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“I be home”: Childhood Belonging and Un/becoming in Hawai‘i

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When the figure of the child is evoked in social and moral debates, it often serves as the nexus of belonging, citizenship, and the nation. Popular discourse surrounding children, crystallized in the common saying “the children are our future,” demarcates them as future or not-yet citizens who need to be protected from social ills but, at the same time, socialized into their political community so as to be able to inherit the nation upon reaching adulthood and attaining full political citizenship. Because children, in Judith (Jack) Halberstam’s phrase, “have been deployed as part of a hetero-logic of futurity” (120), they cannot simply *be* children but must undergo a process of *becoming* that is closely monitored and guided by adults intent on shaping children in specific desirable ways. This construction of the child as citizen-in-the-making has disparate effects on real children, as not all children represent the future face of their nation. Sara Ahmed explains the discrimination at work in ideological indoctrination when she points out that “[Louis Althusser’s] ‘hey you’ is not just addressed to anybody: some bodies more than others are recruited, those that can inherit and reproduce the character of the organization, by reflecting its image back to itself, by having a ‘good likeness’” (*On Being Included* 40). Whereas those children resembling their nation’s imagined face thus get invited to become members of the body politic, children who do not share this likeness are rendered *unbecoming*: they do not fit within the desired parameters, and therefore present a potential challenge to a vision of the future characterized by the continuance of the status quo.

Whiteness serves as a crucial prerequisite for the child to enter the process of becoming in the US context, since whiteness delineates the child as innocent, unmarked, and free of a past. As Mary Zaboriskis puts it so concisely,

“Innocent children, seen as free of a past, can enter the future,” but the innocent child is irreconcilable with the racialized child who is seen “as having a past” and hence is “barred from the future” (606). Lacking pastness, only the white child can be considered a tabula rasa who can then, via the process of becoming, be molded into the future citizen. Only white children can therefore adequately capture what Ahmed calls the “metonymic relation between the apparently unmarked body and the body politic,” which “suggests that the forming of the boundaries of ‘unmarked’ bodies—bodies-at-home or bodies-in-place—has an intimate connection to the forming of social space—homeland” (*Encounters* 46). Racialized or “marked” children, in contrast, are unbecoming and do not inhabit the promise of the future of the homeland when this homeland is imagined as the US nation. While the exclusion from the imagined national future affects all racialized children, it is particularly evident in the case of Native children, whose very existence can present a threat to US sovereignty and the founding narratives that support it. To quote Zaborskis again, “Native children are incapable of innocence because of settler ideology that has viewed Natives as backward, deviant, and dangerous,” and consequently, “Native children are not synonymous with or guaranteed a future in the context of settler colonialism” but are subject to “violences intended to prevent that very future” (606, 624).

The 1959 incorporation of the Hawaiian Islands into the US as its fiftieth state is premised on this prevention of Native futures that Zaborskis identifies. Hence children’s and adolescent literature set in Hawai‘i often grapples with questions of national belonging as the texts’ young protagonists struggle to find a place to fit that adequately captures the complex and competing ontologies in the islands. Mavis Reimer has observed that “the trajectory of most . . . children’s texts . . . is to home the child subject, both the subject inside the book and the subject outside the book” (2), and this process of homing the child takes on a particularly marked ideological function in settler societies such as Hawai‘i, which are characterized by the supplanting of Indigenous peoples’ intimate relationships to land with settler claims of belonging.

In her study *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children’s Literature*, Clare Bradford argues that although children’s literature is rarely discussed within the field of postcolonial studies, “Settler society texts for children . . . constitute an

important and influential body of postcolonial works that construct ideas and values about colonization, about postcolonial cultures, and about individual and national identities” (6). Moreover, whereas non-Indigenous texts for children tend “to recycle the unquestioned assumptions of dominant cultures and their ingrained beliefs and convictions about Indigenous peoples and cultures,” Indigenous texts not only allow their Indigenous child readers to encounter representations of their cultures in literature but can also lead to the realization on the part of non-Indigenous readers “that many ideologies that they thought to be natural and universal are culturally constructed” (226, 12). Because children’s literature functions in large part to socialize its child readers into a specific national community, reading such texts through the lens of postcolonial studies and paying close attention to the ideological uses to which home is put can elucidate how, and on whose behalf, paths of belonging are forged in settler societies. My article is hence concerned with analyzing a novel by a local Japanese author in Hawai‘i, Lois-Ann Yamanaka, in order to interrogate the ways in which the text critiques white normativity but does not therefore automatically participate in decolonizing efforts.

Although Yamanaka’s *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* (1996) was marketed to an adult audience, a part of it had been previously published as a story for young adults, and the novel, which features a child protagonist, is frequently taught in children’s and adolescent literature courses (including my own) at the University of Hawai‘i. As a non-American, white settler who teaches at an Indigenous-serving institution, I have learned much from my students—some of whom are settlers and some Kanaka Maoli—about the complexities of laying claim to Hawai‘i as home, a theme with which Yamanaka’s novel explicitly engages. Given that “home” is a central concept for both postcolonial studies and children’s literature scholarship, my reading of the novel foregrounds child protagonist Lovey’s coming-of-age trajectory, which culminates in her homing on Native land. This article thus considers the effects and implications of *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*’s underlying suggestion that unbecoming settler-of-color children like Lovey can find a sense of belonging and home in Hawai‘i only by dis- and re-placing the Native population, symbolically rendering Kanaka Maoli children as not merely unbecoming but, ultimately, replaceable. I conclude by juxtaposing Yamanaka’s book with Native Hawaiian author Matthew Kaopio’s *Written in the Sky* (2005), a young

adult novel that grapples with questions of belonging through the eyes of homeless Kanaka Maoli protagonist ʻĪkaiikalani. Instead of homing adolescent ʻĪkaiikalani inside a house and within the US nation, Kaopio's text suggests that "home" for Native Hawaiians is ultimately located outside the realm and grasp of the US body politic.

