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# AFTERWORD: IS THE OCEAN A METAPHOR? ON THE OCEANIC TURN, ASIAN SETTLER COLONIALISM, AND FILIPINX STUDIES IN HAWAI‘I

Katherine Achacoso

In 2006, Kānaka Maoli activist Haunani Kay Trask published her field changing article on “Settlers of Color and Immigrant Hegemony.”<sup>1</sup> Intervening into previous literature on local culture and Asian diasporic experiences in Hawai‘i, Trask’s essay trenchantly provides theoretical language to understand both the politics of Indigeneity and the role of Asian settlers in participating in settler colonial processes of Native dispossession.<sup>2</sup> Tracing her mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogy) to Papahānaumoku and Kanaka’s first ancestor Hāloa, Trask provides language to specify Kānaka Maoli’s genealogical relationship to ka pae ‘āina o Hawai‘i.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, Trask clearly speaks back against the confluences made in literature on Hawai‘i Asian im/migrants/Locals highlighting the legal, genealogical, and political differences between Asian immigrant movements to gain minority rights and global movements to reassert Native sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> Written in response to the rise of Asian settlers in American settler statecraft and in the aftermath of statehood, Trask provides us the language to critique local Asian settler politics of liberal inclusion as well as Asian settler desires to claim Hawai‘i through everyday habits that normalize American settler presence in the archipelago.<sup>5</sup> In her work, Trask uses the term “settler,” and more particularly “settlers of color,” as a call for more intersectional methodologies in thinking about interlapping structures of power between Kanaka and Asian settlers.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent publications like those of Candace Fujikane, Dean Saranillio, Eiko Kosasa, and Jonathan Okamura’s work build from Trask’s trenchant scholarship expanding Asian settler colonialism as a methodology to consider the anti-colonial possibilities of remapping Kānaka Maoli histories with transnational Asian diasporic histories of colonization and racialization.<sup>7</sup> Particularly relevant to

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1. Haunani Kay Trask, “Settlers of Color and Immigrant Hegemony,” *Amerasia* 26.2 (2000): 1-3.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. Ida Yoshinaga and Eiko Kosasa, “Local Japanese Women for Justice (LJWJ) Speak Out against Daniel Inouye and the JACL,” in *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai‘i*, Edited by Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008, 294-394; Dean Itsuji

this special issue, Saranillio's work, in an attempt to reorient Filipinx settlers towards solidarity with Kanaka, turns towards the history of "colonial amnesia" in the Philippines and the Filipinx diaspora to address and critique Filipinx investments in the so-called United States.<sup>8</sup> In weaving together anti-imperial critiques in the Philippines and Hawai'i, he powerfully gestures to the decolonial potentiality of thinking through intersecting colonial histories in both colonies.<sup>9</sup> His work also meaningfully exemplifies the possibilities of place-based activism and meaningful engagements with Indigeneity and Native movements for sovereignty. Recounting the Filipina-run group Urban Babaylan's organizing in attempt to stop the building of military bases from Waiāhole-Waiakane to Mindanao, he gestures to the decolonial potentiality of reimagining Filipinx and Kanaka relationalities in ways that decenter the so-called United States.<sup>10</sup>

In thinking about the call for an "oceanic turn" in Filipinx Studies in occupied Hawai'i, I invoke this genealogy of Asian settler colonial literature to provide a cautionary disclaimer in mobilizing oceanic methodologies within the field. While editing the special issue, I encountered many troubling interpretations of the "oceanic" which I believe reproduce settler colonial histories of erasure in Hawai'i and more broadly Oceania. For instance, in reading the call for papers, some scholars and community members interpreted "the oceanic" as an attempt to reclaim our Austronesian heritages. Others have used the special issue to argue for us to be rightfully placed within the field of Pacific studies, even claiming that Filipinx are Pacific Islanders as

