

# MĀLAMA NĀ LEO A KU‘UA NĀ ‘ŌLELO: HĀNAI-ING A NATIVE HAWAIIAN CREATIVE WRITING CURRICULUM

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To date, little pedagogical criticism has explored the intrinsic ethnocentrism within the American creative writing curriculum, which is rooted in the New Criticism movement of the 1920s and privileges Western aesthetics. Using personal narrative and data collected from archives and published reports, the author examines the impact of this curriculum on the Native Hawaiian student and proposes a distinctly Native Hawaiian creative writing model based on both cultural values and cultural memory. The model recognizes the role that colonization has played within education and the field of Native Hawaiian literature, as well as the historical role of Native Hawaiian writing and resistance.

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*‘A‘ohe pau ka ‘ike i ka hālau ho‘okahi.*

Not all knowledge is taught in the same school.

— *‘Ōlelo No‘eau*

I first became acutely aware of the tremendous need for a Native Hawaiian Creative Writing Curriculum while working toward my MFA in poetry at the University of Oregon, a program that initially attracted me because of how it prides itself on the cultural diversity of its students and models itself after the rigorous Iowa Writing Workshop, now the pillar of creative writing instruction in the United States. Our small program consisted of just 10 graduate students in poetry (fiction students had a separate curriculum) from varied cultural backgrounds, including Armenian, Salvadorean, Ecuadorean, Jewish, White, and Korean. However, all identified as “American.”

As the only Native Hawaiian writer in the program, I was also the only indigenous writer. My highly politicized identity fueled and informed both my poetics and scholarship, which often focused on the colonial detriment to the *‘ohana* (family) and the Native Hawaiian community, American imperialism, Hawaiian history, Hawaiian sovereignty issues, as well as a distinctly intimate connection to the land through genealogy. As a result, a great deal of my work was threatening, or at the very least, unsettling to many of my peers and instructors, who often read the Hawaiian sovereignty movement as merely “separatist” and precontact Hawaiian history as “nostalgic.” Claims to an intimate, genealogical connection to the *‘āina* (land) were often seen as “romanticized,” and characterizations or indictments of American imperialism were often either ignored or treated as an evil force that manifested only in conservative figures like George W. Bush or historical figures like the Republic of Hawai‘i, which was formed by American missionary descendants to replace the Hawaiian monarchical government.

Although I understood that these responses were reflective of the predominant ideological constructions of history that privilege a largely White, Western perspective, they greatly affected my self-confidence and my approach to writing, and in turn, my writing itself, which I then composed to be more didactic at the expense of its more poetic references. The dismissive nature of the responses and the collective view that my work was naive and not complicated enough were, of course, discouraging and silencing. I gained very little constructive criticism of my work, and consequently, I came to dread every workshop.

This article asserts that these workshop responses are directly related to the colonial context of Hawai'i—and however unconsciously, the genuine discomfort or threat posed by my indigeneity—which was promoted through the ideological foundation of the American creative writing curriculum I experienced. To illustrate this, I analyze the practices of the creative writing classroom and the historical role writing has played in Hawai'i. I then examine how a new creative writing curriculum based on Native Hawaiian values and beliefs and composition-rhetorical strategies of invention and collaborative learning—exclusively for Native Hawaiian writers and *outside* of the university—may transcend the ideological apparatus of the state, and be *hānai*-ed (adopted) and repurposed to develop literary production toward social and political movement. I also look at possible assignments for this culturally based curriculum.

## THE AMERICAN CREATIVE WRITING CURRICULUM: NEW CRITICISM, WESTERN AESTHETICS, AND THE PROBLEMS THEREIN

The structure of creative writing workshops in the United States has roots in the New Criticism movement of the 1920s. As one of the originators of the New Criticism movement in literary studies, T. S. Eliot (1932) wrote in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” that

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him for contrast and comparison, among the dead...The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. (pp. 476–477)

Emphasizing how this is a “principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism” (Eliot, 1932, p. 476), he asserted that the writer always exists within a framework of tradition (which Eliot defined as being the “European tradition”) to which the writer must conform. He further argued that because the writer shares this tradition with his country’s audience, it is necessary to “divert interest from the poet...for it would conduce to a juster estimation of actual poetry, good and bad” (p. 482).

This concept manifests within the typical American creative writing classroom most clearly through the erasing or silencing of the author. Though often idealized as a community of writers whose goals are to foster and encourage the emerging writer, a typical American creative writing classroom is a space of contention at best, and abuse at worst, in part because of the way workshops are structured. In the MFA program at the University of Oregon, workshops were conducted very similarly to most American writing workshops, in which the writer is to remain silent as the group discusses the merits, shortfalls, strategies, and intentions of his or her creative work. If the writer feels at any time that the group’s discussion is off-base or does not offer constructive help or is misreading his or her work, it is generally considered to be the fault of the writer. Thus, the work is supposed to stand on its own, with very little introduction and absolutely no interference during workshop discussion (as if to emphasize this, it is also a rule to never directly address the writer during a workshop). Only after the writer’s work is deemed to be sufficiently discussed by the instructor does the writer have the chance to address any concerns or to pose questions to the group, though this time is forced to be brief. Any period of time longer than 5 minutes for the writer’s own words after a workshop is generally viewed as defensive and self-indulgent, as there are other newly created texts to be discussed in the workshop.

