

In a Hawaiian world view the **piko** is commonly considered the center. According to the Pukui-Elbert dictionary, the piko is the naval cord that connects a baby to its mother; the summit of a mountain, especially Mauna Kea; the center of a fishpond wall, or kōnane game board; a nodal connection point as where a leaf joins its stem to the kalo (taro) plant. The piko is also the extreme boundary edge, like the tip of the ear or the crown of the head. Mauna Kea is one of the most sacred places to Kanaka Maoli (Native peoples of Hawai‘i) and its piko reaches majestically into the wao akua, the realm of the gods. So sacred is Mauna Kea that it is considered the piko of the Kanaka Maoli world. Significantly, I am writing while nestled on a smooth lava field, starting out at the ahu (religious stone altar) within a panoramic view of the afternoon Lilinoe mists dancing across the horizon line of Mauna Kea, or “Mama Mauna” as many kia‘i (protectors) endearingly call her. When I am not standing on the front lines as a kia‘i defending Mauna Kea from the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT), I volunteer my time here to help organize and facilitate free classes at the make-shift Pu‘uhuluhulu University. As storytelling can be an empowering healing practice for those facing state violence and inter-generational trauma, I teach creative writing classes called “Writing From the PIKO.”

Piko is both an embodied and metaphorical concept and possesses layers of meaning. Dr. Kekuni Blaisdell once explained to me the “triple piko” found in the body. The top *piko o ke po‘o* is located in the head, in the manawa (baby’s soft spot), and connects us to our long line of ancestors, to the Pō (the unseen ancestral worlds beyond this time and space), and to the past. When you ask any keiki (child), “Where’s your piko?” they will gleefully point to their belly button, to the *piko o ka na‘au*, which connects us to this generation in the present. The third piko resides in the *piko o ka ma‘i*, or genital region, which connects us to generations to come, to the future, and to our creative powers. Respected Maui elder Sam Ka‘ai refers to a fourth piko in the foot, or *piko o ka wāwae*, which grounds us to the ‘āina (land). Some families maintain a practice of carving out tiny holes in a large pohaku (stone) on their ancestral lands, so that when the baby’s umbilical cord falls off, it is placed inside until it breaks down and becomes a part of the pohaku. This grounding practice reminds the child how to find their way home, or *ho‘i i ka piko*, return to the central source. If we imagine piko as points of connection, they serve as access nodes to our relationality, cultural life ways, spirituality, and creativity.

By (re)connecting to these piko, I believe we can (re)member and (re)assemble the disconnected pieces of our lives to re-story ourselves. Anthropologist Barbara Meyerhoff coined the term *re-membering* and Australian psychologists Michael White and David Epston developed forms of narrative therapies based on their “club of life” (Russell 1). When applied to those dealing with deaths of loved ones, instead of moving on after loss, clients responded better to letter writing where they re-called deceased members to stay connected (White 105). To facilitate healing from cultural trauma, I extend this invitational re-membering to members of ancestral Pō, as this process supports my experiences of feeling that I am never alone, that my kūpuna stand behind my shoulders and empower me in the face of colonial genocide and erasure of my Hawaiian language and culture.

In order to cultivate (re)connection using the metaphor of the piko within creative writing pedagogy, I have developed a set of *PIKO Principles of Story*. PIKO here becomes an *acronym* which according to Miriam-Webster Dictionary comes from the Greek *onyma*, or name, and *acro-* meaning the extreme or tip (which sounds similar to meanings of piko, as the tip, summit,

or extreme edge). Combining the first letter of each word to form a newly sounded word in itself, PIKO comes to (re)present **Pilina**, **‘Ike**, **Kuleana**, and **‘Ōlelo**, or relationality, knowledge, responsibility, and language. These foundational concepts form the basis for a means to interpret existing literature (in its broadest definition) and to compose new creative writing works.

