying the issue to the Native Hawaiian sovereignty movement and writing that this “movement was and is part of a nationalist movement; i.e., the dynamics of nation-building in literary form” (119). For a culture that was so forcibly stunted, literature becomes a way in which *Kānaka* can rebuild and enrich their pasts, resituate their presents, and construct their futures. Imagining the unimaginable suddenly becomes less scary and less radical when tied to fiction; places and settings become not fanciful other worlds but rather potential sites of material transformation.

## Introduction

From the first utterance of Hawai‘i's origin tale *He Kumulipo* to 2022, the significance of *aloha ‘āina*, or love of Hawaiian land, has become diluted by settler colonial constructs. Legacies of ecological imperialism, which span the forcible removal and withholding of *Kānaka Maoli* from their ancestral lands and the (mis)management of natural resources in the name of capitalism, have all had disastrous effects on *kānakaē*. This “ecological and cultural crisis,” as Graham Huggan terms it, emerges from both “the use of resource-destructive technological processes” and “an erosion of the social structures that make cultural diversity and plurality possible,” respectively (2008: 54). Of course, in the context of Hawaiian history, the “resource-destructive technological processes” applies to the large-scale system of plantation agriculture that turned swathes of diverse land into fields of monoculture; the “erosion of...social structures” refers to the settler colonial processes that bulldozed Native Hawaiian culture and replaced it with one that exalts privatization and capital accumulation. Although Huggan makes it sound as though this “ecological and cultural crisis” is mutually exclusive with “diversity and plurality,” Hawai‘i continues to be a place marke(te)d by these values due to its high percentage of Native Hawaiian, Asian, white, and mixed-race inhabitants. However, rather than promoting *Kānaka* ideologies regarding the interrelation of all things, recent depictions of the islands instead reflect settler colonialism’s associated values. Nature is aestheticized, romanticized, and metaphorized, used to place Indigeneity firmly in the past and thus close off any opportunity for *Kānaka Maoli* revitalization or sovereignty movements. Hawai‘i becomes defined by its diluted paradisiacal qualities shown on film, on Instagram, or in guidebooks, and Native Hawaiians become an ancient relic.



Kana'iaupuni and Malone, building upon Relph's (1976) theories about geographies and place-based identity formation, argue that "place has been a critical foundation of human cognition and identity throughout history" and that "for people of any racial or ethnic group, the characteristics of place...can have profound symbolic and practical effects on identity and identification" (282). That is, geographies and spaces critically shape their (fictional or nonfictional) residents. Moreover, spatial orientation affects racial orientation. Throughout the fictional works I examine, characters struggle with belonging in and to the Hawaiian Islands (and, on a wider scale, to America), a place so critically constructed and advertised to cater to overseas wealth and tourism. Whether the protagonist is a third-generation Japanese immigrant or someone who can trace their history back through a long lineage of Hawaiian royalty, these characters parallel the "real life" questions wrought by notions of un/belonging: who really is at "home" on stolen land? How do we define "local?" And what if you're half colonizer, half colonized?

Varying in understanding and acknowledgment of *Kānaka* epistemologies and ontologies, and therefore varying in effectiveness in terms of translating these -ologies into plot, all of the novels and short stories I examine tackle problems of whitewashing, the gatekeeping of racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, and ultimately, what it means to be a settler versus a local. Moreover, these works of literature all attempt to solve these questions by turning to the relationship between humans and *'āina*, seeking nature as a gateway for personal growth and discovery. In an optimistic reading, their authors draw from *He Kumulipo* to emphasize the interconnectedness of everything on Earth—after all, if everything stems from Earth, then it makes sense that one would return to the Earth to do some soul searching. However, in a pessimistic reading, these authors appropriate *Kānaka* culture to provide an easy way of

explaining supposed character growth. Authors such as Lois-Ann Yamanaka and Kauai Hart Hemmings rely on myths about linked cultural values between AsAms and Native Hawaiians and romantic notions of Indigeneity to deepen their works, conflating issues that have no reason to be intertwined except under the umbrella of an imagined sort of Indigeneity. Nature thus becomes infinitely malleable, just another thing that we can tinker with until it becomes useful and productive for our own personal successes.

## Chapter 1:

### Colonizer and colonized conceptions of land

In Native Hawaiian lore, land or *'āina* is associated with spirituality, cosmology and interconnectedness. The traditional Hawaiian creation story *He Kumulipo* recounts a world in which, over the course of one cosmic night, sea urchins and limu (seaweed), plants, fish, flying creatures, geckos, taro, animals, and mammals are born in quick succession. In the eighth *wā*, or section, of *He Kumulipo*, the four divinities are born: La'ila'i (female), Ki'i (male), Kane (God), Kanaloa (octopus). The next eight *wā* include various births, all catalyzed by La'ila'i taking her eldest brother Ki'i as a mate, thus creating the first humans from her brain (Beckwith 290). Martha Warren Beckwith, one of the first mainland sociologists to examine *He Kumulipo*, describes this “sense of progression to animal and plant forms, each ‘born’ (*hanau*), sometimes one class as ‘child’ of another, sometimes without specified parent relation, but each paired with an opposite as land and sea species...all stemming from a common stock” (290). Thus, land functions as one half of a whole (land and sea), an ancestor of all life in the early Hawaiian world, creating a “universe of familial relations” in which human beings are “but one constituent link in the larger family” (Fujikane 5).

To most Native Hawaiians, there is no hierarchy of life, elements, or resources: nature is “not objectified but personified, resulting in an extraordinary respect...for the life of the sea, the heavens, and the earth,” Candace Fujikane continues (5). Indeed, from a *Kānaka* perspective, professor Momiala Kamahale writes that “The land is our mother. Native Hawaiians call her Papahānaumoku—‘She who gives birth to lands’...As human beings, we understand that our obligation is to serve Her. We do so as guardians and stewards of the land” (79). ku'ualoha

ho'omanawanui extends this human-land relationship: "...we are descended from the land and are *related to* and not *separate from* elements of 'nature'" (128). Land is an extension of the (Native Hawaiian) people who nourish themselves from the flora and fauna, and vice versa. People cannot exist without land, and land cannot exist without people. For *Kānaka Maoli*, the land is their genealogical origin, not a possession.

However, legacies of colonialism by (usually) Western aggressors have led to the expropriation of Indigenous land—both the literal ground and its Indigenous connections to spirituality and genealogy—to build colonizers' wealth, power, and privilege. As Tuck and Yang contend, "In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property" (3). But on a more nuanced level, these Western aggressors make a palimpsest of Indigeneity: they erase and rewrite Native connections to land to allow for physical dispossession. In destroying cultural ties to land, all things Indigenous become natural resources, thus leading to the "biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the 'domestic' borders of the imperial nation" (Tuck and Yang 4). Indeed, the ecological aspects of colonialism include the extraction of natural resources with little gain for the Indigenous community, the removal and disruption of human and animal settlement patterns, the rewriting or ignoring of Indigenous origin stories (such as *He Kumulipo*), and the forceful withholding of land for what Saidiya Hartman labels "white enjoyment"—although she writes from within the context of American slavery—all of which have been observed in Hawaiian history.

A brief side note on East Asian investment in Hawai'i: it's not just American money that is transforming Hawaiian land—both *Kānaka* concepts of land, and the physical land—via soft imperialism. What about the Asians? Yes, Japanese investments in Hawai'i poured into the

Islands in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leading prominent Native Hawaiian activist and scholar Haunani-Kay Trask to write in 1999 that “Japan is moving into the Pacific with aggressive economic penetration as investors and as tourists...Japanese firms have purchased over nine billion dollars worth of real estate [in Hawai'i] since the 1970s” (50). (And actually, total investment was closer to \$13 billion, the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization estimates). However, since 1989 annual investment has fallen, and Japanese investors have been divesting assets in Hawai'i in the last few years—so much so that the cumulative total of investments is less today than it was during the early 1990s (UHERO 3).

As for Chinese investments in the Islands? Similarly, although in 2008 economists predicted a “wave” of Chinese capital flowing into Hawai'i, the numbers have fallen short of predictions (Wiles n.p). China has invested \$890 million in the development of hotels, golf courses, and commercial real estate in Hawai'i from 2000 to 2017 across just nine deals—the majority of investment came from a single company, China Oceanwide (Loomis n.p). Japanese and Chinese people seem to prefer to visit and spend in Hawai'i as transient tourists, rather than investing in long-term, multi-figure tourist infrastructure. Undoubtedly, wealth from East Asia pours into the islands. In 2019, 1.6 million Japanese tourists spent \$2.19 billion in Hawai'i, or around \$242 per person per day, and 92,082 Chinese tourists spent \$222.8 million, or around \$329 per person per day (“2019 Annual Visitor Report”).<sup>2</sup> These numbers are *still* consistently less than the annual amount spent by mainland Americans (\$11.6 billion) and the annual number of mainland American visitors in and to Hawai'i (4.5 million), although the American per capita spending per day (\$194) is less than Japanese and Chinese spending.

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<sup>2</sup> Notably, there was a 25% decline in the number of Chinese visitors to Hawai'i post Donald Trump's announced trade war with China.

While I don't mean to write off the potentially nefarious encroach of the East and the echoes of imperialism that buying up large swathes of land recalls, two things are important to keep in mind. The first is that there are (not-so-subtle) notes of Orientalism in the "What about the Far East? They're colonizing too?" argument. The Far East is already home: those Americans of East Asian descent who claim localness in Hawai'i—and who make up the racial majority of the state population, who occupy the most seats in the state government, and who actively try to disenfranchise Native Hawaiians—are far more insidious than some tourists spending money. East Asian-American authorities also *want* East Asian money to flow into the islands—as long as the spenders don't overwhelm them.<sup>3</sup> In the article "The Coming China Wave" in *Hawaii Business Magazine*, Ted Liu—the Chinese-American director of the Hawaiian Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism—indicates "China as an economic force that can't be ignored over the next decades," with a slight caveat. "We don't want 10 million Chinese visitors," Liu says, noting that he would settle for "just half a million high-spending Chinese" (Wiles n.p).