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Saranillio, "Colonial Amnesia: Rethinking Filipino "American" Settler Empowerment in the U.S. Colony of Hawai'i," in *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i*, Edited by Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008, 256-258; Candace Fujikane, "Introduction," in *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i*, Edited by Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008, 2-4

Also see Grace Caligtan, Melisa Casumbal-Salazar, and Darlene Rodrigues "Filipinos Stand in Solidarity with Native Hawaiians in Opposing United State Military Expansion in Hawaii and the Philippines," In *Major Problems in Asian American History*, Edited by Lon Kurashige and Alice Yang, Cengage Learning 2015; Ellen Rae Cachola, "Reading the Landscape of US Settler Colonialism in Southern O'ahu," *Ferral Feminisms* 4 (2015): 51-64; Grace Caligtan, "Ii, Biaay, Daga," in *Pinay: Culture Bearers of the Filipino Diaspora*, Edited by Virgie Chattergy and Pepi Nieva (2017); Candace Fujikane, *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future*, Durham: Duke Univeresity Press, 2021; Dean Saranillio, *Alternative Histories of Hawai'i Statehood*, Duke University Press, 2019; Karen Kosasa, "Critical Sites/Sights: Art Pedagogy and Settler Colonialism in Hawai'i," University of Rochester dissertation, 2002; Kara Hisatake, "Queer Pidgin: Unsettling U.S. Settler Colonialism in Hawai'i's Language Politics," UC Santa Cruz Dissertation, 2019; Candace Fujikane, "Asian American critique and Moana Nui 2011: securing a future beyond empires, militarized capitalism and APEC," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 13, no. 2 (2012); Katherine Achacoso, Candace Fujikane, Cynthia Franklin, and Vernadette Gonzalez, "Allyship" in the Mauna Kea Syllabus Project, Edited by Māhealani Ahia, Katherine Achacoso, Gregory Pōmaika'i Gushiken, Uahikea Maile, and leilani portillo, *Hawai'i Review*, <https://www.maunakeasyllabus.com/units/cultivating-solidarities/allyship>

evident in our “oceanic origins.” In encountering these interpretations of the oceanic turn, I felt it necessary in this afterword to clarify and provide a caution to trouble the usage of the oceanic in Filipinx Hawai‘i scholarship to unsettle colonial mappings and claims towards the Pacific that I interpret as “settlers move towards innocence.”<sup>11</sup> In engaging with the oceanic and thinking about the specificity of using oceanic methodologies in the context of living in the Pacific, I am thus arguing that it is problematic to impose colonial remapping of Filipinx and Pacific islander relations that undermine native Pacific relationalities and are also predicated on broad assumptions of all Philippine ethnicities, which have differing relationships to various Philippine ecologies (#notallFilipinxareoceanic #FilipinxarenotPacific Islander).

In invoking the oceanic to think about diasporic experiences in Hawai‘i, I am personally not interested in using the oceanic as a marker for identity, but rather I find the oceanic useful as a methodology to consider how geography, region, and place shape diasporic experiences and more importantly visions for decolonization. In particular, I am interested in how living in Oceania—a region that is informed as Epeli Hau‘ofa writes by Indigenous roots and routes of mobility, genealogy, and relationality—shapes diasporic Filipinx experience and histories of migration, racialization, and decolonial organizing.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in turning

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11. Eve Tuck describes “settler moves to innocence,” as an attempt to deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land (11).” See Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity Education & Society*, 1, no.1 (2012): 1-40.

