

on remembering

Both healing and transformation ... become crucial strategies in any approach that asks a community to remember what they have decided unconsciously or consciously to forget.

on writing

... writing is employed in a variety of imaginative, critical, and also quite functional ways.

on creating

Creating is about channelling collective creativity in order to produce solutions to Indigenous problems.

on imagining

Imagination enables people to rise above their own circumstances, to dream new visions and to hold on to old ones.

(Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Smith, 2012)

Introduction

1. A call to power-share

Hanuj!

Storyteller's call to attention!

Mā!

Audience's heeding reply!

Every hanuju begins with a call marking the commencement of a story. My mapiga Lilly taught me this. She taught me to say 'Mā!' with my mouth wide open and with feeling. The call feels ceremonial and maybe because the art of hanuju in a Rotuman context *is* ceremonial. As a child, this call released happy goosebumps on my arms and neck. It was a call to be still. It was a call to imagine. It was a call to hear again and again how Kirkirsasa saved her village by hypnotising the hungry giant with her tattooed armpits. It was a call to 'idolise' and to 'want to be' this Rotuman style Wonder Woman with the patterned kirkiri (armpits). Story and children possess a solid and loyal relationship which we, as Pacific peoples, are all privy to.

As an Indigenous/Rotuman/diasporic/adult/creative/writer in Aotearoa reading and thinking about the many applications of talanoa and vā (Baice et al, 2021; Fa'avae et al, 2016; Halapua, 2007; Johansson Fua, 2014; Manuatu, 2000; Vaioleti, 2006), I now conceive that this call was my mapiga's way of setting relational boundaries between us. *She* was the storyteller. *She* controlled the narrative. *She* decided whether we should sit on a mat or gather under *her* mosquito net and on *her* kapok mattress. *She. Was. The. Boss.* However, she was *not* a 'bossy' storyteller. While *we* were on the receiving end of her power, we did not feel overpowered and subordinated by her. Of course, *we* were expected to *listen* but we were also allowed the freedom to engage as an audience and contribute to the flow of the narrative. We could ask her to repeat Kirkirsasa's armpit-slapping dance and she would oblige. *She controlled* and simultaneously allowed us *to share* the control of the hanuju. We storied organically in tandem. In a way, power was neither hers nor ours: it commuted fluidly from her storyteller space to our listener spaces. Our vā between mapiga and ma'akiga (grandchildren) was healthy and stable: filled

with hanisie (love) and nurturing. Real-time synchronous orality is conducive to this type of power-sharing.

2. The tumultuous birth of a poem

By contrast, a delayed-time asynchronous written hanuju upsets this power-sharing. Unlike my mapiga's rogrogo, my stories and thinking through the medium of poetry have no 'live' audience. I do not have the responsibility of nurturing relationships as I write (Why do I suddenly feel vulnerable writing this? Why do I feel like this statement would upset my mapiga? Do I care? I think I do.). As a creative writer, I negotiate meaning not through power-sharing nor do I 'seek permission and validation' to story but rather through reflexive self-talk (Caetano, 2017) and the influence of external factors such as the social and political climate of the time of writing (cue COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement), the purpose and specifications of a commissioned task, and mostly literary research. It is not unusual to find the likes of us overstaying in our writing nooks constructing meaning the way we see fit. Bigger the audience (some audiences at least). We do not demand nor actively seek out a relationship of reciprocity with our readers. We ask for nothing. If anything, we often ask to be 'left alone'. We write for ourselves (and others should they ask) in order to make sense of the fractured world we live in. We do not write to please: we write to survive. We are painfully selfish and solitary creatures.

But are we really?

This paper is a non-reciprocal, one-way critical hanuju of the writing of *Writing each other*. From a 'selfish' vantage point, *Writing each other* ironically seeks to celebrate and honour my mapiga Lilly's contribution to my creative writing persona (Part II), create space and visibility for the Rotuman language in the spirit of disobedience (yes, we can be this too on many amp levels) (Part II), and push unequivocally for the conceding of power in the pursuit of unity and kotahitanga (Part III). This paper is a creation talanoa of the tumultuous birth of a poem. To clarify further, the application of 'talanoa' or hanuju is presented here as a socio-cultural practice of story-telling rather than a research methodology.

An offering for kotahitanga

1. Stab it with a rusty pin

Writing each other was an offering for Creative Waikato's Kotahitanga United Through Creativity project: a commissioned initiative that involved the participation of a range of artists in the Waikato whose work aimed "to spark crucial conversations against racism and fuel the narrative for kotahitanga" (Wilson, as cited in Kotahitanga Gallery, n.d, para 3). Vaughan Rapatahana, Aotearoa anthologist, poet and prolific writer (New Zealand Society of Authors, 2015), invited a number of poets in the Waikato region in early June 2020 to respond to the theme of kotahitanga: a tikanga Māori value, which means "unity, togetherness, solidarity, collective action" (Moorefield, 2003). The equivalent of kotahitanga in Rotuman is teag'esea: to be together, to work together towards a singular, collective goal.

