

**HAWAI'I'S WOMEN'S PRISON:
THE ROLE OF THE KAILUA PRISON WRITING PROJECT AND THE PRISON
MONOLOGUES AS EXPRESSIVE PU'UHONUA**

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DEDICATION

For the beautiful women inside.

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ABSTRACT

Women's plight in the prison industrial complex resounds within a broader, and disturbingly American narrative: the disproportionate incarceration of non-whites in our prison-industrial gulag. Prisons in Hawai'i indicate an ongoing colonial relationship to the United States of America, which overthrew the Hawaiian kingdom by force. While historical and contemporary prison literature addresses the Black male as the most marked body in the prison industrial complex, my intervention highlights the testimony of women, including that of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women who are overrepresented in Hawai'i's carceral landscape. This dissertation, rooted in my experiences between 2012 and 2016 as a researcher, a participant ethnographer and guest, and a creative writing teacher at the sole women's prison on O'ahu—the Women's Correctional Community Center—addresses a scholarly lacuna in a tradition that privileges male prison writing by examining women's prison writing in two gender-responsive programs: the Kailua Prison Writing Project and its adjacent Prison Monologues. The philosophy of the writing program is rooted in Hawaiian practices of *ho'oponopono* (reconciliation and forgiveness) that resist state-sanctioned inscriptions on Indigenous bodies. Imagined by its founders as a place of refuge and transgressive cultural site, the Women's Correctional Community Center is also a troubled site: a feminized (domesticated) carceral landscape against a backdrop of colonialism—a space between hope and despair. On the one hand, the Kailua Prison Writing Project is a cathartic medium that effects change. The women who write in an incarcerated space perform resistance, even as they confound the anticipations of readers familiar with an

incarcerated male authorship. Yet their resistance necessarily runs against institutional constraint. If the creative writing classes function as a haven for the women, as the women themselves attest, they are never immune to institutional intrusions and fracture. My research holds in productive tension women's testimony of the immeasurable value of the Kailua Prison Writing Project and the ways in which the carceral and colonial regimes continue to impinge upon the women's lives. The story that unfolds is a cartography—a bridge between social justice advocacy and scholarship that interrogates social justice failures in the contemporary carceral archipelago.

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PROLOGUE

Prison is the devil's playground.
~ Vailea¹

The Yard

You know that you're in Hawai'i when you see three roosters careening in the parking lot of a prison. Nestled between Kailua and on the road to Waimanalo, Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC) is dwarfed by the mountains of the Ko'olau. These mountains make you forget you are entering a prison until you hear the primeval clanging of the doors behind you.

I came expecting Dante's *Inferno*. I had just read Malcolm Braly's *On the Yard* set in San Quentin—a site broiling with bets, gambling, and gossip. I came expecting public spectacle, fueled by my recent guilty pleasure: *Orange is the New Black*. America, the largest incarcerator in the world, commodifies its prisons with titillating images of what goes on behind prison walls. I arrived at the prison with the habits of exoticism that we as a culture carry with us.

The Journey

The bus drops me off at the corner of Pali Highway and Kalaniana'ole Highway, technically in Kailua town. My stop is opposite Castle Medical Center on Ulukahiki Street. Most of the people exiting at my stop are on their way to Castle hospital and I often listen to the vulnerable narratives of the passengers in drug-treatment programs. The bus is a public confessional, featuring interrupted narratives of teenage gang

activity, batu withdrawals, and the recent prison stint.² I exit, sweating profusely, my tangerine dime-store sunglasses a shield against the post-bus odyssey towards the facility. Almost no one makes the right down Kalaniana'ole Highway towards Waimanalo. The road is long and the insistent sun puffs over the highway like a portentous mirage.

WCCC is stationed directly across from the Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility (HYCF). Lahela would later inform me in an interview that this was where she came of age: "I wen walked across the road," exchanging one "home" for another.³ I never take the long dusty driveway that the cars frequent, instead descending through foliage, a shortcut past the large signature monkeypod tree in the front of the prison. I am struck by the irony that though I take Robert Frost's "less traveled" road into the facility on foot, I am actually under greater scrutiny by the prison guards.

And then there is the memo: my passport to the prison. No matter how many weeks prior to my scheduled visit that my name was inscribed on this document, the exasperating entryway ritual awaits me. A flustered guard rifles through the memos of the day and is unable to find my name. Calls are made to Education and then to Administration, deadening minutes tick by, and after much rifling through of papers, my name miraculously appears. Then it is the long walk inside.

At the first "bubble" (guard station) I am inspected and stripped of most accoutrements of personal identity.⁴ Allowed only a state-issued ID, I relinquish my keys (any sharp object is contraband). Cell phones must remain behind. The dress

requisites: close-toed shoes, no tank tops, no jewelry unless it is an expression of religious faith (a modest gold cross) or a simple wedding ring. Skirts must cover the knee, and even sleeveless shirts can bar entry if too tight or suggestive. My body is censored and mediated prior to entry, required to perform normative citizenship and a reserved modesty. Underlying this processed body is the preconception that beyond the bubbles are female “deviants,” vulnerable to temptation. I sign my name, date, and destination at the first guard station in the parking lot adjacent to the administration building and a row of gargantuan vehicles, and head towards the main gate.

Once arrived, I press the buzzer, the jarring release of the gate reverberating from my chest to my stomach. At the next guard station, the teller bin spits out pens and I sign in for a second time through a glass window. Taking a short right up an inclining walkway, I run into the chickens and sometimes a cat or two. I can see women coming from work lines, classes, and dormitories. At the third guard station—the last stop for a bathroom break—I’m buzzed through the penultimate door with its forbidding metal frame. One more once-over, then down a tight corridor to the final door before I enter the yard. This portion is more trafficked and awkward as women are waiting to get through from the other side. When the final door slams, I have crossed over the last bubble. To the right of the yard lie the kitchen and the intake rooms where I will conduct my interviews. I pass the law library on the left. I have arrived.

A Retrospective

I recall the first time entering the yard and the self-consciousness that sat in my *na’au* (gut) as I walked past what seemed like thousands of eyes ogling me.⁵ All of the

stereotypes I transported with me about women in prison as an American were reenacted and performed. The yard loomed: an insurmountable Haedes.

In actuality, Women's Correctional Community Center in Honolulu, O'ahu was none of those things. No cat calls. No visible violence. I stood in the rectangle yard across from a bevy of "inmates" dressed in white overalls on kitchen duty with their soiled knees and high gray rubber boots.⁶ That first day spilled into countless others. I spent the next four years at the facility observing Pat Clough's creative writing classes that met on Tuesday and Friday mornings and interviewing many of the inside ("incarcerated") women, until one day I was asked to teach my own creative writing class—a Poetry and Performance Lab.⁷ After countless visits to the facility as a guest in Pat's creative writing classes, as teacher of my own creative writing class, and as ethnographer and researcher, the yard came to feel almost commonplace.

As I spent more time at the facility, the institutional violence and daily infractions—a theft of human dignity—became more palpable. I noticed the institutional brutality rather than the benign roosters in the parking lot and the cats that inhabited the hills before arriving at Olomana (or what the women call the "jungle"), then passing the education building, the law library, kitchen, and parish—all arranged around a concrete yard. And sadly I *almost* —but not quite—became accustomed to the muffled, dictatorial voice over the loudspeaker. Every time I taught on Friday afternoons, the women in my class evaporated to the head-count taking place on the yard in the infinite dehumanizing rituals of prison life. Seven minutes later, the women would re-appear, eager to discuss their intimate thoughts and reflections about writing and living.

“How many times can your heart break? How many times is writing a surgery?”
~ Elmaz Abinader, *This House, My Bones*

NOTES FROM THE PROLOGUE

¹ I use pseudonyms for the inside women in order to protect the women's identities. In Chapter Two, I use the women's real names, which are attached to their published poetry, in order to honor authentic authorship.

² Batu is the local word for crystal methamphetamine (ICE). The ICE epidemic in Hawai'i is particularly severe and disproportionately affects Native Hawaiians.

³ Throughout the text, I maintain the women's way of speaking, a mixture of Pidgin, standard English, and Hawaiian words, in an effort to preserve their authentic voices.

⁴ The bubble is a guard station in the women's prison, equipped with cameras to view who exits and enters the facility. The guards are armed and encased in a room with glass windows.

⁵ Na'au is the Hawaiian word for heart, gut, or literally intestines. I use Hawaiian words and local words because the women use them, and because I have lived in Hawai'i for over a decade and have deep friendships in local communities. At the same time, I acknowledge the challenging ethics of appropriation as a non-Native Hawaiian.

⁶ I use "inmate" here as a category of interrogation, as well as to signify the preconceptions I brought with me on my first day in the prison. "Inmate" reduces the women to their crime, reflective of the criminal "justice" system that erases the human.

⁷ From this point on, I will implement the phrase "inside women," rather than "inmate" or "prisoner," to avoid reducing the women to their crimes. Here, I acknowledge the influence of the inside women at Grand Valley Institution for Women, a medium-security prison in Kitchener, Ontario. (I participated in a one-week intensive workshop with the women through the Walls to Bridges Collective in 2015). The inside women challenged academics and First Nations activists to avoid using stigmatizing language when referring to people in prison.

INTRODUCTION

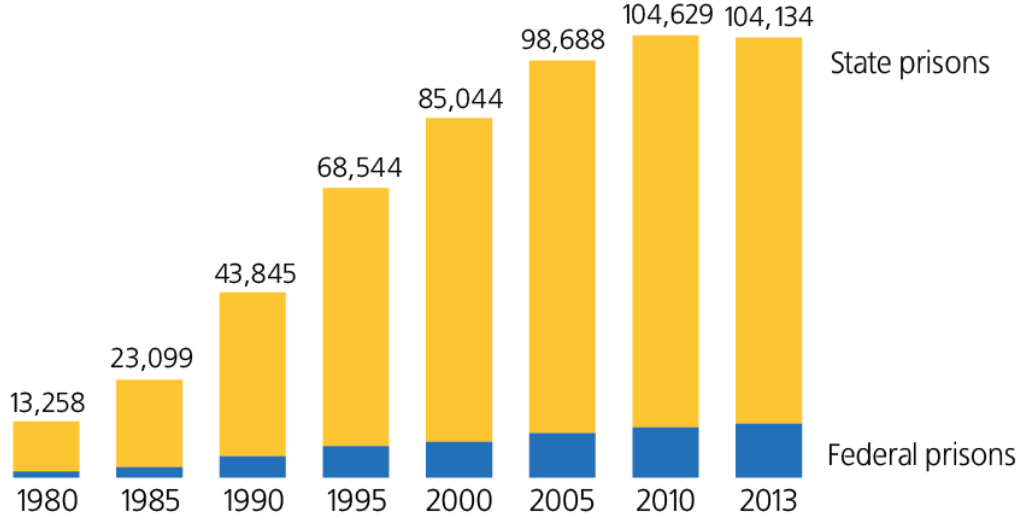
The American Gulag and Indigenous Incarceration in Hawai'i

Writing is my passion. Words are the way to know ecstasy. Without them life is barren. . . . All my life I have been suffering for words. Words have been the source of the pain and the way to heal. Struck as a child for talking, for speaking out of turn, for being out of my place. Struck as a grown woman for not knowing when to shut up, for not being willing to sacrifice words for desire. . . . There are many ways to be hit. Pain is the price we pay to speak the truth.

~ bell hooks, *Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life*

Women are entering prison at a staggering rate, yet they are anomalous subjects in our nation's gendered penal culture. According to statistical analysis from The Sentencing Project Research and Advocacy for Reform, the number of women in prison increased by more than 700 percent between 1980 and 2014, rising from a total of 26,378 in 1980 to 215,332 in 2014.¹ One third of these women are imprisoned due to drug offenses, and they share significant histories of physical and sexual abuse, and high rates of HIV infection.² The statistical analysis below illuminates the sharp rise in the number of women incarcerated, particularly in state prisons, between 1980–2013. Women are nonetheless miserably neglected in terms of prison program funding and in prison scholarship; infantilized and silenced, they are the “disappeared” of the prison population.

Number of Women in State and Federal Prisons, 1980-2013



Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics *Prisoners Series*; Bureau of Justice Statistics *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear Series*; Hester, T. (1987). *Correctional Populations in the United States, 1985*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.



Women’s plight in the prison industrial complex resounds within a broader, and disturbingly American, narrative: the disproportionate incarceration of non-whites in our prison-industrial gulag. Women of color and Pacific Islander women are disproportionately incarcerated both nationally and in Hawai’i. Prisons in Hawai’i indicate an ongoing colonial relationship to the U.S., which overthrew the Hawaiian kingdom by force. As an occupied people, Native Hawaiians have been subject to systematic surveillance and discipline that persists in the contemporary Hawaiian carceral system.³ While historical and contemporary prison literature addresses the Black male as the most marked body in the prison industrial complex, my intervention

highlights the testimony of women, including that of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women who are overrepresented in Hawai'i's carceral landscape.

From 2012 to 2016 I was engaged as a researcher, a participant ethnographer and guest, and more recently, a creative writing teacher at the sole women's prison on O'ahu—the Women's Correctional Community Center that warehouses approximately three hundred women of mixed security levels. This dissertation, rooted in these experiences, addresses a scholarly lacuna in a tradition that privileges male prison writing by examining women's prison writing in two gender-responsive programs: the Kailua Prison Writing Project and its adjacent Prison Monologues. The majority of women in my writing classes at WCCC represent a range of Pacific intersections, and the philosophy of the writing program itself is rooted in Hawaiian practices of *ho'oponopono* (reconciliation and forgiveness) that resist state-sanctioned inscriptions on Indigenous bodies. My work on expressivity (poetry, life writing, and performance) with the inside women counters the demarcation of a civic death for those incarcerated and emphasizes the specificity of inside women's voices in Hawai'i. The story that unfolds is a cartography—a bridge between social justice advocacy and scholarship that interrogates social justice failures in the contemporary carceral archipelago.

The inside women's diverse and multilayered experiences of trauma, as well as the nonviolent nature of many of their crimes, led me initially to perceive them solely as victims of the system. In fact, their poetry, prose, and interviews signal histories and self-understandings far more complex than the polarizing labels of "victim" or "perpetrator" convey. The types of trauma I observed in speaking to the women and

listening to their narratives include childhood, familial, and sexual trauma; the social trauma of poverty and homelessness; the trauma of arrest and incarceration; the trauma of perpetrating a crime; the trauma (for Hawaiians) of living as a colonized people. Not all of the incarcerated women are Hawaiians and thus colonized subjects, but the majority of women incarcerated in Hawai'i share memories of trauma rooted in dispossession, poverty, and violence.

According to the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care, an “inmate” at WCCC is more likely than the general population of Hawai'i to be a woman of Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian ethnicity (40 percent); to report childhood and sexual victimization (60 percent); to be serving time for either a felony drug charge (35 percent) or property offense (36 percent); to have experienced some violence in her life (80 percent); to have a history of substance abuse (95 percent) and mental health problems (33 percent); and to be the mother of at least one child (60 percent).⁴ Sixty percent of Native Hawaiian women at WCCC and 75 percent of women in the nation as a whole have children. Two-thirds of mothers had custody of their children prior to entering prison. Many inside women thus face a particular gendered trauma due to the enforced rupture from their children.⁵ Feminist prison scholar Beth Richie articulates the gendered trauma of incarcerated women:

I cannot imagine a place where one might stand and have a clearer view of concentrated disadvantage based on racial, class, and gender inequality in the country than from inside the walls of a women's prison. There, behind the razor wire fences, concrete barricades, steel doors, metal bars, and thick plexiglas windows, nearly all of the manifestations of gender domination that feminist scholars and activists have traditionally concerned themselves with—exploited labor, inadequate healthcare, dangerous living conditions, physical violence, and

sexual assault-are revealed at once. . . . The convergence of disadvantage, discrimination, and despair is staggering. In fact, it could be argued that prisons incarcerate a population of women who have experienced such a profound concentration of the most vicious forms of economic marginalization, institutionalized racism, and victimization that it can almost seem intentional or mundane.⁶

The nation state's "get tough on crime" movement of the 1980s and 1990s, and the War on Drugs campaign is largely responsible for the disproportionate rates of incarceration of Black, Latino, and Indigenous populations in the U.S.⁷ However, this ethos of punishment has been replaced in part by a contemporaneous national narrative that counters the devastating denial of Pell Grants to prisoners and encourages alliances between the university and the prison. Gillian Harkins and Erica R. Meiners trace the historical trajectory of this alliance in which they situate educational prison programs into two camps: redistributive justice predicated on human rights and reformative justice based upon moral and social reform.⁸ The proliferation of educational prison initiatives, which are both redistributive and reformative, such as the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program and the Bard Prison Initiative, connect "innovative college-in-prison programs across the country" in the belief that "a liberal education can transform the lives of individual students and public institutions more successfully than the prevailing responses to crime and punishment."⁹ These programs reflect current national debates that question the efficacy of prisons to maximize resource expenditure and quell crime reduction and recidivism, while incurring collateral damage to entire communities. The programming at WCCC echoes these national reformist inclinations, yet it also takes inspiration from particular Hawaiian traditions of healing.

WCCC, under the leadership of its former warden, Mark Kawika Patterson, is more in line with the prison reform movement than the state aggression expressed in the War on Drugs. In late 2008, as warden, Patterson implemented a trauma-informed care initiative at the facility. The program acknowledges women's histories of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and the fact that their transgressions are primarily nonviolent. The trauma-informed care initiative uses the framework of an Indigenous pu'uhonua, or a place of refuge.¹⁰ According to the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (NCTIC), "the spirit of pu'uhonua—the opportunity to heal and live a forgiven life—informs the vision that is changing the environment for both incarcerated women and staff at WCCC."¹¹

As Kawika Patterson explained in an interview with Dr. Eiko Kosasa, this marked space of pu'uhonua was utilized in ancient times as a traditional pathway to absolution and reconciliation. When a Native Hawaiian committed a transgression that could in turn endanger his/her life, s/he could enter the pu'uhonua, where "nobody could touch *him*."¹² When he became the acting warden at WCCC in 2006, Patterson sought mentorship from his own minister during his school days at Kamehameha: "I asked him [his kahuna] can you please help me work out the place of our traditional pu'uhonua in our contemporary times and he answered, 'Kawika think of it this way—the women who come into your walls are like our people who came to the walls of the pu'uhonua. You need to embrace them and help them live a forgiven life.'" The programs within the trauma-informed care initiative that Patterson instituted address the various kinds of trauma experienced by the women inside, ranging from recent personal to collective

historical trauma, including the 1893 overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom. According to the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care, the impact of historical trauma is particularly disquieting for Native Hawaiian women, who are disproportionately represented among the prison population. The study correlates the devastation to Native Hawaiian culture in which women once played influential roles with a current state of precarity that produces “elevated suicide rates, substance abuse, mental health problems, coping mechanisms that appear self-sabotaging, unresolved grief, and physical ailments.”¹³

Imagined by its founders as a transgressive cultural site, the pu‘uhonua at WCCC is also a troubled site: a feminized (domesticated) carceral landscape against a backdrop of colonialism—a space between hope and despair. My research illuminates the ways that the Kailua Prison Writing Project so warmly embraced by many inside women remains embedded in a disciplinary system at the institutional, state, and national levels. That discipline takes both overt and covert forms, from the realities of sex with guards, to the silencing—even within the Kailua Prison Writing Project—of women’s intimate relationships with other women. My research holds in productive tension women’s testimony of the immeasurable value of the Kailua Writing Project and the ways in which the carceral and colonial regimes continue to impinge upon the women’s lives. On the one hand, the Kailua Prison Writing Project—a composite of the biweekly creative writing classes, The Prison Monologues, and the bi-annual prison publication *Hulihia* (Transformation)—is a cathartic medium that effects change. The women who write in an incarcerated space perform resistance, even as they confound

the anticipations of readers familiar with an incarcerated male authorship. Yet, as I explore in the ensuing chapters, resistance necessarily runs against institutional constraint. If the creative writing classes function as a haven for the women, as the women themselves attest, they are never immune from institutional intrusions and fracture.

I: THE PROGRAM

The Kailua Prison Writing Project traces its origins back to 2003, when its director and founder, Pat Clough, in concert with *Kumu* (teacher) 'Ilima Stern, began the first of the biweekly creative writing classes at the facility. Pat is committed to the Kailua Prison Writing Project as a program that is steeped in a particular location in the Pacific; however, she does not employ a Pacific Islander canon in her classrooms. At the same time, she has resisted joining a national online community not only because she desires to protect the women's identities and considers online learning lacking in the personal connection so necessary in the incarcerated classroom, but also because she realizes that the particularity of Hawai'i separates the Kailua Prison Writing Project from other national initiatives. In the *Hulihia* prison journal, Pat incorporates local artists and a confluence of languages (including Pidgin), which collectively situate the journal in the particularized landscape of Hawai'i.

In 2008, Pat chose "The Kailua Prison Writing Project" as an umbrella term to encompass the yearly prison publication, *Hulihia*, and its new public initiative, the Prison Monologues, rooted in therapeutic modalities that echo traditional Hawaiian practices of pono (social justice) and *ho'oponopono* (reconciliation). The program, via The Prison

Monologues, soon grew into one of the “best received educational efforts in the system,” reaching thousands of students in middle and high schools across the state.¹⁴ The prison publication *Hulihia* was born from the writing classes and in 2013, Pat published the tenth edition, with her biweekly creative writing classes reaching approximately six hundred women. Pat describes The Kailua Prison Project and her collaboration with Warden Patterson as a “magical confluence—a program that happened at the right place at the right time.”¹⁵ The program continued until 2014, when Pat decided to take a hiatus and Warden Patterson left WCCC to take on a position at the Hawai‘i Youth Correctional Facility (HYCF). With their dual departure, the program faces attrition. The short lifespan of the Kailua Prison Writing Project reflects national trends concerning the fragility of prison programming due to a lack of funding, and a lack of continuity in staff and the women inside.

Pat sees the Prison Writing Project as a “vehicle for learning [that] replac[es] traumatic history with a believable future after years of criminal behavior, drug use, and incarceration,” and as a direct antidote to recidivism. Pat’s belief is reflective of a contemporary climate in which scholars, prison abolitionists, and some carceral workers claim that education, and specifically writing, directly reduces recidivism. Pat envisions the program as an auxiliary to the inmates’ traumatic stories and sanctifies the act of documentation—the “writing it all down”—for its power to redeem and heal. In this sense, the Kailua Prison Writing Project resonates with other creative writing programs in American prisons, whose evolution was inspired by the PEN Prison Writing Program founded in 1971 by a collective of professional writers.¹⁶

It is no coincidence that PEN America was founded in an era of penal policy reform of the 1970s—a period of cultural, literary, artistic, and political change.¹⁷ At the advent of prison writing programs, professional writers (mostly poets) spearheaded the burgeoning prison writing programs.¹⁸ Since that time, according to the Prison Arts Coalition (PAC), Prison Arts Programming encompasses art-based workshops, projects, and courses offered in low- to high-security facilities across the United States.¹⁹ Art forms include creative writing, poetry, visual art, dance, drama, music, yoga, meditation, and horticulture, which may be combined into a multi-disciplinary art program.²⁰ The thematic preoccupations of women’s writing in the WCCC reflect the reformist mindset of the 1970s and depart from the politically driven writing of the 1960s that condemned the nation-state.²¹ Despite the WCCC’s place-specific programming, it is rooted in broader national trends that are both reformist and politically driven.



Former Governor Neil Abercrombie with the core Prison Monologue cast at the Hawai'i state capitol. He is holding *Hulihia XIII: The Prison Monologues* edition and an inside woman to his right is holding the proclamation signed by Abercrombie honoring “Prison Monologues Day.”

The Prison Monologues—abbreviated theatrical performances of the women’s narratives culled from the creative writing classes at WCCC—began as an experiment for fellow “inmates” and visitors inside the prison. In 2008, a board member from La Pietra Hawai’i School for Girls, a private school on O’ahu, came to the first *Hulihia* dedication in the Maunawili courtyard at the facility.²² Eight “inmates” from the creative writing class were invited to give a “dramatic presentation of their writings” at an assembly at La Pietra, which was prominently featured on local television and in print media. From this invitation, the Prison Monologues flourished: the “inside” program grew in size and expanded to the “outside,” reaching not only students, but professional practitioners in the carceral turf: social workers, pastors, parole and probation officers, educators, and judges. More recently the Prison Monologues program has been featured at national conferences on O’ahu: the Office of Youth Services, Hawai’i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity, and the ‘Aha Wahine Conference—a gathering of Native Hawaiian women from the community.²³ According to program publicity, “nearing the end of 2012, the Prison Monologues had presented more than 40 programs at high schools, universities, [and] conferences on O’ahu, Maui, and Hawai’i Island.” Warden Kawika Patterson’s decision to allow the women to travel in civilian clothes and fly to the outer islands suggests his allegiance both to the prison’s potential as a “healing place” as well as to the women’s power to impact their audience. In the same way that Patterson envisions his work in the criminal justice system as a way of giving back to his

own Native Hawaiian community, he envisions the Prison Monologues as a way that the inside women can give back to their communities and “live a forgiven life.”²⁴

Redemption is a premier character in the Kailua Prison Writing Project, and the women’s testimony demonstrates that creative writing and performance can be transformative for the inside women who scribe and perform life writing, as well as for the audiences who witness the women’s testimony. While many Americans may assume that the libertarian impulse of self-expression is a right not a privilege, within the anti-democratic space of the prison that status of self-expression is ambiguous. In *The New Abolitionists: (Neo) Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*, Joy James calls these anti-democratic spaces, such as Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, “dead” spaces.²⁵ Yet the state, she argues, despite its abusive excesses, incongruously provides the possibility of emancipation and redemption.²⁶ The cacophony of voices within the carceral institution reinforces exacting cultural scripts and forms of redemption, lending disciplinary effects to therapeutic rhetoric. In the Kailua Prison Monologues, audiences—from school groups to carceral and legal workers—are moved and co-opted in the performance of authenticity. This dissertation interrogates how speech performs as “an occasion for agency” and suggests that even if testimony speaks truth to power, it may likewise “speak untruth in the interests of power.”²⁷ As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that it is our *kuleana* (communal responsibility) to understand the inside women’s experience of testimony and witnessing to national, institutional, and gendered violence as profoundly meaningful.

The Warden's Trauma-Informed Care Initiative

Over six feet three inches with a large, powerful frame, the former warden, Mark Kawika Patterson, favors lively aloha shirts and his large signature gold cross. He sports an effervescent smile with deep-set dimples. Patterson ushered in many initiatives to WCCC, based on an innovative circle pedagogy that embraces Indigenous programming.²⁸ Circle pedagogy references a way of knowing that is antithetical to linear systems of knowledge making. Those innovations include the cultivation of lo'i fields²⁹ on the facility's grounds; the translation of turn-of-the-century Hawaiian newspapers from Hawaiian into English; talent nights; re-entry and transition planning circles,³⁰ and the employment of "life maps" at parole hearings. The translation of turn-of-the-century newspapers from Hawaiian into English is an example of the politics of Patterson's programming situated in the pu'u honua, which privileges Native Hawaiian speakers and brings visibility to the resistance of everyday Hawaiians to Queen Liliuokalani's overthrow, which has been written out of the historical record.

Warden Patterson's inventive programming emerged from a state of crisis in the Hawai'i prison system. As a result of litigation pending in 1991 against the state of Hawai'i regarding the conditions of confinement for women, the temporary WCCC was remodeled and subsequently completed in 1994 as the state's primary women's all-custody facility. Today the facility, which "houses" pretrial and sentenced female "offenders," who are a composite of maximum-, medium-, and minimum-custody levels, contains four separate structures: Olomana, Kaala, Maunawili, and Ahiki Cottages.³¹ Every cottage operates in accordance with the stipulations of specific programs and

classification levels. The facility offers a fifty-bed, gender-responsive, substance abuse therapeutic community, Ke Alaula (Breaking of a New Dawn).³² Other programming includes cognitive-based curriculum, parenting and educational classes, domestic violence treatment, day reporting, and electronic monitoring programs. Project Bridge is a program designed to “support female offenders in transitioning back to society through employment, education and substance abuse treatment.”³³ The Hina Mauka and Total Life Recovery (TLR) programs offer the women a path to recovery through access to spiritual transformation.³⁴ As 90 percent of the women’s “crimes” are linked to substance abuse and 75 percent of those women suffered from trauma, including domestic and sexual abuse, the former warden envisions Hina Mauka, a program that targets substance abuse and abstinence, in conjunction with spiritual transformation, as a pathway to the outside: “There isn’t a single event of trauma that sent the women to prison, [rather] it is trauma that occurred over a long period of time, usually between the ages of 4–17. The women use substances to cope with their trauma. It is our job to break down the walls. Every one of my staff—from janitors to cooks to ACOs—is trained to break down the walls [of trauma].”³⁵ In addition to in-facility programs, WCCC participates in many community service projects for state and county agencies and for nonprofit organizations.³⁶

Many of the writers in the Kailua Prison Writing Project have been processed through Hina Mauka or the Total Life Recovery Program and the rhetoric from these programs shows in their writing. While many inside women attest to a shift in the culture of the prison with the piloting of a trauma-informed care approach and see Patterson as

a visionary, others critique this movement as a strategy to satisfy political agendas and obtain funding. In a similar vein, Gillian Harkins and Erica R. Meiners explain that it is difficult to track the goals and commitments of college-in-prison programs because all programs must operate according to the rules and expectations of the Department of Corrections: “This can often require public relations materials or program rationales that favor aims of public safety, reducing recidivism, and moral uplift over aims of educational equity and social justice, regardless of the actual operating principles of the program on the ground.”³⁷ In promotional materials, the Kailua Prison Writing Project program appears almost as a holiday camp, replete with reformist and redemptive expectations that fuel a colonial imaginary. Consider, for instance, the bucolic and idyllic description of women at WCCC in *Creating a Place of Healing and Forgiveness: The Trauma-Informed Care Initiative at the Women’s Community Correctional Center of Hawai’i*.³⁸

A group of women in green work clothes poses for the camera, smiling broadly, proudly displaying a six-foot wreath they crafted from flowers and foliage grown on the grounds. Nearby, women tend rows of hydroponic salad greens and herbs grown for the facility’s kitchen, while others clear brush by a rushing stream. In the welding shop, an artist works on a large sculpture of an orchid. Women living in an open unit whose walls are painted brightly with tropical birds and flowers prepare for their jobs in the community.³⁹

This text presents the prison as an open, rather than an enclosed space—one in harmony with nature and replete with smiling women. Tessa informed me that this representation of the prison as a harmonious and healing space was the template presented to visitors but was, in her view, discordant with the reality of the prison.

One can also see a delicate politics of representation at work in the highly successful Prison Monologue program, as part of and sustained by the Kailua Prison Writing Project. Whereas Pat believed in the distinctive nature of a writing program in Hawai'i, the warden's initiative further developed this notion of "distinctiveness" by highlighting Indigenous ways of knowing. Although Patterson faced condemnation by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) and Hawaiian sovereignty groups for his positing of the prison, an anti-Indigenous space, as a pu'uhonua, his visibility and success as a prison administrator, his legibility in the Native Hawaiian community, and his public presence on TED Talks and other political forums positioned the Prison Monologue Program as an authentic vehicle of restorative justice.

The politics of the program was shaped by Patterson's own perspective, but also, in a sense, led to its demise. According to local prison scholars, such as Meda Chesney-Lind, Patterson was fired due to professional jealousy, in a dis-eased system that does not look favorably on humanitarian feats. By contrast, Pat Clough explains that Patterson left of his own volition because he felt that he could accomplish more as an administrator at HYCF. In her words, "Mark always wanted to do work that would connect women's with the youth correctional facility." As part of the larger national narrative of the "school to prison pipeline," HYCF tragically serves as a feeder program to WCCC.⁴⁰

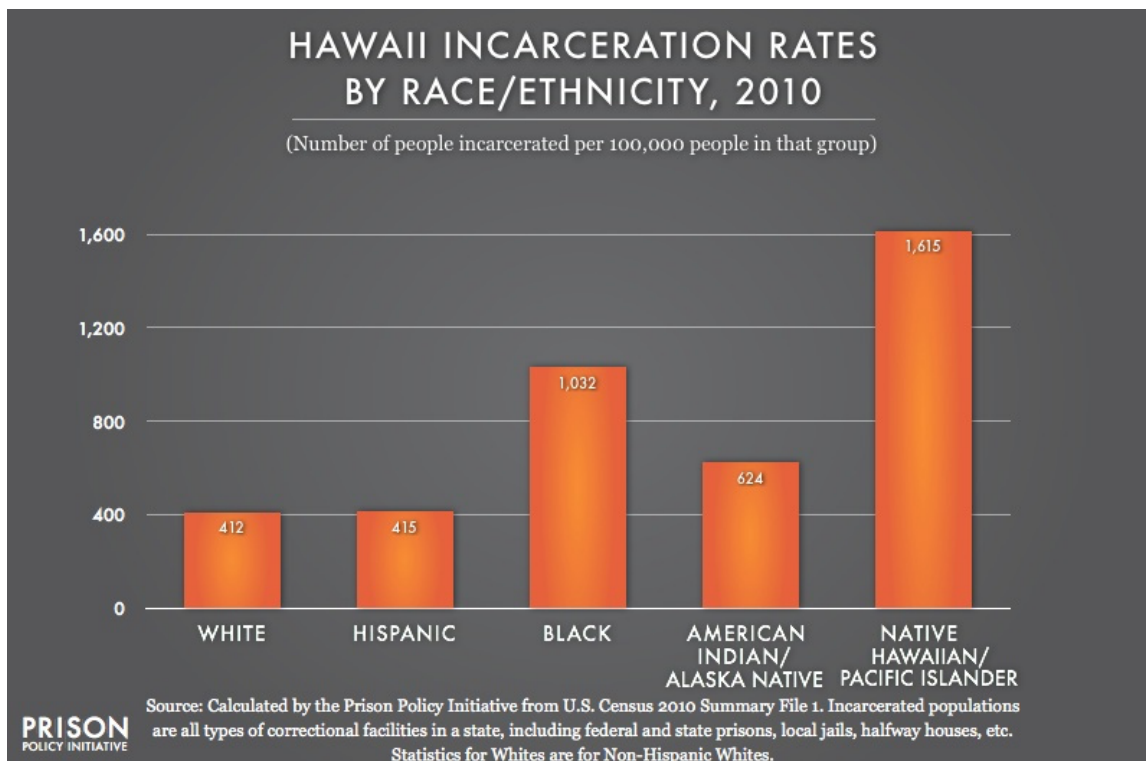
II: THE STATE

Interrogating prisons in Hawai'i poses unique questions endemic to their location. Despite the fact that the program draws upon Hawaiian healing practices, it is crucial to

keep in mind that the state follows national patterns of incarceration in profoundly disturbing ways. According to local O‘ahu feminist criminologist Meda Chesney-Lind and prison advocate Kat Brady, Hawai‘i has followed the national trend not only in the over-representation of people of color, but also in its castigatory and disproportionate imprisonment of parole violators and nonviolent offenders. The writers note that Hawai‘i is fifth in the nation in its incarceration of repeat drug offenders.⁴¹ Its pattern of imprisonment has a particular emphasis on Indigenous incarceration. Native Hawaiians are also significantly more likely to get diabetes, receive inferior education, face homelessness—*Kānaka Maoli* (Native Hawaiians) constitute 60 percent of the state’s indigent population living on beaches and sidewalks—and suffer from the collateral ailments of poverty. These devastations reflect the continuation of colonialism in Hawai‘i.

Although they represent only 24 percent of the state’s adult population, Native Hawaiians comprise 39 percent of the adult incarcerated population.⁴² Native Hawaiian women are more likely than their male counterparts to be overrepresented in the prison industrial complex: 44 percent of incarcerated women are Native Hawaiian, compared with 38 percent of incarcerated men.⁴³ According to *The Disparate Treatment of Native Hawaiians in the Criminal Justice System* report: “Given the 709 percent increase in the incarceration rate in Hawai‘i over the last 30 years compared to the 262 percent increase in the national incarceration rate, it is worth considering that the increase in the incarceration rate of Native Hawaiians over the same time frame is greater than that for any other racial or ethnic group in the United States.”⁴⁴ According to the report by the

Prison Policy Initiative, entitled “Hawai‘i Incarceration Rates by Race/Ethnicity 2010” (see chart below), the rates of Native Hawaiians in prison are probably underestimated, due to the mixed racial identities in Hawai‘i, and the vagaries of racial self-declaration.⁴⁵



Source: Calculated by the Prison Policy Initiative from the U.S. Census 2010 Summary File.

The over-representation of Native Hawaiians in the state’s incarceration statistics follows a genealogy of national and global discrimination against Indigenous people in the criminal “justice” system. In the 1970s, many Native American women in the U.S. were granted parole only if they agreed to acquiesce to the nation’s systemic and systematic sterilization program.⁴⁶ Critics have characterized Indigenous and Pacific Island communities as “unseen victims of a broken U.S. justice system.”⁴⁷ Since 2010, the number of Native Americans incarcerated in federal prisons has increased by 27 percent. According to Sentencing Commission data, Native men in the U.S. are

incarcerated at four times the rate of white men.⁴⁸ In a 2014 *Guardian* article, reporters Nick Evershed and Helen Davidson expose the rate of Indigenous imprisonment in Australia as thirteen times greater than the non-Indigenous incarceration rate.⁴⁹ The Bureau of Statistics offers the sobering statistics that the number of Indigenous Australians in prison has grown by more than 80 percent in ten years.⁵⁰ In *Women of Color and Feminism*, Maythee Rojas provides data that Native Americans are twice as likely to be victims of violent crime as any other group. Domestic violence on reservations is a dire problem and homicide, according to Amnesty International, was the third highest cause of death among Native American women in 2005–2006.⁵¹

Hawai'i's state prisons that fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections include Halawa Correctional Facility (including a special-needs facility and a medium-security facility), Waiawa Correctional Facility (a 334-bed, minimum-security male prison), Kulani Correctional Facility (houses 200 and was recently re-opened in Hilo to mitigate some of the mainland transfers), and the Women's Community Correctional Center. The O'ahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC) is the largest jail facility in the state of Hawai'i' and is situated on sixteen acres in urban Honolulu. The 950-bed facility houses pre-trial detainees and this is where most of the women at WCCC are housed prior to their trials. Danika, who is transgender, told me in our interview that she was raped at OCCC and is suing the state. In addition to its jail functions, OCCC provides reintegration programming for male sentenced felons.⁵²

According to the Department of Corrections' website, several correctional facilities on the continental United States mainland are contracted to house Hawai'i's

prisoners in order to allay overcrowding. Red Rock Correctional Center and Saguaro Correctional Center, both located in Eloy, Arizona, are the most popular destinations. Indeed, approximately one-third of Hawai'i's more than six thousand prison inmates are transferred to private prisons on the mainland run by the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA). In 2010, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs released a report, "The Disparate Treatment of Native Hawaiians in the Criminal Justice System," which confirmed that Native Hawaiians are disproportionately sent to out-of-state prisons. According to the Marshall Project:

Hawai'i first began sending prisoners en masse to mainland prisons in 1995, when it secured beds in a privately run Texas facility. Over the years, Hawai'i expanded the practice, shipping thousands of prisoners to 14 facilities across eight states. Today, under a \$30-million-a-year contract with CCA, the state sends all its overflow prisoners to Saguaro Correctional Center, which was opened expressly for Hawai'i in 2007, with a blessings ceremony performed by Hawaiian "cultural advisors" flown in from the islands. There are 1,391 prisoners from Hawai'i housed at Saguaro, and last year [2015] they had 2,798 in-person visits.⁵³

Prison transfers are not unique to the prison-industrial complex, but the geographical placement of Hawai'i as an island in the middle of the Pacific amplifies the exile that Hawaiian prisoners face. One of the unique ethical and logistical problems that incarcerated Hawaiians encounter in the plight of prison transfers is a racial "mis-filing." Hawaiians, a composite of multi-ethnicities, are not easily "legible" on the mainland, which has led to further stigmatization and at times brutality within the prisons.⁵⁴

There are economic incentives for states that accept prisoners from Hawai'i, as well as large savings for the Department of Corrections. Yet even some carceral administrators, such as the director of the Idaho Department of Corrections, understand that “any time you move inmates away from the people who can support them, away from where they’re going to actually re-enter society, I have to say it is flat-out correctional malpractice.”⁵⁵ Hawai'i pays CCA about \$70 a day to house each inmate at Saguaro, compared with an average of \$140 a day for an inmate at any of the four prisons back home.⁵⁶ The incarcerated population in Hawai'i is predominantly a low-security risk—a fact particularly true of the women—yet prisoners are deported to mainland medium-security prisons. Local research unveils that most women in prison are nonviolent and should rather be serving their prison terms in gender-responsive, community-based programs in their home-state.⁵⁷ The re-location to the “remote” and “rural” mainland prisons for Hawai'i's female inmates is a dire reality as there is only one overcrowded women's prison in the state, which warehouses approximately three hundred women with one case worker/parole liaison.

A 1993 study on the recidivism rates of Hawaiian prisoners uncovered that 90 percent of inmates sent to other states to do their time eventually returned to prison. By contrast, those incarcerated in their home state had recidivism rates ranging from 47 to 57 percent.⁵⁸ While the male prison population doubled between 1985 and 1995, the female population tripled, largely due to the sentencing and incarceration of female nonviolent first-time drug offenders. The Department of Public Safety reports that the number of female parole violators rose thirty percent between January 1, 2001, and

January 19, 2004, while the number of male parole violators rose 18.3 percent during the same period. These statistics reveal that despite the rapid increase in the number of women incarcerated, they are neglected in programming, health care, and research in what is still perceived as a primarily male carceral space. Women in Hawai'i's prisons thus suffer a lack of female correctional officers, gender-responsive community-based programs, and rehabilitation programs.⁵⁹ Warden Patterson's Trauma-Informed Care Initiative was developed to address these gender inequities and it focused on "reducing the use of restraints and isolation . . . since these interventions are likely to re-traumatize women who are trauma survivors and cause trauma responses in women who had not previously experienced trauma."⁶⁰

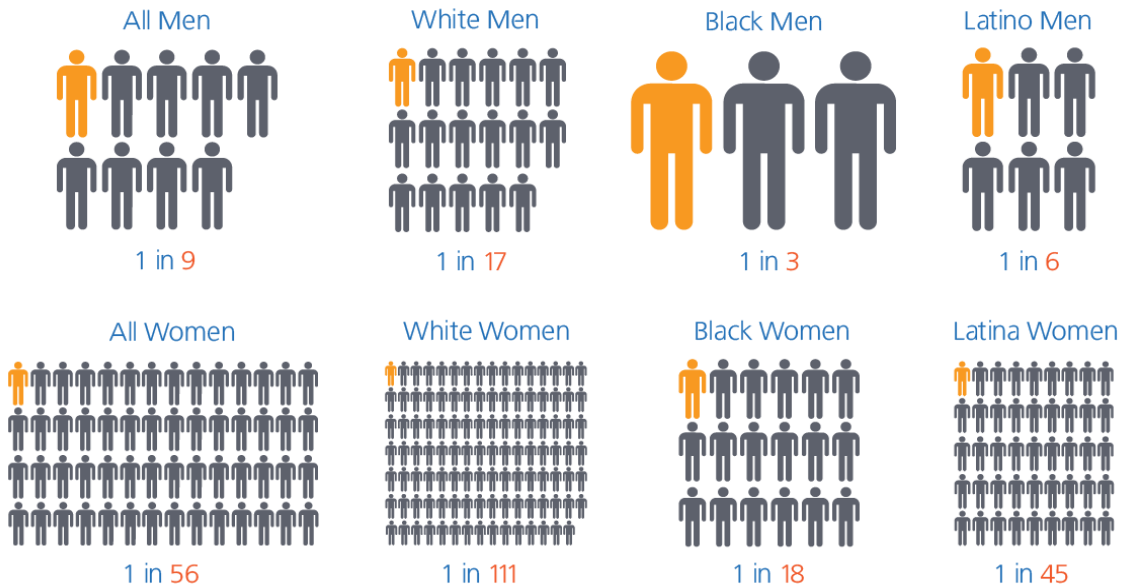
III: THE NATION

The carceral landscape in America as a whole remains a contested space. Many prison scholars, myself among them, argue that the skyrocketing rates of incarceration, the proliferation of multimillion dollar industrial supermax prisons, the militant war against drugs, and the over-representation of minorities in the prisons represent an economic and racial crisis in America—a crisis that contradicts the myth of America as a benevolent democracy. Penal theorists argue that the contemporary climate is one of retribution and criminalization, evident in the expansion of the prison industrial complex and its overtures to Dwight Eisenhower's military industrial complex. According to the most recent Prison Policy Initiative 2016 report, the American criminal justice system holds more than 2.3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 942 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,283 local jails, and 79 Indian Country jails, as well as in

military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, and prisons in the U.S. territories.⁶¹ Chesney-Lind and Brady note that the United States imprisons one in every hundred of its citizens, establishing it as the world's largest incarcerator.⁶² America warehouses over 2.2 million in its prison or jails—a 500 percent increase over the past thirty years—and the literature unveils a disproportionate representation of non-white bodies, reflective of the racial and economic apartheid persistent in America.⁶³

Scholars argue that the prison system has been designed to replace the earlier form of Black chattel slavery and functions today as an institutional, “sanctioned” arm to discipline minority populations.⁶⁴ According to the Sentencing Project, more than sixty percent of the people in prison are now racial and ethnic minorities. One in every ten African-American men in the thirties age-range is in prison or jail on any given day in the United States. The disparate impact of the “War on Drugs” eventuates in disturbing realities: two-thirds of all individuals in prison for drug offenses are people of color.⁶⁵ According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2014 the imprisonment rate for African American women (109 per 100,000) was more than twice the rate of imprisonment for white women (53 per 100,000).⁶⁶ Hispanic women were incarcerated at 1.2 times the rate of white women (64 versus 53 per 100,000).⁶⁷

Lifetime Likelihood of Imprisonment



Source: Bonczar, T. (2003). *Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974-2001*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.