The creative process reflects nature and Kanaka Maoli are familiar with *reading* texts, textiles, and the environment. Kapa (tapa) bark cloth once served as clothing, bedding, sails, and ritual items. Kapa’s labour intensive production as well as its role as a readable cloth, serves as an effective metaphor for the creative writing process. A Hawaiian proverb states: *Ma ka hana ka ‘ike*, *Through working/doing one learns/knows*. Therefore, to truly value kapa, it helps to understand the entire process: from selecting a place and type of plant to grow (chant protocols for auspicious beginnings, topic research, and genre decisions); to raising the wauke/mulberry trees (brainstorming); to knowing how and when to prune and harvest the tall skinny trees (selectively narrowing your ideas); to scraping away the outer bark with an ‘opihi shell (critical examination); to carefully peeling the inner bark off and away from long trunk in one solid piece (revelation, inspiration); to carving wooden tools to pound with (slow and steady craft and structure); to the first pounding on a flat wide kua pohaku, or river stone (rough first draft); to fermenting the bark for a month, as Hawaiians are unique in their fermentation preference (allow the time of gestation and deep listening to ancestral guidance); to pounding the softened and pungent smelling bark on the kua la‘au, or wooden anvil (repeated revisions); to shaping it into the finest grade cloth possible (editing); to softening the delicately thin yet hardy cloth with sea shells and polished stones (polishing); to hand-making plant dyes; to imprinting designs with bamboo stamps and wana (sea urchin) in enriched hues; to scenting the kapa with maile or ‘iliahi (sandalwood). Kapa making illustrates the many-layered engagement of piko connections: to the ‘āina, to the akua (elemental forms, deities) who preside over kapa making such as Hina (female moon deity), to forms of ‘ike kūpuna (ancestral knowledge), and resonance with other artisans.

We can *read* the designs on the kapa cloth as a text. When we think of literacy, we often limit ourselves to written items that are read with the eyes. However, I like to push the idea of what counts as a *text*. This textile of kapa can certainly be *read* and interpretations of meaning are woven into geometrical shapes and colors. Many kapa makers save a special beater for the final pounding that is carved with a unique signature pattern that no one else has and later generations can point to that imprint to identify its maker. This transformation of nature allows a reciprocal relation. The wauke tree has a second life as a piece of art, and I (re)connect with the ways of my ancestors. Our relationship is strengthened as the ‘āina and I co-create a new (re)presentation of life and shared memory.

Pilina - relationality

Pilina, or relationality, is a foundation of Hawaiian life: relations to ‘āina (land), akua (elemental divinities), kānaka (humans), and the various non-human elements in the world. According to Pukui-Elbert Hawaiian Dictionary, *pili* means to cling, stick, adhere, touch, join, cleave to, associate with; a close relationship, or relative. A petroglyph image helps us to visualize the relationality of a piko centered perspective. In the center is a dot with concentric rings encircling in ever-widening expanse, like a bullseye. If I imagine myself standing at the center of

my world, I can call this piko‘u, my piko. The circle surrounding me would include my immediate ‘ohana (family), then another circle of extended family (if you know your genealogy you can eventually connect yourself to any other Kanaka Maoli), then a wider circle of my kaiāulu (community), then perhaps a circle of my school or work place, then the particular island I reside on, then the broader Hawaiian archipelago, then our cousins throughout the Pacific, then perhaps our Indigenous relations, then the wider world, and so on. The intensity of relationship helps determine what kind of reciprocal responsibilities we have to each other. We are all connected to each other in some way, yet knowing how illuminates our potential negotiations, collaborative creative endeavors, and future world building.

Movement for Aloha No Ka ‘Āina (MANA) encourages us to engage piko as connections to places, peoples, and practices. The land is central to Kanaka Maoli and Native peoples. When introducing ourselves to community elders, we will generally say the place our family is from first, then our family name, and finally our personal name and position (eldest, youngest child) within the family. That practice stems from our relationality to Papahānaumoku, our Mother Earth. Our land is literally our family according to our creation chant *Kumulipo*, as we genealogically trace back to the first forms of life emerging out of the Pō within the oceans. As I meet others here at Mauna Kea, I consider it an extended family reunion with my cousins across the islands and with my many generational great-great-great grandparents, for we are all descended from Papa, Earth Mother, and Wākea, Sky Father, who are evident in the landscape. Humans are the last born in *Kumulipo*, and this understanding shifts us to a humbler perspective of humanity; not the pinnacle who holds dominion over a terra nullius, but the younger sibling who is interdependent with our elder landed relations. A Hawaiian proverb states: *He ‘āina ke ali‘i, he kanaka ke kauā. The land is the chief and the human is the servant.* Generational inherited knowledge of a particular place impacts the way we relate within that space, how we treat it. It has a personality. I ask, *What is the difference between space and place?* We come to understand that place-making involves finding and creating meaning. To acknowledge these connections to place, I encourage students to write place-based essays and poems about our piko ‘āina, places we feel most connected.

