

SOUNDWAVES OF CO-RESISTANCE IN HAWAI‘I: ILOKANOS RECLAIMING OUR TIMEK TOWARDS COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

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Growing up in the Philippines, stories about Hawai‘i depicted it as paradise. Balikbayans, returnees, brought pictures and boxes filled with macadamia nut chocolates, Spam, Vienna sausage, and t-shirts. These material goods, images, and stories shaped my imagination of Hawai‘i. When my father left in 1993 to go to Hawai‘i, he strengthened and confirmed this fantasy through the postcards he sent of coconut trees, picturesque beaches, Diamond Head, and the Arizona Memorial. In his letters, he described the temperate climate, air, greenery, and the diversity of people and cultures. But, when my mother and I followed him a year later, my fantasy image of Hawai‘i as paradise began to rupture. Instead of paradise, we found it almost unlivable. Despite my parents’ work experience in the Philippines, employers would not hire them as professionals except as food service and maintenance/custodial workers. We rented a one-bedroom in a downstairs unit of an old house in Pauoa. It was partially underground and infested with rats, cockroaches, termites, and centipedes. The windows were ground level to the walkway outside. All we could see was the sight of people’s feet as they walked by. It was always dark because a tall cement wall blocked sunlight from entering one side. School was no better. As a newly arrived immigrant girl, I was bullied in school and made fun of for my “Filipino accent” and called “bukbok,” a grain bug/pest. This caused me to retreat into myself in order to survive a world that did not accept me. I stopped speaking Ilokano. I stopped speaking in school. I suppressed things that conspicuously marked me as Filipino. The hiding and the shame followed me into adulthood like a ghost, haunting my present.

—Nadine

It was a hot afternoon in November 2020; I biked from Pālolo Valley to the first floor of a strip mall across from Ala Moana Shopping Center. Manong Dean, students from the Timpuyog Organization, and two older aunts were already there waiting nervously in the small vestibule before a large painting of a lū‘au. This was Studio Ala Moana, a recording studio that had captured the voices and immense musical talents of so many Hawaiian musicians. We were all intimidated and no one dared be the first to approach the microphone. When it was my turn to record,

1. Nadezna also uses her nickname, Nadine, in this essay.

I stepped into the booth, put on the giant headphones, and adjusted the volume to hear myself reflected back so clearly. I could barely see anyone in the other booths through the layers of glass, so I concentrated on listening. We practiced a few times with a pre-recorded track—I fumbled the words, the intonation, the rhythm in this language, and felt absolutely inadequate—“Why didn’t they get a real Ilokano speaker to do this?” But as I kept singing with the other voices and chose to trust myself, I found a deep sense of flow and centeredness. *Agrambak! Agrambak! Rejoice! Rejoice!* I took the deepest breaths that I could, closed my eyes, and imagined the land that was holding me, the land that supported me as I rediscovered my mother language, and I sang to her, and to my ancestors.

—Rebecca

Speaking from the perspective of Ilokanas, we explore how Ilokanos in Hawai‘i are engaging voice or *timek* as a way to (re)learn and sustain our language, culture, and histories that have been historically and contemporarily repressed as a consequence of assimilation and anti-Filipino racism. Consequently, this journey has led us down new pathways of connection with others, particularly Kānaka Maoli, and consciousness of our positionality and responsibility as settlers in Hawai‘i, a US settler colony established through land theft and military overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom with the assistance of the US military.² The process of engaging *timek* opens up possibilities for the development of affinities that transgress colonial boundaries and identity categories across time and space.

In this essay, we highlight the work of contemporary Ilokano community organizations, activists, students, and educators to expand notions of Filipino subjectivities and kinships across imposed land and oceanic borders. The two examples discussed here—*LAING* Hawai‘i and the *Kāwili* album—focus on the particularity and heterogeneity of the Ilokano experience in Hawai‘i, where Ilokanos make up the majority of the Filipino community.³ We hope to expand the field of Filipinx Studies literature, which often centers the Tagalog experience of migration to the continental United States, by highlighting the perspectives of Ilokanos in Hawai‘i, most notably those who are second, third, and fourth generations, as they grapple with the legacies and realities of imperialism, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, racism, and settler colonialism. These stories reveal the complex and difficult work of learning and unlearning; the overcoming of shame related to anti-Filipino stigma as they find the language to express their experiences; and the indirect journeys towards consciousness and liberation. They show that learning is often a messy, uncomfortable process, which requires time, commitment, and sustained work. And oftentimes,

2. Trask 2008, 46.

3. Agbayani 1991, 78.

learning takes you to places you never intended. As the students in LAING Hawai'i discuss in Part III, their journey of studying Ilokano language engendered other pathways to learning about themselves and the relationship of their personal struggles to that of others.

In Part I, we introduce and locate ourselves and how we came to be in Hawai'i as Ilokans in diaspora. We present the ways in which we are connected to the projects we write about here and how our personal and community relationships form the root of our language reclamation work. Additionally, we give context to the socio-economic state of Filipinos in Hawai'i and the historical climate of anti-Filipino racism in which we find ourselves today. In Part II, we dive into the Oceanic, examining waves of sound and water as metaphor for the experience of engaging timek as we reclaim our language as settlers on Hawaiian lands. We trace the ways that timek is used traditionally and currently in the Ilokano diaspora. Sections III and IV relate the stories of Ilokans and their varying experiences of cultural and language reclamation work, how they have affected their sense of selves, identity, and relationship to others. We describe the intentions behind each project and how Ilokans are utilizing language and cultural reclamation as a method of building political consciousness. In our Conclusion we present the question of "Where do we go from here?" and consider the ways in which Ilokans can continue to do the difficult work of language reclamation and simultaneously be in support of parallel struggles for social justice.

I. Who Are We and How Did We Get Here?

Rebecca: I am a third generation Ilokana who grew up in Chicago in an assimilated, mixed-race home with limited exposure to the Ilokano language. I came to Hawai'i in August 2017 from México to study Ilokano in pursuit of my Master of Fine Arts degree. I enrolled in the iLaing community Ilokano class at the Filipino Community Center and traveled to the Philippines in 2018 for the first time with the iLaing3 cohort. The following year, I studied Ilokano at UH Mānoa. I experienced a significant transformation—the awakening of lost memories, unlocking of Ilokano timek, uncovering of silenced family histories—with the rediscovery of simple words: numbers, vegetables, body parts, and place names. As my journey of self-discovery was occurring on Hawaiians lands, I began to understand parallels between Hawai'i and the Philippines, particularly through labor history and the broader context of my family's migration history within American imperialism. I observed a similar brand of militarism, hetero-patriarchy, land dispossession and economic exploitation experienced in the México-US Borderlands by comunidades indígenas, migrantes, and workers, this time in a different fetishized landscape that affected my family and extended community in Hawai'i. As an artist, themes of diaspora, relationship to land, and social justice are at the center of my practice.

Nadine: I was born in Pagudpud, Ilocos Norte and raised in Pauoa Valley on O‘ahu. Currently, I live in the ahupua‘a⁴ of Honouliuli. I am a native Ilokano speaker but suffered language loss due to experiencing racism in Hawai‘i’s public schools which caused me to stop speaking Ilokano. Being bullied in school for being Filipino made me internalize shame and self-hatred. While pursuing my MA in Indigenous Politics at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and being mentored by Kānaka Maoli women scholars, I journeyed on a parallel path of learning about myself, Filipinos, and Philippine history. I went back to school to relearn Ilokano, which took a lot of effort because speaking Ilokano felt unwanted and forbidden in Hawai‘i where English became the dominant language after the overthrow. Since then, I have continued my pursuit of learning more about the Ilokano language and culture.

We met in Hawai‘i through our shared political activism and commitment to Ilokano studies and have since been trying to understand how we can best be of service to our communities while sustaining a conscious allyship with Kānaka Maoli in Hawai‘i.⁵ For this essay, we conducted semi-structured interviews via Zoom with our participants from LAING Hawai‘i and those involved with the Kāwili album. We began with self-introduction and orientation, which one participant did traditionally, sharing his genealogy in Ilokano. We allowed ample space for storytelling, weaving our way through their personal experiences and holding space for collective reflection on how our timek work has affected our lives, relationships, and commitment to social justice.

It is here that we find ourselves, having developed a supportive friendship and collaborative commitment to our vision of justice rooted in our personal healing journeys in discovering and engaging our timek. We write as Ilokanas in Hawai‘i with shared experience in the reclamation of our culture and have made the choice to both study and teach our native language. By sharing these stories, we hope to reimagine our relationships and obligations to this place and to Kānaka Maoli through diverse strategies of community collaboration, creative hybridization, and engagement with collective histories. Through the reclamation, materialization, and harmonization of timek, Ilokanos are creating new languages and forging new ways of being in the hopes of bringing collective liberation for both communities.