Even more bleakly, the statistics fail to show any correlation between the gargantuan carceral industry complex and diminishing crime and recidivism rates. Many theorists argue that the media commands public opinion, which is vulnerable to bloated and counterfeit statistics.⁶⁸ They claim that the correlation between crime and the expansion of the carceral system is false as statistics confirm a marked decrease in crime rates since the 1990s. There are devastating collateral consequences that affect incarcerating persons long after release. According to the 2015 American Civil Liberties Union's *Racial Disparities in Criminal Justice* report, increasingly stringent laws and policies restrict people with a felony conviction—particularly convictions for drug offenses—from access to employment, welfare benefits, public housing, and student

loans for higher education. Such collateral penalties pose barriers to social and economic advancement.⁶⁹

In American society, the prison-industrial complex is viewed as a masculine space because men are disproportionately represented in its confines. Although there are many more men in prison than women, the rate of growth for female imprisonment has outpaced that of men by more than 50 percent between 1980 and 2014. There are currently 1.2 million women under the supervision of the criminal justice system.⁷⁰ The increases in prison spending are concomitant with the escalation in the imprisonment of women. According to Chesney-Lind and Lisa Pasko, the nationwide incarceration of women has increased sixfold in the past two decades due to factors other than a shift in the nature of women's crimes. Researchers of these trends have noted that the criminal justice system has become tougher on women at every level of decision-making, from arrests to sentencing to parole determinations.⁷¹

Contemporary terminology, such as the "War Against Crime" and "War Against Drugs," posits the prison industrial complex within a masculinist landscape of battle. Approximately seventy percent of women confined in local, state, and federal institutions are Black, Latina, Native American, or Asian.⁷² Men and women exhibit different patterns towards drug use: women tend to engage in self-injurious behaviors and are more susceptible to drug addiction as a means of escape, whereas men tend to externalize pain via violence. The bulk of women in prison are incarcerated for nonviolent drug or property offenses, with drug offenses as the dominant liability for female incarceration. Women drug offenders, particularly those of color, are far more

liable to be arrested, convicted, and incarcerated than they were prior to the war on drugs.⁷³ Luana Ross and Deena Rymhs, two prison scholars, argue that women of color, particularly Indigenous women disenfranchised from land, are twofold victims in the prison industrial complex.⁷⁴

Women's Prison Writing

The genres of Prison Writing and Autobiography hail from gendered literary traditions that privilege political exile and resistance over rehabilitative domestic exiles. Scholarship on incarcerated writing tends to highlight men's misadventures while it maligns women as "cultural outlaws," because inside women, more than their male counterparts, are judged as violating dominant social and gendered norms. My reference to "domestic exile" arises as the women's writing at WCCC expresses a longing to repair exile from family, society, and community. Incarcerated writing showcases preoccupations with borders—spatial, geographical, somatic, gendered, and linguistic—and both vilifies the prison as a Haedean inferno and celebrates it as a pathway to self-edification. In light of the ambiguous nature of carceral writing, penal theorists and creative writers have pointed to the intrinsic contradiction in the legal assignation of a "civic death" and the act of writing. If prisoners are civically "dead," their voices are accoutrements of an extended death and in that sense can be perceived as impossible voices. It is easy to see why legislatures, penal administrators, and the criminal system at large are invested in disciplining and patrolling the voices of those who are incarcerated. The very act of writing from a dead space and under the

classification of a non-citizen is a beleaguered act. This type of civic death in America has its roots in the constitutional civic death of the slave.⁷⁵

In this dissertation, I examine the contradictions rife in this locked-up space, and explore the ways in which healing might nonetheless transpire within a prison setting. The chapters that unfold reside at the nexus of critical literacy, feminist ethnography, and performances of trauma in a borderland space—the prison—that resist simplistic receptions. Drawing upon qualitative methodologies such as interviews and participant observation, as well as on discourse analysis and penal, literary, performance, and trauma theory, my research not only interrogates the intersection of race and gender in contemporary literary texts, but also emphasizes the ways in which women’s prison writing redefines the literary.⁷⁶ Particular tropes distinguish women’s from men’s prison writing; rooted in women’s specific experiences of sexual and domestic violence, their unique positioning as cultural outlaws, and the policing of women’s writing that demands rehabilitative and domestic outcomes. In *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, Audra Simpson names the Indian stories as “alternatives . . . to the dominant discourses of literature and history only in that they are Indian stories, and Indian stories haven’t mattered much.” These “hidden transcripts,” are similar to many of the hidden narratives of women’s prison writing in Hawai‘i.⁷⁷

Despite the steady flow of scholarship on creative writing programs in male prisons, women’s prison writing suffers a drought.⁷⁸ Part of this absence is due to the lack of funding for enrichment programming in women’s prisons and the asymmetrical access to educational opportunities alive in men’s prisons. Two of the editors of *Women*

Prisoners: A Forgotten Population, Beverly R. Fletcher and Lynda Dixon Shaver, argue that incarcerated women are recipients of meager programs because their crimes are not *sufficiently* violent—an underachievement in crime, and because they more passively accept substandard conditions in prison.⁷⁹ This assumption of women’s “passive” acceptance is a gendered stereotype that essentializes women’s “nature,” and thus victimizes women.

Several prison scholars and writers have refracted the prison industrial complex through the lenses of race,⁸⁰ gender,⁸¹ and class.⁸² Their approaches and methodological interventions are wide-ranging—ethnography, historiography, feminist criminology, sociology, autobiography, and literary criticism.⁸³ In writing this dissertation, I have found inspiration in their work, as well as in collective anthologies such as *Wall Tappings: An International Anthology of Women’s Prison Writings*; *Razor Wire: Women, Prisoners, Activists, Scholars and Artists*; and *Women Writing and Prison: Activists Scholars and Writers Speak Out*.⁸⁴ These gender-responsive collections focus on women’s writing from inside the prison space, and foreground the involvement of the inside women in all aspects of artistic creation. Visually, thematically, and ideologically, they resist the hierarchy inherent in many anthologies, as they showcase process in concert with product. *Razor Wire*, a “collage of unsettling images, testimony, and intersectional theorizing,” explores expressivity both inside and outside the prison-industrial complex. The anthologies reveal that the experience of imprisonment affects not only the individual woman, but also permeates the entire family and extended community. Inside women’s autobiographical writing—unlike men’s single-authored

work—often appears in edited anthologies, offering a window on women’s communal writing practices, and on the politics of collaborative autobiographies in which the editor reframes or mediates the narratives.⁸⁵ Ashley Lucas, one of the editors of *Razor Wire*, argues that it is the women behind the razor wire—artists and writers—who have the power to flesh out the missing details of their lives as counter texts to the nation-state’s injurious and pathological phenotypes. As Lucas argues, the state concocts biographies based upon a missing limb, a scar, a tattoo—visual evidence of the women in parts. Feminist academicians and practitioners like Lucas, by contrast, celebrate the women inside who “share their lives in art and poetry in brash celebration and utterances.”⁸⁶

Despite its cosmetics of complicity with the nation-state, the writing produced in the Kailua Prison Writing Project forms an archive of resistance.⁸⁷ The women’s poetry generated in the Kailua Writing Project borrows from the tradition of prison autobiography—from the canonical Martin Luther King Jr.’s *Letters from Birmingham Jail* to Angela Davis’s *Autobiography*. Genres of carceral writing include testimony, testimonio, witness, apologia, confession, and conversion narratives, which all occur across various writing forms: poetry, autobiography, memoir, political manifesto, and fiction. Davis’s autobiography, an apologia (a defense of her political life), indicts the legal system, and the revolutionary Black Panther party for stripping women of political agency.

Autobiography as resistance, as deployed by Martin Luther King Jr. and extended by revolutionaries such as the Black Panthers, has today been refracted through prison reform. Women’s writing in the *Hulihia* prison journals performs dissent

in its ability to re-imagine and forge new multifaceted identities, yet it is simultaneously institutionalized as an alternative avenue for rehabilitation. Women's voices chosen for the publication *Hulihia* (Transformations) are less overtly critical of the nation-state than was Davis's autobiography, but they nonetheless resist female passivity, the American Dream, and the carceral state. The women's opposition is animated in the forms, styles, and themes of their presentations. Women in my creative writing classes occasionally offer well-articulated appraisals of national and state corruption. In these ways, women's narratives of trauma perform as counter-narratives to a civic death.

The inside women's writing is a radical genre because of its demand for what Deena Rymhs calls a "second hearing"—a demand for society, rather than the incarcerated, to change. Many prison programs consist of cognitive classes that ignore the reality of social, political, and economic disenfranchisement, and insist that prisoners account for their actions, take responsibility for the violence they have "created," and transform *themselves*. By contrast, Indigenous carceral writing, argues Rymhs, summons an "alternate" or "second hearing" for the incarcerated: a hearing that disputes the legal and judicial parameters that are circumscribed by the courts and the penal system.⁸⁸ The second hearings expose the failings of the criminal justice system and work as a form of apologia by affording the prisoner the occasion to rewrite or refashion her life history through autobiography. The reader, witness to the histories of abuse, poverty, and racism, is correspondingly able to reframe her own perceptions of guilt. Here, criminality is re-assigned from solely on the individual to include society and its negligent apparatuses as the writers "maneuver around . . . the constraints that the

law places on self-representation.”⁸⁹ I argue that in using the framework of literacy as a moral and cultural affirmation of belonging, the entombed prison (a dystopian space) becomes a utopian one, as illiterate subjects transform themselves into literate subjects. The restorative justice circles implemented by attorney Loren Walker at WCCC, the life-planning maps for parole hearings generated by the women inside, as well as the Kailua prison project itself, are examples of alternate hearings and avenues through which a woman can symbolically write herself back into society.

Unsurprisingly, trauma narratives emerge as a dominant genre within the Kailua Prison Writing Project. Inside women’s trauma narratives are deeply marked by gender, both because of inside women’s real experiences of personal trauma and abuse, and because of the modeling of certain scripts that authorize women’s stories of victimization rather than political protest. The literary canon that Pat implements in her classes does not model trauma narratives, as her archive primarily consists of triumphant, or “heroic,” narratives that mirror what Pat perceives as the women’s own heroic journeys. Yet due to the personal nature of creative writing and the fact that we tend to write what we know, Pat does not necessarily control the themes that emerge in her students’ writing. The Prison Monologues’ tripartite scheme of Who We Were, Who We Are, and Reflections Back to Home more directly lends itself to the production of trauma narratives. The Prison Monologues is rooted in a tradition of atonement for crime/s, and its very structure requires women to take responsibility for the ways that they have injured others.

In Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson posit “that there is a growing audience for life writing focused on grief and mourning,” which coheres with the assignation of the civically dead.⁹⁰ The authors argue that “life writing in its multiple genres is foundational to the formation of Western subjects, Western cultures, and Western concepts of nation, as well as to ongoing projects of exploration, colonization, imperialism, and now globalization.”⁹¹ In our “contemporary culture of self-help,” they claim, “personal narratives of debasement and recovery as models for conversion, survival, and self transformation” carry considerable currency.⁹² Thus as Smith and Watson suggest, writers of traumatic narratives appeal to modern readers as they “mine the discontinuities, mobility, and transcultural hybridity of subjects-in-process.”⁹³ Perhaps this re-assembling of the human is desirable in our contemporary era of commodification in which product is reified over process. In this sense, narratives of trauma nourish our sense of cultural and communal loss in an industrialized, global, and media-dominated world.

METHODOLOGY AND ARCHIVE

In *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists Scholars and Writers Speak Out*, the practitioner scholars, who bridge activism and scholarship, caution against programs in prison that operate from a “deficiency and redemptive model” that assume the “inmates” need to change or that the facilitators can “save” lives.⁹⁴ These dominant models divert American society from addressing its endemic racial, political, and gendered violence. My experience as a creative writing instructor in a women’s prison in Honolulu, has

taught me the importance of a critical self-reflectivity that grants greater latitude to the women themselves, fortifying lateral rather than hierarchical alliances.

The fraught trajectory of outsider ethnographers conveying disenfranchised voices is politically charged. Eve Tuck, a Native Alaskan academic, cautions outsider “communities, researchers, and educators who work in Indigenous communities to reconsider the long-term impact of ‘damage-centered’ research—research that intends to document peoples’ pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable for their oppression.”⁹⁵ Tuck critiques the deficit model for its reliance on a flawed “theory of change”—one utilized to “leverage reparations or resources for marginalized communities; . . . while reinscribing a one-dimensional notion of Indigenous people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless.”⁹⁶ Tuck “urges communities to institute a moratorium on damage-centered research to reformulate the ways research is framed and conducted and to reimagine how findings might be used by, for, and with communities.”⁹⁷ Clearly, using this collaborative model—one concerned with “understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives”—is complex in an incarcerated setting.⁹⁸ Tuck compellingly unveils the violences that researchers perpetrate on Indigenous communities—“finger-shaped bruises on our pulse points”—with “characterizations that frame our communities as sites of disinvestment and dispossession; . . . spaces saturated in the fantasies of outsiders.”⁹⁹

While sitting in on the classes as a privileged guest from the “free” world and as a non-Indigenous or Pacific Islander woman, my own positionality as a hybrid (inside-out) body was an obstacle I spent years negotiating as both participant ethnographer and

facilitator.¹⁰⁰ Participating in Pat’s creative writing classes and developing relationships over several terms facilitated the interviews that I conducted with the inside women. These variegated relationships shape the terrain of my ensuing interpretations. As a facilitator in an incarcerated space, I employ autoethnography as a reflective practice to consider the process of transformation involved in ethnographic reverse for both ethnographer and collaborators. Norman K. Denzin posits autoethnography as an interpretive, performative, poststructural, and politically transgressive methodology.¹⁰¹ Autoethnography is a mobile site that encourages an intersectional way of seeing and engaging with the carceral culture, and is a useful tool to examine a space where unjust systems and processes are identified and interrogated. Other autoethnographies that inspire this dissertation include Julie Taylor’s *Paper Tangos* for its use of poetics and the evocation of place, Karen McCarthy’s *Mama Lola: A Voodoo Priestess in Brooklyn* for its use of parallel voices of ethnographer and informant, and Alice Goffman’s *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* for the complex issues it raises about class and racial appropriation and ethics.¹⁰²

One of the integral components of feminist ethnography situated within a collaborative model is the ethical responsibility to exchange work with the community. Reading and writing in interaction with “subjects” is a central aspect of life writing and feminist ethnography. Feminist ethnography insists upon a working through of relationships across boundaries of differential power—in the case of my research, the borders between those inside and outside. It was also difficult for me to share the dissertation with the director of the Kailua Prison Writing Project, Pat Clough. Due to my

own experience as an educator, I am aware that opening up one's classroom to a guest involves vulnerability, particularly if a critical lens is employed. Yet critique is an essential component of academic work. Prior to submitting my dissertation to Pat, I reread each chapter imagining her as my reader. This altered lens allowed me to rethink my initial critique. One feminist methodological praxis I incorporate here is the use of parenthetical notes to Pat that perform as an invitation to an extended conversation: an invitation that echoes circle or Indigenous epistemologies. The responses from Pat, which I incorporate throughout, confirm the unique and transformational journey that we undertook together and reinforce the process of feminist ethnography: its collaborative nature, vulnerability, and limitations. Her response likewise employs the personal and the political.

I'm not sure how to respond appropriately to such extensive analysis and story telling. I think we both knew when we were talking, that our conversations mattered—mattered most because I was “unpacking” a program that grew from no plan, no particular curriculum. Since I was teaching in a new space, I figured I'd have to become an explorer and explore I did! The writing, the women themselves became deeply important to me. I didn't know that would happen. You seem to have captured much of that personal connection that unfolded for so many—first with their relationship with themselves and then with the witnesses to that unfolding—the other students and me.¹⁰³

Sharing the work with the women inside also proved to be complicated. Just as the Kailua Prison Project itself is vulnerable to attrition, by the time I was ready to share my dissertation, many of the women inside had been paroled and inevitably had moved on to their lives outside. One woman with whom I had a close relationship died quite suddenly. One of the principal Prison Monologue women had been extradited to the Philippines and others were difficult to reach.¹⁰⁴ As the Kailua Prison Writing Project

folded, and as my contacts— Pat and the former warden—departed, access inside was limited.¹⁰⁵

Throughout the dissertation, in accordance with the IRB requisites, I use pseudonyms to protect the identities of the women and the teenagers. There are numerous ethical questions about the inclusion in this dissertation of high-school youth, who like the inside women, constitute a vulnerable population. Pat and the students' English teacher, Christine Wilcox, provided me with all of the correspondence between the women and the teenagers at two Title I schools on Honolulu's leeward side— Nānākuli and Kapolei—and gave me permission to publish their words. In chapter two, I implement the inside women's authentic names to accompany their published poetry to preserve and honor their authorship. The selection of pseudonyms in other chapters was fraught with complexity. I attempted to select names that cohere with the ethnicity of a particular woman; however, this resulted in an over-representation of "ethnic" names when in reality many of the women had assimilated "American" names. (In hindsight, this feels like a racial typecasting.)

I deliberately chose to begin and end each chapter with the women's voices, and in the last chapter with the teenagers' voices. In homage to Kelly Oliver's articulation of witnessing as a radical act of "seeing otherwise" that summons mutual vulnerabilities across hierarchical divides, I desire the reader to experience the "stand-alone" text without my interruptions.¹⁰⁶ These unimpeded texts authentically reflect the testimony of the inside women and the teenagers. At the same time, I also conduct close readings of

their poetry, as a writerly and methodological choice that foregrounds the women's testimony.

The following is a narrative that transported me to my inquiry, inspirations, and insights, which I offer as a gesture towards autoethnography. From a young age, growing up in apartheid in South Africa, I was aware of the devastation of economic, social, and political disenfranchisement. Far from our leafy suburb in St. Andrews sprawled the dilapidated shacks of Soweto, not unlike some of the public housing projects marking the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, where I worked years later as a HIV educator/activist, or the homeless shelters in which I taught creative writing. When my family immigrated to Milwaukee in the late 1970s after the turbulence of the Soweto Riots, I found myself at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where I became involved in the women's movement. My early academic formations were nurtured by leading American feminist pioneers. I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a bachelor's degree in literature and a certificate in women's studies. I was attracted to grassroots activism, which has informed my academic research trajectory, as well as my community activism as an educator and writer. I worked as a crisis counselor for women at the local Madison Rape Crisis Center in the early 1980s. One of the earliest court cases I attended indelibly transformed my life: I sat before an unmoved audience while the defense attorney humiliated and objectified the victim of rape. It was at this juncture that I committed myself to the pathway of social justice and to antidotes for societal asymmetry and misogyny.

My commitment to working with multi-ethnic communities—particularly those within the “school to prison” pipeline—began over a decade ago in Brooklyn and the Bronx. I was accepted into the New York City’s Teaching Fellows Program, which funded my master’s degree in special education and disability studies. I taught in a Title I high school, Cobble Hill High School of American Studies, which served teenagers who primarily came from the housing projects—one of the most economically disenfranchised housing projects in New York City. I was placed in a special education classroom with thirty juniors and seniors who were victims of a failed system—the majority of whom were African American and Latino young men funneled through special education, largely for disciplinary measures. There, in a collaborative venture with another faculty member and the students, I established the school’s first newspaper that privileged alternate modalities of learning. *Voices from the Track*, a compilation of poetry, reportage, and performance, inspired agency and was successful in reaching students who were considered to be traditionally “failing.” The students who had not accumulated academic credits were now enthusiastic about conducting interviews in their communities and esteemed by the larger school community, which fostered a sense of agency and pride. I made inroads with many of my female students, some of whom were victims of sexual abuse, and established a writing group in which the young women formed their own community of writers. Some of them reconnected with estranged family members through the act of writing.

After completing my master’s degree in performance studies at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts, I was recruited to teach special education in the Department of

Education in Hawai'i. In Honolulu, I worked with students and their families from Micronesia, Samoa, and the Philippines in a Title I school in Kalihi—King David Kalakaua Middle School. Most of the students lived in the nearby housing project in Kalihi. In the process of writing the students' IEPs (Individual Education Plans that offer academic accommodations), I met frequently with the students' families and was welcomed to many cultural events. Many of the students were inappropriately designated with a learning disability due to a lack of English fluency and cultural displacement, and I engaged in advocacy and placement changes on their behalf. In the American studies doctoral program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, I was finally able to combine my commitment to social justice with my belief in expressivity as catharsis.

Teaching writing in the prison, like prison writing itself, is a besieged act—one that insists that we grapple consciously with ethical dilemmas. The ethical critical praxis that informs my approach as a facilitator of an incarcerated classroom includes the circle pedagogy of the Walls to Bridges Collective in Kitchener, Ontario, the Inside-Out circles in the United States as part of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, and the testimony of feminist creative writing practitioners in the prisons.¹⁰⁷ All of these nontraditional or decolonial pedagogical models insist upon an ethical critical literacy praxis that resists the tendency towards “enforced” confessionals in the classroom, and supports what feminist prison writing practitioners Wendy Wolters Hinshaw and Tobi Jacobi identify as the necessary ingredients for an ethical critical literacy praxis that “sponsors inside women’s contributions to their own self-representations; builds critical

literacy about prison conditions both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’; accelerates tactical redistribution of power;¹⁰⁸ and creates solidarity across privilege.”¹⁰⁹

In the summer of 2015, I was awarded funding to attend the Walls to Bridges Prison Facilitator program in Kitchener, Ontario in concert with the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. The program is a five-day intensive training with primarily Canadian academicians and Indigenous activists at a women’s multilevel-security federal prison: Grand Valley Institution for Women. I was trained in the logistics and ethics of establishing a pilot program, based upon the Inside-Out Program in Canada, which originated at Temple University in the United States. The Walls to Bridges model offers “inside” and “outside” students the opportunity to embark on a semester-long seminar together within an incarcerated space, which works to reduce and interrogate stereotypes that cripple society¹¹⁰ in that it subverts hierarchies as “non-traditional” students educate “traditional” students and vice versa.¹¹¹ The weekly classes incorporate a circle pedagogy that foregrounds Indigenous epistemologies and collaborative dialogue aimed to foster egalitarian and collective learning. In *Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education*, editor Simone Weil Davis, who brought Inside-Out to Canada, articulates its radical pedagogical space as a dysynchronous site of discomfort that embraces a politics of poetics and “critically dismantles the hierarchies embedded in higher educational institutions designed to privilege status quo rewards.”¹¹²

I began my research with the idea that I needed to learn from and listen to the women inside, not only for their personal stories but also for the silences that lie behind

them. As a guest in the writing classes, I became a part of this writing community, witnessing and at times sharing in the personal and familial narratives that extended far beyond writing. The relationships I developed in the writing classes facilitated the formal, taped interviews that I initiated at the prison in April and May 2013, and led to the invitation to teach creative writing.¹¹³ From the summer of 2015 to May 2016, I taught my own creative writing class at the facility with ten women enrolled. Class impressions and informal conversations with the women in my class, as well as the writing generated from the classes, have all informed and deepened my work.

Feminist prison scholar, Lori B. Girshick articulates the fraught role that trust plays in ethnographic work within a carceral setting. Girshick is inspired by Kathleen Duff and Cynthia Coll's innovative interviewing protocol while conducting her own interviews with the inside women at Black Mountain Correctional Center for Women, which establishes a feminist lineage of carceral ethnographic work.¹¹⁴ Duff and Coll focus on the process of "exchange which led to authentic group dialog" and a departure from "why the women should talk to them, to one in which the inmates would 'allow us to listen to them.'"¹¹⁵ In a similar spirit, I designed semi-structured interview questions, which I used as a guide to frame the interviews without allowing the questions to impede the flow of what we refer to in Hawai'i as "talk story," which is itself an Indigenous epistemology. Personal narratives resist linear trajectories, thus I privileged a circuitous aesthetic, and drew upon feminist ethnography in search of a methodology that interrogates the hierarchy between interviewer and informant.¹¹⁶

My method sample consists of one-on-one interviews with seventeen women from both Pat's Beginner and Intermediate Writing classes, some of whom were also in the Prison Monologues Program. I additionally had extensive and repeated conversations with three women from my own writing class from 2016–2017. The beginner class typically services twenty women and the Intermediate/Advanced class enrolls thirteen women, many of whom have taken Pat's class three to five times.¹¹⁷ For three terms from 2012–2014, I attended the biweekly writing classes and taught four creative writing classes at the facility as a guest teacher. I have detailed field notes from the classes that I attended as a guest and participant ethnographer.¹¹⁸ I conducted fourteen formal, taped interviews at the facility in the intake section and in an assigned visitor's office, in the spring of 2013. Those interviews were arranged by the administration, and lasted between sixty and 180 minutes. For the most part, I felt comfortable and at liberty to take my time during the interviews. Only once did a guard intrude when I had closed the door; he told me I needed to leave the door ajar. In 2014, I conducted three interviews with women who are past participants of both the creative writing classes and the Prison Monologues and who are now on parole. One of my former students has now been released and invited me to visit her in her transitional housing program, Women's Way, and participate as an active member in her Huikahi circle.¹¹⁹ The demographics of the women whom I interviewed both formally and informally include women who range from their early twenties to their late 50s; one African-American woman from the mainland (the only self-professed practicing Muslim in the prison); five white woman from the mainland; and fourteen women, all born in

Hawai'i and having Filipina, Japanese-Hawaiian, Chinese-Hawaiian, Portuguese, Puerto Rican, Samoan, and Indigenous backgrounds. Three of the women are former Prison Monologuers, all of whom have been recently paroled.¹²⁰ From 2012 to 2013, I attended twenty Prison Monologue performances that included presentations at schools, residential treatments, community colleges, conferences, and events with audiences that ranged from intimate gatherings with forty people to an audience of fifteen hundred at Roosevelt High School. I informally spoke with some of the audience members who shared their overwhelmingly positive impressions of the performances with me.

I also analyze audience assessment conducted after the Performance Monologues, based on correspondence between the new Prison Monologue training lab and the Nānākuli High School sixth-period English class (March 2014) and the Kapolei high school students.¹²¹ Sources include the index cards designed by the students that outline their questions for the women about prison life, the women's responses, the English teacher's evaluation and correspondence, Pat's letter to the class, and formal student evaluation sheets from the Youth Challenge Center—a residential “boot camp” for juveniles at Barber's Point—and from Bobby Benson Treatment Program in Kahuku. I also interviewed women who were active in the Creative Writing classes and who now comprise a peer-generated performance group on the outside, *Voices from the Inside*. These peer-mediated writing and performance groups are illustrative of contemporary pedagogical praxis that attempts to subvert traditional hierarchies of epistemological power structures.

In the pages that ensue, I take the reader with me on a journey through four chapters and epilogue. Each chapter is preceded by an inside woman's life story, and in chapter four, *Love Letters*, a teenager's autobiography. I foreground the written testimony of the inside women and the students as a political tool to counter the civic death of the carceral space, particularly one located in the larger colonized landscape of Hawai'i. In searching for ways to honor the trust involved in personal testimony, I have benefited from scholarship that highlights the voices of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders such as Ty P. Kāwika Tengan's *Native Men Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawai'i*; Cynthia Franklin and Miriam Fuchs *Shifting Ground: Translating Lives and Life Writing in Hawai'i*; and Katherine Irwin and Karen Umemoto's *Jacked Up and Unjust: Pacific Islander Teens Confront Violent Legacies*. In the introduction to a special issue of *Biography*, co-editors Cynthia Franklin and Miriam Fuchs articulate the praxis of linguistic translation and its power to transport to the "surface 'buried lives,'" as it pertains to Pacific Islanders.¹²²

Chapter one, *Pedagogy and Process* begins with the complicated classroom space in which the Kailua Prison Writing Project is situated. Simultaneously resistant to and complicit with dominant carceral tropes, this program's refusal of the therapeutic script lives alongside the embrace of the therapeutic. Here the reader witnesses an assortment of pedagogies: those performed in the Tuesday and Friday classes aligned with the Kailua Prison Writing Project's philosophy, and those performed by repeated institutional intrusions. The second chapter, "*Home*": *Trauma and Desire*, moves from the mediated and communal space of the disembodied classroom to proffer a close

literary analysis of the writing generated in *Hulihia VII: Writings from Prison and Beyond: "Home."* As writing subverts the state-sanctioned imposition of a civic death, so do the polyvocal poems in the prison publication repel reductive notions of home and emancipatory narratives. The *Hulihia* writings appear on the surface to diverge from the political, but as I argue, the women's critique lives in the omissions, ellipses, eccentric grammatical usages, and counter-performativity of their writing.

Chapters three and four turn to the complex relationships between performance and audience. *Performances as Refuge: The Stage Away from the Page* moves from text-based testimony and performance to the public performances of the Prison Monologues Program. Utilizing the lens of performance studies, I analyze the slippage between performativity and life writing, exploring the model of reform behind the Prison Monologues project and the tensions between the "sacred nature of testimony" and the "commodification and consumption of testimonial discourse."¹²³ I explore the quandary of redemption sponsored by the state as both censoring and productive, interrogating how the state exercises the performances for legitimacy. Patterson and WCCC are the recipients of much public praise for Kailua Prison Writing Project, and for the Prison Monologues in particular, which reinforces the redemptive notion of the "prison as a healing place." The final chapter, *Love Letters*, is a participatory, performative dialogic between the Prison Monologues and the students at Nānākuli and Kapolei High schools: Title I schools on Honolulu's leeward/west side. In this chapter, I analyze high school students' reactions to female prisoner monologues in Hawai'i, and frame these dialogues as native Hawaiian epistemologies. This unique archive showcases a

participatory life writing exchange and the avenues in which trauma itself performs as the dialogic. By reading and analyzing the students' life writing texts, which are direct responses to the narratives of memory, pain, and abuse of the inside women, I explore the nature of witnessing, and attend to the cacophony of testimonies evoked. In this sense, unlike the *Home* narratives in chapter two, pain is sutured and testimony is restorative because of its corroborating "live" audience. As we uncover, spectacular bodies are fashioned, but more prominently, a spectacular healing is performed.

It doesn't end when the class ends. It continues.
~ Kailani

NOTES FROM THE INTRODUCTION

¹ E. A. Carson. *Prisoners in 2014* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015).

² The Sentencing Project, Washington, DC, www.sentencingproject.org.

³ For an exploration of the historical incarceration of the Kānaka Maoli—Native Hawaiians—and its contemporary implications, see RaeDeen Keahiolalo-Karasuda, “The Colonial Carceral and Prison Politics in Hawai‘i” (PhD dissertation, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 2008).

⁴ *Creating a Place of Healing and Forgiveness: The Trauma-Informed Care Initiative at the Women’s Community Correctional Center of Hawai‘i* [National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (henceforth NCTIC): Center for Mental Health Services, 2013].

⁵ Erika Kates, *Moving Beyond Prison: Building a Women’s Justice Network in Massachusetts* (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley Centers for Women, 2014).

⁶ “Feminist Ethnographies of Women in Prison,” *Feminist Studies* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 438. For a gendered critique of the prison industrial complex, see Meda Chesney-Lind, *The Female Offender: Girls, Women, and Crime* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1997); Joanne Belknap, *The Invisible Woman: Gender, Crime, and Justice* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1996); K. Faith, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement and Resistance* (Vancouver, Canada: Press Gang Publishers, 1993).

⁷ Nearly twenty years ago, Congress ended a prominent federal effort to support higher education behind bars. “Inmates” of state and federal prisons became ineligible for Pell grants through a provision of the 1994 omnibus crime bill that President Bill Clinton signed into law. The House, then controlled by Democrats, approved the provision on a vote of 312 to 116 in April 1994.

⁸ “Beyond Crisis: College in Prison through the Abolition Undercommons,” *Lateral* 3, no. 3 (Spring 2014), <http://csalateral.org>. The authors argue the “prison uprisings throughout the 1970s—from Pontiac to Attica—pushed for greater access to relevant and quality education for people behind bars. These movements linked educational access to broader aims of self-determination, racial justice, and prison abolition and were connected to larger race radical freedom struggles of the period. In the wake of these legislative and activist demands, education programs in prison flourished. By the 1990s, hundreds of college programs awarding degrees were offered in correctional facilities across the country. In 1994 the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act restricted access to Pell Grants for incarcerated people. . . . As a result, roughly 350 college programs in prison closed.”

⁹ The Bard Prison Initiative, which houses the Consortium for the Liberal Arts in Prison, currently includes Wesleyan University in Connecticut, Grinnell College in Iowa, Goucher College in Maryland, and Bard College in New York, <http://consortium.bard.edu>.

¹⁰ Patterson was joined by Executive Director Toni Bissen, Puanani Burgess of Pu‘a Foundation, and University of Hawai‘i psychologist Patrick Uchigakiuchi. In a television interview at Hawai‘i Pacific University (2013), Bissen articulates that the initiative used the acronym SPACE: staff, programming, administration, community, and environment: all loci to receive trauma informed care training. The trauma initiative uses the framework of a pu‘uhonua for women to “build their beloved community” and to transform their lives. “The field of trauma-

informed care has also emerged in the past 20 years. Rather than focusing on treating trauma symptoms, trauma-informed care is a philosophy for reorganizing service environments to meet the unique needs of survivors and to avoid inadvertent re-traumatization. Trauma-informed practices support resilience, self-care, and healing. In trauma-informed settings, everyone is educated about trauma and its consequences, and everyone is mindful of the need to make the environment more healing and less re-traumatizing for both program participants and staff. A wide range of trauma-specific interventions are now available to address the symptoms of trauma. These include integrated models for trauma and substance abuse treatment, manualized group counseling models, prolonged exposure therapy, body-based interventions, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), and many others.” *Creating a Place of Healing and Forgiveness* (NCTIC, Center for Mental Health Services, 2013).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See “Journey to Justice: A Conversation with Warden Kawika Patterson Part One,” by Dr. Eiko Kosasa, Women’s Community Correctional Center (henceforth WCCC), 2013, posted by the Center of Hegemony Studies, <https://vimeo.com/80406408>. I italicize “him” because in this interview the warden uses the masculine pronoun.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Testimonial language utilized in publicity materials, including by the state of Hawai’i, as well as in local newspapers.

¹⁵ Conversation with Pat Clough at Morning Brew in Kailua, May 15, 2017.

¹⁶ The PEN Prison Writing Program is part of the larger PEN American Center, founded after World War I to “[dismantle] barriers to free expression and reach across borders to celebrate, through writing, our common humanity.” PEN America, <https://www.pen.org/about>.

¹⁷ The International PEN Writing Program began in the 1920s.

¹⁸ Today, American prison writing programs are infiltrated with educators—a movement away from artists as cultural ambassadors to one in which educators are heralded as transmitters of knowledge. A plethora of universities has now connected with prison writing programs and the recent trend is in implementing credit-based courses towards degree acquisition for those inside. Another burgeoning development is the proliferation of “Inside-Out” programs throughout the nation, which serve to dismantle stereotypes and hierarchies between students inside and outside. Walls to Bridges is a Canadian program—an extension and departure from the U.S.-based Inside-Out program, established by Simone Weil Davis. See Lori Pompa’s “Drawing Forth, Finding Voice, Making Change: Inside-Out Learning as Transformative Pedagogy,” 13–25; and Simone Weil Davis’s “Inside-Out: The Reach and Limits of a Prison Education Program,” in *Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education*, ed. Simone Weil Davis and Barbara Sherr Roswell (London, New York, Shanghai: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 163–175. *Turning Teaching Inside Out* is a metatextual exploration of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, which hosts campus-enrolled and incarcerated students together as classmates in postsecondary courses constructed around dialogue, collaboration, and experiential learning within a carceral setting. Similar to the praxis of theatre, where the liminal and unexpected are transformative, Weil Davis celebrates “the conspiracy of committing poetry,” where a single poem can indeed alter our world. For another example of Inside-Out pedagogical praxis, see *Performing New Lives: Prison Theatre*, edited by Jonathan Shailor (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011). I explore the ethics of pedagogical praxis and a call for a feminist-inspired and ethical critical literacy in chapter one.

¹⁹ “Established in 2008, the Prison Arts Coalition (PAC) serves as a national network for prison arts in the United States. Through extensive online outreach and organizing, PAC provides support, information, and partnership opportunities within the American prison arts sector. As an advisory body, PAC provides ongoing, personalized guidance to people who are working to develop arts programs or looking to support incarcerated and formerly incarcerated artists. As a resource, PAC compiles publications, artistic works, research, events, and job postings to share with the public. One of PAC’s most notable resources is a list of prison arts programs around the country, organized by state and region. As a coalition, PAC brings together a consortium of artists, organizations, facilities, students, researchers, and prison arts supporters to build collaboration and strengthen partnership.” (<https://theprisonartscoalition.com/about>).

²⁰ The Prison Arts Coalition programs (<https://theprisonartscoalition.com>) are facilitated by individuals (volunteers, professional artists, teaching artists, students, professors); people in voluntary groups, non-profit organizations, and universities; prison staff or contractors; and partnerships across these various groups. Some programs are offered at a state level and others on a national level, such as the annual PEN Prison Writing Contest.

²¹ See Jack Abbott, Eldridge Cleaver, George Jackson, Angela Davis, and Assata Shakur for examples of writers who held the nation-state culpable for its human rights abuses, particularly against black and Latino communities. The prose, whether fictional, expository, or testimonial, can be articulated as lawless writing. Carceral writing can be read as diasporic writing: a writing of exile. Indigenous scholar Luana Ross and Deena Rymhs explore the pain of exile for marginalized communities who are already in exile: economically, spiritually, and culturally. Indigenous writers are doubly displaced, as they are frequently imprisoned on their Indigenous homelands, in wasteland spaces, proximate to reservations.

²² “In 2008, the creative writing classes hosted its first book dedication in the prison facility courtyard. [Then] Governor Linda Lingle [the sixth governor of Hawai’i from 2002 until 2010] was present and celebrated with the women writers who read their best work. She then challenged them to keep writing, keep learning, to become role models for their children. Acclaimed by TV and print media at the debut event, one reporter suggested that all O’ahu’s high schools should see the production. ‘Prison Monologues’ was born.” From publicity materials disseminated at the Performance Monologues presentation to the PEN Women Writers’ meeting (Pineapple Room, Ala Moana Shopping Mall, Honolulu, 2013).

²³ “The Pacific Rim International Conference, considered one of the most ‘diverse gatherings’ in the world, encourages and respects voices from ‘diverse’ perspectives across numerous areas, including: voices from persons representing all disability areas; experiences of family members and supporters across all disability and diversity areas; responsiveness to diverse cultural and language differences; evidence of researchers and academics studying diversity and disability; stories of persons providing powerful lessons; examples of program providers; and action plans to meet human and social needs in a globalized world.” Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity, <http://www.pacrim.hawaii.edu>.

²⁴ See “Journey to Justice,” interview by Eiko Kosasa. Also extracted from a conversation I had with Warden Patterson at the WCCC facility in 2013.

²⁵ Joy James, ed., *The New Abolitionists: (Neo) Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See Gillian Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

²⁸ See Sarah van Gelder's article, "Prison is a Healing Place," *Beyond Prisons YES! Magazine*, no. 58 (Summer 2011). I use "circle pedagogy" to reference a way of knowing antithetical to linear systems of knowledge making, and as a tribute to the work I did in the Walls to Bridges Collective.

²⁹ A lo'i is a patch of land dedicated to growing kalo (taro). Hawaiians have traditionally used water irrigation systems to produce kalo. The lo'i is part of an ahupu'a, a division of land from the mountain to the sea.

³⁰ See Lorenn Walker and Rebecca Greening, *Reentry & Transition Planning Circles for Incarcerated People* (Hawai'i Friends of Justice & Civic Education, August 20, 2011).

³¹ Women's Correctional Community Center, <http://dps.hawaii.gov/wccc>.

³² Ke Alaula is a unique, therapeutic community-treatment program, based on traditional Hawaiian culture and values. The program is the result of a collaboration between Hawai'i State Department of Public Safety and the WCCC warden and his staff. While outcomes are still being compiled for this relatively new program, testimonials from staff, families of clients, and clients themselves, show the transformation taking place: clients growing in self-esteem, clarity of purpose, and resolve to build happier, healthier, and more productive lives. (Text adapted from the prison's website, <http://dps.hawaii.gov/wccc>.)

³³ "The Bridge is a fifteen-bed open housing unit (no corrections officers are stationed there) providing transitional substance abuse services and assisting women in developing mind, body, and spiritual wellness to support their reentry. Many women in the program have jobs outside the facility. They also participate in community re-integration activities to reduce the rate of recidivism and parole violations." *Creating a Place of Healing and Forgiveness*. (NCTIC, Center for Mental Health Services, 2013).

³⁴ The Total Life Recovery Program is a "faith-based, gender specific program that addresses every area of a woman's life mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically." <http://totalliferecovery.org>.

³⁵ In a 2013 interview with Dr. Eiko Kosasa at the facility, Warden Kawika Patterson makes reference to these statistics, which he says are representative of national statistics on women and crime ("Journey to Justice," WCCC, 2013).

³⁶ Hina Mauka developed Ke Alaula to be a unique, therapeutic community-treatment program, based on traditional Hawaiian culture and values. The program is the result of a collaboration between Hawai'i State Department of Public Safety and the WCCC warden and his staff. While outcomes are still being compiled for this relatively new program, testimonials from staff, families of clients, and clients themselves, show the transformation taking place: clients growing in self-esteem, clarity of purpose, and resolve to build happier, healthier, and more productive lives. (Text adapted from the prison's website, <http://dps.hawaii.gov/wccc>.)

³⁷ Harkins and Meiners, "Beyond Crisis," <http://csalateral.org>.

³⁸ NCTIC, Center for Mental Health Services, 2013.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Patterson was invited as a keynote speaker for "The Cycle of Trauma in the Criminal Justice System," the 2015 Criminal Justice Forum in British Columbia, to address how he "transformed both a youth correctional facility and a women's prison from a modality of punishment to one of treatment using the methodology of trauma-informed care." He stated,

“The Hawai‘i Youth Correctional Facility (HYCF) works closely with the courts and the Office of Youth Services to ensure that any commitment to the HYCF is a “last resort”—after all community-based services have been exhausted. Identification of community-based programs as alternatives to incarceration is ongoing. To enhance gender-specific programming for incarcerated girls, HYCF continues collaborating with Project Kealahou to positively impact the girls at the facility. The project is funded through a federal SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) grant awarded to the DOH. Project Kealahou is twofold. Advocates/counselors from the program work directly with the girls who have been the victims of trauma. Additionally, Youth Correctional Officers who work with the female population receive trauma-informed training to enhance their sensitivity and to broaden their skills and knowledge.” (From the official website.)

⁴¹ Meda Chesney-Lind and Kat Brady, “Prisons,” in *The Value of Hawai‘i: Knowing the Past, Shaping the Future*, eds. Craig Howes, John Osorio, and Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo‘ole (Honolulu: The Biographical Research Center, the University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010), 109–116.

⁴² There is much debate about carceral statistics and the percentage of Native Hawaiians in the state’s prison population. I owe much gratitude to RaeDeen Keahiolalo-Karasuda’s trailblazing work in Hawai‘i’s prisons. She argues that Native Hawaiians are under-reported by the Department of Corrections because people are comfortable with the 40 percent assessment. She posits that Native Hawaiians constitute close to 60 percent of Hawai‘i’s prison population (dissertation, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 2008).

⁴³ Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Justice Policy Institute, University of Hawai‘i, and Georgetown University, 2002. For these statistics, see Meda Chesney-Lind and Brian Bilsky, “Native Hawaiian Youth in Hawai‘i Detention Center: Colonialism and Carceral Control,” *Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being* 7 (2011): 133–158.

⁴⁴ Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Justice Policy Institute, University of Hawai‘i, and Georgetown University, *The Disparate Treatment of Native Hawaiians in the Criminal Justice System*, 2010.

⁴⁵ According to the report, many part Native Hawaiians identify as Samoan or another racial classification, rendering the accurate representation of Native Hawaiians incarcerated in the state opaque.

⁴⁶ I thank Brandy Nālani McDougall for her lecture in her Introduction to Indigenous Studies seminar at the University of Hawai‘i-Mānoa that addressed the conditions under which Native Americans were released from prison in the 1970s (Spring 2016). From 1973–1976, according to *Policy Mic*, 3,406 Native American women were sterilized without permission. The U.S. government recently admitted to forcing thousands of Native American Indian women to be sterilized. <https://mic.com/articles/53723/8-shocking-facts-about-sterilization-in-u-s-history#.3obhazZ03>.

⁴⁷ According to “Reservation to Prison Pipeline,” 2015, <http://qz.com/392342/native-americans-are-the-unseen-victims-of-a-broken-us-justice-system>.

⁴⁸ In South Dakota, the state with the fourth highest percentage of Native American residents, Native Americans comprise 60 percent of the federal caseload, but only 8.5 percent of the total population. The trend continues across states with similarly substantial Native populations, who constitute a third of the caseload in Montana, a quarter in North Dakota, 14 percent in Minnesota, and 13 percent in Oklahoma.

⁴⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/datablog/2014/dec/11/indigenous-imprisonment-rates-still-rising-figures-show>.

⁵⁰ Binghamton University, 5, <http://www.binghamton.edu/aaas/docs/cep-projects-2011-04.pdf>. According to a report by Binghamton University, “Popularly conceptualized as the model minority, Asian and Pacific Islanders are not exempt from the increasing prison population in the United States. Between 1990 and 2000, the Asian and Pacific Islander prisoner population skyrocketed by 250 percent—an unprecedented rise in the prison population in their history. In addition to increasing incarceration rates, deportation has also increased in dramatic numbers, particularly in the Asian and Pacific Islander community.”

⁵¹ Maythee Rojas, *Women of Color and Feminism* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2009).

⁵² Hawai‘i Department of Safety, <http://dps.hawaii.gov/wc>. I use the language verbatim from the website, maintaining their use of words, such as “inmates” and “felons.”

⁵³ <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2016/04/12/the-hawaii-prison-visit-that-cost-my-family-2-370#.XWY9AnKlb>.

⁵⁴ When men from Halawa Correctional Facility were deported to a Texas prison, they were not able to fit in with the Mexican gangs. They formed the USO (United Samoan Organization), the largest Hawaiian gang in the mainland. When they returned to Halawa, they transported undue aggression and violence to the local prison culture. Interview with Kat Brady, *Star Advertiser*, June 27, 2012.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ According to the 2005 Hawai‘i State Legislature statistics.

⁵⁸ *In These Times*, May 2006. As evidence that humans proffer alternate narratives to statistics, several women in my class and Pat’s classes, as well as some I interviewed, reported that they preferred mainland prisons because they offer “better” and more varied programming, are cleaner, and expose them to another world (most of whom had never left Hawai‘i). The decision to finally bring all of Hawai‘i’s female inmates home in 2016 was expedited by the persistent rape of the women by guards in the mainland prisons. See the *New York Times* article, “Hawaii to Remove Inmates Over Abuse Charges,” by Ian Urbina, August 25, 2009. According to a *Hawai‘i News Now* article and video, “Status on Hawai‘i Inmates in Mainland Prisons” (2012): “When Governor Neil Abercrombie took office last year, he said his priority was to tackle the state’s prison overcrowding problem—that includes bringing home some 1,700 Hawaii prisoners locked up in mainland corrections centers.”

⁵⁹ Nationally, women comprise close to 10 percent of the prison population, while in Hawai‘i, women form 11.99 percent of the prison population.

⁶⁰ *Creating a Place of Healing and Forgiveness*, NCTIC, Center for Mental Health Services, 2013.

⁶¹ Peter Wagner and Bernadette Rabuy, *Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2016*, Prison Policy Initiative, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2016.html>.

⁶² Chesney-Lind and Brady, “Prisons.”

⁶³ The Sentencing Project, www.sentencingproject.org.

⁶⁴ Some of these scholars are Robert Perkinson, Michelle Alexander, Angela Davis, and Bruce Franklin.

⁶⁵ The Sentencing Project, www.sentencingproject.org.

⁶⁶ Carson, *Prisoners in 2014*.

⁶⁷ E. A. Carson and W. J. Sabol, *Prisoners in 2011* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012).

⁶⁸ Meda Chesney-Lind and Nikki Jones, eds., *Fighting for Girls: New Perspectives on Gender and Violence* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010); Michael H. Tonry, *Thinking about Crime: Sense and Sensibility in American Penal Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶⁹ <https://www.aclu.org/issues/mass-incarceration/privatization-criminal-justice/private-prisons>.

⁷⁰ <http://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/incarcerated-women-and-girls>.

⁷¹ See Meda Chesney-Lind and Lisa Pasko, *Girls, Women, and Crime: Selected Readings* (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2004).

⁷² See Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).

⁷³ See Chesney-Lind, *Fighting for Girls*; and Barbara A. Owen, *"In the Mix": Struggle and Survival in a Women's Prison* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

⁷⁴ Luana Ross, *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality* (University of Texas Press, 1998); and Deena Rymhs, *From the Iron House: Imprisonment in First Nations Writing* (Toronto: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 13.

⁷⁵ In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment criminalized African Americans and ushered them into a "civic death." This normalized the legal and cultural disenfranchisement of African Americans in American society. Many theorists in the field of American crime and punishment witness the civic death of imprisonment as a continuation of slavery. See Robert Perkinson, *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2010); and Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010, 2012).