Places and peoples interact in a reciprocal integrity and our ethics stem from this kind of care, which we call mālama. So I ask, *Who is in your circle? Who can you trust to be completely vulnerable in front of? Who sees you as you truly are? Who is there to support your voice and development?* Knowing who is in your circle is extremely important. I do not believe in *safe spaces*, especially here on Mauna Kea where Kanaka Maoli are living under constant surveillance and threat of state violence and forced removal. Even in the classroom, we are not safe from institutional power dynamics who are not always supportive of Native epistemologies and methodologies. Instead I prefer the term *brave spaces* where we feel safe enough to be vulnerable in front of each other, to reveal the parts of ourselves that those outside our circle may not respect (especially my own positionality as a diasporic Kanaka Maoli cis-female in a queered relationship), and to practice courageously speaking our truth. Native peoples have long endured inter-generational cultural trauma and in order to heal, we must find places and peoples where we can critically analyze the forces (both foreign and community) who who keep us from recovering our full ea, our life breath and sovereignty. Telling our stories ourselves, “talking story” or informally sharing our life struggles and laughing at our predicaments, encourages an openness.

We speak the truth of our lives. Yet with so much disruption, I continually question, *How will the land recognize me and know who I am?*

If a *sense* of connection is the goal (and also the means), how do you ho‘i i ka piko if you have been dispossessed of your ancestral lands, and you cannot find all the names in your genealogical lines? *What are the challenges and disruptions to your piko?* MANA recommends a contemporary solution: considering cultural practices as an access point, where more opportunities open up to develop a sense of belonging through praxis (MANA 19). A primary way we form identity and connection today is through cultural practices, including hula (traditional religious and cultural dance), mele, (music), mahi‘ai (farming), lawai‘a (fishing), hoe wa‘a (canoe paddling), kilo (star knowledge), and other customary activities that entail a continuity of ancestral wisdom. My two favorite practices are oli (chanting) and kapa making.

Since relationality is fundamental to Hawaiian life, pilina expresses those connections that sustain our ola and ea. In terms of applying the PIKO principle of pilina in story telling, we begin with the relationship of the author to the text and to the reader by investigating the writer’s positionality (locating their background and layers of privileges and oppressions), their insider/outsider cultural perspectives, (un)obvious biases, authoritative voice and ethos. We then explore each of our main and minor characters, including the land and non-human entities: *What kinds of relationships are highlighted in the text?* When crafting our own stories, we examine who our intended reader is and what our relationship is to that audience: *What expectations do we have of them as readers? Are they insiders who will apprehend cultural allusions of kaona (hidden knowledge)? Are they imaginative co-conspirators world building in their own minds toward a shared future? How does this writer-reader relationship build intimacy, belonging, and shared responsibility to the inherited wisdom and knowledge we have embedded in the text?*

‘Ike - knowledge

‘Ike (knowledge) production is important in today’s colonial context, since our language and many of our cultural carriers (like chants, stories and traditional practices) were intentionally erased, dismantled, and disparaged. Some definitions of **‘ike** from Pukui-Elbert include to see, know, recognize, perceive, experience. Knowledge from the ancestors is called *‘ike kūpuna* and seers are said to possess a kind of second sight, premonition, or visionary capacity called *‘ike pāpā lua*. Today, knowledge is studied in its systemic forms, which create a lense to see the world: including religious, mythological, scientific, Western Enlightenment. On the other hand, many families still recognize the particular inherited specialized knowledges cultivated for generations by meticulous study, like observing changes in the reef life or diagnosing illness in the body. Specialized family traits, called *welo*, can be passed down; these rare talents appear as inspired musical genius, or somehow knowing exactly where the fish are at any given time, or the ability to read cloud patterns and predict weather, or connect to the elements and foretell events. Knowledge keeping gets entangled with ethics especially in a colonial context. Western entitlement that insists it needs and deserves to know everything it desires does not settle well in Kana-ka thinking. For instance, some stories have been shared with me so I will deepen my understanding of a particular subject, but I do not have permission to share that information with anyone else. Not all knowledge is meant for everyone; cultural copyright and intellectual property

must be respected. A colonial history of relegating our ancestors to informants, theft of their knowledge, erasure of their labour, and a willful disruption of Kanaka knowledge continuity and replacement and assimilation to colonial paradigms have caused legacies of trauma.

