

*Forum*

## **A Convergence of Hands and Waters Weaving Relations and Resistances**

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On September 2, 2022, Theresa “Isa” Arriola and Jacinta “Cinta” Kaipat launched their “Affect and Colonialism” (AAC) virtual video project Everyday Life in an Imperial Archipelago from Germany (Arriola and Kaipat 2022a). Alongside their seven minute and thirty second video is a posted description that explains that:

[Their digital project] explores the varied, complex and ambivalent experiences of the Indigenous Chamorro and Refaluwasch peoples in an area of the Western Pacific that comprises a highly strategic location for United States military training and testing. We highlight the role of art and music in these everyday experiences alongside our engagement with the US Military’s many environmental plans that seek to alter our lands and cultural identities for generations to come. (Arriola and Kaipat 2022b)

Filipina Assistant Professor Rosa Cordillera Castillo, one of the AAC project coordinators, invited me to join with Isa Arriola for the panel discussion. In 2016, I had become friends with Castillo during a Berlin protest at the Brandenburg Gate. In 2022, she was crucial to my degree when on my PhD defense committee at Humboldt University of Berlin. The launch event was a storytelling evening for Arriola to introduce their website project (Affect and Colonialism 2022) and also included another friend, Māori poet, songwriter, and researcher Hinemoana Baker. My role was to engage with parts of my research on Hawai‘i-Philippines-Oceania and global climate justice solidarities, for which I theorized a “spirit of relationality” that revolves around spirit and “invisible” sources of knowledge and relations. It is also congruent with the Andean cosmology or relationality of *pacha* (spacetime) to other shores of the Pacific Ocean, a relationality invisible

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in explicit words but essential in ocean currents and to the PhD (Hermes 2022a). Before the virtual launch, Arriola explained she planned to share website videos featuring Kaipat's family singing and her own beading work depicting a fishnet (Arriola and Kaipat 2022c). These glass bead solidarity necklaces are called "protector lighatutuur" and represent a fishnet that captures Kaipat's knowledge converging in tiny beads, like teardrops to a whole network or story. Arriola also mentioned military chopper rotor blades, which can cause pressure impacts to ears and glass in the everyday of the Marianas (2022, personal communication). Accordingly, I decided to focus on ideas of sound and "invisible" echoes, but in the form of empirical colonial vibrations or reverberations, with my spirit of relationality theory. This theorization includes metaphors of a hand-knotted fishnet, ocean waters, and spaces in-between of "estuarine solidarities," with the estuary or the intertidal zone as a physical space and a spiritual metaphor for activist solidarities. The incentive to convey or theorize spirit came with Huey P. Newton's theory of Intercommunalism (2002; Banivanua-Mar 2016), an anti-capitalist anti-imperialist global solidarity that transcends or dislocates the concept of nation-states, especially in postcolonial or settler colonial contexts. I related these elements of my dissertation to island activisms, central to frame the physical (but not material absence) and the spiritual and energetic presence of Cinta Kaipat. I also connected with Berlin, Germany, as the place of our meeting and the site where my oceanic and estuarine activism and the doctoral dissertation and its defense were one and the same: an Intercommunalist community effort through waters that connect solidarities across continents. In this essay, I weave my reflections on the AAC *Everyday Archipelago* project and website while connecting to my own spirit/soul/mind in the context of my island activisms also beyond the Pacific. This convergence includes my consideration of select experiences from my PhD work channeled through questions Castillo provided to us before the panel discussion for the launch event. The four questions specifically addressed to me were:

1. Spirit of relationality "as key to climate action holding," that you connect with *aloha 'āina* and Hawaiian cosmology—Can you elaborate on this and how this relates to what Isa had shared in relation to the Northern Mariana Islands?
2. How do you think-feel-know with *'ike*, the Hawaiian word for knowing and seeing?
3. You write too that your dissertation is "an act of storytelling about the active sensory experience of my having been in or my relation to particular place." How do you mean this? How about the importance of poetry and metaphors in your work?
4. What is your connection/reaction to the music video?