⁷⁶ The following texts, which employ feminist perspectives on trauma theory, are primary influences on my argument that trauma studies intersects with prison studies and women's life writing:

Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); Jacqui M. Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Jill Kerr Conway, *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998); Louise De Salvo, *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1999); Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2001); Linda S. Maier and Isabel Dulfano, eds., *Woman as Witness: Essays on Testimonial Literature by Latin American Women* (New York, Oxford: P. Lang, 2004); Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*; Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: A Diary of a Law Professor* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1992); Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999); and Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁷⁷ Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Innterruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 83. "Hidden transcripts" is a reference to James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁷⁸ Women's programming, particularly in creative writing, is sparse and few scholars have paid attention to them. Collective anthologies, such as *Women Writing and Prison: Activists Scholars and Writers Speak Out*; *Razor Wire Women: Prisoners, Activists, Scholars*,

and Artists; *Wall Tappings: An International Anthology of Women's Prison Writings*; and *Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education* are the exception, as well as the work that Wally Lamb and Eve Ensler have conducted in the York Correctional Institution in Connecticut and the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York respectively. Nevertheless, the latter examples involved ethical considerations in that both Lamb and Ensler are celebrities and that Ensler employs “forced confessionals” in her writing class, as well as showcases her own transformation, which feminist prison practitioners have cautioned against due to their potential for traumatic re-injury. See Eve Ensler’s *What I Want My Words to Do to You* (PBS, December 16, 2003) and Wally Lamb’s *I’ll Fly Away: Further Testimonies from the Women of York Prison* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007).

⁷⁹ Beverly R. Fletcher, Lynda Dixon Shaver, and Dreama G. Moon, eds., *Women Prisoners: A Forgotten Population* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993).

⁸⁰ Notable scholars who view prisons refracted through race include Robert Perkinson, Michelle Alexander, Michael Tonry, Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, Beth Richie, John Edgar Wideman, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore.

⁸¹ The scholars who view prisons through the lens of gender analysis include Estelle Freedman, Angela Davis, and Meda Chesney-Lind.

⁸² Scholars who view prisons refracted through class include Meda Chesney-Lind, Beth Richie, Jonathan Simon, John Edgar Wideman, and Michelle Alexander.

⁸³ Many of these theorists call for the downsizing of the industry while others, like scholar/activists Angela Davis and Ruth Gilmore, agitate for the abolition of the prison industrial complex—a position that I, too, endorse.

⁸⁴ Judith A. Scheffler, ed. *Wall Tappings: An International Anthology of Women's Prison Writings, 200 AD to the Present* (New York: Feminist Press, 2002); Jodie Michelle Lawston and Ashley E. Lucas, eds., *Razor Wire Women: Prisoners, Activists, Scholars, and Artists* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011); Davis and Roswell, eds., *Turning Teaching Inside Out*.

⁸⁵ For an example of pedagogical anthologies, see Wally Lamb’s *Couldn’t Keep It to Myself: Wally Lamb and The Women of York Correctional Institution* (New York: Regan Books, 2003).

⁸⁶ Lucas, “Identifying Marks: What the Razor Wire Hides,” epilogue to *Razor Wire Women: Prisoners, Activists, Scholars, and Artists* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011), 301–303.

⁸⁷ Seminal prison autobiographies by Angela Davis and Assata Shakur contest the notion of imprisoned women as apolitical.

⁸⁸ Rymhs, *From the Iron House*, 13. I explore the “second hearing” and secondhand witnesses in both chapters one and four.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁰ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 124.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁹⁴ Tobi Jacobi and Ann Folwell Stanford, eds., *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars and Writers Speak Out* (New York and London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014).

⁹⁵ Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009), 409.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 416.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 412.

¹⁰⁰ Many ethnographers, academics, and practitioners in the prison articulate the difficulty in inhabiting the role of both ethnographer and teacher in an incarcerate space. In “Closed Doors: Ethical Issues with Prison Ethnography,” John M. Coggeshall unveils the particular obstacles involved in both teaching and conducting ethnography in a medium-security male prison in a place he never names. Ultimately, Coggeshall discloses that he felt a moral ambivalence towards his informants, the “inmates,” and was encumbered by the necessity to choose between the institution and his informants/students.

¹⁰¹ Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Autoethnography (Qualitative Research Methods)*, 2nd. ed. (Los Angeles and London: Sage Publications, Inc., 2014).

¹⁰² Karen McCarthy, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Julie M. Taylor, *Paper Tangos* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Alice Goffman, *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014). For a methodological text on feminist ethnography, see Elizabeth Etorre, *Autoethnography as Feminist Method: Sensitising the Feminist “I”* (London: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁰³ Pat shared this with me in an e-mail correspondence on June 18, 2017, after she read the dissertation. Her reading ushered in several e-mail exchanges between Pat and me, which I incorporate into the dissertation.

¹⁰⁴ As I develop the dissertation into a book manuscript, I plan to incorporate the inside women’s reflections and responses. Due to the time constraints of dissertation submission, I was unable to include them here.

¹⁰⁵ I have nonetheless continued to seek to locate women who shared their stories with me, in the hope of incorporating their feedback prior to publishing this dissertation as a book.

¹⁰⁶ Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2001).

¹⁰⁷ See Wendy Wolters Hinshaw and Tobi Jacobi, “What Words Might Do: The Challenge of Representing Women in Prison and Their Writing,” *Feminist Formations* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 67–90. Also see Weil Davis, “Inside Out,” in *Turning Teaching Inside Out*, 163–175.

¹⁰⁸ This tactical redistribution of power is inspired by feminists committed to social justice. See Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁹ See Hinshaw and Jacobi, “What Words Might Do,” 67–90.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ See Weil Davis, “Inside Out,” 163–175.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ The interviews accompanied a consent form that was signed by all participants, according to IRB requisites.

¹¹⁴ Lori B. Girshick, *No Safe Haven: Stories of Women in Prison* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999).

¹¹⁵ Kathleen M. Duff and Cynthia Garcia Coll, *Reframing the Needs of Women in Prison: A Relational and Diversity Perspective* (Project Report, no. 4), Wellesley Center for Women (Wellesley, MA: Stone Center, 1995), 16.

¹¹⁶ I applied for and received IRB approval on February 21, 2013 to conduct my interviews at WCCC. I renewed my IRB February 21, 2014 for an additional year.

¹¹⁷ The number of women in the classes shifted over the term, with the beginning class being more volatile. Midway, women were dropped from the class due to behavioral and administrative infractions. At times, there were issues with “wives” taking the class together and disrupting the class community.

¹¹⁸ Pat’s class terms run for ten weeks and there are two terms per year.

¹¹⁹ Huikahi (literally “individual and community”) is an Indigenous form of restorative justice. Women’s Way is a parole re-entry and drug-treatment program. Unfortunately, Tessa who wrote humorous poems, such as “Fat Lips” and was a fan of Angela Davis, was returned to WCCC after a couple months at Women’s Way due to a violation of their rules: the use of her cell phone. Tessa accompanied me to Angela Davis’s keynote address “Freedom is a Constant Struggle,” at the University of Hawai’i Mānoa Campus, April 8, 2016.

¹²⁰ At the time, Vailea, one of the original Prison Monologue women, was participating in the “outside” Performance Monologue group entitled *Voices from the Inside*, comprised of other Prison Monologues alumnae. *Voices from the Inside* is active in addressing the broader community, performing for school groups and conferences.

¹²¹ After Vailea, Ivelisse, and Kaipo were released from prison, the Prison Monologues lost their core members. Only Liezel remained. Pat established a Prison Monologue training lab, which Liezel led over the summer of 2014 when Pat left for California. I attended a few initial rehearsals and laboratory workshops. Up until early 2015, the group was still in training and had not reached the polish and cohesion of the more established Prison Monologues group. At the first lab rehearsal, Pat disseminated a Prison Monologues expectation guide that addresses credibility, timing, standards, investment, the role of writing, presentation skills, and practice. The guide includes a self-assessment as per teamwork, honesty, leadership, initiative, motivation, and the “serving versus helping philosophy.”

¹²² Ty P. Kawika Tengan, *Native Men Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawai’i* (Duke University Press, 2008); Cynthia Franklin and Miriam Fuchs, “Shifting Ground: Translating Lives and Life Writing in Hawai’i,” *Biography* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2009), vii–xxix. Irwin and Umamoto’s *Jacked Up and Unjust* is a nine-year ethnographic collaboration with “inner city and rural girls and boys in Hawai’i who face racism, sexism, poverty, and political neglect.” *Jacked Up and Unjust: Pacific Islander Teens Confront Violent Legacies* (University of California Press, 2016).

¹²³ Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*.

CHAPTER ONE

Pedagogy and Process

Governmental Seduction

*Look into my eyes and tell me what it is you see
Concede your mind to intertwine with my fantasy
Let me seduce your spirit and allow my soul to lead
Us to a place of style and grace beyond what you believe.*

*Open up your heart and feel me tell you all about it
Bring your body close to mine but be careful not to crowd it
This world is open to you, baby, til the day you doubt it
Let me play with your emotions until you can't live without it.*

*I'll make your greed insatiable
I'll feed you what's not edible
I'll claim it as incredible
You'll never want to let it go.*

*But listen even deeper and let's have a conversation
Watch a little closer as I infiltrate your nation
See through conspiracies, religion and FDA with education
And when you start to understand, sedate with medication*

*So close your eyes and start to dream, I'll rush to meet you there
Embrace my empty promises. Desensitize your cares
Then inebriate with poisons when it's more than you can bear
Uniformity is key to every prey that I ensnare.*

~ Alana¹

Ripe with misalliances, Alana's poem "Governmental Seduction" exemplifies the tension that resides within the Kailua Prison Writing Project. The classroom, I argue, performs concurrently as a healing and disciplinary space in which the re-inscription and rejection of programmatic and institutional neoliberal narratives coexist.² While this incarcerated classroom may share tropes and pedagogical praxes with other prison

classrooms in the U.S., it is not representative of them. As we experience the class itself and its multifarious interruptions, we attend to a community of writers that counters but never escapes the constraints of prison life.³ To watch these classroom performances unfold is to confront a viewer's series of anxious questions. In what context is writing either liberating or therapeutic? If writing works as re-injury, then how can it be simultaneously transformative? Writing as self-discovery is a redemptive script and is embroidered into the program philosophy.⁴ Similarly, it is a recurrent theme in the literature by arts practitioners working in the prisons, as well as in the women's writings. *How do we find ourselves through writing?* The question assumes a reverence for the arts as a means of catharsis and healing. Yet can writing heal?

As educators, we all struggle with the classroom as a troubled space, rife with spoken and unspoken hierarchies, power dynamics, and vested interpersonal relationships. Feminist critic and educator bell hooks posits the classroom as an erotic space and conjoins epistemological passion with erotic passion. Classrooms can be spaces of violence, of love, and of consummate potential. If classrooms are indeed challenging sites, imagine the institutional classroom in an extended institution—the locked-up/locked-down landscape of a prison. I have spent the last four years in one particular prison classroom, in one particular penal facility. The narratives of the classroom that I share in this chapter are imbued with the essence of a specific classroom community. The actors in Pat's beginning and intermediate/advanced creative writing classes that convene for two hours on Tuesday and Friday mornings shift from term to term, however there are many repeat-takers who re-appear in the

advanced class. The teacher, Pat, remains constant. My own creative writing class, entitled Poetry and Performance Lab, utilizes a variant of Pat's literary archive. Informed by spoken word and the performativity of life stories, it unveils the ways in which textual choices can inform students' writing.

The Kailua Prison Writing Project is both resistant to and complicit with dominant carceral tropes. Incarcerated classrooms and those in the "free" world are volatile sites, out of which emerge pedagogical encounters and relationships that are impossible to enclose. What transpires in any classroom always exceeds the boundaries of narrative infiltrations—those of the educator/institution, as well as the interpersonal exchanges that flow between the participants and writers in the classroom. The women in the creative writing classes at WCCC form a community of witnesses who elude, and at times claim, redemptive scripts. A facilitator can elicit acts of imagination in a pedagogical space, but the direction in which imagination blooms cannot be harnessed.

Throughout this chapter, you will witness an assortment of pedagogies: those in Pat's Tuesday and Friday classroom space; those guided by the Kailua Prison Writing Project's philosophy; and those performed by the institutional intrusions. I use the concept of "witness" not in any religious sense—although as Pat articulates, the act of witnessing is one imbued with "honor"—but rather to emphasize that the witnessing process is a liberatory and revelatory one.⁵ Carceral workers, particularly prison guards, frequently assess prison arts programming as frivolous or threatening, and arts practitioners find that they must balance their allegiances to those inside—their students—with their accommodation to the powers that be within the institution. External

forces—both ideological and institutional—inevitably infiltrate, and in fact structure the classroom space. Positioning the reader of this chapter as a witness encourages a direct engagement with the roles that Pat and the inside women in the creative writing classes inhabit. These pedagogies, the programmatic guiding philosophy, and the institutional intrusions ultimately fail to contain the moments of witnessing, spontaneity, and improvisation in the classroom. These living scripts persist despite the institutional constraints.

I arrive at Tuesday's advanced class on February 19, 2013 at WCCC. Kailani, a charismatic woman with short spiky gray hair and dimples confides: "I see everyone's spirit today. Some dim and some bright." Pat Clough, director of the Kailua Prison Writing Project and creative writing teacher, begins the class by asking the women to listen to the Indigo Girls' song "I Bit the Better Bug" and freewrite associations to the lyrics, including their own moods, reflections, and thoughts.⁶ She usually begins with a writing prompt, but this alternate modality is experiential and sensory. At the end of Tuesday's class, Pat asks the thirteen women to say one thing they took from the class that day. The words spill out like burnished stones: "spirit," "inspired." It is my turn. "Meditative," I blurt. "What did you say—potato?" asks one woman, Tatiana, with disheveled fibrous gray hair and spectacles, who frequently thinks outside of the box. "No, meditative," I repeat. But what I really wanted to say was "pain."

I begin with a creative recreation of the classroom that allows the reader to witness from the multiple standpoints of students and teacher the transformations conceived in the classroom space. These transformations occur through a host of narrative scripts—therapeutic, Christian, familial/maternal—and via interpersonal relationships among the inside participants of the classroom, as well as between the women and Pat. These narratives and pedagogies, even as they are corrective, offer specific scripts for healing. Affect, empathy, and voyeurism are ingredients that complicate therapeutic contracts and the institutionalized carceral narrative inflects/infects the pedagogical space. The carceral structure interrupts, inflicting heterogeneous assaults and suffering. In this way, the macro institution disciplines the possibilities of transformation and informs the ways in which women encode trauma in writing.

This chapter conveys the particularities of two days in Pat’s Friday advanced writing class to foreground the construction of programmatic narratives of redemption and rehabilitation—narratives that sit uneasily alongside discomfiting institutional intrusions. The women shape the narratives themselves as they forge alliances, bonds, and meaning via their spontaneous interactions in the classroom space. The classes perform congruently and discordantly with ethical critical literacy praxis. One programmatic harnessing and healing effect is the conflation of the writing program with therapy. Diverse—and often incompatible—healing modalities fall under the term “therapeutic.” There is therapy as the sacred, therapy as secular, and therapy as the familiar American-based 12-step program, evident in the Hina Mauka and Total Life

Recovery programs from which many of the writers come. Additionally, there are methods of constraining therapy—enactments of violence to the therapeutic, and a disciplining of the therapeutic.⁷ The experience of healing that may occur through witnessing and participating in a writing community considered “sacred” by many of its participants is a theme that infuses the pedagogical space.⁸ Inside women utilize the term to refer to the writing process, and their relationship with one another and with Pat. Pat herself refers to the classroom as a “cocoon” where she and the women together create transformative work even as she takes care to distinguish her own pedagogical practice from therapy:

Mark and I spoke regularly during those years and he informed me that there was some concern that I was dabbling in therapy with the women without any training/credential to do so. As far as my classes were concerned, I monitored very closely the kind of situations that sometimes came up when the women cried or got angry at someone else in class for saying something hurtful. In hindsight, I became more “firm” and more aware of how quickly some personalities could spin out of control. In the 12 years of the program, no one went to the clinic or to suicide watch as a result of my class, no one was hurt in class and there were no reports that I was doing any psychological damage.⁹

What, precisely, the inside women mean by “healing” is decidedly subjective, individual, and difficult to assess. Each experience is unique and congruent with a woman’s personal experiences, her history, and the reasons for her incarceration. Processes of healing differ depending upon where the injury occurred: in the institution, within the families of origin, or as a result of colonial violence. Most inside women have experienced multiple forms of trauma, and many—though not all—testify to the transformative potential of the Kailua Prison Writing Program. This dissertation explores their testimony of how a creative writing program might actually “heal.” I remain

conscious throughout of the limitations of any particular institutional project that purports to ameliorate trauma, and conscious of the constraints and violence inflicted by incarceration itself. Trauma endures; healing is a process without a definitive endpoint. Yet these realities do not invalidate many women’s testimony that the creative writing classes, the sharing of community, and the act of self-expression is profoundly meaningful. Rather than imposing my own definition of “healing,” I have relied on the testimonies that the women shared with me.

I return here to that February morning of Pat’s advanced writing class with which I began. Today the class is held in the larger space shared with the facility’s education “department,” which houses a supervised computer lab, rather than in the smaller, mildewy room where we usually meet.¹⁰ Ten women of various ages and races (ha’ole, Native Hawaiian, hapa) are present.¹¹ There is a white board on which Pat begins to write the date and agenda for the day. This could be any classroom on the continent. *But it is not.* I am reminded of this as I look around at the inside women all dressed by the state in their prison uniforms. Many of the women are distinguished by creative markings of tattoos that reference past relationships and cultural origins—and they are wearing thick white socks with their *slippas* because it is a chilly day for Hawai’i. The women are late today. They are frequently detained on work lines, at parole hearings, by administrative infractions, or simply because the adult correction officer refuses to call them to class.¹²

Pat, like any successful pedagogue, has multiple rituals embroidered into the fabric of her classes. She initiates the class by asking the women to pull out a word from

the koa bowl that is a perpetual character in her classes.¹³ Someone draws the word *Wai Wai*, which is translated by one of the Native Hawaiian speakers as “without water there is no prosperity.” This summoned quote resonates with life inside and outside, confirming penal theorists’ analysis of the prison as a microcosm of American culture. In the one-on-one interviews I conduct at the facility, the women frequently voice that the writing classes have “saved their lives.” This redemptive narrative articulates a utopian enclave—the pedagogical—wherein a sacrosanct community is performed and re-enacted within the dystopia of incarceration. The heralding by the inside women of the creative writing classes as a utopian space is troublesome because of the institutional intrusions that disrupt and alter the classroom and the power hierarchies enacted in the classroom space. The censorship of the women’s life narratives and women’s corresponding performances of self in the ensuing prison publication, *Hulihia* (Transformations) also complicate any simplistic reading of the writing program as simply “liberating” the voice.¹⁴ Theme, content, form, and canon, as well as the editorial process, and even the beloved relationship the inside students have with Pat, both enable and constrain the possibilities of the classroom space.

The classes are in effect inextricable from their institutional setting. Despite the fact that the women attest that the creative writing classes function as a haven, the pedagogical space is never immune from institutional intrusion and fracture. In the incarcerated classroom, we witness narratives of healing coupled with violence that lurk under the shadow of the institution. The small education rooms in which we usually meet are no bigger than ten by twelve with drab floors and desks that reek of mold.

Divided by a glass partition, they construct a persistent surveillance across multiple borders: institutional, systemic, and programmatic.¹⁵ Today the women in the adjacent class, seemingly bored, peer into Pat's class in which the women are mostly engaged. Their eyes pierce through the glass jealously. Violence and contradiction contaminate the "utopian" pedagogical space. The women are active agents in that they both resist and comply with the dis-ease. The tissue box is a persistent accoutrement, alongside the koa bowl, a bunch of dog-eared dictionaries, and a container with pens adorned with colorful flowers. I often resort to one of these pens, albeit reluctantly, as the smell of mold is pungent. In setting up my own guidelines in the classroom, I opt against the Kleenex box. In a letter to me, Pat validates her choice to utilize the Kleenex box in her classrooms and its role in the healing process.

Writing freed the women to tell us about their hidden pain, about their traumas, the beatings and rapes, betrayals, standing in door ways getting high, leaving their children, knowing they were gay after repeated rapes at the hands of an uncle or stepfather. That's why the Kleenex box. They would comfort each other in class and learn for the first time that their pain was the same. They did that out loud often after reading/listening to something raw and fresh and new. There were class periods where all we did was listen to each other, when the written word needed elaboration or opened up more that needed to be said. We, in that classroom represented hope. Healing came from release and we gave it time to develop together. You could feel it. It was a privilege.¹⁶

Two women join the class belatedly: now a total of twelve women are present. One woman, Imani, arrives in her signature white kitchen outfit, stained with oil spots, after her encounter with the parole board. No one needs to ask how the meeting went. She is trembling and in tears. Pat walks quietly behind her, places her firm hands on Imani's shoulders, and passes her a tissue. Trauma can enter the classroom in a

myriad of ways: a reading of a poem that chronicles a woman's suffering, the looming shadow of a guard "escorting" a woman in chains, a barking loudspeaker that banishes the women to the head count in the yard. In Imani's case, the women are dynamic actors in the therapeutic script, passing the Kleenex box in a circle of shared compassion that requires no signal.¹⁷ Oftentimes laughter functions as an accompaniment to pain or a "you, go girl" shout-out when a poem is especially poignant or applicable to the inside women's lives. In this way, an archive of feelings, affect, verbiage, and gestures are present in the classroom as a moral and emotional guide. The archive of feelings in this pedagogical space overwhelms the textual archive.

Pat is wearing all white today. A white running shirt hugs her taut body and sinewy arms. Her short blonde hair frames an angular face, slightly weathered from outdoor activities and beaches. She is in phenomenal condition for a woman in her 60s, her wiry body canvas to the fact that she is an avid marathoner. Pat was a recent import from California to Kailua, the town adjacent to the women's prison nestled against the Ko'olau Mountains between Kailua and Waimanalo—homestead land.¹⁸ Kailua was once a sleepy beach town and many of its inhabitants have actively protested the gentrification of the neighborhood. With the acquisition of a Whole Foods and a Target, the town is losing some of its charm. Busloads of affluent Japanese tourists, and those seeking a fantasy wedding on the beach, descend in Barbie doll dresses on the town.¹⁹ The tourists, and perhaps even some of Kailua town's inhabitants, are unaware of their proximity to the women's prison. Pat's own introduction to the prison was haphazard. On a typical sunny day in 2003, Pat was running in her new neighborhood when she

spotted women in orange jumpsuits on a work line. She approached them and discovered that they were “inmates” from WCCC. A few weeks later, the persistent Pat visited the prison with an offer to start a creative writing program. An English high school teacher raised in the school system by nuns, Pat has become a combination of no-nonsense, inspiring mentor and benevolent mother for the women. The women I interviewed unanimously sang her praises and expressed their admiration of her stalwart care and her genuine demeanor.

Pat frequently writes the prefaces and includes some of her own poetry in the *Hulihia* editions, which coheres with feminist anthologies of prison writing that attempt to dismantle boundaries between those inside and outside. Pat’s writing assignments and textual explorations follow a “workshop model,” although the editorial process is hers alone.²⁰ Peer feedback in terms of critique is rare in Pat’s class because she never initiates it, which positions Pat as the sole critic of the women’s writing. In sharing the dissertation with Pat, she responds to my critique of a lack of peer feedback in her classes. I share her response in my commitment to a feminist ethnography and to illustrate how we all are influenced by our training, past memories, and subjectivities.

They [the women] learned how to critique—not by saying simply, “oh that’s really good,” rather with tears, laughter—the kind of unspoken critique that I think meant more to the writers than an analysis they were only just learning how to do for themselves.²¹

Today the class is meeting in the main education center that is shared with administrators and houses the computer “lab,” rather than in the small dank room where we typically meet. Students do not have access to the Internet in the facility and their

computer access in the relatively clean lab is monitored. A facilitator needs to set up a supervised “study hall” for the women ahead of time if they require a typed “home”-work assignment.²² The inside assistants in the lab are helpful. Dressed in the standard red T-shirt and blue pants that signify their minimum-custody status, one woman, Connie, in her 50s, loves to “talk story” with me.²³ Connie was born in Mozambique and feels an affinity with me because I was born in South Africa. The assumptions and intersections of personal geographies are marked in the ties of kinship we form, however preposterous and fictive, across oceans and as migrants. Each week Connie helpfully asks if I need copies. When I sub for Pat on a few occasions, Connie assists me with copying the roster for the day. When word arrives that she has finally received parole after months of waiting, we learn that the parole board is extraditing her to Portugal, colonizer of Mozambique. Connie speaks Portuguese from her childhood in Mozambique, but she lacks any personal connections to Portugal and furthermore her daughter lives in the United States.²⁴ This displaced exile is one of the many absurd regulations that occur in a world rooted in a colonial imaginary.

Race plays out rather differently at the WCCC. The women in my creative writing class, some of whom are Samoan, openly discuss the racial hierarchies that they perceive at the facility. In their view, the Samoan women receive preferential treatment because most of the adult correction officers (ACOs) are Samoan and many of the inside women are related to the guards: “Everyone’s someone’s cousin or aunty here.” The women express that after the Samoans, the Native Hawaiians are recipients of more privileges than the rest of the general population, followed by all of the mixed

races and finally the ha'ole (white).²⁵ This is an inversion of the racial hierarchies that incarcerated women typically face.

Pat utilizes *The Diary of Anne Frank* as a seminal text in her classes: an outsider text to the oeuvre of a white American masculinity—Ernest Hemingway, Robert Frost and T.S. Eliot—that she typically employs. However, Anne Frank certainly falls into what Pat articulates as a heroic narrative, which she envisions as resounding with the women's "own heroic journeys":

I did use mainland and European writers extensively such as Hemingway and Frost and Maya Angelou. Plays such as *Raisin in the Sun* and *The Miracle Worker*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, novels like *Old Man and the Sea*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* became templates for excellent writing but more importantly of heroic character—people overcoming enormous obstacles closely described, painfully lived. I learned the women responded to these large "prompts" and began to find themselves within their own heroic journeys.

I firmly believed that reading was central to writing and that the women needed to move beyond James Patterson and his plots in order to discover good writing. We developed a library at the facility of all kinds of literature both white and European and Pacific Rim. The women knew they had to read and I do think it helped them express themselves with growing authenticity.²⁶

A Jewish Dutch teenager and Holocaust victim, Anne Frank may seem a curious choice, albeit one canonized in many high school curriculums. Anne Frank made her way into Pat's curriculum after Pat traveled to Amsterdam, where she made a personal pilgrimage to the Anne Frank museum. She returned with photos from the museum which she shares with her students and uses as artwork in *Hulihia*, alongside the women's writerly engagement with Anne Frank's daily affirmation: "Work, love, courage and hope / make me good and help me cope." This affirmation is performed as a mantra

in the classroom throughout the term. Here, the personal biography/autobiography of the facilitator intermingles with the life stories performed by the collective inside writers in *Hulihia*.

Pat spends much time developing a relationship between the protagonist, Anne, and the women. She is passionate in how she seeks in Anne Frank's incarceration in an attic a meaningful echo for her students, perhaps one that resonates in specific ways for the Native Hawaiian women. Anne's experience as a prisoner in her own house within a political landscape of terror resounds with the imprisonment of Queen Lili'uokalani—the last ruler of the Hawaiian Kingdom—in the rooms fashioned as a cell in her home: 'Iolani Palace.

Perhaps the starkest example of the centrality of punishment in the Hawaiian experience of colonialism is the imprisonment of Queen Lili'uokalani. The queen actually spent a considerable period of time in prison and would write about her experience in vivid detail in her memoir, *Hawai'i's Story by Hawai'i's Queen* (Liliuokalani, 1898/1991). After a failed attempt to challenge the coup that had removed her from her throne, Queen Lili'uokalani was arrested on January 16, 1895, and imprisoned. She described the cell from memory:

“There was a large, airy, uncarpeted room with a single bed in one corner. The other furniture consisted of one sofa, a small square table, one single common chair, and iron safe, a bureau, a chiffonier, and a cupboard, intended for eatables, made of wood with wire screening to allow the circulation of the air through the food. Some of these articles may have been added during the days of my imprisonment.”²⁷

Both Anne and Queen Lili'uokalani crafted their personal autobiographies while incarcerated. Anne's diary, as well as Queen Lili'uokalani's memoir and her song “Aloha Oe” or “Farewell to Thee,” are resistant texts, enshrined in a specific historical and literary canon.

At one point, Pat exuberantly exclaims, “*become Anne.*” This literary and psychic transubstantiation with a historical figure in a text, someone who lived and suffered a wrongful discriminatory incarceration is rich fodder from which to generate writing. Pat hands back the homework pieces on “Stillness.” They are blank, bereft of comments. “You didn’t do anything wrong. I just want more meat! In poetry analysis, we look at people who did it really well, in terms of conveying their feelings. Analysis is never just about wandering around in a pool of tears. We need our mind. Good poetry carries us into someone else’s shoes; usually we are [moving around in] our own. Let’s apply our own truths to a quote by Anne Frank. It is good discipline. Like running the 500 dash.”

These appraisals are examples of Pat’s indebtedness to a “good discipline”—perhaps the good discipline imprinted on the young Pat by a cluster of nuns. Pat’s moral script summons the women to a “pick yourself up by the bootstraps” ideology in which the therapeutic extends the corrective gesture. Pat’s maternal love is harnessed via an American no-nonsense antipathy to self-pity. Wallowing in self-pity is not an option in Pat’s classes. But then there is the Kleenex box. Classroom spaces are ripe with paradox.

Pat’s “good discipline” points to the complexity of literature and arts programming in a carceral space and to the contested philosophy of a benevolent literacy. Prison writing scholar Patrick Berry discusses the moral bind that literacy practitioners face in the prisons due to their deep belief in the “power of literacy to improve individuals’ lives socially, economically and personally”—beliefs that are not always harmonious with the experiences of students from marginalized communities.²⁸ Berry argues that these

practitioners are “immersed in a popular culture that cherishes narrative links between literacy and economic advancement . . . and further, between such advancement and a ‘good life.’”²⁹ In this way, literacy programming in prisons can resemble acts of colonization. By contrast, Megan Sweeney takes to task critics who in their disembodied abstract musings, refuse to acknowledge the self-growth of those inside and the hope that arts programming can offer. Sweeney cites celebrity “inmate” and carceral abolitionist, Angela Davis and longtime prison writing practitioner, Susan Nagelson, who recognize the institutional space as potentially one of self-growth, despite their political investment in demolishing the system.³⁰

A DETOUR INTO FORM

Writerly form works in the classes as an ironic savior because the women undeniably privilege content over structure. Nonetheless, the women are able to relate to the form of the nineteen-line villanelle: a grammar of constraint. At first, the women “divine” their villanelles, which are not bona fide villanelles but rather approximations, without instruction about the form of the villanelle.³¹ Eventually the ritual of repetition and the constraint of the form become familiar, and they are able to create effective villanelles without much guidance. In this way, writing is demystified, and it ultimately presents as a vehicle of expressivity. Pat discusses the ways in which curriculum building and lesson plans required improvisation:

It was all experimentation as I got to know the woman and experience what they weren’t getting in other prison programming. Adapting was constant. Literary forms emerged in my own research, like the villanelle, which I almost dismissed but decided to try and oh my, how they responded to the villanelle as a form for finding what was hiding.³²

In a conversation between Kailani and Pat, Kailani explains that form can sometimes be an obstacle to expression: “I have to remove the barrier. I was in a writing frenzy. Always writing in bullets. Keeping me shut out from my own feelings and also from reaching other people.” Pat responds to the power inherent in form: “You broke your structure because it wasn’t serving you.” Pat’s pedagogies thus remain flexible enough to accommodate different needs. In an interview with a repeat-taker of Pat’s advanced classes, Hyacinth, a calm woman in her fifties, finds significance in prescribed forms: “Ms. Pat is genuine. I have taken her class about five times and I learn something new each time. I accomplished something I never thought I could, like my villanelle that was published in *Hulihia IX: Writings from Prison, Conversations with Myself*. ”

The repeating refrain, “There is a place past grief,” in Imani’s villanelle, published in *Hulihia IX: Writings from Prison, Conversations with Myself*, functions as hermetic seal for the author’s anguish and offers a byway to an imagined space, liberated from trauma.

There is a place past grief.

I’ve become aware that my game face does not suit me,
that it’s a mask that is fake and boring.
When I find myself in a still place knowing that I’ve come up short,
there—I hear a whisper

There is a place past grief.

It’s a place where I don’t feel smothered,
where kind words, tender mercies
and hollow sympathies don’t feed my pain.
Like dousing a flame with propane,

it's a place where I am not faking it to make it.

There is a place past grief.

It's a place where it's safe to begin to heal,
Where the whispers begin to talk to my soul,
Where sadness is exchanged for soothing memories.
I cannot wait for it to come to me.
I must choose to journey there with a change of thought,
change of heart, change of will.

Out of stillness, a higher voice calls
"There is a place past grief."
I am meant to go on.

~ Imani³³

The pedagogical space of the classroom is heralded by the women as intimate, safe, and separate from the rest of the facility, and the women speak about the disconnect between what "you write on the page" and "what you do back in the dorm." This subtheme circulates frequently in the classroom, and resurfaces in the one-on-one interviews I conduct at the facility. Women who fail to uphold the code of honor outside of the classroom space stand accused of betraying the "beloved community"—a code rooted in the spiritual indoctrination and institutionalized morality that is reinforced in the creative writing classes, in the prison programming, particularly the Total Life Recovery and Hina Mauka programs, and within the larger institution.

The seriousness and dedication with which most of the women invest of themselves in the writing classes, particularly the repeat-takers, is striking. For many of the women, writing functions as an evolutionary narrative of freedom that allows them to access past memories and corresponding traumas and re-record them as a continuous living document, which even though painful, serves as a guide to a "life worth living." In

this sense, writing is a radical and therapeutic process. In our two-hour interview, Lahela conveys how that the discipline of writing and reading, a restraint of form, tethers her to a present rather than dwelling on her past and keeps her intellectually and emotionally resilient. Twenty-three-year-old Lahela, with onyx short, wavy hair that frames her expressive eyes, reveals “I have been institutionalized my whole life.” Lahela, who is gay, grew up homeless on a West Side beach with her two gay sisters after their mother’s suicide. Her one sister, to whom she is very close, was sentenced with Lahela for the same crime and has been shuffled in and out of SHU (segregated housing unit). Lahela has a fierce intellect and a propensity towards brooding introspection. She reads the dictionary obsessively and loves to audition new words in class. She claims the institution as her “teacher”—a pedagogical guide—a sentiment that dominates carceral testimony: “We all have our breaking points sitting in prison. My breakthrough is my goal. My mind is a sponge. I want to soak up everything the place has to offer me.” Other women, such as Gemmi, a powerfully built, tough woman from Big Island (the Island of Hawai’i) with a large and confrontational dragon tattoo on her face, refers to writing itself as a painful document of memory, a pedagogical guide of form that is both a constraint and an opening: “I have perfected the art of hating my past so much. I have to let it go, but never forget it, because it pushes us forward. Like reading my past writing.”

Despite the fact that Pat privileges the particularity of the individual narrative and experience of her student writers, the communal stories that occur as improvisation in the classroom create a corresponding community of witnesses. In this sense, the power

of spontaneous communal narratives disrupts the form of the expectant pedagogical script that Pat sets up. The inside writers narrate their loci of origin, which are simultaneously communal and individual. Pat prizes this individualism in both the form and the texts. The canon that she implements in the classroom is composed of writers such as Hemingway and Frost who overcome adversity by their adherence to individualism. Pacific stories of origin are discordant with the masculine narrative of individual striving and achievement that Pat highlights through her choice of canonical texts because, like the women themselves, many Pacific narratives celebrate community over individualism. However, to represent these narratives of origin as diametrically opposed to “individualist” ones bears the burden of an essentialist nostalgia. David Milward, a Cree scholar and activist, argues for the power of restorative justice in that it “facilitates more constructive responses to Indigenous crime and addresses its root by compelling the offender to face up to the harm caused, to persuade the offender to willingly make right for the harm, to set the offender on a path of emotional and spiritual healing, to guide the offender to living a more productive life, and to inculcate traditional values in the offender.”³⁴ However he cautions against employing utopic binaries that idealize Indigenous systems of justice because many Indigenous communities employed harsh and brutal modes of punishment.³⁵

Pat persistently instructs the women, both in preparation for publication in *Hulihia*, and within the Prison Monologues, that the power of writing lives in the specificity of the details. Any good writer knows that fertile writing lives in the details; yet, curiously, the erotic and romantic “private” particulars are invisible in Pat’s

classroom culture and within the *Hulihia* publications. Despite an absence of these details in print and performance, the women in class serve as witnesses to and co-writers of each other's private life stories, including rape, self-mutilation, mental illness, drug addiction and wives, as they participate in the witnessing of each other's vulnerable histories.

As the communal takes precedence over the individual, a community of writers gradually emerges in the classroom in ways that elude censorship. Feminist poet Adrienne Rich attests to the power intrinsic within a sacred community of writers that is communal without smothering the particular.³⁶ Despite the fact that trauma is the sheathing of the women's writings, it does not obscure the intimate and variant details that embrace humor and difference. Ann Folwell Stanford, evoking Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of "dangerous writing," argues that prison writing, "scripted from the front lines of battle for psychic, spiritual, and even physical survival," is particularly dangerous because it "proclaims a 'we' within the confines of prison walls and disrupts the individualistic discourse and practice on which any system of oppression is dependent."³⁷ In this sense, the "we" is a consolidated corpus, a counter to the obliteration that the institution seeks to impose; and the women inside, not unlike the revolutionary writers of the 1960s, engage in treacherous acts as they pick up their pens.

Many feminist creative writing practitioners in the prisons resist the demand for sensational narratives of pain from the women inside.³⁸ In *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit*, Gillian Whitlock critiques the narratives of atrocity and

abjection that we in the West demanded and consumed from Afghanis after September 11, for example.³⁹ Philippe Lejeune argues against the mercenary character of spectacular narratives by insisting upon the function of autobiography as a pact between author and reader that “integrates a concept of both an implied and actual (flesh-and-blood) reader into the meaning making of autobiographical writing.”⁴⁰ Confounding the pact between author and audience are autobiographical narratives of trauma, such as those of the inside women at WCCC—testimonial narratives that perform simultaneously as “real life” stories and fiction. In the charged and fragile space of performing their life stories, the inside women’s auto/biographies hold invented stories, fabricated stories, hyperbolic stories, mis-remembered stories, stories of the everyday, heroic stories, and stories of despair.

Incarcerated writers are “outlaw” writers because of their somatic state-sanctioned exile from society. Caren Kaplan’s theory of the outlaw illuminates the power within a collective practice of testimony and witnessing in an incarcerated classroom setting. In the creative writing classes at WCCC, the women testify before each other, drawing upon an archive of written and oral texts—an outlaw practice itself—and the ensuing acts of witness transform the process and meaning of the very pedagogies employed. In this classroom community, women write simultaneously against and within the identification of “outlaws” by proffering life stories that challenge and confirm their audience’s expectations. The audience in this instance constitutes their peers, Pat, and those they hope to reach outside, if published. Stories of pain and abuse emerge

alongside those of hope and humor, and in this way, the women defy the institution, state, and nation's insistence upon a depraved criminality.⁴¹

Life writing, particularly by women disenfranchised from publishing and modes of production, performs as a diasporic document—a stateless location, from which women who write about the “I” perform a multiplicity of identities. That diasporic document is more cripplingly marked by a space of diaspora: the homelessness of the prison industrial complex. Recording trauma via writing is complicated, particularly for marginalized writers who are dispossessed of a legitimate status with which to voice their “crime,” due to disenfranchised gender, race, and sexuality subjectivities.⁴² The prison as a house of the state disorders this writerly and somatic exile, as Lori Pompa, criminal justice instructor in the College of Liberal Arts at Temple University, explains: “The setting from whence they come and to which they return each day is authoritarian and oppressive. It is an environment that is antithetical to what is necessary for a productive, creative educational process.”⁴³

Pompa and Patrick Berry point to an incongruity between prison creative writing programs as potentially liberatory and edifying (with their potential to defy corporeal and psychic limitations) and the essential character of the prison as a punitive site. Berry delineates the vitality and restraints of carceral writing: “The prison environment creates distinct spatial and temporal boundaries that shape literate practice. Inmates are told when to eat, when to sleep, and sometimes even when to write. Writing under such constraints, and sometimes in defiance of them, inmate students often produce

narratives of freedom, movement, and transformation. Their narratives, read as both artifact and activity, demonstrate how language is used to move beyond obstacles.”⁴⁴

The next advanced class a week later addresses moments of spontaneous dissent by the inside women to pedagogical scripts. I arrive at Pat’s class on a typically gorgeous Hawaiian day. Ten women are present. Pat begins the class with an excerpt from a *Room of One’s Own*, but she doesn’t mention Virginia Woolf. Someone picks the word *olu olu* (kindness) from the *koa bowl*. The women offer a host of responses, what approximates a call and response litany to *olu olu*. “Once you touch a person’s heart, you leave a lasting imprint that no one else can erase. Impression, memory, mark. I like the way it sounds.” Pat approaches the board where she writes her prompt for the day: “Creative Writing: to create, ‘to bring into being.’” She then faces the class and asks: “What does it mean ‘to bring into being’?”

Pat elucidates the process of creation: “An unique print/fingerprint. Our genetic imprint from our ancestors is lasting and permanent. It can’t be swiped or lost.” The women relate to the example of a fingerprint. They nod with enthusiasm. They have all been processed through the legal system. They have surrendered their fingerprints. Denise goes to the board. She calls out dramatically: “Noelani: to mold something; to bring into existence. Create something out of nothing; give birth/make real.” Pat says: “Please read your poem. Make the visitors touch and smell your poem.” The reference to “visitors” evokes the import of an audience for Pat, whether it is an audience for

Hulihia, the Prison Monologues, or a reading in the creative writing class. Pat is indebted to the sensory: a sensorium of specific words.

Even as the women embrace the therapeutic pedagogies and the “good” discipline encouraged by Pat, their acts of dissent disrupt the classroom space at curious moments and assume various displays. Today Pat addresses the grammar violations in the homework as an example of her commitment to a good discipline and to churning out proficient writers. Pat is a bit of a stringent Grammarian and insists that the women turn to the dictionary centerpieces when they don’t know the words. The women are additionally allowed to check out the dictionaries from the library and to take them back to their dorms for homework assignments, which is one of the few privileges they look forward to, despite the fact that the dictionaries are tattered and smell of mold. The women do not like the grammar exercises.

At times Pat’s insistence on an orthodox grammatical structure appears contrary to the narratives of pain that fill the classroom. This tension between the aesthetic surfaces of writing, versus the foremost need to address narratives of horror, is one of the ethical conundrums of being a facilitator in an incarcerated space.⁴⁵ The writing class at times resembles an emergency room and the facilitator is faced with the dilemma of which wound to address first. In this sense, the refusal of the therapeutic script lives alongside the embrace of the therapeutic.

After a disturbing narrative of pain, Pat returns to her lesson: “From the homework I see that many of you are not aware of complete sentences. As an example,

when to use commas instead of periods.” She then writes the following on the white board:

An example of a noun is a television

A verb: falling (an action)

Adjective: a black square (what it looks like: the details)

Adverb: slowly (describes how it is falling)

Pat invites someone to approach the board and provide an example of a verb, adjective, and adverb. Tatiana, about 60 years old, reed thin with uncombed gray hair and glasses and who appears to be heavily medicated fails to follow Pat’s directive; instead, in an eccentric and spontaneous response to the grammar lecture, she shouts out “Friendly triangle!” Tatiana’s response is defiant. Pat responds with uncharacteristic emotion: “Where does that come from!?” Tatiana is bipolar and I like her offering. Pat continues: “Words are provocative, like punching a hole in the wall.” Tatiana lowers her outstretched arm disconcertedly. Pat continues with her grammar exercise, as some of the women look out of the window at the activity brimming in the yard. The loudspeaker, violent and jarring, grunts the incomprehensible. Typically, the women are riveted to Pat’s words and her lessons, but grammar in classrooms, whether inside or outside, is not captivating material. At many moments during the class, Tatiana resists the therapeutic script via her nonlinear and disjointed responses.

Competing lineaments of power crisscross in this exacting incarcerated classroom. Tatiana is not the only woman whose interventions alter the scripted pedagogies. Marge, a tall, athletic white woman, with a weathered face and intense green eyes always proffers insightful and philosophical contributions to the class, unless

she is in a funk. Marge is reading Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, *The Little Prince*, and *The Essential Rumi*, which she first read in a Maui jail in her 20s (she is now in her 40s)—all *simultaneously*. She is an avid reader with a generous vocabulary. I wonder if Marge has been in prison most of her life.

Marge exclaims: "PROVOCATIVE!!" And that ends the grammar exercise for the day.

Moving on, Pat asks the women to turn to the assignment for the day—poems on stillness, which the women bring to the class like talismans. A woman with thick black hair and Elvira-esque bangs, perhaps in her early forties, cries unrestrainedly. The age spots on her high cheeks move: "*I don't speak to nobody. I am shut in here* [her hands fly to her chest: a spontaneous arabesque of pain]. *But this writing it made me alive. Before I was dead. I went searching for what to say. I had so many papers. And inside I found me. I don't share myself with anyone.*" She exchanges "papers" for pieces of her fragmented identities: memories and recollections that she desperately desires to cohere into a unified self. The writing that transports the women back from the dead to the living invests the writing process as a site of rescue.

Voyeurism is a thorny part of witnessing testimony for its synchronized "nourishment" amidst "horror and sorrow" that it provides for both the witness and the orator. The voyeuristic audience is saved from the pain of their own banal lives by testimony in which catharsis and pain are simultaneously "performed." The women's life stories/confessions/autobiographies provoke both dismay and sympathy for any

audience. But in the witnessing of the systemic and personal brutality of the women's lives, lie moments of embarrassment and shame lurking as interlopers in the classroom. The witness as voyeur, whether it is Pat, myself, or the other women in the class, transforms the dynamics of the pedagogical encounter.

Alana, the author of the opening poem, "Governmental Seduction," which came from the Poetry and Performance Lab that I taught on Friday afternoon, confesses that she despises the expected performance of trauma narratives, particularly those in the process groups: "*The women cling to their stories of trauma and use them as a crutch. The same things happened to me when I was fifteen. But now I need to move on.*" Alana does not disclose what the "thing" is that happened to her as a teenager, but the inference is rape or incest, a tragically common history in the women's lives. Alana resists what she describes as sensational narratives that dominate the prison's culture: "*I don't want everyone to know the details of my life . . . I prefer to have deeper conversations.*" In contradiction to Pat's emphasis on the details, Alana dismisses the details as banal. For Alana, the definition of "deep" extends beyond the personal and beyond trauma. Although she has spent much of her life on the mainland, Alana was born in Honolulu and has an elaborate Hawaiian name—Uluwehi Kamali'i Wahine Onalani—loosely, "Festively Adorned Princess of the Heavens." She laughs sardonically: "*I bet my mother regrets naming me that . . . she probably shakes her head that I turned out nothing like my name.*" Alana views the routine performances of trauma as heroic—and often fabricated—performances of self. The culture of the facility breeds a performativity of pain: the telling and re-telling of trauma narratives.

INSTITUTIONAL INTRUSIONS

The carceral structure inevitably intrudes, inflicting grief and suffering that interrupts the testimony underway in the classroom. As the women discuss stillness and poetry, a guard's immense shadow occupies the window space. His shoulders are as wide as a truck and he is "herding" a woman in an orange jumpsuit, restrained by leg and belly chains, to her destination. The arresting visual image of his shoulders, bollo-head, and impenetrable sunglasses shielding his eyes, intrude into the comfort, the sadness, and laughter that infuses the classroom space.⁴⁶ The brutal thud of the chains is a sensory disruption of the classroom utopia. These institutional secular and habitual intersessions encumber the writing space. The brutal moment passes and Kelly offers up her stillness poem.

*A child waiting to sneak up on a butterfly
Finding our own truth
Intimidation of authority
An honest assessment of the disaster
The remains of what's left*

Serendipity exists in many classrooms. Kelly reads her poem, a testament to authoritarian intimidation, at the precise instant that the shadow of the ACO obscures the classroom space literally and metaphorically. Kelly's depiction of a child sneaking up on a butterfly resides disharmoniously with the ashes of disaster. Melancholy sits heavy in the classroom today.

