

Reading Erasures and Making the Familiar Strange: Defamiliarizing Methods for Research in Formerly Colonized and Historically Oppressed Communities

by Julie Kaomea

In this article the author uses an example from a Hawaiian education program in postcolonial Hawai'i to argue that educational investigations into the colonialist and oppressive tendencies of schooling, in Hawai'i and elsewhere, should employ defamiliarizing analytic tools borrowed from literary and critical theory to peel back familiar, dominant appearances and expose previously silenced and potentially disturbing accounts of the oppressive conditions in our schools. With the use of these defamiliarizing tools we see that within the context of historically oppressed and traditionally marginalized communities, seemingly benign or progressive instructional efforts can have unanticipated, counterproductive effects. Moreover, we find that even the most well-intentioned teachers and administrators can unwittingly be complicit in the operation and perpetuation of oppressive hegemonic dynamics.

In the Native Hawaiian tradition of *ha'i mo'olelo* or Hawaiian storytelling, I begin this article with a small-scale, locally based story drawn from my personal observations and experiences working and researching in an elementary school community in postcolonial Hawai'i. While my story begins locally, its message speaks to all educational researchers working in formerly colonized or historically oppressed communities across the globe.

At a quarter of 11 on a bright Monday morning, an elderly Native Hawaiian¹ woman enters an elementary school campus in Honolulu, Hawai'i. She is a regal looking woman, dressed in a long, flowing *mu'umu'u* (loosely fitted Hawaiian print dress), with a *'ukulele* under her arm, an overstuffed bag on her shoulder, and a *lau hala* (plaited pandanus leaf) hat on her elegantly graying head. She makes her way across campus, smiling and exchanging embraces and warm greetings of "Aloha!" with the students, teachers, and administrators she meets in the halls. As she rounds the corner and approaches the open doorway of her scheduled fourth-grade classroom, she finds a class of 25 smiling students anxiously awaiting her arrival. "*Kupuna! Kupuna!*"² they cheer as they jump from their seats to shower her with hugs. "*Aloha kakahiaka, kamali'i* [Good morning, children]," she says warmly. "*Aloha kakahiaka, kupuna* [Good morning, *kupuna*]," the students reply, and so their Hawaiian studies lesson begins.

Such heartwarming encounters are typical of what I witnessed during my initial visits with eight *kūpuna* teaching in the Native Hawaiian elder program that brings the Native Hawaiian culture to Hawai'i's youngsters through the state's public elementary schools. Although each *kupuna* I met with varied in age, gender, and teaching style, all of my initial encounters with *kūpuna*, teachers, students, and administrators involved in the program painted a positive picture of a thoughtfully constructed multicultural education effort that reunites Hawaiian elders with Hawai'i's youth while exposing the youth to valuable lessons in the Native Hawaiian culture.

Contextual Background

The Hawaiian studies *kupuna* program was started in 1980 to offer assistance to Hawai'i's predominately Japanese-American and Caucasian classroom teachers who were inadequately prepared to fulfill a 1978 state constitutional mandate requiring multicultural instruction in the culture, history, and language of the indigenous people of Hawai'i. During the 85 years between the United States' forcible overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 and the passing of this Hawaiian education mandate in 1978, the Native Hawaiian language had been banned from Hawai'i's public schools, and the mention of Hawaiian culture in the schools was virtually nonexistent. With this grassroots-inspired state legislation, however, these colonial educational policies were finally reversed, and regular instruction in Native Hawaiian culture, history, and language became a mandatory requirement for all of Hawai'i's public schools.

This mandate for multicultural instruction in the indigenous culture of the native people of Hawai'i coincided with the emergence of political movements throughout the United States that aimed to increase the visibility of traditionally marginalized and underrepresented groups in museums, movie houses, mainstream broadcasting, and course syllabi (Phelan, 1993). During the 1970s and 1980s, curricula from kindergarten to college nationwide were undergoing revision to more adequately reflect non-European and non-White contributions to American history and culture. The Hawai'i state curriculum was no exception.

Consistent with recommendations of American multicultural education programs that encourage teachers and administrators of dominant cultural backgrounds to utilize the multicultural knowledge and expertise of community elders and cultural experts, when searching for community members who might be able to assist with the fulfillment of this new Hawaiian studies mandate, the Hawai'i Department of Education turned to community *kūpuna*.

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With the Native Hawaiian language and traditional cultural practices on the brink of extinction and classroom teachers of Native Hawaiian ancestry severely underrepresented in Hawai'i's schools, state education officials made arrangements to supplement the classroom teachers' Hawaiian studies instruction with weekly visits from Native Hawaiian elders. Exceptions were made to the Hawai'i Department of Education's mandatory retirement age for teachers, and school districts began hiring Hawaiian *kūpuna* from the community as part-time teachers to assist with the implementation of this newly mandated curriculum.

Since the first pilot *kupuna* program in 1980–1981, Native Hawaiian elders have become a pivotal part of the Hawaiian studies curriculum. According to students, teachers, principals, and district specialists who speak highly of the program, the *kūpuna* are “invaluable resources” in the teaching of the Hawaiian culture and language and also bring a special feeling of “warmth and aloha” to the elementary school classrooms. The *kūpuna* epitomize Hawaiian cultural values and the aloha spirit and provide positive intergenerational exchanges for those children who do not have grandparents of their own (Afaga & Lai, 1994).

On the surface it looks and sounds like a wonderfully conceived program, one whose virtues are acknowledged by teachers, children, and administrators alike. Personally, as a Native Hawaiian who has been raised to honor the wisdom of my elders, it initially brought me great joy to see Hawaiian *kūpuna* resuming a larger role in the cultural education of Hawai'i's youth. However, as my more extensive investigations into this program later revealed, there is much more (and less) going on with this *kupuna* program than initially appears.

To delve beyond surface appearances, I used classroom observations and interviews with *kūpuna* in eight elementary schools across Hawai'i, along with reviews of related program documents, to develop a critical analysis of this long-cherished program. Beginning with a look at students' artwork and written reflections on the *kūpuna*'s classroom visits, I employed various defamiliarizing interpretive techniques to look beyond the initial and overwhelmingly positive impressions of the familiar, manifest text. I also examined the subtext, or that which has been put under erasure. Through the persistent uncovering of silences and erasures in this program, I defamiliarized taken-for-granted perspectives on this much-applauded curriculum and rendered this familiar program “strange.”