Depicting my non-linear and affective approaches to writing, on the panel I began by answering the last question, referring to the "Falúw Kkaa Effäng" music video (Kaipat 2011). During the event, Arriola had explained how the song in Refaluwasch language was central to the website as "Arts of Resistance," and the song itself would often move the audience to tears (Arriola and Kaipat 2022d). On the panel, I did not mention to the public that when I first listened to the song and watched the music video at my desk at home, it had evoked the same teary reactions from me. At the time, I did not find it a fitting anecdote to share with the German audience, even one that was gathered in the space to "learn" about affect and colonialism. However, I find it a fitting

anecdote weaving as a metaphor to reflect on these panel discussion questions and the affective dimensions of Kaipat's beading.

In Castillo's multi-part first and third questions, she connected the AAC project to my dissertation and its methodologies. The third question quoted my dissertation where I state it is "an act of storytelling *about* the active sensory experience of my *having been in* or my *relation to* particular place" (Hermes 2022b, 188). Writing about being in relation to place, I was motivated by Kanaka Maoli activist Terri Keko'olani, who explains traveling to places across Oceania in order to *haku*, "weave," "braid," or "knot" feminist and decolonial relations against military imperialism (Cachola, Grandinetti, and Yamashiro 2019, 91). I was also stimulated by the initially incorrect yet meaningful error in Aimee Suzara's poem "Amphibious" (2020).

These people, both men and women, seem amphibious, and to be able to live on water as well as on the land, so well do they swim and dive. Five pieces of iron were thrown into the sea to them for the pleasure of seeing them exercise themselves. One of them was skillful enough to get all five of them, and in so short a time, that one can regard it as marvelous.

—Observations of indigenous Filipinos by the Dutch in 1600,  
from *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* by Antonio de Morga. (1609)

Focusing on colonial contact with islanders swimming in a bay, Suzara's poem opens with this epigraph from Antonio de Morga. However, the epigraph was never referring to what is now the Philippines. I originally thought it referred to liminal borderlands of the Malaysian and Indonesian archipelagoes but finally clarified it was about the Mariana Islands by finding the 1609 source referencing "Islas Ladrones" (de Morga 1609). I found myself asking, "But what is the nation-state, and what is one imperial force to another when the tides are in motion?" The Mariana Islands archipelago knows histories and contemporary iterations of US military dispossession—these places have colonial experiences similar to those of the Ryukyu Islands and Kaho'olawe in the Hawaiian Islands. Keko'olani speaks of traveling to other island places like Okinawa to *haku* relational stories. Though I wrote about the reclamation of Kaho'olawe through the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana, I was unable to travel there at that time. Instead, I focused on names and stories of Kaho'olawe and learned its significance as a place that is the embodiment of the ocean deity Kanaloa (Kanahele 1992). I situated my relational engagement with the Pacific Ocean itself as meaning-making through oceanic waters. Castillo's second question asked me about Hawaiian *'ike*, which emphasizes knowing something from seeing it. Importantly, it also means "to sense" and "to feel" (Meyer 2003a) and encompasses an inner knowing, intuitive, or multisensory affect, beyond seeing what could be "material" in existence. Considering manifold meanings, below I further highlight the sensing and feeling of invisible yet interpersonal affects/spirits that lead to knowing, understanding, *beliefs of care* that are part of the spirit of relationality that I advanced in my dissertation. Returning now to Castillo's first question from the panel event, I attend to how the spirit of relationality with its consideration of ocean waters and spaces in-between helps connect my own experiences and the AAC project.