How we know what we know is relevant, as our Native epistemologies and ontologies, or ways of knowing and being, have often been dismissed as antiquated or unscientific, despite generations of empirical data analysis which have informed our Kanaka sciences. From a PIKO perspective, our connections to the past and present, and to our place-based relations, intensify our na‘au-based knowledges. The na‘au is a felt region located in the stomach area associated with gut feelings, intuited knowing, warning messages. We can think of na‘au as a sixth sense beyond the usual five senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste). Since we perceive our world through sensory data, our ways of knowing and being are also tied to how our na‘au feels. Many Kanaka will do a *na‘au check* when making decisions, and will *go with the gut* more often than not. Reorienting ourselves to moving from the na‘au means a shift from Western paradigms of knowledge based in the head and love in the heart; for Kanaka, the na‘au is the seat of what is most valuable. When we are feeling disconnected from our piko, we experience an unsettling or churning in the na‘au; conversely, when we return to our center, we often feel physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually more in tune with our own bodies and the world around us.

Genealogies of ideas reveal continuities and disruptions. A guiding proverb states: *‘O wai ke kumu? Who/what is your source?* How and from where did you receive your information; how did you critically analyze its accuracy; and are you permitted to pass it on to others? When applying PIKO principles to ‘ike, I am fascinated with world views and linger on questions like: *Where/who did this idea come from? Does believing this story serve me? If we see things from this perspective now, what happens when we reorient to another point of view? What if we tell the same story from the younger brother’s perspective, or the villain’s, or the fool’s? What might we learn from their experience of the same phenomenon?* Furthermore, in the Kanaka world view, not all knowledge is meant for everyone. *How do I hold knowledges that are not meant to be shared outside this circle? What is my responsibility to this knowledge that has been generously shared with me?* Those fortunate enough to hear stories directly from kūpuna (elders) have a deep responsibility, or kuleana, to carry that wisdom with integrity.

Kuleana - responsibilities, rights, privileges, accountability

Kuleana is described as responsibilities, rights, privileges, and accountability. In ancestral times, kuleana was determined by mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogy), kūlana (rank), or hana (work), as a chief, priest, artisan, fisherman, farmer. When imagining kuleana, we can return to our petroglyph image of the piko: the closer to the center ring, the more intense the relation, and therefore, the stronger the kuleana bonds. Kuleana is a reciprocal relationality and so we are entangled in mutually beneficial ways that ensure our survival and encourage our growth. With accountability to our communities in mind, I ask: *How am I giving back to the communities that support me? How am I respectfully passing down what has been shared with me?*

Kuleana is also the word for our ancestral lands we tilled as farmers; the image serves to remind us that we were given as much land as we were able to make fruitful and productive. If we had a large family that could produce more, we were entrusted with larger land plots.

Kuleana connections to our birth sands (where we ho‘i i ka piko) have also ensured the survival of specialized knowledges of winds, rains, tidal patterns, prime fishing spots, and cultural life ways. Another important aspect of kuleana is that it is usually granted or bestowed to someone believed capable of increasing its mana (spiritual/material power/essence). You don’t necessarily choose kuleana, and I have heard elders warn not to pick up the end of a stick; you may feel the weight of the whole branch to carry, because you cannot pick and choose and many forms are life-long commitments. Lest we consider kuleana a burden, the beauty is the deepest belonging and interdependence it engenders. When we speak kuleana we invoke a language of reciprocity.

