DIALOGUING ACROSS THE PACIFIC: *KŪKĀKŪKĀ* AND THE CULTIVATION OF *WAHINE MAOLI* IDENTITIES

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Hilihewa ka manaʻo keʻole ke kūkākūkā. As thoughts can become miswoven when there is no discussion, so it is with our identities as *Wahine Maoli*, Native Hawaiian women, and the ensuing choices we make about how to live in this world. Other recent collaborative articles by *Kānaka Maoli* have used *kūkākūkā* to refer to face-to-face "talk-story" sessions. This kūkākūkā is different, as one of us is living in Hawaiʻi and the other in California. We used e-mail and telephone conversations to enable kūkākūkā spanning distances of time and space. As we communicate across generations and across our ocean home, we explore what it means for us to be Wahine Maoli in our respective positions as *ʻohana*, activists, and academics. Through kūkākūkā, we weave the sails of our beings together in a generational continuum of family stories. The letters that follow are selections from this ongoing process.

Dear Mom,

Huge waves have been pounding the Santa Cruz coast for the last couple of days. A big swell came out of the west on Friday and hasn't let up since. We continue to make our daily trips to the ocean, but we have to settle for being spectators since the water is way too cold to even think about jumping in. I miss being able to watch Hina crawl around bare-bottomed in the sand like when we were home for Christmas break. I miss being surrounded by family, drama and conflict included. Now it's back to business as usual with school and dealing with the cold weather. Having the Pacific Ocean right

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down the hill from us is our major source of comfort and connection to home, even if it is only on the cold fringes of the Pacific "rim."

This afternoon, I took Hina for a leisurely walk along West Cliff Drive. We watched the waves crash on the outside. It wasn't a clear day but not too foggy either. High clouds blanketed the sky so that you couldn't really see any blue, and the light of the sun was diffused so that everything seemed to have a silvery wash of color over it. Hina and I lingered at a point along the cliffs. I tried to get her to notice the waves at their breaking point, saying "*NALU*" to her excitedly. She humored me for a while but kept getting distracted by the birds flying overhead. I was explaining to her how the waves that we were watching were kind of like her name, Kaiakahinali'i, the ocean waters that cause chiefs to tumble down. At nine months old, she may not have comprehended my story completely, but I knew that she could feel the power of the ocean.

As we stood there together, mother and daughter, I flashed back on the moment I first felt we connected while she was in the womb. It was the day before Nā Wahine o Ke Kai 1999 … my second crossing of Ka'iwi channel from Moloka'i Island to O'ahu. Our canoe paddling crew was staying at the Kaluakoi Hotel on the west end of Moloka'i. Most of the women were resting up for the race the next day. On that still afternoon, I couldn't sleep and needed to be alone. I hadn't told any of my crew that I was four months pregnant, for fear that I wouldn't be allowed to race. Besides feeling isolated by my secret, I wanted to connect with that *'āina*, that island, and with all the sources of *mana* that I would have to draw upon in making this crossing. I walked along the south side of Kepuhi Beach, which is capped by a large rock outcropping. I climbed about five minutes up to the top of the rocks, overlooking the beach and the channel. Walking across the rock toward the water, I looked out over the horizon. I prayed and meditated, speaking in hushed tones to my baby … letting her know that we would be making this journey across the ocean together.

In a moment when my mind was clear and silent, the word *kilo* came to me. I took it as an indication that the *'ano* of my baby was going to be that of a kilo—a keen observer, a seer, a stargazer, one who sees what others may not. In my understanding of the Hawaiian language, a word added after kilo would elaborate upon what someone might be specifically trained in observing. A *kilolani* would watch the movements of the sky, perhaps making predictions. A *kilo makani* would observe the winds in navigating a canoe. A *kilo aupuni* would be a political expert. A *kilo i'a* might observe fish movements from high places and direct fishermen below. In any case, I knew that this baby would be a child of the ocean. A traveler, a voyager.

A few months later, I found the name "Kaiakahinali'i" as I was researching Hawaiian oral traditions and mythologies. The name stayed with me, making

its way into my consciousness even when I moved on to reading and thinking about other things. Literally translated, "the ocean waters that cause chiefs to fall down," it is associated with the traditions of Pele and her family voyaging from Kahiki to the islands we call Hawai'i. A flood, a powerful wave, not necessarily destructive, but cleansing. A sign of one who can bring change and create the space for new growth. Making way for a change in the established order, changes that are much needed on our *one hānau*. Decolonizing our *'āina*, our minds, our spirits. As we continue directing our energies toward such changes, we also want to nurture our child to extend that work in ways that we may not yet have imagined. Kaiakahinali'i—a name of hope and promise.