Scuba-diving experiences explain being-*with* the ocean and learning from the breath and *ea* or “rising” of the manta ray (*hāhālua* or “two breaths” in Hawaiian) (Hermes 2022b, 207; Miner 2015). The words *ea* and *hā* translate into English as “breath,” but *ea* moreover conveys meanings of “sovereignty” and “life” (Goodyear-Ka’ōpua 2014). The Aloha ‘Āina protectors of Kaho‘olawe and their Hawaiian cultural “revival” in reclaiming the island of Kanaloa are central to understanding the foundation of the contemporary Aloha ‘Āina protectors of Mauna Kea that I began my social activism and doctoral research about. The role the island has played in invigorating Aloha ‘Āina in second and third generations since the 1970s depicts the genealogical and activist lineages to the contemporary Intercommunalism and global solidarities from Hawai‘i across the world since the Third World decolonization solidarities. Mauna Kea activism since 2015 has oscillated across Oceanic solidarities, re-invigorating waves of resistance to a Nuclear-Free Pacific and United Nations decolonization. This unity for demilitarizing and embracing diasporas and islanders—rather than divide Oceania and the Mariana Islands as colonizing borders had done—is emphasized by Arriola and Kaipat in “Marianas Unity” (Arriola and Kaipat 2022e). My multisensory relational practice to this specific island was through narratives of experiencing the ocean depths while scuba diving in the Philippines and in Hawai‘i. I consider the bay or estuary as an area that indexes a spacetime of relation. While estuaries are physical places that mix ocean with freshwater, they also provide a fitting metaphor that helps me reflect when interlinking the Indigenous encounters and resistance at Kealakekua Bay and at Kamay-Botany Bay, located in Hawai‘i and Australia, respectively. The Tagalog word *kamay* (hand) has led me to other meanings of the word, such as the notion of *kamay* as “vital energy” that is enacted in the Andes. These various understandings have become central to my meaning-making of experiences, time, and activism in and across islands and Oceania. Similar to how an estuary is an area of mixing waters, I mix these senses of the word *kamay* while also considering the physical space of the bay named Kamay in Sydney. Together, these ideas help me understand the dynamic spirit of relationality from various ocean waters to kinds of climate actions and activism. Seeds of the PhD defense presentation on Caribbean syncretisms and Haitian Vodou were catalyzed through chance conversations with Addy Adelaine on histories of Indigenous erasure about her Jamaican Taíno great-grandmother when she offered me a place to stay for an islands activist workshop in the UK: Building Transoceanic Solidarity Between the Pacific, the Caribbean, and the UK (Kanngieser and Sealey Huggins 2019).

The island activisms of Kamay-Botany Bay came to me through the relations that I made in Berlin during a NoDAPL action, the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, in 2016, coordinated by Red Haircrow (Black, Cherokee, and Chiricahua Apache), who become another friend crucial to my PhD defense. The waters of the estuaries, rivers, and lakes of the North American continent are connected through hydrological cycles, and the confluence analytics of Lenape theorist Joanne Barker (2019) coalesced to my subchapters on “The Waters Connect Us: Environmental Solidarity from Standing Rock to Berlin” and “Turtle Island Solidarities and Waters that Bind Beyond the Continents,” to more expansively reach across in “Wansolwara: ‘One Saltwater’ Oceanic Solidarity” (Hermes 2022b).

Furthermore, it was the storytelling of activist Roxley Foley (Gumbaynggirr), with his focus on repatriation of Aboriginal remains and artifacts and decolonizing European museums, who built the relations across the seas for me. A spirit of relationality was key to recognizing the convergence of these various solidarity actions and activism across spaces, and *kamay* played a significant part:

This Berlin location was a transient spacetime which built engagement and Intercommunalist actions from thereon. We exchanged stories of coloniality to cultivate resistance through inter/communal care between Standing Rock, Maunakea, and in Roxley Foley's case the Gweagal Shield repatriation. The convergence was so brief in the actual place of the Clayallee, . . . Google Maps now depicts *a five-fingered artificial lake* in this location. This lake as artificial and new as it may be, stands in the alternate imagery of the "working together" or *laulima*—of five fingers on a hand or a group of people working in collaboration—which has been *kaona* or metaphor of the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana in the 1970s, or the themes I interpreted in the estuarine, fishpond, and growth for abundance poetry. (Hermes 2022b, 300)

This excerpt from my dissertation also resonates with Manu Aluli Meyer's move for *'ike pono* (righteous knowledge), which sets intentions for purpose and action (Meyer 2003b, 32). I lamented the lack of written or philosophical scholarship on Philippine knowing-being, so I made efforts to address this and grappled with reappropriating German theorists as "intellectual ancestors" in my writing (Teaiwa 2021). The process was symbiotic, like the mixing of meanings and spirits of place into colonial frameworks, or the saltwater and freshwater in the estuary.