The second thing to remember is that the Hawaiian Islands belong to white-majority America, not to East Asia. White-majority America colonized the Islands, white-majority America forced annexation upon the Islands, white-majority America un-homed Native Hawaiians and decimated their population, white-majority America landscaped Hawai'i to become the land of golf courses and resorts, white-majority America created tactics to assimilate Asian immigrants to whiteness (to further dominate Native Hawaiians and prevent solidarity). Hence, while the East (really, just Japan and China) may have contributed to *Kānaka* land dispossession through investments in the land in recent decades, nothing compares to what two

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<sup>3</sup> I could get into the East Asian/East Asian *American* divide in terms of AsAm internalized racism, the desire to approximate oneself to "Americanness" and therefore dominance, and the accompanying xenophobia...but I won't.

centuries of white “investment” in the land has done, or what one century of Asian-American “investment” in the land has done. To have East Asian residents of Hawai’i, such as Mr. Liu, turn around and point to East Asians as potential colonizers of “their” Islands is nothing short of myopic and ahistorical. Interlude over!

White American and Asian-American expropriation of Hawaiian land is ongoing, although perhaps not visible on the pristine (and imported) sands of Waikīkī. In an attempt to show the ways in which the United States—including the Hawaiian government, which is again majority-East Asian—has colonized both the land and the minds of residents of Hawai’i, I turn to one glaring and one subtle example of the Western expropriation of Native Hawaiian land. First, in what is an egregious example of (one of) the ways in which the American military-industrial complex has “transformed [Hawaiian] land, destroying or altering natural and cultural resources and blocking access to military-controlled areas,” we turn to the example of Kaho’olawe (Kajihiro 177). The smallest Hawaiian island, Kaho’olawe is considered sacred to *Kānaka* Maoli. In 1941, it was transformed into a bombing range post-Pearl Harbor.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the best-known military ecological abuse in Hawai’i, the bombing of the island occurred for decades until 1990, when President George H. W. Bush ordered an end to live-fire training (Napier n.p). From 1998 to 2003, the United States Navy attempted to remove unexploded ordnance and other environmental hazards from the island, but it remains uninhabitable due to the residual damage (Napier n.p).<sup>5</sup> This issue was brought into the national spotlight, thus leading to Kaho’olawe being added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1981 (Graff n.p). However, the broader context of mainland America’s anti-nuclear war protests ensured that Kaho’olawe was deemed merely another example of unwanted U.S. military aggression (a liberal view) and not as a

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<sup>4</sup> See “Operation Sailor Hat” (1965): where three tests of 500 tons of TNT *each* were detonated off the shores of Kaho’olawe. The operation presumably yielded data useful for determining and improving blast resistance of [only American!] naval ships.

<sup>5</sup> And in 2020, a wildfire decimated 30% of the island and due to fears about leftover unexploded ordnance, firefighters abandoned their efforts on Day One.

byproduct of centuries of Western colonization (a more anticolonial view)...although both tactics of displays of military force and colonization of the Other fit into the West's centuries-old quest to dominate, well, everyone.

In a more subtle (or perhaps just lesser known) example of the expropriation of Native Hawaiian land, the State of Hawai'i has occupied over two hundred thousand acres since the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA; 1920). The HHCA set aside these acres "to be considered Hawaiian homelands, to be utilized in the rehabilitation of native Hawaiians, thereby undertaking a trust obligation benefiting the aboriginal people," and laid the foundation for the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL; "The Admission Act"). Notably, the person in charge of the redistribution of Native Hawaiian lands was white Republican Governor Wallace Rider Farrington, who served in this position from 1921-1929.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it goes without saying, but no redistribution happened, and the annexed lands of Hawai'i remained (and still remain) in the hands of the government. Indeed, as a direct consequence of Farrington-era policy, there has been little change in the sociopolitical or even just *housing status* of Native Hawaiians in the past hundred years—a time during which the Hawaiian State Legislature slowly became controlled by an Eastern Asian-majority. While the passing of Act 14 (1995) reiterated the state's commitment to providing reparations to Native Hawaiians and funding to the DHHL, the then-head of the DHHL Kali Watson (a *hapa* Chinese-Hawaiian man) failed to enact tangible change for the *Kānaka* community. Moreover, although for the next twenty years the DHHL received \$30 million annually, helping underwrite the development of more homesteads, few *Kānaka* families (or, those defined as at least 50% Hawaiian) saw material improvements in their living conditions (Perez and Philip n.p). In 2000, Mililani B. Trask pointed out that "45 percent of all

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<sup>6</sup> Instead of the Divide-and-Control tactic of strictly delineating different REC communities, Farrington tried to Americanize the Japanese and Filipino communities in order to assimilate and approximate them (in)to "white culture" (Daws 309). Once again, only specified Asian communities were invested in—at the direct expense of *Kānaka Maoli*.



Hawaiians are living in poverty...The state, meanwhile, has used the lands of the Hawaiian Homes Trust...for its own purposes” (103). These “purposes” (stimulating the economy via building shopping centers and hotels) cater mostly to tourists, with little benefits for Native Hawaiians. And while the State of Hawai'i has also created national parks and established protected areas using this land, ostensibly beneficial to *Kānaka* (although within these parks, once-sacred locations are often deemed off-limits to everyone), many Native Hawaiians still do not have actual *houses* to return to. Indeed, between 1995 and 2020, the DHHL developed a mere 3,300 residential lots statewide despite the residential waitlist expanding to 23,000 people. As Perez and Philip point out, “The strategy of building expensive single-family subdivisions has left thousands of low-income and homeless Native Hawaiians behind in a state with one of the most acute affordable housing crises in the nation” (n.p.).

The colonization of Hawaiian land offers a niche example of certain nonwhite groups being welcomed into whiteness to further white colonization and the expropriation of land. While colonization by non-white aggressors is rare in the West, the case of Hawai'i was highly intentional. What can broadly be called “land alienation,” argues Kyle Kajihiro, not only severs “the genealogical ties between *Kānaka Maoli* and the *'āina*, but also [disrupts] their ability to practice and transmit their culture to future generations” (177). Indeed, over the course of Hawai'i's colonization, “land” has transformed into a malleable concept that has historically (and currently) been weaponized, withheld, and objectified in order to serve the mainland American interests, all while Asian settlers in Hawai'i have benefited directly from *Kānaka* land dispossession. This transformation from land-with-inherent-value to land-with-capitalist-value is reflected in literature from and about Hawai'i as well.

## Chapter 2:

### *'āina* is not a metaphor

In the Western literary canon up to the 20th century—and perhaps, arguably, well into the 21st century—the “environment” or the “land” often functions as only a backdrop in the plot of a novel. The ambition to control and extract profit from nature has become a benchmark for Western progress or modernization; thus, we manage landscapes and at the same time are managed by the very conditions we seek to change...enter the tired, hypermasculinized “Man vs. Nature” conflict or the trope of natural disasters as sensationalized plot points. At best, authors turn the environment into symbols or metaphors to reflect their characters’ inner lives: nature is written to fulfill the plot-driven needs of the author. At worst, authors create a simple equation out of nature. The Mississippi River = freedom; the veldt = the wildness and dangers of adolescent imagination; the ocean = unpredictability and the sublime. Indeed, as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin explain, descriptions of the environment in literature “tend to function more as *aesthetics* than as *methodology*” and thus provide the reader with “a storehouse of individual and collective metaphors” rather than a description of land or nature rooted in scientific understanding (13). “Methodology” is meant in an ecological sense: Huggan and Tiffin highlight the idea that ecocritics and authors frequently ignore—or incorrectly use—hard science when explaining and describing nature. While I disagree with the idea that descriptions of nature ought to be rooted solely in ecology (what about sociocultural and/or ontological conceptions of nature?), I agree that the environment has been aestheticized and metaphorized in literature with harmful consequences. This so-called “aesthetics” in literature allows for land to be relegated to

the background, both utilitarian (in that it sets the scene) and ephemeral (in that it is mentioned only when useful, else merely assumed to be omnipresent).

Given the historically entrenched Western assumption that nature cannot speak for itself—paired with the more modern, neoliberal idea that nature ought to be personified to garner empathy from us citizens of earth—few have interrogated the ways in which we speak for nature in literature until the subject of ecocriticism, or literary ecology, gained traction in the late 1970s. However, as Cilano and Deloughrey write, “It is precisely because nature cannot challenge the ways we represent it using human language that we must resist the temptation to objectify and construct nature in any way we choose” (76). But this also leads to a Catch-22: how do we write about land without “objectify[ing] and construct[ing] nature in any way we choose”? Do we not bother at all with “represent[ing] it using human language”—and therefore once again turn nature into a mere prop, a pure, nostalgic, immutable object in the background? After all, as Ania Loomba points out, “a nostalgia for lost origins [in literature] can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism” as it glosses over violent histories of colonization in favor of a pristine, untouched image of nature (17). Alternately, do we attempt to personify nature, to speak for it on our own terms? (*Perhaps you’ve seen well-intentioned ecowarriors on Instagram post about Mother Nature, alternately writing “She’s healing” or “She’s hurting.” Every Earth Day there are thousands, without fail*). There is no quick blanket solution to how to write *about* nature without writing *on behalf of* nature. However, going back to Loomba, the addition of “postcolonial” to the field of “ecocriticism” is a step in the right direction: postcolonial ecocriticism, she writes, “refuses the nostalgia of pure landscape even while it grapples with the best ways of addressing the representation of the nonhuman environment” (79).

Perhaps the tension between the colonizers and the colonized—and subsequent failures to accurately and respectfully write about land—is epitomized through literature from and about Hawai'i. Many people first encounter Hawai'i through visual representation (the beauty of the land, in this case, “speaks for itself”), but guidebooks and travel blogs also introduce those unfamiliar with the islands to the prospects of “Tropical weather, swimming with manta rays, active volcanoes, lush forests and teaming (*sic*) waterfalls, cocktails by a stunning beach to the tune of a ukulele and a spectacular setting sun,” as one travel blogger puts it (Makepeace n.p). Thus Hawai'i is reduced to a couple of activities catering to tourists (swimming and cocktails), and its geological features exist solely for the visitor's pleasure.