4. “Land division usually extending from the uplands to the sea, so called because the boundary was marked by a heap (*ahu*) of stones surmounted by an image of a pig (*pua‘a*), or because a pig or other tribute was laid on the altar as tax to the chief. The landlord or owner of an ahupua‘a might be a *kono‘hiki*,” from Pukui 1986, 9.

5. We first met at Jessie’s Bakery in Kalihi during an AF3IRM Hawai‘i meeting. AF3IRM is a transnational, multi-ethnic, grassroots feminist organization. Nadine is a cofounder of the AF3IRM Hawai‘i chapter and Rebecca was a member between 2017–2019. We have worked on multiple projects together including co-organization of film screenings, presentations, and workshops. After iLaing class and the Philippine immersion trip in 2018, we co-founded LAING Hawai‘i with other iLaing students to continue to provide free Ilokano language classes in the community.

The stories shared here, both our own as well as the stories of those we interviewed, give evidence to the effects of racism on our bodies and our daily lives. The stigma of being Filipino runs deep, the suppression of our voices, both within and without, has affected our physical beings as much as our conceptual understandings of the world. But these stories denote the ways in which we are actively engaging our vocal chords, our intonation, our breathing patterns. Our embodied experiences of racism, particularly in how our voices are stifled, may go unnoticed. But this kind of remembering, especially the ability to verbalize our experiences, has profound effects on our senses of self and ability to regain confidence and a sense of belonging. For Ilokanos, our recovery of voice is not simply learning the language, but also the understanding and ability to express our world, our needs and struggles. Our recovery of *timek* is therefore informed and shaped by place and context. In the diaspora, our expression of *timek* is influenced by the social and political forces of that place.

The recovery of *timek* for Ilokanos in Hawai'i occurs within the context of the still-present problem of anti-Filipino racism in Hawai'i, which continue to shape the economic conditions, educational attainment, health, representation, and identity formations of Filipinos today. Scholars studying the subordinated status of Filipinos since the plantation era in Hawai'i point to the lesser pay, lower status jobs, and inferior conditions given to Filipinos.⁶ These conditions have not changed as scholarship from the 1980s to the present reveal that Filipinos still have lower socioeconomic status in comparison to most groups.⁷ Not only do they continue to have lower income, they are mostly relegated to service and low-status jobs in the tourism industry as "hotel maids, building and grounds maintenance workers, and food service workers."⁸ Scholars have also underscored the institutional racism and discrimination which have obstructed Filipinos' access to higher education, resulting in lower rates of educational attainment.⁹ Other scholars have highlighted the stereotypes and negative representation of Filipinos in the media, literature, and public discourse which perpetuate anti-Filipino sentiments over time.¹⁰ As a result of anti-Filipino racism, Filipinos develop a sense of shame about their identity, devalue their culture, and stop speaking or refusing to teach their Philippine languages.¹¹

The recovery of *timek* generates other forms of learning. Here, the stories give an account of the beginnings of how some Ilokanos are learning and thinking about, discussing, and confronting settler

6. Adams 1933; Abbott 1971; Alcantara 1988; Cariaga 1936; Ponce and Forman 1980.

7. Teodoro 1981; Haas 1984; Okamura 1990; Okamura 1991; Okamura and Labrador 1996; Okamura 2008; Labrador 2015.

8. Okamura 2008, 49.

9. Halagao 2016; Libarios 2013; Okamura 2008; Okamura 2017.

10. Fujikane 2000; Jung 2006; Labrador 2015; Okamura 2010; Reinecke 1996; Rodrigues 2000; Teodoro 1981.

11. Eisen 2019; Labrador 2015; Revilla 1997.

colonialism, especially their role as settlers who are structurally maneuvered against Kānaka Maoli through their participation and presence in a US settler state.¹² This includes listening to and learning from Kānaka Maoli and understanding their struggles and our responsibility to them and to this place. Haunani-Kay Trask, who spearheaded the scholarship on settler colonialism in Hawai‘i, wrote, “Our Native people and territories have been overrun by non-Natives, including Asians.”¹³ She described that the colonial condition of Native Hawaiians that was initiated by white colonizers continues today, but it is now maintained by the participation of Asian settlers who have risen in social, political, and economic power.¹⁴

Although Asian groups hold different levels of power and privilege, Asian and Kānaka Maoli scholars point to “the structural distinction between Natives and settlers” that is historically produced.¹⁵ Trask explains that it is Native Hawaiians who have a genealogical relationship to their ancestral lands and only they have claim to it. Not only that, their struggle centers on land and sovereignty which is distinct from the struggles of other groups who often frame their struggles within US civil rights discourse.¹⁶ Furthermore, this structural binary and division is ongoing because the system and infrastructures established under settler colonialism are still in place and extant. Hence, the migration and settlement of non-Natives on the Native land of another positions them as settlers. Dean Saranillio explains, “While migration in and of itself does not equate to colonialism, migration to a settler-colonial space—where Native lands and resources are under political, and spiritual contestation—means that the political agency of diverse non-Native communities can bolster a colonial system initiated by white settlers.”¹⁷ Candace Fujikane contends that the term “settler” is not about being “the initial colonizers,” “the political capacity to colonize,” or the condition of being oppressed by white settlers and other settlers, which would erroneously situate settler colonialism in the past, done by white colonizers, and with no implications in our present.¹⁸ This framing takes away the agency of settlers of color and their responsibilities to Native peoples, and it minimizes the consequences of their actions and practices. Additionally, it presumes that there are only two positions, oppressed or oppressor, and that oppressed groups cannot oppress others.

Citing Filipinos as a historically oppressed group who continue to experience racism and socioeconomic and political subordination in Hawai‘i, Fujikane argues that they are settlers because they “enter into and occupy the colony of Hawai‘i” and “the condition of

12. Fujikane 2008, 8; Saranillio 2008, 257; Trask 1999; Trask 2008.

13. Trask 2008, 46.

14. Trask 2008, 46.

15. Fujikane 2008, 6.

16. Trask 2008, 50.

17. Saranillio 2018, xviii-xix.

18. Fujikane 2008, 7.

being a settler is inextricable from the processes of occupation and colonization.¹⁹ Hence, settler colonialism persists whether we are consciously or purposefully participating in it or not. Additionally, Filipinos sometimes uncritically desire inclusion within the US settler state, identify as “American,” and seek recognition and the promises of US civil rights, which have very real implications on the lives of Native peoples who continue to live under US domination in their own Native lands.²⁰ As Saranillio explains, “power does not simply target historically oppressed communities but also operates through their practices, ambitions, narratives, and silences.”²¹

II. Waves of Encounter and Convergence

The title of this essay, “Soundwaves of Co-resistance” evokes the metaphor of mechanical waves which include ocean and sound waves.²² The ocean is a space that connects different lands and peoples.²³ Ocean waves are created by energy from the wind, adverse weather, or planetary forces which cause water to move and travel, transmitting energy. This energy wave moves in a circular motion above and below the surface of the water and when unobstructed, it can move across the vast ocean from one end to the other. Waves and the sea itself have been used as an analogy for migration to signal the movement of people from one place to other places.²⁴ But mechanical waves do not form out of nowhere, they are created by social forces. Hence, migration and diaspora must be contextualized by the larger social forces and the individual choices that propel them. Moreover, the sea, the land, and the pathways that are journeyed and crossed are not simply thoroughfare. They are a part of other peoples’ territories, cosmologies, and genealogies. What then are new insights that we can learn when we consider the ocean as more than an area to travel and cross?

Encountering land, waves can crash and break against the shore, rough and tempestuous, or gently spread and ripple across the

19. Fujikane 2008, 7-8.

20. Saranillio 2008, 257-258.

21. Saranillio 2013, 288.

22. The concept of “co-resistance” comes from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, who has been influential in our understanding of relating to and building community with Indigenous peoples within the context of Ilokanos’ presence in Hawai‘i. Ilokanos have been displaced from our ancestral lands, entangled within the imperial circuits of migration to become laborers in the lands of Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island and the Pacific, while simultaneously experiencing anti-Filipino and anti-immigrant racism in Hawai‘i even as we become part of the settler colonial projects of dispossession on Kānaka Maoli land. Simpson explains “constellations of co-resistance” as working and building relationships with other groups and movements to create relationships to “form flight paths out of settler colonial realities” (Simpson 2017, 217).