12. Epeli Hau‘ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no.1 (1994): 148-161. For a short list on relevant Native Pacific scholarship in Oceania see also Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, “Indigenous Oceanic Futures: Challenging Settler Colonialism and Militarization,” in *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education*, Edited by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, Routledge, 2019; Katerina Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island, Stories of People and Phosphate*, Indiana University Press, 2014; Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa, *Sweat and Salt Water: Selected Works*, Edited by Katerina Teaiwa, April K. Henderson and Terrence Wesley Smith, University of Hawai‘i Press 2021; Emalani Case, *Everything Ancient Was Once New*, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2021; Nalani Wilson Hokūwhitu, *The Past Before Us: Mo‘okūauhau as Methodology*, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2019; Joyce Pualani Warren, “Genealogizing Pō: The Relational Possibilities of Blackness in the Pacific,” *Ethnic Studies Review*, 44, no.3 (2021): 7-16; Tracey Banivanua Mar, “Settler Colonial Landscape and Narratives of Possession,” in *The Settler Complex Recuperating Binarism in Colonial Studies*, Edited by Patrick Wolfe, UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2013; Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the ends of Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 2019; Joy Enomoto, “Where Will You Be? Why Black Lives Matter in the Hawaiian Kingdom” *Ke Kaupu Hehiale*, <https://hehiale.com/2017/02/01/where-will-you-be-why-black-lives-matter-in-the-hawaiian-kingdom/>; Leora Kava, “Pulse in the Atlas: Liberation Embodied in Pacific Islander Movement,” *Amerasia* 46, no.1 (2021): 79-83; Craig Santos Perez, Kathy Jetnil Kijiner, and Lera Kava, *Indigenous Pacific Islander Eco-Literature*, University of Hawai‘i, 2022; Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, “Re-Presenting Melanesia: Ig-noble Savages and Melanesia Alter-Natives,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 27, no. 1 (2015): 110-145; Evelyn Flores and Craig Santos Perez, *Indigenous Literatures from Micronesia*, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2019; Kahala Johnson and Māhealani Ahia, *A Breath of Ea, Submergent Strategies for Deepening the Hawaiian Diaspora*, *Shima* 16, no.1 (2022).

towards Oceania, I am proposing—as many of the pieces in this special issue exemplify—the oceanic turn as an extension of the vast body of literature on Asian settler colonialism that has advocated for an attentiveness to the politics of place and region. While Hawai‘i occupies its own privileged position in terms of visibility within Oceania, an oceanic turn in Filipinx Hawai‘i recognizes the small and big currents that transverse and connect Hawai‘i to the broader regional politics of Moana Nui.<sup>13</sup>

Such an engagement with oceanic methodologies that roots and routes our conversations with an attentiveness to Native Pacific Indigeneities marks an important and intentional methodological shift that expands previous usages of oceanic metaphors in Filipinx/American Studies. In diasporic Filipinx scholarship, oceanic metaphors have been useful to map diasporic experiences, migration, identity, and entanglements with US empire as evident in scholarly engagements with the “American Pacific,” the transpacific,” and “Filipino crosscurrents.” These publications, like those of Allan Isaac, Christine Balance, and Kale Fajardo (among many others) are useful to consider the complex processes of Filipinx negotiations and dis/articulations with the flow of capital, culture, and peoples moving across the Pacific.<sup>14</sup> These publications are also useful to highlight the centrality of oceans within American colonial visions of empire and meta-imperial archipelagic formations. However, in the context of Hawai‘i, as a strange nexus that exists between US empire and the vast oceanic geographies of Oceania, many of the articles in the special issue challenge us to think more carefully about oceans, *not as metaphors for transits of US migration and diasporic fluidity*, but also as a robust Native region that goes beyond transpacific currents and exists within numerous *au* (currents), that flow between islands, places, and spatialities across Moana nui. The articles in this special issue thus invoke oceanic methodologies to consider the complex racial and Native geographies that make up Oceania and do not map easily within US colonial imaginaries. Decentering continental approaches to oceanic methodologies, it attends to the differing politics of race, Indigeneity, and (anti)-Blackness in the region. At the same time, it considers the vast roots and routes of Native relationalities, genealogies, and cosmologies that make up Pacific worlds, and are rooted in the

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13. I recognize that there are limitations to the term “moana nui” since it is a term predominantly used in Polynesia but not does necessarily travel to other parts of the Pacific.