Even East Asian settlers familiar with the concept of *'āina* misinterpret Native Hawaiian genealogy and reflect a palimpsestic view of the term. As Candace Fujikane proclaims, “Native accounts of a genealogical relationship with land are dismissed as ‘metaphorical’”; an un-metaphorized concept of land would involve “a political acknowledgment of Hawaiians’ genealogical, familial relationship with land” (2008: 15). However Stephen Sumida, the co-founder of “Hawaiian” literature annual conference Talk Story, Inc., uses his understanding of Native Hawaiian concepts of land to locate East Asian settler colonialism in Hawai'i within concepts of home. He links *aloha 'āina* (love of the land) with “another parent of Hawaiian values —*'ohana* (family),” writing that these themes’ accompanying “symbols and metaphors, integral to the Hawaiian language, bind love of the land, family, sustenance, and culture itself into a rich complex of values” (Sumida 109). While Sumida understands the complex interconnectivity of “love of the land, family, sustenance, and culture,” he transforms *aloha 'āina* and *'ohana* into “symbols and metaphors” to be used however East Asian settlers please. Indeed, Sumida continues that “These Hawaiian metaphors and cultural values have shaped the

experience of Asian immigrants to Hawai'i, whose original home cultures also emphasize family and the cultivation of a severely limited plot of land" (109). Following Sumida's logic, the so-called "Hawaiian metaphors" have enough proximity to these settlers' "original home cultures" to create a peaceful and multicultural home in Hawai'i based on shared values, and thus the settlers have the right to, well, settle. He never explicitly connects *'āina* to the political project of Native Hawaiian sovereignty, and instead roots it in a romantic past of shared values. The page before he also writes that "The Hawaiian language itself, being metaphorical in form, expresses these values metaphorically" (108). The number of times that Sumida emphasizes the metaphorical qualities of the Hawaiian language and land in East Asian works from and about Hawai'i suggests that *'āina*, rather than remaining a Native Hawaiian concept, has become a metaphor co-opted by (im)permanent settlers to justify claims to land.

From a Native Hawaiian perspective, however, the Hawaiian language is not "metaphorical in form"; rather, it is an irreparable disjunction in the translation from the Standard English language to *'ōlelo Hawai'i* that leads to its frequent dismissal as "metaphorical" (Sumida 108). As ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui writes, "'āina does not translate to 'landscape' because landscape implies a pristine...land devoid of human beings; by being 'land that feeds,' 'āina automatically includes humans" (128). In the case of Kilohana, the westernmost peak of the Ko'olau Mountains on the windward side of O'ahu, Nanea Lum explains that "'Ke Kilohana' is contemplative of a place, where body and mind behold a pace that exists beyond the measure of words...The Hawaiian word *Kilohana* means 'lookout,' 'high point,' 'top,' but it is also used to describe excellence beyond measure of words" (Lum 123). "Kilohana" can be easily translated into single words or phrases, but the word also encompasses the intangible—perhaps this is where Sumida's claim to metaphor comes in. Lum is disinclined to assign meaning to the name

“Ke Kilohana,” writing instead that it “is *contemplative* of a place...beyond the measure of words.” She cleverly undermines the Western tendency to immediately translate phrases into other phrases (which often reduces deeper significance) rather than into feelings or contemplations (which leaves interpretation up to the reader). While she then translates the “Hawaiian word,” she does not directly translate the Hawaiian *phrase* or proper noun of Ke Kilohana.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the translators’ tendencies to define a word with a synonym fail to apply to the rich, culturally rooted, descriptive qualities of the Hawaiian language.

As No'eau Peralto writes in “He Mo'olelo no Pa'auilo”: “We recognize that stories live in places, and when we learn a place’s name, we call forth the stories, great and small, that live there” (16). Stories live in places, indeed, and places live in stories: in the next section, I examine how *‘āina* has been transformed into a vehicle for homing for East Asian, *hapa*, and *Kānaka* characters in certain fictional works by authors writing from and about Hawai’i. *‘Āina* has become not something imbued with ontological power, and not something that “call[s] forth...stories, great and small”; instead, *‘āina* has been co-opted into a metaphor for settlement or un/belonging. The transformation of *‘āina* into “land” reflects the success of settler colonialism in propagating the colonial construct of land as a tool through which characters realize their own individual successes.

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<sup>7</sup> In what is perhaps a perfect example of the co-optation of the Hawaiian language, “Ke Kilohana” is *also* the name of a new-build, luxury high rise apartment building in Ward Village, one of the most gentrified neighborhoods of Honolulu—and an area popular for Chinese and Japanese real estate investment. Every time I visit the area, I am struck by its Disneyland-esque qualities: plasticine, empty, artificial. There’s even music playing from hidden speakers round-the-clock.

## Chapter 3:

### East Asian, *hapa*, and *Kānaka* homesteading and un/belonging

#### *East Asian 'home' making*

For settlers, finding or creating a home is critical to the project of (manufacturing) belonging in a new land. However, the concept of homemaking is precarious terrain: settling down often means forcibly removing others from their houses or their land, especially within the context of settler colonialism. Tuck and Yang identify this tactic as “homesteading,” or the idea that the “the settler is making a new ‘home’...rooted in [the idea that] the wild land and wild people were made for his benefit” (7). Each group that has colonized Hawai’i has redefined “wild land” for their own purposes, subjugating and erasing the “wild people” from their own personal landscapes. When white settlers first moved to Hawai’i in the nineteenth century, they forcefully reconstructed the history of the Islands. Missionaries were pioneers, revolutionaries, the first to imagine profiting off the supposedly pristine land with plantation-based agriculture. And when Asian settlers first moved to Hawai’i, they too reconstructed the history of the Islands. Asian settlers were imports, the first to do the dirty work required to transform the land into money for white settlers.

In both rewritten histories, Native Hawaiians are conveniently invisibilized yet weaponized when need be: Asian settlers have a history of justifying their claims to land because they, too, were subjugated under white dominance. On the plantations, Asian laborers, viewed as instruments of production, suffered under terrible conditions. But as their labor power grew, U.S. territorial leaders, planters, and the white settler population grew increasingly anxious (Fujikane 18). Hence the Americanization movement during and after World War II, and hence the

strategic “seeking to converge their interests with certain East Asian settlers and forge a more liberal multicultural form of settler colonialism” (Saranillio 287). As Houston Wood elaborates: “Rhetoric linking the Hawaiian people’s experience of having their land colonized and their nation overthrown with stories of immigrant plantation struggles undermines claims for Indigenous rights and reparations” (51). The false equivalence in struggles between Asian settlers and Native Hawaiians is another violent attempt to further revise history.<sup>8</sup> In spite of a movement for genuine equality, Asian Americans in Hawai’i ended up slightly modifying, yet renewing, the hegemonic U.S. settler colonial system, with some AsAm immigrants “succumbing to the benefits of compromise and dilution” (Morales 126).

In another act of *literally* rewriting and reorienting history, fiction from and about East Asians in Hawai’i follows a similar trajectory of settler homesteading. Japanese author Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* is perhaps the epitome: its coming-of-age trajectory of third-generation Japanese-American protagonist Lovey Nariyoshi culminates in her locating her “home” on Native Hawaiian land. Lovey achieves self-fulfillment and self-acceptance only through the dis- and re-placement of Native Hawaiians—not that there are any Native Hawaiian characters in the novel, just the one *hapa* love interest named Jenks. At the beginning of *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, Lovey lacks any sort of conception of home or belonging as connected to land; instead, she believes that proximity to whiteness is the key to fitting in at her middle school in rural Hilo (and on a broader scale, the key to belonging in America). Indeed, the distinct absence of “place” in the first third of Yamanaka’s novel reflects Lovey’s sense of alienation from both her peers and mainland American culture. However, as Rocío G. Davis argues, “Spatial orientation has always been an imperative [for creating a home],

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<sup>8</sup> For more analysis of East Asian homesteading in literature from Hawai’i, Rocío G. Davis discusses East Asian authors and residents of Hawai’i Garrett Hongo, Watanabe and Milton Murayama in “I Wish You A Land,” and Seri Luangphinit analyzes Wai Chee Chun Yee’s “For You A Lei” (1937) and Patsy Saiki’s *Sachie* (1977) in her article “Homeward Bound.”



and for...the [immigrant] who must redefine the relationship with place, cultural identity is intricately woven with the idea of location” (49). Instead of considering “spatial orientation” or the intricacies of “cultural identity...woven with the idea of location”—she is, after all, eleven at the novel’s inception—Lovey avidly seeks out material items, notably the opposite of natural resources. She longs for “Owning white items and eating white items...[to] make her white by association”; she wants to resemble Barbie or Shirley Temple and to replicate rampant American consumption practices; she wants to be “good enough for the kind of love that Shirley had” (Yamanaka 28).

Moreover, despite the lack of *Kānaka Maoli* in the novel, prejudices abound. Gina, a popular Okinawan bully in protagonist Lovey’s grade, tells Lovey that she is “...one queer fucka, your whole family, fuckin’ ka-naka style everybody sleeping on your living-room floor, eh? No mo’ nuff beds and blankets so gotta use army sleeping bags from the Surplus Store, eh?” (Yamanaka 209). Gina relies on tired, recycled tropes about Native Hawaiians being lazy, poor, overpopulating, and by equating Lovey to a “ka-naka,” she attempts to further degrade and exclude Lovey from their majority-Asian class (which, again, features one half of a “ka-naka”). Lovey is acutely aware of the social and racial hierarchies at play in American society; after all, all she desires is to have a “haole last name like Smith or Cole” (Yamanaka 28). To be labeled “ka-naka,” therefore, is to be labeled untouchable.