It is often cited that a writer's natural defensiveness about his or her work is the primary reason for this rule of silence. Steve Kowitz (1995), a seasoned poetry instructor, warned that

people with fragile egos or low self-esteem about their writing, or who for some reason or another find such situations annoying, threatening or distracting might be better off avoiding such workshops...[T]hose who are intent upon making rapid progress, and who are able to tolerate an unindulgent and critical environment, are likely to find [formal poetry-writing workshops] a wonderful tool for learning. (p. 247)

However, the expectation of the writer's defensiveness seems small when compared with the detrimental consequences of erasing or ignoring the writer, especially the marginalized or underrepresented writer, from the classroom entirely. It is the nature of writing to dwell in the personal, and necessarily so, regardless of the form or genre the writing takes.

It is clear that the American creative writing instruction model—and its insistence on using a New Criticism approach based on the ahistoricism of the text and its divorce from the writer—needs revision, as it fails to address and even exacerbates issues of silencing related to marginalized aspiring writers who are in the process of empowering their voices. In “Literary Legacies and Critical Transformations: Teaching Creative Writing in the Public Urban University,” Nicole Cooley (2003) implied that American New Criticism's influence on the creative writing classroom to read authored texts as ahistorical, with no relation to the author, limits the underrepresented or marginalized student. Cooley (2003) asserted a revision to the creative writing curricular approach is needed because

the creative writing class is a site of individual identity production; thus we need to think about how certain strategies for teaching creative writing may enforce a normative identity.... It is essential that we reflect on how the workshop process can make students produce texts that deny their voices.... We need to interrogate the inextricable link between language and power, a connection not fully investigated by New Critical readings. (pp. 101–102)

In approaching the creative writing classroom as a “site of individual identity production,” Cooley emphasized that the New Criticism approach in the creative writing workshop does little to help students, especially those who experience silencing and marginalization on a larger, more profound level; rather, the process “enforce[s] a normative identity.”

The normative identity characterized by Cooley draws directly from Eliot’s view of the writer being situated within a distinctly “European” tradition against which all readings of a writer’s work must occur. The American creative writing curriculum accordingly adopts the European (a term fraught with political implications in itself) tradition as its own and, in doing so, dictates that the work of all “American” writers, colonized or otherwise marginalized, must be read within that tradition. Thus, as David Bartholomae (2003) asserted in “Inventing the University,” students

have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were easily or comfortably one with their audience...[and they] must imagine for themselves the privilege of being ‘insiders’—that is, of being both inside an established and powerful discourse, and of being granted a special right to speak. (pp. 406–408)

Bartholomae's view that writers must conform to what the institution upholds as its aesthetic standards by imagining themselves as "insiders" with "special right[s] to speak" is complicated, however, by the colonial process of silencing the indigenous writer, as well as the student who resists assimilating into this tradition, who sees him- or herself as peripheral because he or she belongs to a non-European tradition. For what is generally upheld to be of aesthetic merit and rewarded as such in the university is writing that adheres to certain ascribed traits and rules determined by the dominant power. Thus, the creative writing student must adopt these forms and adhere to these rules to receive accolades and good grades. Accordingly, those writing students whose work resists those rules become failures, outsiders to the "writing tradition." Though both groups may have the drive to pursue their writing careers following the MFA, those students who receive encouragement during their creative writing education tend to do so more than those who do not.

Literary aesthetics are always political, whether or not this is recognized. As part of the "ideological hegemony" conceptualized by Antonio Gramsci (1978), beauty is determined by the dominant power, which uses the aesthetic as a "social technology" to privilege that which serves or is most closely aligned to the dominant power and its values and aims:

The 'normal' exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority.  
(p. 80, fn)

As a promoting force of colonizing efforts, education is determined by the dominating power to uphold certain aesthetic criteria the colonized must meet. Invariably, the aesthetic as a social technology is hidden to appear normative, which then can be accepted as absolute truth, as reality, by the colonized/oppressed.

Thus, Enlightenment philosophers such as David Hume and Immanuel Kant (who are continuously invoked as chief authorities of Western aestheticism) “implicitly aestheticize whiteness” (Roelofs, 2005, p. 85)—Hume defining aesthetics as a “model of ‘taste’... a civilizing force” (Roelofs, 2005, p. 86), and Kant, adding to Hume’s definition, seeing aesthetics as that which is above or outside of any cultural conditions, only achievable by White people (as he gives many racialized examples of others who cannot separate themselves from culture; Roelofs, 2005, pp. 94–96). In doing so, Kant conceals Western/White culture as “an invisible datum, an unmarked given.... The sphere of normative culture is thus whitened” (Roelofs, 2005, p. 96).