23. Fajardo 2011, 18.

24. Fajardo 2011, 2.

sand—interactions that we see as symbolic of modes of encounter between different groups. They can be violent but also gentle if guided by an ethic of love and care. Following the meeting of land and sea, water recedes and returns back to the ocean in a continuous cycle. The encounter is never final, but always happening. Waves are limitless, existing before and after us. As Karin Ingersoll explains her seascape epistemology rooted in Kānaka Maoli epistemology, “the image and idea of the physical structure of the wave [is] a way of knowing the past, and thus a way of understanding . . . the present.”²⁵ The ocean therefore disrupts colonial time and space, bridging past, present, and future; and seemingly incommensurable worlds together. Unlike other conceptualizations of waves as a singular occurrence with a beginning and end, waves signal the expansive and unlimited possibilities of encounter, engagement, and movement. By learning from our past and present, we can pursue different relationships and directions. Even if the violence of settler colonialism and imperialism structures our encounter, it does not dictate our future. The ocean then serves as a guide in creating a more livable and just present and in imagining and constructing alternative futurities.

The ocean also allows us to rethink and reimagine relationalities of different and unconnected geographies, and our relationships to places to which we are not genealogically tied. How might putting two parallel and yet converging oceanic spaces—Hawai‘i and the Philippines specifically the Amianan, Northern Philippines—allow us to think about transoceanic relations that exceed and contest US mappings of Philippine–American relations that are dependent on what Allan Punzalan Issac describes as the “American Tropics?”²⁶ Utilizing an oceanic methodology, we root Ilokanos back to place in order to contextualize and historicize Ilokano migration to Hawai‘i. The first part of the story begins in the Amianan, the first home of the Ilokano people. This narrow strip of land along Luzon island is cradled between the Western Philippine Sea and the Cordillera Mountain range. This land shaped like a bowl or basin, *luok/lukong*, informs the name of part of the land itself, *Ilocos*, and the name of the people and the name of the language spoken, *Iluko/Ilokano*.²⁷ Ilokano life is very much influenced by the geographic meeting of land and sea.

The second part of the story is the story of diaspora, within and outside the Philippines, which symbolizes the breakdown and interruption of colonial containment as Ilokanos migrate to the imperial metropole and other colonized places. Hawai‘i, located within larger Oceania, is the site or zone of the encounters and convergence between Ilokanos and Kānaka Maoli and other settlers in Hawai‘i. The Ilokano experiences shared in this essay are shaped not only by the history of diaspora but also Ilokano settlement in Hawai‘i. These are stories of Ilokanos and stories of place. From this relatively new space for Ilokano time, we begin to hear the overlapping sounds of our language amidst a new context and a different sound of the sea.

Just like ocean waves, sound waves are generated and received, moving in multiple directions simultaneously, combining for strength and expressing a particular tone. Like the migration of Ilokanos to Hawai'i, sound waves evoke this rhythmic flow. The transnational and transoceanic crossings of Filipinos across the geographies of the US empire are facilitated and shaped by US imperialism and its policies. The capitalistic desires of haole sugar plantation owners for an exploitable labor force converged with imperial policies, enabling the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association and its agents to target and recruit Filipinos, predominantly Ilokanos and Visayans. During American colonization of the Philippines beginning at the turn of the century, American capitalism deteriorated the economies of the rural provinces of Ilocos and parts of Visayas which forced many to leave their homelands and migrate to Hawai'i and the United States.²⁸ Although the first Filipino migrant workers that came to Hawai'i were from the Visayas region, Ilokanos became the "majority of Filipino immigrants . . . [between] . . . 1906–46."²⁹ Recruiters targeted young men who were uneducated in order to contract obedient workers who would take lower wages and not go on strike.³⁰ Although there were regional differences and conflicts among Filipinos, they collectively experienced poor working conditions and were given the lowest pay and substandard housing.³¹ Furthermore, they were often homogenized, sexualized, and racialized by white sugar oligarchs, the media, and other racialized groups as inferior, violent, "like children," and "unmanly."³² These narratives and representations prevalent during the plantation period regarding Filipinos continue today perpetuated as ethnic jokes, tropes in popular literature in the media, and even as legal defense.³³

Filipino migration to Hawai'i is dissimilar to Filipino migration patterns to the continental United States. Although the Filipino population in Hawai'i is heterogeneous, it is predominantly Ilokano. According to Amefil Agbayani, "Estimates of Ilokanos in Hawai'i range from a high of 90 percent to a conservative estimate of 70–80 percent."³⁴ Ilokanos already in Hawai'i were able to petition for their family members in the Philippines after the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which loosened previous immigration restrictions.³⁵ As Ilokanos make up the majority of Filipinos in Hawai'i, we focus on the specificity of the Ilokano experience as well as the diversity within the Ilokano community. Furthermore, we hope that through this work we can expand the conversation about the complexity, depth, and limitations of Filipino identity.

28. Mabalon 2013, 40–44.

29. Agbayani 1991, 78; Mabalon 2013, 48.

30. Mabalon 2013, 49.

31. Mabalon 2013, 52.

32. Jung 2006, 84–86.

33. Okamura 2010.

34. Agbayani 1991, 78.

35. Agbayani 1991, 78.

Sound waves serve as a way of understanding the loss of our *timek* as we experience racism and the forces of assimilation that suppress our Ilokano language and culture in Hawai'i. What happens when our voice is repressed or lost? How does it affect who we are and our relationship to the world? At the same time, how are voice and sound sustained despite the social forces that try to suppress them? Hence, sound waves can also reveal the many acts of resistance, preservation, and recovery of our *timek* as we continue to engage in various formal and informal ways of perpetuating our language and culture. Inspired and influenced by Hawaiian and Maori language and cultural resurgence movements, our rediscovery and engagement of *timek* is informed by the various indigenous-led cultural resurgence movements worldwide, although these experiences and struggles are not synonymous. Additionally, the experiences of Ilokanos in Hawai'i are not equivalent or generalizable to the experiences of other Ilokanos and Filipinos in other contexts, especially those of the continental United States or North America. The relationship between Ilokanos and Indigenous groups in the Philippines is also a nuanced issue that we cannot elaborate on due to limited space. But we want to note that despite its status as a minority language in the diaspora and even in the Philippines, Ilokano functions as the *lingua franca*/trade language in the multilingual Cordillera Region where BIBAK/BIMAK, Indigenous groups in Northern Philippines, live and Ilokano also acts as a dominant language in the sugar, banana, and pineapple plantations on Lumad and other Indigenous lands in Mindanao.³⁶

As Ilokanas in the Hawai'i context, we are interested in how *timek* and the reclamation of Ilokano language and voice can be utilized to create new frameworks for relating to each other, to give context for our own experience of cultural genocide and assimilation and how it relates to that of other groups. We see *timek* as a tone of Ilokano-ness that is not easily folded into a Tagalog or Manila-centric identity, nor a Cordilleran Indigenous identity. The tone of the rocky lowlands, the ocean-adjacent flats, the riverine plains, and the diasporic spaces beyond recall these unique homelands. *Timek* expresses a tone that embodies the grief of dislocation and loss of identity, but also the power of community building, cross-cultural collaboration, and deep love and respect for land and life.

We conceptualize *timek* as part of the rich Ilokano oral tradition that includes songs, poetry, chants such as the *dallot*, *burburtia* (riddles), *duayya* (lullabies), *badeng* (love songs), and *pagsasao* (sayings). One of these is the *dung-aw*, dirge.³⁷ It is a song or chant

36. BIBAK or BIMAK is an acronym for several Indigenous groups in the Cordilleras. BIBAK stands for Benguet, Ifugao, Bontoc, Apayao, and Kalinga. BIMAK is sometimes used when referring to the provinces and the second B in BIBAK is replaced with M for Mountain Province.

37. The theorization of *dung-aw* in this context emerged through conversations between Nadine and her mother, Amparo Agcaoili Ortega, who helped her think about the various ways *timek* is practiced and vocalized in Ilokano culture.

of lamentation expressed by family members and close friends at the time of death, at the wake, during the procession to the cemetery, and at the burial. Usually performed by women, it begins with a deep piercing wail evoking feelings of loss and grief followed by a rhythmic blend of song and chant. It is often improvised and unplanned. When one embodies the *dung-aw*, it brings forth deep emotion from the listeners resulting in collective crying, a signal for others to do a *dung-aw* and continue the ritual. This is both an individual and a collective ceremony with the first person making way for others to follow suit. The *dung-aw* is not just a way for the bereaved to voice their love, regrets, loss, and memories, but also as a form of release. Without the expression of grief, the individual and the community cannot move forward and begin the healing process, which for Ilokanos involves rituals performed immediately after the funeral, in the weeks following the funeral, and annually during the anniversary of death. For Ilokanos, our *timek* is the medium by which we vocalize our world and our relationship to each other and our ancestors. In the context of multiple colonial erasures and silences, *timek* is a collective experience of remembering, recovering, and engaging. It is a consciousness that may not only take the form of coherent language, but also sound, song, utterance, silence, breath, shout. In the difficult work of recovering one's lost language, or choosing the path of speaking one's native language in an English-dominant society, Ilokanos find access to a part of themselves. By engaging our *timek*, we are interrupting and reversing the intentional erasure of our culture and perpetuating the knowledge bases and collectivist worldview of our ancestors.