‘Ōlelo - Language

‘Ōlelo is the Kanaka Maoli word for language and I expand it to include multiple literacies within PIKO principles. Families with an inherited musical *welo*, can communicate through the language of music. Those who fish, paddle canoe, or surf have an ocean literacy; they intimately know the tidal patterns, currents, winds, rains, sea life of an area. Others read cloud like omens to predict storms. My ancestors were adept at reading environments and adapting to weather patterns in ways our contemporary conveniences allow us to ignore. There is also nonverbal communication and languages of emotions, art and aesthetics play into this area. A Hawaiian proverb states: *I ka ‘ōlelo ke ola, i ka ‘ōlelo ka make. In the word there is life, in the word there is death.* Famous chanters were known to sing to the elements and request a change in the weather, so powerful were their voices. Still throughout time, words have been the premiere cultural carrier through our chants and our stories and the ability to decode the ‘ike kūpuna and to find the kaona (hidden meanings) woven into them remains our greatest linguistic joy.

Yet today, many of our people do not have such access because our Hawaiian language was suppressed and eventually banned. The missionaries’ abolishing of Hawaiian language in the school system and government during the 19th century has caused innumerable challenges to our piko. Recovery efforts have increased, yet we have much work before all our people can speak our mother tongue fluently. Our culture lives in our native language, and archives full of newspapers and documents await our deciphering. There is so much work to be done that even if every single one of us took up the challenge, we would not run out of wisdom to cull. So in our contemporary creative writing, we cannot take for granted the choice of language or literacy. *What language is most effective to communicate my message or story?* We have many valid choices in Hawai‘i today and each of them have their political consequences: ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, pa‘i ‘ai or a mixed Hawaiian pidgin classified as Hawaiian Creole English (HCE), Hawaiian standard English (STE), American English, or another language from those arriving in our islands. Fortunately, now we are adding our own new stories to this continuum and someday the generations to come will be able to see how our resilience and perseverance to keep sharing our stories ensured our voices persisted and amplified.

Keeping both the kūpuna and the future generations in mind as audience members is a common practice for many Kanaka today. We write to change the narrative that only foreigners use the palapala (paper, writing) as opposed to only honoring our oral traditions, for we have continuously innovated and incorporated new technologies as we apprehended them. We write to make our kūpuna proud and to enjoy that inner dialogue during composition. Here on Mauna

Kea, I have taken to writing letters and have encouraged our writing groups to compose letters to our kūpuna as well as to the future generations. *What stories from the past do I share with my queer progeny to remind them that we have a long history of ‘aikane and punalua relations? Same-sex and nonmonogamous relationships were common practices for our kūpuna and if you allow them into your circle they many support you too. Moreover, how do I tell my story now to add to this continuum? How will my vulnerability within this brave space create more spaces so that others in the future no longer need to feel afraid to reveal their true and powerful voices?* Locating these past, future, and present stories in time and space creates relationships with those times and places. Sitting on the lava and writing my story opens up a portal of connection.

Place-based writing creates relationality with the non-human world in a tangible way. One of the writing practices I like to do here on the Mauna is to write from the perspective of nature. Select a natural phenomenon: *What do you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel inside and out?* Many of the elements surrounding me like the clouds, wind, raindrops, trees, and hills have a much longer memory than I do. Imagine the stories they could tell about all those who have passed through their domain. Today I am longing to climb the pu‘u hill, with its endangered ‘ohi‘a lehua forest and the paths carved down its sides that look perfect for a holua sled ride. I am fixated on a robust section of ‘a‘ali‘i (sapindaceae) shrubs. At about four feet tall they must have lived a long life already and have bloomed their spectrum of ruby, brick, pink, purple, reds and greenish-yellow flower buds season after season. As I watch the afternoon sun kiss them and admire their ability to bend in the virulent winds, I understand how they have come to represent the warriors in battle, a symbol of the resilience of our people through generations of cultural loss and trauma. As I lean into that experience of withstanding an onslaught of elemental forces, I recall my own strength to live in this wao akua (realm of the gods). Kanaka were not built to live here, and we must return to the wao kanaka (human realm, city life) when our struggles to protect our mauna are over; so I am filled with a sense of empowerment and steadfastness that this ‘a‘ali‘i plant has cultivated for thousands of years. My na‘au is full of gratitude for lessons in strength and resilience and I begin to select words for a poetic monologue, words that might capture the delicacy of rounded buds, smooth swirling lava like cake frosting, etched crevices that could swallow me, and razor pointed leaves to cut through colonialism.