In turn, this ideological hegemony is perpetuated within the American creative writing classroom, which must invariably privilege its own literature, as well as Western literature (the tradition within which American literature situates itself). Consequently, the American creative writing classroom is not conducive to fostering a population of writers, like Native Hawaiian writers, who already distrust the institution as representative and agent of the state and experience silencing on a much larger, more profound scale. It is also not conducive to ensuring and nurturing a future generation of writers who can contribute to and empower a social movement through counterhegemonic literature.

## THE HISTORICAL ROLE OF NATIVE HAWAIIAN WRITING AND RESISTANCE

That the written literary space should be seen as a threat within Hawai‘i is, of course, no surprise. Writing has played a large role within Native Hawaiian culture and as a means of resistance since it was first introduced by Western missionaries in the 1820s. By the 1830s and 1840s, literacy rates in ‘*Ōlelo Hawai‘i*’ (Hawaiian) in Hawai‘i were among the highest in the world, and writings by Native Hawaiians were being published in numerous island newspapers and scholarly books. The new technology of writing and printing that the *haole* (White, Caucasian) missionaries introduced was widely embraced and strongly encouraged by the *ali‘i* (royalty):

By 1832, 40% of the population were in schools started by missionary influence with missionary texts. These students were mostly adults and the teachers were mostly their Hawaiian peers. By 1832, 900 schools were set up to teach 53,000 Hawaiians how to read and write. By 1846, over 80% of the Hawaiian population were literate. (Meyer, 2003, p. 24)

From a missionary standpoint, the introduction of the printed word was the only means by which the Word of their God could be shared to convert indigenous populations to Christianity and thus, “civilization.” However, for our *kūpuna* (elders), the written word was embraced for opening up “the flood gates for a whole new way of communicating and sharing in worldly experiences” (Meyer, 2003, p. 25). Like other haole introductions during this early period of Western contact, writing was repurposed by our *kūpuna* to suit their own needs and priorities, including cultural preservation, historiography, genealogy, as well as the dissemination of information of political and national importance.

The first newspapers in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i were published by the missions beginning in 1834 to “supply the means of useful knowledge...[and] to point out existing evils, their character, seat, extent and consequences” (Silva, 2004, p. 130), and they were essentially a vehicle of conversion and colonization. The first Native Hawaiian-controlled newspaper, *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika* (Star of the Pacific), was created in 1861 to publish Native Hawaiian *mo'olelo* (stories), which missionary newspapers had censored because the stories were often deemed “obscene.” Several more Native Hawaiian-controlled newspapers followed to share uncensored *mo'olelo*, genealogies, *oli* (chants), *mele* (songs), and political news.

In addition, many Native Hawaiian scholars and ali'i, like King David La'amea Kalākaua, used writing in an effort both to resist Cabinet members, who were American missionary descendants who had forced him to sign the harmful Bayonet Constitution (so-called because he was forced to sign by gunpoint), and to preserve the culture, *mo'olelo*, and *mana'o* (thoughts, ideas) of Native Hawaiians, who were commonly perceived to be a “dying race.” The motto during Kalākaua's reign, “*Ho'oulu*,” or to increase, was not only a response to the massive depopulation that

occurred during the 100 years following Western contact but also reflected his intention to lift the missionary ban on the hula and other traditional art forms and, thus, strengthen the pride of his people. Kalākaua's *Legends and Myths of Hawai'i*, written in English in 1888, targeted a haole audience, as he believed that Native Hawaiians would inevitably keep

decreasing in numbers and gradually losing their hold upon the fair land of their fathers. Within a century they have dwindled from four hundred thousand healthy and happy children of nature, without care and without want, to a little more than a tenth of that number of landless, hopeless victims to the greed and vices of civilization....Year by year their footsteps will grow more dim along the sands of their reef-sheltered shores, and fainter and fainter will come their simple songs from the shadows of the palms, until finally their voices are heard no more for ever. (Kalākaua, 1888, Introduction)

Here, the American haole audience was indirectly implicated through Kalākaua's attribution of the "vices of civilization and greed" as the cause for the massive depopulation he cited and the "landless[ness]" of his people.

Following the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and annexation to the United States, Emma Nāwahi's nationalist newspaper *Ke Aloha 'Āina* became a primary publication to fight for Hawaiian sovereignty, to organize resistance strategies (such as the petition comprising 90% of the Native Hawaiian population) and meetings, and to offer words of support to an occupied, oppressed people. Though it was banned by the Provisional Government, as most Native Hawaiian-controlled newspapers were at the time, it continued to be produced and disseminated covertly to spread news of the steps being taken by Queen Lili'uokalani (who also used writing to organize a petition that effectively defeated the bill to annex Hawai'i in the American Senate).

In direct response to this came the “closing of all Hawaiian language schools and the elevation of English as the only official language in 1896. Once the Republic of Hawai‘i declared itself on July 4, 1894, the ‘Americanization’ of Hawai‘i was sealed like a coffin” (Trask, 1999a, p. 21). Seen as the most silencing of all acts perpetrated by colonial powers, the banning of indigenous languages almost always accompanies “the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer” (Thiong’o, 1981, p. 16). Because “language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world” (Thiong’o, 1981, p. 16), this effort also does more than silence the colonized; it inarguably seeks to “domin[ate] the mental universe of the colonized” (Thiong’o, 1981, p. 17).