Within the context of worldwide Ilokano diaspora, engaging *timek* is a method of relating and building community with Native and other peoples' movements for a more just world. When Unite Here! Local 5 went on strike in 2018 to demand better working conditions and wages for hotel-industry workers, the mega-phone on the picket-line was consistently held by Ilokana and Filipina hotel workers chanting in Ilokano outside large chain hotels in Waikīkī. When the University of Hawai'i (UH) moved to begin construction on the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) on Mauna Kea, the sacred mountain on Hawai'i Island, UH Mānoa Ilokano Language and Literature Program educators and students released a formal, bilingual statement, which stated: "Our commitment for self-determination and freedom for the Ilokano culture, language, and people includes fighting for the self-determination for all indigenous peoples, including Kānaka Maoli." A few months later, a delegation of Ilokanos, Igorot and other Filipinos, traveled to Mauna Kea to answer the call to stand with Kānaka against the TMT. This March 2022, Nadine spoke at an International Women's Day candlelight vigil condemning the violence of the Honolulu Police Department against women, girls, and gender expansive folks.³⁸ Sharing several Ilokano words—*padaya*, *wayawaya*, and *tagnawa*—to emphasize

38. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CbHxNLZNgC6/?hl=en>

the Ilokano worldview of panagkakadua, a way of being in relationship with others guided by communal care and shared responsibility, Nadine invited those in attendance to look within our languages and cultural practices as guidelines to building relations of care outside oppressive systems.³⁹ In sharing these words, she highlighted the use of our timek, our Ilokano voice, rooted in our cultural worldviews, as a means to recover our suppressed histories and identities, as a way to forge solidarities with others, and as a tool for change.

Although timek is rooted in the Philippines and Ilokano culture, it is also routed in the diaspora, carried across lands and seas. Timek follows the people. We carry our timek with us and it links us to our ancestors. Our timek changes and adapts to new places, scenarios, perspectives, and community needs. We use our timek to give language to our experiences, but it is also our mode of communication with others. Our timek then is one important way in which we relate to others. By speaking, sharing, and listening to others, we learn about others, places, and the world. In the next section we examine how a group of young Ilokanos, despite relocation, assimilation, and internalized shame, are relinking their connection to language and culture through self-organized learning spaces.

III. LAING Hawai'i: Reclaiming Language and Linguaging Connections

I'm on the A Express bus to Waipahu to my Ilokano class at the Filipino Community Center. Socks pulled up cover bulging calves descending the back-door stairs, raising a black umbrella. A woman kicks off her flip flops in a maroon criss cross tank top. Hot pink matte lips reveal a gap-toothed smile, "Are you studying?" a lady asks. "Yes, writing down my ideas," I say, and smile back. I've never been on a bus with this many Filipinos in my life. I've never heard our language in this way—in public. In class we eat, joke, learn; two women bring their kids. We learn how to say fart and vomit and all the ingredients for pancit—"survival Ilokano." On the way out of class, I stop into the Salvation Army thrift store across the street. The sun is going down and I notice a large building marked "Waipahu Store" with a tall smokestack in the background—the O'ahu Sugar Company Plantation Store, where workers would buy vegetables and overpriced rice, new stoves for their shared homes. The thrift store employees are speaking in Ilokano about ditoy washer—When will I be able to converse in this language, Ilokan-ish, around the history and future of this place?

—Rebecca

39. Padaya is a large feast or gathering where the whole community is invited, food is shared, and relationships are strengthened through sharing and giving; Wayaway means freedom and independence. Tagnawa means collective, communal care, and shared work and responsibility emphasizing community well-being.

On a warm Saturday afternoon, LAING Hawai'i students, organizers, and I gathered at the Waipahu Plantation Village. We walked through a short dark tunnel to begin the tour. Purposefully created to have the effect of transporting us back in time, we emerged from the tunnel to see small plantation houses dotting both sides of a narrow road. A small hale, a Native Hawaiian thatched roof house, stood on the right and on the left, a two-story red building stood with double doors adorned with Chinese characters. Our guide tells us, "This was a time when sugar was king." She guides us through each house, restored and replicated, all arranged in a linear progression. The arrangement of the houses visually tells a particular story of Hawai'i's sugar plantation history. This multicultural story tells us that we, immigrants and Native alike, all similarly experienced haole settler violence and exploitation—first with the sugar barons' attempt to extract labor from Native Hawaiians and then with the importation of Chinese laborers. As we walked further, we visited the houses occupied by the Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, Okinawans, Portuguese, and Puerto Ricans, all of whom were subsequently recruited and brought to work in the plantations. This hegemonic tale paints a picture of racial solidarity which erases Native Hawaiians' ancestral link to their land and the settler colonial land theft that facilitated the extraction and importation of migrant labor. We saw the bango tags on display which were used to classify workers by their ethnic group. Instead of names, they were identified by the type of tag and number assigned. After the tour, there was a feeling of heaviness amongst the students. We felt the silences and the haunting of repressed histories. We sat down on the benches under a tall tree by the main building and began to unpack these histories. We recalled the name of the land, Waipahū, meaning exploding/bursting water. The students told their own stories that countered what they just heard. Then, we asked each other what it means to be Filipino on occupied land.

—Nadine

This section discusses the problem of language loss in the Ilokano community in Hawai'i and the intentional reclamation of timek by the students and founders of the organization, Language Acquisition and Immersion for the New Generation Hawai'i (LAING Hawai'i), who relayed stories of their own language loss and shame associated with their identity. The founders of LAING speak of their journeys towards Ilokano language learning and cultural practice that was denied their generation, which provided the impetus to create the organization that has since expanded beyond language education. Their curriculum focuses on unpacking colonial histories and historical trauma while also building place-based connections and relationships. LAING's use of language study as political education also demonstrates an important facet of timek: the utilization of voice as an activation point for political engagement.

LAING Hawai'i was birthed through a desire to learn the Ilokano language. The founders began as students of iLAING,⁴⁰ a community language program held at the Filipino Community Center in Waipahu established in 2015 through a partnership between the Consulate General of the Philippines in Hawai'i and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) Ilokano Language and Literature Program.

LAING Hawai'i follows the work of Ilokano and Tagalog women educators who responded to the particularity of the Filipino community's need to learn their heritage language and culture at a time when Hawai'i saw a significant increase in the Filipino population, particularly Ilokano, after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act.⁴¹ At this time, Filipinos in Hawai'i struggled against racism, anti-immigrant sentiments, discrimination in housing and employment, and assimilation.⁴² This caused them to lose their native language and connection to their roots, which was the impetus for the creation of programs such as Operation Manong (now the Office of Multicultural Student Services) and for the fight to have Philippine languages taught in Hawai'i's public schools and at UHM.⁴³ The UHM Ilokano Language and Literature Program was established by Manang Prescila L. Espiritu in 1972 with support from Dr. Teresita Ramos from the Tagalog Program.⁴⁴ It started with an offering of one introductory Ilokano class and later expanded to four levels because of student demand for the class.⁴⁵ As the program grew, the faculty expanded to include Dr. Josie Clausen, Clemen Montero, Dr. Julius

40. LAING Hawai'i (Language Acquisition and Immersion for the New Generation) derives its name from iLAING (Ilokano Acquisition and Immersion for the New Generation), a three-month Ilokano language class no longer in existence. LAING Hawai'i dropped the "i" in its name because of its goal of perpetuating more than Ilokano language but also other heritage languages in Hawai'i. Since its inception, LAING Hawai'i has offered Ilokano, Cebuano/Visayan, and Samoan language classes.

41. According to Dr. Teresita V. Ramos, "Nine out of ten Filipinos arriving in Hawai'i after 1965 came from the Ilocos region of the Philippines where most of the plantation labor recruits originated" (Ramos 1996, 166).

