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Haole Like Me: Identity Construction and Politics in Hawaii

A Thesis by

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Chapman University

Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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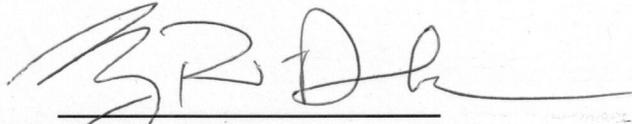
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December 2019

Haole Like Me: Identity Construction and Politics in Hawaii

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by Savannah Leilani Janssen

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ABSTRACT

Haole Like Me: Identity Construction and Politics in Hawaii

by Savannah Leilani Janssen

Haole is a contested, multi-faceted word in Hawaii. It generally means “foreigner,” or “white person.” It is used to refer to both tourists, and *haoles* like me, or those who are born and raised in Hawaii. In either case, it is always negative, referring to something “other” and really, colonial. Paraphrasing rhetorician Kenneth Burke, this thesis analyzes how this word “works in the world,” and from there, explores how identity, culture, and belonging are constructed through language. The essential questions become: are culture and identity constructed and performed, through language, tradition, and cultural engagement? Or is some blood content or ethnicity warranted to claim cultural belonging, and in this case, a Hawaiian identity? The method for this research began with seven interviews with people from Hawaii—a mix of *haoles*, *hapa* (mixed race) people, and ethnic Hawaiians—followed by the analyzing of these interviews, and ending with my personal engagement with these findings autoethnographically. Writing this thesis has changed how I see my own identity in Hawaii. I have used this autoethnographic method to share this transformation, explore it, and through it, mimic the in-flux nature of identity construction and language at large. I see this thesis as fluid and subject to change; as a jumping off point for future research on an otherwise “silent” topic, silent in that people in Hawaii do not openly discuss this issue; as the beginning of a necessary dialogue on what it means to be *haole*, what it means to be Hawaiian, and the nature of identity and cultural construction at large.

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1 Introduction

I walked into a coffee shop in Makawao town in Maui, Hawaii, where I was born and raised. I found a table and sat down, and after a couple of minutes passed, he walked in. I knew it was him right away, even though we'd never met before. He had tribal tattoos down the left side of his face and was wearing a white Maui Built t-shirt, shorts, and as we say in Hawaii, slippers. He must have known that I was "me," too. We introduced ourselves and did the local kiss-on-the-cheek rather than a handshake, and then sat down.

This was the beginning of my interview with Kyle Nakanelua, a retired fire chief and current taro farmer. We had arranged the interview as part of my master's thesis.

I thanked him for meeting me. He nodded, and then added, "I've talked to people to correct the narrative on Hawaiian culture before." The word "correct" surprised me.

I began telling him about my undergraduate thesis on hybridity and performativity in Hawaiian culture. I wrote about Hawaii as a "melting pot," arguing that we should reconstruct Hawaiian identity as performative, and not mutually exclusive with ethnicity.

I was in the middle of speaking when I saw Kyle close his eyes, a smile on his face. I stopped talking, and he said "That feels very colonial." I felt my face turn red.

"Being Hawaiian is not a practice," he said. "Hawaiian is an identity, a national origin. It has to do with knowing, embracing, and living the history of Hawaii holistically."

I probed a little, asking if that was not still a performance.

“Well, we can continue the education of everyone we have to live with,” he said. “But not anyone can be Hawaiian. Anyone *can* be a Hawaiian national, meaning you support the sovereignty of Hawaii.”

I asked where that put *haoles*. He said it “makes *haoles* Americans. But you can still acknowledge the Hawaiian kingdom and support and defend it.”

I told him I understood that, but I couldn’t help but feel, as a *haole*, isolated by that definition. Wasn’t I more than just an American?

I asked what *haole* meant to him.

“There’s a problem with the word *haole*. ‘Ha ole’ means without life essence, whereas ‘haole’ is a wind that wrecks everything. *Haole* is more of a condition, a condition that is always negative—a negative, destructive presence,” he said.

I brought up my own *haole* identity: how I experienced culture shock when I moved to California for college, how I grew up dancing hula and canoe-paddling, how I chanted in Hawaiian before reading in English. I told him that I felt like I had some connection to this place; that it has formed my values and who I am. To this, Kyle got very serious, asking me who I learned hula from, how long I had paddled—he was probing my knowledge and the depth of my cultural experience. I got scared, and thought that no answer would be enough. I explained that I was not trying to claim Hawaiian identity, but that as a result of growing up there, I feel more of a connection to Hawaii than an identity as a American.

I moved onto the next question, asking about his own ethnic background.

Kyle mentioned briefly that he is part Portuguese. “I descended from the Portuguese but I’m not actually Portuguese.” He also said that he is Catholic. He then went back to explaining his Hawaiian identity, saying, “If you descend from the first people, you are ethnically Hawaiian. That

blood quantum matters. The rest is just a pollutant. If you have Hawaiian blood, you are blessed. To deepen that connection, you can learn and speak the language; you can broaden the depth of your ethnicity through action.” Again, this reminds me of cultural performativity, but I stay quiet.

I asked Kyle if he had talked about this before, specifically these issues of *haole* identity, and Hawaiian identity and culture. “It’s all I think about,” he said. “It’s my duty as an elder. It doesn’t make me popular. I never wanted this job.”

I felt the interview wrapping up. At this point we had talked for over an hour.

I asked him if there is anything else he wanted to say.

He said, “This is a duty. I have to put in the extra effort. If you are not ethnically Hawaiian, you don’t suffer that pain. The responsibility, the expectation of a culture. It’s a weight. You have an obligation. There’s no rest.”

I scribbled my notes down as fast as I could, then closed my notebook.

I felt relief fill the space between us.

...

This was the first interview for my graduate thesis and it left me exhausted. I wrote in my journal right afterwards: “I feel emotional after this, and very drained. When he sat down and openly said how he talks to people ‘to correct the narrative’—is this what he was doing with me?”

I drew some preliminary conclusions: “What I’m getting is that true ‘Hawaiian’ is blood related, but anyone can do Hawaiian activities. But if you do these activities, you still aren’t Hawaiian. You can only support Hawaiian culture, increasing your proximity by the quantity of things you do, the depth of your commitment, and your political engagement. But what about performativity?”

While my perception was changing, I still saw moments that resembled my earlier research: “But he’s also Portuguese? He just denies that part of himself? How does he reconcile that hybridity? Is what I’m doing, or my engagement in Hawaiian culture, cultural appropriation then? How do I explain my own hybridity?”

Now, as I write this, I am shocked by my defensiveness. I see now that I was probing for something to prove that my past research was not completely wrong. Like the stages of grief, I was dealing with denial, and soon after, reconciling with acceptance.

I began to feel guilty. I wrote, “I have guilt for being *haole*. Maybe the right thing to do is to drop everything and stop wanting to belong in Hawaii—but that feels like a loss.”

“So maybe I am just American?” I wrote, “But I don’t see myself like that at all. I’m not in touch with Hawaiian culture in the way that he is, but I have been affected by growing up here. So am I just placeless? I’m not trying to become something that I am not, I’m just trying to figure out what this experience is.”

My interview with Kyle left me with questions. Who is native and who is “other”? Whose place is it to speak? Whose literal space is Hawaii? Who benefits from the history of colonialism, and how? Why is there so much anxiety and fear in speaking about this? Why do I feel intimidated even writing about it?

This interview destabilized the theory and ideology of hybridity that I had bought into, and how I saw my own identity. And so began the process of reflection and reconstruction of how I understood identity in Hawaii, and of how I saw myself.

...

The word *haole* has a variety of definitions, but most equate to something like “foreigner.” Judy Rohrer, author of *Haoles in Hawaii*, traces the etymology of the word *haole* to “precontact

days, although its exact meaning is uncertain...Its earliest use seems mostly to refer to things that were foreign” (Rohrer 59). Rohrer quotes the Pukui-Elbert Hawaiian dictionary, which defines *haole* as “[w]hite person, American, Englishman, Caucasian; American, English; formerly, any foreigner” (59). While *haole* may refer to foreigners, it also refers generally to Caucasian people—I have never heard someone call a Japanese person, or a Black person, *haole*. As such, *haole* describes both tourists and white people at large, even those who have spent their lives in Hawaii, or “*haoles*” like me.

While *haole* may refer to literal foreigner, it “is also a marker of a certain set of attitudes and behaviors that are distinctly not local, reminding us that racial constructions always include more than skin color” (Rohrer 59). *Haole* thus encapsulates “tourist behavior” or “attitudes”—such as disrespecting natural sites, disregard for culture, and other “not local” behavior—both in regards to actual tourists *and* locals. However, while this element of performance may seem to qualify who is *haole* and who is not (or separate tourists from “local haoles” through behavior) *haole* is still used to refer to white people at large, regardless of behavior.

In my last thesis, I tried to make a distinction between *haole* tourists, and *haoles* like me; *haoles* who are “distinctly not local,” and others like me who grew up in Hawaii, who are “local” and act accordingly (i.e. respecting the land, participating in the culture, etc.). I started historically: in the 19th century, various immigrant groups, including *haoles*, came to Hawaii, beginning the plantation era. As plantations formed, so did a phenomenon of cultural mixing and blending. Different ethnicities intermarried, “Pidgin,” a hybrid language formed, and Hawaii suddenly became a hot spot of *hapa* (mixed raced) people and cultures, or a “melting pot.” This narrative of hybridity exists today, and is often backed by the tourist industry: it constructs Hawaii as a place of “aloha” and “Hawaiian spirit” where all races are welcome.

I applied this narrative to Kiana Davenport's novel *Shark Dialogues*, arguing that if Hawaii is hybridized, what it means to be Hawaiian also has to be hybrid. In that no one is one hundred percent ethnically Hawaiian anymore—a result of this cultural blending—I argued that Hawaiian identity could no longer be bound solely to blood content or ethnicity. Following what literary historian and scholar, Stephen Greenblatt, defines as culture, I defended culture as an “awareness of a ‘complex whole’ ...a set of limits within which social behavior must be contained” (225), or as “performative” rather than based solely on blood content, meaning something constantly constructed through language, action, and values. I agreed with postcolonial theorist Salman Rushdie, who, quoting from “Imaginary Homelands,” urges us to “build a new, ‘modern’ world out of an old...civilization, an old culture which we have brought into the heart of a newer one...This stereoscopic vision [or hybridity] is perhaps what we can offer” (Rushdie 19). Through my analysis of Davenport's novel, I thought I was creating a new Hawaiian culture out of an old one, offering a “stereoscopic vision” or model of a more fluid, hybrid, and postcolonial construction of culture and of what it means to be Hawaiian.

I see now that I became obsessed with this idea of cultural performativity, in part, because it validated how I saw my own identity. If culture is performative, then as someone who grew up participating in Hawaiian culture, I could to some extent “perform” Hawaiian cultural identity. Even though I am still *haole*, or still white, this performance would make me different than *haole* tourists, or “real foreigners,” and closer to belonging in Hawaii. I realize now, in Kyle's words, how “colonial” that idea was. I thought that I was doing postcolonial work, but really I was overlooking the colonial history of Hawaii to justify my own position as a *haole*.

While cultural mixing is a real phenomenon, so is the colonial narrative of Hawaii. When *haoles* arrived in Hawaii, they didn't create Rushdie's “stereoscopic vision” of a postcolonial

reality, or Homi Bhabha's "third space:" instead, they created a traditional colonial system. This happened first with the buying of land. When *haoles* came to Hawaii, they bought land for plantation crops, and employed other immigrant groups for manual labor. Land ownership ultimately lead to *haole* control of Hawaii. Haunani-Kay Trask, a Hawaiian nationalist and educator, in her book *From a Native Daughter*, explains that Hawaiians originally understood the land as "spiritually based," and only used it in a "self-sufficient economic" and communal way—but this all changed when foreigners arrived and brought the "oppressive, medieval European practice of...ownership...benefit[ing] the haole, who alienated Hawaiians from the land, taking it for themselves" (Trask 115-116). *Haoles* gained power through land ownership, dispossessing the Native Hawaiian people of their land—and eventually, power, and culture—so that "Hawai'i's colonial history, include[es] Kanaka Maoli [Native Hawaiian] dispossession and *haole* hegemony" (Rohrer 63). Hawaiian culture was deemed "primitive" and less than by the now empowered white, Western, Christian immigrants who judged that "*There is no value in things Hawaiian; all value comes from things haole*" (Trask 114). To return to Kyle's words, the foreigners—the white *haoles*, as well as the other immigrant groups—had officially "polluted" a once "pure" Hawaii.