Thus, immediately following the ban of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, Hawaiian-language newspapers and protest through written, oral, and performative arts declined drastically, as an entire generation (my great-grandparents) received corporal punishment in English-only schools for speaking ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. To protect their children from a similar fate, they raised my grandparents’ generation to speak only English.

The resulting absence of widely published written and artistic expression by Native Hawaiians over the past century engendered the belief that Hawaiians lacked a literary and artistic heritage. While other cultures living in Hawai‘i during this time flourished in these regards, Native Hawaiian culture continued to be negated and silenced. Even as more traditional forms of Native Hawaiian culture were revived in the 1970s, with the exception of Dana Naone Hall, Wayne Westlake, ‘Īmaikalani Kalāhele, John Dominis Holt, and Māhealani Kamau‘u, the absence of a larger literary voice supported the hegemonic stereotype of Native Hawaiians as an illiterate people who did not value literature.

Statistics gathered by the State of Hawai‘i Department of Education in 1998 only seem to support this stereotype. Across Grades 3, 6, 8, and 10, the national norm percentile rank of the mean Hawaiian total reading score was at only the 30th percentile, whereas the state average was at the 40th percentile, and Caucasian and Japanese students were at the 60th percentile. In addition, more Hawaiian

students' total reading achievement scores fell in the below-average range than in national norms, and fewer than 10% of Hawaiians scored in the above-average range, whereas Caucasians and Japanese show a contrasting pattern, scoring 40% in the above-average range. In light of these numbers, it is no surprise that illiteracy rates are high for Native Hawaiian adults. Literacy skill assessments reveal that about 30% of Native Hawaiian adults are functionally illiterate (reading below the 4th-grade level). Given that illiteracy was virtually unknown during the time of the Native Hawaiian monarchy, these statistics are particularly disturbing (Meyer, 2003, p. 24).

Thus, the history of resistance in Native Hawaiian writing, whether as a means of cultural and language preservation, testimony, or political organization, further emphasizes the complexity of the political context within which a Native Hawaiian writer in an American creative writing classroom would be situated. This resistance also continues through the creation of Native Hawaiian-controlled publishers, such as 'Ai Pōhaku and Kuleana 'Ōiwi Press, which now offer publishing opportunities for Native Hawaiians. Indicative of how colonial silencing continued through the Hawaiian Renaissance of the 1970s and lasted through much of the 1990s, in a *Honolulu Weekly* article on the launch of the third volume of *'Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal*, Chief Editor Ku'ualoha Ho'omanawanui shared that Māhealani Dudoit, an award-winning poet who had been published "all over the United States in esteemed journals...found it difficult to be published in Hawai'i in some of our local journals" (Griffith, 2005). Moreover, University of Hawai'i professor and now renowned poet, Haunani-Kay Trask, found it difficult to publish her first book of poetry, *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (1994), in Hawai'i. She approached both the University of Hawai'i Press and Bamboo Ridge Press, the latter replying that her manuscript was not "of the aesthetic quality they usually publish" (Trask, personal communication, November 2005). However, she had no difficulties when she approached Calyx Books (a publisher in Oregon) to publish her book in 1994 (with a revised edition in 1998); her book is now being taught in courses throughout the United States and Polynesia. These examples in particular highlight how colonial anxiety is amplified within Hawai'i. Typical publishing venues for "local" Hawai'i writers were rarely an option for contemporary Native Hawaiian writers before Native Hawaiian-controlled presses were created.

## CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND THE UNMASKING OF HEGEMONY

Much critical pedagogy theory has focused on power dynamics both within and through the classroom between teacher and student, as seen through Peter Elbow's expressivist call for curricula to be student centered to deemphasize the authority of the teacher and Mina Shaughnessy's urging teachers to examine "the social and political role in students' unpreparedness" (Mutnick, 2001, p. 185). This line of theory has also focused on power dynamics between the teacher/student and the institution, as seen through Donald Bartholomae's (2003) "Inventing the University" discussed earlier. Also, most notably, the works of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, and Jonathon Kozol examine how teacher/student/institution is shaped and controlled by the state. Contributing to many of the ideas expressed by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970) and *A Pedagogy of Liberation* (Freire & Shor, 1987), Henry Giroux and Ira Shor explored what they referred to as the "hidden curriculum,' [and] the subtle, but powerful ways schools construct students' and teachers' knowledge and behavior" to come closer to cultural production and, thus, social transformation (George, 2001, p. 96). Similarly, Jonathon Kozol's work examined how "cultural institutions function to reproduce the ideology and power of dominant groups" (George, 2001, p. 95).

Bruce Herzberg (1991) added to this critical pedagogical dialogue by examining the curriculum as "ideology" of the state in "Composition and the Politics of the Curriculum":

The curriculum represents a commitment to a set of values concerning the uses of culture and the uses of people. The curriculum declares what should be passed on to the future and what students should become. These are ideological issues, political commitments.... The curriculum, moreover is not an independent entity within the school, and available knowledge is neither the only nor even the primary determinant of the curriculum. (p. 97)

Consequently, as a construct of the American state, the creative writing curriculum within most American universities perpetuates ideological hegemony to serve the colonial effort to continue its occupation and domination.