As I read these two novels, I am acutely aware of my own subject position on the Hawaiian Islands as a cultural outsider, which presents necessary limitations to my analysis since, as Patricia Linton points out, just because "an ethnic or postcolonial writer hopes to be read by a broad or varied audience does not mean that he or she invites all readers to share the same degree of intimacy" (qtd. in Bradford 16). I thus draw on the analyses of a variety of both non-Indigenous and Kanaka Maoli scholars in this article in order to frame my own discussion of the two texts. It is also worth noting within this context that whereas *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* was published by Macmillan in the US as well as by HarperCollins in Canada and has received widespread attention particularly from Asian American critics—as well as a nomination for the 1996 Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) Literature Award—*Written in the Sky* was published by a small Honolulu press and has thus far been analyzed almost exclusively by local settler and Native Hawaiian scholars. Even as "Kanaka Maoli literature is complex and thriving" (McDougall 61), these different publication histories and receptions may indicate one of the ways in which Native Hawaiian literature continues to be marginalized.

Contextualizing the specific positionalities of Indigenous people and settlers—including settlers of color—on the Hawaiian Islands illuminates the hierarchies of belonging that shape depictions of home in Yamanaka's and Kaopio's novels. Within the US imaginary, Hawai'i occupies a peculiar place that renders it sufficiently different for Americans to safely experience an exoticized culture, but not so different as to constitute a potential danger to US hegemonic dominance: understood, in this framework, "as 'our own' paradise," Hawai'i becomes a playground for visitors while the colonization of the islands recedes into the background or even into complete oblivion (Chuh 132). Aspects of Hawaiian culture are commodified and sold to tourists who can then, within the secure space of their hotels, enjoy hula performances and participate in

lū‘au festivities from which the traditional cultural significance has largely been evacuated. A visit to the popular tourist destination of Pearl Harbor and its World War II memorials on the island of O‘ahu further cements the image of Hawai‘i as a place of difference that nonetheless remains firmly anchored in US history and thus within the confines of its colonial parent. Despite its comparatively recent statehood and physical distance from the continental US, Hawai‘i has been reimagined as belonging to its American colonizers and placed in the service of their recreational as well as economic and military needs. Hence Hawai‘i’s millennia-long history is condensed in US discourse to the relatively short period beginning with the arrival of Euro-American missionaries and settlers two centuries ago, a rhetorical strategy that foregrounds the ways in which foreigners have shaped the islands while minimizing Native presence and connection to land.

The fraught packaging of Hawai‘i for US consumers fails to represent either the Native or the local people of the islands respectfully, though with different implications. Within the context of Hawai‘i, the term “local” is commonly used to refer to those who live on the islands—particularly those born and raised in Hawai‘i—but who may not be Kanaka Maoli, or Indigenous to Hawai‘i. In many instances, “local” also serves to delineate the non-white and mostly Asian population of Hawai‘i as opposed to white, or *haole*, settlers, and the term helps to establish a hierarchy of belonging through which local people, unlike *haole*, can claim Hawai‘i as home.¹ However, Kanaka Maoli scholar and poet Haunani-Kay Trask notes that “the struggle between Haole and Asians for local authenticity . . . [is] rather like the fight between earlier and later immigrants: the indigenous is wholly denied” (qtd. in ho‘omanawanui, “Land” 141). When Asian settlers refer to themselves as “local” and to Hawai‘i as home, Trask argues, they deny “indigenous history, their long collaboration in our continued dispossession, and the benefits therefrom. Part of this denial is the substitution of the term ‘local’ for ‘immigrant,’ which is, itself, a particularly celebrated American gloss for ‘settler’” (46).

Even as local identity in Hawai‘i can offer a way of resisting and contesting US hegemony and the dominance of white culture, it presents a threat to Kanaka Maoli sovereignty movements, particularly when it seeks to replace Indigenous with local struggles for rights. At issue here is the difference between civil

rights and Indigenous rights, a distinction that is often glossed over in settler societies since Indigenous law has been supplanted by settler law. Kandice Chuh explains that “the United States continues to colonize Hawai‘i, not only by means of refusing Hawaiian sovereignty, but also by deploying a ‘mainland’-derived binary paradigm of race relations through its state apparatus of the law” (119). Within this legal framework, Kanaka Maoli are conceived not as an Indigenous people struggling for self-determination and nationhood but as merely one of many different racial groups in the islands. Reframing Indigenous rights as civil rights is hence one strategy through which the settler state continues to assert its dominance while hiding Kanaka Maoli land dispossession from view.