This name remained in our hearts for several months. We continued to research, pray, and observe, waiting for *hō'ailona*. As the birth drew closer, I held in my secret wish for a girl, to whom I wanted to give the name Kaiakahinali'i. I wanted a girl child who would never forget her power as a *Wahine Maoli*. Two weeks before Hina was born, I found out that the name of the rock I had stood on before making the Moloka'i to O'ahu crossing was called "Kaiaka." It was a final affirmation that the baby's name should be Kaiakahinali'i.

The first time I crossed the Ka'iwi channel, paddling together with nine other strong and dedicated women, I drew upon the memory of my Popo; your mom, my Chinese grandmother who taught me so much about a love and a stillness that continually informs who I am as a Hawaiian woman. Anytime I felt weak or out of focus, I would try to feel the power of her presence surrounding me. The second time I crossed the channel, I called upon the power of the relationship between me and my unborn child, who had just begun to cause a slight bulge in my abdomen.

You and I have talked about how to cultivate the relationships between the generations of our family's women, even those who aren't physically with us anymore. Today as I stood on the cliffs with Hina, feeling quite sad to be on the other side of the Pacific from my home in Hawai'i, I wondered how I might draw on those relationships to get through another quarter of graduate school. How will I make time to spend with my daughter? How will I be able to talk regularly with my sister as she faces the struggles of adolescence? How will I work through the doubts about whether my work at the university will serve communities of *Kānaka Maoli*? How do I make the familial, the academic and the activist aspects of my life work together? I'm hoping that with so many years of experience in balancing these things, you might talk me through this. I miss you and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Me ke aloha pumehana,

Noe

Dearest Noe,

Yes, I've been feeling sad, too—missing you and feeling your pain at being far away from home. Through the power of your words, I hear the waves pounding against the coast of Santa Cruz. Through your eyes, I look out onto the Pacific Ocean and strain to see beyond the horizon. It is there at the edge of the California Coast that Hawai'i can most be felt. From that vantage point, Hawai'i seems close, although not nearly close enough, and the spiritual pain that comes of separation from the source of our nurturance seems almost unbearable at times. It is when looking out upon the ocean that our sensory memories are activated, and one must work to dull the ache for our home in Hawai'i. I am with you, Beloved Daughter, and feel blessed by my connection with such a strong and loving Wahine Maoli. You give to your daughter what I was less able to give to you—an intimate knowledge of the rising and crashing *nalu* and a native pathway that will guide her to the fullness of Kaiakahinali'i (the ocean waters that cause change and create a pathway for growth). Even more remarkably, you do this all from outside Hawai'i.

Listening to the waves always relieves my mind of the daily stresses and has been a pathway for me to connect with our family stories. We have often spoken of Taipo, your maternal great-grandmother, Yuk Ngan. She was a woman born with a fire that could not be extinguished, and tonight I remind you of the story that we both heard as we were growing up: the story of a little girl who was born in the Kingdom of Hawai'i and spent her earliest years on the sugar plantations of the Hamakua Coast. The little girl was bright and wanted to learn about the world beyond the plantation. Yuk Ngan was six years old and in the first grade when her teacher praised her motivation and aptitude.

The parents of Yuk Ngan were immigrants who came to the Land of the Fragrant Hills seeking respite from the grinding poverty of south China. They were contract laborers, sojourners who hoped for a speedy return to the homelands of Kwantung. But the work on the sugar plantations gave them an income that was below subsistence levels. Yuk Ngan was seven years old when her parents determined that they could no longer afford the luxury of schooling. They reasoned that a female child had no need of book learning. After all, what other future was there for a poor Chinese girl except to marry and raise a family?

So, Yuk Ngan's youthful vigor was channeled into caring for younger siblings, in gathering bottles to wash and sell, in laundering the clothes of others. Many years later, your Taipo would recall that she had cried herself to sleep as a child and had prayed that her desire for learning about the world would not be extinguished by the harsh, tedious life of the plantation. With time,

Yuk Ngan found ways to satisfy her desire for learning, and much later, as a mother, she would speak of her sense of deferred gratification. Her children, both male and female, would have all the education they desired. In addition to their formal education, Yuk Ngan taught the children about life. She mentored her children through stories painted against the backdrop of social inequality. Through her love and simple, yet poignant, eloquence she passed on a legacy of engagement with the world.