In early June, our COVID-19 and BLM inflammations of disparity were at the fore of our collective consciousness. Our shared habit of seeking the lifelines of literary art, or any art for that matter, is especially marked during times of unrest. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the purposeful (Fernández-Giménez et.al, 2019; Justice, 2018; MacDougall, 2014; McCabe, 2019; Ragatahi o te Pene, 2019; Scanlan, 2017; United Nations, 2014; Welford, 2020) and therapeutic nature of poetry (Baker & Mazza, 2004; Obiechina, 2002) and other genres of creative literature (Larsen, 2015; Parssinen, 2020; Wosu, 2018) have been widely recorded. It is now August, as I write, and the wounds of disparity are still far from scabbing over, if ever at all. Fires of dissent have been lit yet again for Jacob Black in Kenosha, Wisconsin (Guarino et al., 2020) and here in Aotearoa, Auckland City (New Zealand

Government, 2020) has moved back to Alert Level 3. Picture a hard angry boil. Now be brave, if you will, and stab it with a rusty pin.



Figure 1. The landing page of the Kotahitanga Gallery website.

2. The think-wait-think-wait-write process

I accepted the invitation and then purposefully walked away from my computer. I walked away to clear the exit doorway of creative ideas in my head for the arrival of *something*. The often-serendipitous nature of creative construction and the embodied storage of life experiences (Amacker, 2019) mean that creative writers have the luxury of thinking and waiting for *something* to arrive: an anchor point from where we can leap off and lose ourselves in the process of wielding creative knowledge. Wendt (as cited in Hereniko, 2006, p. 64) refers to this state of mind as being “in the zone” and “in a high”. I had had enough material percolating in my consciousness from COVID-19, the BLM movement, and my life as a diasporic/indigenous/Rotuman Islander/daughter/teacher/creative writer living in Aotearoa to craft *something* in time for the June 19th deadline.

I walked away for clarity. I walked away to think-wait-think-wait. I walked away to chide myself for accepting this invitation. What could I possibly say about ‘unity’ or perhaps the ‘facade of unity’ that has not already been said in this country? My internal self-talk at this point was terribly unsure and muffled.

The something: Writing each other (I, II, III)

Part I – remember-*ing* my obedience of learning

*Writing each other** arrives in three parts and begins with an imaginary meeting. I am sitting at an imaginary table facing obedience: a ‘virtue’ that accurately characterises my history of tertiary learning. Creative writers are notorious for dragging up memories that are not yet ready to be aired, let alone dust-beaten with a truth stick in the harsh sunlight of scrutiny. In *Writing each other*, my recollections are overdue for an airing and do not cower at scrutiny.

*Lines have been numbered for easy referencing.

I

1. you have shown me ‘your’ literary-ness
2. since forever
3. in the Norton anthology of poetry
4. from the feet of kai valagi teachers

5. swaying on the unconventional relationship
6. of Lear's 'Owl and the Pussycat' (Lear, 1993p. 750).
7. i have swallowed your personifications and metaphorical loads,
8. fastened your meter and rhyme behind my ears like a hearing aid,
9. lathered my pages with modernist playfulness and ambiguities.
10. this was how to 'make it' into your literary canon, you said.
11. be mysterious. show don't tell. release the visceral goddess.

I first heard and witnessed the reading of Edward Lear's *The Owl and the Pussycat* (Lear, 1983, p. 750) in a second-year undergraduate literature class at USP (University of the South Pacific) in Suva, Fiji. It was 1993 and I was 20.

O lovely Pussy!
O Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
You are,
You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!

I fondly remember Jane Ricketts leaning sideways to the left like the tower of Pisa as she performed Lear's classic. She wrung her hands as the love affair of Owl and Pussycat fell from her mouth; her right heel was raised slightly off the ground. Ricketts, who is now my forever default jolt for the remembering of Lear's rather unusual love story, was an engaging poetry-reader-performer. On the desk in front of me was the *Norton Anthology of Poetry, 3rd ed.* (Lear, 1993), the prescribed text for LL205 Poetry. Although I did not connect with many of the poets in the anthology, except perhaps Brooks, Walcott, Dickinson, and Plath, I quickly acclimatised to lugging this cumbersome text around campus with an inflated sense of importance.

I did not 'English-learn in moderation' at USP where my formal training of the creative and literary arts began in the nineties. I gobbled in spurts and dribbled like the novice scholar that I was. I learnt to read and write literary criticisms in English, and unwittingly subscribed to the thinking that the critical study of Shakespeare's work was a mark of prestige. I learnt as I was told.