Yet sometimes words do not come as quickly as we would like, so artistic literacies allow us to interface with the places we feel most connected to, our piko ‘āina. The most popular workshop I have offered on the mauna within the free and accessible Pu‘uhuluhulu University is called “Writing From the Piko.” After explaining the multiple elements of *PIKO Principles*, I set out rectangular pieces of crumpled brown paper bags (intended to simulate kapa cloth), various color ink pads, and popsicle sticks with foam-cut geometric shapes like chevrons, triangles, crescent moons, squiggled water marks. I allow students to make their own stamps if they are willing or they may select from mine. This art table invites curiosity, freedom, and enthusiasm and aims to bypass mental fears of “doing it right.” I instruct them to depict their piko ‘āina, the place they feel most connected to, in any way they choose: abstract geometrics, representational pictures (colored pens, crayons).

Place-making and meaning are woven into kuleana and belonging. Once our creative writing participants are finished with the art section, I have them journal about their piko ‘āina. I see that many of them have chosen to represent Mauna Kea and I resonate with the profound re-

relationships being built here. We put our kapa-like images in the center of the table. Then I ask for one or two volunteers to bravely show their image and describe it to the group. Next, I change the instructions and ask for someone to select one of the other pictures and to interpret it. After apprehension subsides, the volunteer will do their best to attend to the shapes and colors selected, and interpret that it might mean the rains falling over the ocean under a star filled night. Without allowing the artist to answer and explain themselves, we begin discussing the intellectual property rights of artists and writers. I ask, *What if I really love this pattern and I put it on my hat or my t-shirt or my body as a tattoo? Is that alright without getting permission from the creator? What about appreciation vs. appropriation? Or opposite, what if I have a very negative review of this piece and denigrate native crafts as not “real” art? Who gets to decide the value of what is beautiful and meaningful?* I remind them about the role of kuleana: *What is our kuleana to this knowledge, to the artist, to the community from which it evolves?* The discussion often dives deeply when we get to the story-telling part. *Why have others been allowed to tell our history and stories for us? How do we reclaim or develop an empowered writer voice? How do we create brave spaces to speak truth to power through critical analysis and creative writing practices? Is art enough or do we need to stand in a front-line action facing the weaponized police forces to make a difference through our voices?* As we work collaboratively, relational belonging increases and we are supported by this piko Mauna Kea.

Writing in this spacial context elicits deep feelings of na‘au truth. When I sense they are filling with emotion, we do a final writing exercise with the prompt: *I wish I could tell you.* I instruct them to say all the things they wish to express. Perhaps they will write about abiding love for sacred places; the deep wounded legacies of alienation from their ancestral family lands; their frustration, anger, helplessness to make the kinds of changes they wish to create. I encourage them to reflect on how it feels to have someone else tell your story for you. *How does it feel to be silenced? And then what is it like to finally have the opportunity to speak your truth?* I ask them to share with their neighbor; they may share a portion of what they wrote if they like, but I never make anyone divulge what they do not wish to reveal. Therefore, they might talk about the process of this workshop and how the exercises impacted their voice. Finally, we conclude by admiring our art, our stories, the lands around us that provided such inspiration, and the unseen elements that have joined us in our circle. As everyone leaves the place we have created together, I find a section of lava to sit and ground myself once more.

In synthesizing the PIKO principles, I imagine myself standing in the center of a piko petroglyph and I ask, *How do I connect with all these various levels? How do my creative decisions and actions ripple out through my family, community, and to the larger world? How can my words be harnessed to produce the maximum affect and effect. How can I use my creative work to empower others to make changes in their lives, and thus the world?* Although it begins with me, piko‘u, I recognize I am never alone and work in collaboration and interdependence with others, human and non, living here and in the Pō, creating ola and ea, life and sovereignty. When I return now to the na‘au, and I trust my ancestral wisdom that flows through me, I become part of that unending current. When I write from the piko, I am centered in the layers of connective cords that bind me, my ancestors, and all the generations to come.

Works Cited

MANA. *Movement Building For Ea: Participant Workbook*. Movement for Aloha No Ka ‘Āina, 2015.

Russell, Shona and Maggie Carey. “Remembering: Responding to Commonly Asked Questions.” *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*. No. 3. Adelaide, 2002.

White, Michael and David Epston. *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1990.