This returns to the discussion of cultural behavior. If, as I argued previously, culture is performative, it allows Hawaii to become a postcolonial, hybrid space, and yet it also justifies colonialism. If Native Hawaiians do not privilege having Hawaiian blood as necessary in "being Hawaiian," or if they continue to reject culture as performative, than anyone could claim Hawaiian identity, and then everything would be at last taken away from them. Native Hawaiians cling to culture as bound to blood quantum and resist "hybridity," because that fight is bound up with resisting Western and "foreign" hegemony. However, this thinking is not perfect—again, there are few if any people who are one hundred percent Hawaiian, most are mixed race. This narrative fails

to recognize the inherent hybridity of most people's identities. It also traps *haoles* like me: on the one hand, culture as performative allows us to have a place in Hawaii, but on the other hand, it also allows for the continued colonization of the Native Hawaiian people. My purpose in this thesis is to unpack this issue: the *haole* dilemma of feeling caught between the two narratives of “a ‘melting pot’ and...the ‘aloha spirit’...[and the] competing discourse of racial conflict” (Rohrer 63), or of belonging in Hawaii, or being the eternal colonizer or *haole*.

In order to do this work, I decided to—paraphrasing rhetorician Kenneth Burke—look at the way that this language works in the world, or how people in Hawaii define their identities, based in performativity or ethnic identity. I decided to analyze language as a means of exploring these larger questions of how culture works, of what it means to be *haole*, and of what it means to be Hawaiian. In order to analyze language “working in the world,” I conducted interviews. After receiving IRB approval, I called people in my community on Maui and asked them to voluntarily participate in my study. I conducted seven interviews, both on the phone and in-person, with people of Hawaiian descent, mixed ancestry, and other *haoles*, in order to see how they—on an individual and group level—define themselves in Hawaii, and how that relates to these two conceptions of identity construction. Participants had to have lived in Hawaii for over five years, and be over eighteen years of age. Each participant chose how they would like their data to be shared in this research: some chose to use their names, others chose to remain anonymous. I took notes from the interviews, so the quotes shared are direct quotes. All participants have consented to share what I disclose in this research. After transcribing the interviews, I began analyzing the data: circling around key terms, analyzing how people talked about their identities, drawing connections between the interviews and with theory at large.

I analyzed these interviews using, primarily, Burke's idea of terministic screens, specifically that of dramatistic and scientific terms. By terministic screens, Burke means that "terminology [language] is a *reflection* of reality, [but also] by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function as a *deflection* of reality" (Burke 45). This means that we each understand the world, and ourselves, through a fragile "lens" of words: fragile in that each word has an individual charge, negotiated by all the other words that could have been selected, and in regards to each person's unique understanding of language. To put it simply, we create reality at large, and by extension, our identities, through language. If all of reality is flexible, and mediated through language, then so does identity exist through the semiotic discourses that define it, i.e. language. Yet, even if we agree that language constructs reality, and self, not everyone sees that construction in the same way. Burke mentions two conceptions of language, or of how these "terministic screens" operate: "scientific" and "dramatistic." On the one hand, some see the world as made definitive through language, or as "scientific." In a scientific lens, we see reality and ourselves based on a "edifice of language with primary stress upon... 'It *is*, or it is *not*'" (44). Scientific assigns each word, and reality as a whole, a definitive, declarative, solidified meaning. This vision of reality relates directly to a vision of identity, or becomes conflated with self as essential, or defined in concrete terms such as ethnic identity. In terms of this research, as Kyle told me, he situates Hawaiian identity and cultural belonging through blood content. In short, a conception of language as definitive, leads to a construction of identity as definitive, which leads us back to this idea of culture as definitive (or as "being Hawaiian" as equal to Hawaiian blood content). Alternatively, Burke offers a dramatistic conception of language, and identity: in "[t]he dramatistic view of language...the 'same' dream will be subjected to a different color filter...as perceived, recorded, and interpreted" (46). Here,

each word—or following the metaphor, “dream”—is allowed flexibility, a “different color filter,” a different performance. Other “local *haoles*” and I situate ourselves in Hawaii through performance, or “dramatistic” terms: by participating in Hawaiian activities, language, values, etc., we construct a sort of “dramatistic,” performative version of identity and belonging in Hawaii. Accordingly, language, self, culture, and reality are allowed flexibility and “interpretation.” In dramatistic terms, self and culture are mediated through “stories, plays, poems...mythologies, theologies, and philosophies” (Burke 45) rather than ethnicity or other “scientific terms.”

While there are other conceptions of identity and culture—these are not the only two ideas on the subject—thinking of it in this way has significant parallels and relevance to this research. By analyzing the interviews through this lens of terministic screens, I am able to analyze the larger implications for how one understands self, culture, and reality at large, and how that understanding is shared or at odds in different identity groups in Hawaii. How we understand ourselves through language matters as it directly affects this discussion of identity politics and cultural understanding. We make ourselves through the language we define ourselves with, which has larger social implications when we choose to see ourselves aligned with some realities and identities and not others.

In addition to this language analysis, I conducted this research autoethnographically. Thommy Eriksson describes this methodology in his article “Being Native—Distance, Closeness, and Doing Auto/Self-Ethnography,” as “the study of the researcher’s own group...understanding them from within” (Eriksson 91). In autoethnography “we turn ourselves towards a group of people where we already belong” (Eriksson 92), enabling a proximity, familiarity, and self-exploration that is meaningful to the research, and enabling me to reflect on my own place in the community I grew up in. As meaning-making beings, we are always interpreting the world through our

personal lenses—or through Burke’s “terministic screens:” autoethnography purposefully calls attention to that personal interaction and subjectivity, turning it into a profitable resource for creating understanding rather than a flaw. Logistically, this methodology took the shape of me synthesizing the data and simultaneously comparing and writing about my own experience as a *haole*.

This methodology has important theoretical implications—one of which theorist Michel Foucault brings up in his preface to *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, when he mentions the inherent instability and fragility of our “viewing point” of the world, saying “No gaze is stable, or rather...subject and object, the spectator and the model, reverse roles to infinity” (Foucault 5). To me, this reflects the position of autoethnography, or of recognizing the position as both observer and observed inherent to this research. Foucault continues, writing “...we do not know who we are, or what we are doing. Seen or seeing?...[We are] observing a place which, from moment to moment, never ceases to change its content, its form, its face, its identity” (5). I hope to present my research—as autoethnography allows—as in flux, as ever in formation, as reflective of only *a* moment of many moments in my identity formation, as well as others’.

I recognize some critiques of the autoethnographic method. To some, this methodology may appear self-centered: I agree with Eriksson’s point that there is a “risk of self- and autoethnography [of] becoming too self-focused and narcissistic” (93). It is not my goal to privilege my voice above the others that I work with in the study. Instead, I hope that my personal involvement makes this study meaningful, believable, and beneficial in its vulnerability. Ericksson writes that “vulnerability gives authority...[it can] be seen as a verification of honesty, closeness and commitment...[it] proclaims that *I have been there to*” (95). Such is my hope for this study: that my voice is not distracting, or a point of weakness, but that my personal engagement and

exploration—of who I am and where I belong—gives this study strength. Additionally, this is only one version of many discussions of identity in Hawaii. I resonate Dorinne K. Kondo, author of *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*, who writes that “the ethnographic text, occup[ies] a space within a particular history of a specific ethnographer and her informants...within the shifting fields of power and meaning” (Kondo 8). I present a “particular history” of what it means to be *haole* in Hawaii, mediated by “[m]y experiences of identification, fragmentation, and self-transformation...the interplay of meaning and power...[of] rewr[it]ing our identities” (Kondo 24), or my own shifting identity experiences. Finally, in that “[i]dentity is not a fixed ‘thing,’ it is negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous, the result of culturally available meanings and open-ended, power-laden enactments of those meanings” (Kondo 24), I recognize that each interview that I share is also “negotiated,” flexible, and subject to change beyond this moment in time. Each interview is also “mediated,” meaning I recognize myself as a mediator in that each person I interviewed knew me as a *haole*, and that I would be making meaning from and within that identity position (contrastingly, I wonder what this research may have looked like if I were ethnically Hawaiian, or perhaps brown-skinned?). In some interviews I think there was a sense of community and familiarity, while others were charged with the tension of race, as in my interview with Kyle. Each interview is charged with either a sense of belonging, “otherness,” or something in between. To conclude, this is *a* presentation of identity politics in Hawaii, at a moment in time, in a snapshot of the participant’s identity negotiations, as well as my own. All of this is bound to change. As such, may what I present be received with an appreciation for the gaps of meaning, vulnerability, and exploration—of both my identity and others’.

What follows is my analysis of these interviews, broken into chapters. My hope is not to create definite answers—such a purpose is counterintuitive to this research at large—but to reveal this discourse, and what it represents. I am exploring these questions: who is native and who is “other”? What are the terministic screens that are selecting and deflecting the reality of identity in Hawaii? How do the different people and identity groups of Hawaii see themselves, and their role in Hawaii, through the language they are using to define themselves? What is that saying about Hawaii, and about identity, at large? What are the semiotic, cultural, and linguistic systems that shape identity perception and performance?

2 The *Haole* Experience: Dramatistic Terms or Cultural Appropriation

2.1 *Haole* “Discrimination”

“Local *haoles*,” including myself, tend to negotiate identity through Burke’s “dramatistic” terms, meaning looking at language, and by extension, identity and culture, as flexible and performed. This allows for a level of inclusion in Hawaii: if identity is performative, it allows even *haoles* to have some sense of Hawaiian identity and cultural belonging in Hawaii through involvement in Hawaiian culture.

Kyle, to some extent, supports this claim in the interview. He said to me, “To deepen that connection, you can learn and speak the language; you can broaden the depth of your ethnicity through action.” However, here he was referring to people who are ethnically Hawaiian. For all others, he said “Well, we can continue the education of everyone we have to live with. But not anyone can be Hawaiian.” In other words, according to Kyle, participation or “performance” of a culture deepens someone who has Hawaiian blood content’s Hawaiian identity, but for everyone else, participation is only participation, leading to no creation of identity or cultural belonging.

As this interview shows, *haole* participation in Hawaiian culture, and what that means for identity and culture at large, is contested. Most problematically, *haoles* wanting to belong and participate in Hawaiian culture is often backed by colonialist values, even if that is not the intention. In my own experience in the interview, I wanted Kyle to accept me and my narrative of hybridity and cultural performativity. When he didn’t, I felt scared and sort of attacked—I was shocked to realize I, as a *haole*, may have no belonging in Hawaii, as Kyle was suggesting. And

so the conflict of *haole* and Hawaiian rears its head: on one hand *haoles* want to belong in Hawaii, and on the other, Hawaiians want to resist complete colonization.

As a result of this conflict, the *haole* experience is often marked by feeling discriminated against. I recognize how colonial this is—to want to belong in Hawaii as a white person, and then feeling bad when those who are ethnically Hawaiian don't welcome you with open arms—but I also see from the other interviews that I am not alone in this experience, and even from the interview with Kyle, that culture as based in performance and action—in dramatistic terms—still has some merit.