This is the vision Yuk Ngan nurtured in her children. For me, it is a vision of passion, of a flame that never went out. Tonight I leave you with the fire of your Taipo. May it warm you across these many miles and fan the passion in your *naʻau*, darling Daughter.
Me ke aloha pauʻole,
Mom

Dear Mom,

I remember these stories of my Taipo that you have told me many times. They give me comfort, guidance and inspiration. When I am at home in Hawaiʻi, I often sit at the graves of Taipo, Yuk Ngan, and my Popo, Dorothea Sui Kum, mulling over current struggles, sharing with them new events in my life, thanking them for enabling me to be who I am. After my graduation from University of Hawaiʻi, I took all of the *lei* I received and placed them upon the graves of these two women ancestors. I wanted to honor the fact that the completion of my BA was not just a personal accomplishment; it wouldn't have happened without them. Whenever I surf my favorite spot on the south shore of Oʻahu, I look up toward Pūowaina, where Popo is buried, and know she is with me.

It wasn't coincidental that the first paper I wrote in grad school was about Taipo, about the certificate of identity that she was issued after the United States forcefully annexed Hawaiʻi. The certificate marked her Chineseness, making her seem absolutely alien to Hawaiʻi. Yet I remembered your stories about how she walked the shores of Hilo Bay as a child and Popo's stories of how she often heard her mother, Yuk Ngan, speaking Hawaiian with her Native Hawaiian neighbors. Yuk Ngan was not a Wahine Maoli, not Native Hawaiian, but she did have a certain connection to the lands and people of Oʻahu and Hawaiʻi Islands that were communicated to me by those stories about her. I wanted to understand how our family stories became resources for developing a resistant and radical consciousness for the women in our family.

Writing about Taipo gave me comfort. The culture of graduate school at the University of California, Santa Cruz, felt foreign to me. I felt like everything I knew and valued had been erased, in part because I didn't understand the language of this academic site. In my seminars, people threw around

names of theorists as though everyone should already know them. Writing about Yuk Ngan's certificate of identity brought me back to my own genealogy. It reminded me that the theorists of my academic genealogy include the women of our family who formulated their ideas through love and daily struggle.

Just when I was feeling empowered by what I had written, a white female professor challenged my essay. "This sounds like a celebratory assimilationist narrative. The deferred dream of the poor mother who sacrifices her own needs to help her family and then works to give her children the Western education she didn't have. The children then go on to become successful participants in American society. How is your story any different?" she asked. I was profoundly challenged by her question. Inside, I felt these stories about Taipo had led me to a radical consciousness—a feminist, antiracist, anticolonial consciousness, and most centrally, a commitment to Kanaka Maoli liberation. But I couldn't articulate how these stories of my Chinese great-grandmother connected with my own Native Hawaiian identity and my commitment to Hawaiian sovereignty. I'm still struggling with how to talk about local (in this case, Chinese) attachment to the land, without eliding indigenous Hawaiian land claims. How do I reconcile these two connected, but different, heritages within myself? I've been bugging over all of these things since I read your last email.

Our experiences with schooling, with the formal educations that Taipo felt was so important for us to have, seem quite relevant to these questions. In school, I had to learn to keep my Native Hawaiian identity at the fore precisely because I was within educational systems that often tried to educate a commitment to Hawaiian land and people out of me. Maybe part of our politicization and resistance to assimilation was a backlash against those systems that work to assimilate. There was a disjuncture between what we were taught in school and what we were taught by the family stories about Taipo's life struggle against poverty, the long genealogies of Wāhine Maoli on our Hawaiian side of the family, and our own lived experiences as Native women. Perhaps we learned by observing the profound difference between the proper Hawaiian girls we were supposed to be in school and the empowered Wāhine Maoli we could potentially become. Just some thoughts. I'd love to hear what you think and feel. Hina sends her hugs.
Love you lots,
Boo

Dear Daughter,

Taipo's story of stolen education is one of survival, protracted struggle, and transcendence. It helps us to understand how historical circumstances

influence our place in the world. Her stories stand in stark contrast to the view that the only history worth learning is that which focuses on "great men," nobility and aristocrats, the wealthy and powerful—the kind of history that we all must study in our formal educations. Her stories were acts of resistance, and they challenged the kind of class-biased history taught in most school systems. She would not let her voice be subjugated by the manifest discourses of the American Dream and the Great Melting Pot of racial diversity.