The distance between the precarious position of Indigenous people and the relative privilege held by both white and racialized settlers finds affirmation in Aboriginal scholar and activist Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s observation that while postcolonialist discourse may highlight the particular circumstances of the diasporic subject, it cannot, due to postcolonialism’s privileging of migrancy, adequately address the specificities of Indigenous groups (28). For the Hawaiian context, then, postcolonialism offers productive lines of inquiry regarding the positionality of many settlers of color, yet it fails to capture the myriad ways in which migration is bound up with Kanaka Maoli disenfranchisement: “Indigenous people’s circumstances are tied to non-Indigenous migration and our dislocation is the result of our land being acquired for the new immigrants. We share this common experience as Indigenous people just as all migrants share the benefits of our dispossession” (37). Given postcolonialism’s inadequacy in capturing Indigenous peoples’ experiences, Moreton-Robinson proposes the term “postcolonizing” to refer to those nation-states, such as Australia and Hawai‘i, where the colonizers did not leave and colonizing power relations persist (30). Even as the so-called Apology Resolution, US Public Law 103–150 (1993), acknowledges that “The indigenous Hawaiian people never directly relinquished their claims to their inherent sovereignty as a people or over their national lands to the United States” (qtd. in Trask 45), Hawai‘i continues to be a postcolonizing settler society. The resolution had no binding legal effect and was accompanied by neither a return of land to Native Hawaiians nor a recognition of Kanaka Maoli sovereignty.

In postcolonizing societies, then, both settler-of-color and Indigenous children are unbecoming: the racialized former fail to fit the parameters of normative (white) childhood, and the latter pose a challenge to the continued existence, and thus the future, of the nation-state in its current form, which is founded on the forced disappearance of Native peoples and their epistemologies. In what follows, I focus on Yamanaka's novel *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* in order to examine the representation of the unbecoming settler-of-color child grappling with national belonging and questions of home on the Indigenous lands of Hawai'i. Yamanaka's coming of age story follows the Japanese child protagonist Lovey Nariyoshi from sixth grade through middle school as she grows up poor in 1970s Hilo, tracing her struggles as she fails to fit within the parameters of the figure of the normative American child. These struggles are particularly pronounced in the shame Lovey feels because she is not white and in her navigation of a school system that sets mastery of hegemonic English as a prerequisite for receiving an education—a prerequisite that Lovey, as a native speaker of Hawai'i Creole English (HCE) or Pidgin, does not have. At the narrative's end, Lovey has come to terms with her inability to become a member of the US nation by instead claiming a local identity and home for herself. But as the novel resolves its child protagonist's failure to fit by homing her in the islands, it symbolically “un-homes” the Indigenous people of Hawai'i, for whom this ending has no place.

Yamanaka's text begins with a chapter titled “Happy Endings,” yet it quickly becomes clear that an ending that readers might consider happy and expected for a child protagonist is beyond Lovey's reach. Comparing herself to that most iconic of American children, Shirley Temple, Lovey voices her desire to be “just like her, with perfect blond ringlets and pink cheeks and pout lips, bright eyes and a happy ending,” but she has learned that children like her “weren't good enough for the kind of love that Shirley had” (3, 4). As a consequence, and noting the intimate connection between her racialized identity and her Japanese name, which marks her lack of belonging, Lovey Nariyoshi “secretly wish[es] to be haole. That [her] name could be Betty Smith or Annie Anderson or Debbie Cole” (11). Lovey's wish to fit within the parameters of the idealized American child speaks to the legacy of US imperialism that continues to haunt—though in different ways—both the Indigenous people of Hawai'i and the descendants of the predominantly Asian plantation workers who first

arrived in the islands in the mid-1800s. Though Lovey, whose grandfather came to Hawai'i from Japan in 1907 to work on the Kīpū plantation in Kaua'i, is a settler and as such benefits from the continued dispossession of Kanaka Maoli, she too is trapped within imperialistic structures that do not afford her a "happy ending." Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang explain that because the United States is not only a settler society but also an empire, "dispossessed people are brought onto seized Indigenous land through other colonial projects," and consequently "Settlers are diverse, not just of white European descent, and include people of color, even from other colonial contexts. This tightly wound set of conditions and racialized, globalized relations exponentially complicates what is meant by decolonization, and by solidarity, against settler colonial forces" (7). Even as Lovey grows up on an occupied Indigenous island thousands of miles from the continental US, the cultural images that she encounters on television depict the nation's face as white and American, and it is this nation that she wants to become a part of and call home, but cannot.

The Pidgin language spoken by Lovey, a creole born during Hawai'i's plantation era, further marks her as an unbecoming child unfit to claim an American identity. Her sixth grade teacher, Mr. Harvey, makes explicit the connection between speaking hegemonic English and being American when he tells his students that "we will have to practice and practice our Standard English until we are perfect little Americans" because "No one will want to give you a job. You sound uneducated. You will be looked down upon. You're speaking a low-class form of good Standard English. Continue, and you'll go nowhere in life" (13, 10). For Lovey's white teacher, Pidgin—also called Hawai'i Creole English (HCE)—denotes "low class" rather than an identity intimately tied to the recent history of the islands, and he sees his desire to turn children in Hawai'i into "perfect little Americans" not as colonial but as an attempt to offer them a possible future. Although Mr. Harvey's endeavor to teach his students hegemonic English may be read as an invitation for these children to join the process of becoming American, they actually remain trapped in their unbecoming state because they cannot alter the sounds of their words to fit their teacher's expectations. Since contemporary constructions of childhood remain entrenched in a discourse of potentiality and since, as Ahmed reminds us, "in the discourse of potentiality one's becoming is determined by one's being" (*Encounters* 174), Lovey's identity as a Pidgin speaker renders her

unable to become in the ways that the school system lays out. Instead of opening up possible futures, Mr. Harvey in effect instills shame in his students and forecloses the possibility of their becoming “perfect little Americans.” Yamanaka’s text thus illustrates Amy Natsue Nishimura’s point that “Pidgin speakers have historically been instructed to de-value their voices—what they say and how they state things are stigmatized by ‘mainstream’ society. The effects of this silencing are far reaching as children learn not only to feel ashamed of the way they speak, but they begin to question the content and logic of their statements” (184).