In this section, I hope to explore this tension about what it means to be *haole* and how that relates to dramatistic terms, and cultural performativity. If culture is performative, how do I explain a *haole* person who performs more of a Hawaiian identity, or participates more in Hawaiian culture, than someone who is ethnically Hawaiian? Or, are *haoles* who are engaged in Hawaiian culture—through the language, hula, paddling, etc.—actually performing Hawaiian culture, or is it always cultural appropriation if they are not ethnically Hawaiian?

...

In every interview I did with other *haoles*, this idea of “discrimination” was brought up. I interviewed Gloria, a woman I have known for my whole life. Gloria was born and raised in California. Now in her seventies, she has spent the majority of her life in Hawaii. Over the phone, she speaks in English but also tosses in many Hawaiian words. This is the result of her joining a *halau* (loosely translated as “school”) in 2012. In *halau* she learns, with predominantly Native Hawaiian people, about Hawaiian culture and ‘*Ōlelo Hawaii*, or the Hawaiian language. About a recent trip to Mauna Kea with her cohort, she said, “I was in the minority but I usually am [as a white person].” She told me this is really the first time she is talking about being *haole*. In *halau*

she says that she's more accepted now than when she first joined, "but I wouldn't say that I'm embraced." For example, her *kumu* (teacher), selected a cohort for a strong core of people to dive deeper into cultural practices, the language, etc. She is only one of a few who were not chosen.

"The truth is that they are more Hawaiian," she said. "They've been culturally grown while they were young. I was one of two or three people out of twenty-five not selected. I still do not know why. When I feel more comfortable I may ask, but you can't question *kumu*."

This sort of feeling of "discrimination" against, or animosity towards, *haoles* is not uncommon. Through a colonial lens, those who were once "othered" (i.e. the Native Hawaiians) are now "othering" the "foreigners," or the *haoles*. It is the system of othering historically perpetuated by a colonist narrative, and perhaps it is justified. Why should *haoles* have a place in Hawaiian culture? The tricky part is, how do we reconcile the fact that in Gloria's case, she has a deep understanding of the language, and years of committed participation in Hawaiian culture—debatably more than some of the ethnically Hawaiian people in the special cohort—yet she cannot claim any sort of Hawaiian identity. Also in Gloria's case, she has lived and worked in Hawaii, and participated in Hawaiian culture, for the majority of her life—but is she just the same as a tourist because she is *haole*?

...

"When I feel it, [hatred towards *haoles*] I try not to take it personally," says Inanna Carter over the phone. "For one, I know I did not do it [colonialism] but I am not going to fault the person who has held onto that anger. All people should be treated equal and we should all be kind. The way to move forward is through kindness."

Inanna was also born and raised on Maui. She went to the same private school as me, but she was a senior when I was in eighth grade. Her mom is German and Catholic; her dad is Jewish.

When I spoke to her, she was on her way to hula practice. I had called once before she picked up, and it went to voicemail. Her voicemail says, “Aloha, you’ve reached Inanna.” She now lives in California where she goes to UCLA for medical school.

On the phone, she told me about a summer program she did during and after high school, called Kupu, which provide hands-on training in conservation, sustainability, and environmental education for young adults. During Kupu, Inanna said she befriended a local Hawaiian guy her age. Later, he told her that she was his “first white friend.”

“He said to me, ‘I was ready to hate you,’” Inanna tells me. They became friends anyway.

...

From this and Gloria’s experience, the *haole* discrimination mentioned before becomes apparent. In both cases, there is an awareness of not fitting into the Hawaiian community, even when they are “performing” similarly. In Gloria’s case, she speaks Hawaiian as well as other members of the *halau*, but still feels like an outsider in some respect. In Inanna’s case with Kupu, her appearance immediately framed her as an outsider, as a person that someone ethnically Hawaiian “was ready to hate,” even though she was doing the same environmental conservation that he was. Again, we see “discrimination.” Perhaps the question is not “is the discrimination justified,” but instead, “what does ‘*haole* discrimination’ say about identity and culture at large? Can *haoles* perform Hawaiian identity in the way that ethnic Hawaiians can?”

This point is reflected most clearly in an interview I did with a woman, who wishes to remain anonymous. She is originally from the mainland—she is not ethnically Hawaiian—but has lived on Maui since she first came here on a class trip in college. She is now in her sixties. “I stayed here for three months for a class and never left,” she told me on the phone.

“This place spoke to my heart. I know it’s where I needed to be,” she said. “And now I’ve lived here for forty years.”

I chose to speak to this woman, not only because she has years of experience as a *haole*, but because of her in-depth involvement in the hula community.

“My first real Hawaiian cultural experience was after I felt my first desire to dance hula,” she told me. “My first experience was not very welcoming. I tried to join a *halau* and nobody paid attention to me at all. I was later accepted into a *halau* on Front St.—that was very positive, a feeling of the *aloha* spirit. Then I started hula with Auntie, and she welcomes everybody from every walk of life. She gets snubbed from other *kumu* for allowing *haoles* into her *halau*, but she does anyway.”

I, too, danced hula with “Auntie” (for anonymity, and as that is what most people call her, I will refer to her solely as “Auntie”). My sisters and I started dancing when we were five years old. We had blonde hair and white skin, and so did other girls in the class. There were Hawaiian and other “local” girls, too. My mom had originally enrolled us in a different *halau*, where we were the definite minority, and not welcomed. Auntie welcomed us with open arms.

“She wanted to engage in a dialogue with everybody. She welcomed opinions, wanted to talk politics,” said this woman about Auntie. “I felt welcome most of the time.”

However, welcoming as Auntie is, there were some limitations.

“I still felt that there was an underlying current or just importance of having Hawaiian blood,” this woman told me. “All the people who did would be in the front row.”

This was true in my own experience with hula. I was repeatedly chosen to chant, or *oli*, before my group would dance for a few of our larger *halau* performances. I remember feeling proud that Auntie picked me; I felt like I was good at it. Then, a new girl joined our group. She

had jet-black hair and brown skin. She looked Hawaiian, but she may have been Samoan or Tahitian. Regardless, Auntie began choosing her to chant. She was a few years younger, and had done less hula than the rest of us. She never said that she chose this girl because she looked Hawaiian, but I think we all were thinking it—I was.

Our conversation continued. “Fourteen years later, Auntie asked me to do 'uniki,” she told me. 'Uniki is the hula rite and ritual through which an established hula *kumu* will pass down the hula and cultural knowledge to a select few so that they can become teachers.

“She had never brought people to the *kumu* level. It was a scary honor to be asked,” she said. She told me that in order to complete it, it was a full year commitment. “The hope is that afterwards we would go on to teach.”

“We each were assigned an ali'i [chief]. Mine was Queen Ka'ahumanu. As part of the process, we had to make all of the implements, so the pa'u [drum], programs to represent the ali'i, costumes, chants, all hand-died fabric...” she said. The process was in depth, only for the few chosen and committed.

“It took a year of working with dancers and tools and practice,” she told me. “Then we stayed at the *halau* for a couple of days leading up to the final presentation in front of two hundred people with *kumu* from all over. We had to do ritual hula and present our two dancers, while being observed by Auntie's hula brothers and sisters.”

She went through the 'uniki process, and passed. However, three weeks before the ceremony, she started going through a divorce.

“Everyone thought it [hula] would be my rebirth. Finally, I told Auntie about the divorce a week before. My dancers never knew [what I was going through],” she said.

After 'uniki, she took a month off from hula.

“I used to be so on top of it. But then I had to handle everything with the divorce,” she told me. “I couldn’t be who I should have been to respect Auntie.”

While the immediate hardship in personal life slowed her commitment to hula, she still had lingering doubts if she was supposed to be involved in hula, at least at that level, all along.

“Sometimes I would say to Auntie, ‘Are you sure it’s me?’” she said. “It’s the highest honor, but Auntie told me that you don’t need to be Hawaiian. She saw my connection to hula, the land, the ritual—how thoroughly I dove into everything. She saw that my heart and my soul was there.”

“But I always had a feeling of inadequacy,” she continued. “Like I’m just never...No matter how much I do, I just feel that from my peers outside the *halau*, like the respect wasn’t there,” she said. “I shared Auntie’s feeling that I am ‘Hawaiian at heart,’ but I also knew how important blood is to her, and bloodline.”

She has not gone back to hula since. “It’s not in my heart right now. But I think about it.”

...

In another part of the interview, I asked her if she ever felt “discriminated” against as a *haole* in Hawaii.

“In all honesty, forty years ago I tried to get into a hula class and felt ostracized. But ninety-nine percent of my experience here I haven’t felt it,” she told me. “I respect the culture, the land, the social norms. In my communication and the way I tread on the land, I mostly feel like I belong, and I don’t pretend to be anything else.”

“There was one time, before cell phones, in the van with my daughter,” she continued. “I was following a car and a guy was hitting this woman in the car. I saw what was happening and started laying on the horn. I followed them to the gas station. I would’ve called 911 if there were

cell phones, but no phone, so when he was inside, I got out of the car and spoke to the girl. I told her, ‘Get out of here.’ But he came back, and he saw me and was like ‘You fucking *haole*,’ and started shouting at me. I wanted to say, ‘I’ve been here longer than you, dude. And I can chant you to the ground.’”

...

From these stories, I see elements of Burke’s dramatic understanding of language, or of *haoles* wanting to belong in Hawaii, and defining their identities through performance and participation in Hawaiian culture. As this woman says in the last anecdote, “‘I’ve been here longer than you, dude. And I can chant you to the ground.’” To some extent, all of these people know Hawaiian culture and participate in it on a spectrum of involvement. I bring up the last interview specifically: this woman was asked to participate in the most sacred hula ritual, or to become a hula *kumu* herself. Doesn’t that show that participation, or “performance” of a culture in some ways trumps ethnic identity?

Qualifying this idea is colonial under tones. This woman—even though deeply involved in Hawaiian culture—could not shake the feeling of “Are you sure it’s me?”, the feeling of inadequacy, or of not belonging completely. Without blood content, or within “scientific” terms, none of these people can fully claim a Hawaiian identity—even with thorough knowledge of and performance in Hawaiian identity. Thus, a scientific conception of culture still seems more legitimate. Additionally, in every case, being *haole* is also conflated with guilt, or a sense of knowing one’s place; knowing that no matter how much someone is involved in Hawaiian culture, being *haole* is always conflated with being the colonizer.

2.2 *Haole* as Colonizer

Being *haole* is conflated with the colonial history of Hawaii. As mentioned before, *haoles*, bought the land from the Native Hawaiians, and then through this land ownership, gained cultural and economic power over Hawaii. This history lingers within the term *haole* today, as it is often conflated with the negative connotations of the word “rich,” such as “arrogant,” and “materialistic,” no matter someone’s actual socioeconomic background.

I’ve seen this play out in my own life. When my sisters and I were growing up, we went to Kula Elementary school—the public school by our house—and then switched to private school for middle and high school. I am a triplet, so affording private school for three kids all at once was not easy. My parents were severely financially affected by the 2008 recession—the same year we were admitted to Seabury. Suddenly, money was very tight. Our house went into escrow. We would eventually lose our house a summer after my first year of college. We applied for financial aid, and somehow my mom managed—after many phone calls with the financial aid office—to get us to only have to pay for the cost of one child’s tuition. With hefty academic scholarship money and donations from other family members, we afforded the tuition. Why all this effort for private school? Because Hawaii has historically ranked in the lower half of public schools in the United States. Also, my parents thought that Seabury was the best—if we define the “best” or “success” in terms of college acceptances. Statistically, a high percentage of Seabury graduates do get into “good” colleges. My parents wanted the best for my sisters and I, so Seabury it was.

Writing this down, I see the privilege in my own story of “loss.” My family did have enough money to once own a house, and now to pay rent, and before that enough money to lose in the recession through investments. While we were no longer financially as well off as before, I still got to attend an expensive private school. We always had a roof over our heads and food on

the table. Still, at Seabury, we were the “poor” kids. This relates back to *haole* identity because, compounded with our white skin, once people knew my sisters and I went to Seabury, we were immediately judged as “wealthy” and by extension, *haole*—even though in reality, in the case of wealth we were much closer to the other working class “local” groups than the wealthy, land-owning, *haole* families of Seabury.