Though it goes without saying that issues of power within American education warrant study and examination through critical pedagogy, this vein of theory offers little practical suggestion toward resolution or transcendence. Rather, it only highlights the inescapability from these power dynamics, however freeing it may be to name or identify contexts within which oppression rears its ugly head.

The inability of critical pedagogy theorists to escape the confines of the institution and its enslaving ideology has not discouraged practical solutions that have been posed and implemented by Native Hawaiian grassroots educators. In January 2000, in an effort to “initiate a native designed and controlled system of Hawaiian education” (Kahakalau, 2003, p. 147), Nā Lei Na’auao Native Hawaiian Charter School Alliance was formed. Inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, the K–12 model is

framed from a Native Hawaiian perspective designed by and for the Native Hawaiian community...[T]his model presents not necessarily an alternative to the present Western-based public education system in Hawai’i, but rather a preferred way of practicing education...[that is] community-based, culturally-driven, and incorporating a high degree of academic rigor. (Kahakalau, 2003, p. 148)

Kahakalau’s description of how the educational model is “designed by and for” Native Hawaiians is significant in that it emphasizes the role of trust in education. It also highlights how Native Hawaiian educational control is commonly seen as a way through which our *‘ōpio*, or young people, can avoid the detriment caused by their Western education, which “has been used to preserve the dominant position of the colonizer...[and] includes many myths, factual inaccuracies, and omissions” (Kaulukukui & Silva, 2003, p. 94).

In an effort to overturn the hegemonic processes at play in public education in Hawai'i, the Native Hawaiian Charter School movement also seeks to teach Native Hawaiian students “truths about their own histories” (p. 96), to overturn damaging impressions and stereotypes, and to teach “cultural traditions and values, including their native language, in a culturally appropriate environment” (Kahakalau, 2003, p. 146). Hālau Kū Māna, for example, builds its curriculum around a “Place and Project-Based Learning” model, “integrat[ing] all core content areas (Language Arts, Math, Science, and Mo'olelo, or Social Studies), *ola kino* (health), technology, values, environmental stewardship and real world skills” ([www.halaukumana.org](http://www.halaukumana.org)). Projects are culturally based and include “Ko Kula Kai,” which focuses on coral reefs as ecological communities; “Lō'i,” or the study of Native Hawaiian land and resource management; and “Kanehunamoku,” which studies noninstrumental navigation and canoe sailing ([www.halaukumana.org](http://www.halaukumana.org)).

## HĀNAI-ING A NATIVE HAWAIIAN CREATIVE WRITING CURRICULUM

Reflective of the extent to which Native Hawaiian identity and language are politicized, the term *hānai* recently became a term of contention in the Hawai'i State Court system as evidenced in *Mohica-Cummings v. Kamehameha Schools*. Kalena Santos, a haole mother, claimed that her son, Braden Mohica-Cummings, who is without Hawaiian *koko* (blood), is Native Hawaiian and eligible to attend Kamehameha Schools because he was “*hānai-ed*” by Native Hawaiians who, though unrelated to him, consider themselves to be his grandparents.

This definition of *hānai* was challenged by the Kamehameha Schools and several other Native Hawaiian groups, who emphasized that *hānai*, which literally means “to feed” or “to nurture,” was never synonymous with genealogical inheritance or lineage, as required by Kamehameha Schools' Native Hawaiian preference policy for admissions. Despite this, David Ezra, the U.S. District Court judge at the helm of these court hearings, decided in favor of Mohica-Cummings and took the opportunity to reeducate Native Hawaiians about what *hānai* meant historically.

Quoting from a 1958 state Supreme Court decision that in turn invoked “kingdom law,” Judge Ezra cited two kinds of Hawaiian adoption, which he called a “sacred relationship”: *keiki hānai* (adopted child or foster child) and *keiki ho’okama* (the adoption of a child one loves but for whom one may not have exclusive care). Both were in effect when the schools’ benefactor, Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop, wrote the will that provides funding for the school, Ezra said. “This was the law of the kingdom,” he said, repeatedly tapping his bench with his finger. “This was the law of Hawai’i at the time Bernice Pauahi Bishop made her will. She was a brilliant woman. She understood the law” (Viotti & Gordon, 2003).