However, throughout the novel, Lovey reconnects with her familial history through fostering a connection to the land: in a pivotal moment, she flies by herself to the Kīpū plantation near Hā'upu mountain on Kaua'i, where her father grew up, and fills a Ziploc bag with dirt and stones from a road near the plantation. This moment harkens back to an earlier point in the novel, in which Lovey’s father Hubert recounts a story from his childhood. His father, a plantation

laborer from Japan who never got the opportunity to return home, *re-homes* himself by requesting to be buried in Japanese soil:

My fadda...came Hawai'i 1907 for be one laborer in the sugar fields...he neva seen Japan again...Was pau, everything he had with Japan. Except for one small package he had...we could open um when he die...When my madda open the package, was soil—from Japan. My old man, he wanna be buried in Japanee soil. He carry that package in his one bag in 1907 all the way from Japan and keep um under his bed all those years. That was his way of going home. (Yamanaka 196-197)

Told in pidgin, or the “local” dialect of Hawai'i, Hubert's story recounts his father's longing for “home” to Japan. Notably, his form of “going home” is rooted in the soil. Although being “buried in Japanee soil” is not a literal return home, and “one small package” is not nearly enough to encompass his body, Hubert's father is satisfied with what the Japanese soil *represents*: nature, roots, ground and grounding. “Home” is not the “sugar fields,” nor does he attempt to make Hawai'i his home: he carries the package of soil “all the way from Japan and keep um under his bed all those years,” never forgetting his origins. Although Hubert's father lived in Japan for only seventeen years, “home” remains defined as his origins, his ethnicity, his ancestors.

Therein lies the difference between the first generation of immigrants and the second, or third: Hubert's father longs to go home, second-generation Hubert's “home” is the plantation, and third-generation Lovey is geographically and metaphorically dis-located from both Asia and (white, mainland) America. After Lovey visits Hā'upu, however, she flourishes: she is finally able to form an individual, place-based identity by recreating familial history. As Carmen Nolte-Odhiambo points out, “The importance of her journey to Kaua'i seems punctuated by the fact that in Hawaiian, hā'upu means to recall, to recollect, or to remember” (388). However,

Yamanaka fails to mention this fact—and she also renames the mountain “Haupu,” without the Hawaiian macron and glottal stop (both unsurprising). Nolte-Odhiambo continues: the Nariyoshi’s “acts of remembering are restricted to recollections of recent plantation history instead of encompassing the millennia-long history of the land and its Indigenous people...the Nariyoshis fail to understand—indeed, fail even to consider—Native history” (388). Although nature is crucial to this novel, acting as a vehicle for (re)homing the Nariyoshi family, the family’s ignorance of Native Hawaiians and subsequent redefinitions of culturally important Hawaiian mountains ironically erases the centuries of environmental and Indigenous histories that came before them.

By the end of *Wild Meat*, Lovey has—by rehomeing her father, and by bringing herself closer to past generations of settlers—claimed local identity and reconnected herself to Hawaiian land. “From Hilo town as we leave in the morning...I see the *purplemountainmajesty*—Mauna Kea. I know exactly what the song means every time I see the mountain in the middle of my island,” Lovey muses (198). Recalling patriotic song “America the Beautiful,” she redefines her concept of America. America, rather than being marked by whiteness and unethical consumption, instead is symbolized by Mauna Kea. The mountain is one of the most sacred locations to *Kānaka*, the home to deities and the burial ground of generations of *Kānaka* ancestors — not that Yamanaka wastes space on the page to explain this. To her, it is a symbol of Lovey’s reorientation to the island. Indeed, as Lovey carves out a space of belonging for herself, she uproots Indigenous Hawaiians, who again are mentioned only a handful of times in this novel.

Lovey’s desires to be white-adjacent are replaced by acceptance of, inclusion in, and identification with her father’s practices of “hunting, gardening, and gathering as an expression

of nostalgia and as a means of survival, which establishes his organic connection to the physical landscape of Hawai'i, as well as to his Japanese immigrant roots" (Ho 69). Harkening back to Sumida's claim of Japanese-Hawaiian cultural overlap, Ho aligns these practices as both Hawaiian (in the sense of establishing an "organic connection" to the land) and Japanese (returning to his "immigrant roots"). The implicit suggestion within Yamanaka's novel is that Japanese residents of Hawai'i can claim the land if they adopt Indigenous values regarding it, even without knowing a single *Kānaka Maoli* person, and even while using "ka-naka" as a slur. Carmen Nolte-Odhiambo substantiates this claim, writing that the Nariyoshis' "living off the land identifies the family as what might be called 'Indigenous-like,' enabling them to regard the land as their own" (388). Becoming "Indigenous-like" returns us to Tuck and Yang's theory of homesteading as a settler move to innocence: "homesteading can also become a form of playing Indian, invoking Indigeneity as 'tradition' ...while evading Indigenous sovereignty and the modern presence of actual urban Native peoples" (28). Analyzed through this lens, Lovey's actions in *Wild Meat* become a form of "playing Indian" where her status as newly and metaphorically *homed* relies on a charade of "invoking Indigeneity as 'tradition.'" The simplistic understanding of land as soil, gardening, and farming within *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* differs significantly from *Kānaka* understandings of *aloha 'āina*. Coupled with Yamanaka's flagrant exclusion of Native Hawaiian characters in her novel, land, here, becomes a tool through which a Japanese character situates herself as at home in Hawai'i—not through approximation to whiteness, which she strove to achieve at the beginning of the novel, but rather through appropriation of invisibilized "Indigeneity."

Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* is a coming-of-age story, yes, and it is also a triumphant homecoming novel. However, Lovey's journey from Hilo to Kīpū, her

newfound appreciation for the land, and the glaring absence of Native Hawaiians in her life (from whose culture she draws her respect of nature) all point to Tuck and Yang's theory that homing, or homesteading, is a "settler move to innocence" (1). *Wild Meat*, then, remains "entrenched in a colonial fantasy that enables settlers to make their homes on, and create affective attachments to, Indigenous land" (Nolte-Odhiambo 387). The darker side of Lovey's sense of belonging and nostalgia urge to recreate her father's and grandfather's pasts all rely on Native un-belonging and a falsification of Hawaiian history. Seri Luangphinith suggests that the "operative word" and solution to settler tactics in East Asian literature from Hawai'i lies in the word "comfort... Therein lies an answer to local Asian-American sentimentality in literature" (74).<sup>9</sup> Seeking "comfort" in a new home, and conversely defining "home" as "comfort," is a settler tactic that manufactures comfort by erasing and rewriting notions of nature, land, and Indigeneity. Nolte-Odhiambo corroborates Luangphinith's theory: "For local literature to truly question colonial structures, it would need not to home or to settle, but rather to unsettle its local characters" (387). "To unsettle," according to *Merriam-Webster*, means "to loosen or move from a settled state or condition." But it also means "to perturb or agitate mentally or emotionally," or in Donna Haraway's terms, "to stay with the trouble" (1).

The idea of staying with the trouble is crucial to decolonial literature; Asian characters glossing over their status as settlers via the appropriation of (erased) Native Hawaiian culture or assimilation to whiteness is markedly not. Luckily, not all examples of "local literature" from and about Hawai'i construct homes out of stolen land. Short stories such as "The Guest" by Gary Pak and Kristiana Kahakauwila's "This Is Paradise" deliberately create unsettling situations in

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<sup>9</sup> Redefining "home," Luangphinith also suggests that Asian-American writers from Hawai'i "abandon the notion that home is where we do not become embroiled in the ugliness of Empire, where we can lead self-indulgent lives, where we can be guaranteed the kind of inclusion we 'hanker' after" (74). In both literature and in real life, the East Asian-American has made a blissful, *comfortable* home out of Hawai'i over time: a place of peace (freedom from "the ugliness of Empire"), excellence ("self-indulgent lives"), and acceptance by the dominant group ("inclusion").

which Asian immigrants face reminders that they are not “home” on the islands. In “The Guest,” Colbert Nakamatsu confronts Herman Penorio, an unwelcome Native Hawaiian guest who decides to re-settle where his ancestors once lived, coincidentally on Nakamatsu’s property. In “This Is Paradise,” hotel workers at the Banyan discover a dead white tourist on the beach minutes after they move through the hotel, remarking on the beauty of the surrounding landscape. The unnamed women note that “Diamond Head is blooming with a pale yellow light...[a] soft glow” and “the sand is soft and fine” (Kahakauwila 37). However, instead of being lulled into complacency, comfort, and a sense of re-homing, the women reject the draw of the “natural” world and the Islands’ exotic beauty. “We pretend that in the distance, beyond the white haze that hangs above the ocean, lie our home islands,” the women remark (Kahakauwila 37). The sand, rather than being merely “soft and fine,” instead “feels fake to us, unlike the coarser sand of our islands, the sand that, like us, is whole and hardened” and they note that the sand is “imported from beaches on Maui and Kaua’i” (Kahakauwila 37). The hotel workers are in a strange place, far from their “home islands,” and like the sand, they too are exotic imports meant to serve and please tourists. By repeatedly referring to their “home islands” not as the Hawaiian Islands but rather as hazy, distant locales, these women veer away from homesteading tactics and claims to belonging at the expense of Native Hawaiians.

### *Mixed-race liminality and un/belonging*

What if there are no home islands to return to? Where do mixed-race, *hapa* characters locate themselves in a No-Man’s Land, caught in the middle of their colonizer-colonized genealogies? For Davis, who emphasizes the idea that spatial orientation is “imperative” in terms of homing the immigrant in Hawai’i, the central question becomes this: in a hybrid space such as Hawai’i, with such a high percentage of mixed-race people who are descended from immigrants,

how can a (multi)cultural identity situate itself in a way that weaves “cultural identity...with the idea of location?” (49). Indeed, a place such as the Hawaiian Islands are a symbol of liminality: both of and not of mainland America, with a population that vastly differs from the majority of states, physically located 2,300 miles away from San Francisco, the nearest mainland city. Mixed-race people, too, symbolize liminality and hybridity: neither one race nor another, sociologist Keri E. Iyall Smith notes that “The individual occupying a hybrid space navigates between two cultural groups and occupies a space with both cultural groups. This space holds both a challenge and a privilege” (73). In Hawai'i, with its few full-blooded *Kānaka* and an overwhelming, perpetually increasing array of immigrants and tourists, “localness” remains disputed and residents struggle to define their cultural relationships with their heritage. Given the significance of place in identity formation, then, a place as liminal as Hawai'i, *plus* the added liminality or hybridity of its *hapa* inhabitants, Kana'iaupuni and Liebler suggest that “the resulting multiracial mix...complicate[s] questions of identity for Hawai'i's host culture. Living or growing up in Hawai'i is certainly a notable experience that affects the identity processes of all its diverse residents...[but] Hawaiians will always have [a] genealogical connection to Hawai'i as the ancestral homeland. No other group holds this claim” (691). Mixed race Hawaiians are genealogical descendants of the land despite any sort of settler blood in their veins, but complicating this is the long history of exclusion and quantification of Hawaiianess.