I’m bringing up Seabury because growing up in Hawaii, the school you went/go to matters, especially when compounded with ethnicity. King Kekaulike is the public high school upcountry—where I’m from—and that’s where a lot of the other kids from Kula School would end up. The public high school was diverse, racially and economically. Seabury was not. Academic scholarships were available, but still families had to afford the tuition, making most of the students white and wealthy—the colonial discourse rears its head, again.

Inanna told me, “I went to Waldorf, and then Seabury. Both are primarily white, rich schools. I did hula with *kumu hula* (hula teacher) Napua Greg. I didn’t like being white, and being immediately judged [based on the school she went to] as rich, when I wasn’t.”

When Inanna talks about “immediately being judged as white and wealthy” when people know/knew she went to Seabury, I know what she means.

Going to Seabury was a challenging adjustment. As if middle school was not already difficult, I remember feeling anxious about money, and hyperconscious of the clothes I wore, the cars my parents drove, etc.. I went from a socioeconomically diverse public school, to a space where I was surrounded by the hyper-rich, at a time when my family had never been more poor. I remember—I laugh at my younger self, now—crying because my mom would not buy me Abercrombie jeans, or “real” Ugg boots. I remember she looked at me, no tolerance for my hissy-fit, and bluntly responded: “I can make a tag that says ‘Abercrombie,’ or ‘Ugg’ and sew it on there.

Would that make you feel better?” As any middle schooler, or human being at large, I wanted to belong. At Seabury, sometimes “belonging” felt like wearing the right kind of clothes, or pretending to be wealthy just to blend in.

While it was challenging at times to “belong” at Seabury, it was also challenging to belong outside of Seabury. I felt this most clearly the summer after our first year at Seabury, when my mom enrolled my sisters and I in outrigger canoe paddling at Hawaiian Canoe Club. We went from being surrounded by white kids, to being surrounded by the other ethnic groups of Hawaii: Hawaiians, Filipinos, Samoans, *hapa* (mixed) kids, etc. Here, we were the minority. I think that my mom did this on purpose: she saw what the environment at school was like, and intentionally put us somewhere else.

At first, my sisters and I only talked to each other. Yet, by the end of the summer, we had lots of friends. I remember feeling surprised: that these new friends were not how I had expected them to be, just as I don’t think my sisters and I were how they expected us to be. I think I had internalized the idea that “local” people (Hawaiians, *hapas*, etc.) were poor, uneducated, and that because we were *haoles*, they didn’t like us and or didn’t want us around. Haunani-Kay Trask writes on this conflation and divide—between race, class, economic gain, etc.—claiming it stems from how Western historians first wrote down the history of Hawaii. When she writes, “And when they wrote that Hawaiians were lazy, they meant that work must be continuous and ever a burden” (117), Trask insinuates *haoles*—the writers of history—positioned Hawaiians as poor and “lazy” to justify their claim and buying of the land, which ultimately lead to “The common [Hawaiian] people, driven from their birthright, receiv[ing] less than one percent of the land. They starved, while huge *haole*-owned sugar plantations thrived” (116). Hawaiians, and the other immigrant groups, became the working class while *haoles* were the wealthy landowners. Somehow, at only

thirteen and many years later, this myth was still around, with serious social implications—even at something as seemingly non-political as paddling practice.

The economic divide between *haoles* and Hawaiians, and the other racial groups—*haoles* as wealthy and Hawaiians / “locals” as poor—is conflated, obviously, with race. The animosity from “local” and Hawaiian people is fueled by economic hardship and made more apparent by racial difference. When I write that at paddling, I thought the local girls didn’t want us around, I think that closed-off attitude is fueled by this trifecta: of class difference, race, and a history of separation manifested in the terministic screens of identity labels and their underlying discursive baggage.

Maybe they (I am aware of the us vs. them language, and use it as a tool to make this exact point) saw us along these lines: or as the “other,” as “wealthy,” as perhaps equally unfriendly. We only knew each other in this binary. Eventually, there must have been some realization that we (my sisters and I) were not rich or mean—and I began reconciling with my own internalized prejudice against “them.” We were not super *haole*; we were white, and went to Seabury, but we were not rich, and that maybe that made us okay to hang out with. Or maybe it was the realization that people are people, and that we are all different—there are plenty of rich “local” and Hawaiian people, too. Perhaps we subconsciously saw that we could move beyond the history of colonization which perpetuated myths about each other, and we could just be thirteen-year-olds. Regardless, by summer’s end something had given, something had changed, and we all became just seventh graders wanting to connect. “Us” and “them” became “we” and “us,” together.

...

So, what is to be made of the *haole* experience? How does perceived or actual “discrimination” affect how *haoles* see themselves, and others? If there is animosity, can it be called discrimination? Or is it a justified response to colonial history?

Judy Rohrer deconstructs “*haole* discrimination,” calling it a symptom of internalized white hegemony. “Most *haole* newcomers are not used to being in a situation where whites are the minority,” she writes (72). She warns that “part of what defines performative *haoleness* is a certain arrogance of ethnocentrism and certainty of knowledge” (Rohrer 72). At first I didn’t see a blatant arrogance or “*haoleness*” in these particular interviews. However, through the “us” vs “them” language, and certain stereotyping through the conflation of the word Hawaiian with poverty, I think it is there. I remember my own defensiveness in my interview with Kyle—and in my entire previous thesis—where I wanted to find some hole in the logic, some place for myself in Hawaii. Even though my intentions were not to be colonial, I now see that I was perpetuating a colonial mindset. Rohrer’s idea of “*haole* arrogance” is still there, even when I didn’t want to see it—perhaps making me all the more arrogant.

As someone who was not a “newcomer” but rather born and raised in Hawaii, I did not share what Rohrer describes as the “ethnocentrism” of the mainland, or wherever she had in mind. Growing up here, I only knew my experience in Hawaii, where *haoles* were one of many ethnic group represented. The same applies to Inanna: this is the place we know as home, the place where we grew up. Yet, as I was suggesting before, this “ethnocentrism” could be seen as subconsciously ingested. It emerges in my story about paddling and making friends who weren’t white, when I was surprised that they didn’t match the stereotypes I had once believed. It emerges in my defensiveness with Kyle. Maybe in being known, called, and identifying (I never rejected, but perhaps passively accepted) myself as *haole*, I in some ways took on the stereotypes and colonial

beliefs that the word perpetuates. In some ways, I adopted the mindset created from the term, or of being “above,” or to use Pidgin, “high *maka maka*,” loosely translated to “someone who looks down upon others.” In this way, the term *haole*, and all it entails, may actually enforce a binary, colonial structure and “othering,” and the resulting attitudes. Maybe this internalized prejudice is evidence of Rohrer’s “*haole* arrogance.”

Back to this concept of discrimination: Rohrer cautions that “[P]eople come and don’t expect to assimilate to Hawaii, they expect Hawaii to assimilate to America. That’s unacceptable...Thinking that Hawai‘i is for you is a key element of haoleness” (72). I think this statement rings true for *haole* tourists to Hawaii, as well as those who move to Hawaii after spending most of their lives somewhere else. Some move as a way of escape, looking for a connection—maybe as white people, living as a “majority,” they seek an alternative, or some sense of culture beyond the “white mainstream” and maybe “ethnocentrism” they may be used to. The same could be true for *haoles* born and raised in Hawaii. Myself and others, of all ethnicities born and raised here, may be guilty of this search for “assimilation” or belonging in the “non-white” community to some extent, and that thinking is inherently colonial. For so long I thought I could write myself a place in Hawaii, and that desire to “assimilate” and to belong will always be colonial. We can speak the language, speak Pidgin, dance hula, be involved in the culture, to increase this feeling of Hawaii as “home,” yet, this process may also be viewed as colonial conquest. Maybe this culture was never ours to participate in, and definitely never ours to claim, even if this place is more home than anywhere else. In this way, being *haole* is sort of linked to a feeling of placelessness—of not knowing where we belong.

Again, these layers of meaning—as “above others,” “white,” “other,” “placeless”—all exist within the term *haole*, including the colonial implications. Rohrer discusses this last point

specifically, writing that *haole* is not just equal to the term “white,” or “Caucasian,” that it “is historically and spatially specific” (74). Instead, “even when used purely descriptively, it [the term *haole*] is not a completely neutral term, nor should it be. It reminds us of the violences perpetuated against the land and people of Hawai‘i...that spill over into our present” (74). Thus, *haole* is a loaded term, referring directly to the colonization of Hawaii, as a constant, unpleasant reminder. Yet, as Rohrer notes, “it is important that we be reminded, even if that is not comfortable or we do not know how to respond.” (74). If we overlook the politicization and history of the word, we essentially deny the colonialism that forged it. Perhaps that is how I can exist as a *haole* in Hawaii: I can constantly remember the colonial backing of my existence in Hawaii, and work against it.

So, are *haoles* “discriminated” against? The word discriminated implies the history of human rights, of injustice against a particular racial, or in some way marginalized group. I am uncomfortable writing that *haole* people—and the historical white dominance and colonial history they represent—are marginalized and discriminated against. No offense or list of offenses could back up that claim, especially in contrast to the history of colonialism implicit in the term *haole*, and that in some ways, that the *haole* experience continues to maintain. Still, I would write that *haoles* are not welcomed. Returning to Gloria’s remark at the beginning of this chapter in regards to her *halau*, maybe *haoles* can be to some extent accepted, “but I wouldn’t say that I’m embraced.” And maybe that is exactly the correct position for *haoles*: we may seek belonging and a sense of place, and sometimes we may be accepted by some people, but we will never belong. Haunani-Kay Trask dives into this, explaining that “when they [*haoles*] wrote that we were racist because we preferred our own ways to theirs, they meant that their culture needed to dominate other cultures” (Trask 117). Again, any perceived “discrimination” begins to look more like the desire to perpetuate colonialism—to gain acceptance, to “dominate,” to have the indigenous community

secede to “us” and our need to belong. So even though I was born and raised here, I cannot escape the colonial legacy my skin color, and my parents’ coming to Hawaii, represent. For if Hawaii, Hawaiians, were to accept me, it would in some ways represent an acceptance of colonialism. Returning to my interview with Kyle, if he were to welcome my desire to belong and to find a place in a hybrid Hawaii, he would seemingly be excusing colonialism by saying, “Yes, this can be your home, too.” At this point, I am beginning to realize that Hawaii was never ours to claim—that very mentality perpetuates *haole* “arrogance” and a colonial mindset of conquest. Hawaii will never be my rightful home because I will never be, and perhaps never should be, and have no reason to be, welcomed.

Rohrer explores this claim as well, writing that “[m]ost white people are not used to being racially marked, especially when that marking carries a reminder of injustices that made and maintain white privilege” (74). The internalized racism and colonial discourse, as expressed through the seeming “discrimination” I experienced growing up, is evidence of this, or a unintentional desire to “maintain white privilege.” My feeling of being “marginalized,” and maybe those of other *haoles*, are only evidence of internalized “white privilege,” even though we may be well-intentioned and desperate to fight against just that. Yet, as Rohrer continues, “Part of becoming less *haole*, or more local, is beginning to understand all of this...our choice as *haoles* is not whether or not we will be called ‘*haole*,’ but what kind of *haole* we choose to be.” (74). As *haoles*, we will never be welcome in Hawaii, but we can take steps to recognize privilege and “*haole* arrogance,” and be less *haole*, or what now seems to mean, less colonial.