I include this excerpt in which Judge Ezra defined *hānai* within the context of Kamehameha Schools’ Native Hawaiian preference policy (a) to highlight the threat posed by Native Hawaiian exclusivity; (b) to demonstrate the extent to which Native Hawaiian identity and self-definition are politicized and challenged by non-Hawaiians; (c) to illustrate the authority claimed by non-Hawaiians like Ezra and Santos in defining Hawaiian-ness and Native Hawaiian traditions and values; and (d) to underscore the severity that our identity, values, and traditions as Native Hawaiians are at stake. The very idea that any non-Hawaiian, albeit one with legal authority and agency, would feel empowered to instruct all Native Hawaiians about our cultural values without consulting Native Hawaiian leaders and cultural experts and practitioners, and then to use superficial research to rule against Kamehameha Schools as a Native Hawaiian institution, is situated within a colonial framework. Without a Native Hawaiian Tribunal, or some other legal or official means of self-representation or self-definition, we are vulnerable to being represented or defined by others with no recourse. The ramifications of this situation go beyond this case or future legal decisions; they affect us on a personal level, mentally, emotionally, and creatively, which is always a part of colonial intention. Native Hawaiian writing presents an outlet to challenge and overturn imposed definitions of who we are. Thus, fostering the production and proliferation of Native Hawaiian writing by *hānai*-ing an exclusively Native Hawaiian curriculum, in general, is a strong political act. However, to *hānai* a Native Hawaiian creative writing curriculum that aims to create a safe writing environment, to unmask and overturn the pervading ideological hegemony that silences and devalues Native Hawaiian *mana’o* and denies Native Hawaiian literary inheritance, and to regain control of self-definition and self-determination is *liberatingly dangerous*.

## CONTEXT

That said, I offer the following curricular approach as a theoretical sketch, in which I envision a creative writing class outside of the university and any other public or private institution (for reasons, in part, examined earlier), consisting of a *kumu* (teacher) and 10 self-identifying Native Hawaiian writing students of various writing experience, ages 16 to 60 years old. That this curriculum be offered exclusively to Native Hawaiians is key because of the history of silencing and colonization. Trust in education and a “safe,” culturally appropriate environment are crucial to the curriculum’s success.

The students, or participants, represent various socioeconomic backgrounds, education levels, and communities throughout Hawai‘i and the continental United States. About 30% are studying or have studied ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i in a school setting and have at least conversational proficiency, which they plan to use in their various writing exercises and assignments throughout the 10-week workshop.

## CREATING SELF-DEFINITION

Because American imperialism is “a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity [that] colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: ‘Who am I in reality?’” (Fanon, 1963, p. 182), the first discussions in the Native Hawaiian creative writing classroom should focus on self-defining the Native Hawaiian text itself. Self-definition is emphasized here as a response largely to prescribed stereotypes and imposed cultural identities that have marked the Native Hawaiian presence within literature written by outsiders, generally as part of a colonial enterprise. Because of the pervasiveness of the colonial “double consciousness,” to use the words of W. E. B. Dubois, the class must also discuss ways in which we, as writers, have a duty to help “clearly define the people, the subject of [our] creation...[as] it is not enough to reunite with the people in a past where they no longer exist” (Fanon, 1963, p. 163). Thus, self-defining will entail historical definitions of Hawaiian identity, both imposed and self-created, as well as more contemporary definitions and how those have been shaped.

Likewise, the workshop students will also need to collectively define Native Hawaiian literature and determine whether or not a definition by *koko*, or Native Hawaiian blood or ancestry of the writer, or by *mo'okū'auhau*, by genealogy, alone, will be adequate or even appropriate, though certainly these are factors in determining Native Hawaiian identity. This will inevitably also lead to a discussion to distinguish local writing, travel writing, colonial writing, and Hawaiian writing, as well as discussing ascribed stereotypes created by non-Hawaiian texts and the colonial enterprise within which they exist. This topic is especially rich and important within the Native Hawaiian literary context, as it helps to lay the groundwork for the participating writer's project toward decolonization and resistance. Examples of Native Hawaiian historiography, historical literature, translated Hawaiian newspaper excerpts (or not—this may lead to another rich discussion on whether translations should be used to read the 'Ōlelo Hawai'i text), and local, travel, and colonial literature will be read, discussed, and responded to through creative writing.

## NATIVE HAWAIIAN AESTHETICS

Creating and defining a Native Hawaiian aesthetic for writing will also be critical and, I believe, liberating to the class, because aesthetics must be examined as a political and cultural construction. In reading publications like 'Ōiwi that challenge the Western construction of the aesthetic as a colonizing tool that invariably deems indigenous/colonized art forms to be of inferior quality or merit, as well as mele and oli composed by our kūpuna, students may see the continuity of themes, such as genealogical connection to land and nature, spirituality, 'ohana, as well as culturally distinct depictions of human emotion and aesthetic tropes, like *kaona* (the use of complex, multilayered, hidden metaphors), repetition, dedication to gods and ali'i, and poetic rhythms in Native Hawaiian literature. In "Carving a Native Hawaiian Aesthetic," Māhealani Dudoit (1998) described the aesthetic as holding within it a means by which Native Hawaiians may also assert nationalism. By emphasizing how beauty is created through art and perceived by Native Hawaiian standards, as well as how it changes with Native Hawaiian culture over time, Western aestheticism's colonizing force will weaken and *huli* (reverse, change).

Rather than creative writing assignments, close readings of work by contemporary Native Hawaiian writers and spoken-word artists (slam poets and hip-hop artists), as well as traditional art forms chosen by both the kumu and the students, will be read closely and analyzed as masterful examples of Native Hawaiian creative writing to help the workshop formulate ideas about how Native Hawaiian aesthetics differ from Western concepts of beauty. These readings will also enable the workshop to uphold some aesthetic tropes as ideals to incorporate in student work and will be used in critiques of all writing completed for the workshop.