Taipo, your great-grandmother, was not formally educated so she did not use terms like this. However, it was through her efforts that all her children were educated. Thus, it was Taipo's daughters who questioned the inconsistency of the American Dream for women of color as they came of age in the early to mid-twentieth century. They criticized the plantation economy of Hawai'i that forced their father to close his small business and return to a position as a wage laborer in order to support the family. They introduced historical incidents to my cousins and me, telling us their perspective on the infamous Massie Case of 1931–1932 and criticizing the "justice" of a territorial legal system that functioned to protect the interests of a wealthy, white elite at the expense of Hawaiian and Asian working people like themselves. They noted the irony of a society that stamped *e pluribus unum* (i.e., out of diverse origins emerge a single people united in democracy and justice for all) on the face of its coins, while systematically discriminating against people of color living in Hawai'i and in the continental United States.

As you can see, Taipo was a teacher to her children in the truest use of the term. In recounting her stories, she provided an alternative narrative that demanded action on the part of her daughters, and a generation later for me as well. Whenever I think about these stories, I am encouraged to be honest about what I learn from my own life experience, to trust the critical questions that arise when I juxtapose this experience against what I have been taught in my formal education and, ultimately, to stand up and articulate this perspective that comes from the strength of all that I know, from all the sources of knowledge available to me. Talk with me about your critical reflections, your truth. From the strength of your na'au, tell me what being a Native woman, a Wahine Maoli, means to you.

I send my thoughts to you with love,
Mom

Dear Mom,

You ask me to write about what I mean by "Wahine Maoli identity." As I have struggled for the words to come up with a description or a definition, nothing seems to quite make sense or be enough. Meditating on my

experience of becoming a Wahine Maoli, the memory of one sensation keeps coming back to me—the sweet fragrance of *pikake*. Strands and strands of fresh pikake.

For a long time, I understood my Hawaiianness as a lack or a loss. Not because I felt that it was shameful or inferior to be Hawaiian. Quite the contrary, I have been fortunate to grow up in a generation taught to be proud of being Hawaiian. Perhaps it was because Hawaiianness was becoming a more highly valued commodity that, as an *ʻōpio*, I understood who I was as a Hawaiian through a recognition of what I lacked. I lacked all of the things that I thought marked an "authentic" Hawaiian youth.

I had no living Hawaiian *kūpuna* with whom to connect. Your dad, Lyman David Kaʻai Kaʻōpua, died when you were only a toddler, so the only extended family I knew growing up was our Chinese family, the Chuns. I didn't have a kupuna to speak to me in Hawaiian or to tell me stories of old Hawaiʻi. I had no Hawaiian first cousins or aunties and uncles. I had no lived connection to my Hawaiian ʻohana.

So, there was always an emptiness I felt in association with my identity as a Hawaiian. As I learned more in college about the history our people have suffered—land alienation, theft of our government, massive deaths due to haole-introduced diseases, language loss, and persecution for practicing cultural traditions—I felt that sense of loss and mourning even greater. At twenty years old, it was out of a desire to fill that emptiness that I set out to find out more information about our Hawaiian lineage. I thought that, if I could just find out who my ancestors were, where they lived and what kinds of lives they led, then I might have a better sense of my own direction in life.

More fulfilling than the tedious process of gathering birth and death certificates were the times I spent meeting and talking with family members whom I had never connected with previously. Aunty Amelia Kaʻopua Bailey graciously shared with me stories about her parents (my great-grandparents) and her brothers and sisters (including my grandfather). One afternoon stands out in particular. As we sat at an old wooden table in the quiet coolness of her Mānoa house, she crafted a lei of story with memories of her mother's death.