Kristin Bumiller, a professor and Inside-Out instructor in Economic and Social Institutions at Amherst College, articulates that jail itself can function as a text.⁴⁷ She

recalls that while leading a discussion on the bureaucratic authority behind a uniform in the Hampshire Jail and House of Corrections, the serendipitous appearance of a guard in her classroom enlivened the very symbol of power under discussion: “As she spoke, a prison guard, dressed in uniform, entered the room and stood behind her to take the first of the afternoon’s two head counts. The class laughed. “I thought it was one of those perfect learning moments,” Bumiller says. “It’s one of those things that create clarity by concrete example. Sometimes, the situation or the scene itself becomes an opportunity to learn something about how power operates, without putting the inside students on the spot and having them tell their story.”⁴⁸

In a similar vein, I attended a healing/restorative justice circle at WCCC in the summer of 2016. In attendance to hear women’s stories were Judge Steven Alm, who sentenced several of the inside women, a few lawyers, a parole and “imprisoned person” advocate, a federal court pretrial selection chief, members of People’s Fund and Hawai’i Friends, and a few university folks. In the midst of the testimony intruded the sounds of a guard disciplining a woman inside: “YOU, you get back to your cottage NOW!” The explosions stand in stark contrast to the laughter and tears in the restorative justice circle. I look around the room, my hands shaking, but the inside women register neither shock nor dread—testament to a culture that disciplines the women to conceal their emotions.

The fragmented, interrupted narratives in the classroom constitute a composite and communal autobiography about pain, or what Miriam Fuchs refers to as “catastrophic narratives.” Since the space of the classroom is a space of witness, the

testimony of each individual woman, layered upon the last woman's testimony, forms a communal autobiography that supersedes individual linear lessons. Fuchs posits that following the tradition of female autobiographers—the scribes and subjects of catastrophic narratives—“wrote partial life stories rather than teleological unities, illustrating ways that women have produced narratives that address conditions over which they lose control or never had control.”⁴⁹ The narratives-in-part that are performed in the WCCC classes cohere in uncanny ways to catastrophic narratives.

I love T.S. Elliot. He is one of my favorite poets. His poetry will awe you. A rhapsody. His poetry is not meant to be about stillness. It is fidgety and perplexing.

~ Imani

Imani frequently astounds me. She has a slight speech defect and a vast vocabulary. She has taken Pat's class more than five times. As the only practicing Muslim in the prison, she has administrative permission to be “ministered” to individually. One day I notice a sight unusual in our cultural location in Hawai'i. A man with a yarmulke and tzitzit (skullcap and knotted ritual fringes attached to the four corners of the tallit, the prayer shawl, worn by Orthodox Jewish males) is checking in at the guard station. I uncover later that he is a *Messianic* Jewish minister who, strangely, is brought to the prison once a week to speak to Imani about being a Muslim. Imani is African American and part Native American. In our interview, she discloses that her grandmother is dying on a reservation back home, and that she is struggling for permission to attend her funeral. *Imani never gets to say goodbye to her grandmother.*

Writing performs as a personal archive of the past and literally documents life's forgotten or repressed details—*details in hiding*. When Brooke refers to poetry as “an adventure like a treasure hunt,” it is because writing disinters memories, and the excavation allows for a particular type of transformation. Danika flings a catalogue of words towards the center of the table—an outcome of Pat's homage to the dictionary. Danika's body is always moving. “I have discovered a teenager: Anne. I am hopeful in silence that another day is worth living. I have learnt so much about myself here. I am soon getting out. . . . I learnt that I don't always have to fight for everyone's rights and my own rights. In fact, I don't have to be *right*. I don't always need to speak. I am a verbal person. I can be a listener. It's okay to be a listener and hear what other people have to say to me.” Danika's “I am soon getting out of here” is a repeated “hopeful” narrative that appears like an incantation in many of the classes. The performance of self in a pedagogical setting is intricate, as the process always engages unspoken negotiations between the individual and the community, which allows and disallows for tacit identities, personalities, and roles.

Pat ends her lesson by asking the women: “What do you hear?” The women answer: “*Being still won't hurt me.*” Pat frequently writes herself into the community of incarcerated women writers, testament to the vulnerability and influence of facilitating an incarcerated writing class. “*We* have been unpacking self-defeat without knowing it through our poems on grief, waiting, and stillness. There is a discipline in this. You have shared your concrete experiences in writing. So where are you going next? Who are *we* now?” (my emphasis). The “*we*” additionally marks a space of belonging as part of a

community of writers within the classroom and beyond the prison: *Who are we now after we write?*

I think of the connection between discipline and disciple, a divide that Pat inhabits. Shoshana Felman affirms the fractured character of testimonial narratives and situates testimony as a performative speech act that is “idiosyncratic,” “strange”—a “radicality” of the poetic. Her vision provides a framework in which to read the “strangeness” in the circular conversations (testimonial narratives) that perform as “liveness” in the creative writing classes. Pat’s insertion of herself into the frames of her pedagogy resounds with Norman K. Denizen’s performative autoethnography as a restriction and as an opening, which subverts “liveness” and re-inscribes it onto textual and pedagogical performances.⁵⁰ Its ethical autonomies and constraints unveil the pedagogical space as at no time immune from the institutional one. Roger I. Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Epperts, instruct the reader on “remembrance as a means for ethical learning.”⁵¹ The authors argue that ethical pedagogy “move[s] toward . . . a critical and risk-laden learning that seeks to accomplish a shift of one’s ego boundaries, that displaces engagements with the past and contemporary relations with others out of the narrow, inescapably violent and violative confines of the ‘I,’ to a receptivity to others.”⁵² This “live” receptivity and violence inscribes the creative writing classes at WCCC as performances “between hope and despair.”

Ultimately, Pat’s classroom, and her engagement with an ethical pedagogical praxis, exemplify both the power and limitations of performative autoethnography. Affective connections are omnipresent between teachers and students within

incarcerated classrooms, as they are within classrooms in the “free” world. As Patrick Berry argues, we need to challenge the “polarizing rhetoric about what literacy can and cannot deliver, arriving at more nuanced and ethical ways of understanding literacy and possibility in an age of mass incarceration.”⁵³ Inside-Out anthologies like *Razor Wire Women: Prisoners, Activists, Scholars, and Artists*; *Wall Tappings: An International Anthology of Women’s Prison Writings 200 AD to the Present*; and *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars, and Writers Speak Out* are the few carceral anthologies that pay close attention to women’s words behind the concertina wire. *Women, Writing, and Prison* reminds us to interrogate “the romantic notions of the writing teacher or workshop facilitator as transformative agent or savior.”⁵⁴ As facilitators of creative writing in incarcerated spaces, we need to be vigilant about the institutional, systemic, and pedagogical complexities that coexist in the classroom, even as we observe the power of the written word, explosive in its capacity to inspire transformation for those who are excluded from the privileges of citizenship, as well as for those who are privileged to witness the voyage.

The Stuck-Up Blues

*I was taught to be kind and know that everyone’s equal
I was raised not to judge or humiliate people
I was told we’re all different in our very own way
And informed that a smile can make someone’s day—
But then I messed up and got locked in this hell
With know-it-all people who can’t even spell
And some are so fat that they fight over fans
And use bathrooms, then walk out without washing hands.
I see people around me that gossip all grim
And write statements, then smile, like it wasn’t them.
I see girls trying to take the ACOs place
So they can sneak in the kitchen to shove food down their face*

*I see nobodys thinking they're someones in here
I hear "I love you sister" but nothing's sincere
I feel sick to my stomach and drop down to my knees
And scream "if this is my future, then God, kill me please!"
"I can't take this no more and I'm tired of trying
The more time I spend here, the more brain cells are dying.
I'm not trying to be mean, I don't wanna be rude—
But everything's filthy and I don't trust the food
Coz the meat comes in boxes labeled 'for inmates only'
And the butchies are toothless, so I'd rather be lonely
And the classes they have are basically "ABC"
This might be for some, but this shit ain't for me
And when I'm done ranting, I hear a voice say
You made your own bed, so quit crying and just lay
Let haters hate and don't give up your peace
Stay strong through the famine, you'll eventually feast.*

~ Alana⁵⁵

NOTES FROM CHAPTER ONE

¹ Alana wrote “Governmental Seduction” in response to the HBO Series *Def Poetry*, which the students viewed in my Friday class in November 2015. Season 6, directed by Stan Lathan (New York, NY: HBO Video, 2008).

² Alana’s poem began (as she articulated in class) as a personal ode of seduction that journeyed, perhaps not so strangely, into a critique of the nation-state. Here the erotic sits closely to systemic tentacles of power.

³ I use the word “sacred” in this chapter to foreground the transformative nature of life writing in this particular class based upon my observations, facilitation of the class, and foremost, the testimony of the inside women in the interviews I conducted. The healing that occurs in this incarcerated classroom approximates liberation, because of the transformational potential this community of writers has for the writers in the class. As the idea of the sacred carries a fraught genealogy, I use this word divorced from any religious context.

⁴ “Self” is part of the rhetoric omnipotent in the *Hina Mauka* and *Total Life Recovery* dogma. The women will frequently refer to “self” without an article in front as though it is a psychological and epistemological containment.

⁵ I am indebted to Kelly Oliver’s argument about witnessing as a radical act that summons mutual vulnerabilities across hierarchical divides. *Witnessing Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2001).

⁶ *Poseidon and the Bitter Bug* is the eleventh studio album by Indigo Girls, released on March 24, 2009 by Vanguard Records. The title is drawn from lyrics in “Fleet of Hope”—“You’re all washed up when Poseidon has his day”—and from “Second Time Around”—“I’ve been bitten by the bitter bug.” Some themes the Indigo Girls address are fate’s deliverance of cruel blows, dashed dreams, love gone wrong—all infused with social justice overtones.

⁷ The 12-step programs are modified to fit a Hawaiian context, particularly Hina Mauka.

⁸ There has been much discourse around creative writing classes as sacred communities. Within creative writing pedagogy, there is debate about whether one can actually teach creative writing. See Adam Breckenridge’s review, “A New Collection of Essays Examines the Effectiveness of the Creative Writing Workshop: What’s Right and Wrong with the Workshop,” *Pedagogy* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 425–430. Breckenridge reviews *Does the Writing Workshop Still Work?* edited by Dianne Donnelly (Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters, 2010). He traces the increasing popularity of creative writing programs post World War II, alongside its scrutiny by “prominent authors, such as Donald Hall and critics in literature studies, who tend to view the field as anti-intellectual and lacking in any real academic substance.” Questions that haunt creative writing studies and workshops are: “Can creative writing be taught? Can students ever really hope to imitate great writers? Does the creative writing process practiced in universities actually produce great writing . . . ?” As a participant in an academic creative writing graduate program, I ascribe to the power of the writing workshop and a corresponding sacred writing community, which can, depending on the bond between the authors in the class, allow for writerly risks and vulnerabilities that frequently are transformative for the writers.

⁹ Pat shared this with me in an e-mail correspondence sent June 22, 2017, after she read the dissertation.

¹⁰ Pat tells me that in all of the years of her teaching creative writing at the facility, there was never a single meeting of “faculty” in the prison, which precluded any inter-collaboration.

¹¹ “Hapa” is a local term that means “of mixed ancestry.” In Hawai‘i, people often have a mix of Native Hawaiian with Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and/or Samoan roots.

¹² Many of the theater/literary/educational practitioners in prison classrooms attest to the fact that prison guards are frequently suspicious of and resentful that the “inmates” are receiving an education, which they have been denied. The promise of doing “hard time” without mollification, is part of a punishment model, reinforced by the institutional ideology.

¹³ Koa is an Indigenous wood in Hawai‘i. Many Indigenous forms are made from this exquisite wood: canoes and bowls, for example (for utility and as art).

¹⁴ Some of the censorship occurs within the editorial process. The women’s relationship with wives and performances of the queer self are not represented in *Hulihia*. For the most, part romantic relationship as a theme is not included in *Hulihia* or the Prison Monologues. One reason for this could be the program’s and Pat’s belief in individualism as a requisite for change. The women frequently repeat in class that they are “co-dependent,” a belief indoctrinated and perpetuated in the process groups.

¹⁵ The women are aware of the deleterious physical space of the small classrooms inhabited by mold, and at times complain when we are unable to occupy the large room with the computer lab because the Kapiolani Community College (KCC) culinary class has taken over that space. The women come to the creative writing class with wistful food longings, after smelling the scents emanating from the dishes of “real” food that the KCC chef creates with the women in his class. The fortunate women in the culinary classes have access to authentic ingredients that are unmarred by the designation: “For inmates only!”

¹⁶ Pat shared this with me in an e-mail correspondence sent June 18, 2017, after she read the dissertation.

¹⁷ I am utilizing the idea of performance here both as a literal one and as a performative, less conscious derivative.

¹⁸ The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act was instituted in 1921 to “rectify” the wrongs of imperialism and the theft of the Hawaiian land from its Indigenous people. The act is intended to provide affordable homes for Native Hawaiian families. Waimanalo was designated as homestead land, reserved for Native Hawaiians.

¹⁹ There are numerous devastations as a result of tourism in Hawai‘i, many of which are economic. The Whole Foods in Kailua and in Kahala are flooded with Japanese tourists, which drives up the prices in an already-inflated market, targeting people who are health-conscious. The exorbitant prices alienate many local people, particularly Native Hawaiians. Whole Foods competes directly with the local farmers’ markets and local farmers. When I refer to encounters of imperialism, I have noted that the mostly young to middle-aged Japanese consumers exhibit acts of entitlement that accompany privilege: failing to clear or clean their own tables (assuming someone else will do it), and a general lack of awareness of people around them.

²⁰ Pat testifies in class that she never alters the meaning of the writing, but aims to make it “better.”

²¹ Pat shared this with me in an e-mail correspondence sent June 18, 2017, after she read the dissertation.

²² I begin to notice that the inside women are incongruously well-informed and isolated from current events in the contemporary world. Despite the fact that they don't have access to the internet, they frequently are informed about political events in their own and extended communities.

²³ It has taken a while for me to read the cultural signage of the prison space. Only recently in facilitating my own class, did I realize that not all of the women carry a minimum-custody status. "Talk story" is a popular expression used on the Island. It implies a local way of perceiving reciprocal conversation and the fact that we are all informed by our genealogical stories.

²⁴ The students inform me that they heard from Connie who now lives in Portugal. She is trying to find a way to move to the United States to live with her daughter.

²⁵ "Ha'ole" literally means in Hawaiian as "those without breath." This is what the Kānaka Maoli called the Europeans when they arrived on the Island of Hawai'i. Today the term is used both innocuously, as well as in a racialized way.

²⁶ Pat shared this with me in an e-mail correspondence sent June 18, 2017, after she read the dissertation.

²⁷ See Chesney-Lind and Bilsky, "Native Hawaiian Youth."

²⁸ See Patrick W. Berry, "Doing Time with Literacy Narratives," *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition and Culture* 14, no. 1, 137–60.

²⁹ Patrick W. Berry, *Beyond Hope: Rhetorics of Mobility, Possibility, and Literacy* (dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011).

³⁰ Megan Sweeney, "Legal Brutality: Prisons and Punishment, the American Way," *American Literary History* 22, no. 3 (Fall, 2010): 707.

³¹ According to the Academy of American Poets, "The highly structured villanelle is a nineteen-line poem with two repeating rhymes and two refrains. The form is made up of five tercets followed by a quatrain. Contemporary poets have not limited themselves to the pastoral themes originally expressed by the free-form villanelles of the Renaissance, and have loosened the fixed form to allow variations on the refrains."

³² Pat shared this with me in an e-mail correspondence sent June 18, 2017, after she read the dissertation.

³³ *Hulihia IX: Writings from Prison, Conversations with Myself* (Kailua, HI: Women's Correctional Community Center, Fall 2013).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ David Milward, "Justice as Healing: Indigenous Ways," *Wicazo Sa Review* 22, no.1 (Spring 2007), 127–131.

³⁶ Adrienne Rich (1983, 85), quoted in Tobi Jacobi, "Speaking Out for Social Justice: Institutional Challenges and Uncertain Solidarities," in *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars and Writers Speak Out*, 243. Adrienne Rich writes: "Most often someone writing a poem believes in, depends on, a delicate, vibrating range of difference, that an "I" can become a "we" without extinguishing others, that a partly common language exists to which strangers can bring their own heartbeat, memories, images. A language that itself has learned from the heartbeat, memories, images of strangers."

³⁷ Sister Helen Prejean, foreword to *Women, Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars, and Writers Speak Out*, 8–9.

³⁸ Ethical feminist carceral-literacy practitioners have taken Eve Ensler to task for her work in the Bedford Hills maximum-security women's prison in New York state. The theorists point to the ethical problems in eliciting forced confessionals from those inside, as well as its dangers, such as the potential for traumatic re-injury. See Hinshaw and Jacobi, "What Words Might Do," 67–90. Also see Weil Davis, "Inside Out," 163–175.

³⁹ Whitlock renders a chilling scene in which a group of "well-meaning" feminists disrobe an Afghani female survivor on the Oprah Winfrey show before a large American audience, upholding the U.S. as "savior" in an imperial gesture and mis-translation of Afghani culture.

⁴⁰ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 207.

⁴¹ Folwell Stanford, founder and former director of the DePaul Women, Writing & Incarceration Project, and creative writing facilitator at a woman's prison, argues that we need to focus more adamantly on women's writing behind bars because "as long as prisons and prisoners remain relatively inaccessible, the myth of prisoners' inherently predatory natures can remain in place to justify the brutality of incarceration." Jacobi and Folwell Stanford, eds., *Women, Writing, and Prison*.

⁴² In *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), autobiography theorist, Leigh Gilmore, addresses the complexities of marginalized writers' recording of trauma, when by virtue of their gender, race, and sexuality they are dispossessed of legitimate status with which to voice their crime.

⁴³ Pompa quoted in Hinshaw and Jacobi, "What Words Might Do."

⁴⁴ See Berry, "Doing Time," 137–60.

⁴⁵ I have faced the problem of aesthetics in my Friday class. Nicole, a gifted writer with impeccable grammar and syntax that intimidated some of the other writers, submitted lengthy, exquisite poems each week. The aesthetics of her writing utterly seduced me, despite the fact that the content of the writing was emotionally disturbing: a catastrophic narrative. I persisted in responding to her as one writer to another with extensive comments that addressed the beauty of her writing. It wasn't until our one-on-one consulting session that I uncovered Nicole's life sentence. I realized that the cosmetics of her writing served as an anesthetization and aestheticization of unendurable pain, and I felt ambivalent about how to respond to her—beyond the surfaces of her writing. In some ways, this experience resounds with the question that Cynthia Franklin posed during my oral defense about the dangers of the normalization of trauma narratives in prison.

⁴⁶ "Bollo" is a Pidgin word for bald-headed.

⁴⁷ Kristin Bumiller teaches an Inside-Out Prison Exchange seminar, "Regulating Citizenship," at the Hampshire Jail and House of Corrections.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Chiles Shelburne, "Two and a Half Hours a Week," *Amherst Magazine*, Summer 2008.

⁴⁹ Miriam Fuchs, *The Text Is Myself: Women's Life Writing and Catastrophe* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 11.

⁵⁰ Denzin, *Interpretive Autoethnography*.

⁵¹ Roger I. Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Epperts, eds. *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma* (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 8.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Berry, "Doing Time," 137–60.

⁵⁴ Jacobi and Folwell Stanford, eds., *Women, Writing, and Prison*, 3.

⁵⁵ "The Stuck-Up Blues," by Alana came out of my Friday class (October 2015) in response to the students' viewing of *Def Poetry*. Alana's institutional dissent mirrors the systemic dissent prevalent in the show, which reveals that the creative writing facilitator's selection of required texts directly influences student-generated writing.

CHAPTER TWO

“Home”: Trauma and Desire

Home

*No gas, no light, no food
And Daddy's in a bad mood
Distinct smell of alcohol
Down the hall with bloody walls
Can anybody hear us at all?*

*In a dark room of echoes and tears
“Lord help us,
Please appear”
On my knees in despair I ask
Mommy, “are you not scared,
Why are you letting this happen to us?”
She says, “stop making such a fuss”
My little brother and sister are afraid
They say “Oh no, he's drunk and being mean”
“Shhhh, be quiet, don't make a big scene
Let's run out the front door and away from here”*

*Loud screams of a woman
Another can of beer
We hate this house but there's no where to go
We get on our knees and begin to pray
“Dear Lord please show us the way out
Right now we're in desperate need and doubt
Can you change the heart of our Dad
And take away all of the bad?
We're confused and just want to understand
Why do we have to be on his command?
We don't want to grow up and dwell in our past
We just want a normal home at last”*

~ Joanne¹

Poems about “Home” by the inside women serve as a political tool to counter the experience of dispossession in the carceral space to which they have been consigned.

Indeed, “home” performs as a particularly troubled archive in Hawai‘i: a site of U.S. Empire and British intervention since the eighteenth century that bears a fraught political and colonial history. Many of the inside women are direct victims of that history and are located in a genealogy of political trauma, including the overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani, and the subsequent annexation of Hawai‘i. The rise and transformation of prisons in Hawai‘i is inextricable from the contemporary militarization of Hawai‘i and what the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement witnesses as the perennial occupation. RaeDeen Keahiolalo-Karasuda, the director of the Office of Native Hawaiian Partnerships at Chaminade University in Honolulu, traces early examples of public shaming and terrorizing of Native Hawaiians, such as the staging of the public execution of King Kalakaua’s and Queen Lili‘uokalani’s grandfather, which persist in the contemporary prison industrial complex in Hawai‘i. Keahiolalo-Karasuda points to the hanging of Chief Kamanawa II on October 20, 1840 as “the start of a codified Western legal system that subjugated Kanaka Maoli through cruel and unusual forms of punishment.”² The establishment of a “leper colony” in Moloka‘i in the mid-1800s can be considered as one of the earliest examples of a missionary prison and a troubled “home” in Hawai‘i, and its historicity hosts complex scripts that enact Western punishment and Indigenous restoration.³ In an article in the *Atlantic*, Associate Editor Alia Wong describes how many of Kalaupapa’s patients forged paradoxical bonds with their isolated world: “Many couldn’t bear to leave it. It was ‘the counterintuitive twinning of loneliness and community, wrote *The New York Times* in 2008. ‘All that dying and all of that living.’”⁴ This type of connection to a wounded home is evident in the women’s

writings about home to the extent that prison often becomes a “home” for the women who have been institutionalized. The home as wound is even more pronounced for some of the Native Hawaiian women who have been perennially denied a homeland.

The geographical and cultural space of the Pacific serves as a semantic, linguistic, cosmetic site of resistance, as well as an apparatus to particularize the writing.⁵ In the chapter’s opening poem by Joanne, who is Samoan, home represents an ongoing space of trauma, which parallels the inherent contradiction between the legal assignation of “civic death” and the creative, spiritual, and intellectual agency inherent in the act of writing within a woman’s prison. It is easy to see why legislatures, penal administrators, and the criminal system at large are invested in disciplining and patrolling the incarcerated voice. Historically, the voices of the incarcerated, particularly in the radical prison movement of the 1960s, were voices of dissent against the state that threatened to expose state brutality and human rights’ violations. In their collectivity, they were a threatening presence on the national stage.

In this chapter, I evaluate the writing that comes out of the Tuesday and Friday creative writing classes taught by Pat Clough from 2003–2013 with a focus on the *Home* edition, generated by Pat’s prompts on home/homeland. Inside women’s writing subverts the state-sanctioned imposition of a civic death, as do the poems residing in *Hulihia VII*. Although the stories of “home” at times reflect the redemptive narratives that Pat, the director of the WCCC Kailua Prison Project, endorses, the multiple valences of “home” in the women’s representations exceed those limits. Ongoing trauma, from family trauma to the trauma of incarceration, lies at the root of many of these narratives.

In these writings, “home” appears as a site of trauma as well as a site of fantasy and desire, and occasionally—particularly with the notion of the prison writing program itself as “home”—as a site of healing. The desire for home and redemption, in spite of the horrors of home, filter through the words on the page, illustrative of the proximity between pleasure, desire, and harm. The reader witnesses these fantasies and discomforts in the eccentric grammatical usages, the silences, the ellipses, the chronological play, the memories that are privileged in the drumming-up of trauma.

Here, the page is a mnemonic re-collection for the skin. The texts are presented as poems, yet they contradict orthodox expectations of what constitutes a poem in their arrhythmic and contrapuntal nature. Despite the institutional and programmatic assertions that writing heals and soothes, the women ultimately are unable to escape the trauma of their own experiences. The writing leaks out on the page, resisting the effort to discipline painful stories. Trauma surfaces within the grammatical intrusions, twists of memory, and the aberrant uses of language. Thus, sites of desire and fantasy are inseparable from the marked site of trauma. The women’s writing eludes the redemptive script despite its longing to perform a “benevolent” American citizenship. Harsh, caustic, it testifies to the difficulty of the healing process. Within the *Hulihia Home* edition, a cacophony of voices resides within the terrain of personal, historical, and familial trauma.

The focus on women’s writing, rather than on canonized male carceral writing, invites us to think differently about the genre of prison writing. Male and female carceral writing frequently differs in its representation of home. From narratives around the

mythic yard, sexual predation, tattoo culture and gangs, the male body is inscribed as simultaneously a singular machine-like body, yet one vulnerable to somatic and institutional penetration.⁶ Archetypally, women's narratives circulate around community. The surrogate "home"—prison—is further domesticated in an all-female space, as well as in some of the women's embrace of traditional notions of the feminine, as we shall see from a close interrogation of the poems themselves. Early American penology reform, managed and executed by primarily white, Christian middle- to upper-class female reformers, sought to "correct" and "purify" the female body. These "vanguard" agitators struggled to uncover avenues of reform that diverged from the punitive work regimes implemented in early male prisons. Fin de siècle American penology reform fashioned punishments in harmony with societal, cultural, and contemporaneous ideologies about the normative gendered body. These gendered practices of punishment and reform correlate with the preoccupations, themes, and writerly structures evident in male and female incarcerated writing. The character of trauma—a persistent and introspective anxiety, an internal wound—is ubiquitous in women's writing, but not in male carceral writing. Furthermore, the Kailua Prison Writing Project cultivates heterosexuality and narrow notions of the feminine that coexist with the masculinist national narratives that are reinforced by Pat's elect literary canon.⁷

Joanne's opening poem appears in the middle section of the *Home* edition—"Ki'i Oleleo a me Ho'omana'o" (Word Pictures and Memories). This volume is dedicated to female prisoners' recollections of home punctuated by all of its corresponding malady and rapture. The writers included in this journal are primarily inmates culled from the

creative writing classes at WCCC. Female inmates from two federal corrections facilities, the Federal Medical Center in Carswell, Texas and the Federal Detention Center in Honolulu, are also represented in the collection. Pat states that the inmates in the Federal Correction facilities, some of them with origins in Hawai'i, "have maintained their connection to home through their writing." The other writers are student groups from Farrington High School and ROC (Restore Our Community), both in the Kalihi area. The decision to extend the plurality of voices to two high school communities reflects the ideology of the program and the institution, which serves to promote redemptive narratives as pathways to healing, and to extend the limits of family to "local" communities.⁸

The women speak variously about home in ways that resist simplistic interpretation. Some poems mourn home as a "paradise lost," while others denounce home as a dystopic space—a site of injury. Some women condemn the mother as the passive enabler of abuse, while others celebrate home as a lover or spiritual abstraction. These complex representations of home breathe complicity with and resistance to societal and institutional projections of home, and live alongside Pat's notion of an idealized home. The Kailua Prison Writing Project, echoing the valences of the women's voices, dismisses the genre of carceral autobiography, and particularly the revolutionary canon of the 1960s, by refusing to employ the linguistic and thematic resistances utilized by Black revolutionary writers of the 1960s.⁹ Linguistically and thematically the *Hulihia* writings showcase a penitence and nostalgia and these proclamations, seemingly politically sanitized, align themselves with a gendered

American citizenship, rather than an incendiary critique of the nation-state. However, the women offer a form of rebuttal in that they refuse to conform to linear and chronological narratives and their frequent use of ellipses signals writerly and psychological omissions, disquiet, and multiple meanings. The poems trace a pathway to hope that bespeaks disavowal and complicity with the institution of the prison. The multivalent scripts situate the women as orators of a counter-discourse, while uncovering desires and fantasies that can be aligned with the utopic.¹⁰ In this way the women's writing mirrors the redemptive narrative of a liberal penal reform, which is Pat's own vision of reform. However, within this cosmetic collusion lie songs, screams, shouts, and silences of dissent.

The autobiographical writing at WCCC spans diverse genres of life writing: apologia,¹¹ testimonio,¹² autoethnography, psychobiography, and performance. Thematically and contextually, the writing echoes the nineteenth-century women's penal reform movement that focused on rehabilitation. Historically, confessional literature has served as the sanctuary and domain of women: from the nineteenth-century accounts of romantic friendships, adopted by feminist pioneers, women have gravitated towards the "diary" genre. According to historian Steven Stowe, diaries as a form of life writing changed form and focus considerably from the nineteenth century to the twentieth.¹³

The diary is a relatively recent form in the culture of western Europe and early America, arising in large part from a Christian desire to chart the story of individuals' spiritual progress toward God. Such religious diaries broadened over time into the nineteenth-century practice of using diaries to record personal feelings and explore intellectual growth. Diaries thus were born of self-examination but expanded into a means of self-reflection and self-fashioning (experimenting with who one wants to be in the world). By the 1830s, diarists

freely employed many of the literary devices of novels and other kinds of imaginative writing, especially writing by and for women. These aspects of diary-keeping continued into the twentieth century with an increasingly secular accent on psychological self-scrutiny and on using the diary as a means of emotional well-being and self-discovery.¹⁴

As women were barred from public life, the private, feminized space of the diary as confessional afforded women a voice, legibility, and authorship. It is important to note that the diary was a form that presupposed literacy, valued writing in the English language, and privileged writing as a form versus orality, thus its agency to empower excluded many women.

The pages of the *Hulihia Home* edition frame the poems as miniature diaries as they inhabit the containments of the genre, “shaped by inspiration and habit,” and marked by the scars of trauma, displayed concurrently in form and content.¹⁵

Home

*A figment of my imagination somewhere far off
A hopeful place I used to wish to find again someday
But the only home I ever knew was broken, empty and cold
Shattered glass, a drunken mother her face becoming old
An empty stomach, dirty school clothes
Slapping my brother around . . .*

~ Jessica C.¹⁶

Jessica’s *Home* poem is rife with dissonance: the desire for home juxtaposed with the hopelessness of home. The poem contains awkward syntactical pairings: shattered glass, a drunken mother . . . an empty stomach. Estranged subjects and verbs that are invariably misplaced accost the reader. Likewise, the violence

perpetrated against her brother is a gesture that Jessica assumes, almost against her will, in a familial transference of abuse.

*Slapping my brother around
The tears falling from his face as he'd look up from the ground
I didn't mean to, I was just so angry . . .*

~ Jessica C.¹⁷

The inside women share decided histories of abuse, yet inside the prison's walls they are disproportionately disciplined with psychotropic medication compared to the men inside: a systematic pacification of bodies, minds, and mouths in a “perverse” effort to make women “conform to the norms of a male-imagined and dominated life in these cages.”¹⁸ This shutting up of “mad” women has its origins in early America where women who were considered gossips—a signpost of hysteria—were visually and publicly punished: their mouths clenched shut with a facial apparatus. The need to silence women's voices, both inside and outside of the carceral landscape, situates women's life writing as an archive of resilience and resistance. Filmmaker Tracy Huling describes the women she visits in a correctional facility in upstate New York as “shadow women,” and admonishes a society that treats “bad” women as “mad” women.¹⁹

The tension between the therapeutic and the punitive is evident in the history of liberal penal reform, with its dominant tropes of disciplining female bodies, as well as in confessional literature and discourses of redemption. The Prison Writing Project and its resultant *Hulihia* publication exhibit some of the incongruous impulses of the twentieth-century New Penology movement. In *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830–1930* and *Maternal Justice: Miriam Van Waters and the Female Reform*

Tradition, feminist Estelle Freedman addresses the politics of gender-specific penal reform traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to Freedman, “with the rise of the modern penitentiary and criminal justice system post 1840,” women were imprisoned due to their economic vulnerability in an industrializing society, as well as a Victorian code that criminalized “fallen women.” The “new penology,” rooted in Christian reform movements, extended benevolence to white women of the lower classes by middle- and upper-class white women, while it marked the bodies of women of color as always already “deviant.” Efforts to control the excesses of the white female body and police its purity were entwined with both “the cult of pure womanhood” and the “progressive” penology movement by the turn of the twentieth century.

The tropes of therapeutic emancipation and Christian redemption, the prison as “home,” and the discourses of nostalgia and repentance—legacies of the New Penology—today infuse women’s prison writing. Confessional literature follows the historical trajectory of the New Penology in that it confirms, even while resisting, the apparatus of oppression. The confirmation lies in the requisite that those inside repent for their sins, even as they catalogue the societal ills that generate crime. The earliest prison writings from the eighteenth century were “gallows confessionals, oftentimes created and printed the day preceding execution,” that performed tragic forgiveness and redemption. In the nineteenth century, these gallows confessionals were vanquished by a picaresque swagger by the accused—a showcase for sensational and titillating tales of criminality that were performatively masculine. “But it was nineteenth-century slave narratives and the oral traditions of emancipated African Americans,” claims H. Bruce

Franklin “that truly sparked the development of prison literature as an identifiable genre.”²⁰

The *Hulihia* texts manifest identifications with various redemption narratives—religious, familial, societal, historical—and evince exacting claims to redemption that position women’s life writing within a particular genealogy of female prison reform. As discussed, contemporary redemption narratives are potentially harnessed to an institutional voice, including the reformist demands for personal responsibility, hard work, and transformation. Even in Pat’s choice to name the poetry publications “Hulihia”—the Hawaiian word for transformation—and in the offering of English and Hawaiian *oli* (chants/oral genealogy) created by Kumu ‘Ilima Stern, as preface to all editions, there is an assertion of transformation, whether literal, psychic, or writerly.²¹

PRISON AS HOME

Hulihia VII, the *Home* edition, is divided into three parts: “Pa’ahao” (Imprisoned), “Ki’i Oleleo a me Ho’omana’o” (Word Pictures and Memories), and “Ai ka hone e hana au” (Home is where I make It). This triptych structure is reiterated in most of Pat’s publication volumes. The triad follows a redemptive trajectory—a prescriptive cartography from imprisonment to freedom (from a state of *pa’ahao* or imprisonment to *ai ka hone e hana au* or “home is where I make it”)—that is replicated in the Prison Monologues performances. A redemption narrative is not necessarily constraining or oppressive, but it suggests a somatic or psychic liberation. The fifteen opening poems in “Pa’ahao” (Imprisoned) bespeak a psychic, spiritual, and physical imprisonment. The sixteen poems residing in the interior section—“Ki’i Oleleo a me Ho’omana’o” (Word

Pictures and Memories) hint at the idea of a middle ground—a byway between imprisonment and freedom. They allude to the power of imagination, whether it resides in writing, in memory, or in images—as an antidote to oppression. The sixteen poems in the last part—“Ai ka hone e hana au” (Home is where I make it)—proffer a mobile and liberatory home that is not limited to physical walls and structures.

The generic titling of “home” with minor variations—Pat’s editorial choice—impresses upon the reader that home signifies as both universal and particular. In some ways, the narratives of longing can be read as universal, yet in this volume, we witness the particularity and polyvocality of the revealed homes. Most marked in its departure from the collective “home” is the denouement, Pat’s poem, “Finding Home.” In the contents page, the poem is listed as *Finding Home* by Pat Clough, “Teacher.” Pat employs a parallel structure, juxtaposing her own school days under the stalwart tutelage of the nuns to the incarceration of the women in her creative writing classes.²² My decision to place Clough’s poem first is to present the complexities of her own voice of witness, as well as her desire for a fanciful home.

*A bell shrills in paneled halls
Gleaming linoleum*

*Cushions the crush of girls in blue jumpers
Summoned from lockers with small hidden mirrors
Blush and brush carelessly stashed*

*Nylons and crew socks with two-inch cuffs
Sturdy brown oxfords buffed blood-red
Hem lengths measured
By vigilant nuns²³*

The daily accessories of petty vanity are cherished items for the schoolgirls living under the perpetual scrutiny of the austere nuns. The reader wonders at the “blood-red” oxfords, a striking image embedded in the sadistic, yet “loving” buffing: a metaphor for benevolent or therapeutic care. The blue jumpers of the Catholic schoolgirls mirror the blue uniforms of the inmates, Pat’s students:

*Now
Worn cement sidewalks
In lush mountain shadow
Too many women in long blue lines
Slippers slapping to block buildings
Shackled, cuffed
Behind barbed wire*

*“For the good of society”
Shoveled from sight
Mothers, daughters
Sisters, grandmothers
Poked and probed behind steel doors*

The opening word of the stanza “Now,” isolated in its singularity, takes the reader on a temporal and shifting chronology. Pat wears the voice of the witness and testifies that the humanity and communal assembly of the women is violated by a disciplinary institution: “Shackled, cuffed / Shoveled from sight / Poked and probed behind steel doors.” The “sh,” “s,” and “c” sounds, a sardonic alliteration, evokes the body in process or the processed body. The critical tone of the poem leads the reader to wonder if the “care” of the institution is analogous to the “care” of the nuns. However, Pat’s nostalgia towards the punitive custody of the nuns troubles the implicit appraisal. Here the “steering of spirit” coexists with the “shaming, scolding” and “stretching [of] mind.”

*“For your own good”
Sisters squelched silliness
Steering my spirit
Shaming, scolding,
Stretching my mind
I loved them for it
But not then
Not then*

The twinning “not then” serves a consonant purpose to the chronological shift of “now,” avowing that one’s perspective can shift with the passing of time. The older, gracious, and introspective Pat can “now” appreciate the correction of the nuns “for your own good,” which reinforces the classroom (perhaps even Pat’s classroom where affects of compassion and respect reside) as a site of colonization in the political landscape of Hawai‘i. The last and lingering image that seals this volume is of a monkeypod tree resting in a circle—a dream-cloud of sorts—the identical tree that lives on the grounds of WCCC. Thus both the cover—an impressionistic painting of the Ko‘olau mountains—and the concluding black and white monkeypod, locate the narratives of the women in the specific landscape of O‘ahu.

*They come to my class
And write
And laugh
Cry with relief
Clutching word treasures
To healing hearts*

*Leaving, I linger
In lacey magic
Gripped in the hug of a monkeypod tree
Suddenly recalling
The girl in blue jumpers
Sent forth by the nuns so long ago*

*“Sister,” I whisper
“I found my home”*

The double entendre/enjambment of “sister” as both staunch nun and the community of women at WCCC—Pat’s simultaneous “sisters” and “students”—is a troubled imagining of home. Her poem suggests that discipline is for the women’s own good, even if they do not yet recognize it. In this sense, Pat offers her “good discipline” as a substitute for the oppressive discipline of imprisonment. Pat collapses writing—“word treasures”—with “lacey magic.” Like magic, writing, for Pat, serves as a pathway to healing. This romantic, almost mythical envisioning, prompts Pat to reimagine her own “home” as both a teacher in an incarcerated classroom and as a witness to the inside women’s healing. The monkeypod tree that Pat selects as one of the visual texts for the *Home* edition performs as an aide memoire that summons sublimated memories from Pat’s past, “Sent forth by the nuns so long ago” within a scripted, biblical narrative.

Pat is indebted to the notion of *authenticity*: the idea that through writing and the re-cording and re-ordering of memory, truth can be revealed in a process of self-discovery. Pat attributes this self-discovery to the women’s journey to believing that they are worthy. In our last conversation in the summer of 2017 at Kailua’s Morning Brew, Pat emphasizes that the skills the women gained from the writing classes—the excavation of “something inside themselves covered by poor choices, abuse, and addiction . . . the thinking skills and the opportunity to express themselves”—were instrumental in the women’s constructive transition back to society.

Inevitably, the women's writings about home spill beyond the boundaries established by the writing course, the program, and the experience of incarceration itself. Inside women's poetry and prose posit home in a myriad of ways: as a dystopic space resplendent with violence; as a counter-narrative to the mythic home; as the traumatic reiteration of injury; Pacific homes as "home-spun" homes; home as tethered to landscape; home as a healing/redemptive intergalactic; and home as dis-location (physically, literally, psychically, and spiritually). In their imagery, the women depict home variously as a wasteland wilderness, as a dysfunctional lover, as savior and, frequently, as "paradise lost."

HOME AS SITE OF TRAUMA

Many of the inside women experience home as one occupied by threatening male bodies—familial members and strangers—who violate their bodily borders. Kelly's poem, from the Federal Medical Center in Carswell (FMC), Texas, is representative of the overwhelming presence of incest and rape in the women's lives.

Fear was the foundation of my home, fear of being ambushed, sexually assaulted or even apprehended by what we call "law enforcement." There was never any stability in the place I called home. My food and water consisted of a substance, a white crystallized substance that resembled a stone that was always in different shapes And sizes. No matter the size, I was never able to fill my immediate hunger.

My primary household was a collection of men with no names and no faces. Any and all interactions were done in darkness. No one could face the actual sin, only the unspeakable pleasure it gave.

At the end of the day, there was no comfort of a warm bed, or maybe a book to read. No my nights ended wrapped up in pain, shame, guilt and degradation. I was not happy in this place called home.

~ Kelly, FMC²⁴

Kelly explains that in her childhood home, the lull of bedtime stories are usurped by “a collection of men with no names and . . . faces,” and food swapped for narcotics. Comfort gave way to terror in “nights *wrapped up* in pain . . . and degradation.” The conflation of nights with a “wrapping up,” which suggests comfort, even in the context of rape, disrupts some of the other writers’ adherence to conformist narratives. Resistance and orthodoxy coexist in the compound narratives.

Tiffany presents home as a national narrative of trauma, drug addiction, and disenfranchisement. When I met Tiffany, a brilliant and politically savvy woman, she was in TJ Mahoney & Associates’ parole reentry program, Ka Hale Ho’āla Hou No Nā Wāhine/The Home of Reawakening for Women. Tiffany’s poem straddles two geographical spaces—New York City and the island of O’ahu. The poet portrays O’ahu as an extended incarcerated space of trauma, and her reference to *batu* summons the exactitude of the ICE problem in Hawai’i: one of the most severe in the nation with its victims disproportionately the Indigenous and impoverished. Tiffany excavates her home as a miniature: a tableau of transience and deprivation. The spectacle of the “home in situ” is a violent home: “*My transient home, a metal drawer / It screeches beneath me . . .*”

Where is Home?

Home

My transient home, a metal drawer

It screeches beneath me

A metal lock to guard the safety of the few belongings I still own

Is my home really this place?

The sickness of insanity, a revolving door of recidivism

This is no New York City penthouse

That one over there is a gatekeeper, not your doorman

I see it everywhere, the comfortable the complacent

She'll sing the batu blues without a care

She's been given a bed and three meals

*Grandma soothes and rocks her babies to sleep in a lonely
corner of this island . . .*

~ Tiffany²⁵

Tiffany is critical of her “complacent” neighbors who exploit the system for a “free” home, resulting in a systemic venality, as generations of grandmothers raise their grandchildren after their parents’ disappearance. Here the Lilliputian home is a stand-in for the macro: the American prison industrial complex. The author impugns both the inmate and the institution. The title “Where is Home?” exemplifies Tiffany’s tendency towards the rhetorical: the perpetual “wondering” of the radical citizen.

This is the land of the lost

Where is home?

*I will not always be a wanderer, unsuccessful at my attempts to create a
sanctuary*

*The place I yearn for, all that home has promised to be, pretty pictures
in a magazine*

I am discovering the haven I seek

I am still seeking me

Home will reveal itself

The more I find myself, the more I realize that I'll be home when I am

Being me

~ Tiffany

In “Where is Home?” Tiffany conflates home with selfhood. Tiffany, like many of the women, explores the mythic quality of home and exposes the utopian home as an illusion. She concedes her personal failure to create a sanctuary, yet her refusal to accept the custodial as “home” is a gesture of resistance congruent with her presentation as a radical. Whereas most of the women I interviewed spoke highly of the former Warden Kawika Patterson, Tiffany was critical of his administration, asserting that it infringed upon her rights. In her view, the leadership discouraged women from having positive, intimate relationships in the facility. At the same time, Tiffany divulged that she had found her love at WCCC, her future wife. Prior to her ultimate release from WCCC, Tiffany was actually returned to the facility from TJ Mahoney’s for infractions. Though there is no evidence that she purposefully violated TJ’s rules in order to be sent back to the facility (to be with her lover), a consideration of desire and the tension between self-actualization and need for the other is instrumental. After her release, Tiffany married a man: her complex and contradictory mode of self-representation a wondrous example of the complexities of auto-biography.²⁶

This incongruity between home manifest within the self and the desire for a beloved as “home” is illustrative of the myriad expectations conjured by the term “home”: the demand for a partner to feel complete; the yearning for an idyllic home in a sanitized context; and the need for normative familial relationships devoid of conflict. All these anticipations rest uneasily beside women’s frequent privileging of anti-normative American narratives. The fact that the women are inmates immediately inscribes them within the tradition of voices from the margins: “un-American” voices.

Joanne's poem, "Home," gazes at the island of O'ahu from the West side where she was raised, and it too transmits memories of violence in a "hall with bloody walls."

*We don't want to grow up and dwell in our past
We just want a normal home at last
Down the hall with bloody walls
Can anybody hear us at all?*

*In a dark room of echoes and tears
"Lord help us,
Please appear"
On my knees in despair I ask . . ."*

~ Joanne²⁷

Here the author posits her home as a wilderness—a violent frontier—estranged from the "rectitude" of a just God or civilization. In this imperialist binary, Joanne's poem carries a plea for redemption.²⁸ She does not romanticize the homeland, but rather paints her home as a dystopic space where the motherland/mother fails to protect her children from the "bad heart" of their father. Joanne mourns the desire for a "normal" (disciplined) home, and posits a "good" and "bad" binary of the heart: "*Right now we're in desperate need and doubt / Can you change the heart of our Dad / And take away all of the bad?*" In this poem, the normative collapses into a mythic future, divorced from an unspeakable past. Just as many inside women turn to God as savior in their redemption narratives, Joanne posits God as guardian of the home. "*Loud screams of a woman / Another can of beer / We hate this house but there's no way where to go / We get on our knees and begin to pray / "Dear Lord please show us the way out . . ."*" Here, dysfunction resides in the same line as religiosity. Joanne employs direct rhyme, which lends the poem a child-like fairytale tone. The tone is ironic because its corresponding

story performs a grotesque “fairy” tale of neglect, abuse, and fear. Joanne’s sing-song nursery rhyme couples violence with innocence—a frequent feature of the *Hulihia* poems.²⁹ By borrowing from literary traditions, the inside women give homage to an American tradition of confessional poetry.

Brooke’s “Home,” rendered in prose, is also a wasteland:

I never had a real home since I was fourteen years old and before that I was getting molested and beaten. I ran from it so home is not a good thing for me to think about. I hate my last home. I was given dog food. I was whipped and spanked with thick paddles with holes. I was getting my head pounded on the wall and mother saw all this happen and didn't do anything. I don't have a happy memory of home. I finally had enough guts to leave.
~ Brooke³⁰

Home for Brooke represents a traumatic reiteration of injury. She presents the dream of an authentic or “real” home even as the emphatic negative or an estranged grammatical construct (“I *never* had a real home since I was fourteen years old and *before that* I was getting molested and beaten), connotes the impossibility of an authentic home as refuge. Brooke bares/bears an enduring physical and psychological battering that is an indelible pattern in her life. She traces the horrific abuse—the molestations, the paddling of her body, and the enforced feeding of dog food—that her mother fails to prevent. Like Joanne’s mother, Brooke’s mother is a witness to her daughter’s devastating physical abuse and neglect. The traditional vessel of nurturance, the mother, becomes a vehicle and enabler of pain. Many of the poems contain the characters of men, father figures who are palpable perpetrators; however, mothers, in their traditional role of “passive” perpetrators, also haunt the narratives.