In an effort to counteract this stigmatization, *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*—told from Lovey’s perspective and written in Pidgin—foregrounds the impact that HCE has on its child protagonist’s coming of age and on her nascent understanding of “home” as a space that need not be predicated on attachments to the US nation. Hence when Lovey tells us that “the sound from my mouth, if I let it rip right out the lips, my words will always come out like home” (14), the home that her words delineate exists apart from the homeland demarcated as “American.” Yamanaka’s text in fact shares this use of HCE as a form of resistance to white normativity with R. Zamora Linmark’s coming of age novel *Rolling the R’s*, which was published a year prior to *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* and tells the story of predominantly Filipinx adolescents growing up in the Honolulu neighborhood of Kalihi in the 1970s. Much like Yamanaka’s child characters, Linmark’s young protagonists are poor, racialized, and fascinated by white mainstream pop culture icons, in this case Farrah Fawcett’s *Charlie’s Angels* character. Although Linmark’s narrative delineates the experience of queer Filipinx rather than Japanese characters, it too ultimately affirms a distinct local voice that resists white hegemony.

Yamanaka’s and Linmark’s uses of Pidgin in their novels hence function in part to set the young protagonists, and the local settler community more generally, apart from settlers in the continental US and to affirm a distinctly local identity. The novels’ representations of HCE as a valid language also mark an important point of resistance to US cultural dominance in Hawai‘i, and in particular to the enforcement of hegemonic English in the islands’ schools and institutions. Nalo Hopkinson, writing within the context of Caribbean speech, notes that “To speak in the hacked language is not just to speak in an accent or a creole;

to say the words *aloud* is an act of referencing history and claiming space” (Hopkinson; orig. emphasis). For Pidgin speakers in Hawai‘i, who notably include both locals and Kanaka Maoli, their creole language is intimately tied to “claiming space,” too, and actively speaks back to a linguistic hierarchy that stigmatizes any usage of nonhegemonic English. However, glorifying HCE as a language of resistance, as Yamanaka’s and Linmark’s texts do, can also further the silencing of the Indigenous Hawaiian language, and Trask suggests that “a celebration of pidgin English becomes a gloss for the absence of authentic sounds and authentic voices” (qtd. in ho‘omanawanui, “Land” 138–39).² Trask further critiques Yamanaka and other writers’ desire to establish a local homeland in Hawai‘i when she notes that “This kind of settler assertion is really a falsification of place and culture. Hawai‘i has only one indigenous people: Hawaiians” (qtd. in ho‘omanawanui, “Land” 139). Such a critique echoes all the more loudly when one considers the ending of *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, which firmly homes the Nariyoshis in Hawai‘i and effectively replaces Native with settler bodies.

When her father, Hubert, is blinded and hospitalized following a hunting accident, Lovey recalls his wish to be buried in soil from Hā‘upu mountain close to the sugar plantation where he grew up, and she sets out on a journey to Kaua‘i in order to collect this soil for him. Hubert’s wish evokes the story of his own father, who brought a package of Japanese soil with him when he came to Hawai‘i in the early 1900s; being buried in this soil from his country of birth “was his way of going home” (197). Upon returning from Kaua‘i with a bag of soil from the plantation, Lovey fills a second bag with earth from the family’s backyard in Hilo before joining her relatives in the hospital and presenting Hubert with her surprise. “I going mix the two bags together so you can be in two places at the same time,” she explains.

“Then I put it under your bed and unwrap it when you die. Then, Daddy, you be home.”

“And thass where it’s all at, right, Lovey?”

The answer is small. I don’t even have to say it. (308)

The novel's last line, Hubert's telling his daughter "I be home" (308), further punctuates the significance that Lovey's act of collecting and claiming the land holds for her and her family, while Yamanaka's rendering of this utterance in Pidgin, as Yu-ting Huang points out, moreover "eradicates tense, so that Local belonging becomes timeless in a final, confirmed settledness" (43). By effectively homing her father in the islands, the text suggests, Lovey simultaneously lays claim to Hawai'i as home for herself and future generations of the family line. Through the child body and its belonging to Hawai'i, the local past, present, and future converge and become firmly rooted in Native land, a land from which Native bodies have been symbolically evacuated and thus has been made available for settler belonging. Even as Lovey here finds a home and an unexpected happy ending that positively affirms her difference from the normative American child that Shirley Temple represents, she can do so only by displacing the Native body and replacing it with her own.