When Aunty was a little girl, her mother, Kamila Amina Kaʻōpua had a massive brain hemorrhage while her infant child played on the bed beside her. Aunty remembered being told that she was too young to attend her mother's funeral service. While her father and elder siblings went to the Catholic Church where her mom was an active member, Aunty Amelia was left at home with a relative. Her memories centered on a moment at dusk when her large ʻohana gathered for the wake at their Kalihi home. The house

was packed with many relatives and friends who had come from various parts of Oʻahu and Hawaiʻi Islands to grieve the passing of Aunty's mom. As the bowing sun shed a reddish light throughout the house, Aunty heard the deep, guttural chanting of an elder female relative from Kohala offering a *kanikau* as she slowly walked the length of the parlor to the coffin that was covered with open strands of fresh pikake. Knowing the small white flower was Kamila's favorite, Aunty's father had blanketed his wife's coffin with the flower. Aunty remembered being overpowered by the scent, by the chant, and by the weight of the gathering's grief. As she told me the story, she looked out the window toward the thick trees of Mānoa Valley. It seemed her ears were again filled with the vibrato of the lament and her breath filled with the sweet, consuming aroma of pikake. For a moment, I too felt these overwhelming sensations. I wondered if these memories had often come back to Aunty over the years of practicing her art as a lei-maker, perhaps working with pikake flowers from time to time.

While Aunty's story was filled with sadness at the loss of her mother, she wove other stories about the joys of her mom's life around that memory of her mother's wake. She told me how, after her parents had moved to Oʻahu from Kohala, their family's house became a place where Big Island relatives would stay when they came to visit or pass through Honolulu. Her mom also had folks from her church over to the house regularly. The Kaʻōpua house in Kalihi became known for the good fun parties that lasted several days and particularly for the good music they all played together.

I heard Aunty's story about my great-grandmother's death to be both about the sadness of her loss and a testament to the fullness of her life. Woven into the lei of her story were lessons about how her mom maintained many close connections with her ʻohana on the Big Island, as well as building a new community on Oʻahu. It told of how her mom connected those networks of people across time and place through her *aloha* and her love for life, music, and her family. I was honored that Aunty had bestowed this lei of story upon me.

A few nights later, I was sitting at my computer typing the stories about my great-grandmother, Kamila Amina Kaʻōpua. All was quiet except for the clicking of the keys of the keyboard. Then slowly, gently, the smell of pikake arose in my nostrils, growing ever stronger until so intense that I could almost feel its scent on my skin. I walked outside onto the *lānai* to see if there was a breeze. Maybe someone was walking by with lei, I thought. But there was only a warm stillness. Unable to dismiss the fragrance, I knew that I had been graced by the presence of my great-grandmother. Perhaps she was letting me know that as a Wahine Maoli, I have never been alone, that my Hawaiianness was never just about what had been lost, but that it had to be about fullness and celebration as well.

I tell Aunty's story again now as my own and give this lei to you, my mama, as a way of talking about what it means for me to be a Wahine Maoli. The sweet scent of pikake, still faintly in my nostrils, reminds me of the way I want to live in this world, both remembering and mourning what has been lost and celebrating the abundance of what we still maintain as Native people. Claiming a Wahine Maoli identity is, for me, about cultivating a deep spiritual connection and political commitment to the ʻāina, the *kulāiwi*. Such connections allow us to both revel in the beauty of the Koʻolau Mountains and to be wrenched by the pain of walking on the bombed-out earth of Kahoʻolawe Island or of driving by Kapaʻa Quarry and seeing the ʻāina be devoured and ground up to make concrete for buildings and highways that will cover our sacred burial sites. It is about being able to laugh and sing and dance with our brothers and sisters, whether we're jamming music at the *loʻi* or clubbing down by Aloha Tower. It is about standing with those same brothers and sisters to fight the powers that continue to steal our educations, our lands and the food off our tables. For me, being a Wahine Maoli is about balancing the joys and the pain of being Hawaiian in a way that allows us to act for social change, based on a grounding in our traditions and stories. It is about the bittersweet smell of the pikake.

As I continue along this process of becoming a Wahine Maoli, I want to remember that we are at all times surrounded by the power of the women who have lived before and will live after us. I try to live my *ʻŌiwi Hawaiʻi* identity out of the fullness of my genealogy. I try to nurture confidence that I have a place and a people and a history from which to begin speaking and acting in the world.

Me kuʻu aloha nui,
Noe

Aloha pumehana e kuʻu Kaikamahine—
I send the warmest of love to you, dearest Daughter—

You invited me to reflect upon being Wahine Maoli, and so I sit now in these hours of the early evening to put some of my thoughts to words. I am in your childhood bedroom from which I can easily see the mist shrouded Koʻolau Mountains. The hectic events of the week quickly fade into a comfortable haze, and the words of your sister's *mele* about Kāneʻohe move gently through me...