Defamiliarization and “Making Strange”

The concept of defamiliarization (or in Russian, *ostraneniye*, literally “making strange”) was introduced to literary theory by

Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky. According to Shklovsky (1917/1965), over time our perceptions of familiar, everyday situations become stale, blunted, and “automatized.” Shklovsky explains, “After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it—hence we cannot say anything significant about it” (p. 13). Similarly, when reading ordinary prose, we habitually gloss over a text with the greatest economy of perceptive effort and rarely stop to really attend to the words on the page (Shklovsky, 1917/1965).

Art and literature, on the other hand, force us to slow down our perception, to linger, and to notice. Because our everyday perception is usually too automatic, art and literature employ a variety of defamiliarizing techniques to prolong our perception, attract and hold our attention, and make us look at a familiar object or text with an exceptionally high level of awareness. In poetry, for instance, literary devices—such as word play, deliberately roughened rhythm, or figures of speech—defamiliarize or estrange ordinary speech and force us into a dramatic awareness of the language. By having to grapple with language in a more strenuous, self-conscious way than usual, the world, which that language contains, is vividly renewed. Our habitual responses are refreshed and familiar texts are rendered more perceptible (Shklovsky, 1917/1965).

This defamiliarizing inquiry into the Hawaiian studies *kupuna* program serves as a reply to contemporary calls for anti-oppressive (Kumashiro, 2000, 2001) and decolonizing (Smith, 1999) research methodologies that look beyond familiar, dominant narratives and give

voice to the previously marginalized or voiceless. In response to these requests, this study employs a variety of defamiliarizing techniques drawn from literary and critical theory, in concert with Native Hawaiian cultural traditions, to force readers into dramatic awareness of previously silenced perspectives on the lesser known aspects of this highly praised curriculum. Through a careful analysis of the *kupuna* program's many silences, absences, and erasures, this defamiliarizing study reveals the various ways in which numerous Hawaiian *kūpuna* are systematically misused and abused in Hawai'i's public elementary schools.

As the inner city ethnographies of Michelle Fine and Lois Weis (1998) remind us, individuals from groups that traditionally have been marginalized or oppressed are not always comfortable with or experienced at explicitly articulating the forces that suppress or oppress them. Moreover, as Gayatri Spivak (1988) suggests, when marginalized individuals do speak, members of the dominant society are not always adept at hearing them. In this article, I propose that educational researchers who are committed to exposing oppression and recovering the histories and

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perspectives of marginalized people may benefit from new interpretive tools that enable researchers to seek meaning behind or beyond familiar surface impressions or communications. For instance, in postcolonial settings, such as contemporary Hawai'i, centuries of colonization, domination, and subordination have led to the suppression and repression of indigenous histories, cultures, and modes of expression. Thus in lands such as this, where generations of colonized Hawaiian *kūpuna* have learned to bury painful memories, repress hostility and resentment, and occasionally express small resistances to their subordination through the subtle use of metaphors and words with hidden meanings or concealed references (Pukui, Haertig, & Lee, 1972b), I am suggesting that comprehensive interpretive analyses should progress beyond the study of surface appearances and should include the persistent excavation of perspectives and circumstances that have been buried, written over, or erased.

Reading Erasures

Sous rature (under erasure) is one of the central concepts in the work of deconstructionist Jacques Derrida (1976). To put a term *sous rature* is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both the word and its deletion. Because the word is inaccurate, or inadequate, it is crossed out; because the word is necessary, it remains legible. Although my use of the concept of *sous rature* is intentional in its reference to deconstruction and Derrida, throughout this article I use the term both more loosely and more literally than he likely intended. Early on I use the concept to refer to children's artistic images that have been literally erased and drawn over, remaining as vague traces. Later I use it to examine images that through their positioning have been visually cropped or cut off; and all the while I simultaneously use these literal erasures as a springboard for probing more deeply into situations, emotions, or perspectives that have been erased figuratively or metaphorically.

In Native Hawaiian tradition, this process of uncovering or excavating successive layers of erasures can be likened to the concept of *mabiki* (peeling away), a central practice in Hawaiian conflict resolution. During the *mabiki* phase of Hawaiian conflict resolution, outer layers of actions or emotions are peeled away like the skin of an onion to disclose layer upon layer of underlying motivations, feelings, and causes (Pukui, Haertig, & Lee, 1972a). Through these combined processes of peeling away surface layers and analyzing underlying erasures, this study reveals that there is both more and less going on with this Hawaiian studies *kupuna* program than appears on the surface.

Consistent with the logic of postcolonialism and its suspicion of grand theories and narratives (Bhaba, 1994; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1987), my theoretical framework and interpretive methods are intentionally eclectic, mingling, combining, and synthesizing theories and techniques from disparate disciplines and paradigms. Writing as a Native Hawaiian in the middle of the Pacific, far removed from the academic center of the metropolis, I do not have the luxury of attaching myself to any one theoretical perspective but instead "make do" (de Certeau, 1984) as an interpretive handyman or *bricoleur* (Levi-Strauss, 1966; see also Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Throughout this study, I draw widely from an assortment of structuralist and poststructuralist theorists, moving within and