Yamanaka's novel thus enacts a local entitlement to Hawaiian lands while disregarding the dispossession of Kanaka Maoli that is inevitably bound up with such settler claims of the islands as home. The foundation for this homing of settlers is precarious and built on a falsification of history, and its impetus is inherently colonial, as ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui makes clear: "any claim to 'Hawaiian' roots by settlers through the plantations goes back a mere 150 or so years; the Kanaka Maoli claim goes back at least two millennia. . . . it is colonial for settlers to claim Kanaka Maoli traditions and land" ("Land" 122). Houston Wood furthermore reminds us that "rhetoric linking the Hawaiian people's experience of having their land colonized and their nation overthrown with stories of immigrant plantation struggles undermines claims for indigenous rights and reparations" (51), and hence any attempt at creating a local homeland for settlers in Hawai'i stands in direct conflict with Native Hawaiian struggles for recognition and self-determination. Yet this conflict remains unspoken and invisible in Yamanaka's novel, from which Kanaka Maoli characters, with the exception of the half-Japanese and half-Hawaiian character Jenks, are absent. The adolescent Jenks plays only a relatively minor role in the text as a fellow student on whom Lovey has a crush; as she explains, "In our school, if part Hawaiian goes with pure Jap, that's the ultimate. Everybody wants a hapa [mixed-race] girlfriend or boyfriend. Everybody wants a part Hawaiian person" (244). Huang notes that the novel thus removes Hawaiian

presence from the land, locating it at school instead, and she appropriately comments that, given the exoticization and sexualization of Polynesian bodies in colonial discourses on the Pacific, the novel's depiction of Jenks is reminiscent of "the discursive and biopolitical strategy by which Native Hawaiians are incorporated into the settler community" (42). By the end of the text, Jenks has disappeared from the narrative, and Lovey's claiming of Hawai'i as home is not met with Native Hawaiian (or any other) voices of dissent, furthering the symbolic silencing of the islands' Indigenous people.

It should also be noted that the history of the islands' plantations, which the novel draws on explicitly in order to effect settler-of-color homing at the narrative's end, has contributed significantly to rendering Native Hawaiians a numerical minority on their land. While Hawaiians and part-Hawaiians made up 97% of the islands' population in 1850, that figure shrank to 16% in 1920, following the immigration of more than 300,000 Asian workers in the interim (Takaki 27). The planters' importation of foreign labor resulted in an eightfold population increase between 1876 and 1941, at which point one out of three employed persons in the islands worked for either a sugar or a pineapple plantation, underscoring the tremendous impact that these enterprises had on Hawai'i's economy and people (Hitch 58, 59). While planters initially employed Hawaiian workers, Ronald Takaki notes that Kanaka Maoli laborers were difficult to discipline since they did not rely on employment for survival and could live off the land (20–22). In addition, the Native Hawaiian population had been declining sharply since the arrival of the first settlers, who introduced foreign diseases, such as measles and smallpox, that caused the deaths of many Kanaka Maoli, so that planters looked elsewhere to meet their demand for labor (20).

Beginning their strategy of "divide and control," which pitted different ethnic groups against each other in an effort to discipline them, the plantation managers imported Chinese laborers in the 1850s and "encouraged the Chinese to call the native workers '*wahine! wahine!*'—Hawaiian for 'women! women!'" (Takaki 24). Chinese immigrants were followed by Japanese, who were paid less than the Chinese laborers so as to keep the latter from demanding higher wages, and eventually the planters turned to Korean and then Filipino workers in order to maintain control of the Japanese workforce (25–26). Jonathan Y.

Okamura explains that the racialized policy of divide and control, which was enforced until the first multiracial strike in 1946, was designed “to maintain, if not create, divisions among laborers from different racial groups to prevent them from collaborating with one another in organizing strikes and labor disturbances” (24). The racialization of plantation life, in which race also determined a worker’s pay, housing, and job, formed an integral part of this policy and served to maintain a hierarchy in which only laborers of European descent held positions of power (29). Despite the plantation managers’ efforts, however, the predominantly Asian workforce eventually developed not only a creole language that allowed them to communicate but also a pan-ethnic working-class consciousness, both of which have come to be characteristic of local culture in Hawai‘i (Nguyen 158, 159).

In its insistence on the validity of Pidgin and its affirmation of this local culture that originated in the hardships faced by plantation workers, *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* ultimately offers a resounding critique of the US and its imperialist legacies. The novel also presents a compelling critique of constructions of the racialized child as unbecoming, and Yamanaka’s depiction of Lovey highlights the manifold exclusions by which the nation operates, particularly in its refusal to offer a home to children who do not approximate the parameters of normative childhood. While the text thus resists US imperial structures that mark racialized, non-normative others as unbecoming and abject, it nonetheless also participates in settler colonialism and, instead of calling for decolonization, furthers the displacement of Kanaka Maoli. “Decolonization,” Tuck and Yang remind us, “is not a metonym for social justice” (21), and although Yamanaka’s novel underscores and critiques the injustices that settler-of-color children face in Hawai‘i, it remains entrenched in a colonial fantasy that enables settlers to make their homes on, and create affective attachments to, Indigenous land. For local literature to truly question colonial structures, it would need not to home nor to settle, but rather to unsettle its local characters: as Tuck and Yang put it, “decolonization is necessarily unsettling. . . . Settler colonialism and its decolonization implicates and unsettles everyone (sic)” (7).