Indeed, concepts of race did not exist in Hawai'i until missionaries introduced racial formation to the Hawaiian population (Douglas and Saenz 594). Plantation owners and overseers pushed concepts of race further, stratifying ethnic groups to diminish the power of labor unions as the population of Hawai'i diversified. After the 1898 annexation, however, the United States implemented racial categories to quantify the Hawaiian population. Of course, by this time the

population of full-blooded Native Hawaiians had declined significantly—from 40,014 in 1884 to around 22,636 in 1930. The already-waning population of full Native Hawaiians was replaced by *hapa haole*, or mixed Hawaiian-white people, who by 1930 outnumbered *Kānaka* by around 6,000 (Lind 22).<sup>10</sup>

Nowadays, scholars, writers, scientists, and marketers all portray the Islands as a racial paradise due to the prevalence of mixed-race individuals and the fact that the majority of residents are East Asian. Some go so far as to uphold Hawai'i as an antidote to racism (*The New York Times* published an article in 2019 entitled “Want to Be Less Racist? Move to Hawaii”). According to a 2015 Pew Research Center analysis of Hawai'i's census data, 24% of the population identify as multiracial—within this percentage, 70% state that they are some combination of white, Asian, and Native Hawaiian (Krogstad). However, while Hawai'i is touted as a multiracial society, this claim is frequently weaponized to further disenfranchise those who identify as Native Hawaiian under the guise of neoliberal colorblindness. For example, in 1999 the United States Supreme Court heard the case of *Rice v. Cayetano* and ruled in favor of Freddy Rice, a white rancher from Hawai'i Island. He claimed that reverse racism was alive and well when it came to elections for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (Franklin and Lyons 49). Until this ruling, elections for the Office—charged with overseeing the crown and government lands of the former Kingdom of Hawai'i—were confined to Native Hawaiians; however, Rice's lawyers argued that excluding non-Hawaiians from voting was an unconstitutional, race-based exclusion.

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<sup>10</sup> In the 1920s, white male scholars from elite institutions visited Hawai'i to study racial hybridity. Verging on eugenics, these scientists' findings claimed that Hawai'i's population offered “the best example of racial experimentation in the Pacific and, in many respects, the whole world...a veritable ethnographic museum...a statistician's playground...a happy hunting ground,” in the words of Australian historian Stephen Roberts (315–316). Although not from the U.S., Roberts' words were echoed by other (American) scientists, who viewed Hawai'i as a “racial laboratory,” a “melting pot,” and a symbol of “colonial progress” (Altemus-Williams and Hobro). Their research was crucial in arguments for Hawai'i's statehood (1959)—if the population was culturally assimilable, then it could become a paradigm of racial harmony for the United States.



(Rice's team was also funded in part by "Americans for a Color-Blind Society"). The Court's ruling opened the door for the legislative overturning of all Native Hawaiian entitlements.

Thus the skewed logic is that if no one is 100% Native Hawaiian, no one is "authentically" Hawaiian and thus anyone from Hawai'i can be Hawaiian... "or worse, that there are no Hawaiians left at all" (Kauanui 139). Using racial hybridity to inform this iteration of the "disappearing native myth," which insists that Hawaiians are a vanishing *race* rather than a sovereign *nation*, can be traced back to the history of land dispossession and blood quantum that "defin[ed] people out of existence" (Kauanui 139).<sup>11</sup> Feigning colorblindness under the assumption of cultural hybridity also conveniently glosses over the ethnic and racial hierarchies manufactured during the plantation era that persist today: Native Hawaiian, Filipino, Samoan, Micronesian, Black, and Tongan communities are disproportionately undereducated, underpaid, underhoused (and overpoliced, oversurveilled, and overimprisoned) (Trask 22). Thus, the prominent mixed-race status of Native Hawaiians is both a desired outcome of assimilation (proximity to whiteness disguised by the promotion of multiculturalism) *and* also a condition weaponized to gatekeep Hawaiian identity and disqualify Hawaiians from access to their ancestral lands, among other benefits.

In the following works of literature produced by authors Hawaiian and not, mixed-race characters are defined by their inability to navigate these liminalities on and off the Islands. Matt King of *hapa* Kauai Hart Hemmings' *The Descendants* and Leilani Milton of (white) author Austin Aslan's *The Islands at the End of the World* navigate both internalized notions of un/belonging and an inability to locate metaphorical definitions of "home" in the midst of their

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<sup>11</sup> The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA) of 1920, which transferred ~200,000 acres of land to Native Hawaiians if their blood was at least 50% from "individuals inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands prior to 1778," quantified and institutionalized race and genealogy (Douglas and Saenz 596). "Hawaiianness" was reduced to something *place-based* rather than something encompassing genealogy, culture, and Indigeneity. J. Kehaulani Kauanui writes that "The definition of Hawaiian identity on the basis of blood logistics was an American conception, a colonial policy developed through experience with American Indians" (110).

competing white and Native Hawaiian cultures. Both works explore themes of cultural hybridity, or the difficulties of finding an identity among the practices and values of two or more different cultures, as their protagonists reevaluate and ultimately accept their *hapa* identities as products of their social and literal landscapes. At the beginning of each novel, both protagonists are uncomfortable with their status as “hybrids,” either explicitly or implicitly. Leilani Milton is isolated from her insular Hilo community and laments her otherness as both a mixed-race person and a new arrivant to the island; Matt King pads his discomfort regarding his heritage with cynicism, wealth and approximation to whiteness. (Perhaps you’re aware of the Oscar-nominated movie adaptation of *The Descendants* starring George Clooney as leading man—viewers are encouraged to use their imagination in imbuing Clooney with Indigeneity).

*The Islands at the End of the World* adopts a more forgiving and expansive understanding of hybridity and belonging than *The Descendants*, but protagonist Leilani still struggles with an inferiority complex regarding her status as both newcomer to her insular Hilo neighborhood and her mixedness. Having only lived in Hilo for three years, she searches for her own definition of “home” on islands defined by their isolation: “I’m only half Hawaiian, but I want to belong... The island itself—it feels like *home*... I hate it when people try to take that feeling of *home* away from me,” she bemoans (Aslan 21). Leilani defines home as a “feeling” rather than a place, reflecting the placelessness and liminality of being mixed-race. Moreover, her definition of “home” as a “feeling” rather than as a physical location is a stark contrast to the Nariyoshi’s definitions of home as rooted in soil in Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* despite the characters both living in Hilo. Her grandfather, consoling her, tells her that “You can take the child from the *‘āina*... but the *‘āina* from the child? Hawai’i’s in your blood” (Aslan 20). While he roots Hawaiianness in connection to land and blood, he avoids the colonial conflation

of blood with the quantification of belonging. That is, he pushes back against colonial blood logics and how they delineated a new race of culturally hybrid people in order to promote Hawai'i to the mainland tourist imagination and to (further) dispossess Native Hawaiians of claims to land and sovereignty, echoing J. Kēhaulani Kauanui. Later, Leilani's grandfather states that "The seizure of Hawaii by the U.S. military was a despicable act...But should you and your father be kicked out? No! Your dad's just as Hawaiian as I am. *'Ohana*. Family. *'Ohana nui*. Place is very strong in us, but *'ohana* is always stronger" (Aslan 21). To the Milton family, *'ohana* and its accompanying responsibilities and values is the axis around which "Hawaiinness" rotates. While the idea that Leilani's dad is "just as Hawaiian as [her grandfather is]" veers dangerously close to the logic that if no one is 100% Native Hawaiian, no one is Hawaiian—such as in the case of *Rice v. Cayetano* (1999)—her grandfather teaches Leilani that home is made up of family and an ontological relationship to nature rather than blood percentages or places of birth. Despite Leilani's insecurities and discomfort regarding her outsider status, her family attempts to pass down their knowledge about Indigeneity by modifying their definitions of belonging and home to incorporate legacies of colonial violence.

In *The Descendants*, by contrast, protagonist Matt King starts off already comfortable with his status as a *hapa* due to his own economic success—and therefore his exceptionalism in comparison to his relatives—and conveniently glosses over the colonial history of his family. Rather than suffering from an internal sense of un/belonging as a result of his hybridity, as Leilani does, King is jaded and whitewashed (although this could be a byproduct of each characters' ages: Leilani is sixteen, while King is in his fifties). He fails to engage with any colonial history beyond assuaging his own sense of (limited) guilt regarding his "inheritance issues" (Hemmings 22). King describes his intergenerational wealth as "mak[ing] money off of

luck and dead people”; his Hawaiian great-grandmother “happened to be a princess” and his great-grandfather was a “haole businessman” (Hemmings 22). While King is aware of “the progression of his bloodline” and that his “missionary ancestors came to the islands and told the Hawaiians to put on some clothes, work hard, and stop hula dancing...[and made money by] making some business deals on the way, buying an island for ten grand, or marrying a princess and inheriting her land,” he cannot escape the colonial narratives that shape(d) his “bloodline” (Hemmings 157). According to King, random lucky business arrangements, illicit marriages between Native Hawaiian women and white men and, as Leanne Day writes, “a series of unplanned events that seem to have no consequences for the Indigenous population” have all led to the present (73). In an optimistic reading of the beginning of *The Descendants* King is cynically hyper-aware of his “issues”; however, this nonchalant explanation of his familial history is still steeped in legacies of land dispossession, cultural and linguistic oppression, and the general violence wrought by settler colonialism.