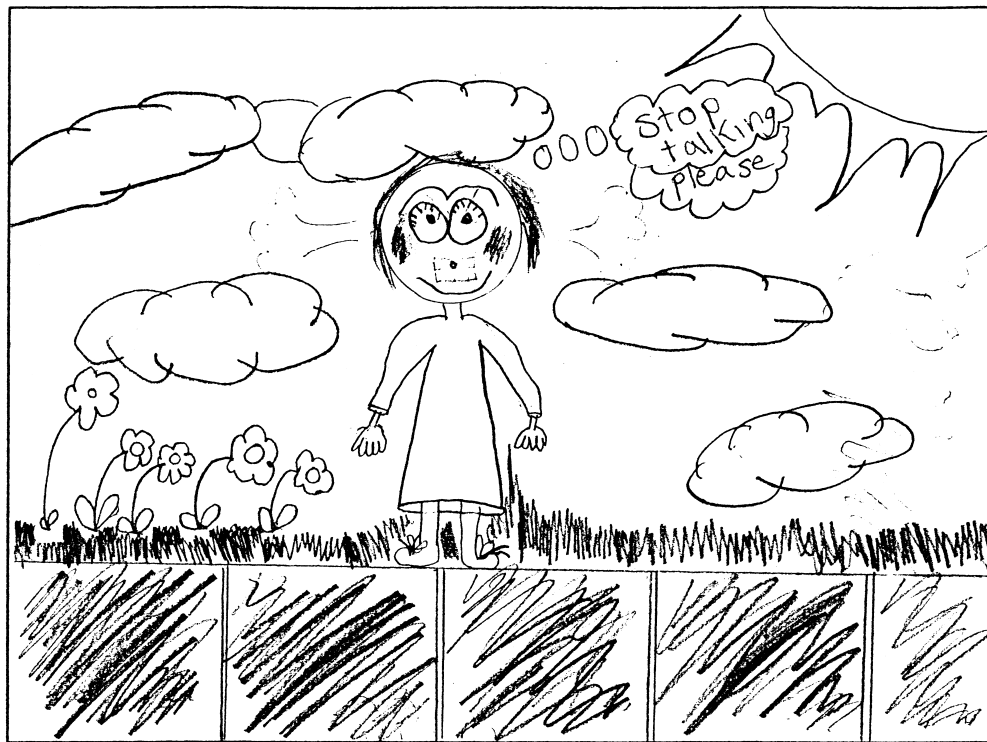
between sometimes competing or seemingly incompatible interpretive perspectives and paradigms. Consequently, this study has both a deconstructive playfulness as well as a Marxist earnestness. It engages with Jacques Derrida's (1976) notions of deconstruction and erasures as well as Karl Marx's (1867/1977) concern with deep structures and material effects. At the same time, it consciously and unapologetically privileges Native Hawaiian philosophies and concerns. Although I do not deny the possible contradictions between these various theoretical perspectives, I believe that postcolonial studies require such theoretical innovation and flexibility. If we are to meet the demands of postcolonial studies for both a revision of the past and an analysis of our ever-changing present, we cannot work within closed paradigms (Loomba, 1998).

Although this study focuses on the people and the place that I know best (i.e., Native Hawaiians in the state of Hawai'i), I believe that my methods of analysis can apply to all educational researchers working in historically oppressed or traditionally marginalized communities across the globe if they are dedicated to defamiliarizing dominant narratives, exposing oppressions, and uncovering previously marginalized perspectives on familiar educational practices or programs.

Defamiliarizing Lei Day

My analysis of the Hawaiian studies *kupuna* program began with a look at a number of student drawings that were produced for a class assignment in two fourth-grade classrooms at my request. I had asked the students to think back on the many times that a Hawaiian studies *kupuna* had visited their class throughout their elementary school years and produce an illustrated reflection on what they learned from or what they remembered about the *kupuna's* classroom visits. Although these drawings provided a crucial starting point for my subsequent investigations into the *kupuna* program, they were never intended to function as hard and fast evidence in and of themselves. Rather than read the drawings as indicative of the thoughts and feelings of these particular student artists or as evidence of problems at their particular school sites, throughout the course of this study I read the drawings symptomatically (Althusser, 1969; J. J. Tobin, 2000) as defamiliarizing clues that opened up a window onto the hidden conflicts and tensions in the Hawaiian studies *kupuna* program in particular and the Hawai'i public school system in general. These clues functioned as leads that gave direction to my further investigations and allowed me to probe more deeply and ask more explicit questions in my subsequent observations, interviews, and historical analyses.

For instance, consider the student drawing that appears in Figure 1. If we strictly read the surface image, we see a cheerful drawing of a smiling *kupuna*, dressed in a long-sleeved *mu'umu'u*, teaching outdoors on a sunny day, surrounded by thick grass, fluffy white clouds, and beautiful flowers. On the surface, the image seems to epitomize what the *kupuna* program purportedly is all about: Hawaiian elders from the community coming to Hawai'i's Western-oriented schools to instruct the state's youngsters in Native Hawaiian ways of life. The student's written description that accompanies the drawing, along with my classroom conversations with the student artist, suggests that the representation is of *Kupuna* Kauhane³ conducting one in a series of out-



I remmber that when
 we needed to get ready
 for our May day and
 we went to the field
 and we needed to walk
 across the field more
 then once.

FIGURE 1. A surface look at a Hawaiian studies kupuna conducting an outdoor Lei Day rehearsal.

door rehearsals held in preparation for the school's annual Lei Day (or Hawaiian May Day) pageant.

Lei Day is a celebration held on the first day of May when girls and boys in elementary schools across Hawai'i perform elaborately orchestrated pageants of Hawaiian song and dance. Lei Day for many students is the most memorable part of their Hawaiian studies education. They get decked out in elaborate Hawaiian costumes, adorn their heads, necks, and ankles with ferns, ti leaves, and beautiful flower lei, and proceed to the school courtyard where Hawaiian music fills the air and a standing-room-only audience of parents, grandparents, and younger siblings are treated to an extraordinary Polynesian revue.

As the performance comes to a close and the parents pack up their video cameras and prepare to return to work, they leave the school with blissful smiles on their faces. Some approach their children's classroom teachers to personally express their gratitude for the spectacular performance, while others amble over to the

school parking lot and discuss the event among themselves. Parents leave this joyous pageant pleased that their children are learning about Hawai'i's unique heritage and thankful that they are able to participate in this splendid Hawaiian tradition.

The picture I just painted, like the spectacular Lei Day pageant itself, is a polished, staged version of reality. In order to gain a better understanding of the intricacies surrounding this Lei Day celebration and defamiliarize this pleasant, polished picture, we need to take a closer look at what is hidden beneath the surface and what goes on behind the scenes. For instance, although the classroom teachers usually get the thanks and recognition at the conclusion of the pageant, it is typically the Hawaiian studies *kupuna* who are tirelessly working behind the scenes to make the program a success. In many schools, Lei Day is the *kupuna's* primary instructional responsibility. Although one or two classroom teachers might envision and choreograph the program, the *kupuna* is usually the one who is charged with bringing these plans to

fruition. The *kupuna* helps children at each grade level write and memorize their scripts, prepare their costumes, and learn the words and motions of their featured hula. This preparation is a mammoth task, often requiring far more than the *kupuna*'s designated hours of paid compensation.