42. Alegado 1991, 23.

43. Operation Manong was created to "supplement basic services available to recent Filipino immigrants, particularly in the area of education." The project document recognizes that Filipinos have "consistently been afforded less than their fair share of the benefits of American society" citing housing and employment inequalities; however, Operation Manong's primary objective was addressing the educational needs of school-age Filipino immigrants. (Operation Manong, <https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/1962d680-3052-45d6-8e71-e43cabfe2374/content>); Ramos 1996, 165-169.

44. Manang Prescila L. Espiritu explained that Ilokano translation and interpretation services were needed in social services, health institutions, and the courts because of the large size of the Ilokano community. As a result, she proposed the teaching of Ilokano at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (Espiritu, Prescila. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, August 14, 2022).

45. Espiritu, Prescila L. "Hawai'i and the University of Hawai'i's Ilokano Language and Literature Program: 50 Years Later" (Zoom presentation, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Center for Philippine Studies, Honolulu, HI, October 19, 2021). <https://www.facebook.com/100008788386699/videos/4689969741023729/>

Soria, Dr. Lilia Santiago, and Dr. Aurelio Agcaoili. Class offerings and courses increased to include Ilokano grammar structure, translation and interpretation, Philippine film, and Philippine drama. The program offers a site for Ilokano students to not only learn their language and culture, but also to embody and engage their timek through culture-based methodologies that incorporate singing, theater, performance, community involvement and participation, and gatherings. We want to explicitly acknowledge the work and determination of these Ilokans who also struggled with their own confidence in their language skills and utilized their collective skills and resources to bring a sense of pride and interest in Ilokano language to the community.

In 2017, LAING founders signed up for the free community Ilokano language class citing family as their reason for taking the language. Janine Mariano expressed her feelings of shame and regret for not being able to speak with her grandmother in Ilokano.⁴⁶ Anthony Arce and Yvette Cudal wanted to connect with family and community.⁴⁷ Although Yvette's grandmother taught her some Ilokano when she was younger, she wanted to continue learning and wants her nieces and nephews to learn Ilokano because they may not have a chance to learn and speak their ancestral language. Each week Anthony, Yvette and Janine devoted four to five hours on Saturday afternoons to sit in a cramped classroom at the FilCom Center. With ten to fifteen other students, they learned basic sentence structures, vocabulary, common phrases, and songs. They joked and laughed and shared pancit, lumpia, empanada, and various Filipino desserts. After class, they gathered around a table under a large umbrella in the open courtyard and talked story. Each class, they forged relationships and connections which strengthened over time, and a few months later, they invited friends and family to their graduation ceremony to witness their growth. One by one they introduced themselves in Ilokano and vocalized what they learned in the class. Together they sang *Bannatiran*, *O Naraniag a Bulan*, *Pamulinawen*, *Lubilubi*, *Ti Ayat ti Maysa nga Ubing*, and *Dikanton Malipatan*—classic Ilokano folk and love songs.

After the class ended, the students traveled to Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur in August of 2018, a trip made possible through sponsorships, a GoFundMe fundraiser, and their own contributions. The trip was organized by Filipino regional associations based in Hawai'i with contacts and networks in the Ilocos. On their first day in Candon City, the group of twenty students, their chaperones, and local guides made their way to the capitol building where they were greeted by heads of local government and their staff. They held a program with welcome speeches from the mayor and other officials, sharing food generously provided by the city. Similar ceremonies were held

46. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

47. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

in Vigan, Ilocos Sur and Laoag City, Ilocos Norte. Aside from political meetings, the students visited Candon South Central School, Candon National High School, Gabaldon Elementary School, and Ilocos Norte National High School where they donated school supplies and met with students and teachers. They visited and toured a city health office and dropped off medical supplies. They learned about rice production and planted rice; visited a pottery shop in Vigan and witnessed the making of Ilokano banga, clay cooking pots; visited a cooperative of inabel weavers to learn about Ilokano woven textiles; and visited Itneg and Tingguian villages, where they learned a dance from a group of Indigenous community elders and watched a dance and musical performance by Indigenous youth.⁴⁸ At each of these engagements, the iLaing class performed *Paumulinawen*, a traditional Ilokano love song with pre-colonial roots that was also sung while rowing. In Nueva Era, they exchanged songs and sang together with Tingguian youth. The trip also gave some of the students a chance to visit family that they had not seen in a long time or connect with family they had never met.

After the trip, students reflected on their immersion trip and the class. Janine, Anthony, and Yvette described the trip as transformative. Anthony said that he “formed a community” with other students and Yvette explained that it was much more than a “language class.”⁴⁹ Going on the trip, she said that she “understood it more,” what was at stake beyond the language, noting the connections to the language but also to the people and the land itself.⁵⁰ She was concerned that her consciousness of these connections may be lost after the conclusion of the class. Janine described that she realized something was missing in her life before she took the class. She said, “I didn’t think there was

48. While the trip to the Ilocos was proposed as a culmination of the Ilokano language class through an immersion trip where the students can practice and advance their language skills, the trip was also problematic as the itinerary was pre-planned. While the trip was within the context of language and cultural reclamation in the diaspora, we also recognize that we held a privileged position in the communities we visited in the Ilocos, particularly in the Itneg and Tingguian communities we visited. Ilokano are not classified as Indigenous peoples under Philippine law, but Ilokano functions as the lingua franca in the region between Indigenous groups around the Cordillera and Ilokano (See Indigenous Peoples Rights Act 1997). Ilokano (along with other lowlanders) face different lived realities in contrast to those classified as Indigenous peoples in the Philippines. In the immersion trip, we were also not local Ilokano, but Ilokano from the US imperial metropole which came with different levels of privilege. As we were transported around in air conditioned buses and taken to these Indigenous villages, they held a program and performed for us, and taught us Indigenous dances. During the Itneg dance demonstration, Nadine did not join because she felt conflicted. Drawing connections to the tourism industry in Hawai’i and the exploitation, objectification, and commodification of Native Hawaiians, she did not want to participate in the exoticization of other Indigenous peoples. As we journeyed through the Amianan, we also felt as if we were being paraded and displayed from one political office to another and community center to another.

49. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

50. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

anyone else looking for this.”⁵¹ Just like Anthony, she found others like her who were searching to learn their language and culture that for one reason or another they never had the chance—or were denied the chance—to learn. For many Ilokans and other Filipinos in Hawai‘i, family members push their children to assimilate, refuse to teach them the language, and encourage their children to conform to the dominant culture and speak English in order to succeed.⁵² Peers and the larger community also stigmatize Filipinos which causes them to disassociate from their identity, language, and culture.⁵³ The students in the iLaing class, however, intentionally chose to learn. Janine said that she did not want to lose the connections she gained in the class. Anthony said he “didn’t want it to end.”⁵⁴ Once they realized that it was much more than language learning, as Yvette explained, they felt they had to do something more.

After reflecting on the class and the immersion experience, the now former students decided to share their personal experience of transformation with others and began to work towards establishing an official non-profit organization. Thus, LAING Hawai‘i was born. Reflecting on the motivations behind the creation of LAING Hawai‘i, Anthony explained that “personal relationships were at the core” and the desire to “make transformative change” recognizing that the denial and marginalization of their language and culture were structural and systemic.⁵⁵ The founders envisioned a student-led and student-centered language learning. While they saw the need for an Ilokano language class, they also recognized the need for other language classes in Hawai‘i as they connected to other communities experiencing subordination and assimilation. They wanted to offer more than Ilokano and help fund the teaching and learning of other common immigrant languages in Hawai‘i. According to their website, LAING’s mission is: “to perpetuate, promote, preserve, and introduce the various heritage languages and cultures of the immigrant population of Hawai‘i and the United States to use them for heritage education, social services, language and cultural access, and people empowerment.”⁵⁶

As they built the organization, the vision became clearer and connections strengthened. “LAING grew as we discovered ourselves,” Anthony explained.⁵⁷ “Language was the gateway. Then, we learned about our histories and as we learned, we realized that we needed to include the things we were learning. We needed to teach others what

51. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

52. Eisen 2019, 247.

53. Eisen 2019, 247.

54. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

55. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

56. “Mission,” April 15, 2022, <http://www.lainghawaii.org/mission/>.

57. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

we were learning,” he said.⁵⁸ Janine added that otherwise, “They would never have been exposed to this.”⁵⁹

Describing the process of figuring out what and how to teach, Anthony said, “We learned from each other.”⁶⁰ They each had different backgrounds, strengths, expertise, and experiences which helped them come up with unique ideas. They learned from their students and allowed feedback to shape the design of the next classes, events, workshops, and trainings. They collaborated with other organizations which allowed them to learn from and see the connections with their work. During the first two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, they shifted into a virtual classroom which extended their reach worldwide, allowing them to draw connections between the Filipino experience in Hawai‘i and beyond.