Indeed, King attempts to clear his conscience and assuage his discomfort as a mixed-race descendant of a missionary and a princess by accumulating wealth and approximating himself to whiteness. He subscribes to ideologies of superior capitalist work ethics, reverting to tired critiques of Native Hawaiians as being lazy and unmotivated. While King and his relatives do not have to work, King believes he is exceptional. He is a successful lawyer while the others “don’t work,” “all look the same,” and have “stripped down to running shorts or bikinis and play beach volleyball and take up hula dancing” (Hemmings 157). While King critiques his relatives for their ignorance of colonialism and their privilege, his own understanding of his lineage is equally as bereft...he can just articulate his guilt better. In attributing his wealth to “luck and dead people,” King subscribes to a neoliberal, capitalist interpretation of history that obscures

colonial dispossession of *‘āina*. He erases the long history of *Kānaka Maoli* land dispossession and the calculated destruction of any sort of ontological relationship to the land, instead maintaining the fatalist claim that his family stumbled upon wealth. Hemmings’ and Aslan’s novels are extremely different. However, the discomfort of their *hapa* protagonists—and the characters’ often misguided attempts to rectify this discomfort—reflect the struggles of mixed-race claims to belonging, whether “belonging” is defined by empirical data or by a more abstract connection to land or ontology.

Eventually, by the end of both novels, each character faces a reckoning of sorts that homes them on the Islands. Satisfying endings abound. Leilani shifts from battling internalized senses of unbelonging (othering herself as a *hapa*) to establishing a place for herself within the broader history of Native Hawaiian lore, while almost inversely, Matt King (ever the realist) shifts from outward contempt for his *hapa* relatives (othering others) to establishing himself as a work-in-progress patriarch for his immediate family. Leilani focuses outward, defining home as the *Kānaka* world, with everything intertwined according to *He Kumulipo* and herself as one tiny part of an established whole; by contrast, Matt shifts his focus inward and defines home as wherever his daughters are. But neither endings are actually *that* satisfying: both of these characters’ claims to home fall short of actual land restitution.

Leilani, at the beginning of the novel, claims “I can feel the warmth of their akua—the Hawaiian gods and family guardians. When I’m hiking in the high forest with Dad, Kāne, the creator, is in the ohia trees, watching me” (Aslan 20). The gods are at first distant, surveilling her and seeing if she is worthy enough to be a heroine. Leilani’s explicit connection to the land and to its accompanying gods strengthens throughout the course of her odyssey. When disaster strikes on vacation in O’ahu, Leilani and her father have to navigate their way back to the Big

Island, encountering racist tourists and spiritual cults and government-sponsored internment camps. By the end of the novel, tired, bruised, and utterly changed, she reflects: “*I belong. We’re all in the same boat now. We belong here. We belong to each other. This is my home, and no one can ever take that from me. Pele fought her sisters here. She won her right to remain on the Big Island. Dad and I fought our way home, and we won our place here, too*” (Aslan 340). In setting up a direct parallel between herself and her white father to Pele, Leilani closes that original distance between herself and the gods and assumes the mantle of being a thread in the (*Kānaka*) universe’s cloth, emphasizing the collective aspect of belonging and therefore of her right to a place to call home (“We’re all in the same boat... We belong... We belong”). They welcome her into their genealogy because she fights to return “home”—but is “home” what one fights to claim? The colonizer mentality *also* emphasizes winning “a right to remain” and a “place here, too” as a justification for settlement. Leilani qualifies her newfound comfort in Hilo based on her willingness to resort to violence in her journey and the idea that the gods chose her to be a heroine, but never really does anything to actively belong to her home, such as immersing herself in her community or learning and developing a personal relationship to Native Hawaiian beliefs. Opportunities all come to her through dreams or prophecies spoken by *Kānaka* commune leaders...she’s just along for the ride. At the end of the day, she and her father are physically alone for their journey home yet somehow become Indigenous, a part of the Native Hawaiian legend by the end of the novel.

As for *The Descendants*, Matt’s transformation from whitewashed missionary descendant to Real Native Hawaiian is underwhelming and overdramatized. Ultimately he does not arrive at one definitive racial identity by the end of the novel—which is fine, because he’s *hapa* and theoretically shouldn’t have to—but rather arrives at an identity constructed around his

immediate family. However, his justification of how and why he chooses to do so are merely another iteration of his guilty conscience, and King ends up reifying the binaristic distinctions between him and the Other, between whitewashed *hapas* and Native Hawaiians. He fails to holistically understand the complexities of being a culturally hybrid person—or, at the very least, what it means to be part Indigenous Hawaiian. Upon inheriting a valuable (in the capitalist sense) plot of Hawaiian land and deciding whether or not to preserve it or sell it to corporations to build hotels and golf courses and supermarkets and the like, Matt reflects:

Even though we don't look Hawaiian, even though our constant recombining has erased the evidence of our ethnicity, sharpening our flat faces, straightening our kinky hair, even though we act like *haoles*, going to private schools and clubs and not having a good command of pidgin English, my girls and I are Hawaiian, and this land is ours. I find myself not wanting to give it up—the land, the lush relic of our tribe, the dead... (Hemmings 79)

While he understands that “look[ing] Hawaiian” does not a Hawaiian-at-heart make, King constructs an impermeable distinction between *haoles* and *Kānaka*, with only a blasé recognition of the muddy in-between that constitutes *hapa*-ness. *Haoles* are Aryan, go to private schools, country clubs, and cannot speak pidgin; *Kānaka* have flat faces, kinky hair, speak pidgin, and are barred from these exclusive status symbols. The two are seemingly mutually exclusive, despite the high percentage of mixed-race individuals (King and his daughters included) in Hawai'i—but to King, their hybridity is a mere byproduct of “[their] constant recombining,” as though the lineage of his family boils down to different pairings of chromosomes. (I mean, if you're looking at it literally, which King is apt to do, sure). He neglects the intertwined social, racial, and colonial processes that accompany and form identity, instead once again attributing his multiculturalism to randomness and luck. King's sentimental desire to recapture a (highly re)constructed Indigenous past via “the land, the lush relic of our tribe” is embarrassingly

pastoralized: land still exists, is still significant to Native Hawaiian culture, and is *definitely* not as highly valued and protected as other religious “relic[s].” Later in the novel, King waxes poetic about a taro plantation he views from the window of a plane: “I imagine the valley doesn’t look much different than it did a hundred years ago. The ocean beyond is dark blue...the stretch of beach unfolds before us...I have this urge to make sure they’re seeing what will no longer be in our name” (Hemmings 160). King subscribes to an idealized, romanticized Indigenous past common in *haole* understandings of Indigeneity (the disappearing Native trope, the nostalgia for pristine, untouched nature, etc.). By collapsing the past with the present, he promotes the idea that the Native Hawaiian way of life has remained static, untouched by settler colonialism’s atrocities. But that’s not all—what catalyzes King’s nostalgic internal reflections is not the travesty of colonialism but rather the idea of selling land and the changing of privatized property. The land “will no longer be in [their] name,” the King family will no longer be able to claim ownership of land. Although he ultimately decides not to sell the land to the highest bidder, his conceptualization of land still remains exclusively figured through a capitalist, colonial concept of ownership. By the close of *The Descendants*, King learns to selectively accept the Hawaiian part of himself and embrace the idea of pristine, untouched land to leave to his daughters, his own descendants, without having to acknowledge the brutalities brought about by the white side of his family, which he explicitly states has “erased the evidence of [their] ethnicity” (Hemmings 79).

Both authors ultimately attempt to rectify the central qualm of *hapa* identity—who are you if you’re a mix?—by reestablishing their protagonists’ respect for and connection to the land, their physical home and environment. After all, according to Kana’iaupuni and Malone, “The interconnections of place and [Native Hawaiian] people were influenced by traditional



practices of collective ownership, where, unlike Western land tenure systems, rights to land/sea access were negotiated by generation and family lineage” (290). Leilani Milton and her father conquer the land and *earn* their place there. While Matt King negotiates the terms of his land ownership via “generation and family lineage,” he still espouses capitalist notions of work and privatization that are antithetical to the age-old Hawaiian notion of collective ownership. Both characters end up satisfied, at home with themselves and in their environments, but again, at what cost? The “interconnections of place and people” go farther than one’s immediate family and require more than appreciation or recognition of the land. These interconnections require the acknowledgment of the rich history of Native Hawaiian culture, stories, and ontologies; the acknowledgment that to this day Native Hawaiians remain deracinated, that Native Hawaiian children suffer from disproportionate rates of poverty, substance abuse, a lack of education, and juvenile deviance (Kana’iaupuni and Malone 297). Again, to quote Kana’iaupuni and Malone, “From a sense of place grows a sense of *kuleana* (responsibility)” (298). *Kuleana*, a uniquely Hawaiian value and practice, suggests a mutually beneficial relationship that, in this context, requires an understanding of the ways in which the land shapes us, and vice versa. Actualizing one’s *kuleana* to the land necessitates actively turning from internal, individualized reflection to external, collective reflection, and the active sustenance and expansion of place-based epistemologies.

### *Kānaka Maoli and “now-time”*

Recognizing *kuleana* is at the center of works of fiction such as Lurline Wailana McGregor’s *Between the Deep Blue Sea and Me* and Gary Pak’s “Language of the Geckos,” both of which experiment with narrative temporalities for their protagonists to understand and to realize their *kuleana*. Indeed, another iteration of *hapa* un/belonging and liminality manifests

itself in narrative temporalities, and neither work is wholly set in the 21<sup>st</sup> century nor in ancient Hawaiian times. *Between the Deep Blue Sea and Me* and “Language of the Geckos” blur spatiotemporalities to challenge Hawai’i’s neocolonial present and the assumption that Indigeneity is rooted in the past. These authors’ interplay between Native Hawaiian mythology and current American realities place them in what Māori author Patricia Grace calls a “now-time,” or a “spiral temporality that moves back and forth between the past and the present in order to consider both the traditional culture and the contemporary moment” (Hogue 27). Both texts are marked by disruptions: to temporality, to culture, to the environment, and to dominant American culture. Moreover, McGregor’s *Moana* and Pak’s *Gabriel* both challenge their present circumstances by engaging with their *Kānaka Maoli* pasts, ultimately learning to closely identify with their Native Hawaiian heritage despite a long history of (Asian)American settler colonialism. Paradoxically, both protagonists end up situating themselves in the present by returning to the past.