Instead of juxtaposing Kanaka Maoli voices with settler-of-color characters, Yamanaka’s novel suggests that its local Japanese protagonists can lay claim to the islands as home by adopting Indigenous values, particularly in relation to

the land. Rocío G. Davis argues that *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* links the Native Hawaiian cultural values of *aloha ʻāina* (love of the land) and *ʻohana* (extended family), prevalent themes in traditional Hawaiian literature, to the importance of land and family in Asian cultures, which allows Lovey to understand her place in Hawaiʻi as a descendent of Asian immigrants (237). (The connection to land as depicted in Yamanaka’s novel differs significantly from the Kanaka Maoli understanding of *aloha ʻāina*, however, a point to which I will return when comparing this text to *Written in the Sky*.) Jennifer Ann Ho comments on Lovey and her family’s relationship to land as it pertains to consumption, observing that the novel’s child protagonist initially longs for “Owning white items and eating white items,” since she believes that such consumption “will make her white by association” and thus afford her belonging within the capitalist US nation (57). As Ho points out, Lovey’s desires as a consumer are eventually replaced by acceptance of, and even identification with, her father’s rejection of such capitalist consumption: Hubert practices “hunting, gardening, and gathering as an expression of nostalgia and as a means of survival, which establishes his organic connection to the physical landscape of Hawaiʻi, as well as to his Japanese immigrant roots” (69). By thus aligning traditional Japanese with Kanaka Maoli values, the Nariyoshis’ living off the land identifies the family as what might be called “Indigenous-like,” enabling them to regard the land as their own.³ Hence, the settler child protagonist in Yamanaka’s text must reject US capitalism and “learn Indigeneity” as her father has in order to become understood as a legitimate inhabitant of Native land.

However, even as Yamanaka draws heavily on the importance of land in order to effectuate Lovey’s homing, it might be this very land that also “unsettles,” and affirms resistance to, local claims of belonging in the novel. As Lovey’s trip to the Kīpū plantation near Hāʻupu mountain proves pivotal to remembering her family history and thus to forming a local identity, the importance of her journey to Kauaʻi seems punctuated by the fact that in Hawaiian, *hāʻupu* means to recall, to recollect, or to remember (“hāʻupu”). Yamanaka’s text, however, never notes this meaning and renders the mountain’s name as “Haupu” without the Hawaiian diacritical marks of kahakō (macron) and ʻokina (glottal stop). But perhaps, and even as the novel does not invite such a reading, the

significance of Hā‘upu mountain and its ties to memories can also be interpreted differently, suggesting instead that Lovey’s memory remains incomplete, with a vital part of the land’s history outside her grasp.

The mountain itself, in fact, remains elusive for both Lovey and her father as they are prevented from setting foot on it: young Hubert by his older brother, who draws a line in the dirt when hiking on the mountain and forbids him from going beyond it, and Lovey by the owner of the former plantation, who wants her off the land, so that she grabs the earth for her hospitalized father from the side of the road rather than from the mountain itself. The mountain’s inaccessibility is emphasized further by Hubert’s blindness following the hunting accident, so that Hā‘upu mountain becomes for him merely a dreamlike vision as “He wants to look deep into the valley. Treasures he can’t see” (Yamanaka 300). It is because Hubert can no longer see that Lovey takes on the role of “Secondhand eyes to see Haupu Mountain” (300), allowing her to become part of her family’s history with the land, yet she too never sees the “treasures” hidden by this mountain. Hence Lovey and her father effectively have access to neither the mountain nor the *hā‘upu* that it represents, and their acts of remembering are restricted to recollections of recent plantation history instead of encompassing the millennia-long history of the land and its Indigenous people. In such a reading of the symbolic work that Hā‘upu mountain does in the novel, the Nariyoshis fail to understand—indeed, fail even to consider—Native history, which remains out of their reach. Even as their memories stand in for local history more generally within the text, Lovey’s and Hubert’s remembering is limited to a personal history of family, and although the novel seems to foreground the importance of land through Lovey’s act of collecting bags of “dirt and stones” for her father (305), the land is ultimately left out of this history rather than being central to it.

Both Davis and Huang read *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* as an ethnic bildungsroman, but their analyses of the novel’s ending and its emphasis on the importance of land diverge sharply. Davis notes that the trajectory in an ethnic bildungsroman differs from the traditional bildungsroman’s pattern as it does not detail the protagonist’s socialization into and identification with the dominant social order, instead focusing on the character’s “process of

awareness of particularity and difference” (233). While Davis does not engage the fact that Lovey’s eventual self-awareness as a young local Japanese woman is coupled with her claiming of Indigenous land, she observes that the text culminates in Lovey’s “affirmation of belonging to a land, a history, a people, and the determination to preserve that tradition,” as symbolized by her present of land to Hubert (244). Huang is more critical of the ways in which local literature in Hawai‘i has adopted the ethnic bildungsroman, arguing that a novel such as Yamanaka’s “relies on an anxiety of dislocation and alienation to valorize minor settler’s (sic) right to place” and thus “justifies non-Indigenous belonging to land through the naturalized trajectory of alienation to belonging” (33, 35). Within a settler-colonial context, then, the ethnic bildungsroman becomes problematic when it omits Indigenous voices, denies Indigenous sovereignty, and/or establishes parallels between settler-of-color and Indigenous struggles, as Yamanaka’s text does (36, 37). Ultimately, as Huang suggests, the issue of settler identity need not be resolved by either identification or disidentification with Indigenous land; instead, settler identity can signify the “recognition of one’s responsibility to heed Indigenous sovereignty and that one’s history of migration and settlement is entangled with Indigenous dispossession, as the condition of one’s sense of place” (32). A settler identity might, then, foreground not the denial or disregard of injustices committed against Native people, but rather a sense of obligation to the land. Such an emphasis on settler responsibility would, I believe, need to be tied intimately to a form of *hā‘upu* that *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* gestures toward but ultimately rejects in favor of presenting a more coherent and less complex local identity.