LAING Hawai‘i’s current programming includes Ilokano, Visayan-Cebuano, and Samoan language courses; Wellbeing Workshops to support health and wellness in the community; and Pakasaritaan Storytelling and Skillshare Workshops from community members with a special skill or story to share. Their programming provides opportunities for cultural reclamation of ancestral knowledge as they work towards collective liberation and radical futures. This includes addressing intra-ethnic tensions and relations between Filipino groups, which had been leveraged historically by plantation owners to create divisions in the labor community. LAING programming continues a historic collaborative program which connects the Visayan and Ilokano communities in a collaborative effort to revitalize both languages and cultures. What began as a journey of learning language and histories led to the discovery of connections beyond the individual to other selves, bodies, and communities. LAING students saw the links between Hawai‘i, the Philippines, Oceania, Turtle Island, Palestine and other indigenous struggles and studied the deeper connections between people, health, land, water, food, and spirit rooted in Ilokano words and language itself. With that knowledge, Anthony explained, “We could not ignore [the connections]. With awareness comes the need to address.”⁶¹ He added, “this involves thinking about questions of responsibility and accountability to the land and to the Native peoples of that land.”⁶² Beyond learning and confronting responsibility and accountability is the hard work and action that follows.

58. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

59. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

60. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

61. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

62. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

The founders and board members of LAING Hawai'i are pushing the boundaries of what learning can look like, pursuing a liberatory education that centers community needs and a broader goal of collective liberation. This includes co-sponsoring and co-organizing political actions, teach-ins, and educational events in support of social justice movements in Honolulu and beyond such as the movements for human rights, de-occupation and sovereignty, demilitarization, labor, ending violence against women, girls, and LGBTQ+, and Palestinian liberation. Because Hawai'i is at the intersection of military and police violence, settler colonialism, racial injustice, and economic oppression, they see their participation in intersectional social justice movements as necessary, particularly in relation to the unique socio-political and cultural context of Filipinos in Hawai'i. LAING incorporates conversations around current indigenous issues in the Philippines and Hawai'i into their programming to build awareness and connections between both regions' struggles.⁶³ The Board continues to strategize ways of actively supporting Kānaka Maoli self-determination, including making yearly donations to and participating in outdoor aloha 'āina workdays with Hawai'i Land Trust, a conservation organization with the focus of stewarding and purchasing land.

LAING students experience their own transformation and growth as they journey through the classes. Students consistently share that they grow closer to their family and culture. Multiple generations of family members often take the class together and former students bring family and friends to the next class cycle. Former students return to teach workshops, as well as share their timek and learnings outside of the classroom. In a testimonial collected by LAING, a former student shared, "I came looking for some sense of where I came from so that I could somehow impart that to my son and I found it." By emphasizing the historical context of our relatively recent language loss and how it relates to the experience of Kānaka Maoli in Hawai'i, LAING is helping to raise the consciousness of a generation desperately looking to connect with their families and themselves.

The LAING board engages timek through student and community-led education that interrupts the colonial and neoliberal domination of schooling and learning. In "Weaving Our Sovereignities

63. For the past three years, LAING has co-hosted Cordillera Day teach-ins in collaboration with HiCHRP (Hawai'i Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines) about the human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples fighting against the development of the Chico River Dam. LAING believes this is an important issue to address in order to draw connections between Native Hawaiians, Philippines, and global environmental movements, particularly the attempted construction of the thirty-meter telescope at Mauna Kea and the poisoning of the aquifer at Kapūkākī (Red Hill) by leaking Navy jet fuel tanks. Through a three-part podcast moderated by Kānaka Maoli historian Adam Manalo-Camp entitled, "Voyaging Through Words Podcast: Languages of the Ancestors," LAING also opened discussion around interconnections between Austronesian/Pasifika languages, featuring guest speakers from Ibaloi, Ilokano, Marshallese, Tagalog, Bisaya, Chavacano, and other Pacific language backgrounds.

Together: Maximizing Ea for Filipinx and Hawaiians,” Filipinx scholar and activist Kim Compoc asks, “How do we build the vision of interconnected sovereignty and intersectional justice when surviving in global capitalism means there’s little time to educate our communities on their own issues, never mind building coalitions?”⁶⁴ Compoc highlights the very real difficulties of knowing, understanding, and recognizing our specific struggles and the work of building a coalition when our lives are structured by imperialism, settler colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. By bringing awareness to the shared histories, language genealogies, and struggles for land and water rights, LAING attempts to break down the barriers that keep us from knowing each others’ stories. As the organization continues to grow and emphasize land-based learning, they hope to build deeper relationships with Kānaka Maoli organizations and movements. By putting collective liberation at the forefront of the work, LAING is working to inspire a new generation of Ilokanos to foster relationships outside the confines of oppressive colonial boundaries, stand in solidarity with Kānaka Maoli, and support Indigenous sovereignty globally.

IV. Kāwili: Remixing Wor(l)ds

I can still hear my grandmother’s voice and intonation in my head – “Re-beh-kaaaaah” – calling me from downstairs to come eat. I only have a few recordings I made of her when she was already quite old, her speech is slow and her words garble in her throat. But I can remember her voice so well, her accent, and everytime I hear an older Filipino lady it reminds me of her. My mom, a born-and-raised Chicagoan, developed a classic Midwestern American accent—all nasal and drawn out sounds. My grandmother didn’t speak to my mother or to us in Ilokano, so I never heard it growing up unless we were at a family party with an auntie chattering to cousins to do this or that. But even then, I didn’t really pay much attention to what I couldn’t understand. In fact, I didn’t know that the language I heard from time to time wasn’t Tagalog until late in my 20s when I began to ask about where our family was from and realized that we were Ilokano—and that Ilokano wasn’t Tagalog. And that our Ilokano language from Pangasinan was also different from what was spoken in the Ilocos. And that my grandfather spoke another language, Pangasinense! And it wasn’t until I came to Hawai‘i at age 31 that I was able to begin the immense process of unraveling my family’s story of assimilation. My studies of Ilokano revealed to me the troubling depths and profound unconscious sense of loss we have experienced that we carry and embody every day. Each Ilokano word that I learned became an access point to an Ilokano nakem, soul, or sense of self that I never even knew existed.

—Rebecca

64. Compoc 2019, 322.

Kāwili, a musical album blending Philippine folk music and Hawaiian *mele*, creates a site where “boundaries become bridges” through the mashup of song, language, and voices. Created through the collaboration of Filipino, Kānaka Maoli, and Filipino-Kānaka Maoli musicians, the reinterpretation of these songs accompanied by ukulele and a symphony of voices opens space for Filipino-Kānaka existence and exchange beyond the dominant American plantation narrative, recalling stories of Filipinos in the 19th century Hawaiian Kingdom. In Kāwili, we can hear Ilokano timek woven into melodies of songs that are central to contemporary Hawaiian culture, including the musical writings of Queen Lili‘uokalani. The re-singing of these songs in Ilokano points to how our own reclamation of voice is informed and shaped by Hawaiian cultural resurgence movements, which have served as guides to our own experience of unlearning. As an Ilokano audience, we have the chance to hear, listen to and learn Kānaka histories and how our own narratives are intertwined. As both the producer and participants of this album shared with us, the project offered a unique opportunity for the reclamation of timek both as individuals and as a collective. We see these remixes of music and timek as vibrations that spur the development of a greater wave of political and social engagement and sense of collective responsibility on the part of Ilokanos, and as an opportunity for the building and growth of Filipino-Kānaka relations.

Kāwili, the title of the album, means “to mix ingredients, blend” and “entwined, interwoven, interlaced.”⁶⁵ The themes of intersection and remixing highlight the encounter and history between Filipinos and Kānaka Maoli that is obscured by and dates further back than the dominant plantation narrative. It calls forth the story of Filipino-Kānaka collaboration in Hawai‘i in the creation of one of the most well-known Hawaiian protest songs, *Kaulana Nā Pua*, written by Eleanor Wright Kekoaohiwaikalani Prendergrast in 1893. Jose Sabas Libornio, a conductor and musician with the Royal Hawaiian band, was said to have composed or arranged *Kaulana Nā Pua*.⁶⁶ Libornio was born in Manila, migrated to Hawai‘i before the migration of Filipino plantation laborers in 1906, and became a citizen of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i.⁶⁷ He refused to take an oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government composed of American capitalists who overthrew the monarchy, and toured with the band to advocate for the restoration of the Hawaiian Kingdom.⁶⁸

Solidarity between Filipinos and Kānaka Maoli also dates back to the late 19th century “as both peoples lost their hard won independence to the United States within three months of each other.”⁶⁹ While Filipinos were resisting US colonizers after defeating

65. Pukui and Elbert 1986, 140.

66. Compoc 2017, 1-2.

67. Compoc 2017, 2-3.

68. Compoc 2017, 2.

69. Manalo-Camp 2019.

Spanish colonizers after almost 400 years of colonization, Robert Wilcox extended his support and offered to send troops to aid Filipinos.⁷⁰ Other expressions of solidarity between Filipinos and Kānaka Maoli include the Waiāhole-Waikāne anti-eviction movement in the 1970s; the continued demilitarization movement; labor activism; and the movement to halt development of the thirty-meter telescope on Mauna Kea.