Heleleʻi ka ua ʻĀpuakea
Mai ka lani polū
Akaaka a mānoa
Piha me kaʻōpua
A ka ʻeleao o ka lā

The ʻĀpuakea rain is sprinkling over this part of Kāneʻohe now, and the sunlight filters through the clouds that sit as *lei poʻo* atop the Koʻolau. Before my eyes, the trees and plants grow more lush and green from the rain and the Ulumano wind blows down from the mountains.

Puhi ka makani Ulumano
Mai nā kuahiwi uliuli
Ikaika a maluhia
ʻAleʻo me ka pohihihi
Ma luna o ka ʻāina

As I witness the Koʻolau in its life-giving mystery, a wave of gratitude washes through me, and I say a silent prayer to *Ke Akua*: Thank you Great Creator for giving this beautiful place to which I can return each day. Thank you for blessing me with two nurturing mothers—the strong, yet gentle woman who gave me human life, and the powerful, comforting ʻāina that each day awakens me to spiritual life.

Who I am is part of where I am in physical-spiritual place. Koʻolaupoko—this place is alive in my *naʻau*, this place grounds my sense of being when I journey to "foreign" places or struggle with the sense of fragmentation that can come of being Wahine Maoli in a society that rewards Western ways of knowing and being. In the presence of the Koʻolau it is easy to remember why we named you Noelani. For like the heavenly mists that sit as lei around the Koʻolau, your life is a precious lei from *Akua*, a lei of sweet fragrance to the life of your family.

My memories of Koʻolaupoko run deep. Through the collective memory passed on as family story, I see the *lawaiʻa* of our family—my grandfather, James Kaʻōpua and my father, Lyman—walking in shallow waters on this coastline. My mother's family also came to make their home on this side of the island and during my childhood, Kahaluʻu Valley became a regular gathering place for the extended family. On the winding road behind the old Hygienic General Store, our family built a flower nursery, cultivated fruit trees, and raised animals of all sorts. Here, my uncles raised game birds and taught me about the science of breeding, training, and yes, fighting, cocks. The uncles also kept horses and some of my fondest childhood memories are of riding horseback through the tall grasses that hugged the narrow trails. Occasionally, we hiked to gather mountain guavas for making jams and jellies. On these hikes, we lingered at the shallow freshwater ponds to watch the tadpoles or to splash in the icy mountain streams. Remembering those days, I am keenly aware of the abundance we enjoyed in the family homes on the road behind the Hygienic Store. While we had our troubles, secrets, and tragedies, those are stories for another day. What I remember here is the humble, hardworking family whose closeness to the land and to each other made life seem plentiful.

In sharp contrast to the idyllic days of childhood, my adolescence and young adulthood were confusing and painful ones. Privileged by private, upper class education, I learned to love academic inquiry and rigor. However, over time I was able to step back and realized how school-learning was altering my view of the world and in the process, taking me further and further away from my loving family and their resourceful, yet humble, lifestyle. I began to feel burdened by a profound sense of disconnection that I could not easily put into words. Back then, I only knew that I could not reconcile "what" I still valued from my childhood with "who" I was being socialized to become. It felt like a brutal choice.

I saw myself thinking and doing things that my family seemed unable to understand. After my freshman year in college, I remember sitting at the kitchen table with Uncle Norman. He was genuinely interested in what I was studying and how I was making sense of it. Although I kept it to myself, I found our differences to be terrifying. On the afternoon of that conversation, I really got in touch with how my education could take me on a trajectory far removed from all that was embodied in the Kahaluʻu lifestyle—all that was vital to me from childhood.

Shortly after the kitchen table epiphany, I "dropped out" of the private university that I had attended as a freshman. Six months later, I found myself among hundreds of other undergraduates who waited to enter Klum Gym, the site of registration for the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa. In those days, Klum was in the midst of a large quarry and seemed always to be under a cloud of dust. As students, we waited in long lines that snaked their way around the perimeter of the gym. Upon entering the gym, there were more lines, a line for each course we hoped to take. Here I waited to obtain the colored cards that would allow me a place in one of those huge undergraduate classes that met in Varsity Theater or some other cavernous auditorium. "This is different," I remember thinking to myself. I found the difference uncomfortable, as well as exciting and so wonderfully far away from the shady quad in the more exclusive private college I had just left.