14. Christine Balance, *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016; Kale Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, 2011; Kale Fajardo, “Queering and Transing the Great Lakes,” *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 20, no.1 (2014): 115-140; Allan Isaac, *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America*, University of Minnesota, 2006; see also Steven McKay, “Filipino Sea Men: Identity and Masculinity in a Global Labor Niche,” in *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions*, Edited by Rhacel Parrenas and Lok Siu (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2007).

materialities of being and coming from oceans and (is)lands. In doing so, these articles thus respond to Teresia Teaiwa's commentary on Diaspora and Native Studies through attending to the intersections as well as differences between diasporic and Native movement and mobility.<sup>15</sup> In her work of retheorizing the native as an "open signifier" for numerous forms of connections and kinships across Oceania, she exemplifies the intersections as well as differences between diasporic studies and Pacific Indigeneities, to make room for conversations while attending to the s/Pacific genealogies, spatialities and places that make up what Hau'ofa describes as a "sea of islands" in Oceania.<sup>16</sup>

In the next section to illustrate the decolonial potential of an oceanic turn in Filipinx Studies, I propose a more intentional engagement with the oceanic not just as a metaphor that transits the Pacific. Instead, in expanding Asian settler colonial commitments to methodologically disorienting US empire through attending to the politics of place (and I would also add region), I challenge diasporic Filipinx Hawai'i scholarship to consider how our usages of the oceanic might meaningfully attend to the vast politics of Oceania. In doing so, I want to emphasize that "oceanic" to me is not an assumed positionality or subjectivity that emerges simply via being diasporic/Filipinx in Hawai'i/Oceania (which I would argue is shaped by complex negotiations with what Kaleikoa Ka'eo describes as "settlerisms"), but rather, the oceanic turn is an intentional emerging praxis and methodological approach that is used to reimagine the decolonial potentiality of being in relation to the oceans, wai, and 'āina we live on and are in relation to. The next three examples taken from the special issue attempt to speak against the ocean as a transiting metaphor to imagine the complex worldings that might emerge through a more intentional engagement with the vast politics of Oceania.

### ***Oceanic Methodologies and Filipinx Hawai'i Activism/Scholarship***

In 2020, a Filipinx collective of Hawai'i-based academics and community activists organized the "Hoy Get Out of the Sun Series" in response to the global movement to protect Black lives. In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police, Hawai'i became one site of community mobilization to address a global climate of anti-Blackness that crossed the Atlantic and the Pacific. Hawai'i's unique location, inhabiting a nexus of U.S. and Pacific relations raised numerous questions about how anti-Blackness and Blackness operated in the context of occupied Hawai'i. As Filipinx organizers, who wanted to instigate Filipinx community conversations on the intersections

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15. Teresia Teaiwa, "Native Thoughts: A Pacific Studies Take on Cultural Studies and Diaspora," in *Indigenous Diaspora and Locations*, edited by Graham Harvey and Charles Thompson, Routledge, 2005.

16. *Ibid.*

between anti-Blackness, Blackness, and Indigeneity in Oceania, the Philippines, and the Filipinx diaspora in Hawai'i, we sought to create programming that attended to the numerous racial and Indigenous geographies that shaped the climate of anti-Blackness within Filipinx communities in Hawai'i and more broadly Oceania.

Decentering US continental approaches to Black and Asian solidarities, the series began first with highlighting the transnational intersections between discourses of anti-Indigeneity and anti-Blackness in the Philippine archipelago. Marie Ramos, Grace Caligtan, and I mapped how anti-black and anti-Indigenous discourses were historically used to racialize Filipinos under US occupation and how they were also used to create hierarchies among various Philippine ethnicities. Ramos in particular as a diasporic Kankanaey (Igorot)/Ilokano community organizer, described how Indigenous peoples in the Philippines continue to be racialized within proximities to Blackness and how this fear of "Black bodies" continues to replicate anti-native sentiment that has material impacts in terms of Native dispossession in the Philippines.<sup>17</sup> In centering conversations in response to Filipinx in Hawai'i, the series also unpacked how these discourses map onto Hawai'i, where there is a sizable Filipinx population and where anti-Native and anti-Black sentiment is reproduced by Filipinx communities that often internalize harmful behavior towards diasporic Indigenous Philippine peoples in the Philippines and diaspora.