In an effort to further defamiliarize this pleasant Lei Day image, let us return for a closer look at the Lei Day illustration featured earlier (see Figure 2). This time instead of habitually or automatically focusing on the surface picture, we will linger a bit with prolonged attention (Shklovsky, 1917/1965) on that which was rubbed out from the picture, literally put under erasure. If we study the child's illustration with the same care that an art historian would give a repainted canvas or an artistic palimpsest, we discover that beneath the image of the smiling *kupuna* on the play field lay another hidden picture, a first text that had been rubbed out and covered by the second.

Like a psychoanalyst interpreting a verbal slip, we find that a latent, repressed text can be glimpsed through the gaps in the manifest. Beneath the surface drawing of the *kupuna*'s bright, round eyes, cheerful smile, and rosy cheeks, we find a face flushed with anger, with gritting teeth, cutting eyes, and pent-up steam bursting from both ears. When we inspect the *kupuna*'s accompanying dialogue, we see that it too readily comes undone. The two-tiered configuration of the dialogue bubble suggests that the *kupuna*'s calm request that her students "Stop talking please," originally stood as the abrupt command of a *kupuna* low on patience ("Stop talking") and was later softened with the subsequent addition of the word *please*. Try as they might, however, these and other subsequent smoothing modifications, such as the fluffy white clouds and cheerful flowers that have been superimposed over the earlier scene, can never fully disguise the underlying angry picture.

The defamiliarizing investigative process that followed from here can again be likened to the practice of *mahiki* in Hawaiian

conflict resolution, where outer layers of actions or expressions are peeled away to disclose suppressed emotions and successive layers of underlying feelings, motivations, and causes. The literal erasures in this student drawing led me to probe more deeply into the many successive layers of veiled and troubling aspects of the Hawaiian studies *kupuna* program that have been erased figuratively or metaphorically.

For instance, after extensive study of the literal erasures in this Lei Day rehearsal drawing, I made a conscious effort to look beyond the neatly polished and carefully orchestrated Lei Day pageants and directed my attention to various behind-the-scenes happenings, such as the often overlooked Lei Day rehearsals leading up to the pageant. After sitting in on and assisting with weeks of grueling Lei Day rehearsals, it became clear to me that these outdoor rehearsals are not all fun and games for the *kūpuna*—or the children for that matter. The rehearsals require that these Hawaiian elders stand on their feet out in the scorching midday sun, sometimes for hours on end, straining their voices in order to be heard by students positioned across the large expanse of the play field. Many of these children are so distractible when working outside that if, by chance, they can actually hear the *kupuna*, they do not always listen. As the big day nears, the children's restless energy and excitement continue to build, creating an extremely challenging teaching situation that nearly all teachers, regardless of their age, would find unbearable.

Although few of these *kūpuna* have ever expressed their discomfort to their supervising teachers or school administrators, in the candid conversations that followed our hours spent together in the hot sun of Lei Day rehearsals, several *kūpuna* confided in me that the responsibility given to them in coordinating the Lei Day program is enormous and often dictates the thrust of their entire curriculum. When I asked *Kupuna* Kauhane about the many uncompensated hours that she puts in during the weeks leading up to Lei Day, she gave a deep sigh and explained:



FIGURE 2. *The Lei Day rehearsal up close.*

The resource teachers tell us that we should not be expected to be in charge of May Day [Lei Day], but that if anyone asks for our assistance with it, we should help out. So one by one the teachers ask for help . . . Pretty soon I'm helping every teacher in every class. It's really a lot of work. I ask the teachers to practice with the children during the times that I'm not there, but their schedules are really tight and they don't usually get around to it. So the last few weeks are always really tense and we all have to work very hard to get the program in shape.

Kūpuna Kealoha explained that it takes so long to prepare the children for the Lei Day pageant, and the pressure for a polished performance is so great, that through the years she has learned to forgo all other lessons in Hawaiian history, culture, and language so she can start Lei Day rehearsals from her first day of instruction in the fall.

Considering that, in many cases, Lei Day preparation is extremely taxing on these classroom elders, and virtually nothing else is taught in Hawaiian studies in order to prepare for this performance, I began to ask myself why schools continue with these elaborate Lei Day pageants. Why do they continue to subject these *kūpuna* and their students to these Lei Day hardships, and why do they continue to commit so many hours of Hawaiian studies instruction to perfecting this performance?

When I broached the subject with classroom teachers at one elementary school, they seemed to agree that Lei Day demands far too many instructional hours and explained that several years ago their school had considered doing away with Lei Day celebrations altogether. After much debate, they decided that they would have the celebration every other year. "After all," one teacher explained, "we live in Hawai'i and we owe it to our children to perpetuate these Hawaiian traditions." But is this really a Hawaiian tradition?

My further excavations or peeling away at the surface of this celebration, through a Foucauldian genealogical analysis of the holiday, exposed a quite surprising Lei Day history that is largely hidden from popular Hawaiian consciousness. Unlike traditional forms of historical analysis, which trace a line of inevitability between the past and present, Michel Foucault's genealogical projects (Foucault, 1970, 1972, 1979) urge us to examine the discontinuities that break off or estrange the past from the present. By demonstrating the foreignness of the past, one relativizes and undercuts the legitimacy of the present and explodes the rationality of phenomena that are taken for granted (Sarup, 1993).

Although I have always thought of Lei Day as a Hawaiian tradition, something my Hawaiian ancestors have practiced for generations, after a bit of digging into the buried history of this holiday I was surprised to learn that these Lei Day celebrations were actually the brainchild of a Kansas City man, Don Blanding. As a young man, Blanding was so taken by the romantic exoticism of a *haole* (White or Caucasian) hula dancer performing in the 1912 traveling stage play "Bird of Paradise," that he packed up and moved to Hawai'i where he remained for the rest of his life. After living in Hawai'i for several years, Blanding became a well-known poet and a local celebrity. He used his influence to convince the Hawai'i public that the first day of May should be celebrated as "Lei Day" throughout Hawai'i and shared his vision of a romantic Hawaiian holiday when people donned aloha attire and fragrant flower lei and attended exotic Lei Day pageants (Hopkins, 1982).