HOME AS PARADISE LOST

As if to counterbalance the narratives of terror, the women frequently write about a “paradise lost”—the nostalgia for their homes/homelands, a domestic space—even one replete with abuse. At times, they conceive the prison as a surrogate home, and trace their transformative path towards personal salvation.

The Home I Now Carry

*In my youth, I found every reason not to be home
I made broad choices with a small mind
I took for granted that your true home is in your heart
Not just the walls, the chores and curfews I sought to avoid
Home is the family I long for that I forsook with selfish choices
And a lover that took root in a garden of many thorns*

~ Pamela³¹

Pamela’s poem is an illustration of the *Paradise Lost* theme: home is sacrificed to a dysfunctional lover, and the biblical garden of desire is overgrown with thorns. One can read Pamela’s poem, among others, as a reflection of the language of therapeutic emancipation and Christian redemption that infiltrates the politics of prison administration. The women often achieve transformation through writerly expressions of regret. Pamela mourns that she took her home, even a home filled with drudgery, for granted. In hindsight, the mundane home is reinvented as a paradise lost.

Home Is

*Cookouts, weddings and funerals
Snooping around your parents’ room
Giving up yours when relatives visit
Being sent to your room when Nana’s cigar girls visit
Home is where blessings are not material
Where the family bond is everything*

Home fills me with happy memoires when life presses down on me
~ Pamela

Pamela, who is African American and Native American, privileges the everyday rituals of family cycles: cookouts, weddings, and funerals that take place alongside the reception of “Nana’s cigar girls.” The ambiguous gender and generational assignation of “Nana”—father, mother, grandmother, or grandfather—is significant. All we know is that “Nana” likes cigar girls and that as a child, Pamela is aware of the nontraditional sexuality that is enacted within the family circle. Here, the “normative” is collapsed with the anomalous in this nostalgic recollection of the childhood home. Pamela celebrates non-material blessings, and thereby refuses the American narrative of economic ascension. The holes and silences in this recollection of home and family of origin echo Gayatri Gopinath’s preoccupation with how “omission—rather than targeted derision—is used as a strategy for policing sexual minorities.”³² Just as in South Asian representations of queer sexuality, in the *Hulihia* women’s writing about home we see an erasure from domestic space. Pamela, who is gay but doesn’t overtly articulate her queerness, likewise polices the queerness in her narrative. This erasure from domestic space is a complex enactment in the *Hulihia* women’s writing about home and an apt example of a paradise lost as the carceral home replaces the familial home.

THE MYTHOLOGIZED HOME ROOTED IN HOMELAND

Home

*A mother so loving, her unconditional love pours out with her deadly hugs
Her hugs store up happy memories that help me get through anything
Her hands rough and scratched show her hard work but gentle touch
Every scratch and wrinkle shows her experience and suffering
Though she doesn't show her struggles, hidden in her eyes you can see them*
~ Melody, ROC³³

The women who fill the pages of *Hulihia* and write from a physical and psychic diaspora, indict the mother-daughter relationship as mnemonic devices of the colonizer/colonized dialogic, even as they express an idealized desire for their lost mothers.³⁴ In several of these narratives, mothers who have been subjected to abuse and colonization transpose their bodily and psychic trauma onto their daughters. The daughters' recognition of the familial abuse, even more excruciating at the hands of their own mothers, is one of the arms of resistance the inside women exercise in their poetry. In Melody's "Home," "unconditional love" is collapsed with "deadly hugs." This dual destructive/generative fuel of the mother saturates the women's writing. The relationship with the mother imbues an aura of the incestuous, a relationship that closely mirrors dysfunctional lovers. In this way, the incarcerated writing echoes the writing of many female diasporic writers of color—Jamaica Kincaid, Saaidiya Hartman, and Audre Lorde. Across the diversity of cultures, the fantasy of the mother infuses all of the texts of both the *Hulihia* writers and the diasporic writers of color. This duality towards mother and motherland is foregrounded in the inmates' writing about home in which shame and resistance haunt explorations of memory and trauma. Many diasporic writers articulate writing as lifesaving as they work towards alternate presentations of

themselves. At times, this takes the form of liberating themselves from overbearing mothers; at others, it finds expression as a romantic adoration of the mother.

I'll Be Home

*It's lonely here
I need your touch, your voice*

*I got lost in a crazy world
I know I hurt you mamma
I left you worried, scared and searching for me
Days without one call
I left my children in your care, no goodbye
I had to get high*

*Just one hit
That's all I needed
Strung out with faded memories
Mesmerized by my own destruction
I had to get high*

*I couldn't look you in the eyes
I was afraid you'd see the lies
I had to get high*

*All alone behind these prison walls
Thinking about your pretty brown eyes
And every tear I made you cry
I had to get high*

Who would have ever thought you would be the one to understand

*It ended so wrong
I didn't belong
Please hold on
I will be home and never again will I leave you alone*

~ Brandy, FMC³⁵

Brandy's ode to her mother is a tragic tale of love lost. The refrain "I had to get high" is formally and psychologically juxtaposed to her duty to her mother with the

“pretty brown eyes,” who is left behind to raise her children. The poem’s denouement is the poet’s promise to eternally be with her mother. Here the mother is symbolic of the jilted lover. The repetition of language, ideas, and themes is characteristic of trauma narratives, and this recording and re-recording is a way of making meaning out of pain. Writing in this sense is like the puckering of skin and surfaces. The *Hulihia* texts borrow from the genre of the hagiography of saints, but they resist and expand its borders. If the mother is elevated to the status of saint, she is in some of the women’s poems simultaneously vilified. Inside women share with diasporic writers such as Jamaica Kincaid “an interest in self-naming and renaming, and the centrality of the mother-daughter relationship as a site of enigmatic trauma.”³⁶

The women of *Hulihia* employ a fragmentary and fractured “speaking in tongues” that was a key characteristic of marginalized forms of writing and subjectivity in the late 1980s and early 1990s.³⁷ This syntactical and idiomatic glossolalia serves to mnemonically act out the repetitive musings of trauma: the refusal to forget. The triptych framework employed by Pat allows for an interplay between self-representation and the dialogic as the serial poems link together in a mosaic of crossings, or what Leigh Gilmore names as an “intertextual system of meaning.”³⁸

Some women speak of home as longing, as a lover, as a figment of imagination; others as talismans that they carry with them. In this way “home” performs as a spiritual abstraction: *“Home is never so far away from me / When I’m lost in the middle of the darkest forest / Home is never so far away from me / In trying to find a way out of this labyrinth / Home is never so far away from me / Because home is always in my heart.”*³⁹

This privileging of “home” and the collapse of a home with godliness reflects Christian missionaries’ conceptions of home and domesticity, and echoes prison programming that aims at reform and redemption. It stands in stark contrast to Indigenous re-imaginings and recollections of home that are rooted in a particularized landscape: the islands that comprise Hawai‘i.

Amourelle, a white mainlander in her 30s who frequently wears her hair in French braids, summons the individualized daily trappings of her “home” as chronicles of memory: *“Photo albums bursting with captured memories . . . / My arms wrap around my children / My favorite chain, my favorite T-shirt / The comfort of all the familiarity of life’s trinkets collected along the way.”*⁴⁰ The poetry collected in this volume passages between the domesticated memories that are imprisoned like the women’s bodies, to the political odes to the homeland of Hawai‘i. The preponderance of “homes” in this volume are rooted in Hawai‘i, despite the fact that some of the women were not raised here. In one exception, Karen pens an ode to her Wisconsin farm home: *“A drafty white farmhouse high on the hill / . . . I fuss over a pregnant mare / Belly swollen with life / . . . A simple life / Unadorned and pure / I am that girl at home on a Farm.”*⁴¹ The characters in Karen’s poem are particular to her Midwest birthplace (“drafty white farmhouse”/“pregnant mare”) but not divergent from many of the Indigenous women who were raised in Big Island farming communities. The cover depicts the politicized and contested Hawaiian Home Land of Waimanalo.⁴² The handpicked Waimanalo landscape as cover is evocative because the prison itself is situated in the majestic

Ko'olau mountains between Kailua and Waimanalo. The cover works like the kaona (hidden meaning) of hula—a double entendre, a form of political resistance.

The poignancy and tragedy of “home” resonates given the threat of climate disaster—a concern now even more pressing with a new political administration that is hostile to the Environmental Protection Agency. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are most vulnerable to the deleterious effects of climate change, including “transnational crime, drug and human trafficking, piracy and wildlife exploitation, illicit abuse of resources, rising sea levels, dying coral reefs and the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters that exacerbate the potential predicament of community displacement and migration.”⁴³ Islands are facing literal extinction: a permanent erasure of home. With the escalating effects of climate change on global and local home/s, incarcerated women’s depictions of home in a Pacific women’s state prison provide particularly compelling scripts.

This chapter has performed twin interventions: it exposes the internally contradictory evocations of “home” generated within a women’s prison—an embrace and repudiation of a heteronormative domesticity—and it carves out a space in prison writing scholarship for women’s prison writing in the Pacific. The *Hulihia* texts position the inside women’s life writing within a particular genealogy of prison reform through their manifest identifications with various redemption narratives: religious, familial, societal, and historical. Ultimately, we are left with the uneasy realization that comfortable scripts never heal trauma, whether familial trauma, the historical trauma inflicted on the homeland of Hawai'i, or the contemporary trauma of imprisonment. The

Hulihia women undermine institutional, programmatic, and societal directives only as they excavate imagined paths through their historical traumas.

Looking Back

*Everyone at home has gotten used to having me away
With 13 years of prison time
There's not much I can say
The reality of my life today I made all on my own
If I could change one thing in life
I would've stayed home*

~ Jennifer, WCCC⁴⁴



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NOTES FROM CHAPTER TWO

¹ “Home” by Joanne is published in the seventh edition of the prison’s yearly publications—*Hulihia VII: Writings from Prison and Beyond* (Kailua, HI: Women’s Correctional Community Center, Fall 2011).

² See RaeDeen Keahiolalo-Karasuda, “A Genealogy of Punishment in Hawai‘i: The Public Hanging of Chief Kamanawa II,” *Hūlilī: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being* 6 (2010).

³ Today Moloka‘i is primarily inhabited by Native Hawaiians. This author was invited to participate in an outrigger canoe race on Moloka‘i. From her personal observation and the testimony of the family with whom she stayed and paddled with, “everyone in Moloka‘i is someone’s aunty,” and there is a marked absence of ha‘ole folk. Moloka‘i is perhaps the least visited of the Islands besides the uninhabited and militarily occupied Kaho‘olawe and the privately owned Ni‘ihau—and in this way, it is liberated from tourism. From the 1860s–1960s, eight thousand people, mostly Native Hawaiians, were forcibly removed from their families and relocated to Kalaupapa—the “leper colony”—on the remote Island of Moloka‘i. This exile echoes a disciplining of non-white bodies, paralleling contemporary examples in the Ebola crisis, the Guantánamo Bay detention camp, and the remote South Pacific island nation of Nauru’s concentration camp, euphemistically named—the Nauru Regional Processing Centre.

⁴ Alia Wong, “When the Last Patient Dies,” *The Atlantic*, May 27, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/05/when-the-last-patient-dies/394163>.

⁵ An example of the ways in which the Pacific particularizes the writing in *Hulihia VII* is that the women’s words serve as political resistance, similarly to the way double-meanings (kaona) were embedded in the choreography of hula. Kaona frequently existed as “insider” ways of knowing, which were useful when hula was banned by the colonist invaders for its “lasciviousness.”

⁶ See Malcolm Braly’s *On the Yard*, *New York Review of Books*, 1967.

⁷ I explore Pat’s penchant for masculinist and individualistic American narratives such as Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* (1951) and Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” (1916) in chapter one. These texts are a curious choice, given her audience.

⁸ The Farrington ninth graders, under the guidance of their teacher, Melinda Malele, “added their Pacific island voices to the writing contest,” writes Pat in her introduction to the “Home” edition of *Hulihia*. Pat states the youth from ROC “found writing about home . . . compatible with their mission. Eight students, under the guidance of community organizer, Dorothy Pregil, are leading clean-up efforts, bridging poverty, housing projects and Pacific island neighborhoods in an ambitious charge to restore pride in their ‘home.’ ROC’s driving force consists of youth from Our Lady of the Mount, St. Augustine’s Tongan community, and Mormon youth ministries.” Embedded in this epilogue is the thorny marriage between Pacific Island voices and communities and the church. It is worth noting that both these Kalihi schools service economically disenfranchised communities, many of which the women at WCCC come from. Thus there is a recognition of “home” that is passed between the women and the students.

⁹ See Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books. 1999); Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of

Chapel Hill, 1991); and George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970).

¹⁰ Eric Cummins identifies in the 1960s, at the height of the bibliotherapy movement, a tension between prescriptions for autobiographical work as moral pedagogy versus prisoners' resistant counter-narratives—Karen Kaplan's "outlaw texts." The literary boom in the prisons, argues Cummins, faded with the demise of the radical prison movement."

¹¹ A writing form that is a defense.

¹² A genre developed in Latin America that foregrounds a collective witnessing of the oppressed. "In testimonio, the narrator intends to communicate the situation of a group's oppression, struggle, or imprisonment . . . and to call on readers to respond actively in judging the crisis." Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 282.

¹³ "Making Sense of Letters and Diaries," Steven Stowe, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/letters/letters.pdf>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Home" by Jessica C. is published in "Ki'i Oleleo a me Ho'omana'o" (Word Pictures and Memories), 22.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Introduction to *Wall Tappings*, xiii.

¹⁹ Huling offers up the narrative of a correctional officer in New York who, after observing the intricacies and curves of their gardens, complains that women cannot plant in a straight line. This is testament to women's subversive practices of artistry.

²⁰ See Theodore Hamm, "The Prisoner Speaks," *American Quarterly* 51.3 (1999): 738–744. Hamm references H. Bruce Franklin's *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²¹ Oli is a Hawaiian chant used to accompany Hula and for the purposes of lament, prayer, and genealogy, to name a few. 'Ilima Stern was the assistant director to Pat in the early years of the Prison Writing Program.

²² The incarceration is ambiguous because Pat critiques the nun's stifling of the girls (herself) but concludes the stanza with "I loved them for it / But not then / Not then," 46. The emphasis and repetition of "not then" implies an ambivalence to institutional discipline that the auteur appreciates in hindsight. Pat collapses her personal experience with "correction" to the systemic corrections that her students face within the facility.

²³ "Finding Home" by Pat Clough. This entry is set off as it is the only one that is identified with a last name and the appellation, "Teacher." In a sense, it is the singular poem that rejects anonymity. The poem is published in *Hulihia VII* in "Ai aka home e hana au" (Home is where I make it), 46.

²⁴ "Home?" by Kelly is published in "Pa'ahao" (Imprisoned), 14. I have kept the unorthodox and perhaps awkward line breaks intact to maintain an authenticity to the published piece, which is more prosaic than poetic.

²⁵ "Where is Home?" by Tiffany, in *Hulihia VII* in "Pa'ahao" (Imprisoned), 4.

²⁶ Based upon our conversations, I gleaned that Tiffany was unhappy living without her "wife," despite the fact that they did not engage in a physical relationship while in prison, fearing administrative retaliation.

²⁷ “Home” by Joanne is published in “Ki’i Oleleo a me Ho’omana’o” (Word Pictures and Memories), 23.

²⁸ These tales are reinforced in the institutional programming, such as the religiously driven Total Life Recovery (TLR) and *Hina Mauka* programs, explored in the introduction. Many of the women in the writing program are concurrently TLR and Hina Mauka participants and many of our conversations circle around the embracing of Jesus in their lives, which exists alongside their desire to explore self-discovery. Pat attempts to steer the writing away from the scriptural.

²⁹ Joanne’s poem echoes one of the most reputed poems by a confessional poet, Sylvia Plath in her 1962 “Daddy,” where she conflates herself with a Jew condemned to Dachau/Auschwitz/Bergen-Belsen (a troubling generic conflation) and her father with Hitler. The *Hulihia* women’s writing employs the “intense coupling of violent/disturbed imagery with [the] playful use of alliteration and rhyme” that Plath is noted for.

³⁰ “Home” by Brooke, is published in “Ki’i Oleleo a me Ho’omana’o” (Word Pictures and Memories), 17.

³¹ “The Home I Now Carry” by Pamela (a repeat taker of Pat’s Advanced Writing class) is published in “Ai aka home e hana au” (Home is Where I Make It), 44. Pamela, as a writer who has been published in many of Pat’s *Hulihia* volumes, informed me that her “Home” poems are her least favorite. After a class that I recently taught at the facility, I saw Pamela in the education room, bereft of her white kitchen uniform, her hair in high braids with more gray than I remembered, engaged in art work. Pamela presents a complicated and composite performance of selves. She readily admits that she loves to smoke cigars, a predilection from her Caribbean grandmother. However, the Nana depicted in this poem is of mixed German and Scottish ancestry. Pamela’s mother died over two years ago and she requested to attend her mother’s funeral on a mainland reservation, which was denied. In chapter one, I explore the perpetual trauma of losing a loved one while incarcerated. Pamela attributes her poem, “My Committee of Voices” in *Hulihia IX*, to Pat’s ability to challenge her through grief: “I will always be grateful to Ms. Pat for that.”

³² Romit Dasgupta, review of Gayatri Gopinath’s *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, in *Intersections: Gender, History, and Culture in the Asian Context*, no. 14 (November 2006).

³³ “Home” by Melody is published in “Ki’i Oleleo a me Ho’omana’o” (Word Pictures and Memories), 24.

³⁴ I explore the censorship of the *Hulihia* texts in chapters one and three, positing Pat and the institution within the colonizer/colonized mother/daughter dialogic.

³⁵ “I’ll Be Home” by Brandy is published in “Pa’ahao” (Imprisoned), 10.

³⁶ In *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Leigh Gilmore notes that Jamaica Kincaid sanctifies her mother as a “mythic” creature. “There Will Always Be a Mother: Jamaica’s Kincaid’s Serial Autobiography,” 101–102. See also Audre Lorde’s *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (New York: Crossing Press, 1983) in which Lorde allows the poetic voice to intercede and disrupt linear narrative—her deployment of the myth.

³⁷ Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin describes this polyvocality and the disruption of linear narratives as “heteroglossic dialogism,” that is the multiplicity of “tongues” or the “polyvocality through which subjectivity is enunciated.” Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 216. In Jamaica Kincaid’s serial autobiography (*At the Bottom of the River, Annie John, My Brother*,

Lucy, and *Autobiography of My Mother*), the author performs a speaking of tongues in her inexorable linguistic repetition, as well as in the making and re-making of her “characters”—autobiographical composite selves.

³⁸ Gilmore, *Limits of Autobiography*, 98.

³⁹ “My Permanent Home, Heaven” by Taniela at ROC is published in “Ai aka home e hana au” (Home is Where I Make It), 41.

⁴⁰ “Home,” by Amourelle, is published in “Ai aka home e hana au” (Home is where I make it), 34.

⁴¹ This line evokes the foremost prison, Eastern State Penitentiary in Pennsylvania, which countered the contemporaneous Auburn, New York system aimed at communal silence and instituted a separate system of rehabilitation. The line also evokes the founding fathers’ edict of America as a “beacon on a hill” amidst the surrounding wilderness. Karen’s “Farm” is published in “Ki’i Oleleo a me Ho’omana’o” (Word Pictures and Memories), 16.

⁴² The cover for *Hulihia VII* is by artist Louisa S. Cooper.

⁴³ According to a concept note (document S/2015/543) prepared by the delegation of New Zealand, the United Nations classifies fifty-two territories as small-island developing states, including thirty-seven member states, with a combined population of over fifty million people. See “Issues Facing Small Island Developing States ‘Global Challenges’ Demanding Collective Responsibility, Secretary-General Tells Security Council,” United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, July 30, 2015, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc11991.doc.htm>.

⁴⁴ “Looking Back,” by Jennifer is published in *Hulihia VII* in “Pa’ahao,” 11.

⁴⁵ This woodcut block print is by the well-respected Big Island artist Dietrich Varez, who gifted some of his images to WCCC. The image is pasted on the walls in one the smaller education classrooms where both Pat and I teach. Pat reprints this image in the *Hulihia* journals next to the opening oli by Kumu ’Ilima Stern. Varez’s work on the mythology of Hina and her various manifestations is an apt symbol of hope for the women at WCCC, as it chronicles her multifarious powers. In the foreword to *Hina, The Goddess*, Varez writes, “The name Hina, or variations thereof, occurs in mythologies throughout the Pacific. Hina usually refers to a strong female creative force as personified by a goddess over a specific domain. In Hawaiian mythology, for example there is Hina-puku-i’a (Hina-gathering-seafood) the goddess of fishermen. Or there is Hina-’opu-hala-ko’a who gave birth to all of reef life. Another more popular Hina is the goddess of the moon.” Varez was inspired to create the block prints after viewing performances of the powerful and ancient Kahiko form of hula at the 1986 Merrie Monarch Festival in Hilo, Hawai’i, when a raging storm swept over Hilo and plunged the town and the festival into utter darkness at the precise moment of a compulsory chant for the wahine (women) about Hina and the gourd calabash in which she captured three windstorms. Known for her forceful ways and power over the physical world, Hina is a force to be reckoned with. One hula halau took this sign from the heavens so seriously that they withdrew from the competition. From the book jacket of *Hina, The Goddess*, written and illustrated by Dietrich Varez, New Petite edition (Hilo, HI: Petroglyph Press, 2009).

CHAPTER THREE

The Stage Away from the Page

When we started to go out and perform not just for the children—but for adults, doctors, professors, and judges—it was a confirmation that what we do is full impact, not just for the children but for people from all walks of life. And that’s when I realized that what I do makes a big difference. That what I say, my stories and the way me and my team gel makes a difference. It works. It definitely works. I feel that it’s not even us when we are up there.

When we are up there . . . We are so anointed.

~ Vailea, Prison Monologues, Women’s Correctional Community Center

The Prison Monologues is a curious, hybrid body—not quite theater, not quite spoken word. This chapter departs from and extends the mediated space of the classroom and the text-based testimony of the *Hulihia* publications as it turns to the informal readings of the women’s published work that they perform for each other in the facility’s dorms and cottages, and then to the larger public performances of the Prison Monologues program.¹ It highlights the complex relationships between public performances and audiences of the Prison Monologues—a theater of witness. Loosely modeled after the work that director/writer Eve Ensler conducted at the maximum-security Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women, minus the celebrity actors, the Prison Monologue performances have ranged from intimate school presentations with forty people in attendance to an overflow crowd of fifteen hundred in Roosevelt High School’s sprawling auditorium.² Performed at high schools and middle schools across the state, as well as at local and international conferences on O’ahu, including the

Office of Youth Services Annual Conference, Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity, and the 'Aha Wahine Conference, and more recently in the outer Islands of Big Island and Maui, the Prison Monologues has been heralded by the former Governor of Hawai'i, Linda Lingle, as a "must see."³

Nevertheless, the director of the Prison Monologues, Pat Clough, seeks to circumvent the commodification of the women's words and simultaneously permits and harnesses resistance in conjunction with reform. As the reader becomes a vicarious bystander to the Prison Monologue performances, she registers the quandary of a state-sponsored redemption as both censoring and productive. Indeed, in some instances, the performances shore up the legitimacy of the state. Utilizing the lens of performance studies, I analyze the slippage between performativity and life writing, exploring the model of reform behind the Prison Monologues project and the tensions between the "sacred nature of testimony" and the "commodification and consumption of testimonial discourse."⁴ Within theaters of testimony, individual narratives of trauma are frequently "escalated to the universal narratives of abandoned childhoods."⁵ This universal narrative of the fall (suffering) and its corresponding ascent (overcoming suffering) is an indelible character in the Prison Monologues, explicitly designed as a pu'uhonua or a transformative site of refuge and forgiveness.

In an interview at the facility, Vailea, one of the original stars of the Prison Monologues, describes the Monologues as a ritualistic, sacred theater. Vailea speaks for the group in her insistence that the Prison Monologue women feel "so anointed up

there”—on the stage or in the classroom. All of the women I spoke to from the Monologues conveyed their belief that the presentations “saved lives”—their own and those of the high school students, whom the women lovingly call “the children.” Vailea, a Samoan woman with an avalanche of waist-length black hair, reiterates my observation that even after my twenty-odd viewings of the presentations, the Prison Monologues never become boring:⁶

*I felt so misunderstood growing up. We have performed for thousands and thousands of kids. I am at the point that if we save even one I feel good. So you would think that with every single experience, it would become boring. But it's not. Every single time something happens. And every single time I shed a tear for a kid that is going through some hurt. If they are misunderstood, I feel as if I am there with them. Reliving their experiences with them.*⁷

Because of the ephemerality endemic to performance, it is—unlike a written text—not constant. The dramatic utterance houses a transformative essence more vibrant and alive than the words on the page. In this sense, the Prison Monologues are an extension of the creative writing classes. The Prison Monologues resemble the genre of community theater in that it blends “theater” with the staging of human rights—in this case, the rights of the woman inside, as well as of the school communities that share similar cultural, familial, ethnic, and political locations with the women.⁸ The Prison Monologues straddle the divide between performance and pedagogy, between performance and the sharing of life narratives, and between performance and spoken word. The Monologuers’ complex scripts draw upon familiar scripts of redemption even as they subvert national narratives that disavow the realities of domestic abuse, poverty, and disenfranchisement. They counter the tragic narratives by performing them

alongside hopeful narratives, and utilize their powers of writing and performance to attract and compel audiences.

Nevertheless, transformation is constrained within gendered cultural scripts and punitive institutional structures. Indigenous healing practices embedded in prisons at once offer avenues for healing and serve as an arm of the carceral system, which mirrors the tribulations in the loss of sovereignty. Indigenous cultural practices are frequently appropriated and staged by carceral institutions and the state to garner funding, while at times not authentically or appropriately benefitting the women inside. In 2015, I visited Grand Valley Institution for Women (GVI), a federal prison in Kitchener, Ontario, as part of the Walls to Bridges Prison Facilitator Training. At that time, the inside women expressed to the women in the training—First Nations activists and Canadian academics—that they frequently felt like objects of “study” or specimens, despite the program’s ideology to dismantle the borders between the “inside” and “outside.” One woman spoke impassionedly about the power of prison tours to dehumanize those inside. Despite the history of genocide and the contemporary violation of First Nations’ Rights in Canada, there are Indigenous smudging practices and a sweat lodge in place at GVI. The incorporation of Indigenous healing practices in GVI, as in WCCC, to “service” the over-represented Indigenous populations in confinement thus presents knotty ethical issues.

The Monologues fall within the genre of Community Theater, given their penchant for pedagogical lessons and advocacy of transformation of both the performer and spectator. The performances serve as aid memoires or cautionary tales for the

teenagers, but also for the adult audience, about the perils of making “bad” choices. Lacing its script with prophecy, the Prison Monologues trace the spine of 12-step programs and redemptive narratives: “if you avoid temptation, you can have a life worth living.” The former Warden Kawika Patterson envisions the Prison Monologues as a political missile to dismantle inter-generational incarceration. In an interview with Dr. Kosasa at the facility in 2013, Patterson explains that “sixty-five percent of the children of the [inside] women go to jail. They [the youth] are keeping the Criminal Justice system in business.”⁹ Wryly confirming that the Hawaiian cycle of incarceration mirrors national statistics, Patterson imagines the Prison Monologues as an antidote to recidivism and an opportunity for the women to give back to a community that they have “wronged.” The Center for Hegemony Studies, which produced and archived “Journey to Justice: A Conversation with Warden Kawika Patterson and Eiko Kosasa: Part One,” describes the Prison Monologues as:

One of the Center’s more public programs . . . where women write about their past experiences and perform their written work at schools and other venues, as a means of giving back to the community . . . Soon after his appointment as warden, he [Patterson] realized that female inmates were imprisoned for non-violent crimes and thus began to implement ways to transition the Women’s Correctional Center from an institution of incarceration to a place of healing or sanctuary (pu’uhonua). In this initiative, he welcomed a variety of community-based organizations to offer their programs to female prisoners, because he realized that his institution had been dealing with larger societal issues than just individuals who had committed crimes. Moreover, Patterson concludes that it will take the efforts of both the public and private sectors of society to create this sanctuary for incarcerated women.¹⁰

Evident here is Patterson’s belief that the Prison Monologues program, a form of restorative justice, is a reciprocal venture. Not only is it an avenue for the women to give

back to the community, but equally important, it is the community's kuleana (responsibility) to restore the sanctuary for the women. This reciprocity is in alignment with a Hawaiian epistemology. The warden's insight that the personal narratives of the women deepen in accordance with their longevity in the program, points to the therapeutic and restorative nature of the programming.¹¹ At the same time, the Prison Monologues have ushered in some renown for the Kailua Prison Writing Project, the facility, and the warden himself. In this sense, the Prison Monologues program legitimizes the institution.¹²

The auto/biographical excerpts encased in the Prison Monologues "showcase" are performed as part of a scripted trilogy, which adheres to a chronological trajectory: "Who We Were," "Prison Life," and "Reflections." This trilogy is faithful to the arc of a conversion narrative, duplicate in Pat's structuring of most of the *Hulihias*. The conversion narrative is one of the most common narratives in the Prison Monologues program. A contemporary form of conversion, it draws upon canonical and historical conversions such as enforced prisoner confessions and conversions as public spectacle, deathbed conversions, and ritualistic conversions performed in religious institutions, all of which aimed to deter apostasy.¹³ Contemporary audiences acclimated to conversion narratives through experiences in the church readily receive the Monologues' public renditions of their private transformations. Ultimately, the Prison Monologues showcase their pre-conversion tortured identities in the Who We Were section vis-à-vis their triumphant post-conversion identities in the Reflections fragment.¹⁴ The writing and performance of the inside women's life stories travel across

time and are showcased as a “performing self . . . negotiated between one’s past and present.”¹⁵

In *Performing Exile, Performing Self*, Yana Meerzon claims that a tripartite schema structures Western and Greek theaters of exile. This structure also resonates with Pat’s tripartite mapping of the Prison Monologues: “leaving home” (Who We Were); “living in a new country” (Prison Life); and “passage home” (Reflections). Following this pattern, the prison is the “new country,” a floating island with its exacting customs, idiosyncrasies, and habitual ways of life. In the Greek “democracy,” exile was envisioned both as a punishment and existential journey, a psychological process.¹⁶ And all of the twenty Prison Monologues performances I have witnessed address exile as both a physical and a psychological location. Meerzon argues that though exile results in displacement, dislocation, and depression, it is also artistically regenerative; and this quality of re-awakening is apparent in the Monologues as well.

The Prison Monologue presentations are theatrical. The space of the Monologues, like the pu’uhonua itself, is imagined as a sanctuary: a site of transformation. As in other theatrical venues, crossing the stage—whether a bare classroom floor, or a raised proscenium—is to passage across a delineated border into another world. Pat contests the Prison Monologues as “performance”; instead, she labels them “presentations.” The students, by contrast, refer to them as “lectures,” inserting them directly into a familiar pedagogical framework. Since at times these “presentations” occur on a proscenium stage with lighting and props, their proximity to performance is nonetheless palpable. Prison Monologue rehearsals convene every

Saturday and sometimes Sundays; women must “audition” for the Monologues, which are followed by “tryouts”—all ingredients that re-inscribe the process as theater.

This rest of this chapter, mirroring the structural three-part conversion narrative, is composed of three sections. The first draws upon the warden’s, Pat’s, and the women’s testimony to trace the creation of the Prison Monologues. It is informed by the one-on-one interviews that I conducted with the women at the facility, and those on the outside with women who have been paroled. Section two moves to my own creative re-creation of a performance, staged within its corresponding tripartite structure: “Who We Were,” “Prison Life,” and “Reflections.” It is important to note that this performative rendition is not a singular recreation of a performance, but rather an amalgamation of various performances in different venues.¹⁷ Women assume the formula and texts of prior iterations of the performance, for example, when a woman leaves the facility and gifts her poem or letter to another woman to enact. In the re-narration and repetition, the performers and the performances are in a sense transposable. Lastly, I chronicle the ways in which various interested parties—Pat, the warden, the inside women, the guards, the media, the audience, and I myself—read the meanings of these performances. In this way, I conclude with layered reactions to the Prison Monologues’ presentations.

THE AUDITION

It’s Saturday. February 6, 2013. I attend the Prison Monologues audition, which is held in one of the larger education classrooms at the facility. Twelve women are present: Liezel, Ivelisse, and Vailea, the nine women who have come to audition for

them, and Pat. With the imminent departure of the core members, all of whom will be facing parole in 2014, Pat needs to find new members. Pat opens her “Prison Monologue Lab”—a training ground for new women who wish to participate in her successful outreach program. Pat is adamant about not identifying the group as “performers.”

The selection process into the Prison Monologues is particularly rigorous: a process that both Pat and Warden Patterson oversee. The prerequisites to becoming a Monologuer include positive performance in the creative writing classes; “good behavior,” which requires a compliance with administrative and institutional rules; and “good” institutional standing, which usually insists upon a minimum-custody status that allows the women to exit the facility.¹⁸ There are amorphous requirements at play in the selection process, including each woman’s appeal and ability to relate to students, as well as Pat’s desire for a representative selection of women by age, ethnicity, and sexual preference. Many of the inside women vie for membership in this elite group due to the obvious privileges it bestows, particularly the privileges to engage with school-age students, to impact their lives, and to participate as citizens on the outside. The fact that the post-presentation reception includes a spread of non-prison food is quite a draw as well.

In a nearly two-hour interview at the facility, Vailea confirms the rigorous emphasis that Pat places on the role of writing in the Prison Monologue program. *“You know Ms. Pat—the Prison Monologues is her baby. She put me through this whole interview. She encourages us to write—now Ivelisse, Liezel, and I journal every day. I*

never thought I was a journaling type of gal. And it doesn't have to be a poem. She wants us to be reflective, to be able to express our feelings. To give a voice to anger. To pain. To disappointment.”¹⁹

At this Saturday audition, Pat will evaluate potential Monologuers' authenticity, commitment, and talent. With the support of Liezel, Ivelisse, and Vailea, Pat firmly lays out her rules and expectations of what it means to be a Prison Monologuer. Pat takes the mic in her role as impresario:

We are not changing the so-called “script.” But we are changing the representations of these stories. We are looking for all these stories and voices to not be the same. “Who I Was” is the introduction to the audience. “Prison Life” is for those who don't know [what life is like inside]—even the children, especially the children. The “Reflection,” including the letters home and kids' day, is part of the enriching experience while here. All of this stays the same. So don't go out and just wing it. We work from the core, foundational pieces of writing. Writing is very important to them [the Prison Monologue women] and to me. That's why taking the writing class is extremely beneficial. It is about integrity. And it starts here. Kaipō and Liezel were both part of my first creative writing class ten years ago. We have won so much praise: it is the courage to repeatedly tell the story.²⁰

Pat inserts herself as a character and community member of the Prison Monologues—as part of the collective “we.” According to acclaimed performance studies theorist and director Richard Schechner, if “rituals are performative . . . and performances are ritualized,”²¹ then Pat's insertion of her own testimony as a “codified, repeatable action” is among the ritualistic practices of the “beloved community.”²² Pat's insistence on the integrity of writing echoes her commitment to the transformative power of the Kailua Prison Writing Project, as well as to her belief in the grueling work of writing as craft. One of the requisites of membership in the Prison Monologues program

is attendance in at least one term of Pat's creative writing classes. Most of the women selected for the program are already students in her intermediate/advanced classes, unless they have exceptional writing and dynamic performance skills. An example of such a student, whom we meet in the Prologue, is the twenty-three-year-old Lahela, institutionalized as a juvenile in the Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility. Pat admires Lahela's poetry, her articulate comments, her desire for change, and her youth, all of which facilitate Lahela's connection with the mostly teenager audience. However, her minimum-custody status at the facility is often in jeopardy due to administrative infractions. Her sister, who was arrested with Lahela for the same crime and sentenced to the facility, cycles in and out of the SHU, which has a deleterious effect on Lahela's moods. Despite Pat's aspiration to recruit Lahela to the Monologues, the maintenance of a minimum-custody status is not negotiable.

As an introduction to the Prison Monologues program, Pat positions the three-part structure as pedagogical lessons for the audience: lessons that are byways from the outside to the inside. Another instructional lesson that Pat wants to impart is the necessity for discipline and courage "to repeatedly tell the story." The fact that the Prison Monologues ritualistically perform a narrative for an audience that is at once communal and markedly individual—a tale that performs destruction and resurrection—positions the Prison Monologues as a theater of witness.

Pat passes the mic to the more reticent Liezel. Pat and Liezel are close, and in some ways Liezel is Pat's second pair of eyes. Pat trusts Liezel implicitly and is instrumental in her commutation. In fact, when Pat departs after the summer term, she

invites Liezel to teach her class to the inside women who have mild and moderate disabilities. This is the first time that women with severe cognitive disabilities are included in the creative writing program, although I have noted that there are women in the classes who have mild learning disabilities and mental illness diagnoses.²³ Pat expressed to me that she would prefer that all of her students arrive at the classes with at least a high school diploma, but due to the lack of support from the educational liaison, this is not the case. Liezel gently and deliberately instructs the auditioners:

The Prison Monologues is not about vanity. It's about looking at a bigger world. Getting out of the small world in here. When we started the Monologues, two kids were invited with us to the Capitol. They were included in a professional community as part of the domestic violence conference. We were the keynote speakers. Adults are the new audience for the Monologues. Why are they drawn to us? We teach them how to reach the kids. So what did we learn from the adult audience that we didn't expect? They have their PhDs, their therapist licenses, but they don't know anything about the kids—our kids. It is not about reading or writing a paper. This is not acting—we are not acting. This is real life. The hurt we've been through is real.

The inside women claim the teenagers as their own kin, forging affective ties across generations. It is their veritable suffering—“the hurt we've been through is real”—that enables the inside women to reach their teenage audience: a bond that eludes the teenagers' teachers and community members. Liezel highlights one of the tenets of Pat's program: the Prison Monologues is not theater—an ideology that Vailea and Ivelisse resist. Vailea jumps on the mic:

Attitude is important. The consideration for others on the team. People are hustling for us. Ask Melinda when she messed up, we addressed her on the spot. It's not about her—it is beyond the gate. Don't waste our time—we don't want to waste their time. Some people have come out with us and they are not in sync with what we believe in. You guys will have the paparazzi chasing you soon and I

ain't lying. We break down thousands of kids and bring them to one place. They see the bond and affection we have for each other on stage. [And in turn] they open their minds and hearts to each other.

Now the chairs have personalities. The kids want to sit on them—they do! They participate as if it's a place we have returned to. They face each other . . . they pay attention to each other. In this sense it is theater. It becomes dramatic—a dramatic gift of each others' lives. Please know how important the Prison Monologues has become to us. We have no problem telling someone to step back.²⁴ If you come on, humility plays the biggest part. Never forget where we come from. If we decide that you are toxic to our group, we have no problem telling you so. Just food for thought.²⁵

Pat elegantly sidesteps Vailea's call-out for and against drama:

Think about your delivery. Not about being dramatic right now but feeling your message. Like in class when we all feel it. They [educators, carceral workers, politicians] want to be more effective. They want to have your sensitivity and credibility without having had your life experience. It's hard to do. That's why they are forming partnerships. You have been through the system: you know what works. The women who developed the Monologues didn't have a professional community as a goal—but now the community is asking us! They have never done this before. The professionals are boxed in by the system, by a lack of initiative, a lack of thinking outside of the box. Who would have thought that you were the ones to be their teachers? It is enormously exciting to see what type of potential comes out of here.

A host of competing themes punctuate the audition, which is a template for what Pat and the Prison Monologue women expect from the incoming members. Vailea passionately argues for “drama”—the “paparazzi”—a position antithetical to Pat's core beliefs, and in opposition to the humility that Vailea herself demands. Ivelisse, who matches Vailea's joie de vivre for drama, is markedly and uncharacteristically silent for the entire audition. I later uncover that Ivelisse and Pat have been struggling around Ivelisse's “stepping out of line.” Liezel claims the teenagers as her own children, while Pat exhorts the Prison Monologue cohort as community leaders. Vailea ends her edgy

speech with Pat's favorite expression: "Food for thought." Her swift ability to code switch between cultures and languages, such as "*People are hustling for us. . . . You guys will have the paparazzi chasing you soon and I ain't lying. We break down thousands of kids and bring them to one place*" and Pat's pedagogical phrase, "Food for thought," illustrates Vailea's brilliance at working an audience. Vailea employs Pidgin when talking to the inside women, and uses it hyperbolically in performances, but in the same breath employs standard English and duplicates Pat's language.

At the onset of the audition, Pat disseminates a rating sheet that serves as an introduction to the Prison Monologues with a numeric rating scale. She asks the women to rate themselves numerically in accordance with the ten categories on the sheet: why are they at the audition today; what is the purpose of the Monologues; and how would they rate their own relationships with motivation, initiative, curiosity, leadership, teamwork, honesty, credibility, and timing?²⁶ She emphasizes her philosophy of the Prison Monologues, which requires a "serving," rather than a "helping," temperament. According to Pat and the Monologue team, Melinda was "let go" from the Monologues because she exhibited codependent behavior with the other members on the team. Pat says: "Serving is knowing yourself—developing skills, insights, and self-knowledge. You offer your message because you know who you are—you are humble. Helping creates a dependency—your dependency on being recognized, seen, admired, and needed. Here the image is more important than the message. This is not what I'm seeking!" There is a whiff of discipline in the auditioning process.

In this Saturday's Prison Monologue Lab audition, participants share (audition) their own traumas for the core Monologue women. One woman recounts that despite meticulous documentation of abuse in her home as a child, Child Protection Services (CPS) returned her to her father, who raped her continuously since she was a middle-schooler. In halting prose, she reassembles her memories of sitting on a long bench in the drab CPS office in the Big Island of Hawai'i, her short legs scuffling before her and seeing the shadow of her father's shoulders loom in the glass reflection. He had come to collect her, to take her "home." She recounts how beaten and "shame" she feels because she is pregnant at the time with her own father's child. There is a hush in the audition room but there are also nods of recognition. Each woman auditions her own traumatic and personal remembrances that translate pain into performance. As Richard Schechner has shown, in performances of pain and atrocity, the "real" transforms into representation and catastrophe risks losing its purchase in the multiple replays.²⁷ In today's highly mediatized world there is a strong desire for the "real." Yet catastrophe does not relinquish its "purchase," despite its reiteration, when testimonies of shared suffering and identification are bound by collective experience. As the auditioning women share their histories of incest with the core Prison Monologue group, a currency of pain lingers in the room.

THE PERFORMANCE

We are in the cavernous President Theodore Roosevelt High School auditorium on windy Nehoa Street, which sits on a hill a stone's throw from downtown Honolulu. The school's website attests that it is the highest achieving high school in the state, but

with financial investment in the private schools, such as President Obama's former alma mater, Punahou and Iolani and the recent gang activity at Roosevelt, this claim seems dubious. Over one thousand bodies pack the auditorium. It seems that the entire school is here on this sunny Wednesday afternoon.

Six women—Vailea, Ivelisse, Liezel, Melinda, Barbara, and Kaipō—sit on six wooden stools elevated on a proscenium stage before the teenage audience, teachers, and administrators. Their numbers loom and their last names, an afterthought, are inscribed on their navy carceral tops. They shift their legs and torsos on those wooden stools. A moment of measured silence follows, redolent of a prayer. Vailea's robust voice booms as she rises from her stool and strides across the stage.

"Good afternoon, Y'all!" The "y'all" is out of place against Vailea's half-Pidgin. *"We are here so much—I feel as if I am a student here with you."* Reserved giggles rupture the tension that hangs over the scene.

Vailea is on fire today. *"If we have a chance to touch a life, it is beautiful. One day you will be professionals, leaders in our community. We are just like you—except behind bars. Close your eyes. Are you there with us? Open your eyes and receive every single hurt. Prison is the devil's playground. So which of you are Samoan in here?"* Her direct performative command transports the students, immobilized, to their own injured spaces. It summons powerful identifications with the audience and collapses the women inside with the students outside—a gesture that serves to dismantle the walls between

those in the “free” world and those inside. This enjambment can be construed as a cautionary parable for the witnesses.

Vailea’s employment of a childhood game, connected with dreaming and magic is a theatrical sleight of hand. A teenager with gargantuan blue earrings, hemmed by a pink flower decorating her ears, shyly lifts her hand in response to Vailea’s question. This cultural exchange is a frequent character in the presentations and their dialogic response. After a presentation for the Chaminade University’s criminology students, I speak to a Samoan student who confides that she wanted to ask Vailea a host of questions, “*but I shame. Vai made me think of my ohana.*”²⁸ Frequently, the Samoan students are drawn to Vailea because she performs her Samoan-ness as a cultural entrée into a familial connection that is often troubled for the students. The Samoan students gravitate towards Vailea, either publicly through specific questions addressed to her, or by their crowding of her post-performance. This identification across cultural and national boundaries is complicated. Many of the Samoan students are first generation Americans. Their parents, predominantly born in American Samoa, are displaced citizens who transport the trauma of a troubled relationship with the nation-state vis-à-vis the military occupation and colonization of American Samoa—not unlike the relationship that Kānaka ‘ōiwi (Native Hawaiians) have with the U.S. nation-state. Thus the alliances the Samoan students form with Vailea are polyvocal ones that stretch across familial, national, cultural, and generational divides. Vailea shares the experience of familial abuse with the students, as she does during our interview—“*we all got lickins*”—discipline that Vailea frames as cultural tradition. Samoan parents, she

explains, value discipline, and respect for the elders is paramount. Many second-generation Samoan teenagers live in a world culturally detached from their parents.

The script opens with a four-minute video, filmed by Kimberlee Bassford of *Making Waves Films*.²⁹ “The camera follows the Monologue presenters through the process of coming into prison, scenes in the dorms, and brief interviews. Then in real time, perched on stools in a classroom or auditorium, the presenters begin their readings.”³⁰ The opening video is poignant and powerful. Haunting music plays as a backdrop. The close-up frame of the inhospitable barbed wire fence, juxtaposed with a wide-angle lens panning the magnificent Ko’olau Mountains, maps a tone of discordance as the viewer witnesses Ivelisse encased in belly chains being processed by an invisible guard. The scene abruptly closes with an aural image—the visceral shudder of the clanging doors behind Ivelisse’s retreating back. Like performance, visual narratives proffer an alternative, and perhaps more charged, experience than the written word.

PART 1: WHO WE ARE

After the video, the performance begins. Part I: Who We Are. Ivelisse grabs the mic. She inhales and exhales, then waits until a reverent hush saturates the tense atmosphere: *“I want to take you on a journey through a life that started out normal but somewhere in time turned chaotic, worthless, and desperate. I was trapped in a powerless, unmanageable addiction that has wasted two-thirds of my life.”*

Different casts of Prison Monologue women recite the opening lines on different occasions. Pat confides that the group experiments in the rehearsals until it discovers what “works.” This refrain of “what works” by both Pat and the women reinforces the magic of theater that relies on a present-centric moment. The script that ensues is culled from many previous performances and from the *Hulihia XIII* journal itself.

Individually authored poems, prose pieces, and declarations are adopted, adapted, and ultimately performed by a number of women and are therefore not always the speakers’ own writing. In this way, the Prison Monologues becomes a communal tapestry in which narratives of trauma and hope are shared.