In weaving together how discourses of anti-Blackness in occupied Hawaiian territories also mapped onto Filipino migrants, the series also complicated our understanding of the numerous complexities of anti-Blackness in Filipinx communities in Hawai'i through highlighting the histories of how Filipinx were historically racialized through discourses of anti-Blackness. Demiliza Sagalar Saramosing, Ellen-Rae Cachola, and Nadezna Ortega recounted the forgotten histories of lynching and policing of Filipinx Hawai'i communities, describing how racialized tropes that stem from US imaginaries on the continent were used to target, discipline, and punish Filipinos. In thinking about the contemporary context of the movement to protect Black lives, the series also made important connections highlighting how diasporic Micronesian communities are racialized through discourses of anti-Blackness that inform contemporary policing infrastructure. The series thus attempted to intersectionally map the complex racial and Native geographies of anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity, joining Kānaka Maoli activists' calls to think about Black Lives Matter in Hawai'i as an issue intrinsically tied to Native movements for sovereignty across Oceania.

Building from this, in turning towards Oceania and oceanic futurities, the series reoriented oceanic methodologies to consider how the decolonial politics of the Native Pacific might shape Filipinx organizing. In thinking about decolonial futurities and decolonial

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17. Kankanaey can also be spelled Kankana-ey.

relations, the series attempted to integrate and grapple with Kānaka Maoli visions of oceanic solidarity while also highlighting the complexities of Native Pacific articulations of Blackness as a site of creation, cosmology, and re-emerging. In particular, recounting Kānaka Maoli authors Joy Enomoto and Joyce Pualani Warren's theorization of pō as the cosmological origin from which Hawaiians trace their mo'okū'auhau (ancestry), the series attempted to open a space in relation to Black Pacific thinkers, in order to reimagine different oceanic visions of decolonization, blackness, and abolition.<sup>18</sup> In doing so, the series submerged Filipinx critiques within the context of Native Pacific politics, refuting the notion of Oceania as an empty site of transit.

Similarly, many other pieces in this special issue turned towards oceanic methodologies to consider how being located in Oceania informs different contemporary Filipinx organizing and place-based solidarity. Malaya Caligtan-Tran's work, for instance, highlights the place-based specificity of diasporic Igorot experiences in Hawai'i, noting the complicities as well as sites of potentiality for trans-Indigenous solidarity with Kānaka Maoli . Within their work they describe how, in occupied Hawai'i, diasporic Igorots often travel through circuits of military service as a result of the role of American militarization in the Philippines. They ask, how then do diasporic Igorot who call Hawai'i home learn from land-based struggles in the Pacific to unsettle everyday settlerisms that are embedded in US-Philippine migration and diaspora? Caligtan-Tran mobilizes the oceanic not as an identity to claim themselves as part of Oceania, or even to call diasporic Igorots oceanic. Rather, they use the oceanic as a method to consider how lessons and relationships they formed in growing up on this 'āina (land/that which feeds) shaped their understanding of the potentiality of trans-Indigenous relationalities. In their work, recounting the story of a hui (collective) of diasporic Igorots offering ho'okupu at Pu'uhuluhulu at Maunakea during the 2019 action to protest the building of the Thirty Meter Telescope, they reflect on how Kānaka Maoli movements to protect 'āina ignited trans-Indigenous solidarity amongst diasporic Igorots who were reminded of similar investments in protecting Native lands and waters. Their piece eloquently points to the kinds of decolonial visions oceanic movements in Hawai'i sparked in thinking about Filipinx and Indigenous Philippine movements for self-determination. Caligtan-Tran's work opens the possibility of trans-Indigenous exchange that opens up these new decolonial worldings.