This familiar Lei Day celebration becomes defamiliarized or estranged when we consider that respected *kūpuna* across Hawai'i are spending countless hours of Hawaiian studies instruction teaching thousands of school children to dance the hula in performances on May 1 because one *haole* hula girl dancing in a play touring in Kansas caught the fancy of a *haole* poet who watched. Although we can never know for certain the depth or complexity of meanings that these Lei Day celebrations may have taken on for various members of the local Hawai'i community, once the buried colonial origins of Lei Day are brought to the surface the logic behind the endless hours spent in preparation for these elaborate Lei Day pageants begins to unravel; and one is forced to question whether this Hawaiian holiday instruction is really what Native Hawaiian activists of the 1970s had in mind when they lobbied for a Hawaiian curriculum.

Uncovering Erasures in the Hawaiian Holiday Curriculum

While Lei Day drives the Hawaiian studies curriculum at many schools, I do not mean to suggest that all *kūpuna* start Lei Day preparation from their first day of instruction each fall. In several schools there are a few months, typically from September through January, when Lei Day is rarely mentioned. During these early months of the school year, beyond the standard lessons in Hawaiian song and dance, many *kūpuna* (under the direction of their supervising classroom teachers) use their 30-minute class periods to teach quick, pre-scripted lessons in Hawaiian games, crafts, food preparation, and Hawaiian values. The children learn to fashion tops out of *kukui* nuts (candlenuts) and small wooden dowels. They color worksheets depicting birds and dolphins practicing *kōkua* (help), *ho'okipa* (hospitality), and other Hawaiian-Christian values. They weave coconut fronds into the form of angelfish, sample the sweetness of different varieties of sugar cane, and learn to make string figures through the Hawaiian string game of *hei*.

Although I appreciate these attempts to move Hawaiian studies instruction beyond Lei Day performances, I fear that through these inevitably short and sporadic lessons in benign Hawaiian arts, crafts, and values, we once again have nothing more than an extended holiday curriculum—a holiday curriculum all year round. To some the idea of a year-round Hawaiian holiday curriculum may not sound like cause for concern. One of the major critiques of holiday-based multicultural curricula is the isolated period of exposure to different cultures (Banks, 1997; Derman-Sparks, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 1999). In many "multicultural" elementary classrooms, Native Americans only appear in the curriculum in November, around Thanksgiving, and Hispanics on Cinco de Mayo. In contrast, a year-round calendar of activities featuring Native Hawaiian crafts, food, and culture may initially seem quite progressive. However, my further defamiliarizing investigations into the many curricular silences and erasures in this year-round Hawaiian holiday curriculum have left me with deep concerns about the arrangement. Although these *kūpuna* focus on presenting Hawai'i's children with a pleasant curriculum of benign arts and crafts, a good deal of the more disturbing or contentious aspects of Hawai'i's colonial history are erased or repressed, never to find their way into these elementary school classrooms.

If we return to the earlier image in which the *kupuna's* anger is put under erasure (see Figure 2) and once again read it symptomatically in the broader context of Hawaiian studies instruction beyond Lei Day, we find that it can be read as indicative of a larger issue: that is, the complete erasure of Hawaiian anger and oppression from the Hawaiian studies curriculum. This prescribed Hawaiian holiday curriculum overlooks the historical injustices of Hawai'i's colonial past and neglects to discuss issues that still anger Hawaiians to this day—including the forcible dispossession and destruction of our indigenous Hawaiian lands, our native language and culture, and our sovereign right to self-determination. These curricular erasures ultimately function to suppress Hawaiian resentment, treating the Hawaiian community's suffering and oppression as something to be kept under wraps, far below the surface, never to be revealed.

In an attempt to once again denaturalize or defamiliarize what has become a very acceptable practice in the Hawaiian studies instruction of many, if not most, of Hawai'i's elementary schools, I tried to envision a comparable situation in another context, such as a U.S. mainland school district where various underrepresented groups have been fighting for adequate and accurate curricular representation for far longer than Native Hawaiians. It is hard to imagine an African-American resource teacher teaching about African-American history and culture without teaching about slavery, or a Jewish-American resource teacher teaching Jewish history and culture without teaching about the Holocaust.

Jewish Americans hold steadfast to their belief that no one should be allowed to forget the genocidal atrocities inflicted upon their forebears. In contrast, the many curricular silences and erasures in the Hawaiian studies program raise many questions: Why are the expectations different in the case of Native Hawaiians? Why does this "Hawaiian" curriculum put Hawaiian anger, hardships, and oppression under erasure? Why does it bury the colonial afflictions of Hawai'i's past? Why does it force Hawaiians and others to forget?

I find the work of social reproduction theorists particularly helpful in answering these questions. Reproduction theorists view American society as fundamentally capitalist and institutionally structured to protect vested interests. Although they acknowledge the promise of public schools to provide social mobility and equal opportunity for the oppressed and disenfranchised, they recognize the extent to which these institutions nonetheless participate in the perpetuation of social inequalities and ultimately function to reproduce the existing stratified labor force needed to sustain this capitalist economy (Althusser, 1971; see also Sarup, 1978). If we consider America's schools as potential sites of social reproduction and acknowledge the state of Hawai'i's reliance on tourism as its primary economic industry, it is not entirely surprising to find that the corps of Hawaiian studies instructors often consists of retired Hawaiian tour guides, musicians, and Waikiki performers (Afaga & Lai, 1994) who teach the upcoming generations lessons in Hawaiian games and crafts, hospitable Hawaiian values, and Waikiki-style hula dancing.

Upon retirement from their low-paying front-line tourist industry jobs, in need of money to survive in this capitalist economy, and with little else to sell but their "Hawaiianess," numerous *kūpuna* are lured into these positions as part-time Hawaiian studies teachers in Hawai'i's public elementary schools. When limited to a restrictive holiday curriculum and substandard, alienating

working conditions (which will be discussed further in the following section), many of these *kūpuna* may unwittingly contribute to the survival of Hawai'i's tourist industry as they participate in their own reproduction through the "interpellation" (Althusser, 1971) of a new generation of low-paid Hawaiian tourist industry workers. (A more extensive discussion of the state-encouraged commodification and exploitation of the Hawaiian culture through the Hawai'i tourist industry and the complicit role that the Hawai'i Department of Education plays in the reproduction of this exploitation can be found in Trask, 1993, and Kaomea, 2000.)

