

Practicing Decoloniality 3/3: Decolonizing Dilemmas with a “z”

On Wednesday 22nd February 2017, PhD students at the Gender Institute organised a roundtable discussion and interactive workshop titled *Practicing Decoloniality in Gender Studies*. This short series of posts presents the transcripts of the three speakers' discussion papers, concluding today with Amanda Shaw's reflections on decolonizing dilemmas.



Awa or Kava Kava (*Piper methysticum*) processing. Image credits to the author.

My research concerns gendered labour within food systems in Hawai'i. How did a once self-sustaining archipelago become reliant on food imports? This is an agricultural paradox that Hawai'i is not alone in experiencing and it can be understood in relation to the promises of international trade, global flows of capitalism and in relation to colonialism – specifically settler colonialism.

The Pacific Islands of Hawai'i have been occupied by the U.S. since a coup ousted the independent government in 1893 and Hawai'i became a U.S. state in 1959. The advent of private property dispossessed Native Hawaiians on a massive scale, enabled white settlers to accumulate land and then meant that sugar planters brought people from Asia, Europe and the Pacific to work on plantations.

This kind of plantation agriculture is a central part of colonial projects, as it both literally and symbolically **remakes the landscape** as well as **transforms social relations**. Food and agriculture systems offer interesting sites through which to analyse how settler colonial states are maintained and capital is accumulated, in racialised, classed and gendered ways. They are also important sites to understand how these projects are resisted – through, for example, discourses of food sovereignty and in Hawai'i, of aloha 'āina, caring for the land.

My work has tried to unravel some of these threads using multi-sited ethnography. And it may come as no surprise that participation and observation in very different food spaces can be entangling. Specifically, doing gender work as a white settler feminist in decolonising spaces has raised several questions for me.

Firstly, from my specific location, what does it look like to support decolonising movements, even when it is not always clear that such projects have taken on the insights of Native, **Native Hawaiian and other anti-imperialist feminists** that show how decolonising work is intertwined with gendered and sexual self-determination? And, in a different vein, what are the dangers of **settler**

participation in decolonising spaces, if part of what characterises settlerhood is the propensity to indigenise oneself and lay claim to Native knowledge?

I could spend my time responding to and unpacking these two questions alone. But these dilemmas are sort of just the tip of the iceberg and in the interest of unsettling the submerged, I want to offer something otherwise. So I shall follow the examples of my co-conspirators who have already shared very brave words, and will offer a poem.

The poem follows the form of the alphabet memory game, “I’m going on trip and I’m bringing with me....”. This version goes something like “I’m coming back from fieldwork and I’m bringing with me....”

I call it “Decolonize with A Z: Patchwork Dictionary for Settlers”

A is for acute decolonising dilemmas

Of where do I appear and when?

Am I an ally

An accomplice?

Another academic?

B is built on ambivalence

Bridges called backs

Barter and betrayals

As in

C for critique

And for settlers suspending the craft

cutting down on killing joy

loosening our grip on objects most dear

learning decolonial lessons in letting go

D is for decentering, divesting, de-authorising

for difference and accounting

for making homes in the inhospitable



which is already a privilege

E is for enduring impasses

and ongoing tensions

for unsure embraces

and uncertain expanses – instead of enclosures

F for the friends that help us

G is for giving, in all its phrasal forms

giving up, giving in

giving way

giving out

H is for healing

And

I, for looking inward just an instant

J, what else but justice?

K, collective Kuleana

rights, responsibility, mandate

guiding our different work on different land

L for Lili'uokalani

A steadfast Queen

And for long lines of



M for *mana wahine, women divine and powerful*

for *mō‘ī, old time leaders*

And *māhū, healer-teachers*

Maybe also for *moe aku, moe mai,*

sleeping here, sleeping there

For the *lāhui re-membering,*

And for *settlers, learning for the first time*

N for *this never being enough*

O not for *owning*

but for *owning up*

For **P**, what was made *pilau*

For **Q**, Queen *Lili‘uo* again

the **R** is for *remembering*

not *romanticising*

Although there may be some *love*

in these *re-workings of the past*

S the *English Sovereignty*

That doesn't *save but may sustain*

T is for *translations*

for the *frustrated tiredness*



of words not transcribed

for the trust bestowed in stories

which are not mine to tell

as much as settlers love to sell a gift

U – *unsettling futures*

ones not built in my name

V *for the violence doubled over into writing*

One **“W”** *for the “what” I write*

Another, for the “what” that I don’t

X *marks the spot*

signs a signature

marks the theft

stole the land

formed the subjecthood

held up by the

Y

at the end

of property

But

before the end

There’s the Z



in decolonize.