2.3 *Haoles* and Belonging: Languaculture, “Hawaiian at Heart,” and Activism

From these interviews so far, perhaps you can see the difficulty and complexity here. The term “*haole*” is forever conflated with colonial history, and any attempt to say *haoles* are “discriminated” against only adds evidence to this claim. To recap a conclusion from the last chapter, *haoles* may be able to become less colonial. This negative *haole* identity can be mitigated by not being wealthy—less like the original landowning plantation-era *haoles*—and by recognizing white privilege and the colonial nature of *haole* identity and actively combating it. This returns the conversation back to dramatic terms versus scientific terms: seeing identity as in flux and flow, versus bound to a definite claim, such as ethnicity. Rohrer’s claim that *haoles* can “become less *haole*, or more local” (74), implies a certain performance, or lessening of *haole*-ness. Yet, can *haoles* ever really be rid of their *haole* or colonizer identity? If so, or if not, what is gained? If so, or if not, what is lost? If *haoles* attempt to become more “local” or Hawaiian, are they?

In this vein, I think there are three versions of identity performance that *haoles* define themselves as: through languaculture, as “Hawaiian at heart,” and as “local *haoles*.” Again, returning to this idea of language defining self and culture, each of these ways of identifying matters; each is an attempt at belonging in Hawaii. Yet the question remains: is any true “belonging” actually achieved, or is it always a qualified cultural performance, or even worse, cultural appropriation?

...

Heewon Chang writes more about cultural performativity, and specifically through knowledge of a language, in his book, *Autoethnography as Method*. Taking the “self” as “a

‘fragile’ and interdependent being” (Chang 24), constructed through interactions with others, and or “performance,” he describes something called “languaculture,” or a sense of a belonging to a cultural group based on the knowledge of that group’s language. This type of identity or culture functions “[w]ithout securing memberships in certain cultural groups, obvious traits of membership, or members’ approvals...[instead] outsiders can acquire cultural traits and claim cultural affiliations” (23), meaning that “[w]ithout an innate membership, [outsiders can participate in] cultural and linguistic knowledge—‘languaculture’...which [may] eventually...[lead to] an ‘affiliate’ membership” (23). Gloria, through her participation in *halau*, may seem to actualize this through her knowledge and use of the language. Maybe, knowledge and the acting out, or “dramatistic” terms of language allows for some cultural acceptance, or maybe just a lessening of one’s *haoles* status, through what Chang calls a “cultural affiliation.”

...

When I interviewed Inanna, she told me a story that portrayed this conflict well. Inanna moved to Hana, Maui after receiving her undergraduate degree from Harvard University. She moved to Hana to fill a space as a high school science teacher. However, she says, “I was a little nervous because I didn’t want to move there if I wasn’t wanted.” To put this in context, Hana is a rural, predominantly Hawaiian, “local,” or “brown” community on Maui. Few *haoles* live there—most who do, or who own land there, use it as a vacation home or rental—a fact that carries its own colonial weight.

“I wanted to come in humble and be in the community,” she tells me. “It took a bit for the class [at school] to respect me but the community eventually welcomed me.”

I asked her more about what lead to her being welcomed.

“I wouldn’t speak Pidgin,” she told me.

Pidgin is the hybrid language from in the plantation era days formed so that all of the ethnic groups could communicate with one another. It is now used predominantly by “local” people, sometimes more than Standard American English. Was her choice *not* to speak Pidgin a choice to show respect, to show that she, too, sees herself or knows her “place” as “other” in this community? Or was this a missed opportunity to use the performativity of language to “blend in”? Whatever her reasoning, eventually she was accepted, by her students and her community at large.

“[After she was accepted] My students would say, ‘You know more than us,’ when I would use Hawaiian words in my day to day speech,” she said.

This stood out to me. Through her knowledge of Hawaiian words, she seemingly lessened her *haole* identity. Her knowledge and “performance” of the language allowed her to align herself as a “local,” or not a *haole haole*. Her choice to speak in Hawaiian aligned her more with a Hawaiian community, than perhaps a *haole* trying to appear “local” by speaking in Pidgin.

“They would ask me, ‘Whose cousin are you?,’ like they wanted me as part of their community, thinking I must be someone’s family,” she said. “It was the biggest compliment. When they decide they like you, they assume you must be connected to them somehow. They try to make you family.”

I see what she means—eventually her behavior admitted her into this otherwise closed off community. Perhaps her participation in this “languaculture” allowed her to be included. However, as I write this, I am aware of her repetition of “they,” meaning the Hana community: a binary opposition mentality is still apparent in her language, despite her inclusion in the community.

...

From this story, perhaps “languaculture” warrants some sense of cultural belonging: Inanna was ultimately accepted into this Hawaiian community. Whether she was accepted based on her

knowledge of the language, or from being generally respectful, regardless she was ultimately invited in and “made family.” Through performance—or a “dramatistic” conception of culture and identity—can *haoles* have some sort of place in Hawaiian culture and or Hawaii at large besides a colonizer identity?

Relevant to this conversation of belonging and performance is the idea of white or *haole* exceptionalism. According to Merriam-Webster, “exceptionalism” refers to the “condition of being different from the norm...[also] a theory expounding the exceptionalism especially of a nation or region” (Merriam-Webster). In this context, I see a connection that based on certain identity performances—i.e. Inanna using Hawaiian words, Gloria learning Hawaiian—to some extent, *haole* or the “other” may be accepted by the host culture or Hawaiians and other “local” groups. This explains why and how Inanna eventually was invited into the community in Hana—she wasn’t the “destructive presence” some may have read her as based on the color of her skin. To put it simply, eventually they accepted her as one of the “good *haoles*,” or as an exception to the rule. Through her actions, she gained “insider” status, even as a white person. I remember in Kyle’s interview, he told a story about his *haole* friend growing up, who he would “defend until the end,” but who he still referred to as “*haole* boy;” he was still *haole*, but not *haole haole*.

I remember Inanna’s choice to use Hawaiian words in her class; my mom’s choice to enroll my sisters’ and I in hula and paddling; Gloria’s choice to learn ‘*Ōlelo Hawaii* and join a *halau*. Was each of these decisions made as an attempt to be “more local”? Can there be “exceptional” *haoles*? Or, if *haoles* will never belong, is any engagement in Hawaiian culture by non-Hawaiians cultural appropriation? Can *haoles* ever belong, to some extent, in Hawaii?

...

After she completes med-school at UCLA, Inanna thinks of returning to Maui, where she hopes to work in underserved communities as a medical doctor. She is aware that “underserved” (i.e. impoverished) could also mean “local,” Hawaiian people, such as the community in Hana. She is very aware of how this could be read as a type of “white savior” behavior, and she is actively working against this.

She tells me about the questions she keeps in mind, for herself and for other white or *haole* people, to hold herself / themselves accountable.

“My questions for white people are: are you respecting and perpetuating culture? Are you perpetuating the host culture? Are you aware of your privilege and making sure not to misappropriate or profit off the host culture?” she says. “I think this applies to white people anywhere there is a history of colonization where native peoples have been in many ways ‘fucked over,’ to put it simply.”

So if she does move back, she is doing it on her own terms.

“Even if I were to move back I would hesitate to buy land. [After going to UCLA] I’m going to have ‘*haole*’ money. I am conscious of that.”

I find it interesting that here, she uses the word *haole* to modify “money,” almost in a way that suggests “not her money,” or not the money of people like *her*. She is using the term *haole* along the same lines as it was once used to describe her—as negative, materialistic, invasive, greedy, white, as “other.”

...

As this moment from my interview with Inanna shows, maybe *haoles* can have some place in Hawaii, if they behave respectfully—or essentially, not as *haoles*. Maybe we can belong to some extent if we listen to Inanna’s questions: “Are you respecting and perpetuating culture? Are you

perpetuating the host culture? Are you aware of your privilege and making sure not to misappropriate or profit off the host culture?” In other words, in each case, *haoles* chose to combat their whiteness, feeling a “responsibility” to engage in and “perpetuate” the “host culture,” albeit intentionally and responsibly.

Participation in Hawaiian culture through activities, or “performance,” becomes an example of “dramatistic,” and thus a performative version of identity. This engagement increases personal feelings of, as well as actual, communal belonging, in a culture, for *haoles*, Hawaiians, and the various others that make up “locals.” Yet, the lines become blurry when we think about how the different levels of “belonging” each of these different groups can achieve. For ethnic Hawaiians, participation in the culture, “performance,” seems to increase their pre-existent belonging (i.e. blood quantum, scientific). However, if a *haole* were to do the same activities—learning the Hawaiian language, dancing hula, etc.—at the same level of engagement as someone ethnically Hawaiian, can we say that they are equally Hawaiian? Or would the *haole* just become “less haole” through this engagement? Or is it cultural appropriation because they are not ethnically Hawaiian?

...

These stories bring me back to this theme of cultural performativity. In every case, *haoles* are invited and accepted into the culture, to some extent. In the anonymous woman’s case, she was invited to participate in the most exclusive ritual in hula, and a very sacred process in Hawaiian culture at large. In Gloria’s case, she is admitted to some extent into her *halau*. In Inanna’s case, she was accepted into the Hawaiian community in Hana. In my case, my local paddling friends accepted me even though I was *haole* and went to Seabury; Auntie still had asked me chant, even though I wasn’t ethnically Hawaiian.

Still, in every case there are elements of uncertainty, of wondering if we actually belong. In the woman's words, "I always had a feeling of inadequacy," of asking "'Are you sure it's me?'" In my experience, I still don't know how I feel about my participation in hula for so many years. Did I have a right to learn it, as someone born in Hawaii? Did I ever really belong in that space? Didn't the girls who were ethnically Hawaiian, belong there more than I did? Didn't Auntie always privilege them a little bit more than us *haoles*?

If we return to this idea of "dramatistic" terms and cultural performativity, than identity is always being constructed. On a larger cultural level, culture—as expressed by the people who live it out—is always be enacted, through language, tradition, practice, etc. The questions I posed at the beginning remain: if a *haole* were to do the same activities—learning the Hawaiian language, dancing hula, etc.—at the same level of engagement as someone ethnically Hawaiian, can we say that they are equally Hawaiian, at least in regards to identity performance? If all identity is performative, wouldn't it be true? Or are *haoles*, as this woman puts it, just always "inadequate"?

The impacts of performative identity relates to this concept, briefly mentioned, of "Hawaiian at heart." As the anonymous woman I interviewed said, "I shared Auntie's feeling that I am 'Hawaiian at heart,' but I also knew how important blood is to her, and bloodline." Can someone be such a thing? What does "Hawaiian at heart" mean?

"Hawaiian at heart" refers to the search for belonging inherent to the *haole* experience, and with it, the desire white people have to belong in Hawaii. I am guilty of this behavior: I think of my undergraduate thesis where I wanted, to some extent, to say that through my cultural performance I could have some sort of place in Hawaii, and Hawaiian culture. In most cases, this desire is well-intentioned. It's not always demonized by people who are ethnically Hawaiian. As Auntie said to the woman who did *'uniki*, "She saw my connection to hula, the land, the ritual—

how thoroughly I dove into everything. She saw that my heart and my soul was there.” This means that through her commitment—the years of hula dancing and learning the culture, her commitment to Hawaiian cultural participation and “performance,” etc.—she developed a certain level of belonging in the *halau*, which then reflects a certain level of belonging in Hawaii and Hawaiian culture at large.

Yet, as Kyle noted in his interview, “I don’t support the idea of ‘Hawaiian at heart...Hawaiian is still a nationality,” bringing up the questions again: can someone who is not ethnically Hawaiian belong in Hawaii? However, Kyle did also say in his interview, “...if you aren’t Hawaiian you can still love the things that are Hawaii, like the language and the land...and contribute to the culture.” Within the same conversation the paradox arises: can non-Hawaiians participate and “contribute” to the culture? What does their contribution mean? How is it different than someone who is ethnically Hawaiian who is also “performing” Hawaiian culture? This idea of “Hawaiian at heart” wound up in this paradox: on one hand, some *haole* people are very involved in Hawaiian culture, which helps to keep it alive in the face of Western hegemony. Yet, in that they are *haole*, is this participation wrong, or could be labeled appropriation? Or is it more of this *haole* desire to belong in and to Hawaii even if that comes with colonial undertones?