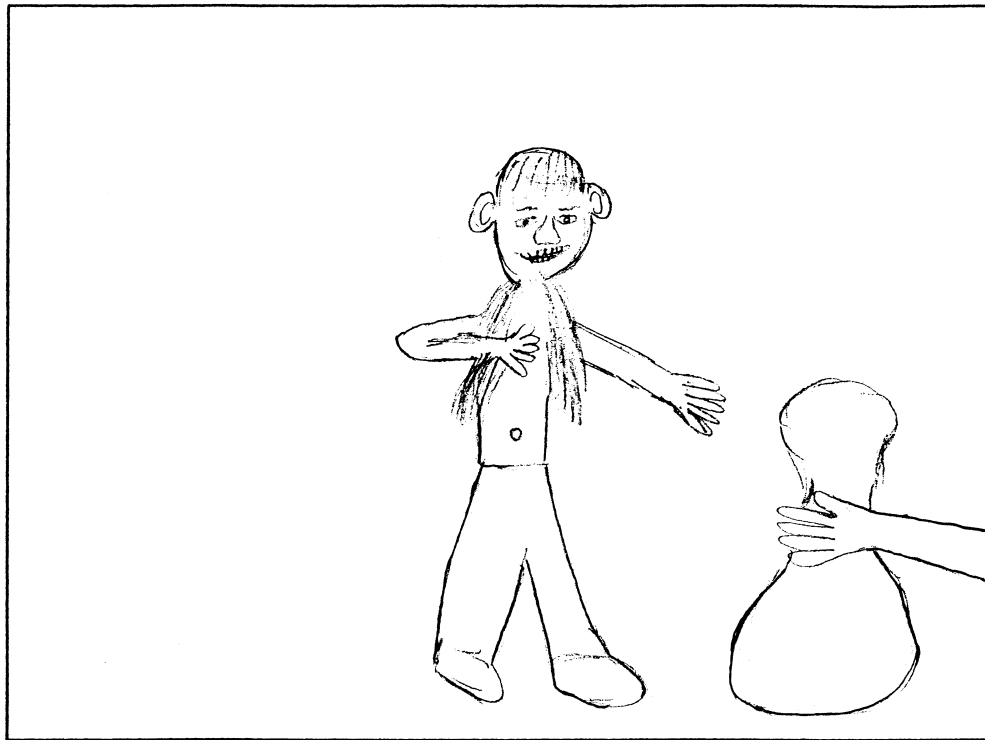
The Disembodied Kupuna

A second student drawing motivated my further investigations into the trying occupational circumstances of these classroom *kūpuna* (Figure 3). Here we see a boy in long pants and a ti-leaf lei dancing a Lei Day hula to the beat of a large *ipu* (gourd instrument) that fills the lower right-hand corner of the page. While in Figure 1 the *kupuna's* anger was erased, in this drawing the *kupuna's* body is conspicuously absent. The only glimpse this picture gives us of the *kupuna* is at the edge of the drawing—a single hand and forearm grasping the neck of an *ipu*. The rest of the *kupuna's* body is literally cut off from the page, leaving us only to imagine her outside of the frame.

This curious erasure of the *kupuna's* body occurred in not just this one student drawing but in several others, including the Lei Day rehearsal drawing featured in Figure 4. A study of the erasures in Figure 4 suggests that the *kupuna* was originally drawn from a back view, with her arms crossed and legs astride, facing a row of misbehaving third-grade dancers who are making a parody of their Lei Day song "Pearly Shells." However, the figure of the *kupuna* was subsequently rubbed out, enduring only as a faint trace while an *ipu* remains to mark her place. In addition to a handful of drawings in which the *kupuna's* body was cropped off or erased, in the majority (40 out of 56) of these student drawings of the *kupuna's* classroom visits, the *kupuna* was altogether missing. These illustrations led me to question why the *kupuna* was frequently absent in bodily form or present only as a hand or gourd.

While interpreting drawings such as these—where essential elements are missing, erased, or replaced—I found it helpful to turn to the literary concept of metaphor and consider the hand and *ipu* as a metonym or synecdoche. In metonymy, the literal term for one thing is applied to another with which it is closely associated because of contiguity in common experience. "The crown" or "the scepter" is used to stand for a king (as in "lands belonging to the crown"); "the White House" stands for the president. In synecdoche, a part of something is used to signify the whole or, more rarely, the whole is used to signify a part. We use the term *hands* for workmen and *sails* for ships (Abrams, 1993).

Figurative language and metaphors play a significant role in communication within the Native Hawaiian culture. Hawaiians have historically used euphemism, allusion, and metaphor in their poetry, chants, and speech, and through successive generations have developed a special sensitivity or aptitude for grasping the *kaona* (hidden meaning) of a word or phrase. This use of metaphor and *kaona* became particularly prevalent during the early period of Western colonization, as Hawaiians relied upon veiled messages and hidden meanings to enact small resistances against the colonizers' repressive restrictions. For instance, as the



I remember when we made the tea
leaf lei and we did the may
day dance (e-pele e-pele) out on the
courtfield without our shirts and it
was real fun dancing our may
day dance in front of everyone

FIGURE 3. *The disembodied kupuna.*

sexually repressive Puritan missionaries began to learn the Hawaiian language, Hawaiians took great pleasure in composing and performing seemingly innocent chants and dances with multiple layers of meanings that playfully flirted with sexual innuendo while unsettling the more literal translations of the unsuspecting missionaries (Pukui, Haertig, & Lee, 1972b).

In a related, but contrasting, scenario taken from the dominant Western culture (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), when a metonym or synecdoche is used to describe a relatively powerless individual, it can operate as a dehumanizing semantic violence that dismembers the whole or complete person by casting off everything but the most functionally pertinent parts. For instance, a baseball team manager might scout around for a couple of “strong arms,” while a modeling agency might be on the lookout for a “pretty face.” Just as a baseball player can be reduced through synecdoche to his arm or a young woman to her face, in Figures 3 and 4 the Hawaiian studies *kupuna* is reduced to nothing more than a hand or gourd.

The term *hand* functions actively in Western culture as a popular synecdoche for people who are thought of merely as a means

of achieving menial tasks and physical labor or individuals who are considered physically skillful but not particularly intelligent. For instance, a ship captain who calls for “All hands on deck!” when the sea gets rough and his rig flails out of control is interested strictly in what his crew can offer him in terms of their brawn or physical labor. He is not in the least interested in their opinion on what course he should take next. Similar arguments could be made concerning the dehumanization of field hands, ranch hands, hired hands, and handmaidens.

Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky (1917/1965) explains that beyond just a poetic turn of phrase, metaphors, metonyms, and other literary techniques function as effective defamiliarizing devices by impeding and prolonging our perception and thereby preventing us from responding to a text habitually or automatically. By making readers pause and go through the extra step of interpreting each metaphor and its referent, texts with dramatic metaphors force us to attend to the work with an exceptionally high level of awareness. In similar fashion, the synecdochic dismemberments and metonymic reductions in these student draw-



I remember from last year
 when [Kupuna] told us a song
 called perly shells and me Larry
 and Dave all ways make fun of
 it like curly fries from Mcdonolds
 something like that then we all
 got busted.

FIGURE 4. *The kupuna erased.*

ings prevented me from responding to the images habitually or automatically and instead forced me to pause, linger, and focus my attention on the metaphoric objects and their referents.

When lingering on these drawings, I again found it helpful to read them symptomatically—not as conclusive evidence, nor necessarily indicative of the perspectives or insights of their respective student artists, but as defamiliarizing clues to the many ways in which classroom *kūpuna* are dehumanized, de-professionalized, and disembodied in Hawai‘i’s schools. My subsequent excavations into Hawaiian studies program documents, along with my further investigations into the demanding and often demeaning occupational circumstances of these Hawaiian studies *kūpuna*, revealed the many ways in which all that these expert *kūpuna* have to offer, all that they could teach, is cut off and cast aside; their wealth of experiences and ancestral knowledge is effectively silenced and erased. Instead of appearing with strength and complexity, the Hawaiian

studies *kūpuna* is reduced (in both real life occupational circumstances and in the children’s drawings) to little more than a hired hand; one who is valued not for one’s *na‘auao* and *‘ike* (ancestral wisdom and experience), but for a willingness to serve and assist in the implementation of a pre-scripted and restrictive curriculum that emphasizes benign lessons in Hawaiian arts, crafts, and music.

In his discussion of the disfiguring, dehumanizing effects of capitalism and the division of labor, Karl Marx (1867/1977) described how the capitalist laborer is severed from his productive knowledge, judgment, and will, and becomes “a mere fragment of his own body” (p. 482)—a hand watched, corrected, and controlled by a distant brain. Under capitalism the labor process is dissociated from the skill and knowledge of the worker, and there is a sharp division between those who conceptualize and plan for others (the “head labor”) and those who execute the work (the “hand labor”). Because management, whose sole purpose is to ex-

tract from labor power the maximum advantage for the capitalist, controls and dictates each step of the labor process, man is dehumanized and alienated from the right to that which is essential to his nature—the right to be in control of his own activities.

As my further investigations into the daily working conditions of the Hawaiian studies *kūpuna* have subsequently revealed, such is the fate of many *kūpuna* who are hired under the guise of Hawaiian studies experts; upon entering Hawai'i's elementary schools, they are treated as little more than hired hands. Virtually homeless in the schools, with no classroom or even office space, these itinerant seniors scurry back and forth through the school halls on a cost-cutting and efficiency-maximizing teaching schedule that has them running from room to room at a hectic and dizzying pace. Once in the classroom, these expert *kūpuna* are expected to execute a song and dance curriculum or a series of pre-scripted “*kupuna*-proof” lessons, all under the watchful supervision of the ever-present classroom teacher. (For a more comprehensive analysis of the various ways in which numerous Hawaiian studies *kūpuna* have been de-professionalized in Hawai'i's elementary schools, see Kaomea-Thirugnanam, 1999.)

As this study of absences and erasures suggests, we have before us a program in which many respected Hawaiian *kūpuna* are treated as hired hands, alienated from their work, and virtually disembodied. Within Hawai'i's elementary schools these *kūpuna* are of abject status as they are simultaneously there and not there; subject, yet not subject; respected in title, but not treated with respect. They are part teacher, part nanny or grandmother; part educator, part tourist industry worker; part Hawaiian studies expert, part Lei Day pageant stage manager.

I do not doubt that the Hawaiian studies *kupuna* program was well intended at its inception, and I have seen—and reported on elsewhere (Kaomea-Thirugnanam, 1999)—a few situations in which Hawaiian studies *kūpuna* have effectively contested or resisted the restrictions of this state-mandated curriculum and used their positions to function as positive agents for social change or “cultural production” (Levinson & Holland, 1996). However, after uncovering the many ways in which numerous other *kūpuna* have been disempowered and disembodied in Hawai'i's schools, I am made aware of the many challenges of implementing a progressive, liberating Hawaiian curriculum within a system whose goals may, in many respects, be incompatible with—or even hostile to—Hawaiian self-determination and empowerment. For in every instance when Hawaiian *kūpuna* are incorporated into the school system as handmaidens of the larger state apparatus, the Hawaiian studies *kupuna* program is effectively turned on its head and is ultimately made to serve ends inimical to its original, progressive intentions.

As we continue to peel back and expose layer upon layer of transgressions within the Hawaiian studies *kupuna* program, we find that this is not a clear-cut story where characters are neatly divided into victims and villains. Instead, as one often uncovers through the *mahiki* process of Hawaiian conflict resolution (*ho'oponopono*), we find layers of complicity and entanglement; the responsibility for the various shortcomings of the *kupuna* program is shared by all involved. Even the most well-intended and innocent-seeming characters (the cost-cutting school administrators, the uninformed but ever-watchful supervising classroom teachers, the loving yet misbehaving students, and even the Hawaiian *kūpuna*) are, to some extent, all entwined and com-

PLICIT in complex ways in the operation and perpetuation of the program's colonialist and capitalist dynamics. (A more extensive analysis of the complex roles that these various characters play in the implementation of the Hawaiian studies program can be found in Kaomea-Thirugnanam, 1999.)