I'm going on a voyage

And I'm taking with me

Decolonizing dilemmas

Alphabetic inspirations

Ever clearer kuleana.

—

Hawaiian Language Glossary

kuleana: Right, privilege, concern, responsibility, title, business, property, estate, portion, jurisdiction, authority, liability, interest, claim, ownership, tenure, affair, province; reason, cause, function, justification; small piece of property, as within an ahupua'a; blood relative through whom a relationship to less close relatives is traced, as to in-laws. Source: Wehewehe.org For more see [Goodyear-Kaopua, N. \(2011\). Kuleana Lahui: Collective responsibility for Hawaiian nationhood in activists' praxis. *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*, 5\(1\).](#)

lāhui: Nation, race, tribe, people, nationality; great company of people; species, as of animal or fish, breed; national, racial. Lāhuikaua, a warring people; a large company of soldiers (*rare*). 'Ao'aoLepupalika lāhui, national Republican Party. Lāhau'ae'a, nomadic people, gypsy. Lāhuipua a lalo, commoner. ho'o.lā.hui To form a nation, race, etc. Source: Wehewehe.org For more see: [Osorio, J. K. \(2002\). *Dismembering Lāhui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887*. University of Hawaii Press.](#)

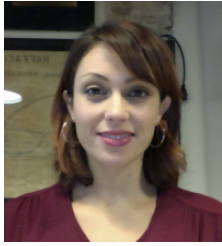
māhū: often translated as third gender or transgender. See also: [“The Meaning of Māhū”](#); [Kame'eleihiwa, L. \(1999\). KaLe'alea o nāKupuna, Traditional Hawaiian Sexuality, A Celebration of Life: Ni'aupio, Punalua, Po'olua, Alkane and Māhu. Paper presented Page 110 of 116 at the Building Bridges with Traditional Knowledge II: An International Summit Meeting on Issues Involving Indigenous Peoples, Conservation, Sustainable Development and Ethnoscience, Honolulu, Hawai'i.](#)

mana wahine: this term is often associated with Māori feminist writings, which Simmonds describes as “about recognising the authority, dignity, and power (the mana) of Māori women” (Simmonds 2011: 13). This and other terms have also been used in Hawaiian. Source: [Simmonds, N. \(2011\). Mana wahine: Decolonising politics. *Women's studies Journal*, 25\(2\), 11.](#)

mō'i: King, sovereign, monarch, majesty, ruler, queen. (Perhaps related to 'ī, supreme. According to J. F. G. Stokes, the word mo'i, king, is of recent origin and was first in print in 1832.) Temple image (Malo 162); lord of images (Malo 173); according to Kepelino and Kamakau, a rank of chiefs who could succeed to the government but who were of lower rank than chiefs descended from the god Kāne (For. 6:266). See *ikūnu'u*. The term mō'i was apparently not used in the Fornander legends collected in the 1860s nor in RC. Source: Wehewehe.org For more see: [Kame'eleihiwa, L. \(1992\). *Native land and foreign desires*. Bishop Museum Press.](#)

moe aku, moe mai: literally, sleeping here, sleeping there. The practice of sleeping in more than one place; multiple intimate/sexual relationships (punalua). For more see: [Kame'eleihiwa, L. \(2001\). *Na Wahine Kapu: Divine Hawaiian Women*. In *Women's Rights and Human Rights* \(pp. 71-87\). Palgrave Macmillan UK, and \[Linnekin, J. \\(1990\\). *Sacred queens and women of*\]\(#\)](#)

consequence: Rank, gender, and colonialism in the Hawaiian Islands. University of Michigan Press.



Amanda is a fourth year PhD student. Her research explores agricultural work in Hawai'i from an intersectional perspectives. She was raised on O'ahu, Hawai'i and traces her family origins back to the British Isles, Scandinavia and parts of Western Europe via Appalachia and the Ozark mountains. She is a member of Sea of Islands Consulting group <http://www.seaofislandsconsulting.com/>

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