This is what it means to be “Hawaiian at heart:” it is *haole* people not claiming to be Hawaiian in the full sense of the word, in regards to ethnicity or blood quantum, but leaning in that direction, perhaps in the sense of “performance,” or behavior, or feeling. It’s a seeking to belong to Hawaii and to perform some sort of Hawaiian identity, which in some ways, equates to an escape from whiteness, from *haole*-ness—so at what cost?

...

In my interview with Gloria, she touched on this concept of “Hawaiian at heart.”

“Just because I was born in California doesn’t mean that it’s the place with my deepest sense of home,” she told me. “I didn’t find that in California. I rooted myself out of there.”

This quest for belonging has been life-long, she told me.

“Where is home? Where can I settle?” she asks.

Coming to Hawaii, and becoming involved in Hawaiian culture, didn’t necessarily solve this sense of placelessness.

“At *halau*, people say ‘*Our* people, *our* land, *our* way...and then it gets to me.”

Gloria is very aware of her place in Hawaii, and Hawaiian culture.

“I never borrow and never claim their culture. I support it,” she said. “I don’t have a lot of preaching to do. I receive a lot.”

To her, and to many others, there is some sense of connection. Even though it’s not an ethnic or genealogical connection, something feels familiar, and like home.

“The culture speaks to my internal allegiance to the land, to nature, to living on the land and the society that comes out of that. And that’s not how I was raised, but how I always felt.”

...

The anonymous woman shared a similar experience of belonging. Besides being invited to become a hula *kumu*, there was one particular moment that stood out to her. Once, she was asked to do a chant in Hawaiian for a group of people. She chanted, and afterwards an older Hawaiian woman came up to her. At first she felt nervous—what if this woman was coming over to rebuke her or something? Instead, the Hawaiian woman said, “I don’t know where that comes from in you, but that was the most beautiful chant.”

Is this inclusion in culture through performance? This woman is constructing her sense of belonging through dramatic terms: through this moment of literal performance and then acceptance, regardless of her blood content. Is that enough?

...

In both of these cases, I see the limitations in dramatic terms that “Hawaiian at heart” brings up. Can people self-identify as “Hawaiian” through their participation in Hawaiian culture? Is that cultural appropriation?

Alternatively, is it really problematic to want to belong? It is easy to look at these words objectively, to see these white women as trying to make space for themselves in an indigenous community that they will never really be a part of. It’s easy to say that they will always represent the colonizer, despite any internal feeling or external practice—cases closed.

And yet, this is difficult for me to actually write down. These are women I know and love deeply; both are highly intelligent, compassionate, and respectful. How can I talk about the issues their identity position represents, without also ripping them a part? I respect these women so much—I don’t know if I can fully admonish their participation in Hawaiian culture. Maybe that is a weakness; maybe to fight my own internalized colonialism, it is something I should change about myself. Still, I don’t want these women to be placeless, for they represent all “local *haoles*.” If I say that they have no place in Hawaii or Hawaiian culture, then neither do I.

...

Rohrer discusses this concept of “Hawaiian at heart” as well. She writes, “Hawaiian at heart” acts as an “escape hatch out of haole. Motivated primarily by a desire to belong, which includes an obscuring of white privilege, we want to at least be ‘Hawaiian at heart’; we certainly do not want to be haole” (Rohrer 58). So maybe when *haoles* get involved in Hawaiian culture, it

is motivated by a desire to “escape” being *haole*. Perhaps this involvement is okay to the extent that it lessens “*haole* arrogance” and insensitivity to Hawaiian culture, but perhaps it is also harmful in that it could be a different version of colonialism, where “participation” in the culture is used to “obscure white privilege.”

To some extent, it seems that *haole* people can be involved in the culture without appropriating it, or without it being negative. Gloria talked about this in her interview.

“I address this to myself sometimes: am I trying to borrow their culture because I rejected my own?” she said to me. “I have grief about being American.”

So, can *haoles* ever fully participate in Hawaiian culture? Or is their (and my) participation always less than the “real thing,” or at worst, cultural appropriation? Perhaps the closest *haoles* who are from, or who have lived for extended periods of time in Hawaii, can be to Hawaii is this concept of “local *haoles*.” This identity allows, as Inanna said in her interview, people to be “of Hawaii” but not Hawaiian. As she told me, “I don’t try to act Hawaiian and I explain why. That is reserved for people of Hawaiian blood.” We can be “local” in the sense that we can engage in the culture—learn the language, and participate in the cultural traditions—but we are still forever *haoles*, or to some extent, “foreigners,” regardless of any level of performance.

...

After this discussion of *haoles* in Hawaii, I still think it would be hasty and untrue to say that they can achieve *no* level of belonging in Hawaii. Instead, I think of Kyle’s comment that “Well, we can continue the education of everyone we have to live with. But not anyone can be Hawaiian. Anyone *can* be a Hawaiian national, meaning you support the sovereignty of Hawaii.” Kyle continued saying, “...if you aren’t Hawaiian you can still love the things that are Hawaii, like the language and the land...and contribute to the culture.” In other words, while full belonging—

or a real Hawaiian identity, or true belonging in Hawaiian culture—cannot be achieved without blood content, *haoles* can still belong to a limited extent.

As discussed in the previous sections, through participation in the culture—hula, the Hawaiian language, canoe paddling, etc.—*haoles* may achieve some feeling of belonging, but it is always contested because these activities are so cultural, and sacred for the Native Hawaiian people. Perhaps there is a “performance” or “participation” that is more accessible for anyone to participate in, that would not appear as “cultural appropriation” if *haoles* participate. I see this as a sort alliance: haoles who want to do work advocating for and within the Hawaiian community can be allies (not “Hawaiian” in the sense of performing a Hawaiian identity, but “pro Hawaii” through a performance of advocacy). I see this alliance unfold in two main ways: environmentalism and supporting Hawaiian sovereignty.

In the first case, supporting environmentalism and the protection of the natural resources and beauty of Hawaii is something that does not require ethnic identity. Ironically, environmentalism in itself is sort of a performance of the Hawaiian value of *malama aina*, or taking care of the land. Kyle touched on this idea specifically, writing that *malama aina* means to “care for the land that feeds you; to take care of the Earth and contribute to it in a fashion that supports it. It’s a connection with the physical world.” Taking care of the land destabilizes *haoles*’ position as colonizers, as to some extent, it undoes the original *haole* occupation of Hawaiian land—what first started the colonization of Hawaii. It undoes the *haole* transformation of the physical islands from “something alive and dynamic...[to] something static to be claimed, owned, and exploited” (Rohrer 15), and actually allows *haoles* to share in this “connection” to Hawaii. This is something several of the interviewees have experienced: Gloria told me about her own connection to the land: “It’s inside of us to know what is basically true and of value, and it is the

land. When I first arrived here, I thought, ‘Oh, I know you. I recognize you, you are just the same as me.’” Another person I interviewed, a *haole* environmental activist named Serene Gunnison, has created an identity for herself in Hawaii through her commitment to environmentalism. Born and raised on Maui, she told me on the phone, “I don’t have any other home. I don’t identify as Hawaiian, but also not really American. That’s not my culture. I’m more about the land, which I think comes from being born and raised here.” As explored to this point, she does not try to claim Hawaiian identity, yet she feels somewhat participative in Hawaii and Hawaiian-ness through her environmental work: “I want to protect this place, but I don’t know where I stand. I’m not Hawaiian, but this is the only home I’ve ever known. I do have a responsibility to protect it.” Finally, as Inanna told me in her interview, “There is no question that Hawaiian culture and environmentalism are tightly linked. The word *‘Āina* means so much more than land, more caring for the land that provides for you. Environmentalism doesn’t ask, ‘Are you native Hawaiian,’ but more, ‘Are you here because you care about the land and conservation.’” Therefore, to some extent, caring for the land affords some level of belonging in Hawaii—ultimately inclusive of any race, and any identity, in Hawaii. While in some ways, it could be read as again “performing Hawaiian identity,” regardless of identity and cultural politics, environmentalism allows anyone to promote and participate in Hawaiian values, and to “defend” Hawaii.

The next way *haoles* can to some extent “belong” and “participate” in Hawaii is by supporting the sovereignty movement in Hawaii. As Kyle put it, “*haoles* [are still] Americans. But you can still acknowledge the Hawaiian kingdom and support and defend it,” and to some extent, “belong” in Hawaii as a “Hawaiian national.” Serene also discussed this in her interview, saying that she supports the recent movement to stop the construction of telescopes on the volcano of Mauna Kea on Hawaii island, and on top of that, the resurgence of the Hawaiian kingdom. “If I

see people [protestors] on the side of the road, I'll honk, and in that aspect it doesn't matter what skin color you are. It brings everyone together." In other words, anyone can be an ally of Hawaiian sovereignty and freedom from colonial enterprise—a move that, as with environmentalism, begins to subvert and unravel the *haole* history of colonialism and power. Inanna brought this up as well, saying that "Hawaii is not recognized as its own country even though it should be. Only those with native Hawaiian blood are Hawaiian, however, if Hawaii were reinstated as sovereign nation, then every citizen could conceivably 'be Hawaiian.'" Therefore, to gain a limited belonging in Hawaii, *haoles* can work to un-do the history of colonization that we have and continue to benefit from, or as Inanna said, "As white people, your job is not to feel guilty or apologize for what your ancestors have done, your job is to dismantle the systems of oppression they have put in place." Through actively working to reverse colonialism, *haoles* can adopt an advocate or ally identity in Hawaii.

Both environmentalism and supporting sovereignty construct a feeling of community and belonging in Hawaii where ethnic identity is not required. While both of these could be labeled as "performances" of Hawaiian culture, despite this ongoing conversation on culture and identity as dramatic or scientific, these behaviors are available to anyone in Hawaii, and work directly against colonial narratives. Therefore, even if "being Hawaiian" requires blood content, anyone can belong to some extent by being an ally to the Hawaiian people.

3 **Conflicting Performances: Deconstructing Scientific Terms**

It may seem like at this point, I can conclude that *haoles* have no real place claiming Hawaiian identity or belonging in Hawaii beyond environmentalism and supporting sovereignty. But, this is not the case. Contradictions run throughout this argument, especially when we turn to those I interviewed who are *hapa* or “mixed race,” or even Hawaiians like Kyle. How do we reconcile the real and present hybridity of Hawaii, where most people are not one hundred percent ethnically Hawaiian? Or what about people who are “brown” and “pass” as Hawaiian or “local,” but are not ethnically Hawaiian, and in some cases, even from Hawaii? If they participate at the same level as someone ethnically Hawaiian, are they Hawaiian?

My point is: it seems to me that everyone who participates in Hawaiian culture—or culture at large—performs and creates Hawaiian culture, and thus to some extent, creates some sort of place for themselves or identity in it, even with or without blood ethnicity. This gets complicated as everyone achieves a different level of belonging based on their race, and perhaps, the color of their skin. For *haoles* or white people, sometimes a vast knowledge and in-depth performance of Hawaiian identity will never be enough. I remember Gloria’s words about her *halau* and the special cohort that was selected: “The truth is that they are more Hawaiian. They’ve been culturally grown while they were young. I was one of two or three people out of twenty-five not selected.” This idea of being “culturally grown” implies a level of performance—a performance that Gloria, as a *haole*, is engaged in by learning the language—yet she is not “selected” for the advanced group, which may be related to her *haole* identity and white skin. She

joined her *halau* in 2012: she has been learning the language and cultural practices for seven years now. People who are less versed in the language are in the advanced cohort. Returning to Gloria's words, "I still do not know why [I wasn't selected]. When I feel more comfortable I may ask, but you can't question *kumu*." Were others selected because they are ethnically Hawaiian, and she is not? Or because they are brown, and she is white? Again, here we see cultural performativity at work, and also how it works for different identity groups.

I am reminded of my experience with hula, and the "brown" girl who began chanting over me. She is actually not from Hawaii, or Hawaiian. She is actually adopted, by a *haole* woman. Nevertheless, she is an exquisite dancer—regardless of her ethnic identity.