At the center of the Kāwili project is the linking of Filipinos and Kānaka Maoli in a mutuality of collaboration and affinity: “Kāwili is a compilation album that seeks to bring Filipinos and Hawaiians together as allies of and in Oceania, free to encounter and relate to one another in a world without the historical and present colonial impositions that continue to structure contemporary society in Hawai‘i.”⁷¹ Producer Lance Collins explains that Kāwili pushes the boundaries of our imagination to conceptualize relationships and ways of being outside those constructed by colonialism.⁷² He asks, “What does [the relationship between] Hawaiian-Filipino/Ilokano look like without American mediation? What would have this looked like had there been two independent countries that were interacting directly with each other?”⁷³ Lance states that this project disrupts the “heroic immigrant plantation worker narrative” and subverts settler colonial time and setting by adjusting the timeline to the 19th century, not starting with the sugar plantation era.⁷⁴ Instead, it situates the relationship within an anticolonial struggle of sovereign peoples fighting for independence against the United States, allowing for an alternative history that “relocates the Kingdom of Hawai‘i in the history of Hawai‘i.”⁷⁵

According to Lance, the Kāwili project originated over a decade ago while working with Professor Lilia Santiago of the UHM Ilokano Language and Literature Program to translate *Aloha ‘Oe*. It was well received at a community event, which gave him the idea to expand this work beyond a single song. Lance explained that *Aloha ‘Oe* was already historically linked to the Ilocos because the predominantly Ilokano sugar and pineapple workers brought the song to the Philippines when they returned in the early to mid-twentieth century. Ilokanos incorporated it into their cultural practices specifically as a song played popularly during wakes and funerals but only as an instrumental.

70. Manalo-Camp 2019.

71. Kawilimusic2021. “Kāwili.” *Instagram*, January 18, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CKNstxPD3Pz/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>.

72. Lance Collins is an Ilokano, Maui-based lawyer and legal activist who studied and lectured in the UH Mānoa Ilokano Language and Literature Program.

73. Collins, Lance. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, December 31, 2021.

74. Collins, Lance. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, December 31, 2021.

75. Collins, Lance. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, December 31, 2021.

Lance mentioned that the project was slowed in the beginning because of concerns about the possibility of a “negative reaction in the Hawaiian language or Hawaiian music community.”⁷⁶ He noted that popular songs in the past were translated into multiple languages and shared globally with success, and that more recently, Hawaiian songs translated into Okinawan or Jawaiian music blending reggae and local music have been accepted without negative reaction. But because of anti-Filipino racism which has produced “shame and fear and loathing of being Filipino and Filipino-Hawaiian,” there was concern that the album would receive negative reception.⁷⁷ “Because of the internalized racial hierarchies within both communities,” he shared, “there was hesitation for collaborators to jump onto the project.”⁷⁸ What could have easily turned into a project of cultural appropriation or the romanticization of a bygone pre-plantation nostalgia, Lance chose instead to collaborate with Filipino-Kānaka musicians, writers, and artists to create a unique collection of songs bridging the two cultures.

The Kāwili album consists of eleven Ilokano, Tagalog, and Visayan folk songs such as *Leron, Leron Sinta, Dandangsoy, Pamulinawen, Dungdunguenkanto, Igid ‘Diay Baybay, Lubi-lubi, Bahay Kubo, O Naraniag a Bulan, Agdamdamilikami*, and *Biniganbigat* translated into and sung in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i over Hawaiian instrumentation. Two popular Hawaiian songs, *Aloha ‘Oe*, composed by Queen Lili‘uokalani in 1877, and *Hawai‘i Aloha*, written by Reverend Lorenzo Lyons with music attributed to James McGranahan, were translated into Ilokano and sung by Ilokano singers.⁷⁹ Lance enlisted the help of Dean Domingo, coordinator of the Ilokano Program at UHM, to ask students to lend their voice to the project. Ultimately, he was able to secure the participation of Ilokano program students Eugene Tunac Marquez, Irene Joy Cabuloy, Emily Erika Acoba, Rebecca Maria Goldschmidt, and others. Most participated primarily due to personal relationships and their responsibility and commitment to the Ilokano community, including Timpuyog, a non-profit student-run organization under the Ilokano Program, whose mission is to preserve Ilokano language and culture. Dean explained that he participated for the students. He saw the project itself as valuable “as a text to connect community to the histories,” and as “more than just bridging cultures but also starting conversations.”⁸⁰ Irene agreed to sing on the album because of the participation of Dean, Eugene, and Emily, whom she knew from Timpuyog. She explained, “Being part of this project is to do the same

76. Collins, Lance. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, December 31, 2021.

77. Collins, Lance. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, December 31, 2021.

78. Collins, Lance. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, December 31, 2021.

79. Morris 2013, 43; Kam 2017, 5, 26.

80. Cabuloy, Irene Joy and Dean Domingo. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

thing, to preserve the language.”⁸¹ Emily signed on because proceeds from the sale of the album were going to the UHM Ilokano Program and the Refugee and Immigrant Law Clinic at the William S. Richardson School of Law. She said that she wanted to give back to the Ilokano program that was integral to her reconnection with her Ilokano-ness which helped her get to where she is today. She described growing up in Hawai‘i feeling like she did not belong and being disconnected from her Ilokano language, which she was not taught growing up.

Many of the participants shared their deep sense of shame and fear around both speaking and singing that have created a barrier for a full expression of themselves. While everyone shared that they had grown up with music, especially karaoke in the home, each of them felt that they lacked confidence to sing on their own. Eugene, who played an integral part in updating the translations and arrangements of two tracks, sings the solo *Aloha ‘Oe*. After migrating to Hawai‘i from the Ilocos at the age of 9, he recalled Filipino students being called FOB (fresh off the boat) in school and being teased for their accents. This led him to internalize a mindset of “[making] sure that I am assimilating, otherwise I will be in a situation where I am scrutinized.”⁸² Sharing her own sense of shame around being Ilokano, Irene said, “I had pride for our culture, but in secret.”⁸³ But each singer explained that their perspective on Ilokano language, culture, history, and the way they felt about themselves changed after taking Ilokano and Philippine Studies courses. Irene explained that she developed a sense of pride from her studies and had a desire to “pass on” and “preserve the language.”⁸⁴ As a shy undergraduate student, Dean recalled, “[I] fell in love with [reclaiming] the language” and so he majored in Philippine Languages and Literatures with a concentration in Ilokano.⁸⁵ He gained a sense of pride which led him down the path of teaching. Now as coordinator of the Ilokano program, he witnesses students’ growth from insecure to confident students through collective class projects and performances. Irene, Emily, and Eugene’s individual journey of reclaiming their Ilokano heritage led them to pursue work to serve the Ilokano/Filipino community. Both Irene and Emily are in medical school with plans to stay in Hawai‘i to work as doctors, while Eugene is interested in pursuing his graduate studies in Philippine Sociolinguistics to research the impact of the Tagalog-centric national language policy in the Philippines.