Elizabeth DeLoughrey, in her article “The Spiral Temporality of Patricia Grace’s *Potiki*,” criticizes mainstream (Western) fiction’s inability to “reconcile indigenous notions of sacred, spiral time...within an abstracted, Western linear framework” (59). To reiterate, Indigeneity is frequently represented as rooted in the past or in the process of dying out, which erases or at least devalues contemporary Indigenous presences. The seemingly impermeable barrier between “genealogically ‘sacred’ time” and “abstracted, ‘political’ historiography” thus leads to a strict distinction in literary genres (DeLoughrey 59). However, according to DeLoughrey, works such as Grace’s *Potiki* challenge rather than reify this distinction made by “critics who find reclamations of the past atavistic” (79). By drawing together the past and the present, authors such as Grace, McGregor, and Pak all suggest that there is *no separation between past and*

*present*, drawing from Native Hawaiian ontologies to not fetishize “sacred time” but rather to underscore the idea that the past, present, and future are all intertwined—and that “now-time” has very real political, cultural, and social impacts and responsibilities.

Within Native Hawaiian culture, the concept of “now-time” offers a way for characters to refamiliarize and reterritorialize their Hawaiian identities via connection to the land—something very different from settling on stolen land, but with the same goal of “homing.” In McGregor’s *Between the Deep Blue Sea and Me*, protagonist Moana shifts back and forth through the present and past via dreams and spoken-word stories, a spiral temporality that revolves around her land and native culture. Despite finding success on the mainland and years of disconnection from her family and Hawaiian traditions, the untimely death of her father and Hawai’i’s gravitational pull lead her to question her motivations for escaping Hawai’i. Upon her arrival, her uncle Buddy explains the changed way of life for many *Kānaka Maoli* by pointing to the fact that “Everything’s good for us when it’s in the name of jobs and the economy... The outsiders will simply leave when there is nothing left to take” (95). That is, “when there is nothing left to take” settlers pick up and take from another location and leave plundered land and people in the past. Buddy emphasizes the “opt-out” ideologies of settlers of Hawai’i, who remain unconnected to the land, to the past, and ignorant of Native Hawaiian origin stories. He continues: “The cultural practices of your ancestors assured that food would always be plentiful, that the sea, in its bounty, would provide for everyone. This was our peoples’ way of life for centuries... Today, outsiders with different values control our islands” (95). Hawaiian tradition is oriented towards the future; after all, ensuring plentiful bounty for generations to come is at the core of Hawaiian culture. Buddy distinguishes between the then (“*was* our peoples’ way of life”) versus the now (“today...”), inadvertently discarding the presence of Native Hawaiian culture and the

possibilities of “now-time.” However, his niece is unconvinced. After facing a series of (literally) earthshattering moments that force Moana into the role of a heroine, she reflects: “This isn’t the first time there have been unexplainable quakes associated with the theft and violation of cultural property...Have you ever thought that maybe the earth, our ancestors, are protesting all the greed and corruption going on in Hawai‘i?” (111). She emphasizes the circularity of time (“This isn’t the first time”) and directly connects it to her Native Hawaiian ancestors “protesting,” perhaps in order to emphasize their lasting responsibilities to “[assure] that food would always be plentiful...[and] would provide for everyone” among future generations. Ultimately, Moana overcomes the physical and metaphorical distance between herself and her family *by* overcoming the distance between then and now, reterritorializing herself and her place on the islands as the past bleeds into her present.

In “The Language of the Geckos,” author Gary Pak highlights a similar disruption of Native Hawaiian culture through a (super)natural disruption that collapses temporalities. After the mo'o (spirits and ancestors in the form of geckos) who inhabit Gabriel Ho'okano's house become restless after sensing a rainstorm, the Biblical-proportion storm hits his house for five days and five nights. The water floods the land around his family's house, where he lives alone after the death of his activist brother Jacob, and cuts him off from the nearby town. “Strange things,” “vintage” objects, and old *‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i* newspapers from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries begin to surface in the waters, literally bringing to the surface the history of American economic and military expansion into the Pacific, such as newspaper clippings highlighting the sinking of the U.S.S. Indianapolis at the end of World War II (26-27). Teresa Shewry points to the fact that “nineteenth-century Hawaiian language newspapers and other archival materials make visible anticolonial struggles, including nationalist struggles” that “have been absent from

most historical writing on Hawai'i. The dreams and perspectives in these archives have politically energized contemporary Hawaiians, who are reconnecting the past to the present" (636). While Shewry does not explicitly mention "now-time," her writings on "reconnecting the past to the present" and exploration of in/visibility within the context of anticolonial and nationalist struggles, once again both past and present, suggest that the rainstorm not only pauses Gabriel's life but also draws it back into the past in order to restore his latent "Hawaiianess" or *Kānaka* solidarity.

The rainwater also symbolizes a sort of "now-time," (re)building histories and socialities while also implying "certain permanences," buckling the past, the present, and the future (Shewry 628). Water remains unchanged, but water remains—and water *retains* the ability to change, to erode, to reshape. Within the historical and colonial context of Hawai'i, water has been appropriated and diverted from Native Hawaiian homes to support the capitalist economy of plantation agriculture for centuries. By 1923, in fact, water from almost every stream in Hawai'i was being channeled to sugar plantations, thus destroying traditional Hawaiian fishing and agricultural environments (Maclennan 498). Today, fights over water rights occur for every new commercial and residential project in Hawai'i, almost always to the detriment of Native Hawaiians, who are unable to support their ecosystems and communities without water. But Pak, in "Language of the Geckos," shows how water disrupts time and space, "leaking across borders, finding its way through rifts in the present, gesturing towards alternative possibilities for existence" (Shewry 628). Indeed, as time goes by, Gabriel finds himself eating less and less, consuming less, unable to drive anywhere. The rainstorm diverts his "modern" way of living, one marked by development, technology, and capitalist modes of production, to one that more closely resembles self-sufficient Native Hawaiian practices.

In both *Between the Deep Blue Sea and Me* and “Language of the Geckos,” natural disasters place Moana and Gabriel in temporally blurred situations where they reckon—and ultimately reconnect—with their Hawaiian roots. The rupture in time that Gabriel experiences catalyzes his regret for not respecting and supporting his brother Jacob’s fight to sustain Hawaiian lifeways and sovereignty, and at the end of the short story he acknowledges the potential of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. At the beginning of the story he merely remarks that “Dis funny kine weather making everybody funny kine, everybody jumpy,” suggesting that everyone’s “funn[iness]” and “jump[iness]” is a result of a mere impermanent bout of “funny kine weather” (24). However, by the end of the story he understands that he could be “making all dis rain instead of suffering from it” (27). Gabriel could be boisterous, disruptive, even *inconvenient* in his activism to bring Native Hawaiian issues to the forefront of Hawaiian politics instead of assimilating to (and “suffering from”) dominant white/East Asian culture. Moana, at first uncomfortable with her place in her family and her status as pedigreed, PhD’d Los Angeles transplant, ends up staying in Hawai’i, losing her cushy job, and immersing herself in *Kānaka Maoli* culture. These Native Hawaiian characters come to identify with their heritage despite their Americanization via connection to the past and to the land (which are inherently intertwined, as *‘āina* is the genealogical ancestor of all beings). They resituate themselves in the present, and in doing so promote the contemporary Hawaiian sovereignty movement taking place through the decolonization of their minds and the revitalization of their culture. Perhaps it is not so much land as the Hawaiian value of *kuleana* that ends up rehoming Moana and Gabriel, and their reckonings with their past (in)actions ultimately lead to a sense of belonging and fulfillment by the end of each work.

“The Shatter the Wave Throws Over”:

*Sharks in the Time of Saviors* and Homecoming

In the works that I have examined thus far, authors have rendered nature formless, abstracted: not in the sense that it is omnipresent and nourishes everything on Earth, but rather that authors have tried and failed to tackle the too-big concept of “nature” without a heuristic grasp on the Native Hawaiian lore that they rely on in their works. On a textual level, nature becomes a malleable tool for homesteading in the hands of (often clueless) protagonists. In *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, Lovey manufactures familiarity with landmarks around her home, which is devoid of any Native Hawaiians, and thus redefines the landscape to be her own; in *The Islands at the End of the World*, Leilani harnesses and conquers nature in order to prove her ability to belong as a *hapa* teen; in *The Descendants*, Matt absolves his guilt over inheriting a large plot of (potentially lucrative) land by not selling it, and it’s unclear what he does with it after he washes his hands of any sort of culpability.

In the last section of Chapter 3, I pivoted to exploring *Kānaka Maoli* relation to “now-time” and *kuleana*, which, in tandem with a holistic view of nature rooted in Native Hawaiian beliefs and a little dash of speculative fiction, offer an opportunity to do away with the tired tropes of the Disappearing Indian and the Pristine Landscape of the past. Authors’ attempts to reclaim or reappropriate these tropes are frequently played out through the use of what Patricia Grace labels “now-time,” which is essentially an extension of what *He Kumulipo* promotes. The collapse of the past, present, and future allows characters to draw from the past, to embody it, to imagine alternative futures for themselves and their families, which occurs in Gary Pak’s “Language of the Geckos” or Lurline Wailana McGregor’s *Between the Deep Blue Sea and Me*.

“Now-time” allows for an objective look at pre-contact and post-contact Hawai’i that avoids the assimilation of one into the other. In the murky space between then and now, characters are able to recognize their individual *kuleana* to the land and can then situate it within the longer context of intergenerational interconnectivity that aims to ensure bountiful resources for future generations. In response to critics who view “a corporeal (genealogical) relationship to the past” as unattainable and atavistic, Elizabeth DeLoughrey writes that failures to capture or understand the idea of “now-time” stems from a failure to alternatively “imagine our present/future communities in our linear trajectory towards national fulfillment” (64). She sentences those same critics to a failure of imagination and a static view of time as linearly reaching for the ultimate goal of “national fulfillment.”