I am also reminded of my interview with Kyle where I saw ideas of performance garnering inclusion, to some extent. He said that "The ethnicity of Hawaiian has to do with knowing, embracing, and living the history of Hawaii holistically," suggesting performativity—the verbs "knowing, "living," essentially "acting out" Hawaiian culture—or Burke's "dramatistic" terms on one hand. Yet on the other hand, Kyle also said that "Being Hawaiian is not a practice," and that "We can continue the education of everyone we have to live with...But not anyone can be Hawaiian." This last point exemplifies identity and culture in "scientific" terms, or this idea of knowing things in concrete terms through language: of defining Hawaiian-ness based on exact numbers such as blood content, rather than the subjective fluidity of cultural performance. So, is culture and identity always scientific? Can performativity garner some level of acceptance, but never full? How much does skin color matter?

If Kyle, or a "scientific" conception of culture is right, only blood quantum would allow for a true sense of belonging, and participation in Hawaiian culture—a return to Burke's "scientific" terms, dismantling "performativity" and "dramatistic" terms. I remember Kyle

questioning me, probing my experience in hula and paddling, testing the depth of my knowledge and “performance.” I remember feeling like no answer would be enough. Yet, if we are to understand culture and identity in concrete terms, I wonder, what percentage of Hawaiian blood does someone need to have? How much is enough? From there, how much does an ethnically Hawaiian person have to “perform” their Hawaiian identity in order to *be* Hawaiian, or are they just Hawaiian by default? What if they are mixed-race? How much Hawaiian blood makes someone’s engagement in the culture, their “embracing, and living the history of Hawaii holistically,” not just imitation? How do we account for those who are not on hundred percent Hawaiian, like Kyle himself?

...

I spoke to two people who best represent this paradox. The first I spoke to is Roland Benua. Roland is the grandfather of my friend from college. He lives in Washington. When he answered the phone, hearing his thick Pidgin accent immediately transported me to Hawaii, even though I was talking to him in California.

Roland was born on Kauai. He left Hawaii to join the army in 1963. He’s lived on the mainland since then. He tells me that people ask him where he is from.

“Every once in a while I get a question ‘Are you this, are you that?’ Can’t get rid of it [his Pidgin accent]” he says to me, laughing.

People also ask him about his ethnic background. Physically, Roland was the “fairest in the family.”

“My Dad was pretty fair for a Filipino. I was the only one who would get sunburnt,” he said. “My dad came from Philippines. Dad already had Filipino blood, Spanish, and Chinese blood. My mom’s family moved from Puerto Rico. I’m also part Native American, some North African

and West African. And I have DNA from Southern India—I just did *23andMe*. I have very, very little Hawaiian blood content. Maybe three or four percent—it goes way back. I say I’m mostly North Asian blood and Polynesian.”

He told me more about growing up on the south shore of Kauai the 1950s.

“When I go home now, I see it’s all touristy. It used to just be the side of the road,” he said.

His parents worked plantations and the canneries. He grew up in the “Filipino camp,” or a pineapple plantation town of 250 people total that one of the big *haole* plantation families, Alexander Baldwin, owned. This environment was very racially diverse.

“Because of immigration, all the kids were Filipino, and *hapa*, and some Japanese families. I grew up primarily with Filipino culture, but I lived with a Hawaiian family for several years, until Dad could take care of us again,” he said.

Growing up in this plantation setting, he encountered a lot of the *haole* colonial dynamics discussed prior.

“I went to a school that was a mix of all nationalities,” he told me. “There were ‘Portagee,’ Chinese, ‘Japanee.’ There weren’t lots of *haoles* until I go college. Most *haole* kids were sent to Honolulu to go to Punahou. Their families would sell the pineapple to the canneries.”

Most of the *haole* families were outside of his community.

“Lots of Germans came to work as managers for the plantations. They had a big house away from town, they didn’t socialize with the rest,” he said.

Growing up, he didn’t socialize with the *haole* kids too much.

“People [*haoles*] would still say, ‘Hey Benua!’ when they saw me,” he said.

But friendships were limited.

“My friends and I would steal pineapple from the *haole* kid’s fields,” he told me. “We were not very close because after school I’d go back to another world. I knew very few *haoles* before WWII. When the war started, soldiers brought over supplies and I met more.”

...

This interview demonstrates a lot of the paradoxes within this question of scientific versus dramatic conceptions of culture and identity. On one hand, Roland seems very engaged in a scientific understanding of his identity: he has broken down his genetic makeup into percentages that “define” who he is. However, dramatic ideas are still there: he also refers to Hawaii as “home,” even though he hasn’t lived there since he was a teenager, and is only “three or four percent” Hawaiian. Yet, even with very limited Hawaiian ethnicity, he is included in the “local” immigrant community. He “performs” local identity by speaking Pidgin (even still, many years later). In school he hung out with the non-*haole* crowd; he grew up catching crab and *opihi*, (limpets) and bodysurfing in Poipu. All of this biographic data seems to culminate in the question: how Hawaiian is he? Does it matter that even though he is “fairest” of his family, he “passes” as “local” and or Hawaiian, and is therefore, included?

Unlike the interviews with Gloria and the hula dancer, Roland never mentions participation in Hawaiian traditions, but talks more about his involvement in “local” culture. I would be curious to see if or how he would be included if, for example, he were to join Gloria’s *halau*. Either way, he has none of the anxiety, or feeling like he “doesn’t belong” in Hawaii, even though he in some ways engages less in Hawaiian culture—remember, he only lived there when he was growing up—and in scientific terms, is only a tiny bit ethnically Hawaiian among many other ethnicities. Does he have any more right to call Hawaii “home” than *haoles*? Does his minimal blood content afford him that right? Also, how do we reconcile the hybrid experience that Roland represents? If he is

allowed to claim a Hawaiian identity, is he just supposed to deny his other ethnicities and his Filipino cultural background? Or, are we back to square one, where the definition of “Hawaiian” has to accommodate this inherent hybridity?

...

Roland and I also had an interesting discussion of his experience on the mainland after he joined the service. He first came to the continental United States—specifically, to Huntsville, Alabama—during segregation. He told me that he and his other army friends from Hawaii would hitch rides: “Any one would stop for us. We were accepted by both groups [black and white]. White girls dated us, too. It was weird to see the separation between races.”

While he may “pass” for Hawaiian in Hawaii, on the mainland he passed as white.

“At that time I could pass for *haole* ‘cause of my fair skin,” he said. “But I would hang out with the other local boys.” This seems the paramount example of cultural performativity, as well as this dilemma of skin color allowing for group identification.

Roland told me about one time when he and his “local” friends were taking a bus from Alabama.

“Out of habit we went to the back of the bus,” he told me. “But then the driver said, ‘You folks can sit a little closer to the front.’ Because we weren’t black or white, we were invited to move up a little.”

The idea that being brown—not clearly black or white—afforded Roland and his friends a seat “a little closer to the front” seems so odd. Judging skin color—levels of “black,” “white,” or “brown”—seems so arbitrary. Yet, in Hawaii, I cannot help but think of how this process is alive today. *Haoles* feel “discrimination” for being white, despite immense cultural engagement; “brown” people can pass as Hawaiian based on skin color alone.

At the end of the interview, I asked Roland if he saw himself as more Hawaiian or American.

“I have a sense of home [in Hawaii] because my family still lives there. But you talking about hybridity—well, we a pretty good example,” he said to me.

“I feel more Hawaiian because of my family. The cannery is gone now and the house is now woods. I drive slowly through there. I’m close there, but I’m also close here.” He paused, and then said, “I feel split between Hawaii and the mainland—I couldn’t give you a percentage though.”

I can’t help but notice this dichotomy: this thinking of needing a “percentage” to talk about “home” or identity, paralleled with dramatic tendencies, or the language of belonging to a place as a result of “family,” of memory, of “constructing” a self in Hawaii. In terms of my own identity in Hawaii, “I couldn’t give you a percentage.” Before this interview, I was beginning to think there was almost nothing to be done to save this idea of “dramatic” terms or of culture and self as performative. Now, at the end, I see “scientific terms” crumbling before me.

...

I spoke to a woman who represents another interesting identity position. Her name is Kaui. We did the interview on the phone, and before I asked any questions, she stopped me and said, “My views may not be the popular views. I’m not one to go with what everyone is believing.” She continued, “I’ve had some pretty uncomfortable experiences in the Hawaiian community.”

Kaui is from Hawaii, and part Hawaiian, among other things: Chinese, Caucasian, Native American, etc. She told me about her routine confusion when filling out forms.

“On forms, there used to be options like Asian, Black, White, Cosmopolitan. Where did the Cosmopolitan option go? I didn’t have to choose one or the other,” she said to me,

lightheartedly. In regards to her Hawaiian identity, she said, “Now Hawaiians are grouped into ‘Pacific Islanders,’ but that’s not right. Now it’s politically correct to say Hawaiian. But I still wonder, which one do I check off? I get really irritated. I don’t fit in anywhere.”

Kaui teaches at a Hawaiian immersion school. “Hawaiian immersion” means that all instruction is done in the Hawaiian language. She told me that she learned Hawaiian because “I was feeling very marginalized because I was mixed race. I never felt a part of any one of my ethnicities. I wanted to get in touch with my Hawaiian side.”

While she has enjoyed learning the language, as much as to become an immersion-school teacher, it has not been smooth sailing—at the school, or in regards to her own identity journey. As her preface beginning the interview suggested, she has had what she calls “some pretty uncomfortable experiences in the Hawaiian community.”

“They [the Hawaiian immersion school, faculty, parents, etc.] didn’t accept me because I’m not doing what the immersion community wants me to do,” she said. “I’m not Hawaiian according to them.”

I asked her why they didn’t accept her. After all, she is ethnically Hawaiian, and fluent in the language.

“I was raised more Western but with both Hawaiian and Christian values,” she told me. “I thought the Hawaiian community [at the school] would embrace me. I had never been persecuted because of my ethnic group and faith as a Christian, but people could not accept me. My beliefs and vigor as a teacher were ‘Western.’ My refusal to participate in Hawaiian religious activities made me ‘non-Hawaiian.’”

For Kaii, while she may “be Hawaiian” on what appears both a dramatic (performative by knowing the language) and scientific (blood ethnicity), she does not “perform” Hawaiian identity in the way her Hawaiian community wanted her to, and as a result, excluded.

“I thought that [blood content] was enough. I was there. I was learning [performativity]. But it wasn’t enough. In the Hawaiian community there is bigotry,” she told me. “When I became a teacher, I thought ‘I will finally have a cultural identity.’ But I was treated the way that some Hawaiians treat *haoles*. I had students that were indoctrinated to believe that they were Hawaiian and therefore superior. It blew my mind.”

The biggest reason she isn’t included is because of her faith, but as she said, “My identity is not my ethnicity but my faith.” Kaii identifies more as a Christian than any one of her particular ethnicities.

Her religion became an issue for the first time when she started teaching: “Until this point, I had always belonged. I already fit in. I fit in by my faith.”

She told me a story about one particularly volatile moment: when the school was going to celebrate Makahiki, the ancient Hawaiian celebration known as a time to feast, rest, and enjoy competitive games.

“I wouldn’t do Makahiki. Makahiki ceremonies are religious,” she said. “They wanted to practice it at school. Before anything, I am a Christian. So I asked them, ‘Tell me, is what we are doing a religious ceremony or a cultural demonstration?’ And they said, ‘It’s a religious ceremony.’ So I told them I could not participate, that ‘I will teach it and attend but will not participate.’ I was so hated for that. People told me, “Kaii, you can do both,’ meaning be Hawaiian and a Christian. Those parents meant well, but I’m not into dualism and polytheism. People tried to get me fired. They thought that I didn’t match the picture of what a Hawaiian immersion teacher

looked like. They thought that my faith made me incapable of sharing the culture. But I'm still there. I love the kids, language, culture, and even the people who hate my guts.”

...