Hā‘upu presents the central impetus for ‘Īkauikalani, the adolescent protagonist of Kaopio’s *Written in the Sky*, a text that illustrates the myriad differences between settler and Indigenous remembering. Following the death of his grandmother, who raised him, fourteen-year-old ‘Īkauikalani is left literally homeless, without knowledge of his genealogy, and in need of putting back together—or re-remembering—the pieces of his ancestral past, which occur to him in dreams and in visions that he sees in the clouds. Through its depiction of ‘Īkauikalani’s process of recovering Kanaka Maoli culture and history for himself while refusing to be homed in US institutions, the novel comments on

the interplay between remembering and forgetting within the postcolonizing context. Arguing for the subversive potential that forgetting can hold, Halberstam links it to “a shadow archive of resistance . . . [that] articulates itself in terms of evacuation, refusal, passivity, *unbecoming*, unbeing” (129; emphasis added). ‘Īkauikalani demonstrates such unbecoming refusal by not attending school and by evading police in fear of being placed into a foster home. In reference to the positionality of Native Hawaiians in the US, Halberstam further notes that “forgetting has been a colonial tactic in the past and has produced a hierarchical relationship between foreign and native knowledge, but in order to remember and recognize the anticolonial struggles, other narratives do have to be forgotten and unlearned” (77). For ‘Īkauikalani, this process of forgetting and remembering involves decolonizing the mind, as the title of a book by Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o has it, so as to be able to recover a sense of belonging that is distinctly Indigenous.

Like Lovey, ‘Īkauikalani is ashamed of his name and only grows to appreciate it when he learns of its connection to his genealogy. His shame does not, however, stem from a desire for a *haole* name but rather from “the fact that most people could not pronounce his real name properly” and often call him by Anglicized nicknames such as Kelly or Lonnie (27, 15). Following the overthrow and subsequent annexation of the islands, the US government banned the Hawaiian language in public institutions, and despite the successes of language revitalization efforts in recent decades, English remains the language most commonly spoken by many settlers and Kanaka Maoli. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Kaopio’s novel is written predominantly in English, even as it includes some Hawaiian words and phrases as well as dialogue in Pidgin. ‘Īkauikalani himself only learns his name’s meaning, and its intimate connection to his cultural identity, at the end of the novel:

“‘Īkauikalani. The answer is placed in the heavens” (127). His name speaks not only to ‘Īkauikalani’s ability to “read” the sky, as he can see predictions in the clouds, but also to his genealogy: he is the “Great-great-great-great grandson of Lono-‘Ī-kau-i-ka-lewalani,” whose ancestors were the highly respected priests of the god Lono who would communicate via omens placed in the sky (130, 126). The genealogical ties evoked by ‘Īkauikalani’s name hence root him firmly in the Hawaiian Islands, and his ancestral connection to the land moreover

imbues him with an important sense of responsibility because he is “a direct descendant of ancient Hawaiian chiefs and powerful priests. . . . As long as he lived, his ancestors lived” (133–34). Now that ‘Īkauikalani remembers this genealogy, his name becomes a source of pride instead of shame, and the line of Lono priests can continue through him.

Kelsey Amos, who reads *Written in the Sky* as an example of Hawaiian Futurism, identifies ‘Īkauikalani’s ability to connect with and read the natural world as Indigenous literacy, a practice that she calls “a sovereign act that creates resurgence” (204). She observes that this young protagonist’s Indigenous literacy opens up kinship connections beyond the human relations privileged in Euro-American contexts, as it “extends both the imagined community and imagined futures to include kinship with land, stars, animals, and spirits” (205). ‘Īkauikalani’s kinship with the land and animals—demonstrated, for instance, in his interpreting clouds, picking up trash all over the city, and sharing food with two doves whom he names Pegleg and Two-Toe—speaks to what ho‘omanawanui calls “Kanaka Maoli spiritual foundations and traditional concepts of the interconnectedness of everything in the universe—elemental, flora, fauna, and human” (“Moamahi” 102). Through ‘Īkauikalani’s familial connection to the land and his caring for it, Kaopio emphasizes the Native Hawaiian value of *aloha ‘āina* in a way that is not realized in Yamanaka’s novel. Whereas ‘Īkauikalani intuitively understands his intimate connection with animals and the *‘āina*, Lovey’s story is haunted by the presence of abused and exploited animals for whom the protagonist feels empathy but who are nonetheless firmly positioned below her in a hierarchy that Hubert explains after he intentionally runs over a cat with his car: “Better it than us, that’s my philosophy. Get it in your head. Humans more important than animals” (172). Even though *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* aligns child and animal bodies as exploited and vulnerable, it depicts human relationships to animals as often violent, and human characters frequently react to their own mistreatment by abusing animals. The human/nonhuman hierarchical relationship hence remains unquestioned and is even reinforced in Yamanaka’s text, which stands in stark contrast to Kaopio’s focus on *aloha ‘āina*: it is precisely because ‘Īkauikalani does not see himself as ruling over the natural world that he is

empowered and able to create an *'obana* with both human and nonhuman residents of the park where he lives.⁴

Although 'Īkauikalani is, to a certain extent, “homed” at the novel’s end via his Kanaka Maoli genealogy and identity, he simultaneously remains homeless since his land is under occupation and his culture under assault by colonizing forces. He continues to live on the very margins of society as a homeless boy who does not go to school, which we can read as a form of resistance that manifests itself through evacuation and unbecoming by refuting the choice between “freedom in liberal terms or death” (Halberstam 129) or, as Amos puts it, by rejecting “an assimilative or ghettoizing inclusion” (213).