Making the Familiar Uncomfortable: Implications for Postcolonial Decolonizing Studies

As I conclude this article, I worry how it will be received within the local Hawaiian community. When describing the uncomfortable and disconcerting effects of Leo Tolstoy's defamiliarizing accounts of customary church rituals in *War and Peace*, Victor Shklovsky (1917/1965) explained that many faithful churchgoers were “painfully wounded” by Tolstoy's unsettling portrayals of long-cherished religious traditions and considered it “blasphemy to present as strange and monstrous what they accepted as sacred” (p. 17). Similarly, I fear that with this unsettling, defamiliarizing study of the many hidden, buried, and silenced aspects of the long-cherished Hawaiian studies *kupuna* program, I walk a fine line between making the familiar strange and making it uncomfortable—or even hurtful.

My earlier work that challenged dominant textbook accounts of colonial Hawaiian history by breaking the silence on the horrific violence of Western colonization (Kaomea, 2000) has been well received within the Hawaiian community. In this earlier work, I, like others before me (Trask, 1993; see also Stannard, 1989), exposed a colonial history of Hawaiian victimization that was more brutal and destructive than contemporary Hawaiians imagined. The contemporary Hawaiian community has also embraced recent celebratory works that contest stories of overpowering victimization and colonial domination by uncovering previously suppressed accounts of heroic Hawaiians involved in anticolonial resistance (Silva, 1998; see also Goodhue, 1998; Kamahale, 2000).

I feel it is time to begin to tell more uncomfortable stories; and to tell different stories, we need different research methods (Fine & Weis, 1996). With this new work and its novel defamiliarizing methods, I am proposing that these techniques for peeling away surface layers and analyzing underlying erasures can enable researchers to move decolonizing studies beyond familiar tales of colonial villains and colonized victims or heroes. Using these new defamiliarizing tools, we can uncover more complicated, nuanced stories of (post)colonial complicity and entanglement.

In his reformulation of the concept of *hegemony*, Antonio Gramsci (1971) argued that ruling classes achieve domination not by force or coercion alone but also by creating subjects who “willingly” submit to being ruled. Hegemony, according to Gramsci, is power achieved through a combination of coercion and a form of consent that is “part voluntary, part contrived” (Arnold, 1994, p. 133). Building upon Gramsci's concept of hegemony, I am suggesting the need for further decolonizing studies that expose how colonial and neocolonial regimes achieve domination by involving colonized subjects in creating and sustaining the states and regimes that oppress them (Lomba, 1998).

In the recent past, such uncomfortable and potentially self-critical studies have been largely absent from Native Hawaiian postcolonial scholarship. Perhaps rightly so because Hawaiian scholarship was still relatively young and the handful of Native Hawaiian scholars representing Hawaiian interests had to be vigilant of the possible ways in which their words might be misappro-

riated by groups or individuals seeking to undermine or oppose movements toward Hawaiian sovereignty (Trask, 1993; see also J. P. Tobin, 1994). Now more than 20 years since the onset of the Hawaiian Renaissance, with increasing strength and confidence in Hawaiian movements toward self-determination and growing numbers of Native Hawaiian scholars on the rise, I believe that Native Hawaiians are ready for more complicated—and perhaps uncomfortable—perspectives on our colonial past and neo-colonial present. With these more nuanced perspectives, we can begin to consider the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which Native Hawaiians and other unwitting collaborators have consented to or participated in the creation and reproduction of the colonial and state apparatuses that continue to contribute to Hawaiian oppression.

As several indigenous scholars (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992; Osorio, 2002; Sinha, 1995; Trask, 1993) have eloquently suggested, there is a history of using stories of native peoples’ greed, passivity, or incompetence to justify colonialism. (For instance, suggestions that Hawaiian rulers were selfish or corrupt have been used to argue that the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy was in the best interest of Hawaiian commoners.) This is not what I am calling for. I am not calling for a shift in the decolonizing gaze from critiquing the colonizers to critiquing the colonized, past or present. Instead, I am suggesting that with these new defamiliarizing methods, we can add more complexity and nuance to our understandings of the workings of colonization by uncovering and exploring how even well-intentioned efforts of resistance can have counterproductive effects, and how centuries of living under the insidious forces of colonialism have ensnared countless unwitting collaborators in the web of colonization, incorporating us in the reproduction of neocolonial apparatuses.

Broader Implications for Research in Historically Oppressed Communities

At a more general level, I am proposing that educational researchers who strive for more complex and nuanced understandings of the colonialist and oppressive tendencies of schooling, in Hawai‘i and elsewhere, should consider using defamiliarizing interpretive methods that delve behind familiar hegemonic surfaces and unveil the many masked and insidious ways in which various oppressions are reproduced in our schools. Although I will not presume to predict the possible uses that other researchers will find for these defamiliarizing methods, I can suggest that in other related studies I have used these interpretive techniques to reveal curricular silences and historical erasures in Hawaiian stud-

ies textbooks and curriculum guides (Kaomea, 2000). I have also used similar analytic methods to uncover the indirect messages communicated through silences, absences, and erasures in classroom discussions, children’s writing, and interview transcripts (Kaomea-Thirugnanam, 1999).

With the aid of these defamiliarizing tools, anti-oppressive researchers working in historically marginalized communities can begin to ask very different kinds of questions that will enable us to excavate layers of silences and erasures and peel back familiar hege-

monic maskings. Building upon Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1881/1964) “insidious questions,” we can begin to ask: What does this textbook passage, classroom dialogue, interview transcript, or curricular artifact intend to show? What does it intend to draw our attention from or conceal? What does it seek to erase?

As we have seen with this study of the Hawaiian *kupuna* program, the stories that we uncover with these new defamiliarizing tools may sometimes be uncomfortable or disturbing. However, as Weis and Fine (2000) remind us, “to obscure the bad news is to fool no one” (p. 62). The suffocation of bad stories only masks the very real and complex stories of oppression we seek to expose. It is my hope that with these new methods for reading and exposing erasures, we can

begin to defamiliarize seemingly innocent and apolitical educational institutions and make ourselves, and our schools, better equipped to contest and resist our incorporation as unwitting agents of oppression.

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¹ Throughout this article I use the terms *Hawaiian* and *Native Hawaiian* interchangeably to refer to the indigenous people of Hawai‘i: the descendants of the aboriginal people who inhabited and exercised sovereignty in the Hawaiian Islands for over 1,500 years prior to the 1778 arrival of Hawai‘i’s first European explorers.

² The term *kupuna* (plural *kūpuna*) refers to a Hawaiian grandparent, ancestor, relative, or close friend of the grandparent’s generation.

³ All names presented in this analysis are pseudonyms.

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