Ivelisse walks to the center of the proscenium stage at Roosevelt High School. She is emblazoned in an unnerving blue light. Her boundless energy is subdued as she solemnly reaches for the mic:

*Time stands still as I near the gates of the prison
Shackles, handcuffs, chains around my waist
As I step off the bus, I look at the razors all around me
They represent the clean cut of this place—I will bleed here
As I walk through the gates,
The stopwatch of the next 10 years suddenly begins*

*Memories of my life shoot through my imagination in still shots
The pain, the tears, the laughter, the people*

All slowly fade away

*I took life for granted—numb to cause and effect
This time, will I learn from the rules or will I learn the lesson?
It’s the system I could never beat
Over and over I’ve been locked away, or on the streets
I run for my freedom but never knowing what for
And that life becomes a part of me
The streets will always be a part of me*

*But now I step forward, take a deep breath
The doors slam shut
I'm in prison*

Ivelisse's commanding performance of her "Who I Was" poem provides moral instruction about the consequences of poor choices, while testifying to a desire for the streets that is etched into her skin: "*The streets will always be a part of me.*" This tension lends a rawness to the presentations, the slice of "real life" that mirrors that of the students themselves. Ivelisse's arresting line, "*the clean cut of this place—I will bleed here,*" is a double entendre: the razor wire, unlike the streets, is clean *cut*—both redemptive and punitive. The space of the prison, as Ivelisse attests, is violent for its inhabitants, yet here Ivelisse acknowledges her new home as a potentially transformative one.³¹

Liezel, who has the lithe body of a child but a weathered face marked by pain, speaks in a heavy Filipino accent: "*Look at us as your textbook, not as inmates.*" Liezel offers up a pedagogical framework, a smorgasbord of lessons gone awry. The premise of the inside women as teachers and also as "textbooks" positions the inside women as consummate educators.

Ivelisse hands Liezel the mic, and Liezel wistfully begins to read "Who I Was": a poem that mourns her thwarted dreams:

*A black and white portrait captures my innocence as a little girl.
My gaze is fixed on a balloon.
A string is tied to my wrist and I have no other cares in the world,
just the safety of my balloon.*

*During high school, I stood on a stage at an award ceremony:
first honors in academics, quiz bee champion, outstanding medal award.
I was a girl scout.
Oh how I've outgrown hopscotch and jump rope.
Sanrios, Hello Kitty and pajama parties,
The "I've got a crush on him" emotions.
I had big dreams,
I had lots of
"when I grow up, I want to be" ideas in my head.
Some came true, most did not.³²*

Liezel's poem, published in *Hulihia VIII* and showcased as the opening performance piece in the "Who We Were" section, echoes the *Hulihia's Home* theme in its mourning of a paradise lost. It demonstrates a classical "descent into perdition" leitmotif that presupposes an ascent or a conversion narrative. Liezel, unlike some of the other women, does not have a history of abusive parents or drug abuse, but her sentencing was longer than the other women due to a murder conviction that involved a child in Liezel's day-care facility. Liezel's thirty-year sentence was commuted by Hawai'i's former governor, Neil Abercrombie, partly due to her public participation in the Prison Monologues, her stellar recommendation letters, and her exemplary behavior and leadership at WCCC. A former administrative assistant to the former warden Patterson, Liezel took over the training of the new Prison Monologue Lab while Pat was in California, and taught a creative writing class for women with emotional and cognitive disabilities.³³ Liezel speaks with a restraint that contrasts with Vailea's vivacity and Ivelisse's angst.

From the cavernous auditorium emerges a strong but slightly quivering voice that belongs to Kaipo, a reserved forty-something woman with long hair and a stern beauty.

“I was raped and molested as a child.” One young man in the far reaches of the auditorium in a simple white and blue T-shirt is rocking back and forth, his hands like fisted steel over his eyes. In a conversation with Warden Patterson after the women return from their first performance in Maui, he confides:

Kaipo is now in Hina Mauka. She resisted it [at first]. I think the Prison Monologues will be good for her. You see it with the women and men who are the most institutionalized. With Kaipo she was scared to come to me and I said you are going home and she said, “What’s home?” Kaipo doesn’t know her parents. She was adopted into a family as a kid and they were the ones who molested her. She has been in prison her whole life and *this* is her home. She’s scared to go on the outside. She said, “I’m an addict because of what I’ve gone through,” and she doesn’t want to give up her addiction. In the first three months of Hina Mauka, women get all sorts of reasons to leave . . . but Kaipo has turned around and I am sure she will be successful there [at Hina Mauka].³⁴ I just want to tell you this so you know what’s going on. It’s good for Kaipo to tell her story out there. One thing I notice is that the stories get deeper, the longer the women are in the Prison Monologues. For example, Ivelisse and Vailea. Vailea has probably changed the most through the Prison Monologues.³⁵

Everyone has their own idea about who has changed the most—a “rehabilitation rivalry”—through the Prison Monologues. Vailea tells me it is without a doubt Kaipo:

Kaipo has done the longest time—thirteen years. I remember when she first came out with us, her face just lit up. It made me so happy. Kaipo had a really hard time talking about her kids. But now she does it all the time. The children are so supportive of her. They rush her after the performance, all crying “Ms. Kaipo, it’s going to be okay!” Kaipo had a really hard attitude—she has spent much of her time in closed custody.³⁶

Warden Patterson confides:

Kaipo was the most radical one. She escaped from OCCC (Oahu Correctional Facility) through the fence.³⁷ Someone from the outside clipped the fence and it brought her much notoriety. I have known her through that—not really known her a long time—but known *of* her. She had a thirty-year sentence, reduced for good behavior. When we go deep into a community—Nānākuli, Bobby Benson, or

Waipahu, I usually send only three of the ladies, Ivelisse, Vailea and Liezel—the ones who are seasoned and who I know can improvise—can change things up if they need to. Bobby Benson asked us to come back in January and then I will take all the ladies. I would like to set the tone—to teach the other ladies. Liezel, Vailea, and Ivelisse could run the Prison Monologues themselves. We sometimes go out without Pat—but not too much this year.³⁸

The warden emphasizes the importance of a theatrical cast (a corpus), seasoned with improvisational aptitude. Vailea acquiesces that the warden has *some* power in deciding who will join the Monologues but she also jokes about women who *claim* to have the warden’s permission. Through my interviews, observations, and participation in rehearsals, I have gleaned that the opinions of the core Prison Monologue group—Vailea, Ivelisse, Liezel, and now Kaipō—trump the warden and even Ms. Pat concerning who is allowed to enter, and ultimately remain, in this tight-knit team—a practice that subverts the theory of a top-down decision-making process. In our lengthy interview, Vailea mischievously endorses the core’s intuition of which new woman will work out or not: “*Sometimes we just say “No Ms. Pat, NO!”*”³⁹

Conversion and redemption assume complex roles in the Prison Monologues presentations. Vailea divulges that the “children need” her and the other Monologue women, yet in her own testimony about Kaipō’s pain and pathway to change, Vailea insinuates that it is the inside women who need the “children.” In speaking about her future once she is released from WCCC—Vailea is the first of the core group to be granted parole—she explains: “*It is Ivelisse’s and Kaipō’s and my dream to form our own group when we get out.*”⁴⁰ Vailea describes her personal conversion narrative, which was reinforced by her experience on the Monologue team:

I always wanted to be a pastry chef because I love baking. But He [God] has been tugging at my heart and telling me that I am on the wrong path. I finally woke up a few weeks ago and decided I was going to go back to school, Kapiolani Community College, for a degree in Social Work. The children need me. And I am just a servant in all of this. [laughs]⁴¹

PART 2: PRISON LIFE

The presentation moves on to the second part of the triptych, “Prison Life.” Liezel frequently introduces the section, as her calm demeanor conveys a sense of presence that the students call “leadership.” She begins: “*This section is about what we do in prison and what prison feels like. It’s much easier to talk about what we do daily. What it feels like is much harder. We intend for you have an experience of both.*” She solemnly passes the mic to Kaipō, who reads Daniella’s poem as if it were her own. Kaipō, who is Native Hawaiian and Filipina, shares a similar cultural genealogy with Daniella, which allows her to more easily approximate the narrator.

*I wonder how many before me have sat in this cell
Listening each night to the door slam shut like it’s the gate to hell
If only I didn’t do this, if only I hadn’t said that
If only . . . if only, I can’t take them back
I’m not going to lay here and be sad and depressed
I’d rather think of my kids and happier times—minus the mess
The baby laughter and smiles, small hands reaching to me
My sister in a princess prom dress, magical and pretty
Hula skirts twirling in unison, a beautiful lady in red
‘Ipo Leimomi playing in my ears, wearing a paper haku on my head*

*I lay on this metal bed tonight
And tell myself—the future is promising
Soon—no more headcounts, no belly chains
No more scratched mirrors
No more panties hanging from bunks
I will be free*

Daniella’s poem, “Prison Life,” is rooted in the everyday life of the prison—*panties hanging from bunks*—and juxtaposed with an idyllic American dream of femininity—“*My sister in a princess prom dress, magical and pretty.*” These two oppositional offerings of the feminine—one crass, the other idealized—is representative of the duality encased in the Prison Monologues: the allegiance with and the resistance to narratives of redemption and the authorization of the nation-state. Daniella’s poem reaches for direct rhyme, which lends itself more effectively to performance rather than to the word on the page, and it simultaneously houses off-rhyme—“me”/“pretty.” She references her part-Hawaiian heritage—*Hula skirts, paper haku, and ‘Ipo Leimomi*—as memory markers that rescue her from the monotony of prison life.⁴²

The “real” labors as a commodity in our increasingly dis-embodied and dis-associative world. The performance or celebration of an authentic self is what lends power to the Prison Monologues.⁴³ Like the poems in *Hulihia*, the monologues leak out of their tidy borders, resonating with their teenager audience’s lives, whether familial incarceration or the teenagers’ own array of the incarcerated: friends’ suicides, parental abuse, drugs, alcohol, incest, immense alienation. Loneliness. Even though each performance follows this triptych spine—Who We Were, Life in Prison, and Reflections—no two presentations are exactly alike. The setting, characters, and narrative arc are informed and altered by the venue, the audience, and the questions that arise, as well as by intangibles like the “actors” moods and their synergy on “stage.” The Roosevelt High School proscenium is an anomaly, as most presentations

occur in bare classrooms on level floors; however, the props, such as the chairs and the women's letters, transform even the everyday classroom space into a theatrical one.

After a few melancholic poems that depict the depressing landscape of prison life, Vailea grabs the mic and playfully bellows: "So if you think that all we do in prison is sit around and boo-hoo all day . . ." [she wipes her eyes dramatically],⁴⁴

We have jobs in prison that contribute to the running of the facility. Called worklines, we take turns cooking and delivering our meals to the dorms, doing the laundry for 260 women, maintaining the grounds and buildings, and the lucky ones go out into the community as the landscape crew helping to keep Kailua beautiful. We also take classes—parenting classes, anger management, life-skills, culinary arts, creative writing, and can earn our GED if we came to prison without it.

*But back in our dorms at the end of our day, we are left with thoughts of home, family, what we miss—our kids, their birthdays, the moments we took for granted. Memories haunt us, letters from home make us happy or make us cry. Sometimes we create our own entertainment. In many ways, the evening is our time to be who we really are.*⁴⁵

Countering the cliché of doing hard (a slow and monotonous) time, Vailea offers up the evening dorms as a liminal space, where the women can be their authentic selves. The improvisational scene is perhaps the most theatrically complicit ingredient in the entire performance. This humorous departure from the mournful script usually elicits guffaws and chuckles from a spirited audience, grateful to be saved from the anguish of the earlier scenes. However, Vailea confides that at an appearance at Hawai'i Pacific University, which included many international students, the audience was mostly silent in response to the raucous skit. The skit is peppered with local references and is written in the local dialect—Hawaiian Pidgin—so despite its universal themes of power,

privilege, and humiliation, it targets a local audience. The scene, usually a crowd pleaser, was created by Vailea's sister-in-law, Teresa, a member of one of the first Prison Monologue troupes, for Vailea and Ivelisse. As the women write their own pieces not only for themselves, but also for each other, the texts are enshrined as a repertory of sorts, which aligns the Prison Monologues with theatrical and improvisational praxis.

Ivelisse and Vailea move to the front of the proscenium stage as the other three women drift to the back, congregating as a heckling chorus and ancillary audience. Ivelisse sashays audaciously into the make-believe intake room at WCCC. Vailea with wire frames perched high on her nose and a smirk on her face, stretches to her full height and girth, assuming the institutional silhouette of an adult corrections officer. She commands in a brash voice, bereft of empathy:

Step up here, come on, I don't have all day

3 blue uniforms, 2 white bras, 3 white panties (*Ivelisse disgustedly holds them up*)

6 pair white socks, 1 pair black slippahs

1 white bath towel, 1 white wash cloth

1 white pillow case, 1 white sheet

1 white blanket, 1 raincoat, 1 hygiene bag

Ivelisse: Um, exCUse me, *don't you know who I am?* I thought you already knew. I can't use that in my hair cause only brand names is what I wear. You want me to put on what? That doesn't even match my complexion. I shop more in the Clinique, the Lancome, you know, the MAC section.

You must be crazy if you think I'm gonna put on that. *Don't you know who I am?* I only sport ECHO or Baby Phat, Apple Bottom jeans, Ed Hardy gear, a pair of Guess boots and a set of Victoria sexy underwear!

Vailea: That's right, keep it a secret—keep ALL that a secret!

Ivelisse: Come on, I mean don't get it twisted, don't you know how I roll—manicured fingers and pedicure toes, hair done up tight, outfit crisp and clean. Don't you know who I am? That's right, I'm a QUEEN!

Coach bag in my hand—Gucci or Louis Vuitton. Nikes on my feet or K-SWISS is what I got on.

I mean you really don't expect me to wear any of those? It doesn't even go with any of my clothes let alone coordinate with any of my accessories.

And of course my IPOD and my cell phone are a daily necessity . . . *I mean don't you know who I am? UH!* (The chorus chimes in chanting: "Don't you know who I am")

Vailea: Are you done? Cause if you are, let me tell you where you are, in case you got—AMNESIA.

You are no longer at the Hilton. From now on you sportin' not a damn thing cause now you in prison.

NO more shopping at Macy's Pearlridge or Ala Moana. You shoppin' at Correctional Industries in Halawa cause that's where we get our store.

And if you want some matching accessories—I know exactly who can hook you up. I got a nice selection of ankle bracelets and one-of-a-kind steel handcuffs.

You pick—your choice, makes no difference to us, cause in a few minutes you gonna be sittin' in the lockdown hole cause that's how WE roll.

From now on you're inmate—number #A101270. And that's who you are. Now GIT!

And take your new clothes with you.

Ivelisse takes the bag and walks toward audience. "That's how it is. We were each someone else before we became a number."⁴⁶



“The Skit.” From left to right: Two women as members of the chorus assist in sorting the arriving women’s new wardrobe. Vailea stands in as prison guard and Ivelisse holds up a pair of prison pants.⁴⁷

The skit, although humorous, poignantly conveys the shattering transition from the free world to an enclosed one—an entry into a civil death. The women, stripped of the material signifiers of selfhood and the rituals of the familiar, are shocked at the erasure of self that accompanies incarceration. The written rendition is unable to capture Vailea and Ivelisse’s facial expressions, the large plastic garbage bag that stores the inmate’s new “closet,” the humongous white briefs that the ACO mockingly holds up before the snooty diva Ivelisse, or the stained white sheets sporting a massive hole. The skit functions within a familiar theatrical vernacular—the requisite humorous rupture from pain.

PART 3: REFLECTIONS

The arc of the presentation then turns to the most distressing aspects in the lives of incarcerated women: the loss and displacement from their children. The final section,

Reflections, begins with a brief video depicting Family Day—one of the most powerful and emotive parts of the Prison Monologues program. The video clip comprises a loop of still images of mothers with their kids. In the prison, Family Day is a rare occurrence and the still images showcased on a large screen attest to this deprivation. The parade of faces, unaccompanied by text, is commanding in its minimalism. The familial resemblance between mothers and children are at once uplifting and depressing, as the viewer contemplates the impact of incarceration. I have watched this video over twenty times and every time I cry. Vailea accompanies the Family Day video, her honeyed soprano incongruous with her brazen persona. The revisionist Luther Vandross lyric, “If I could dance with my father again,” is re-inscribed as “If I could dance with my daughter again.” Artfully preceding “Letters from Home,” this inter-textual backdrop is deeply nostalgic. On the basis of this popular portion of the performance, Vailea has been baptized the “songbird.”

The video Family Day leaves the audience emotionally shaken—teenagers sheltering their tears behind hair, caps pushed down on foreheads—and is followed by an equally plaintive “Letter from Home.” Vailea—now transformed from prison guard to mother—sits subdued on her stool. She pulls an envelope from her work pants, opens it and reads with slow deliberation the letter from “her” daughter:

Dear Mom,

I was sitting here reflecting on different parts of my life and trying to picture you being here. The funny thing is I can't remember any times you were here. The time I skinned my knee, you never put the band-aid on. When I was sick with the flu, you never made me chicken soup. When I got my period, you never explained what to do. I have a beautiful voice. I have won many singing

competitions. You've never heard me sing. The first time I fell in love, I needed you to share my excitement. When my heart was broken, and I thought I'd never be the same, I longed to cry in your arms.

Mothers and daughters are supposed to share times and memories together. I should be able to look back on my life and have a lot of Mommy-daughter moments . . . I have none. I'm not telling you this to hurt you; I just want you in my life. It seems that only when you get busted and go to prison, you feel guilty, and then you want to have contact with me. Your bad choices have affected my life.

I want a mom, full-time. I want hugs and kisses. I want a reason to love you. I need you here in my life. Don't you get it? I love you and I'm begging you to please think about me the next time you get out of prison. Think before you break the law, use drugs, and go back to prison with the same "I'm sorry."

*Mom, please can we make some mommy-daughter moments—or is it too late?*⁴⁸

The deliberate trope that Pat orchestrates in Reflections—a re-cycling of Prison Monologue women parked on a stool reading a letter from their daughter/son, which they received “yesterday”—is an apt example of the transubstantiation of the “real” into re-presentation. The women carry the stools with them to the high schools in the white prison van and they frequently invite the teenagers to occupy a stool in the post-performance dialogue. The chairs are mobile and persistent characters in the presentations, and hold much significance because, as Vailea explains, the students love sitting in them and occupying the women’s places. Other than the homemade letters the women bring to each presentation, tucked into their uniforms, the chairs are the only physical props utilized in the Prison Monologues.

Daniella, one of the original Prison Monologuers, who is now working at Honolulu Community College on parole, discusses the performative gesture that collapses the powerful “letter home” with a perennial present. Daniella is an authentic witness to

narratives of desertion, as she abandoned her biological family of four children for an imagined community: the world of *batu/ice* and alcohol. In a recent solo performance at Nānākuli High School, many of the students relate to Daniella's desire for an imagined community because of its promise to eradicate, even temporarily, the reality of their bleak present.

The compelling visual narrative of mothers and children in the Family Day video, followed by the letters is heart-wrenching. The audience witnesses the collateral effects of incarceration—an injured family and community. During one of our long talks at Whole Foods in Kailua town, Pat tells me that it is not always the reader's bona fide letter: it could be a letter written by another Monologuer who has been released, and has given permission to one of the remaining Monologue women to read the letter as her own. An archive of painful memories is thus built into the Prison Monologues repertory, which functions as a site of collective trauma and collective mourning.

Letters from Home is the most troubled segment of the scripted Monologues, and perhaps the most theatrical because handmade cards or letters are used as props. The letters are indeed verifiably from the women's daughters; however, the women frequently inject into the script "I *just* received this letter from my daughter last week." This collapse of temporality—past performed as present—recurs in each performance: a repetition of the traumatic moment. In addition, the performance of Letters from Home allows the teenagers, some of whom were abandoned by their biological mothers, to cherry-pick their fantasy mother from the Prison Monologuers. Ivelisse, for instance, is a young mother herself, which appeals to the teenagers, and her "Letter from My

Daughter” is an audience favorite. Ivelisse is singled out by the teenagers who frequently encircle her post performance. She is the youngest and the loudest—the one residing on the margins. Her long Medusa hair, neck tattoos, thick mole, and perpetual pouting mouth are all features of desire that reel the teenagers in. I wonder at the length of Ivelisse’s and Vailea’s hair. “*We don’t get haircuts too frequently here,*” laughs Ivelisse, always the *kolohe* (rascal).⁴⁹ Ivelisse is twenty-six years old and has been in prison since she was eighteen. She is bejeweled in tattoos.

Vailea’s letter from her daughter is a public confessional of shame that fits within the historical genre of prison autography.⁵⁰ Nineteenth-century prison memoirs slaked the public’s thirst for spectacular memoirs of transgression, crime, and conversion. Contemporary audiences, too, are compelled by modern memoirs of transgression and rebirth. Life writing theorists Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue that in our “contemporary culture of self-help . . . personal narratives of debasement and recovery as models for conversion, survival, and self transformation” carry considerable currency. Furthermore, “there is a growing audience for life writing focused on grief and mourning.”⁵¹ Paul Eakin suggests that American national mythology rooted in individual triumph over adversity feeds the obsession in contemporary Western culture for confessional and personal storytelling. Smith and Watson contend that while narratives of loss are common historically, “in several recent memoirs . . . narration acts ambivalently as memorialization of mourning and its melancholic refusal.”⁵² After witnessing the Prison Monologues on multiple occasions in a variety of venues, from the intimate classroom presentations to the swanky Ala Moana Ballroom, I consider

whether the overwhelming audience response is about the passive pursuit of pain as *spectacle*. Clearly as a culture we are attracted to the horrors of the body, as is evident in the redundant spectacles of torture saturating every media conduit in America.

Yet the teenage audiences of the Prison Monologues are less implicated in this desire for *passive* pain, for they are frequently the active receptacle of real-life pain. Student audiences worship the Prison Monologuers for their representations of pain that echoes their own genuine suffering. Teachers at middle and high schools across the state of Hawai'i confess that the women reach their students in ways that they cannot. Judges and lawyers, too, admire the women with the result that the inside women's involvement in the Prison Monologues has literally saved some of them from an extended incarceration.⁵³ Xandria, through her public performances with the Prison Monologues, was released early from WCCC and is now a community leader in her hometown of Hilo on Big Island. In the Prison Monologues made-for-television video, Xandria is featured as a model of reform. In that video, an elated Xandria stands in the Maunawili courtyard at one of the *Hulihia* dedications in civilian clothes, a dress hugging her pregnant belly. As she speaks to the inmates about her past transgressions and current life, she rubs the large circle of her belly, gesturing towards a restorative healing and a continuity of life.⁵⁴

EVOLUTION

The multifarious responses to the Prison Monologues signal the power in suffering and collective witnessing to challenge a carceral structure that impinges disproportionately on Pacific Islander communities. As many theater practitioners have

shown, prison theater functions as a restorative circle of reconciliation that ushers in an evolution for both the performers and the audience.⁵⁵ Yet performance also lends itself to the potential for voyeurism, or what Yana Meerzon refers to as “estrangement.” She aligns this estrangement with exilic children’s “borderline” existence or what scholar, Homi Bhabha characterizes as a “stillness of time and a strangeness of framing.”⁵⁶ This estrangement is more likely in the prison: an exilic space that etches a violent border between public and private. It is this precise barricade that makes the study of theater in prisons that much more compelling.

The Prison Monologues, like Boal’s Forum Theatre, is a “form of participatory theatre called “simultaneous dramaturgy,” in which audience members are asked to “inform the actors what to do next.”⁵⁷ Even though the Prison Monologue women do not literally summon the audience to inform the script, they do rely on their audience’s feedback via the question and answer period at the culmination of the program, as well as through direct audience address within the seemingly improvisational moments in the script. In fact, in a Prison Monologue Lab presentation at Nānākuli High school, Pat and the women enacted a form of participatory theater by inviting the students to read some of the writings of “inmates” who were not present. In this instance, the specter of a larger community of incarcerated women inflected the presentations; the individual performances of trauma opened up to incorporate a communal, national narrative of trauma.

Boal named his audience as spect-actor, to challenge traditional theater in its “oppressive” use of the stage.⁵⁸ S. Leigh Thompson argues that Boal witnessed the

spect-actor as a vehicle for heralding a “democratiz[ing] [of] the stage space—rendering the relationship between actor and spectator transitive . . . activating the spectator and allowing him or her to be transformed into the ‘spect-actor.’”⁵⁹ The democratization of the “stage,” in which the audience occupies the place of both spectator and actor, is a key element of the Prison Monologues. The women frequently invite students to occupy their wooden stools (on stage or in their classrooms) following the performance, which simultaneously aligns with Boal’s approach of activating viewers and refutes his idea that actors are interpreters confined by their own subjective experience.⁶⁰ As the Prison Monologues perform as a space of atonement, the invitation for the students to sit in the places of the women “prisoners” and read their scripts, works as an act of “witnessing beyond recognition” and reinforces the reciprocal process of performance.⁶¹ Thus the actors too can be affected by the exchange, rather than confined. After *Who We Were*—the section that presents the women in their previous lives of crime—*Reflections* allows the students to share vicariously in the loss that the women encounter inside. Sitting in place of the women and reading their scripts incorporates the students into the performance as empathic witnesses, while encouraging the teenagers to make different choices in their own lives. The exchange is simultaneously moral, pedagogical, and emotional. Pat explains in our last meeting at Morning Brew in Kailua that the first time they tried out the stools was in a performance by the closed-custody women at La Pietra High School. This was before a minimum-status was required for the women to go out to the schools: “It was kind of dramatic,” Pat reminisces, “seeing the women in their orange jumpsuits, handcuffed, and the exchange with the stools.”⁶²

Daphne, one of the original Prison Monologuers, offers a lens into the reciprocity of the Prison Monologues, as well its authority to intervene in national discourse. Daphne's script, "Giving Back," testifies to the social justice activism that the Prison Monologues inspires and her tribute is used for the promotional materials about the Prison Monologues.

Shortly after my release in 2010, I joined Warden Patterson's Trauma Informed Care Initiative Team at WCCC and participated in a conference sponsored by the National Center for Trauma Informed Care (NCTIC) in Baltimore, Maryland. I have also been organizing Alumni events for TJ Mahoney and the Bridge furlough programs, as well as an appreciation luncheon for employers that hire women from prison. A student at Leeward Community College studying for my Substance Abuse Certificate, I also work part-time at United Cerebral Palsy Foundation. My goal is to go to UH Manoa in Spring of 2014 and begin the Social Work program while attending Leeward Community College doing my practicum for CSAC. I would like to receive my MSW in Social Work. I live by the words of Gandhi: "Become the change you would like to see."⁶³

I have noted that most of the Prison Monologuers and alumnae decide to work in the arena of social work, primarily with "lost" teenagers after their release. The Monologues thus functions as a manifold conversion tableau, personal, professional, and institutional, for the women inside and the audience outside. At times, the categories of "inside" and "outside" are inverted as the outside audience, suffering from failed jobs and relationships, often share narratives that the inside women consider an even deeper imprisonment than their own. This type of respect for the inside women is evident at some of the larger public events. On May 20, 2014, at the Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity, the Prison Monologues showcase was advertised as a personal "meeting with "amazing women for an afternoon of inspiration and transformation. [Women] who rock with their poetry, who write with their

soul and who spread the word to thousands of people.” The fact that transformation was promised in a single afternoon speaks to the utopian impulse of the program. The verity that the inside women drew a standing-room-only crowd of human rights and disability rights activists, illustrates the Monologuers’ ability to impact local, state, and even national discourses on criminal justice.⁶⁴

Despite the popularity of this particular program, some critics have taken prison arts programming to task for its propensity to exact confessions and compel repentance from “inmates.” How, they ask, do we recognize if an “inmate” is genuinely sorry for her transgressions against society? Vailea speaks to the difficult issue of authenticity, as she reveals that her initial impetus to join the Monologues was merely to get out of the facility and eat some non-prison food. The catalyst for her transformation, she explains, was the appearance after a performance of a sobbing “little girl” who uttered through a waterfall of tears: *“You and my mother are the same. The only difference is that she’s not in prison.”* Her words work as a powerful refrain that haunts Vailea, who confides that she has revisited that scene at every school she has frequented in the last four years. *“We have reached thousands of children.”* This experience made Vailea a staunch believer—so much so that when Vailea had the opportunity to choose her re-entry program, Vailea chose to remain at WCCC’s Bridge program instead of Ka Hale Ho‘āla Hou No Nā Wāhine (The Home of Reawakening for Women), because she could not imagine her life without the Prison Monologues.

The nature of performance occludes, as well as confirms, performances of “authenticity” by the Prison Monologue women. The women perform a veritable

suffering that resonates with their audiences. Vailea confirms that principals, teachers, and social workers come to the Monologuers for advice: “*We have known the students for years and they never tell us all the things they share with you.*” Teachers express the need for a veritable perpetrator and victim within the framework of the redemptive narrative in order to reach their students. In this instance, the women are perpetrators and the community is the victim; although the audience can glean that frequently the women are victims of traumatic pasts and abuse. The demand for what I term the “exceptional survivor” is also evident in the demand for the Prison Monologues’ showcase within local communities. The Monologuers are a *mise en scène* of authenticity (*tangible* trajectories of suffering) and many of the teachers herald them as pedagogical successes.

The Prison Monologue women perform as templates of success for the women in the larger facility. When they return from performances and presentations, the women back in the dorm are often hungry for the details. Vailea says: “*Some of them want to know what we ate, but most of them want to know about the children. The most important thing we do is teach forgiveness—you can only heal when you can forgive.*” For the inside women, forgiveness is a private and public endeavor that allows them to see themselves as both perpetrator and victim of personal and systemic injury.

When actors stride across the stage, the conventions of performance make their identities legible as “authentic” inmates.⁶⁵ The fact that the body of the ACO (adult correction officer) is never far away marks the performance as a potential site of danger. Everyday garb—blue and white prison uniforms with white T-shirts peeking through the

collars—become costumes under the glare of stage lights. When these performances occur in convention rooms, the performances mirror academic presentations. Occasionally, the audience shifts from public school groups and university students to carceral and legal workers and politicians. The audience and the performative space, from the clinical space of the classroom to cavernous auditoriums, shape the performance. On one occasion—the Office of Youth Services Annual Conference at the Ala Moana Hotel—the Monologuers perform behind podiums and conference desks for a standing-room-only crowd. The inside women distribute small “business” cards that sport a miniature simulacrum of the cover of *Hulihia VIII*—a pencil drawing by an artist inside of a beautiful Hawaiian woman with a lei of flowers decorating her hair against an undeniably feminine pink background.⁶⁶ The *Hulihia* cover doubles as a business card and the Prison Monologuers are now celebrities on the human rights/rehabilitation circuit. A long line of professionals waits to speak to the inside women. Surrounded by their groupies, the Prison Monologue women look like rock stars.

As repetition or iterability informs performativity, there is both repetition and a departure from the script within the historical life of the Prison Monologues.⁶⁷ In 2014, the program entered its sixth year, during which time the fundamental concept and structure of the script remained largely unchanged.⁶⁸ However, some things were in flux, like the recycling of inside participants upon their release from the prison. Initially, the Prison Monologue troupe was comprised of middle-aged and older women to whom Pat gravitated for their maturity and depth.⁶⁹ With the escalating demand for the Prison Monologues in high schools across the state, Pat began incorporating younger women

to appeal to the youthful audience. After Pat’s “stars” exited the facility, the Skit could no longer be performed. “The Skit was written for Ivelisse and Vailea by Teresa, Vailea’s sister-in-law. No one else could perform the Skit and anyways it was time to come up with something new,” Pat confides. After numerous conversations, I glean that due to her commitment to the “truth” in the narrative, she rejected the escalating drama in the Prison Monologues towards the end of 2013. However, by then she was flooded with invitations from community organizations and panels requesting the Prison Monologues as keynote speakers and it was difficult for her to replace her “stars.” The Prison Monologues had become a moving body of energy that seemed to be traveling in a direction incompatible with Pat’s tenets of humility, integrity, and community.

I am invited to travel with the Prison Monologues to one of their repeat presentations at the Bobby Benson, a residential drug-treatment program for teenagers in far-flung Kahuku on the windward side. The trip takes two hours, in part because the only way to reach Kahuku is to drive twenty-five miles west on the old, windy Kamehameha Highway that stretches across the island, hugging the sea. The night is stormy, and rain obscures the windshield as the ACO—the driver—forges ahead. In the prison van, Liezel sits in the back reading unobtrusively while the other women trade stories about past transgressions.

At Bobby Benson, “celebrity” Prison Monologuer, Ivelisse, is a live witness to a teen’s mother’s death to cancer. Ivelisse grew up in Kahuku where she committed crimes that she chronicles nostalgically on the two-hour ride in the prison van. Both

Ivelisse's reminiscences en route, as well as the performances themselves, elicit a site of desire that is connected to nostalgia for a fictive Hawaiian "paradise lost"—a utopian past prior to development. Kahuku is one of the few places on O'ahu largely untouched by tourism. I remember catching the bus from Ala Moana to Kahuku, four hours roundtrip, to supervise special education teachers at Kahuku's middle school. The bus drops you off right on the highway next to the beach park and the walk to the middle school is about fifteen minutes past the high school down a dusty road filled with squawking chickens. I was shocked by the dire situation of the special education teacher who had little institutional support and few resources. Ivelisse's affection for Kahuku is attached to a desire for a lost home and homeland which forges an immediate intimacy between the women and the teenagers. Indigeneity plays a role in this expressive framework and is simultaneously highlighted and sidelined within the structure of the Prison Monologues program.

Many theorists argue that theater and prison are ideal bedmates in that theater grants the inmate with the power to gaze back at the spectator/captor—prison guards, administrators, visitors who are present at performances. Furthermore, those inside and outside are attracted to theater due to the performative nature of punishment and the tension between the hidden and the public that prisons depend on.⁷⁰ Prison theater practitioner, Paul Heritage, argues that the regenerative power of performance, particularly as it connects to carceral theater, is that it allows for the fashioning of alternate selves. It comes as no surprise, then, that theater and arts programming have

faced persecution from penal administrators. WCCC is an anomaly among penal institutions due to the warden's full support of and endorsement of the Kailua Prison Project. Heritage chronicles his experience as a theater arts practitioner in a male prison in urban São Paulo, where theater as a vehicle for creative expression is scapegoated by the institution for inciting a prison riot, which eventuated in the banning of theater arts programming in Brazil's prison system for over two decades.⁷¹ Heritage points to a global crisis in the prisons in which prison administrators are hostile towards arts initiatives, in their rigid view of arts practitioners as "reformers." In this sense, arts programming can become an enemy of the state even while sustainable programming relies on institutional support. Heritage laments that the carceral space is a corrosive one for all of its inhabitants: "The anger that is vented is about a system in collapse and about men and women who are constantly endangered by the work they do in conditions that dehumanize both captives and captors."⁷²

Similarly, the Prison Monologues is more threatening to the WCCC prison guards than are the *Hulihia* publications and the creative writing program precisely because the Prison Monologue "cast" is able to leave the prison. Exit from the facility is considered a privilege, which challenges the carceral workers' notions of "value" and "worth." This distrust of prison theater programming, as well as of the "inmates," is a cynicism based upon moralism and class. The ACOs are frequently poorly compensated for their long hours of service. Some arrive at the facility with an aggressive stance towards their "charges," as well as resentment towards educational prison programming since they do not have the "luxury" of furthering their own education. I myself have experienced the

distrust of the guards on a few occasions on entering the facility.⁷³ Vailea corroborated that some of the other inmates and ACOs are jealous of the Monologuers; however, in her view, this envy is exceptional: “*The ACO Lisa, who goes with us most of the time is firm but very supportive.*” Due to the minimum-custody status of the Monologuers, they are never handcuffed and the ACOs June Sula and Lisa Kaululaau particularly are more like “tough-love” guides than punitive despots for the women. At one Chaminade University performance, I notice Kaululaau wiping a tear from the corner of her eye, her substantial frame leaning against the wall as the Prison Monologue women share their pasts of abuse and drugs with the criminology students.

Pat and Warden Patterson have generated publicity designed to quell the concerns of carceral workers and the public about the freedom exercised by the inside women in the Prison Monologues. For instance, the Prison Monologues’ brochure claims that the women understand their teenage audience because they have experienced their traumas and repent their “bad decisions”:

Under the leadership of Pat Clough and with the support of Warden Patterson, inmate writers are making their voices heard in Hawai’i communities, striving to interrupt the cycle of self-destruction that leads so many women and young people to prison. With “Prison Monologues,” the outreach program of the Prison Writing Project, the women visit high schools, treatment programs, shelters, and conferences. They offer their audiences a first-hand perspective on prison life and the consequences of bad decisions. Each inmate participant has lived the traumas of the students they meet. Each carries a message of hope reminding students that they are still free, they are not alone, prison is not a home.

The brochures highlight testimonials from the students, who idolize the inside women. As one witness attests: “The difference between these women and me is that

they have turned a bad situation into great lessons to teach teenagers like me to not make the mistakes that they made. They are identified by an inmate number but to me, they are my heroes.” In their publicity materials, Clough and Patterson portray the Prison Monologues as an arm of Community Outreach, thus an educational program—a communal intervention that interrupts cycles of destruction. One wonders whether this frame also frees the social, economic, and carceral systems from culpability.

The Prison Monologues as community theater blends theater and the staging of human rights reinforced in Heritage’s example of the restoration of prison arts programming in Brazil. Here, Heritage aligns the promise of performance with that of human rights.

What emerged from the pollution-fueled smog of a São Paulo summer’s day, was a confluence of theatre and human rights. The same promise that we find in performance is the deferred victory implicit in declarations of human rights. Like theatre, these declarations are always brought into the present by their enunciation, and are based on the experiences of the past. But they point to a future that can be different, can be changed. In “Theatre of the Oppressed,” Boal provoked us to consider that theatre is perhaps not revolutionary in itself, but rather a rehearsal of revolution.⁷⁴

Daniella ends the day’s performance at Kalakaua Middle school. She grabs the mic.

First, we’d like to say that we’re not here to tell you that you have to, you need to, or you’d better—do anything. Our childhoods were rained on by stoppers, words that were defeating. That’s not what we’re here to do to you. What we are here to say is each of you has the power to change, to hope, to rise above the things, situations, and yes, people that hold you down. The same power that holds the stars in the sky lives in you. Hope is not lost even if it feels that way. If you feel weighed down by expectations, shake it off. If you have shame in your life, fight it by speaking about it and doing what the voice in your mind says you can’t do. If

*you think you're insignificant and not valued by anyone, know this. We believe in you. Each and everyone of you are why we are here. You don't have to hide and you don't have to pretend. You don't have to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders. It's OK to be simply who you are—not who everyone around you thinks you should be. It's OK to be perfectly imperfect. We learned that the hard way. Thank you for having us today.*⁷⁵

Daniella's dénouement to the Monologues' presentation is published in *Hulihia VIII*, and beneath that appears a photo of three of the Monologue women, Ivelisse, Vailea and Liezel, wearing multicolored leis. Vailea is wearing hers like a sling. They are encircled by what appears to be middle-schoolers—all small and wearing backpacks. Even though the image is still, the shy smiles exchanged between the women and the three boys are ineffable.



From left to right: Ivelisse, Vailea, and Liezel. The three women from the core Prison Monologues program stand before middle schoolers at Kalakaua Middle School. The women have plastic leis draped around their necks—a gift from the students.⁷⁶



From left to right: Vailea, Liezel, Kaipo, and Ivelisse. The four women from the core Prison Monologue Program are seated on the stage in front of the stools, holding up the proclamation for “National Prison Monologues Day,” signed by the former Governor, Neil Abercrombie.⁷⁷

NOTES FROM CHAPTER THREE

¹ In a conversation on January 4, 2016, Pat expresses that the informal presentations in the dorms and cottages were in some way the most moving. The women, published in *Hulihia*, shared their published work with their “sisters.” The larger inside community of women was able to experience the Kailua Prison Project firsthand.

² See the appendix for the list of schools, conventions, and public events that the Prison Monologues performed at between 2012–2014.

³ ‘Aha Wahine Conference is a gathering of Native Hawaiian women from the community.

⁴ Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*.

⁵ This is a reference to Salman Rushdie’s memoir on exile, *Shame*, by performance studies scholar Yana Meerzon, *Performing Exile, Performing Self: Drama, Theatre, Film* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁶ From 2012–2014, I attended more than twenty Prison Monologue “performances,” an appellation that Pat resists, which included “presentations at schools, residential treatments, community colleges, conferences and events.” This text is extracted from the Kailua Prison Project’s publicity and testimonial materials.

⁷ The direct quotes from Vailea are transcribed from the interview I conducted with her on May 6, 2013 in the intake room at WCCC.

⁸ My idea on the intersection of theater and the staging of human rights is informed by Paul Heritage’s article, “Taking Hostages: Staging Human Rights,” *The Drama Review* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 97, http://muse.jhu.edu.eres.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/journals/the_drama_review/v048/48.3heritage.pdf.

⁹ “Journey to Justice,” interview by Eiko Kosasa. See Chesney-Lind and Bilsky, “Native Hawaiian Youth in Hawai‘i Detention Center,” 133–158.

¹⁰ “Journey to Justice,” interview by Eiko Kosasa.

¹¹ This conversation with Warden Patterson occurred in 2013 in the warden’s office.

¹² Partly due to the media’s accolade of the Prison Monologue program across the state, as well as Patterson’s positioning the prison as a pu‘uhonua, the former warden has been featured on TED Talks, as well as on public television. See “Mark Patterson: The Criminal Justice System: A Place Of Healing at TEDxHonolulu 2012,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8uCC3DedyfU>.

¹³ For a discussion on storytelling and story-listening within a 12-step program, see Maria G. Swora’s article, “Narrating Community: The Creation of Social Structure in Alcoholics Anonymous Through the Performance of Autobiography,” *Narrative Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (2001): 363–384.

¹⁴ For an analysis of public conversion narratives, see Don Waisanen’s review of Dana Anderson’s *Identity’s Strategy: Rhetorical Selves in Conversion* in *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 145–147.

¹⁵ Meerzon, *Performing Exile, Performing Self*, 299.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ The performative rendition includes excerpts from *Hulihia VIII: Monologues from Prison* (Kailua, HI: Women's Correctional Community Center, Fall 2012). In this eighth edition of the prison journal, Pat published the monologues performed almost verbatim.

¹⁸ Kaipo was an exception to the minimum-custody rule. On the other hand, Pat wanted Kaipo to be part of the new Prison Monologues due to her talent and appeal; however, because of Kaipo's infractions in the facility, she was not allowed to join, which speaks to the often arbitrary enforcement of the prison's rules.

¹⁹ An interview with Vailea on May 6, 2014 at the facility in the intake room.

²⁰ I underline words the speaker emphasizes.

²¹ Barbara Myerhoff quotes Richard Schechner from *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies*, 248.

²² The term a "beloved community" is used frequently in the facility's promotional material, by Warden Kawika Patterson, and by the WCCC Total Life Recovery and Hina Mauka programs.

²³ I have a master's degree in special education and have worked with teenagers with learning disabilities and supervised special education teachers in the Department of Education, as a faculty supervisor at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

²⁴ Vailea tells me that there was a part of her that didn't want to leave the facility when she was finally released to furlough. In fact, she chose Bridges, the furlough program on the facility's grounds, rather than going to TJ Mahoney & Associates, a gender responsive program in Honolulu town. In her interview, Vailea expresses her attachment to the Prison Monologue program: "I can't imagine my life without the Prison Monologues!"

²⁵ "Food for thought" is a phrase that Pat frequently uses in class. In this introduction of the Monologues to the Lab, Vailea is the most forceful, almost bordering on pedantic, with her moralistic lecture. Ivelisse hardly says anything. I later uncover that there has been some strife with Pat and Ivelisse about Ivelisse's stepping out of line.

²⁶ See the appendix for the audition guide that Pat disseminated at the Prison Monologue audition on February 16, 2013.

²⁷ Richard Schechner, "Self Inflicted Wounds: Art, Ritual, Popular Culture," in *Performed Imaginaries* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2015).

²⁸ "Ohana" is the Hawaiian word for "family." The word is used by locals and in some ways represents the value of the extended family and of aloha (peace, love, welcome).

²⁹ Making Waves Films LLC is a documentary production company in Honolulu, Hawai'i, established in 2005 by award-winning independent filmmaker Kimberlee Bassford. According to their promotional materials, their mission is to "produce social issues, cultural, historical, and environmental documentary films that advance social justice, strengthen our connections to one another and deepen understanding of the world."

³⁰ Introductory performance text to Part 1: *Who We Were*. Simultaneously printed in *Hulihia VIII: Monologues from Prison*, 2.

³¹ See Regina Kunzel's *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

³² Liezel's poem "Who I Was" always headlines The Prison Monologues performances. Published in *Hulihia VIII: Monologues from Prison*.

³³ Liezel followed Pat's syllabus and direction for the class she led at the facility.

³⁴ The warden explains that the parole board requires women to go through the Hina Mauka program, which is also a drug-treatment program with a Hawaiian cultural and religious framework, two to three years before they leave the prison. After the women complete their time in Hina Mauka, they are required to complete a work furlough program—TJ Mahoney or Bridges—and then their parole.

³⁵ This conversation with the warden took place in the administration building in 2013.

³⁶ An interview with Vailea on May 6, 2014 at the facility in the intake room.

³⁷ OCCC is one of the three men’s prisons on O’ahu. The women are frequently housed there on arrest before their transfer to WCCC. OCCC can be a dangerous place for the women. Dakine who is transgendered was raped at OCCC before her transfer to WCCC.

³⁸ This conversation with the warden took place in the administration building in 2013.

³⁹ An interview with Vailea on May 6, 2014 at the facility in the intake room.

⁴⁰ This did happen for a while. Vailea and Kaipō worked with Toni Bissen, executive director of the Pu’ā Foundation, “a charitable organization that was established in 1996 as a result of the apology, redress, and reconciliation between the Native Hawaiian people and the United Church of Christ (UCC) for the Church’s complicity involved with the 1893 overthrow of the Hawaiian Constitutional Monarchy. The Foundation’s vision is that through pu’ā, the process of feeding, nourishing and strengthening, there will be the emergence of empowered, enlightened communities and society. Its aspiration is community healing and well-being to reconcile the past with the present, so that as a Hawai’i community, together we can build a better future.” From the website.

⁴¹ At my most recent meeting, May 15, 2017 with Pat at Morning Brew in Kailua, Pat tells me that Vailea now has a job at a car dealership and is instrumental in getting some of the inside women, who are now paroled, jobs. Despite the fact that she is not working directly with youth, she is giving back to her community.

⁴² Both Pat and I encourage the women to work in blank verse as direct rhyme tends towards the cliché, but it can be effective as irony when employed to critique institutional violence as Alana’s poem “Governmental Seduction” does in chapter one.

⁴³ This authenticity is both debated and heralded by historians and by literary and carceral theorists.

⁴⁴ The reference to “creating our own entertainment,” prefaces the infamous and typically well-received “SKIT: Don’t You Know Who I Am?” The women always preface the skit with “So—if you think all we do in prison is sit around and boo-hoo all the time, well . . .”

⁴⁵ Introductory performance text to Part 3: *Reflections*. Simultaneously printed in *Hulihia VIII*, 24.

⁴⁶ “SKIT: Don’t You Know Who I Am?” in *Hulihia VIII*, “Prison Life” section, 12–13.

⁴⁷ I have IRB permission to include this photo as it is published in *Hulihia VIII: Monologues from Prison*, 13.

⁴⁸ “A Letter From My Daughter” is printed in Part Three, *Reflections* in *Hulihia VIII*, 27.

⁴⁹ Hawaiian word for mischievous or naughty.

⁵⁰ Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy*, 34.

⁵¹ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 138.

⁵² *Ibid*, 138.

⁵³ Former Governor Abercrombie commuted Liezel's hefty fifteen-to-life sentence before he left office partly because her central and visible role in the Prison Monologues inscribed her as a model prisoner and template for rehabilitation.