'Īkauikalani’s decision to continue sleeping in a beach park at the novel’s end furthermore constitutes a choice, as he was offered a place to sleep at a friend’s house. This choice connotes his defiance in the face of colonialism: “Hawaiians who live off the legal and economic grid,” Anne Keala Kelly explains, “represent a profound manifestation of kū‘ē—resistance—against the U.S. occupation of Hawai‘i,” especially since their “genetic and cultural knowledge of belonging” has been consistently “covet[ed], undermin[ed], and criminaliz[ed]” by settler institutions (37, 38).⁵ 'Īkauikalani’s resistance to foreign institutions is further illustrated by his refusal to attend school. Since the US school system in Hawai‘i can perpetuate colonial structures and the forgetting of Native epistemologies, 'Īkauikalani instead seeks out those who can help him to remember his Indigenous past and point toward possible futures, and he therefore gains knowledge through conversations with Indigenous elders rather than from foreign teachers. The educational practice in which 'Īkauikalani participates constitutes an act of decolonization, allowing him to reconnect with his Indigeneity while unlearning, or forgetting, settler revisions of history and place.

The young protagonist of *Written in the Sky* is thus simultaneously unbecoming, as he refuses incorporation into the US body politic, and representative of Native futurity, as he is invested with the responsibility of keeping alive Kanaka Maoli traditions such as reading the clouds. That 'Īkauikalani is an adolescent makes his resistance to US institutions particularly pronounced, since, according to Zaborskis, “Native children . . . continue to be targets of settler

policy that seeks to erase indigenous presence under the guise of welfare” (609). Rather than homing ‘Īkaiikalani in a foster family or via the education system, as settler welfare policy would suggest, Kaopio’s novel depicts its protagonist’s homelessness as the only viable outcome; as long as Hawai‘i remains a postcolonizing society, it implies, Kanaka Maoli paradoxically find themselves homeless in their own homeland. In order to counteract this unhoming of Indigenous peoples in places like Hawai‘i, Ahmed argues, it becomes imperative for both white settlers and settlers of color “To ‘feel’ differently about this land, as belonging to others, [which] is not about generosity; it is not premised on giving up one’s home, but on recognising that where one lived was not one’s home to give or to give up in the first place” (*Politics* 36).

Yamanaka’s and Kaopio’s novels illustrate the extent to which settler remembering, or *hā‘upu*, of land and the history of place is necessarily limited and cannot approximate the genealogical and ontological ties that Indigenous people have to their home. Settler claims to Indigenous lands as homeland are ultimately based not on remembering but on a forgetting of Native history that perpetuates postcolonizing ideologies and practices. Indigenous literature counteracts this lack of *hā‘upu*, precisely because, as Zaborskis writes, it “makes us recognize that *not everyone has forgotten*. Despite ongoing colonization, indigenous communities *do survive*, and literature is one site where indigenous peoples can affirm their survival, presence, and remembering” (614; orig. emphasis). Non-Indigenous authors of children’s fiction can contribute to decolonizing processes by creating texts that do not eradicate Native epistemologies but that rather, as Bradford asserts, “afford diverse, self-conscious, and informed representations of Indigenous cultures” (227). Children’s and adolescent literature produced in postcolonizing societies and intent on participating in efforts of decolonization, then, can productively resist the impulse to home the settler child on Indigenous lands and instead radically call into question the ways in which we construct home and belonging through the figure of the child.

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Notes

1. Although the Hawaiian word *haole* can refer to any non-Polynesian foreigner, today it is typically used to indicate a white person.
2. As ho‘omanawanui explains, Trask is here speaking to “the ‘identity crisis’ that Asian settlers feel. . . . they feel ‘different’ from their continental Asian counterparts, who identify themselves as ‘American,’ and thus have cloaked themselves with a ‘local’ veil, claiming a ‘local’ voice through Hawai‘i Creole English. Yet the authentic sound and voice of Hawai‘i is ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, the Hawaiian language, not HCE” (“Land” 139).
3. Perry Nodelman identifies a similar pattern in the Canadian children’s books that he discusses in “At Home on Native Land,” observing that “in order to move past prejudice and intolerance and/or to find redemption for the guilt of the theft of land and the mistreatment of indigenous peoples by their ancestors and/or contemporaries, the people of non-Aboriginal backgrounds in these novels can and must learn to think and act like Aboriginals—like those shaped by the land they live on” (115).
4. ‘Īkauikalani’s relationships with animals thus speak to traditional Kanaka Maoli values because, as ho‘omanawanui explains, “in Hawaiian culture, there is no precedent set for humans to rule over animals; rather, nature has agency and a degree of power” (“Moamahi” 89).
5. Moreover, Brandy Nālani McDougall points out that Kanaka Maoli constitute the majority of the islands’ homeless population, with many families resorting to living “on beaches, where they have access to a source of food, showers, and spirituality through our familial connection to the ocean and the land,” thus “exemplify[ing] Kanaka Maoli resistance to further displacement and our defiant survival by returning to the land for our sustenance” (53).