“It takes imagination and courage to picture what would happen to the West...if its temporal fortress were suddenly invaded by the Time of its Other,” writes Johannes Fabian (35). Fabian retaliates against binaristic oppositions such as Here/There and Now/Then, which he argues excuses and even lengthens the distance between the observer and the observed, the colonizer and the colonized, the West and the Rest. Perhaps the novel that best encompasses “now-time,” or the “Time of [the] Other,” is Kawai Strong Washburn’s *Sharks in the Time of Saviors*. Perhaps the *Time of Saviors* is synonymous with the “Time of [the] Other”; perhaps we need to view the Other not as the subaltern but as the redeemer.

Washburn’s debut novel deals not with “the Hawaii of resorts and honeymoons” but rather with the gritty quotidian struggles of a working-class Hawaiian family, depicting Hawai’i in its entirety as “a place of proud ancestors and gods and spirits, but also of crumbling families and hopelessness and poverty,” writes fellow speculative fiction author Imbolo Mbue in a review for *The New York Times* (n.p). Despite these systemic challenges, the family is able to find love



and beauty and joy and closeness to each other. Augie and Malia Flores and their children—sons Dean and Nainoa and daughter Kauī—find their lives forever changed when Noa falls overboard a ship at age seven and is rescued by a shiver of sharks. He later goes on to develop healing powers, explained by his mother as a gift from the gods. Noa becomes a local hero, and with the money he earns and saves from donation checks and free food and clothing, Augie and Malia send all three children to the mainland for college. In contrast to the works I examined previously, the majority of the novel takes place *not* in Hawai'i: Noa, Dean, and Kauī all heading off to Portland, Spokane, and San Diego, respectively. On the mainland, the siblings struggle with “the Hawaii within them and the America around them. Their dreams fail. They wrestle with sexuality, with belonging, with whether to go forward, deeper into America, or backward, home” to Hawai'i (Mbue n.p). Eventually, all reunite in Hawai'i after tragedy strikes. While they “fail” on the mainland, the Flores family finds fulfillment back on the Islands, and Washburn closes the gap between belonging and unbelonging by paradoxically increasing it, in doing so discarding essentialist claims of Hawaiian authenticity.<sup>12</sup> The siblings live their respective lives, trying to make it abroad but still maintaining their roots in Hawai'i, underscoring the idea that belonging is not dictated by the land on which you stand but rather an innate connection and belief in a construct of home.

Washburn uses no heavy-handed language to romanticize the land or hail Hawaiian gods, yet his writing is still romantic and ethereally effortless. Nor are gods absent. However, instead of glorifying these gods, Washburn interweaves their presence throughout the novel so smoothly that, often, godliness blends into (super)natural events, which blend into colonial histories, which

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<sup>12</sup> In “Where Exactly is the Pacific?” Rona Halualani highlights the challenges that diasporic Hawaiians face on the mainland in terms of navigating their dynamic identities so “that a connection with the ‘aina of Hawai'i can be maintained and a claim of indigeneity can be preserved” (5). Halualani argues that “[*Kānaka*] diasporic groups must reconstitute their understandings of cultural tradition, authenticity, and identity in line with their diasporic contexts and experiences,” in doing so reframing conceptions about Hawaiinness being insular and place-based (18).

blend into quotidian occurrences, thus once again recalling *He Kumulipo* and the metaphysical link between everything on Earth. Malia laments capitalism's encroachment: in the past, her ancestors "had no use for paper printed with the silhouette of some faraway haole man... What was needed was food from the earth, housing from the earth, medicine from the earth, a sense of one's place in the system," but upon contact with white people, "ships from far ports carried a new god in their bellies... and money was the name of that god" (170). Gods, here, are not benevolent and omniscient and worship-worthy. Instead of cheapening their presence by including (literal) deus ex machina interventions (as seen in *Between the Deep Blue Sea and Me*, *The Islands at the End of the World*, and a novel by Tom Peek called *Daughters of Fire*), Washburn highlights the fact that the god of money ushered in an era of exploitation and expropriation, worsening inequalities and diverting attention from the simple necessities touted by traditional Hawaiian culture.

Land is not wielded as a tool in this novel, but rather as an omnipresence that is inseparable from the Flores family. Rather than functioning as a separate entity that "teaches" characters how to live, how to be Hawaiian, how to experience and spread *kuleana*, etc., as seen in the previous works, nature in *Sharks in the Time of Saviors* is unexceptional, notable only for the different components of the world that it nourishes and that nourish it. Nainoa, on his journey through the jungle to find answers about his powers and origins, has a moment of clarity:

I don't see inside anything, but rather outside myself: Waipi'o Valley, its rivers, the lo'i paddies of kalo stalks growing plump and green, swarming the valley bottom, and there my family is among it all, with many families... The figures of our bodies become shadows and warp and diminish into the paddies, the river, the bay, as if we are made of the same water, beating into the current with the same motion the sharks are making now, everything blending into the other, it all flows into me and I flow into it. (Washburn 178)

Mirroring *He Kumulipo* once again, Nainoa loses his individuality and becomes part of *everything*. “Our bodies” blend together, becoming the “paddies, the river, the bay...everything blending into the other” in fluid motions that parallel (or are?) the motions of water. Rather than echoing the nostalgic and pastoralist description of the lo'i paddies that Hemmings offers in *The Descendants*, Washburn's rich descriptions are extra-spatiotemporal. Noa narrates in the present tense, but the descriptions of bodies moving, warping, diminishing occur seemingly in a different plane of existence, a non/place, and Washburn avoids any sort of indication that suggests a return to the past. The success of this passage comes not only through Washburn's writing, I think, but also through his subtle anticolonial disavowal of American individualist and capitalist narratives of success. Everyone and everything is “made of the same water,” no hierarchy exists between different forms of life, including people. In stark contrast to *The Descendants* and *The Islands at the End of the World*, Noa homes and finds himself not through distinguishing himself as exceptional, but rather through realizing that he is wholly *unexceptional*.

Noa is not the protagonist, really, but one of five narrators of the novel—unexceptional except for the powers he's been randomly bestowed. And despite having powers, he's not invincible: it is on this same journey that he is never seen again. Heroes and heroines are viewed as immortal, and rarely does a hero die halfway through the novel. Noa will not go on to change the world, perishing in the same spot where he was conceived. Cleverly, Washburn crafts a novel that undermines dominant Western fictional narratives and promotes Hawaiian cultural values not only in content but also in form. His chapters rotate through the points of view of each member of the Flores family, and by making his “hero” share equal screen time (page time?) with other characters, Washburn turns each character *literally* a part of a whole (in this case, a book).

This shock devastates the Flores family, and Augie suffers from a mental break and is rendered mute for the rest of the novel. However, his brain is active, and his narration unperturbed. Reflecting on his family's tragedies and successes and failures, and in a monologue that (almost) parallels his son's, Augie recognizes:

I am the man named Augie and I am the blood that pumps inside  
and I am the sand that was blown to life with the breath of all our  
gods and I am the wet mud of the valley and I am the green that  
grows from within it. I am the shore, the drift of the world  
underwater and I am the shatter the wave throws over. (Washburn  
373)

While Augie's monologue does read similarly to his son's earlier musings, the similarities are due to more than a sort of father-son psychic connection. If the two men understand and know and embody Native Hawaiian epistemologies and myths, it makes sense that they would understand life through a similar lens. Both men experience moments of de- and then re-familiarization with themselves and the interrelation of all things. Both men lose track of time and space. Both men are the verdant valley and the white-combed waves breaking on the shore, both men are everything, everyone, and everywhere. However, Augie's narrative differs in its significance. Able to home himself within himself—and within all of things he is simultaneously—Augie reclaims his body and “heals” himself, much as Noa healed others. Indeed, after Augie realizes this, he begins to speak again. Words come tumbling out to his family, just as the words of his narration tumble onto the page: two rambling, excited sentences marked by Washburn's use of polysyndeton. While Noa territorializes himself by recognizing his lack of exceptionality, Augie *re*-territorializes himself by affirming his existence. “I am...I am...I am.” The repetition is an affirmation that Augie is “the man named Augie” and that he is alive, and he is “the blood that pumps inside”—he, too, contains multitudes. The characters in *Sharks in the Time of Saviors* do not seek out nature to provide comfort or clarity, nor do they

“use” land as a tool on their quest to security; nature comes to them. Or rather, nature is a part of them, and they are a part of nature. Washburn suggests a faint distinction between being *in* nature (which, I would argue, aligns with all of the characters in the works examined throughout my thesis) and being *of* nature (a lens which only the Flores family seems to understand). I would like to think that this differentiation reflects the space between sitting in a field, admiring nature’s sublime, and believing that the grass and the trees and the flowers will softly whisper to you the answers to life’s big questions, and just sitting in a field to sit in a field because it feels good and who knows what will happen.

And indeed, this wide-open field of possibilities located at the collapse of the past and the present is a site of (re)generation. At the end of *Sharks in the Time of Saviors*, Kauai drops out of college and finds work on a farm. While the manual labor is grueling, she uses her training as an engineer to develop a “new ahupua’a: the old system resurrected” (Washburn 362). In her own iteration of “now-time,” Kauai brings ancient Hawaiian technology—from “when the island was ali’i split in stripes top to bottom and everything produced was given to everything else,” from when communal living was the norm from the mountains to the sea—into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (362). Of course, Kauai smirks, the only difference is that “...me and Hoku have enclosed the whole thing in a smaller space, plus incorporated photovoltaics plus water reclamation” (362). Kauai, head on her shoulders, dreams of *more*: “I’m not looking to lose myself. I’m looking to expand what I’ve made...It’s going to change what these islands are, I swear” (362). Echoing her father and her brother, she doesn’t “lose [her]self” in the dredges of history, but rather finds herself there, and brings her knowledge to the present to make a tangible difference. Boldly facing her own past, refusing to look past her and her family’s traumas, and tapping into the collective traumas of generations of ancestors, Kauai moves forward. (Re)learning, (re)creating,

(re)generating. To return to Imbolo Mbue: “Since the day humans began telling stories, we’ve strung countless narratives on our attempts to escape the past and find peace with the present. It is our collective cargo [...] Places — our connections to them, our disconnections from them — break us and remake us.”

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