## PURPOSE OF/THROUGH WRITING

Within the Native Hawaiian culture, all work must have purpose or function, because “[f]or Hawaiians, knowledge for knowledge sake was a waste of time” (Meyer, 2003, p. 57). Of course, creative writing is no different. Thus, an integral part of a Native Hawaiian creative writing curriculum would be to consistently address not only the purposes served by writing in general but also the specific purpose for the individual creative piece (a story, poem, or memoir) and the writer’s purpose as he or she sees it for his or her work in general. Consequently, it will also be of utmost importance to determine the purpose or function of the creative writing workshop or classroom. These functions or purposes are expected to change over time, as goals or contexts change, but as they change or shift, this change will need to be identified and discussed with the group. Students will also need to negotiate and formulate for themselves the nature and scope of their creative works’ purposes, as well as the individual roles each student will take on within the workshop as readers, constructive critics, cheerleaders, and so on. Students will be asked throughout the course to keep a journal to reflect on their purpose as writers and the purpose or function of writing in general. Class time will be devoted to freewriting in journals and group work on this topic.

## NATIVE HAWAIIAN CULTURE AS CURRICULUM

In *Ho'oulu*, Manulani Aluli Meyer (2003) asserted that a reversal of the colonizer's control of the curriculum based on the ideology of the state can occur through the application of Native Hawaiian culture in curriculum:

Culture as content: the things that get taught, learned, brought home. It is here that culture adds profound depth to any course experience.... Hawaiian values offer a way of contextualizing what is being learned.... Although just words, values can set the context for what a group holds up, honors and acts upon. (p. 37)

Native Hawaiian charter schools have laid much of the groundwork for designing curricula based on Native Hawaiian ideology. Hālau Kū Māna, for example, uses and defines the Native Hawaiian values of *kūpono*, *makawalu*, *mālama*, and *aloha* as its guiding principles in curriculum development, lesson planning, and discussion of the conduct of all members of the learning community. (See the Appendix for an explanation of these terms.)

In the creative writing classroom, the Native Hawaiian values that the students most strongly identify with will provide a compass by which the participants may navigate through several class discussions and workshops. Once the guiding values are articulated by the class, everyone will collectively brainstorm ways in which they can use those values in writing assignments, their behavior toward one another, their approach to writing and the class, and the "rules" or "protocol" for the writing workshop. By working to incorporate these values into the framework for a creative writing curriculum, participants will have the chance to develop and explore their identity as Native Hawaiians, as well as how their spirituality and personal histories intersect with their writing and the creative process.

These values can then be reinforced through accompanying written assignments or exercises asking participants to interview family and community members, especially kūpuna, which would then be used as the basis of a creative piece (emphasizing 'ohana); to give a close observation of some aspect of the natural world to which they feel connected (as part of mālama 'āina and aloha 'āina); and to use their writing to exemplify how colonial definitions of identity, such as blood quantum, are damaging and inherently racist.

## CONSTRUCTION OF WORKSHOP PROTOCOL

Key to the foundation of the creative writing curriculum will be the instructor's participation in the writing workshop with his or her students, which will emphasize the collaborative aspect of writing and learning/teaching as well as how the community will set up rules or protocol for the writing workshop and classroom. Rather than predetermine this protocol, I believe it would give more agency to the writers to collectively describe the activities and how, as a class, all the participants will create the rules for the writing community workshop and how the roles of community members, aesthetics, purpose, and spirituality will be decided and addressed. Although this practice may represent a departure from the traditional educational model of our kūpuna, I believe that giving the students of the workshop a measure of control in shaping their writing environment and its rules will help them to feel safe and therefore more empowered and freer creatively.

As Peter Elbow (2000) advocated in *Everyone Can Write*, the instructor should be a model whenever a “difficult or potentially threatening procedure” is introduced:

I make sure I freewrite with students or workshop participants; I introduce reading out loud by reading something of mine first; I introduce feedback by first offering something of my own for response; and I soon model the process of giving feedback. (p. 393)

Accordingly, as the writing workshop will have writing at its center, through various freewriting and automatic writing exercises intended to aid invention, the instructor will be a participant in these activities alongside the students and model each of these activities. (See Table 1 for a comparison of the proposed Native Hawaiian curriculum with the American creative writing curriculum.)

### CULMINATION OF THE WORKSHOP AND COMMUNITY READING/PUBLICATION

Because of the history of silencing that has pervaded Native Hawaiian literature, I also feel strongly that the curriculum should culminate with a literary reading that is planned and coordinated as a community and that spotlights the participants of the workshop as a public showing of the creativity resulting from a safe, Native Hawaiian-controlled space for literary freedom. In turn, all writers will also be encouraged to submit their work for publication in *‘Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal*, or if funding can be secured, their work would comprise a professional collection commemorating the workshop itself, which can be distributed through Kuleana ‘Ōiwi Press and Nā Mea Hawai‘i, the Native Hawaiian bookstore at Ward Warehouse on O‘ahu. Students will also be taught how to submit their work for publication to other literary journals or publishers should they choose to in the future.