"Our history, our way"… In the spring of 1972, I took my first class in the fledgling Ethnic Studies Program. By this time, the program was already a hub for university students who had a different view of how the university-educated might serve the community. Through involvement with the program, my worldview was opened in ways that surpassed my greatest expectations. I joined classmates in learning from local communities struggling with issues of land, housing, and loss of a land-based lifestyle. I had read about the Kalama Valley struggle a year or so earlier. The Kalama Valley struggle had set a precedent of standing up to fight back against development that served a few at the expense of many. As students, we learned about the

farmers' struggle through reading and discussion, as well getting up at 4:00 a.m. to slop farmer George Santos' displaced pigs. Real life—it brought a vitality and immediate relevance to questions like: Who does development serve? How can it better serve all the people? What are the options? We learned and practiced critical skills in community development. Learning about the historical struggles of ethnic people, including Hawaiians, in Hawai'i was an important part of my emerging consciousness. The slogan of the Ethnic Studies Program was "our history, our way" and reflected the emphasis to liberate the subjugated perspective of people's history. It was a historical perspective against which I could contextualize our own family stories, and working within the community became a vehicle for using my education as a tool to work toward the empowerment of marginalized communities. For the first time in my educational career, I was able to integrate my adult learning with the values instilled through my early childhood. Becoming a mother only made learning and work seem more important—now there were young lives, a visible sign of the future. What kind of life did I want you to inherit? As a mother and an activist, I took you to university sit-ins and even to the tent-city organized by the tenants and small farmers of the Wai'āhole-Waikāne Community Association as they resisted eviction.

Puhi ka makani Ulumano
Ma luna o ka moana polu
'Olinoino a 'olu 'olu
Kolo me ka'olu
Ma ke kapakai

Nearly thirty years have passed. The Ulumano wind still blows over the ocean, yet many things have changed for me as I have settled upon my life course. My work has evolved into areas related to health and well-being of Native Hawaiian communities. As a social worker, health researcher, and university instructor, my role in communities has changed, but my belief in serving and learning from and with our communities has not changed. In the last two decades, you and your sister have grown to young adulthood, and you have given birth to your own daughter, Kaiakahinali'i. You and your sister, Kulamanu, have benefited from the Hawaiian Renaissance, and your children will learn from you how to speak in our mother tongue. A new generation of committed activists like yourself and your colleagues in the charter school movement, are unafraid to learn new skills that will strengthen our Native Hawaiian communities to perpetuate Hawaiian language and tradition. At the age of sixteen years, Kulamanu, your sister, already understands the spiritual power of the 'āina. Together, you will forge a new place for our vision of a Native epistemology that will broaden the way we educate our young. *Mahalo Ke Akua*. I am moved to tears by what you can do, and it gives

me deep satisfaction and pride. Always remember how precious you are to me, Noe. Remember even when my days of walking the ʻāina are only memories that you share with Kaiakahinaliʻi's children.

So much remains to be done, but while the direction is clear, the course is often very arduous as we continue to walk with our feet in two worlds. I am so glad that we can share learning and that we can continue to connect in a loving and meaningful way despite the miles that separate us. I am thankful for electronic mail and long distance telephone lines, but more importantly, I am so thankful that we have this kūkākūkā.
Your loving Mama

Dear Mom,

Your letter brought back so many memories for me. Memories of my two-year-old self tagging along with you to the university, being puzzled by the strange shapes and diagrams as I flipped through your school binders, making up stories to go along with the unintelligible characters on the thin pages of thick books, and playing on the stones in front of the University of Hawaiʻi campus center. I remember Dad taking me home one night when you were arrested at a demonstration. I remember carrying signs around the Witecks' house and chanting, "The people united will never be defeated," not having any clue what it meant but enjoying yelling it really loudly.

In later years, I remember sitting and coloring in your office at Queen Liliʻuokalani Children's Center or at group meetings with you and your social work colleagues. I remember reading in your office at Hale Kipa youth services or at the Sex Abuse Treatment Center. (No wonder I learned how to be quiet and enjoy books!) And I remember with great fondness traveling with you to a conference on HIV/AIDS in Aotearoa: sitting in on panels, staying at the marae, meeting other Pacific Islanders working for their peoples' health and sexual rights. I didn't have the language to articulate what I was learning back then. In hindsight, I realize how much I was picking up and internalizing about the possibilities and responsibilities to create social change, just by being around your work. Watching you, I grew up with a model of a Native Hawaiian woman, raised by her Chinese aunties and uncles, committed to ending suffering in her communities and specifically working for the health, founded upon self-determination, of *Kanaka Maoli Hawaiʻi*.