Similarly to Roland, Kaii has some Hawaiian blood identity, which makes her included in Hawaiian culture and able to claim a Hawaiian identity on a scientific level. Additionally, her knowledge and “performance” of Hawaiian culture through the Hawaiian language would seem to further her membership in the Hawaiian community. However, in that she “performs” her Christian identity—as when she refused to participate in Makahiki—she is denied inclusion, and even outcast. How do we reconcile this? Kaii essentially “checks the boxes” of Hawaiian identity—both in scientific and dramatic terms—but due to a counter identity performance, or her not “performing Hawaiian-ness” in the way other Hawaiians want her to, she is discriminated against. If she is not accepted in Hawaiian communities and spaces, can she really say she is Hawaiian?

Additionally, there is the issue of hybridity. While her ethnicity may allow her to claim Hawaiian identity in scientific terms, how is she to reconcile with the her “ethnicities?” As Kyle has done, should she call those other elements “pollutants” and deny their existence?

...

I talked to Kaii about hybridity as well. She said that in her classroom, she asked her students to ““Raise your hand if you are part Hawaiian?” I would then ask the same question, but for Filipino, Japanese, Portuguese...I noticed that one Filipino kid refused to raise his hand. He was ashamed to be part Filipino.”

In this case, it seems these kids have been taught—by the other teachers, or society at large—that claiming any other identity besides Hawaiian is something to be ashamed of.

“People are so intent on claiming the *real* Hawaiian, like you have to do more and show that you are Hawaiian, you can’t just say that you are. It’s confusing for people who are part Hawaiian. It causes students to negate their other races, or aspects of who they are,” she told me. “I try to teach kids that they are more than their ethnicity. I tell my students that every single thing you are made up of is just as important as the rest—and then I am accused for not being Hawaiian enough.”

“Maybe if I really loved my Hawaiian side I would participate and believe in all the traditions and practices. But why do I have to choose? Who says you have to choose who you are?” she asked.

There are internal contradictions in the Hawaiian community as well.

“We have some *kumu* [teachers] with no Hawaiian ancestry,” she said.

Additionally, the parents who tried to get her fired, or who don’t think she is “Hawaiian enough,” “have a TV, cell phones, and go to the grocery store... These parents will do rallies and come to school and judge you. They will say, ‘Your language is not good enough,’ and treat you horribly, but then when they are at home they live a Western lifestyle. All of them are contradictions.” Kai sighed, and said, “It opened up a world that I never saw. It showed me that we are just as racist as anyone else.”

Again, how can we demand certain performances of Hawaiian identity and dismiss others? Who is Hawaiian *enough*? How can anyone prove that they are?

Just like I felt like I could never justify my position as a *haole* in Hawaii and Hawaiian culture to Kyle, so it seems here, even for someone ethnically Hawaiian.

Before I hung up the phone, I thanked Kai for her honesty and vulnerability. I am grateful for all that she was willing to share—and in some ways, for putting herself at odds with her community.

She said to me, “People don’t speak out about this. Thank you.”

...

It is the goal of this section with Kai and Roland to destabilize the seemingly strong sway of a scientific understanding of identity and culture over that of dramatic, meaning through performativity and cultural engagement. In the section on *haole* identity, there seems to be a movement towards agreeing that yes, *haoles*—despite any and all cultural engagement—have no place in Hawaii and Hawaiian culture because they are forever representative of “the colonizer,” and in that they have no blood ethnicity—no matter how small—their cultural engagement is always borderline cultural appropriation. Again, the only “safe” way for *haoles* to participate in Hawaii and Hawaiian culture—to “belong” somehow in Hawaii—is through the anticolonial project of environmentalism and by being an ally for Hawaiian political sovereignty.

What I hope this past section does is challenge that line of thinking. Can I really confidently dismiss my identity in Hawaii when people of Hawaiian ethnicity “perform” less in Hawaiian culture than I do? Can I confidently say that they are “more Hawaiian” even if they have not lived in Hawaii most of their lives, simply because they have the ethnicity and are brown? Or, does being a *haole* really mean I am forever ostracized?

How can I understand a Hawaiian woman who is both ethnically Hawaiian and Hawaiian through performance, but is rejected from the Hawaiian community? How can I understand *haole* women who are, to some extent, accepted and welcomed into the Hawaiian community, and who feel “Hawaiian at heart”? How can I understand a *hapa* Filipino man who is accepted as Hawaiian?

How can I understand a Hawaiian man who is deeply involved in the culture, and ethnically Hawaiian, but who is also Portuguese?

If I were to draw a conclusion, can I ever escape my own bias of wanting to belong in Hawaii? Or am I forever in this identity position of wanting to write down my own belonging?

If I deny myself belonging in Hawaii, then who am I?

4 Conclusion: Remaining Questions and the On-Going Conversation

The purpose of this project has not been to say identity and culture works one way or the other, but rather to see how these issues are discussed, to pull them a part, and work out, work through, and work within them. That being said, I find “concluding” a rather strange task. How do I end this? There is so much left to say, think, and do—where do we go from here?

To summarize where have we gone in this paper, I think it may be helpful to return to the word *haole*. It is what brought us here.

The word *haole*, just as this project, is unfinished, changing, full of contradictions and multiplicity.

Roland defined it in terms of physical appearance, or as having “fair skin and light eyes.” He also noted that being *haole* is something you don’t want to be: “I hate to be looking *haole*.”

Kaui told me, “I don’t allow my students to use the word *haole* in the classroom.” It has a negative charge, but she said it wasn’t always this way. “It’s more commonly used to refer to someone of non-native Hawaiian descent. At first, Hawaiian people embraced the Europeans. After annexation, Hawaiians got so angry that it changed from ‘ha ole’ to ‘haole.’ ‘Ha ole’ had the parts ‘Ha’ and ‘ole:’ ‘Ha’ means breath, and ‘ole’ is the negation of that, meaning ‘no breath.’ Then when we became colonized, we would say they have no ‘ha,’ meaning ‘no forgiveness.’ It became a new word with a new meaning, one that was now negative.”

It may refer to “white person” or “foreigner,” but this gets complicated when some *haoles*, like me, are born and raised in Hawaii. In this way, while *haole* may include white people at large, it also connotes a particular behavior.

Serene said *haole* “can mean different things to different people, in different contexts. I don’t take it offensively if someone calls me ‘*haole* girl,’ but I might if someone called me a ‘fucking *haole*.’”

Inanna said, “I don’t enjoy being called *haole*, but I am white—I don’t have ancestry. But I fully accept it. But still, it’s not my favorite word. If you name yourself by your values, I wouldn’t call myself *haole*. And I don’t call anyone that.”

Its meaning is relative, and refers both to physicality and behavior. Serene described this as well, saying *haole* is “more of a mentality, an attitude of ignorance.”

Kyle described *haole* as “more of a condition, a condition that is always negative—a negative, destructive presence.”

Gloria also said *haole* is more of a behavior. “It’s always negative; it’s a set of values that may not mix with Hawaiian values. It’s a rejection and rubbing against culture.”

The hula dancer defined *haole* as “an awareness. It’s hardly ever explicit, but it’s a feeling. Maybe it’s a guilty feeling, like you do not have a place. It’s that sort of unconscious planning and awareness of how you are being received... You have to respect the culture and to know what that means... Don’t go too far, don’t be too boisterous. It’s a behavior, and doesn’t always refer to physical appearance. You know enough about the culture to tread lightly. And that makes all the difference.”

...

The word *haole* is packed with a variety of different meanings: a history of colonialism, a bitterness from the Hawaiian community, and guilt and anxiety from the “local *haole*” community. Its meaning has changed over time, and is bound to change again. The quote from Michel Foucault at the beginning of this project finds new relevance at this moment: “...we do not know who we are, or what we are doing. Seen or seeing?...[We are] observing a place which, from moment to moment, never ceases to change its content, its form, its face, its identity” (5). This project presents the discourse around the word *haole*—showing how it works in the world—at this ever-changing moment in time, its ever-evolving negotiation of “who we are” and “what we are doing.”

To bring back Kenneth Burke, language—specifically this investigation into the term *haole*—is a “*reflection* of reality, [but also] by its very nature...a *selection* of reality; and to this extent...a *deflection* of reality” (45). Therefore, if we accept this notion of language as fragile and changeable, may we also accept these “conclusions” and questions I have presented, and these larger ideas of identity and cultural construction, in their fragility and for their limitations. Casey Boyle makes an affordance for this flexibility in “Rhetorical Ecologies of Posthuman Practice,” writing “rhetoric cannot only be situated, particular, or concrete or else there would be no rhetoric. To exist at all, rhetoric has to be exercised across middles, *in-between* a supposed general and particular. Rhetoric repeats itself, repeatedly, differently” (Boyle 57). This project is not over, nor is anything definitely concluded—instead, may this be an exploration of this “in-between-ness,” and a launching point for more investigation. I hope I have “made-meaning” and something meaning-full, and that this conversation sparks further scholarly and personal reflection on the subject of identity construction in Hawaii.

If I have accomplished anything, it may be this seemingly very basic act of talking about this otherwise “silent” issue. I mean “silent” in that this is not something people are talking about

in Hawaii. As Inanna said in her interview, “Nobody wants to make mistakes. People are scared to talk about these deeply political issues.” These issues of identity, race, culture—of who is *haole* and what that means, and who is Hawaiian and what that means—are not openly discussed. For obvious reasons, this is something difficult to negotiate: it is personal, political, and often, divisive. I hope that this project represents a model of a burgeoning conversation, one that people in and of Hawaii need to have. If any of us is to figure out who we are, what identities we can claim, and where is “home,” we first need to begin talking—and writing—about it.

...

At the end of my interview with Kyle, after I had packed up and we both were both about to go, he stopped and said, “What you’re doing is *pono*.”

I was taken aback—my loose understanding of *pono* is that it means righteous, or sacred. From everything we had just talked about, I felt like what I had supposed in my last thesis, and had come into this interview believing, was not *pono* at all. His words “That feels very colonial” still circled in my head.

He went on, smiling, “On a scale of one to ten, where do you think *pono* is?”

I tentatively said ten, thinking that *pono* is the most righteous and true.

He laughed. “*Pono* is a five,” he said.

I think he read the embarrassment on my face—I had effectively made the assumption that my work was “the most perfect,” the “most correct,” even though that’s not how I felt about it at all. I thought I had misspoke.

“*Pono* is five: where we meet in the middle,” he said, smiling. “If *pono* were ten, that would be unattainable. No one is perfect. *Pono* is meeting halfway, and having conversations like this one.”

...

Just before I finished this project, I was on a plane back to Maui. It was my first time going back since I started this. White clouds filled the airplane window as we began our descent.

Suddenly, a flash of blue and green peaked from behind the clouds, and then there it was.

There was the turquoise blue water of Makena Beach—the namesake of my sister—rushing underneath us, the shadow of the plane rippling on the ocean.

There were the old sugarcane fields, brown and drained from the residual summer heat, waiting for the rainy season.

There were the green pastures of Kula, where I lived for eighteen years. My eyes scanned for Holy Ghost church and for purple jacaranda trees.

My brain jerked—is this home? Can I really call this island home?

I am emotional by nature, but still, I was surprised when this thought brought tears to my eyes. Is this my home?

We drew closer to the black strip of runway. Downtown Kahului—the city I was born in—changed from dollhouse to life size dimensions as we got closer to landing. Serendipitously, my favorite hula song, Keola Beamer’s “Pua Lililehua” began playing through my headphones.

Is this home?

I closed my eyes, and mouthed the words, quietly, to no one: “I am sorry, Hawaii.”

Hawaii, I am sorry for the history of colonialism that my identity as a *haole* represents; I am sorry for justifying my place in my past research; I am sorry for upholding some feelings of residual and internalized colonialism; I am sorry for my faults as I commit them, now and in the future. I am sorry, but I am working to be better.

“I am sorry, Hawaii. I love you.”

Hawaii, I will continue to question, navigate, honor, and protect you, until the day I die.

The plane lands, and I am home.

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