**TABLE 1** Comparing the proposed Native Hawaiian curriculum with the American creative writing curriculum

Native Hawaiian creative writing curriculum	American creative writing curriculum (based on New Criticism)
Self-definition of Native Hawaiian identity	Normative identity
Emphasis on defining and adhering to a Native Hawaiian aesthetic	Emphasis on adhering to a Western aesthetic
Writing to self-represent and empower	Writing to succeed academically and within American literary circles
Native Hawaiian culture as curriculum	Western culture as curriculum
Workshop protocol is determined as a community	Workshop protocol is imposed by the teacher and informed by an ahistorical approach to the text
Teacher actively participates in workshop; shares unrevised work with students	Teacher does not participate in workshop; does not share unrevised work with students
Publication/readings: Planned and coordinated as a community	Publication/readings: Largely self-directed

## CONCLUSION

Just as literature and writing have been used in the service of colonization, so too can literature and writing articulate the colonial situation from the perspective of the colonized. As described by Fanon (1963), in the hands of the colonized, literature has the power to “call upon a whole people to join in the struggle for the existence of the nation...it informs the national consciousness, gives it shape and contours, and opens up new, unlimited horizons” (p. 173). As our kūpuna recognized, writing in various genres, especially when distributed, is a powerful technology that may be used to our own devices. Through historiography, testimony, and claims to genealogy, land, and indigenous identity, writing can be used as a

means to emphasize and continue language revitalization efforts, to educate the outsider on Native Hawaiian issues, to refute false claims and stereotypes made by colonial writers, and to emphasize a distinctly indigenous aesthetic. These are empowering aims that are all inherently resistant of colonialism.

Examples of how Native Hawaiians are using writing toward these ends can be seen in the creative works of Haunani-Kay Trask, Joe Balaz, ʻĪmaikalani Kalāhele, and Māhealani Kamauʻu, to name a few; in the scholarship of Native Hawaiian intellectuals like Noenoe Silva, Haunani-Kay Trask, Manulani Aluli Meyer, Jonathan Osorio, Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa, and Kuʻualoha Hoʻomanawanui; in publications like *ʻŌiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal*, a self-defined collection of Native Hawaiian literature, testimony, and art; in the development of textbooks, such as *He Hawaiʻi Au: Hawaiian History, A Hawaiian Perspective*, a collaboration between Native Hawaiian educators, Puanani Wilhelm (State Department of Education), ʻAnuenue School teachers, and Julie Kaomea (University of Hawaiʻi College of Education); and in ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi instruction “huli” books written by senior high school students in the Native Hawaiian charter schools for use by their younger counterparts.

Thus, in many ways the present moment is ripe for a Native Hawaiian creative writing curriculum to occur. More than ever, there is “a continuing refusal to be silent, to join those groups of indigenous people who have disappeared.... Hawaiians are still here, we are still creating, still resisting” (Trask, 1999b, p. 20). There is also the hope, with this and every successive generation, that we, as Native Hawaiians, come closer to reclaiming ourselves and the truth of our Hawaiian-ness.

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From Upcountry Maui, Brandy Nālani McDougall is a 1994 Kamehameha Schools graduate who completed her MFA in poetry from the University of Oregon in 2001 and a Fulbright Study Award (Aotearoa/New Zealand) in 2002. An award-winning poet, she has been published in journals and anthologies throughout Hawai'i, the continental United States, and the Pacific. Her first collection will be released in 2007. She is an assistant editor for Kuleana 'Ōiwi Press, the publisher of 'Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal, and the 2006–07 recipient of the Grace K. J. Abernethy Fellowship in publishing, awarded by the international journal *Mānoa*. Currently pursuing a PhD in English from the University of Hawai'i–Mānoa, she has taught classes in creative writing, ethnic studies, and composition.

## APPENDIX

Native Hawaiian charter schools have laid much of the groundwork for designing curricula based on Native Hawaiian ideology. One of the schools, Hālau Kū Māna, for example, uses the following Native Hawaiian values as its guiding educational principles:

**ALOHA.** Love, compassion, and “the intelligence for how life can be experienced.” Aloha involves being in each other’s presence, or *alo*, and sharing *ha*, which can be described as breath, energy, voice, and all the ideas, mana, love, and support contained within.

**MAKAWALU.** “Eight eyes”; there are many truths and perspectives. Rather than perceiving two-dimensional, black-and-white dichotomies, one can explore things from many angles with an open mind and develop a well-rounded, colorful understanding of the world that fits well with one’s “truth.”

**MĀLAMA.** A reciprocal relationship with the land and all its inhabitants. To care for, cherish, respect, preserve, and perpetuate.

**KŪPONO.** Striving to always be in a state of pono (balance, harmony, fairness). To stand, walk, think, talk, and act in a way that feels pono.

These values guide all members of the school in teaching and learning behaviors and approaches, real-world problem solving in “authentic assignments” (e.g., navigation and kalo farming), as well as how to live within the natural environment, the home environment, and in the school environment. ([www.halaukumana.org/corevalues](http://www.halaukumana.org/corevalues))