⁵⁴ December 7, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LizWtILTlao>.

⁵⁵ See *Performing New Lives: Prison Theatre*, edited by Jonathan Shailor (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011) and Meerzon, *Performing Exile, Performing Self*.

⁵⁶ Derek Walcott addresses the rhizomatic complexity embedded in exilic performances—"the desire to leave home when there and the desire to return when away." This bipolar affect towards home is representative of many exilic anxieties and is present in both the Prison Monologues performances and the prison as a "border-zone." See also Meerzon *Performing Exile, Performing Self*, 125.

⁵⁷ Augusto Boal, *Legislative Theatre*, quoted in "Theatre of Change: Theatre of the Oppressed as an Aesthetic Tool for Social and Political Change," by S. Leigh Thompson, 67. Boal's Forum Theatre, according to Thompson, is "the most common performative expression of the Theatre of the Oppressed."

⁵⁸ See Thompson, "Theatre of Change," <http://theforumproject.org/whatistoforumtheatre>.

⁵⁹ Thompson quoting Augusto Boal, "Theatre of Change," <http://theforumproject.org/whatistoforumtheatre>.

⁶⁰ According to Thompson, "In one performance, an audience member, frustrated that an actor was unable to perform her suggestion satisfactorily, was invited by Boal to take the stage to play the part herself. With this display, Boal realized that actors could only ever translate another's ideas and would always pass ideas through their own subjective filter." Thompson quotes Boal: "On stage the actor is an interpreter who, in the act of translating, plays false." <http://theforumproject.org/whatistoforumtheatre>.

⁶¹ Oliver, *Witnessing Beyond Recognition*.

⁶² Pat shares this reminiscence with me at our last conversation at Morning Brew Café in Kailua, May 15, 2017.

⁶³ Daphne's testimony "Giving Back," appears in the Prison Monologues' publicity material.

⁶⁴ Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity, 2014, www.pacrim.hawaii.edu.

⁶⁵ Meerzon, *Performing Exile, Performing Self*, 17.

⁶⁶ In the acknowledgements to *Hulihia VIII*, Pat gives a shout out to Iwalani Meyer, a student in her creative writing class who is "responsible for the beautiful cover drawing," 3.

⁶⁷ See Judith Butler on performativity (*Bodies that Matter*, 232). The subversive uses of performativity are manifest through citation and re-citation of the performative. It is the use of "ordinary language" in "non-ordinary" ways, or what Derrida would call "reinscription" that a term can break with discourse to engender insurrectionary potential. See, e.g., Derrida's *Limited Inc.*, 7–12. "The iterability of the performance is generated from the citationality of the sign that allows one to 'make trouble' by citing or reciting the performative in ways that are contrary to or revealing of the instability of heteronormative hegemony." From Stephen Young's "Judith Butler: Performativity," in *Critical Legal Thinking: Law and the Political*, November 14, 2016, <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2016/11/14/judith-butlers-performativity>.

⁶⁸ In chapter four, I explore in detail changes in the Prison Monologues when the core group was released from the facility and Pat began her Prison Monologue Lab.

⁶⁹ Newton and I formed a friendship in early 2012 and from time to time would do social activities together. I maintained a connection with her, and she frequently shares her poetry with me. For a while Newton was working on the piers, communicating with chefs from around the world, and scribing humorous poems about her interactions with them. Sadly Newton passed away in the spring of 2016.

⁷⁰ See Paul Heritage, "Taking Hostages: Staging Human Rights," 97.

⁷¹ Heritage provides the notorious case study of theater artist Ruth Escobar, whose theatrical staging in 1980 in a Brazilian facility was followed by a prisoner riot.

⁷² Heritage, "Taking Hostages: Staging Human Rights," 99.

⁷³ One of the first times that I substituted for Pat at the WCCC, the class ran over a few minutes because I had not wanted to interrupt a women's story. A fuming guard approached me and sharply rebuked me for detaining the women. I realized that this class was markedly variant from the classes I taught at the university, and that "time" in the prison carried a poignancy and urgency quite distinct from classrooms on the outside.

⁷⁴ See Heritage, "Taking Hostages: Staging Human Rights."

⁷⁵ Conclusion to the Monologues from the *Hulihia VIII*, 37.

⁷⁶ I have IRB permission to include this photo published in *Hulihia VIII*, 37.

⁷⁷ I have IRB permission to include this photo published in *Hulihia IX*, back cover.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Love Letters”

Dear Unbreakable Survivors,

There are many things I'd like to say to you, but I can't quite figure out the words to say. It's ironic because Mrs. Wilcox, our amazing English teacher has taught us how to incorporate our emotions and feelings through writing. . . . Yet here I am . . . staring blankly at this page, with nothing but scattered thoughts.

Scattered thought #1: Have you ever befriended someone so beautiful? And over the course of time, they started telling you about all the horrible people who've hurt them in their lives, like friends and family, and the only thing running through your mind is “who would ever want to hurt someone like you?” I wanted to scream out to you all, “you're beautiful,” “you're wonderful,” “You're magnificent,” “look at you, you made it, you're here!” “I love you.” It seems so surreal to me—that yes, people do actually go through these things. They are not just a few made up stories merely written for entertainment. I'll never understand why it always rains hardest on those who deserve the sun.

Scattered thought #2: Your speeches replay in my head every once in a while. The fact that you had the courage to over-come the fear of exposing yourself, entering a class-room filled with a bunch of students whom you've never met before and having the strength to spill your heart and soul out through poetry. That was unspeakably brave. As you all spoke, you were able to silence the entire room of teenagers. It was so quiet. The type of quiet you encounter right before you're about to fall asleep, before the late night thoughts come rushing in, the good type of quiet.

I remembered looking around, observing everyone's reactions and suddenly seeing familiar faces turn into unfamiliar ones. I see these people everyday but today they are strangers. That's when it hit me . . . everyone has something he or she will never share. By exposing yourselves, you gave the students, myself included, a much needed inspiration to do the same. To open up and to share our deepest darkest secrets. You may not know it, but you showed us that it's alright to speak up, it's alright to ask for help every once in a while, it's alright to say that we're not alright, but most importantly you taught us that things do get better.

Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but eventually.

Scattered thought # 3: Sometimes I forget what it's like to feel nostalgic, at peace. There are days, I feel everything at once and then there are days that I feel nothing at all. Frankly, I don't know what's worse: drowning beneath the waves or dying from thirst?

Scattered thought # 4: (On the day of your speeches) I haven't cried like that since my best friend committed suicide 3 years ago. I miss her terribly of course, but I think suicidal people are just angels wanting to go home. But, how I wish she could've been here. How I wish she could've heard your speeches too.¹ How I wish she'd known.

*I met a girl once,
Who sighed and told me she was not lovely.
And it confused me that she could not see
The sunlight shining through her scars.
Oh how I wish she'd seen what I'd seen.*

Thank you all so much, for allowing me to feel again. Even if it was expressed through tears, thank you for allowing me to feel something because something is definitely better than nothing.

Scattered thought #5: I miss you all. I miss learning from you. I miss listening to your touching words. I miss the people who brought me tears. I miss everything about you.

There are many things, I'd like to say . . . but I guess this'll do.

*Love always,
Giselle²*

Giselle's fractured and redeeming passages, "Scattered Thoughts," speaks back to the three inside women from the Prison Monologue Lab who share their testimonial narratives during her English period at Nānākuli High school. The stories that Giselle and the other students witness that day are of three women from WCCC's Prison Monologues program: Liezel, incarcerated for her involvement in a death of a child; Kailani, whose repeated rape by her grandfather paves her pathway into drugs and alcohol; and Mahina, implicated in a driving accident while "high on ICE," resulting in a

death of a minor.³ As these testimonies of incest, drugs, and murder spill out, the students accompany the inside women on an inter-generational pilgrimage to their own pained and sutured memories.⁴ I frame the high school students' reactions to female "prisoners'" monologues as "Love Letters." In "Love Letters," I analyze the Nānākuli and Kapolei high school students' written responses to the Prison Monologues "presentations" in their classes.⁵

Giselle's "Scattered Thoughts" is an aperture into a performative dialogic: a showcase of participatory life writing interchanges between high school students from two Title I schools on Honolulu's leeward side and the inside women.⁶ These life-writing texts—mini-memoirs—transcend the genre of enforced confessionals and its corresponding re-traumatization. Despite horrors of adult traumas that visit the students, the students utilize the inside women's performances as projections into a future that they do not have to inhabit: an imaginary space, separate from their lives impacted by colonization. Through both identification and "dis-identification"—a term that I borrow from queer performance studies theorist, José Esteban Muñoz—the students inscribe and imagine futures liberated from the frontiers of incarceration.⁷ The students resist the prescriptive pathways of both their biological and surrogate families—the inside women—through gestures of love and defiance. Ultimately, the Love Letters and their dialogic interchange are a register of healing, not re-traumatization, in which the students subvert national and prescriptive discourses of redemption and reform.

Giselle's remarkable confession, poetry intruding prose, positions her as a secondary and participatory witness to the inside women's pain as she shares the

agony of witnessing the suicide of her best friend, whom she doesn't name. Giselle expresses a perpetual longing for the family that she never really had, which mirrors at times the elusive binary patterning of the loved and beloved. The women's performances, as both "poems" and "speeches," passage her to a place she has evacuated: a space of affect and hurt. The Prison Monologue performances release her from anesthetization, and transport her back to a place of feeling. In this letter, Giselle suggests that her friend who "could not see the sunlight shining through her scars," could have possibly been "saved," as is she, by witnessing the women's "speeches." Giselle experiences both the women's writing and her own as transformative and redemptive. Giselle's address of her "Scattered Thoughts" performs a simultaneous identification and dis-identification. Separated from a larger and more condemnatory community that may not witness the women as survivors, Giselle sees the women within a discourse of societal suffering. She memorializes them as "unbreakable," despite the fact that their *breaks* and ruptures are performed so overtly.⁸ Her writing, poetic and bare, serves as testimony for her reader. In this sense, she is a secondhand witness to an audience that is comprised of the other students in her eleventh grade English class, her teacher (Mrs. Wilcox), myself as intermediary, and you—the imagined audience who is reading this manuscript.

"Love Letters" is the appellation I have ascribed to the letters and index cards the students offer to the women in the Prison Monologues and the Prison Monologue Lab after their school visits.⁹ The sixty homemade cards and sixty indexes written by the students function as mirrors to the Prison Monologuers' confessionals. They are created

as talismans for the six performers and the three women in the Prison Monologues Lab at WCCC. The narratives of trauma represent odes of longing to parents disappeared from their lives; they construct surrogate families and resurrect disappeared mothers, liberated from the complications of blood and kin. Just as the teenagers are witness to the inside women's transformation, the women in turn become witnesses to the teens' transformation, via the epistolary. Ironically, the women in the Prison Monologues who are vanquished mothers to their biological children are surrogate/performative mothers for the teenagers at the high schools, as the Love Letters reveal. The teenagers return the gesture of trauma in their elegies to the women: a calligraphic liberation.

I foreground the written testimony of the inside women and the students as a political apparatus to counteract the disciplinary regime at work in any carceral space, particularly one located in the larger colonized landscape of Hawai'i.¹⁰ The inside women and the students at Nānākuli and Kapolei high schools, the majority of whom are Native Hawaiian or part Native Hawaiian, are direct victims of Hawai'i's ongoing colonial history, and are located in a particular genealogy of political trauma. Unlike the well-funded private Kamehameha schools in Hawai'i that are overtly politically identified with Native Hawaiian history, Kapolei and Nānākuli suffer from paltry resources and many of the students are dis-identified from a political framework. As Meda Chesney-Lind and Brian Bilsky state in "Native Hawaiian Youth in Hawai'i Detention Center: Colonialism and Carceral Control," the carceral system has long been implicated in the colonization process, as exemplified by the imprisonment of Queen Lili'uokalani in Hawai'i. The overpolicing of Hawaiians continues to the present."¹¹ Similarly to the

overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian women at WCCC, the authors posit that Native Hawaiian youth, who account for 30 percent of Hawai'i's youth population account for nearly half (46 percent) of detention-home admissions. That racial overrepresentation is also a gendered problem: "The racial disparity is particularly notable for Native Hawaiian girls, who account for 52 percent of those detained and are being held for the noncriminal status offense of running away from home."¹²

The bonds that the inside women form with students via epistolary and oral testimony are cultural productions that highlight political trauma, familial trauma, vulnerability, and marginality. The language employed in both the students' Love Letters and within the women's performances represents a mixture of Hawaiian, English, and Pidgin—all inflected with exilic words that represent various Pacific locations including Samoa, the Philippines, Marshall Islands, Palau, and Micronesia. This language speaks against the powers of colonization that inflicted cultural genocide through the demand for standardized English, and the shaming of Hawaiian and Pidgin.¹³ The ban on the Hawaiian language was preserved until 1986, and today, according to census data, those who identify as at least part Native Hawaiian comprise only a fifth of Hawai'i's population.¹⁴ The students who come from Pidgin-speaking families on the west side of O'ahu seamlessly transit between Pidgin and standard English in their Love Letters to the women. This fluid speaking between tongues can be read as a dissonance with, and a resistance to, the institution and the state.

I frame the high school students' reactions to female prisoner monologues in Hawai'i as Native Hawaiian epistemologies because the women and the high school

students represent a range of Hawaiian and Pacific intersections, and the Kailua Prison Writing Project is rooted in Hawaiian practices of *ho'oponopono* (forgiveness and reconciliation). This unique archive showcases a participatory life-writing exchange and the avenues in which trauma itself performs as the dialogic. The students' life writing texts, which are direct responses to life—the narratives of memory, pain, and abuse of the inside women—house an assortment of witnesses and a cacophony of testimonies. In this sense, unlike in the *Home* narratives in chapter two, pain is sutured/restorative because of its corroborating “live” audience.

Philip Auslander's Theory for Performance Studies: A Student's Guide reads:

Every theory frames and focuses our attention on some things while leaving other things outside the frame or out of focus. Thus, Performance Studies is always in search of new theories that might open up new ways of seeing and interpreting performance. Performance Studies is theory: it is the myriad conceptual tools used to “see” performance.¹⁵

The methodological interdisciplinarity of my research reverberates with the theoretical frames of performance studies and queer studies, which collide in ways that “trouble our notions of gender.”¹⁶ I draw upon these performance theorists to engage the performative nature of the monologue presentations and the analogous student reactions. Utilizing queer performance theorists' frameworks of dis-identification as well as Judith Butler's seminal theory on the performativity of gender, we can see the Love Letters as weapons of dis-identification in their resistance to a majoritarian citizenship.¹⁷ Race, gender, and indigeneity shape the violence faced by women at WCCC and the

teenagers, who come from similar racial, cultural, and economic locations. Both are “queered” by witnessing and experiencing tragedy, violence, and generational trauma.

The students’ auto/biographies are created and performed in response to the inside women’s re-presentations of pain, which in turn elicit a dialogic response in the sense that the inside women subsequently write back to the students. These micro “*truth* and reconciliation circles” that puncture the prison walls, and which I articulate as performances of pu’uhonua, are generative and enduring. The performances in chapter three are the seeds of what becomes an extended choral of performances that unfold once the women leave the high schools to return to the facility and the high school students reluctantly return to their classrooms. This extended dialogue appears at times as poems, published as epistolary interchanges between the pages of the prison publication, *Hulihia*; other times as unaltered student responses to the performances in the form of index cards, letters, questionnaires—frequently generated by the students themselves; and then, most enigmatically as lingering afterthoughts that impact the students indelibly. These afterthoughts—the concrete changes that the students frequently actualize and record—are revisited when the women return to the school the following semester or year.

This chapter argues that the performances by the inside women in the Prison Monologues program and the students at Nānākuli and Kapolei high schools suggest novel ways of embodying grief and trauma that move beyond the confession as a tool of redemption. As we follow the exchange between inside women and students, we see the emergence of coherent narratives of self—a wholeness that emerges from finding

voice in the wake of trauma. The primary archive of this chapter—the letters and indexes themselves—is a “call and response” to the women’s performances/instruction/moral lessons/lectures, and the nuances of these exchanges are illuminated by a particular trauma scholarship.¹⁸ The chapter is organized around the following themes: Love Letters and Circles of Intimacy; Confessionals and Auto/Ethnographies; Prison Monologues/Dialogues as Expressive Pu‘uhonua; Indexing Speechlessness; and Hearing and Healing. These themes trace a journey through intimacy—its dangers and pleasures, its utterances and omissions.

LOVE LETTERS AND CIRCLES OF INTIMACY

After making my way gingerly around the crowing threesome of roosters and passing the over-sized truck in the reserved space named “Warden,” I ascend the three stairs to the administration office. Inside, I ring the bell at the desk and Josie, the warden’s secretary, comes out to greet me. She is dressed in a blue and yellow muumuu, local kine.¹⁹ I have come to read the correspondence between Kapolei High School and the then six women in the Prison Monologues program: Vailea, Ivelisse, Liezel, Melinda, Brenda, and Kaipō. Vailea, Ivelisse, and Liezel are all pioneers of the program; Melinda, Brenda, and Kaipō are recent additions. I give Liezel, who works in the warden’s office, a quick hug. Liezel walks quietly like a cat. She is efficient, effective, a natural administrator.

Josie delivers the Kapolei correspondence in an unruly colorful package. As I open the manila envelope, the dissonant shapes and colors of the letters, penned in the students’ handwriting, spill over the warden’s koa desk. Pastel pink, baby blue, verdant

green contours linger and loiter. Tortoise scripts, elongated vowels in pen, pencil, and high-school markers stumble over the edges of school papers. Many of the students underline their physical space in the classroom during the performance, showcasing a *lived* presence: “*I was also in the last class in front wearing white converses and a blue tank top with long hair in a bun*” (Makelina). These concrete, self-descriptions connote an anxious attempt to be recognized, as if the teenagers are attempting to write themselves into the scripts of the women’s lives. “*I don’t know if you remember me but I was one of the girls that said goodbye to you and Liezel.*” Subsequent to these guiltless and precise physical descriptions, the students frequently write in the hesitation: “*I don’t know if you remember me . . .*” reinforcing the vulnerability of their position as lover/beloved. This particular elegy is addressed to Vailea. Makelina concludes her love letter to Vailea with: “*You have an awesome voice. I almost cried. I hope to see you again before I graduate. Love and god bless.*” Makelina re-inscribes Vailea as an imperative witness to a milestone in her own life: her graduation from high school. It is bittersweet: Will Vailea still be in prison when Makelina graduates?²⁰ Will Makelina indeed graduate? The future of many of the teenagers is tenuous as they are injured by drug addiction and abuse.

The silhouettes on the oval koa desk recall the Valentines of our youthful and idealized imaginaries. Teenage boys and girls single out desired mothers: the beloved, love, and lover. They resurrect their own vanquished and abusive mothers and adopt the inside women as surrogate, stolen mothers. The women in turn select beloved

daughters and sons to take the place of children they abandoned to drugs and the streets—all in a performative re-imagining of family. *An invention.*

Scribed testimony (writing) speaks back to performed testimony (performance). As the women frequently articulate a fantasy relationship with their children outside the prison, the substance of a “home/homeland” represents a nostalgic site of desire, one painted in the hues of a nostalgic mis-remembering—a paradise lost. For many of the inside women and the teenagers, desire traces a pathway not only to a lost (domestic) home but also to a homeland: a longing for national and cultural belonging as well as for intimacy. The performances are staged within a testimonial theater of witness that blurs the boundaries between speaker and witness. The varied audience response, including the teachers’ confessionals, confirm the “authenticity” of the Prison Monologuers and thereby reveal the ways in which the act of performance can erode barriers between prisoners and “free” persons, constructing complicated relationships of affiliation, family, and similitude. The acts of witness elicit a testimony of trauma, alongside the imagined alternative homes and families.

CONFESSIONALS AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHIES

The students’ letters to the women function as both confessionals and autoethnographies. They evince the fluidity of boundaries between prisoners inside and the girls and boys outside, as well as the transformative imaginable of that interaction. Thulani, for instance, chronicles a life of abuse—her parents wanted for drug crimes, her attempts at suicide, the taunting at school because she is “fat, short, and unloved.” A litany of trauma fills her paper, a somatic and psychological re-remembering.

I am 15 years old with a storie to be told. When I was 2 years old my father passed away, I've been living life without him for 13 years. Throughout my 13 years without him I experienced what life really was. I was sexually touched at the age of 9, by my 45 year-old uncle. He touched me in places I never wanted to be touched.

For Thulani, “real” life is about pain. In giving voice to her memory, Thulani asserts her agency: a verbal counter to her uncle’s violations: *He touched me in places I never wanted to be touched.*

*But I was young. I didn't know better. I was always bullied around because I Was Fat, short, slow at everything and stupid.
I've always felt unwanted and unloved by my family
I would try to kill myself . . . stack 2 pillows on my face
And 5 telephone books on top of the pillows
Just for the weight*

*Life got harder.
Moved from Town to Nanakuli.
From Nanakuli to Pearl City*

*We moved in with my mom boyfriend's family.
My younger brother and I barely ate because their
Was only little food.*

*I did weed during my 9th grade year . . . I was just so stressed.
I did so much weed (spice) that it ended me in the hospital
For a whole week. I laid in that hospital bed thinking “what the hell Thulani.”
When I got out of the hospital I felt thankful that god gave me another chance
To live.*

Thulani’s poetry traces an unstable and impermanent home environment, uprooting yearly between neighborhoods. Yet her catalogue of exile, displacement, and rejection culminates in a climax of redemption. The willingness to share these narratives, juxtaposed with the denouement of hope, is remarkable, and characteristic of the testimony of Thulani and her peers. Thulani, like many of the teenagers, faces a

crisis that eventuates in transformation: a decided script of redemption and regeneration. As her writing divulges, Thulani is hospitalized due to a drug overdose. At this turning point, she thanks God for giving her a second chance. Many of the Love Letters culminate with the teenagers gifting love, wishes, and hope for the women, and most importantly, bestowing their own confirmation in the act of forgiveness. The letters excavate personal trajectories and genealogies, but ultimately they perform as a community tapestry that comprehends cultural grief. The sophistication and capacity of the students to self-reflect is arresting and unexpected: a justly selfless performance. The Love Letters function as a circle of healing: a way of giving back. Pu'uhonua.

PRISON MONOLOGUES/DIALOGUES AS EXPRESSIVE PU'UHONUA

Warden Patterson worships community. As we gather around the warden's oval table in his room in Administration, he speaks of the "circles of intimacy" created between the women in the Prison Monologues and their "benevolent community."²¹ "When I see the audience rush the women at the end of their performance, I always keep my distance, because this circle of intimacy is sacred. It should not be interrupted." As he recounts: "I come from a matriarchal family. The women were the glue . . . they held our family together. What we are missing in our lives today is the valuing of people's gifts. We have forgotten our people's gifts." The fact that the warden posits the post-performance encounter between audience and "inmate" as a "circle of intimacy" inserts the Prison Monologues within the Indigenous framework of pu'uhonua. The "circle of intimacy" that the warden names as "sacred" prescribes a compassionate hearing. The warden's words offer a particular avenue in which to see the post-

performance encounter—testament to the emotional assembly generated by the performances. The first school that employed the epistolary with the women at WCCC was La Pietra Hawai'i School for Girls, a predominantly ha'ole (white) and economically privileged all-girls community. "They were the first school that invited us," says the warden wryly. "It was not the first school we thought of. We wanted to return to the communities that the women come from . . . the west side."²²

The Love Letters perform discourses of pain and abuse with the goal of the re-formation of the self, understood as "reform"—a disciplining of the body—as well as the re-formation of the wounded body.²³ Frequently the students conclude their letters with gestures of pu'uhonua. "*Mahalo nui loa*" intone the students, positing the women as redeemers.²⁴ "*Thank you all so much, for allowing me to feel again. Even [if] it was expressed through tears, thank you for allowing me to feel something because something is definitely better than nothing.*" Despite the potential for re-injury, many of the letters express an unexpected process of rebirth: a journey back into "living."

The theater of testimony, as discussed, utilizes Native Hawaiian tropes: an extended healing circle and the concept of pu'uohunua—sanctuary and reconciliation. The precepts of pu'uhonua are performed within the presentations themselves, as well as embedded in the text and subtext of the Love Letters. Despite their liberatory and resistant content, these Indigenous practices of testimony are also disciplined by codes and expressions—master narratives—that conform to contemporary cultural, political, ethical, and moral expectations.²⁵ Within the therapeutic gesture reside transformational expectations on the part of the "transgressor" and "victim." Within the pedagogical

context, in particular there is an anticipation of an intellectual, moral lesson, yet within the framework of the 12-step program, from which the Prison Monologues subliminally borrows, there is also the assumption of a higher power. The act of re-telling traumatic narratives works on two levels. First, the traumatic narrative loses its potential to *terrorize* through the reiteration of traumatic details, thus releasing its orator. Secondly, it aims to facilitate a communal healing, with its mana (spiritual power) to release its audience. Despite the aspiration to restore, healing is always incomplete: the students return to school, their biological families, Child Protection Services, or to the beaches; and the inmates depart to the prison.²⁶

The Prison Monologue women's performances and their corresponding rejoinders can be viewed in conversation with the crisis of our national gulag: the warehousing of America's "surplus" populations—women, the poor, people of color. The performances that occur in Hawai'i's schools constitute an indictment of the terror and dispossession propagated by the nation-state. Prison activist and scholar Simone Weil Davis condemns the violence implicit in the forced, cultural expectations of the confessional, principally for the incarcerated.²⁷ Although the Prison Monologues adhere to a redemptive narrative, contrary to the aforementioned examples, the teenagers resonate with those scripted confessionals. One wonders if the Prison Monologue testimonials would be considered as authentic or effective if redemption was absented.

Feminist prison arts practitioners caution against encouraging sensational testimony from the women inside due to its potential to re-injure already traumatized women, and in this case a traumatized youthful audience. However, most students'

letters express a sense of relief and comfort in hearing testimony that resonates with their own lives. Moreover, many function as gestures of empathy, as the high school students, despite their own lives pockmarked by pain, encourage the women on their difficult pathways, at times absolving them of their crimes. Many of the letters express the tone of a sympathetic magistrate—an inversion of the women’s experience in the carceral and legal setting—most particularly for Liezel, whom the teenagers decry has been wrongly accused. Just as the Prison Monologuers are “teachers” for their audiences, the teens, in a pedagogical reversal, assume an educational and parental posture towards the inside women. Generally, however, the students play the roles of daughters and sons.

The teenagers’ writing frequently assumes a breathy tone, partly due to their inexperience as writers and their erratic and aurally influenced grammar and syntax. They proclaim their roles as undying witnesses for the women—whether metaphorically, spiritually, or concretely.

*For Liezel: Wow 2 more years are you ready . . . what happened to the baby I don't think it was your fault. I know it was in your care but you shouldn't be accused of second-degree murder. To me, I think the parents did that to the baby putting injuries on her head is dumb. That was wrong doing that to the baby. If I was the judge I would ask the parents if they have proof that you hurt the baby or not. So hopefully those two years goes by fast for you.
Much Mahalo's²⁸*

The compelling voices within the carceral institution reinforce exacting cultural scripts and forms of redemption. In the Nānākuli teenagers’ written responses to the Prison Monologue Lab women—Kailani, Liezel, and Mahina—we encounter the

performance of the genuine, empathic witness.²⁹ The teenagers identify with Kailani and Mahina as fledgling performers, encouraging them in their re-tellings. “*Mahina, we are so proud of you even though this was your first time, we made you part of our family in our heart because of your courage and heart touching stories.*” However, some admonitions sneak in: “You are not *bad* women, but have been influenced by *bad* people.” Some of the teenagers hold simplistic ideas about “good” and “bad,” although they rarely condemn the women. They witness the inside women’s actions as “bad choices,” sporting “bad consequences,” yet they claim the inside women as their “role models” who provide pathways to “good choices.”

The Prison Monologues function as an extension of the making of public memory, in which the teenagers transform into secondhand “precarious” witnesses, straddling the divide between empathic listener and victim—and even at times perpetrator—of traumatic histories.³⁰ As discussed, the circle of student witnesses are more like the women—culturally, demographically, narratively—than different. The precarity arises because of the performed testimony’s potential for emotional re-injury, as the inmates’ life stories may closely resemble the teenagers’. Thus the psychoanalytic trope of transference is a potential character within the staging. Yet the students’ letters and women’s testimony suggest that more often than not, the relationship that emerges from the reciprocal performances is one based on “hope” rather than re-traumatization.³¹

The extended community of witnesses—the high school students and their teachers—forms an embodied community via the power of performance. Performance

proffers a dialogical, multi-layered permeable exchange between the students and the women inside; between students and teachers; teachers and the inside women; students and their extended families; and the inside women and their extended families. The performative exchange elicits stories of bodies as well as spirits: a repertoire of corporeality. The injured body is enacted by the inside women and is in turn written and performed back by the teenagers.

Acts of reciprocal witnessing may also occur at the performances themselves. In Spring 2013, I joined the inside women in the white facility van on a journey to the Bobby Benson Residential Treatment Center in Kahuku, where a fourteen-year old teenager read aloud her own poem about rape and losing her mother to drugs and cancer.³² Ivelisse serves as a living and concrete link to the teenager's mother, while the teenager represents Ivelisse's own daughter, who has been denied the opportunity of mourning. Besides being surrogate parents, the women, like the letters themselves, are conduits of information—an informal network of exchange, bridging present and past lives. At times, the women at WCCC know the disappeared biological mothers of the teenagers, who imploringly demand material evidence of this. Frequently the teenagers ask the women to send love to their mothers who are incarcerated at WCCC. Post-performance, the teen and Ivelisse hold each other in an embrace that mnemonically summons the dead mother, with Ivelisse transubstantiated as the vanquished mother in absentum: "You know my ma," whispers the teenager into Ivelisse's hair. The inability to mark the passing of a loved one is one of the voluminous mournings that the inmates at WCCC share with their teenage audiences. Refusal of

the right to mark ritual corrodes community, which aligns with the anguish of the civically dead. The inability to say goodbye to parents who die while the women are incarcerated haunts the women's writing and disclosures in class. The location of Ivelisse's personal genealogy in the geographical space of Kahuku fortifies her as a secondhand witness to the teen to whom she is testifying, rehabilitating, "re-forming."

Literary critic Shoshana Felman argues that the secondhand witness typically disrupts the shape of the narrative, but as the Love Letters disclose, the students—secondhand witnesses—facilitate testimony.³³ The staging of inside women's testimony appears to offer both women and students a mirror of their own life experience, an affirmation of their human worth, and hope for a different future. After witnessing the Prison Monologues on more than twenty occasions in a variety of venues, I have come to understand the ability of oral testimony to join the lives of the inside women with those of the students, in a complex referencing of individual narratives with communal ones.³⁴ The Love Letters reside unapologetically in the genre of testimonio due to their collective testimony of and for the beleaguered: both the inside women and the students.

Kapolei high school student Nico draws an incandescent yellow sun on a mint green paper: "*because you rarely get to see the sun in there.*" This visual souvenir that the women can carry as an amulet—a signifier of healing—with them into the prison is a gift that many of the teenagers create. The smorgasbord of childish symbols work like portable graphic texts, mnemonic devices that stand in for hope and solidarity. Nico concludes: "*I love the fact that you treated our class like family. I wanted to cry my heart*

out yesterday. For the time you shared your stories, I think everyone in the room felt human for a while.” The concept of ohana (family) is a distinct and tenacious feature in the letters, in which teenagers’ generously inscribe the women into a familial union in an amendment of the many dis-unions in both of their lives. Through the act of invention, the students and inmates project desire onto each other and their compassion is performed in the present, while simultaneously easing past hurts. Meerzon argues that exilic writer Josef Brodsky situates exile as a liminal space—one in which the “past becomes the place where you are not anymore and the future is a place where you can not yet be.”³⁵

The teachers give the students prompts: “What surprised you the most about the performance? What touched you the most?” Some of the students answer the prompts directly, while others abandon this prescriptive writing exercise, privileging creative expression that itself performs as a pu’ohonua. A dusky pink paper embroidered in a light blue and purple border postulates the women’s life-stories as a “miracle”: “*There was so much raw emotion tied into it that I couldn’t help but cry.*” This public display and crying against one’s will is present in many of the school performances. I frequently see large, seemingly tough young men hugging their caps tight around their eyes, as they wipe away their tears.

The Love Letters are surprising in what they convey about gender. Unexpectedly, the teenage boys’ Love Letters are more intricately and flamboyantly decorated, professing more emotion than the girls. There is something simple and wrenching about these homemade cards, reminiscent of childhood cards concocted for “secret”

valentines. Kawika, who signs his elaborately decorated card in curvaceous handwriting, confides:

I also had a father that I lost to prison. He got Life. I couldn't forgive him. Today, you showed me that he loved me. That he really wants to be there in my life just like how you guys are doing for your kids. I know I just met you guys but I love each and every one of you. You guys will always be in my prayers.

This acquired intimacy is intimacy in a rush, not unlike the intimacy of lovers. And the love defies the transitory circumstances of the encounter. Brandon documents his own transformation in his ability to witness the women's humanity: "*When I first saw you guys I was like 'Damn these ladies look hard core and could probably whoop all of us!' . . . But I come to find out you guys aren't that mean, you guys are actually pretty cool. I am also surprised that you guys did little things and is serving all these years.*"

Some of the boys are introspective and reflective, showcasing a vulnerable intimacy with the women, which frankly surprised me: "*I know it must have been difficult for you to share your experiences in the facility. To be honest, for the longest time, I thought all prisoners were a blight upon the world. For some reason, I didn't view them as fellow human beings. I never gave them respect because I was a fool.*" Brandon charts his own transformation from societal stereotyping to the compassionate embrace of a morally situated citizen. "*Hearing your stories changed my opinion. I don't mean to say that I am better than you—because I am not—but your skit about life inside the correctional facility made me realize how luxurious my life is. You all changed my view on life.*"

“*Thanks a million,*” Akoni proffers a card resplendent with comic characters. “*Dear The Believe in Me Project . . . you guys were brilliant.*”³⁶ Akoni identifies with the women, as he is a self-proclaimed writer. The connective tissue spans across artistry and faith. “*Your writings hit me . . . they sounded amazing coming from you.*” Akoni attests that the women made him a stronger “*drug healer*” and provided him the opportunity to understand why his parents do the things they do. Many students position the inside women to redeemers even as—in a rhetorical inversion of the biological household—the teenagers wear the voice, eyes, and heart of moral guide.

Tadashi reinforces a Christian framework that is familiar to the “inmates,” many of whom are required to graduate from the Total Life Recovery’s faith-based program model: “*You are strong women of God. I’ll be praying for you guys every day. My brother is like you. He drank alcohol and did drugs. He stole from our family. He is now rehabilitated in California and studying to be a pastor.*” The teens tender narratives of shame, abandonment, and parental transgression; however, beneath the surfaces there is a melodious forgiveness—the pedagogical recipe the Monologue women emphasize in their one-on-one interviews.

In her luminous autobiography/memoir/autoethnography, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, Saidiya Hartman names the wound—a space of fracture—as home. Hartman returns to Ghana to trace the nine transatlantic slave routes in her vanished homeland. This pilgrimage is in a sense an act of redemption, a redemption that ultimately occludes her as she is baptized “*obruni*” (outsider) by young Ghanaians invested in the hustle of slave tourism. She performs herself as a stateless

“citizen” of the United States, dislocated from the American dream, rejected in the “prison” of the “after-effects” of slavery and its collateral damages: the prison industrial complex, AIDS, project-poverty, and her life in Brooklyn. Likewise, the rhetoric and testimony performed in the Love Letters unveils the students’ complicated experience of home as a “wound.”

Many of the teenagers confess to multiple viewings of the Prison Monologues. “*It was just as touching as the first time,*” exudes one student, attesting both to the regenerative power and ephemerality of performance.

Freed from Sin

*Her heart is filled with so much pain
She’s at the border of going insane
Laying on her rocky bed
Just letting fear take over her head*

*The cries of masses, the cowards, the weak
It’s pleasure to her because fear is what she seeks
Depending on people she thought were friends
And they fail to come through again and again*

*Feeling trapped like there’s no way out
Trying to clear her head of every doubt
A pen and paper is all she needs
To free her mind so she can succeed*

*She’s cleaning up for a better life
Like slowly pulling out a knife
Don’t ever give up, don’t ever give in
For a day will come when you can say
“I’m released of my sins!”*

~ Ahulani³⁷

Ahulani's opening line, "Her heart is filled with so much pain," exemplifies one of the personal testimonials that constitute a composite/communal autobiography of pain. Like the women's writing in the *Hulihia Home* edition, the teenagers' offerings frequently resist simplistic receptions. Ahulani's poem makes references to fear and pain as destructive forces that are simultaneously desired. Ahulani testifies to the power of the word to liberate the protagonist in her poem: "*A pen and paper is all she needs / To free her mind so she can succeed.*"

INDEXING SPEECHLESSNESS

The testimony in the following section indexes a speechlessness that occurs after wounded life narratives are shared with the teenagers. I do not read the Nānākuli correspondence at WCCC; instead, Pat arranges a meeting and interview for me with the Nānākuli English teacher, and then chair of the department, Christine Wilcox. Wilcox arrives to our interview in Mānoa with hands overflowing with the correspondence.³⁸ She informs me that the index cards are a student-generated idea. The students suggest that they write their post-performance notes to the Prison Monologuers, who would then digest their confessionals while back in the prison, and in turn correspond with the students. The index card is a departure from standard practices and eventuates in a *Hulihia* publication that features some of the students' and women's correspondence through poetry. One anonymous student's run-on declaration of love for Liezel is peppered with social moralism, indignation, wistfulness, and empathy.

Liezel, You are so sweet and soft and real nice. When I saw you I was surprised because you don't look like a prison person. You know, like prison people, to me, look scary and mean but none of you guys are like that. LOL. But to me, you

didn't deserve to be in prison. I got mad when I found out the reason why you were in jail because it wasn't your fault. But it's good to see that you are being the better person and just taking the consequence. Your almost there Girl!!! When you come out I'm going to be senior already. We can help each other out! LOL . . .

The index cards, a less formal genre than the Love Letters, more naked and less decorative, are nevertheless Love Letters to the women. One outcome of the index-card dialogic is that Wilcox and Clough utilize the cards as evidence in Liezel's parole hearing that eventuates in the commutation of a fifteen-year-to-life sentence. Liezel was extradited to the Philippines, where she is reunited with her family.

The students' English teacher, Christine Wilcox, an active collaborator with Pat for the past four years, most clearly expresses the temporary loss of speech that the students' stories of trauma can provoke. Wilcox grew up in the Kalihi projects and is pursuing her second Master's degree in Curriculum Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Although she doesn't readily share her background, she confides: "I grew up poor but surrounded by love. Five of us have advanced degrees." She comes to our interview armed with a letter printed on a steely green paper that she wrote to her eleventh- and twelfth-grade students after the Monologuers visited for the first time. Her vulnerability suggests the power of the Monologues and the students' letters. "There were times that I felt as if I couldn't handle all the pain that entered our class after the women visited. There was a time when I wanted to quit." Her letter begins:

To Our Beautiful Students of NHIS

Each year, for the last three years, when the Prison Monologue Presenters return, I am excited! When the events take place, I am reminded about the raw

emotions their stories evoke within you. You are later assigned to construct a letter/poem/picture—your choice as long as your approach comes from your heart. . . . I later find a quiet spot at home and read. The depth in which you share, the “soul searching” of dark pasts exposed, the existing struggles—standing strong as a tree to not get knocked down, the creative creations expressed through your poetry, the connections, the sympathy and empathy, ALL displayed in black and white . . . WOW! To be honest, I sometimes have a difficult time hearing (some) of your stories. Why? This is because it fills me with melancholic emotions as I gain insight into your past and (sometimes current) conflicts. It makes me wish I could’ve been there to hug you when you felt like you were worthless . . . to the point you didn’t even want to exist. I wanted to be there to take the place of an absent parent due to CPS, drugs, incarceration, or even the sad ultimate reality—death. I cry a river of tears leaving my eyes puffy and my nose looking like Rudolph the Red-Nose Reindeer. Ask my husband, Mr. Wilcox; he respectfully gives me my space but checks in from time-to-time just to make sure I’m okay. I later share with the inmate’s teacher, Pat Clough, and we compare notes about both our students’ receptions. We are left speechless! It’s a wonder why we continue to do what we do—we have developed a love for our students.

Endless Aloha,
Mrs. Wilcox (11 years and counting . . . damn right!)³⁹

Many students, like Wilcox, share that they find themselves without words after hearing the Prison Monologue’s life stories—a temporary state followed by an outpouring of words. Shoshana Felman addresses the moment of speechlessness implicit in witnessing, when “time and memory intervene between the moment of seeing and the moment of saying” and that the “extremity of the event” may occlude description altogether.⁴⁰ The recounting of trauma for the secondhand witness, explains Felman, is mediated by a remembering or rather a mis-remembering, since full knowledge of what actually happened is unattainable. As Wilcox articulates during our lengthy interview, it is arduous to straddle the divide between teacher and confidante, the keeper of secrets. It is only after the Prison Monologues visit and the testimonial sharing as a “de-briefing” that the students are inspired to disclose their narratives. I ask Wilcox what makes her

so effective with the students. “Although my home was not broken, I grew up knowing what it was like to be hungry, to not having any food to eat. Many teachers have never experienced this.” While Wilcox escaped the plight of drugs and abuse, she has cousins who have been in and out of prison.

The comments on the index cards move from simple declarative sentences, to questions, to encouragement, to consolation often framed in a religious context, and often, to heartbreaking gratitude.

You guys are never alone. We may be young but we're always here to listen. I sometimes feel the same way sitting alone with no one to listen [to me]. No one to express my feelings.

You have inspirational stories. My dad always's tells me “your not judged on how you fall its how you get back up.” You truly got back up a dusted yourselves off. You made a difference. Mistake can be fixed. You showed me that anyone can get back up from the deepest fall.

I have preserved all grammatical transgressions as a way to preserve the integrity of the students’ words. As Wilcox confirms, grammatical intrusions into pain are acts of violence: “Who am I to violate their thoughts?” In her letter to the students, Wilcox sanctions the students’ writing as acts of liberation: “As your English teacher, grammar goes out the window. Why? This is TO NOT restrict your flow, your emotions and your truth. I slightly cringe seeing those errors. But I know this, your freedom of expression during that moment, supersedes any rule.”

Resonant in the students’ indexes is the display of the geographical, familial, and intimate devastations that the Nānākuli teenagers undergo and what some social theory

critics like Michael P. Johnson and Kathleen Ferraro call “intimate terrorism.”⁴¹ Ferraro argues that women who have survived intimate terrorism frequently describe ways in which their abusers manipulate their perceptions of events, ranging from routine everyday occurrences to entire biographies. The teenagers’ recollections and recording of their lives are strategies of resistance: counter-records to the master narratives of their perpetrators.

*Mom did drugs
Dad was her dealer
She went jail while he re-married into whole new life
I was born with drugs (why I look different)
All this happened when I was a baby (2 lbs 2 oz)
Mom got out
changed and on right path (14 years old me)
Moved to Alaska to stay away from bad
influences
Nothing changed I still can't see her
Adopted into a good family*

~ Anonymous

This particular student’s confession crams the space like an exploding poem with parenthetical expository explications that seem to tumble over the borders of the index. Due to the limited space and fractured nature of the poem, it appears to be hijacked mid-sentence. The perpetual trajectory of loss is evident, despite the insistence that the narrator is adopted into a “good” family. However, the reader is left questioning what comprises “goodness” in this particular familial setting. Does “good” simply imply a space in which one’s body remains un-violated? The speaker exposes a common narrative in which women more frequently than men suffer sexual assaults: rape, incest, “pimping” for their men. The narrator, who chooses anonymity, nevertheless inserts

identifying features of the physical self into parenthesis—(*why I look different*) (*2 lbs 2 oz*) and (*14 years old me*)—as a curious afterthought to convey the trajectory of a child who arrives in the world marked by drugs. The mother’s exilic displacement to Alaska chronicles a desperate need to distance herself from temptation, even at the expense of abandoning her child.

Another disturbing student testimony assumes the role of perpetrator:

“I hate drugs and I ~~when~~ went to Juvi for biting up a kid.”

Below this violent sentence, the student has scribed two versions of *hate* and *hat’s*, as if the auteur is auditioning words for their grammatical appropriateness.

As the letters and the index cards demonstrate, the Nānākuli and Kapolei high school students frequently respond by serving up their own or family’s transgressions as a way of connecting with the inside women. Occasionally, the students ask the women to comment upon their own regrets: *“How were you able to last that long? If there was one thing you could change what would that be?”* Some students have questions about the everyday life of prison. *“What is the best kind of food?”* collapsed with a pensive, *“I regret not listening to my parents.”* This indication of the everyday rituals in life is a feature of ethnography, which inscribes the students as anthropologists of sorts. The testimonials perform as various types of personal regret for the students—regret at disappeared parents, regret about failing societal expectations, regret at not belonging: *“The lack of a relationship with my mom starting down the wrong path, hard to get back on the good one.”*

In a longer letter, Malia writes: “I miss you guys and I want you guys to come back. You guys are like family to me now. Even though I only saw you once, I really like you guys and I became close.” The display of similitude and “intimacy in a rush” is evident here. Malia both identifies and dis-identifies with the women. In response to Kailani’s disclosure of serial rape by her grandfather, she scribes: “I don’t know what I would do if the same thing happened to me.” She tenders insanity as the sole outcome she envisions for herself. In this sense, she is morally “weaker” than the women who maintain their sanity, yet she assumes a moral superiority by scolding Mahina for being “angry at God for keeping her alive” after her driving accident that kills an underage passenger.

One writer of an anonymous index card confesses an unspeakable or unsayable narrative:

When I thought people could understand me they really couldn't. When I was young I used to hate life, I lost my father when I was 2 years old. I am 15 years old now! With a storie that's scared to be told. Life to me now is worthless, I'm done and over it . . . I hat[e] Life, being used, unwanted and scared! I'm thankful for having you guys around to open me up and Realize a lot of things can happen just don't give up!"

Mahalo

On the far right-hand corner of the index is perhaps the auteur’s name scratched out with an almost emphatic vengeance, an act of ferocity. The intentional erasure of identity sits on the index card, its inky body a moniker of defiance. However, it simultaneously signals a prior transitory resolve when the auteur desired to be breathed into recognition. Alison Bechdel employs a similar erasure within the pages of her visual

autobiography: an erasure that is simultaneously generative and destructive.⁴² Ann Cvetkovich argues that “the act of witnessing disintegrates as the teenager Bechdel is unable to “document the everyday events that are so frequently the subject of adolescent journals.”⁴³ She posits that “the graphic act of striking out words with a mark that is a cross between word and image . . . provides its own eloquent testimony to the impossibility of documenting truthfully what she is seeing or experiencing [and that it] suggests the potential ordinariness of the unrepresentability that is the hallmark of some theories of trauma.”⁴⁴

The Nānākuli teenagers’ effacements are not about global genocide, however they speak to a localized, familial annihilation in a world in which one anonymous teenager desires death as an escape from overwhelming torture, neglect, and abuse in her life. Nevertheless, the student testifies that the Prison Monologuers are her *redeemer*: they resuscitate her from the pain of her life, the invisibility of it, by extending an alternate pathway to recognition. She marks life as without value: “*Life to me is worthless, I’m done and over it . . . I can’t wait for it! I hate it. I hat life, being used, unwanted and scared!*” This breathless, run-on sentence marked by erratic punctuation, spelling, and ellipses is followed by the contradictory impulse of gratitude for the women and for the ability to “open up”—to testify—to excavate hope. Many of the teenagers’ retorts authorize the women as *prophets* in their sovereignty to see them, *know* them without *knowing*. In these interchanges, knowing and love are abridged: an act that collapses the Hawaiian concept of mana with a Christian framework, characteristic of colonized places. The indexes mirror Alison Bechdel’s everyday utterances of teenage

angst, only here the angst is life-threatening and obliterating. They transport a similar character as the diary.