These lessons live with me, even when I feel most assaulted and alienated by the foreign academic system in which I currently work. By "foreign," I mean an educational system that does not affirm multiple indigenous ways of knowing, understanding, and living. Most of the time, to survive up here in graduate school, I disconnect with a part of myself. I disengage my naʻau

when I sit in many of my seminars, keeping my mouth closed because of my discomfort with integrating what I feel and know in my naʻau with the academic language that has currency here.

Many of these thoughts and emotions were brought to the surface for me this weekend at a conference on campus called "Decolonizing Methodologies and Beyond: Constructing Indigenous Methodologies" (Anonymous 2001). As I sat in the circle, looking at more Native PhDs than I had ever seen in my life, I felt for the first time since I've been in grad school like I could open myself up. So many people spoke so powerfully, integrating their poʻo and their naʻau, integrating their own indigenous ways of understanding with their Western academic training. This demanded that one listen in a different way. And it was incredibly rigorous both intellectually and emotionally. I felt inspired, vulnerable and completely drained by the end of the weekend. Perhaps most powerful for me was being in the presence of three amazing Hawaiian women—Kū Kahakalau, Manu Meyer, and Kuʻulei Maunupau. They embody everything I mean when I think of being Wahine Maoli. True wāhine of the ʻāina, of the people. True to themselves, their akua and their ʻohana. Speaking always from the intelligence of their naʻau.

I facilitated the panel on indigenous pedagogies that Kū and Manu presented on, and, at one point, brought Hina to sit with me. She grabbed at my hair, took the pen from my hand, chewed on it, and then dropped it on the floor. She climbed off my lap, took a couple of steps into the circle, gave a coy smile to the folks sitting next to me, and then toddled back over and grabbed onto my leg again. I'm sure she was a little distracting to some, maybe even irritating. But, so what? It was so important for me to bring her into that space. At eleven months old, she doesn't comprehend what's going on in the same way adults do, but I know that something will stick with her, and I want her to grow up knowing that she can occupy a political and academic space if she wants. She has a *kuleana* to uphold for her people, for Kānaka Maoli Hawaiʻi, just as we do. I want to help her cultivate a Wahine Maoli consciousness, guided by our ancestors and our family stories, connecting to the *kulāiwi*, committed to our people.

Me ke aloha ana ʻole,
Noe

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GLOSSARY

akua—god, spirit, divine, supernatural
aloha—love, compassion
Hilihewa ka manaʻo keʻole ke kukakuka—a Hawaiian proverb loosely translated as "thoughts become miswoven when there is no discussion"
hōʻailona—sign, omen
Kanaka Maoli—a Native term to describe the indigenous people of Hawai'i, used interchangeably in this *kūkākūkā* with "Native Hawaiian," "Hawaiian," and "*ʻŌiwi Hawai'i*"
kanikau—a chant of mourning or lamentation
kilo—as a noun "kilo" can be translated as a stargazer, a reader of omen or a seer. As a verb, "kilo" means to watch closely with focused intent, to examine, observe, or forecast.
kūkākūkā—to discuss; discussion
kulāiwi—native land or homeland, refering to the place where the bones of one's ancestors are buried
kuleana—responsibility, privilege, right
kūpuna/kupuna—elders, grandparents, ancestors; "*kupuna*" is the singular form
lānai—porch, veranda
lei—garland or adornment, often made with flowers or shells
loʻi—wetland taro field
mana—power, life force, spiritual or supernatural power
nalu—ocean wave
naʻau—seat of emotions, intellect, intuition; located in the intestinal region
one hānau—native homeland, birthplace, literally "sands of birth"
pae ʻāina—archipelago, here referring to the Hawaiian islands
pikake—jasmine flower
Popo—Cantonese expression for maternal grandmother
poʻo—head
Taipo—Cantonese expression for great-grandmother
ʻāina—land, literally translated as "that which feeds"
ʻano—character, disposition, tendency
ʻohana—extended family
ʻōiwi/ʻŌiwi Hawai'i—native/Native Hawaiian
ʻōpio—youth, juvenile, adolescent