Similarly, Ellen-Rae Cachola's work builds from lessons being raised in occupied Hawai'i to consider how oceanic movements for demilitarization and decolonization inform transnational Filipinx organizing on O'ahu. Drawing from the Filipinx archive she curated at Hamilton Library at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, she highlights various examples of Filipinx settlers on O'ahu who organize and learned from demilitarization movements in the Pacific to exemplify

how lessons learned from other militarized island communities inform diasporic Filipinx critiques of US occupation in the Philippines.

Both Caligtan-Tran and Cachola, who are notably involved in relational praxes of working, organizing, and theorizing with Kānaka Maoli activists, scholars, and artists, ethically enter into thinking through oceanic methodologies through a careful process of unsettling colonial mappings of Hawai'i and more broadly the Pacific. Caligtan-Tran and Cachola importantly note that these forms of solidarity are not assumed, but rather emerge from an intentional pivoting towards Native Pacific methodologies that are predicated on careful listening and learning. I invoke these two examples from the special issue to highlight the limitations of the use of the oceanic as a metaphor to talk about all forms of diasporic mobility to urge Filipinx scholarship to consider what it means to engage meaningfully with the relational ethics of Native Pacific Studies. In this regard, I am wary of using the ocean as only a metaphor to map all diasporic movement, because I question whether it reproduces the very colonial erasures that Native Pacific scholars have been arguing against all along.

### ***Towards Being Good Relatives: On Diasporic Filipinx Settler Erasures, Conflations, and Futurities***

I want to end this short afterword with ruminations on the meaning of the oceanic turn by recounting a panel in which leilani portillo, Kahala Johnson, Ellen-Rae Cachola, Lorenzo (Lolo) Perillo, and I participated for the Center for Pacific Islands Studies conference at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (2019). In responding to yet another round of Filipinx claims to the Pacific on Twitter, as Filipinx scholars (some of whom are Filipinx and Pacific Islander—Kahala and Leilani are Kānaka Maoli ; Lolo is Tongan) located in Hawai'i, we reflected on Filipinx proximities to the Pacific and the problematic usages of oceanic methodologies that conflated Filipinx and Kānaka Maoli experiences. In our panel, responding to Filipinx desires to reclaim a pre-colonial identity that is predicated on colonial anthological mappings that presume our shared Austronesian roots, as Filipinx scholars we critiqued the constant desire to conflate diasporic Filipinx identity with Oceania. I noted that rather than wanting to claim uniformity as colonized peoples, perhaps it might be more productive to think more complexly about where our histories connect and where they diverge. I elaborated that there have been numerous times where Filipinx have not been good relatives to Pacific Islanders and that there are vast epistemological, cosmological, and ontological differences between Filipinx and Pacific peoples that trouble synonymous usages of the oceanic metaphor. Thus, while there is an impulse to rush towards solidarity, there is still so much relationship building needed to enact those deep relationalities that acknowledge our differences. leilani portillo also noted that even going beyond Hawai'i, which is often used as a signifier for Filipinx

relations to the Pacific, there is a much larger conversation needed amongst Pacific Islanders to think through oceanic relations in ways that encompass and hold the complexity of the Native cartographies, genealogies, and experiences across Oceania.

As a conclusion to this special issue, I want to end with portillo's and my comment to be caustious when using the term "oceanic" in Oceania to foreground that there is still so much learning necessary to ethically engage oceanic relations in Hawai'i and across Oceania. A turn towards the oceanic should be approached with care to acknowledge there is so much work to be done to bridge ethical, meaningful conversations with Native Pacific Islanders in Hawai'i and across the Pacific. Thus, rather than running towards the oceanic to assert solidarity, similarity, and cultural hybridity, perhaps it would be more useful to ease into the oceanic turn by carefully mapping where currents intersect and become muliwai, and where they exist as parallel and/or where they depart.