Aisha pens a letter on Friday, March 28, 2014 that begins, “I don’t even know what to say.” Speechlessness gives way to a flood of words, as Aisha seeks to be forgiven for her mother’s incarceration. She gives voice to her complicity, but most stridently to her guilt:

Dear prison monologue presenters: (Liesel, Kailani, Mahina & Pat)

I don't even know what to say. I'm pretty much speechless right now. You all have touched my heart with your personal history, poems, and letters. As I sat among the audience and listened to all that you had to say, I could literally feel tears forming in my eyes. I tried to raise my head and not let them fall. Suddenly a little puddle formed on my index card. All that you've shared honestly meant something to me. I could relate to them in many ways especially when those two strong words were mentioned "C-R-Y-S-T-A-L M-E-T-H! That alone made that little puddle on my index card twice as big as it was before. Crystal meth was the drug that made a once unbreakable bond between me and my mother shatter to billions of pieces. She was an addict, always gone late at night, missing from my bedside, pupils larger than ever, and always on her feet and occupying her hands with something.

Sometimes she'd bring me along with her to her friend's house where they all looked and acted just like my mom, as if they were playing follow the leader. Until one day the secret slipped from my mouth when I was watching TV with my

aunty. Some kind of ICE intervention was on and I seen a clear glass looking object and said “Mommy has that too.” My aunty questioned me and I answered truthfully not knowing I was getting my mom in trouble.

I was only a little girl. I didn’t know things I said would cause me to loose my mom for a lifetime. CPS got involved because my aunty told my grandparents who then called the cops who stole my mom away from me.

For Aisha, the Prison Monologues’ life stories are historical documents invested with the power both to silence and to usher in speech. Evident in Aisha’s letter is the perpetual desire for her mother, despite her mother’s addiction. Within the semantic slippage of asserting it was the police “who *stole* my mom away from me,” is the buried and perpetual hurt of a never-ending loss that persists in Aisha’s present as a teenager. Embedded in this script of longing is perhaps the desire to be “mothered.” Here the confessional of brutality—Kailani’s daily rape by her grandfather and her flight to crystal meth—renders the witness, teenager Aisha, temporarily mute. However, this inescapable identification with pain ultimately ushers in release, followed by speech. Aisha testifies to the tears that fall unwillingly, whether blighting or enhancing the index card.

HEARING AND HEALING

Hearing and healing are essential components of the dialogic interchange. Once back at WCCC, Mahina gifts a written testimonial to the English class at Nānākuli. Mahina’s written story, more intricate and detailed than her oral performance, loosely

follows the spine of the students' direct questions inspired by the "presentation." In her letter, Mahina inscribes the students' writing as a weapon that sustains her:

First of all, I want to thank you for my folder. It really means a great deal to me.

You may think "Why? It's just paper!" Well, for the days I sit alone, I can open the folder and be reminded that I do not stand alone. I stand strong with an army full of beautiful children. I am 25 years old and am from the island of Maui.

The reason for my being in prison was choosing to drive recklessly with 4 minors in my car high on ICE. It was the accident that nearly took my life. It took place on an old dump road called Omaopio. This dump road was very windy and dark at night because there are no street lights. The passengers in my vehicle were 14, 15, and 17 years of age. I was driving with no license. In a split second I took my eyes off the road . . . my front right tire went off the road a little. I looked up, pulled back on the road entered a dip and drove around a turn about 50 mph. My car completely lifted off the ground and slid straight into a telephone pole. My tire on the driver's front side hit the pole head on and my car instantly wrapped around the pole leaving me crushed. They had to cut me out of the car and medivac me over here to Queens.

My body instantly bloated from the impact of the car hitting the pole. I stayed in a coma for about 3 ½ weeks and when I awoke, the one who was there with me was the wicked stepmother . . . I had no idea what happened. I made the front page of the Maui news. I had tubes running out of me everywhere. I couldn't eat solid food or talk. I couldn't sit up. My stomach was cut open 4 inches wide. An

open wound with a hose was attached to a wound vac. They left a black sponge in the open wound.

The most terrifying feeling was when I couldn't move a single limb in my body. I had many internal surgeries. I broke ribs, both lungs collapsed. I damaged my intestines, bladder and broke both pelvic bones. I have pins in them. That's why I had to learn how to walk all over again through physical therapy. My right arm shattered. I have a bar in my arm. I fractured my right knee along with my ankle. The swelling never went away. I had no voice—completely no sound.

I was hella mad at God for keeping me alive. I was bed ridden for 7 months and in a wheel chair. That was too long for me. The doctors said I may never walk again.

I went straight back to drugs pushing myself to walk, numbing the pain with drugs. I kept driving without a license—getting pulled over until I ended up in a program. I cleaned up but kept on dealing drugs while in the program. My son's father wanted to get back together but I didn't want to be with him. Unknown to me, he was working for the cops and bought drugs from me. He wore a wire and recorded our phone conversation. Crazy, yeah!? Now that I look back on it—it was my choices, wrong choices that have cost me 10 years of my life. I knew right from wrong but because I did not love myself, I just didn't care. I have done a total of 4 years in prison going on 5 and let me tell you, I really miss my freedom.

I hope I have answered your questions—well some. But mostly, I would like you to see how easy it is to lose everything, including yourself, if you give up hope and dedicate your time to making choices you know are unhealthy. Try to make it a habit to always think things through especially when it could be a life-changing event. For me to open up and be honest with myself gives me confidence. Because the more I share and people relate, I don't feel alone or singled out. I don't beat myself up and treat myself bad. Instead, I search for solutions that strengthen loving myself. What I also found out about myself is I give great advice to friends but never walk it myself. All of you sharing your secrets with me has motivated me to walk my advice. Doing that makes me feel better about what happened and gives me courage to be the role model for someone in their life. I don't know what it is with you kids but when I am here . . . I don't wanna leave. One more thing, thank you so much for the program you presented to us. I have endless appreciation for you all. And I gotta say that you are all my heroes 'cause I never made it to high school.

In this written testimonial, Mahina works through a personal history of trauma as she recounts the day of the accident in excruciating detail. Mahina has a large scar running down the center of her face—a visual and permanent marking of her trauma. Many of the students honestly confide in letters to her that they are initially frightened by her appearance until they realize that she is “sweet” and “serious.” The students identify with the narrative of her abandoned son, encouraging her to “heal” for her son’s sake. As Mahina cobbles together agonizing details of abandonment, betrayal, loss, and

unimaginable physical pain to re-form traumatic memories, she is ushered into the community of *ohana* (family). Mahina relinquishes both her body and her voice, which symbolize the forfeiture of self; and it within the precise recounting of tragedy and her audience's capacity to hold her—that the restorative circle of justice repairs.

As Aisha demonstrates in her written response back to Mahina's detailed scripted testimony, the restoration continues long after the Prison Monologue's school visit. Despite the fact that Aisha herself does not engage in drugs, Mahina's narrative is a stand-in for Aisha's biological family's relationship with drugs. Hearing Mahina's oral testimony, followed by its written re-iteration, allows Aisha to heal Mahina and herself. This witnessing—both aural and scripted—delivers Mahina back into the community of *ohana* that she has been ex-communicated from.

Dear Prison Monologues presenters

Mahina, I really enjoyed listening to your stories I can relate to your stories. I don't do drugs or sell it but my mom and dad does I live with a foster family and I love them alot. My biological mother is finally getting help but my dad still does drugs his been doing drugs for as long as I lived Ive disowned my biological mom I told her I want nothing to do with her but my dad is a different story for some reason I still want my dad in my life. My dad has been in & out of prison a lot of times. You only have a little time left In WCCC don't let ANYONE bring you down. YOU GOT THIS! KEEP YOUR HEAD UP!

LOVE ALWAYS, Aisha

Aisha's letter, bereft of traditional punctuation, which is strikingly in short supply when the trauma escalates, is characteristic in the encouragement it bestows on the women. Aisha does not explain her willingness to forgive her father, even as she disowns her mother. This asymmetrical affection for one parent over another is typical

of complex familial encounters. In another letter from Aisha, she professes that she connects with Kailani because she doesn't "trust boys/guys . . . and that's why I have a girlfriend." Her words demonstrate queer desire, where sexuality presents as a layer of an apprehensive "dis-identification" and identification. Kailani comes out to the students in her performance/testimony, sharing her struggle to accept her own homosexuality, which surfaces within her writings in Clough's creative writing classes that I observe at the facility. Aisha identifies with Kailani as a queer part Native Hawaiian woman, while Kailani both identifies and dis-identifies with her queer sexuality growing up in a traditional family on the Island of Hawai'i. These dialogic relationships, or what Kamuela refers to as "healing from the inside and out;" and what feminist theorist Julia Watson coins a chiasmic "network of transversals" bespeaks to the unique power of the Love Letters.⁴⁵

Depression is a state of being that saturates many of the Love Letters. In the accounts of far too many teenagers' parents disastrously disappeared to incarceration, and the inside women's lives behind bars, depression haunts the narrators and protagonists. In *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich interprets Saidiya Hartman's *Lose your Mother* as a narrative about the gaps, holes, and silences in the historical record. Cvetkovich reflects on these abysses as pertinent to her own inability to connect the gaps between "depression and the histories of slavery, genocide, and colonialism that lie at the heart of the founding of U.S. culture."⁴⁶ She desires to write depression into Hartman's catalogue of the "afterlife of slavery," as well as excavate it as a text of political depression. The Love Letters likewise redeem trauma from

posterior spaces—the prison and the schools—and re-inscribe suffering within a public, communal landscape. The students' consolation, their whispers of intimacy and identification, are all gestures of compassion toward the women inside and the boys and girls on the outside. The Love Letters are acts of imagination, desire, and empathy that rewrite traumatic historical records. *A hearing and healing.*

*Thank you prison monologues for coming to our school
I think you are all really cool
Your stories were touching and heavy for the heart
I felt a little sad when we had to part*

*I hope in the future we will make all the right choices
No matter what others will say with their voices
Because the power one can have over the mind
Won't usually be too kind*

*Drugs could easily mess us up
Even if our dealers greet us with "sup"
They will have us by the throat with their evil claw
Not to mention, it's illegal by law*

*We are all capable of seeing wrong from right
Though, it may take more for others to see the light
You should always try to stick to the right path
So we all should stay in school, learning english, science, and math
~ Kai*

*I can tell it wasn't easy for you ladies sharing your stories with us
And seeing you ladies fighting through the pain
Because of everything that you ladies kept inside for years.
But now you ladies had the courage to tell somebody
Tell us about your life
And how it finally healed you from the inside out.
~ Kamuela*

NOTES FROM CHAPTER FOUR

¹ The students alternate in naming the Prison Monologues “performances,” “speeches,” “history,” “secrets,” “life stories,” and “lectures,” which inserts them within a pedagogical framework, thereby anointing them with an institutional power.

² I use pseudonyms for all of the high school students to protect their identities. Giselle is a student in Christine Wilcox’s English class at Nānākuli High School. I maintain the underlining of words to reflect how the students wrote their letters.

³ According to Mahina’s own written testimony to the Nānākuli teenagers.

⁴ As I explore the letters from Nānākuli and Kapolei high schools on separate occasions, I intersperse testimonials collected from various readings. They carry a dysynchronous essence, characteristic of memory.

⁵ Nānākuli High and Intermediate School was founded in 1967 and services 954 students; Kapolei High School was founded in 2000 and services 2,500 students. The Prison Monologues has a long-standing relationship with Nānākuli and Pat has developed a close working and personal relationship with Mrs. Wilcox, the chair of the English Department. Some of the Nānākuli responses are connected to themes embedded in the English high-school curriculum standards, such as student exploration of Logos, Pathos, and Ethos. On the back of the poems, the students identify how the presentations cohere with these precepts.

⁶ The leeward side of O’ahu is the west side, which is far dryer and hotter than the east side.

⁷ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

⁸ Giselle’s letter and the “Unbreakable Survivors” appellation came out of a Nānākuli class on March 10, 2014.

⁹ After the core group—Vailea, Ivelisse, Kaipo, and Liezel—was no longer present, Pat formed a group in training, which she called the Prison Monologue Lab, appointing Liezel as the director in her absence. This group of Prison Monologue Lab women included Kailani and Mahina—women whom Pat knew well as they were students in her creative writing classes. Pat wanted Lahela as part of this group for her raw talent and stage presence—but Lahela did not have the correct custody to join the group, as she frequently ran into trouble with administrative infractions.

¹⁰ The privileging of the inside women’s and students’ voices, and the making sacred of personal testimony, borrow from Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander scholarship, such as Ty P. Kāwika Tengan’s *Native Men Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawai’i*, and Katherine Irwin and Karen Umemoto’s *Jacked Up and Unjust: Pacific Islander Teens Confront Violent Legacies*. In Tengan’s *Native Men*, the disclosing of personal stories in an extended community is a vital part of Hale Mua (men’s houses) fellowship, and Tengan’s account is replete with members’ first-person narratives. Tengan articulates the lineage between “Hale Mua rituals and practices to the broader projects of cultural revitalization and Hawaiian nationalism.” Similarly, testimony and exchange between the inside women and their audiences, primarily the school-age groups, proffer a pathway to counter the “dislocations of colonial history.”

¹¹ Chesney-Lind and Bilsky, "Native Hawaiian Youth," 133. The authors discuss contemporary carceral practices in Hawai'i that discriminate against Native Hawaiian youth.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement ushered in the revitalization of the Hawaiian language.

¹⁴ Keahiolalo-Karasuda, *The Colonial Carceral*. Another example of cultural genocide was the banning of Hula by the missionaries.

¹⁵ Auslander, *Theory for Performance Studies: A Student's Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.

¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. See also Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) for her queer approach to trauma and her archiving of everyday trauma, beyond the catastrophic, as well as for the collapse of the public and the private.

¹⁸ See Simon, Rosenberg, and Epperts, *Between Hope and Despair*; Irwin and Umemoto, *Jacked Up and Unjust*.

¹⁹ Muumuu is a traditional Hawaiian dress. According to Wikipedia, "da kine" is an expression in Hawaiian Pidgin, probably derived from "the kind," that usually functions as a placeholder name, similar to "whatsit" and "whatchamacallit." Unlike other placeholder names in English, "da kine" is general in usage and could refer to anything from a person to an abstract concept. "Da kine" is probably the most identifying characteristic of spoken Hawaiian Pidgin, and certainly the most versatile. The humorous illustrated dictionary *Pidgin to Da Max* defines "da kine" as "the keystone of pidgin." You can use it anywhere, anytime, anyhow. Very convenient.

²⁰ In this case not, as Vailea has been released on parole.

²¹ The reference to a "benevolent community" borrows from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's "beloved community." Dr. King summoned a world that would be love-blind, rather than color-blind.

²² The largest ethnic group of the 214 students at La Pietra Hawai'i School For Girls (Honolulu, Honolulu County) is white. In addition, the student body includes students of two or more ethnicities (30.8 percent), Asian (26.2 percent), Pacific Islander (4.2 percent), Hispanic (2.3 percent), Asian Indian (0.5 percent), and Black (0.5 percent). The central point the warden is making is that the school is only four percent Pacific Islander, and is not representative of the community of inside women.

²³ See De Salvo, *Writing as a Way of Healing*. DeSalvo chronicles how a diverse range of writers have uncovered healing through writing (Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Jamaica Kincaid, and Mark Doty), and she demonstrates instances where writing works as an alternative to insanity. An example is New Zealand writer Janet Frame, who was literally saved from a lobotomy in a mental institution.

²⁴ Mahalo (thank you); nui (big, great); loa (long). The etymology has resonances in Hawaiian voyaging practices.

²⁵ Some of my ideas here are informed by Analisa Oboe's article, "The TRC Women's Hearings as Performance and Protest in the New South Africa," *Research in African Literatures* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2007), 60–76.

²⁶ At times the students are homeless, living as indigents on the beaches on the west Side of O‘ahu.

²⁷ See article by Simone Weil Davis in *Turning Teaching Inside Out*, 163–175.

²⁸ The fact that the majority of the teenagers have Hawaiian last names, attests to the fact that Native Hawaiians are disproportionately represented in the criminal “justice” system. Interestingly, the teenagers know more about the specific “crimes” of the women than we do as educators.

²⁹ The Nānākuli responses to the Prison Monologues in 2014 are addressed to what Pat calls her Prison Monologue “Lab.” Three of the original team of Monologuers were released from WCCC: Ivelisse, Vailea, and Kaipo. Melinda and Brandy were “let go” from the Monologues. Only Liezel remained. Pat needed to find a new team. Liezel, Kailani, and Mahina became the Prison Monologue Lab in-“training,” with an additional three members who did not go out to the schools, as Pat thought they were not ready for public presentations. The Prison Monologue performance at Nānākuli High School was the first time that Kailani and Mahina performed their life stories before a live audience, outside of the Lab. Pat articulated that they were a huge success and that they made a profound impact, perhaps even more so than the well-established Monologuers, who had become too “dramatic.” She attributes this to their honesty: the rawness/authenticity of their life narratives.

³⁰ Shoshana Felman, literary scholar, has written extensively on the secondhand witness in her co-authored text with Dori Laub, M.D. *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York and London: Routledge University Press, 1991).

³¹ In a February 16, 2016 conversation with Sarah Shotland, director of Words without Walls, the Pittsburgh creative writing program, she confirmed that she frequently reflects on the potential of re-injury in the classroom she teaches in a male prison in Pittsburgh.

³² “The Bobby Benson Center is a facility dedicated to offering Hawai‘i’s adolescents assistance in overcoming substance abuse. The residential treatment program offers a supportive environment in which teenagers and their families can acquire the knowledge and skills needed to overcome the cycle of drug and alcohol addiction.” From the program website.

³³ See Felman and Laub, *Testimony*. The idea of narrative disruption is argued by Michael F. Bernard-Donals, “The Belated Witness: Literature, Testimony, and the Question of Holocaust Survival, and: Testimony after Catastrophe: Narrating Traumas of Political Violence,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 44, no. 3 (2007): 340–345.

³⁴ See the appendix for the catalogue of the Prison Monologue performances I attended between 2012 and 2014.

³⁵ Meerzon, *Performing Exile, Performing Self*, 36.

³⁶ After seeing student letters addressed to the “Believe in Me Project,” I asked Pat what the project was, as it was my first encounter with this framing. She didn’t explicate much, but I have a feeling that she didn’t like the title and that the project was abandoned by the schools.

³⁷ The students do not use Hawaiian diacritical marks in their names, which Professor Brandy McDougall informed me is a way of preserving the ways in which their families have always written their names, as well as allowing for multiple meanings that the diacritical markings preclude. The use of diacritical notation is a more recent usage employed by academics.

³⁸ Christine Wilcox and I had an immediate connection. Our planned one-hour interview lasted for close to eight and migrated from the house I was staying at in Mānoa (the house of the former Governor, Neil Abercrombie and his wife Nancie Caraway) to Wilcox's favorite Italian restaurant in the Mānoa marketplace.

³⁹ Wilcox wrote the letter to her students, March 2014.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Johnson and Ferraro, "Domestic Violence in the 90s: Making Distinctions," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62.4 (November 2000): 948–963.

⁴² Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

⁴³ Ann Cvetcovich, "Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel's 'Fun Home,'" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, nos. 1 and 2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 111–128.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Cvetcovich footnotes that "Cathy Caruth's notion of "unclaimed experience" has widely disseminated the association of trauma with unrepresentability and epistemic crisis. See *Trauma* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience* (1996).

⁴⁵ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*.

⁴⁶ *Depression*, 126. As many prison theorists have argued, the prison industrial complex in America is directly related to the collateral effects of slavery and colonialism and is an instrument of genocide for "surplus" populations.

EPILOGUE

Palliative Praxis or Pathways to Transformation?

Oblivious to the trees and the long quiet street, my inside was searching for a word. A milk-near word. Something rising through all the remnants of past hearings. How was one to break through all these dividing borders? “Suture,” I think. Perhaps “suture” is the word that can wash this world. Carefully, to stitch, to weave, this side to that side, so that border becomes a heart-hammered seam.

~ Antjie Krog, *Begging to Be Black*

To suture takes on a pressured imperative as the U.S. confronts a dispiriting political rupture. With Trump as president and the Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions as the appointed U.S. attorney general, the prospect of criminal justice reform looks bleak. Sessions employs a sensational crime rhetoric, hearkening back to Nixon as he threatens Americans with a “dangerous, permanent trend” toward “a rise in crime.”¹ In March of 2017, Trump signed three executive orders to “crack down on violence in America,” targeting drug gangs, violent crime, and violence against cops. His inaugural promise to halt the “American carnage” is manifest in the push for mandatory minimum sentences.² Civil liberties groups have sharply criticized the executive orders. As ACLU Deputy Legal Director Jeffrey Robinson asserts, “President Trump intends to build task forces to investigate and stop national trends that don’t exist . . . We have seen historic lows in the country’s crime rates and a downward trend in killing against police officers since the 1980s. The president not only doesn’t acknowledge these facts about our nation’s safety, he persists in ignoring the all-too-real deaths of Black and brown people at the hands of law enforcement.”³ Many people are referring to these unsettling times

as a “Blacklash.” The current ethos of vengeance and the continued expansion of the prison industrial complex raises ever more urgently the question with which I began: “How can healing take place in a carceral setting?” The Epilogue closes by revisiting this question as it explores the opportunities and limitations of a Prison Writing program in the Pacific. I approach this epilogue as a tapestry of anecdotes—a stitching together of autoethnography and analysis.

In a telephone interview on February 16, 2016, playwright and novelist Sarah Shotland confides: “Sadly, I feel pessimistic about the role of creative writing and arts programming and their impact on recidivism in the prisons.”⁴ Shotland’s pessimism is poignant in the likelihood that the prison industrial complex under Trump will lead toward elimination of all such creative writing programs in prisons. Shotland, who teaches in the MFA program at Chatham University in Pittsburgh and founded the Words without Walls Program, has taught in carceral settings for a decade.

People are not invested in reducing recidivism rates in prisons because it is a huge for profit business. In testimonials by administrators about our program, they attest that they like our program because it keeps people *occupied*, which infers docility. I don’t want to think that I am only doing palliative work, keeping people quiet and docile. I wonder if they would endorse me if say, I wanted to teach a class on Marxism or a cultural studies seminar that interrogates the system. We are reading Malcolm X next week. So the next time you speak to me, maybe I won’t be doing this anymore! [laughs]

Words without Walls offers twenty-six classes per year in the following venues: a men’s medium-security facility, several jails, a psychiatric hospital, a drug-rehabilitation program, and transitional housing projects with an AIDS positive community. Shotland articulates her anxiety about transporting the “dysfunction of the academy,” which she

sees as largely anti-democratic, into the dysfunctional prison system. She struggles with ethical dilemmas such as whether and when a workshop model is right for an incarcerated classroom, and whether the student actually desires criticism. Writing workshops house ethical strategies and pedagogical structures that are different from other academic seminars. This is particularly true when the writing workshop entails some form of life writing, and these ethical dilemmas are magnified within an incarcerated classroom.

In writing this dissertation, I, too, confront the ethical dilemma of how to do “justice” to the women’s words and life stories. I don’t want to replicate the failed criminal “justice” system. There have been decided moments of seduction when I have fallen in love with the women’s words—in love with the women themselves. I find it curious that many creative-writing prison programs revert to cliché and euphemism when selecting their title or brand: “Words without Walls,” “Walls to Bridges.” These names signal hope, a projection into a future where there are no impenetrable walls blocking people out, which is particularly caustic at a time when the American president advocates not for the destruction of walls, but rather for their resurrection. According to Shotland, there isn’t a single system in place in Pennsylvania that tracks recidivism rates. I am left perplexed. Despite the rhetoric of the Left, the proliferation of prison/university initiatives, and the carceral abolition movement, are people really invested in dismantling the prison system, or is big business at play?

Gillian Harkins and Erica R. Meiners, who both come from queer, feminist, anti-racist, and economic justice backgrounds, articulate that they are “struck by the hetero-

gendered, economic and racial dynamics of volunteerism in most U.S. prison education programs.” They argue that the shifts in the prison nation offer opportunities to engage abolition frameworks in new ways.⁵

An abolition-democracy, to use the term of Angela Davis and W.E.B. DuBois, requires reconstructing the structures and traditions that safeguard power and privilege, just as much as taking down those that visibly punish and oppress. Challenging the prison-nation therefore means fighting to close prisons, but it also means doing the perhaps more difficult work of opening up and reconfiguring other institutions that have shut their doors to those who have been abandoned by our punishing democracy.⁶

Daniel Berger’s *God of the Rodeo* exposes the marketing of prison life at the hugely popular Louisiana State Penitentiary annual rodeo or “The Farm.”⁷ “Inmates,” many of them lifers, are exhibited on dangerous bulls in a competition for the prized rodeo belt—at times at the expense of their lives. Gladiatorial in nature, the rodeo show is a spectacle of masculinity and consumption. Tourists flock to the Farm to have their photos taken alongside the competitors and rodeo belts are sold in the thousands. In “Discipline and the Performance of Punishment: Welcome to ‘The Wildest Show in the South,’” Mary Rachel Gould analyzes the collapse of the carceral with consumption.

Once described as the bloodiest and most dangerous prison in the United States, the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola hosts one of the only remaining prison rodeo and crafts fair in the United States. The event, more commonly known as “The Wildest Show in the South” is open to visitors every Sunday in October and for one weekend in April. Advertisements for the day-long event promise “untrained convicts roping and wrangling livestock” and the opportunity to browse among “authentic” prison crafts and concessions . . . [which] transforms the prison into a space of tourism, the incarcerated men into objects of surveillance, and returns punishment to that of a spectacle by offering the bodies of the incarcerated as a form of public entertainment.”⁸

If the prison industrial complex is indeed a capitalist venture, then is the reduction of recidivism really the aim? Many creative writing prison workshops in the U.S. claim a direct correlation between their classes and a reduction in recidivism, and studies point to statistical evidence that with education those inside do not return as frequently to prison. Yet there have been drastic cuts to prison education programs, despite the studies' affirmative statistics. If prison writing programs assist in reducing recidivism, as the testimonials of the women at WCCC certainly confirm, then why do these programs remain undocumented and largely unsupported? Lack of funding, the programs' dependency on their teachers and administrators, and the turnover of inside women themselves, who like Liezel occasionally exit the facility earlier than scheduled, leave the programs fragile and vulnerable to attrition. Just this last term, Pat decided to take a hiatus from the Kailua Prison Writing Project. Despite the fact that I and another teacher were able to teach creative writing at the facility, there was no one to take over the Prison Monologue program in Pat's absence. Without Pat, and deprived of the support of the prominent former warden Mark Kawika Patterson, who left WCCC, the Kailua Prison Writing Project faces expiry.

My pedagogical praxis and attitudes toward the categories of "guilt" and "innocence" of the women inside have also evolved over the years of my association with the program. When I initially began observing the writing classes and interviewing the women inside, I envisioned the women solely as victims of an unjust society. I was a sympathetic audience for the women's traumatic narratives, which leaked into the classroom. Over the years, I came to question my assumption, and accepted that the

women could potentially be, and often were, both victims and perpetrators. In my last conversation with Pat Clough at Morning Brew Café in Kailua in May 2017, Pat said: “I never forgot where I was.”

Here I turn to my own pedagogical practices within an incarcerated classroom, with a particular focus on the pedagogies and rituals that I implement. In my classroom, I attempt to employ a writing workshop model that encourages the inside women to become effective peer critics. I frequently encourage the women to give feedback to their peers prior to offering my insights and always ask the writer to articulate what she needs from her reader. Having spent many years in creative writing workshops, I attempt to import this circle pedagogy into my Poetry and Performance Lab. Like Shotland, I bring in revolutionary texts to the classroom from time to time through the “back door.” Partially due to the laxity at WCCC, the guards “manning” the bubble have stopped checking the materials I transport to class, submerged within stacks of unruly papers. I show the incendiary *Def Poetry* hosted by Mos Def uninterrupted from time to time.⁹ After sitting in on Pat’s writing classes for close to two years, I can attest that the selection of a writerly canon influences both the texts generated by the inside women and the types of conversations that circulate in the classroom. In fact, the influence of the canon extends to the oral testimony, discourse, and public and private conversations that I share with the women in class, and at times after class.

I never directly witnessed mention of wives, girlfriends, and lovers during Pat’s classes, even though Alana says that 90 percent of women in the facility are gay, or at least “gay for the stay.” Alana, who does not identify as gay, has nevertheless met her

life partner in the facility while taking my summer Poetry and Performance Lab in 2016, and is excited to join her in life when she is released from the prison. One could argue that Pat has better boundaries than I, but as in classes in the “free” world, there are all types of educators.

A recurring theme that those inside express in the testimonials from creative writing programs in the prisons, is that writing gifts them a “voice”—and that prior to the class they were without voice. This is the emotion that Ivelisse expresses in the promotional Prison Monologues video, which ends with her uncharacteristically shy, halting words: “I found my voice.”¹⁰ Despite the fact that many women testify to the transformative impact of the Kailua Prison Writing Project, it is not a panacea, for it remains located within a disciplinary regime. This is evident even in the unexpected and varied ways that the women themselves occasionally resist the pedagogical praxes. Pat confirms her classroom as a disciplinary space:

The control I maintained though for sure . . . it was informed by my own background, had more to do with the place (prison) and the personalities—some on meds, some with chronic disorders that caused fights. I steered toward calm acceptance. Firmness was often essential and I think they came to respect each other more. I’d like to think that carried over into the dorms. I think the women came to value honesty. They were quick to point out when someone wasn’t and they learned how to speak to each other, as well as read to each other knowing they were in a safe space and they were valued.¹¹

The privilege of sitting in on Pat Clough’s class for the two years allowed me to witness another writing teacher’s pedagogy up close, including the tours, detours, and trajectories of two classes over two terms. I was initially a bit wary of the white, mostly male canon of writers that Pat implemented. I recall being quite surprised at how

passionately the women responded to Robert Frost, particularly after teaching Frost in high schools to unenthusiastic students. I remember thinking, perhaps pompously and stereotypically: what could the women inside have in common with Robert Frost? Thus, when asked to substitute for Pat on a couple of occasions, I arrived to the Tuesday class, armed with Haunani-Kay Trask's series of poems from *Night is a Sharkskin Drum*. While some women celebrated Trask's anger as I'd expected, others resisted this pedagogy rooted in resistance. One Native Hawaiian woman from the Big Island in particular loudly protested against Trask's anger, insisting to the class that living "off tourism" as a bus driver in Hilo had kept her alive. I felt foolish after the class and took a closer look at my assumptions about pedagogy, race, and culture. In fact, the texts that Pat used resonated more deeply with some of the women than Trask's politically charged poetry. In this way, what began as a critique of Pat's canon, evolved into self-critique. Pat also countered my assessment of her literary canon in her letter to me:

I wish I had had a book list of source material I used over the years I taught at WCCC. You would have seen more Pacific Rim anthologies, art work depicting Hawaiian legends that we interpreted in writing, Hawaiian writers and teachers who brought in their own work to share, such as Lee Cataluna.¹²

Along with *Def Poetry*, I like to utilize visual texts in my classroom. On a couple of occasions, I screened excerpts from Eve Ensler's *What I Want My Words to Do to You*. Alana clearly prefers the racy *Def Poetry* and dismisses Ensler's work for falling into the category of a process group. Ensler has the women in her Bedford Hills writing class revisit their crimes in response to what seems, in the video, to be the initial writing prompt. There is no evidence of building trust as part of the class community—a quality

so palpable in Pat's classes. Instead, the film showcases a "damaged community."¹³ Ensler requests that the women write letters to their "victims" and share their writing in the following class. This "request"/demand creates scintillating tales of grief, sorrow, and brutality. As a viewer of these heartbreaking confessionals—the forty-year-old woman who kills one of her "johns," a man in his seventies, due to her accumulated rage and a lifetime of abuse—one may query where redemption begins and where it ends. Perhaps these are the tales that an outside audience craves. Prison writing can be an act of dis-identification, a concurrent harnessed and liberatory praxis that inserts the "prisoner" into a fantastical lens consumed by voyeurs.

From teaching my Friday afternoon class, I have come to know both Nicole and Alana through their writing and intimate conversations, as they are repeat-takers in my Poetry and Performance Lab. My encounters with Nicole have been transformative, and in some ways painful. I choose to share some of these compelling interactions as a way to trace my own preconceptions as an educator in an incarcerated classroom, as well as an avenue to demonstrate that personal inflections transform pedagogy.

Nicole arrived in class on March 3, 2016 smelling of the kitchen. I spot her at the edge of the classroom door, her eyebrows arched in an atypical huff. A pen perched in her ponytail, she strides across the linoleum floor, her pants stuffed into black rubber boots. Her energy today is decidedly heavy: "I am quitting the kitchen," she erupts, as she chronicles the pettiness and power struggles enacted in the kitchen. "I expected there to be dysfunction between inmates, but not between inmates and the chefs from the outside." Nicole is the veggie chef. "Don't expect dinner to be anything tonight. It's

chowder. I am sure you're going to taste my mood in that soup!" Mama is a large-boned, tattooed, part Native Hawaiian and "Portagee" woman—a fixture in the kitchen who informs me that she has lost close to two hundred pounds in the facility due to the food. Apparently she has decided that she hates Nicole, even though last term they were tight. Halfway through our class, a petite man with a heavy Filipino accent knocks timidly at the door and anxiously addresses Nicole: "You *are* coming back to the kitchen—aren't you?" The kitchen is not one of the highest-paying jobs in the facility at 25 cents per hour. Even so, Nicole likes the "job" for the easy gossip and lively atmosphere. But that was before the dysfunction set in.

Each week Nicole turns in breathtaking pieces—lengthy poetry mostly. Her writing is sumptuous: a cascade of words replete with delicious imagery. Each week the rest of the women are amazed, as am I, by her brilliance: her skill with language, her constructive critique of her peers' writing, her sophisticated theories on writing and life. As the context of Nicole's auto/biography seeps into the classroom—multiple rapes, falling in love with one's rapist, murder—I realize that she is writing from an exceedingly dark place.

When Nicole hurtles into class on that February day, she blurts out that she has never taken any type of psychotropic medication. "Meds," she insists, "are not my addiction." The only time she acquiesced was as a teenager, based on her lawyer's advice in order to support her insanity plea. Nicole was charged with murder, but did not receive a life sentence due to her underage status in the state of Georgia. But Nicole is far from mad. During the term, I encourage the women to submit work for the PEN

national writers' competition that they hold for "inmates" every year in four genres: poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and playwriting. One Friday, I agree to meet with Nicole about her submission to the competition, as well as to offer insight about a fantasy novel that she wants to publish. Nicole arrives at our meeting in one of the small education rooms, fortified with her portfolio that contains the samples that the women have been working on: an experimental creation of each others' bios, her cover letter to the editors of the PEN writing prize, her title page which lists her poetry, and her selection of poems. Nicole is extremely diligent about her writing and one day, when she has to miss class due to an illness, she sends her poem to class with Alana. In fact, this particular writing class is the most engaged group of writers that I have ever had the privilege of facilitating. During our first one-on-one consultation, Nicole divulges her crime. "I have done bad things," she tells me. "I will be here for a long time." Later I learn that Nicole "has a retainer on her" from the state of Georgia, which keeps her at a medium-security status and in the kitchen. "There are only four jobs I can technically do with a medium security status—sewing is one of them—and I don't sew."

When Nicole tells me about her crimes, I am shaken, horrified. I grieve, in part, for my naïve assumption that all of the women are in the facility on trumped-up drug charges. I had responded to Nicole all along as one writer to the next, commenting upon the aesthetics and cosmetics of her sentence structure, attempting to bury the tragic and brutal context in some other part of my brain. Following Pat's advice, I never asked the women about their crimes. This was also one of the important lessons that the Walls to Bridges Program imparted to us as prison-facilitators-in-training. And then there was

my intuition that guided me to the precept that to ask the women about their “crimes” was a way to reduce them to past transgressions, or even to crimes that they might not have committed. It was also an avenue to extract sensational confessions.

Thus, when Nicole told me her story, I felt both intrigued and frightened. I felt overly sensitized to her proximity to me on that Friday afternoon: her starched white T-shirt tight against her body, her overarched eyebrows, and the very red lipstick she had begun to wear. When I praised her ability to alter her handwriting when speaking in different voices, she glared at me and spat in a tone that I had never heard: “I hate it when people analyze my handwriting.” This was the only time I have ever felt uncomfortable in the incarcerated classroom. I became acutely aware that Nicole and I were alone. Young Nicole who had burnt down her home with her father in it at the age of fifteen. Due to her status as a juvenile, her family history of abuse, and the fact that this was her first serious offense, Nicole was extradited to her sister’s home in Hawai‘i.¹⁴

At home that evening I did something that I am not proud of. I took Nicole’s dare to “look her up” and yes, I *googled* her, splintering the bond between teacher and student. There was Nicole, smiling elatedly at the closed face of her boyfriend in court. The boyfriend was the physical perpetrator in the stabbing of her sister, who was in the military and pregnant. This cemented Nicole’s life sentence. Under the court photograph was text that painted Nicole as a psychopath. I was unable to reconcile the smart, edgy Nicole from my class—the gifted writer—with that text, or with the young, almost cherubic face that peered up at me from the screen.

Nicole and Alana are in some ways exceptional students. They are critical of the system, and both are able to articulate their dissent succinctly. But out there in Olomana, the “jungle” as the women call it, they are careful not to reveal their frustration. Alana, in particular, has uncovered ways to negotiate the system. This is Alana’s second time in the facility and she too has “high” charges of assault. It is only at the end of the term that she confides that she is an incest victim. Reflective of her up-front character and intellect, Alana says: “I always ask women in here directly, because I want to know if they are incest survivors—80 percent are—and if they are gay or just gay for the stay. I think most of the women are just lonely.”

Both Nicole and Alana reject the inmates’ autobiographies with their predictable arc from trauma to healing. They also reject what they refer to as the tiresome process group with its tenet of religious conversion and its apparatus of brainwashing. In some ways both Alana and Nicole are too smart for process groups. Nicole vehemently resists any type of religious conversion. “Listen to this bullshit, I am in advanced ukulele and I can’t even play because the teacher wants to convert me. It was worse in Georgia. I will never forget the traumatizing time when I was a juvenile and incarcerated in the state prison. A woman, ministering to us, cornered me in a room and refused to let me out until I was *saved!* I was a lot more sensitive then and this experience haunts me.” Nicole brings in some of her old poetry that she wrote as a teenager in the Georgia prison. The words sit on lined pages—those antiquated pages from bible school with rubber-stamped endorsements of God at the bottom of the page.

I know I have one more teaching term ahead of me and the impending departure from the facility fills me with remorse and an intractable depression. I don't want to leave. These days, the only thing that makes sense to me is the work I do in the prison. The types of conversations that I share with the women inside feel more genuine than those on the outside.

DEPARTURE—A LESSON IN DISCIPLINE

I am leaving for the day—heading to an awards ceremony organized by the local chapter of the American Association of University of Women (AAUW). I am late and have to take the bus, which only departs from the Kailua side twice an hour. As I make my way down the hill out of Maunawili cottage and head to the main bubble, the guard sees me coming, but rather than letting me pass, he directs a barrage of insults at the women inside. Through the glass, I see his legs splayed, his head nodding in contempt as he stuffs popcorn in his mouth. I knock at the window, timidly at first, but then more assertively. For over twenty minutes, I knock as he refuses to acknowledge me. I can feel myself tremble, enraged at his dismissal and at the prospect of missing my speech. I know I wouldn't last a day inside.

This temporary moment of humiliation is a microcosm of the extensive humiliations that the inside women face on a daily basis. My sense of disempowerment reminds me of the time that Pat gets locked in the white prison van at a Prison Monologues performance. Pat, visibly shaken by her experience, shares that moment of panic and desperation in both of her creative writing classes. The women nod in a gesture of understanding, but it is hard to know what they feel inside. After all, unlike the

inside women, Pat and I head home after our teaching day. We walk the long and winding path out of Maunawili, past the cats and the roosters on the hill. The door clangs behind us.

Thinking about my life, I'm almost free in a month. It's scary knowing I'm maxing out, getting out for good, no cushion to fall back on. It's up to me now, my life given back to me in my own hands. I've been down for 5 straight. It's almost surreal. I look back and think, "wow, I'm almost out!" I should be happy but it's scary; an oxymoron that delights and hurts at the same moment.

I'm an institutionalized addict, raised by ACOs I've known for 15 years—recycling in and out. Other inmates helped shape my beliefs, strengthening my criminal activity and instant gratification to get what I want. Surviving to get mine, survival of the fittest—like the wild.

It's a game I can be beaten at if I show my heart . . . a maze with many detours. A labyrinth any novice can get lost in. I hide my heart safe and secure. It's only for the select few that I'm willing to extend myself. Not everyone deserves that part of me. I have to break through the walls that are built to keep me out. Everyone has something to hide, something to protect. No one wants to hurt, to feel, to seem weak or vulnerable. It's a masquerade, a dance of masks, changing faces, side stepping [one's] true self, pushing away [one's] true worth.

Everyone's hiding from each other—all little girls inside, all broken in pieces . . . each afraid to be seen . . . the recognition in eyes that spark attraction. It's a tug of war. No one can hurt me this way. The sudden . . . gentle nudge to heal, to overcome, to grow, to change—the fight to the light, screaming in silence . . .

My time is up. It's time for another chapter . . . my life beyond these gates, making the best of what's left of my life . . . freeing myself from the chains of the past, the handcuffs, the regrets. I will not look back. I do not long or yearn for anything here. My dreams will guide me to [the] gates without regrets . . . I see my hope for a better future. Life, love and happiness await me.

My future's so bright—I gotta wear shades!
~ Kailani, Women's Correctional Community Center

NOTES FROM THE EPILOGUE

¹ The Marshall Project, February 2, 2017.

² Ibid. See Matt Zapotosky's article, "In Executive Actions, President Trump vows Crackdown on Violent Crime. Is America as Unsafe as He Thinks?" *The Washington Post*, February 9, 2017.

³ Ibid.

⁴ My interview with Sarah Shotland took place on February 16, 2016.

⁵ Harkins and Meiners, "Beyond Crisis," <http://csalateral.org>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Louisiana State Penitentiary (LSP; also known as "Angola," "Alcatraz of the South," and "The Farm") is a maximum-security prison farm operated by the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. It is named "Angola" after the country the slaves of this former plantation originated from, and is the largest maximum-security prison in the United States with 6,300 prisoners and 1,800 staff. It is located on an 18,000-acre property that was previously the Angola Plantations owned by Isaac Franklin. During the Civil War, the property served as either a Union or Confederate prison. In 1869, the land was officially purchased by Samuel Lawrence James, a major in the former Confederate Army, and the James family continued to use the property as a prison. ("Louisiana State Penitentiary," *Wikipedia*, last modified July 28, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisiana_State_Penitentiary#Angola_Rodeo.) For more on prison tourism in relation to the Rodeo Show, see Robert Perkinson, "Angola and the Agony of Prison Reform," *Radical Philosophy Review* 3 (2000): 8–19; and Jessica Adams, "The Wildest Show in the South: Tourism and Incarceration at Angola," *The Drama Review* 45 (2001): 94–108.

⁸ In "Discipline and the Performance of Punishment: Welcome to 'The Wildest Show in the South,'" *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 7, no. 4 (December 2011), 1.

⁹ Def and Simmons, *Def Poetry*, Season 6.

¹⁰ Some of the men in the Minnesota Prison Writing workshop concur with Ivelisse's emphasis on finding voice. Their testimonials speak to the value of their writing program: "I spent many years of my life with no voice. No way of saying what I needed to say or think that what I had to say had any merit. Through writing I've found a way to give voice to my thoughts, ideas, and feelings. What comes out in writing is what I struggle to say with my own mouth." <http://www.mnprisonwriting.org/testimonials.html>.

¹¹ Pat shared this with me in an e-mail correspondence sent June 22, 2017, after she read the dissertation.

¹² Lee Cataluna is a noted local playwright, journalist, and novelist. She is best known for her witty stage plays and newspaper columns about Island life and her "dorky" childhood in Maui.

¹³ Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities" *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009).

¹⁴ I am grateful to both Elizabeth Colwill and Robert Perkinson, who debriefed me after this troubling meeting with Nicole, and who encouraged me in my work through their rich experiences and insights.



“Kiki in her Miss Kitty get-up.”

Tessa, a repeat taker of the creative writing classes (mine and Pat’s) left WCCC over a month ago to give birth to her daughter, Kiki. She was at a substance-abuse treatment program, Women’s Way, with Kiki and was to be released in three weeks. Unfortunately, Tessa was “returned” to WCCC because she was using her phone to text, which violates the many rules at Women’s Way.

Tessa’s poem “Fat Lips” tells her story: “My fat lips (mouth)—it always gets me into trouble.” A few weeks ago, I heard from Tessa again. She is now publishing a children’s book and has been invited by Lorenn Walker to collaborate on an article that will be published in the UK as part of an academic publication on restorative justice circles. Tessa asked me to help edit

her bio and has sent me various versions—the last one letting me know in a throwaway sentence that she omitted “all the things like my gang rapes.” Tessa’s feisty survivor personality is contagious. In the writing of her bio, she has flattened her voice to conform to what she thinks is the prim audience of the academy. I suggest that she access the voice of Fat Lips.

I know that the women will continue to be part of my life. They have been my teachers.



Tessa's Koi

APPENDIX

Performances of the Prison Monologues

The following is a catalogue of the Prison Monologue performances I attended between 2012 and 2014:

- Huliha XIII dedication in the Maunawili courtyard at WCCC (September 2012)
- Talent Show at WCCC (Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration (2013)
- Roosevelt High School (March 2012 and March 2013)
- Two separate events at Chaminade University, Department of Criminology (March 2012 and March 2013)
- Office of Youth Services Annual Conference at the Ala Moana Hotel (April 2013)
O'ahu's Youth Leadership Conference at JW Marriott Ihilani Resort & Spa, Ocean Ballroom Place (February 2013)
- National League of American PEN Women Honolulu Branch Meeting at Alan Wong's Pineapple Room (February 2013)
- Bobby Benson Residential Treatment Program in Nānākuli (November 2012);
Girl's Court (July, 2013); Kapolei, Kaimuki, Farrington, and Sacred Hearts high schools (February to May 2013)
- Hawai'i Pacific University Conference (March 2013)
- Sixth Annual Distinctive Women in Hawaiian History Program He Ho'olaule'a No Na Mo'olelo o Na Wahine, A Celebration of Women's History at Honolulu Hale (September 2012 and March 2013)
- Thirtieth Pacific Rim International Forum on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the Hawai'i Convention Center (April 2014), and an alumnae performance, "Voices from the Inside" at the Women Helping Women benefit at Kapiolani Community College (Summer 2014).

Prison Monologues Audition Guide

Pat began the audition on February 16, 2013 with an overview of the Prison Monologues:

The Big Picture: What are the monologues? What is the purpose? How did it begin? From what?

She also disseminated a sheet with the following questions

1: Why you are here?

2: Philosophy of the Prison Monologues: *Serving vs. Helping. Serving*: Knowing yourself – developing skills, insights, self-knowledge, offering your message because you know who you are, *you are humble. Helping* creates a dependency – your dependency on being recognized, seen, admired, needed, image more important than message (*not what I'm seeking*).

3: Motivation: What is it? What does it take to have the right motivation?

4: Initiative: What is it? How do you recognize it?

5: Curiosity: Why is it necessary?

6: Leadership: in the facility – you are becoming congruent, living your words in your actions;

7: Teamwork: You are no more or less important than the members of the team. What are the characteristics of a team player? List.

8: What does it take to be honest with ourselves?

9: What does it mean to have credibility?

10: What is the role of “timing?”

Rate yourself on your answers.

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