81. Cabuloy, Irene Joy and Dean Domingo. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

82. Marquez, Eugene Tunac. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 8, 2022.

83. Cabuloy, Irene Joy and Dean Domingo. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

84. Cabuloy, Irene Joy and Dean Domingo. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

85. Cabuloy, Irene Joy and Dean Domingo. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

Furthermore, their academic journey of learning and reclaiming their language and culture fueled their commitment to their community which also led them to other projects such as participation in the album which further led them to make connections. Throughout the process, Dean felt that he learned a lot about elements of shared culture including “canoes and using water to navigate, bringing over root crops, and language and words that are similar or close” in both Ilokano and ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i.⁸⁶ Irene said that she learned about the “shared history” and the responsibility we have because “we live in a place that is home to Native Hawaiians and they are being pushed out.”⁸⁷ Emily also pointed out the shared suppression of Ilokano and Native Hawaiian culture. “We share in that struggle whether we actively realize it or not,” she said, “We are connected. We need to keep our culture and language alive.”⁸⁸ Irene drew direct connections between the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i, the banning of Hawaiian language and hula, and the changes imposed by the American government on Kānaka Maoli land and people as the shared Filipino and Hawaiian experience of what she phrased as “confusion of sense of self.”⁸⁹ “Why was I ashamed about my identity?” she questioned, “It comes down to what caused that in the first place—when I think about it, colonialism.”⁹⁰

Eugene’s inclination for music overlaps his interest in social justice. “Singing gave me a sense of clarity in that it allowed me to realize that I have a voice to share with others.”⁹¹ His studies in Indigenous Politics informed his understanding of these cultural bridges. Knowing that the song he would perform was written and translated by “two influential women of color who had faced adverse oppressions by patriarchal regimes (Queen Lili‘uokalani and Manang Lilia Santiago) . . . gave [him] more of a sense of clarity as to why we should continue to imagine and birth the ways we can deconstruct, decolonize and dismantle the systems that continue to bring us down.”⁹²

Zachary Kaleikaumaka Lorenzo, an Ilokano–Hawaiian student at UH Hilo, sang on the album and expressed his ongoing efforts to overcome stage fright and shame, especially through voice. To help Zach improve his singing, his father advised him, “You can’t sing to

86. Cabuloy, Irene Joy and Dean Domingo. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

87. Cabuloy, Irene Joy and Dean Domingo. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

88. Acoba-Harrison, Emily Erika. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 25, 2022.

89. Cabuloy, Irene Joy and Dean Domingo. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

90. Cabuloy, Irene Joy and Dean Domingo. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

91. Marquez, Eugene Tunac. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 8, 2022.

92. Marquez, Eugene Tunac. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 8, 2022.

sound like anybody else, sing to sound like you! Sing to find that sound that you have.”⁹³ For Zach, his Hawaiian cultural identity crisis pushed him to study ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i and major in Hawaiian Studies, but he did not pursue Ilokano language, despite questioning from his Ilokano mother. But his involvement in the Kāwili album project inspired him to finally take the chance to explore his Ilokano identity. “I have this opportunity that I can find out more about my cultural identity,” he said, “I might as well take it.”⁹⁴ He was able to connect with his family, ask questions about their history for the first time, and see them open up “not from a place of hurt or shame because they left their home in the Philippines.”⁹⁵ Family members called from California saying “We didn’t even know you could sing!” excited to hear him use his timek on *E ka Mahina Hoku/O Naranaiag a Bulan*.

The collective timek formed on the album generated both a shared sense of self and personal identity that relieved feelings of shame and lack of confidence. According to Dean, the process created a sense of “togetherness” captured in the final multi-layered acapella track. He said, “I think using our voice, somewhat harmonizing the best we could . . . it helped us connect. We were hearing one another, hearing their pitches, hearing how they’re pronouncing, we’re following one another, we’re doing it together.”⁹⁶ Zach also underscored the importance of music in bringing a sense of good feeling and flow because “nobody is outshining anybody.”⁹⁷

Kāwili provided a rare opportunity for Ilokanos to activate their timek with the intention of invoking their timek, and expressing their solidarity with Kānaka Maoli and other Filipino cultures. The album has since been nominated as a Nā Hōkū Hanohano music award finalist for “Best Compilation Album of the Year” in 2022. It has become a teaching tool to share with friends and family, as well as in the Ilokano Program and LAING Hawai‘i classrooms. “By having these conversations, it allows me a platform to essentially educate others and hopefully they will gain something from that conversation and share it with others,” shares Eugene.⁹⁸ Through a shared sense of collective identity, harmony, and vocalization of these alternative histories, young Ilokanos are creating new expressions of timek that will resonate through future generations.

93. Lorenzo, Zachary Kaleikaumaka. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

94. Lorenzo, Zachary Kaleikaumaka. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

95. Lorenzo, Zachary Kaleikaumaka. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

96. Cabuloy, Irene Joy and Dean Domingo. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

97. Lorenzo, Zachary Kaleikaumaka. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 26, 2022.

98. Marquez, Eugene Tunac. Interview with Rebecca Goldschmidt and Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 8, 2022.

V. Conclusion: A Chorus of Voices

*E hauoli nā ‘ōpio o Hawai‘i nei
‘Oli ē! ‘Oli ē!
Mai nā aheahe makani e pā mai nei
Mau ke aloha, no Hawai‘i*

*Agragsak dagiti ubbing iti Hawai‘i
Agrambak! Agrambak!
Dagiti pul-oy a naalumamay
‘Tay Aloha, para iti Hawai‘i*

*Happy youth of Hawai‘i
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Gentle breezes blow
Love always for Hawai‘i*

Zach described the concept of Hawaiian mele as a way to “lock in” a time, place, or feeling, the composer writing as a way of transmitting that feeling or experience—the flowers or breeze or waves of a certain place—across time and space. In this sense, the *Kāwili* album acts as a marker in time for the participants and the listeners, on their own paths of exploring possibilities of time and as a collective sense of belonging and confidence.

But stopping at our own healing or liberation is not enough. Anthony explained: “If we don’t have the language to understand what’s happening to us, we don’t even know there’s a wound there. Having the language for that first is important, the articulation of the pain, so you can understand it. And when you understand it, you know how to heal from that. While it’s deeply personal and transformative, it can only happen in relation to others. When you’re in motion and in dance together, in song and dance together, that can be very powerful, it can be even more striking! All the voices move and sing and chant together! They don’t have to be the same; they don’t have to be perfectly in harmony, but they do need to work together.”⁹⁹ Grace Nono in *Babaylan Sing Back: Philippine Shamans and Voice, Gender, and Place* comes to the same conclusion as she asks, “What else might one do?”¹⁰⁰ After listening to the “singing back” of indigenous oral practitioners she says, “One can learn to sing along with these voices that are irreducible to musical tropes, and participate in their power. The promise of singing together is immense. It includes the healing of social relations, and the building of a differentiated yet coordinated chorus of voices that sing back to larger forces of domination.”¹⁰¹

99. Arce, Anthony, Yvette Cudal, and Janine Mariano. Interview with Nadezna Ortega. Personal Interview. Honolulu, April 3, 2022.

100. Nono 2021, 178.

101. Nono 2021, 178.

A new generation of Ilokanos is regaining consciousness of their own timek in this particular time, within the context of the continued US military occupation of Hawai‘i, the non-stop outmigration from the Philippines, and the slow-burn of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are rediscovering the importance of our ancestral knowledges that have been so violently disconnected from us. Whether we imagine this work as waves building together offshore, or the collective, ceremonial wails of our timek from deep within, we recognize that our pasts and futures as Ilokanos are tied with that of Kānaka Maoli of Hawai‘i. While we have our own separate and distinct battles to fight, we, as Ilokanos living in Hawai‘i, need also to answer the call of Kānaka Maoli in their fight for sovereignty and the call of other marginalized communities because our struggles are ultimately linked together. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson says, “we need to join together in a rebellion of love, persistence, commitment, and profound caring and create constellations of co-resistance.”¹⁰² With this responsibility also comes the commitment to impart our ancestral knowledges to the next generation in the pursuit of collective liberation.

It was 2:00 pm on August 3, 2018. I sat my daughter, Kalikolehuaikawēkiu, between my partner, Keli‘i, and I while waiting for the plane to take off. We were on our way to the Philippines with the students of iLaing on a language and cultural immersion trip. I was co-teaching and Keli‘i joined the class to learn Ilokano. In college, he took ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, which was banned after the overthrow of the Kingdom. We wanted to ensure that our child learned our languages. After we landed in Manila, we took a minibus to our first destination, Candon, Ilocos Sur. The minibus traveled slowly away from the crowded streets of urban Manila, the Tagalog center and capital of the Philippines. It headed north passing through the provinces surrounding Manila. The air became cooler as the bus reached a steady pace without much traffic along the highway at night. We made a stop at a popular bus depot and I picked up some Ilokano spoken amongst the sounds of Tagalog. We were nearing the Ilokano-speaking provinces. In the morning, I arose to the sight of the peaking sun as we reached Candon, the site of departure for the first Ilokanos recruited to work in the sugar plantations in Hawai‘i. I could hear Ilokano everywhere—the sounds, the sight, the world. I felt my Ilokano returning. The words flowed out of my mouth, coming back, returning home.

—Nadine

102. Simpson 2017, 9.