Returning to the AAC event, viewing Kaipat's video reminds me about bringing in various spirits whose languages I do not speak, like the Haitian Creole ones that had sustained my PhD defense. The storytelling soundwaves are moving in both material and metaphysical ways; it prompts an affective reaction or theorizing, even when I cannot understand the language of the stories being told. The lyrical vibrations cause sensory meaning-making and *'ike*—a belief in candor or clarity of *knowing from sensing* a "spirit" that urges its transcendent meaning to relate *beyond* words. By the time of the AAC event, it was clear that we were connected through knowledges and relations; I use this spirit of relationality to consider how we shared our activism and how the ocean waters connected us to each other and through the multiple meanings of *kamay*—holding us and our spirit or energy. My experiences throughout islands in Oceania and the doctoral degree in Berlin are now curatively overlaid by this AAC event, and the relations built with those who attended, much like the singular event of *laulima* relations through the Berlin NoDAPL action in 2016, had catalyzed estuarine solidarities. That I know Castillo from a Philippine protest in Berlin, that I met Baker through social media when calling out German colonial perspectives on the Pacific/Hawai'i, and that Arriola and I realized we had numerous mutual relations from our overlapping but divergent time at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa all played a role in the metaphorical fishnets connecting and holding our shared spacetime of this event. Although Kaipat herself could not attend, I was weaving her simultaneous physical absence and virtual presence. For example, I mentioned during the panel discussion that I kept reminding myself not to pronounce her name as if it sounded the same as the word *cinta* of "love" in Bahasa

Indonesia. Kaipat's protector lighatutuur, one of which Arriola was wearing, is an example of her material storytelling by showcasing beadwork and solidarity from a Refaluwasch perspective. But the necklace also reflects an Intercommunalist energetic/spiritual relation that Kaipat brings to others when gifting these with her stories.

Hinemoana Baker reweave *aloha* in sound and breath from the audience with a spontaneous Māori *mihi*, or "honoring invocation," for our panel. This offered another sensory dimension to connect us in the shared space. Seeing and listening are practices that can be very specific to attunement or hypersensitivity, and this event sought to create space for the spiritual in equilibrium to the material—much like how equilibrium occurs in the motion of waters. Considering the estuary or the spirit and the meaning or value of communities to it, and reflecting on the AAC event dialogue with Arriola and Castillo, offers me a deeper understanding of relationality. I was invited to share my experiences with Aloha 'Āina, and the event provided the opportunity to further my Oceanic connections with Arriola and Baker.

The AAC illustrates the ways that resistances to colonial violence and openness to affect can weave together. When joining hands, our collective energies and forces are stronger against colonialism and militarism. The event participants, Castillo, Arriola, and Baker, all shared their active *belief in* and *care for* my own work. This collective response also signifies the power of metaphors and multiple meanings from the estuary, *kamay*, and *laulima* that help understand activism as they manifest across islands and how our resistance is synthesized in a spirit of relationality. As eclectic as these examples are—from my dissertation work, Indigenous relations, activism, and solidarity about militarism and climate justice (Hermes 2022b, 291), as well as music/sound—in their unweaving, it is as if removing single beads from a lighatutuur: tricky. More so than reknitting fishnets, as each teardrop bead tells its story of hands and ancestral skillsets. This project has had a personal effect on me, facilitating processes of personal healing from my experiences with colonial abuse. The AAC digital project "brings together researchers, journalists, activists, and artists all over the world interested in the affective dynamics of colonialism," (<https://affect-and-colonialism.net>). This emphasis provides a way to connect and share about the care and community work involved in addressing structures of violence. I encourage engagement with Arriola and Kaipat's Everyday Life in an Imperial Archipelago website to connect with their work that is "exploring Islander-oriented perspectives with militarism and colonialism in the Northern Mariana Islands through music, storytelling, art and photography" (Arriola and Kaipat 2022a.). The section on "Arts of Resistance" weaves together interoceanic resistances and provides a self-reflexive activism that amplifies artists from across the Northern Mariana Islands, throughout Micronesia to Hawai'i, and throughout Polynesia. Moving beyond their own personal stories, they are extending collective hands to restorative affect with their outreach from Berlin.

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