We were learners preoccupied with the merits of creative *literary fiction*, as opposed to oral and popular fiction. Students like me with literature and language majors (LLs) were chaperoned into the exclusive canons of Pacific prose and poetry (LL100 Intro to Literary Studies: Pacific, LL102 Pacific Literatures in English), Victorian prose (LL204 Prose Fiction), Shakespearean playwriting (LL301 Dramatic Literature), and post-colonial writing (LL306 New Literatures in English) to familiarise ourselves with the unsaid rules of 'literary excellence'. For example, I learnt to accept that a prosaic work which was more character-based as opposed to plot-based, was more deserving of the literary fiction tick of approval. These exclusive literary posses were tight and inaccessible to plot-based popular fiction writers and practitioners of oral storytelling such as the fagogo (Samoan), and hanuju (Rotuman). I consumed my 'diet' of Indigenous and Western literary fiction, which included the likes of Wendt, Hau'ofa, Thaman, Sipolo, Thomas, Hereniko, Kafka, Bronte, Dickens, Stoker, Brecht, Fugard, Ibsen, Naipaul, Achebe, Desai, and Armah, with obedience: too high on literary sugar to feel unsettled about the gaping absence of plot-based Indigenous oral fiction. In the context of tensions surrounding text selection, Te Punga Somerville (2016, p. 189), inspires us to courageously perceive a classroom where "canonical and non-canonical text are *relational* rather than simply *competitive* or *incorporative*" and one which "has room for both".

If your literary studies classroom is reflective of such a relational space, thank you for your courage.

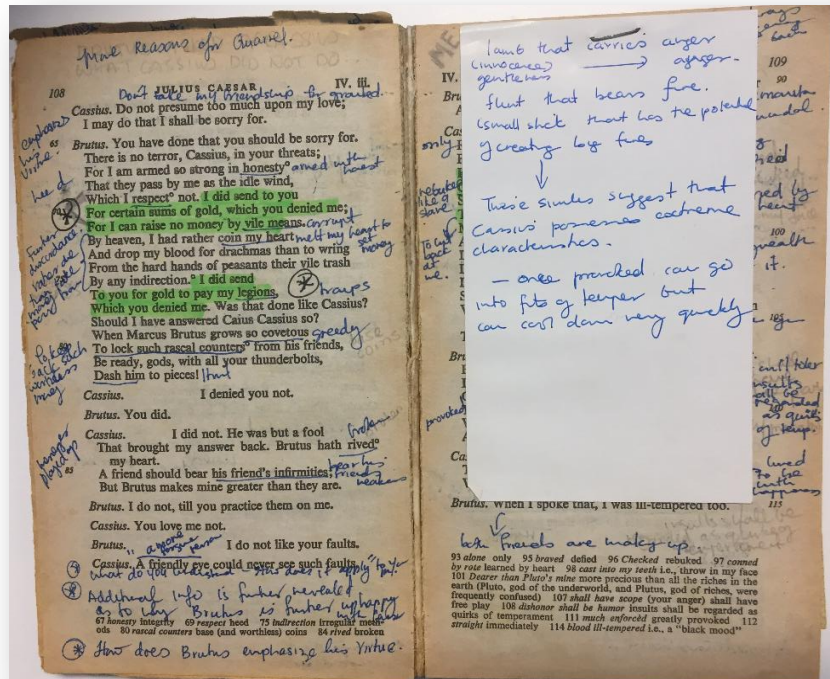


Figure 2. Yellowed 27-year-old study notes on Brutus’ virtue in a Signet Classic Julius Caesar text.

Holding obedience as a prerequisite for kotahitanga and teag‘esea is problematic on so many levels. If unchecked and unchallenged, obedience can breed unity that is fragile and brittle. As a result, this ‘facade’ of unity can create organisational, educational, commercial, and governmental systems that purport to uphold humane values of inclusiveness, justice, and equity, when in reality, it fails miserably to foster all of the above. To illustrate, research on the lack of recruitment of Māori and Pasifika academics by Naepi (2019) and McCallister et al (2019) show that this trend is rampant in universities across Aotearoa, despite the promotion of Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) values. In Part I, obedience is demonstrative and expository: a remember-*ing* rather than a celebration of learning.

Part II — mov-*ing* over in honour of disobedience

In sharp contrast, Part II does not rely on the memory of obedience nor does it take its form in the English language. As an Indigenous diasporic in Aotearoa, obedience for the sake of unity and harmony is not a virtue I aspire to. Besides, it has been 27 years since Lear’s *Owl and the Pussycat* and quite frankly, obedience is rather overrated. In fact, the word ‘obedience’ disturbingly conjures for me, the image of a Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) sardar on horseback; he is whipping a plantation worker in the sugarcane fields of Wainikoro, a settlement in my hometown of Labasa in Fiji. In case you missed it, I associate ‘obedience’ with the exploitative regimes of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The weight on my shoulders, as I write, is noticeably heavy.

In Part II, I am not politely sitting at an imaginary table. I am standing: lifted up by my mapiga Lilly’s ancestral mana instead. I am holding a bullhorn. Disobedience is beside me with three linguistic elements of poetic ‘insolence’. These include the macaronic (Ramazani, 2015) use of the Rotuman language, the display of plot-based, discourse patterns of Rotuman oral storytelling, and the accidental inversion and bastardisation of Lear’s strange cat and bird love story. Unlike Pre-Part I and Part I, my reflexive self-talk had reached penetrative levels: restless and panting for a fight.

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		Translation
1.	now let me show you mine .	
2.	Hanuj!	Storyteller's call to attention!
3.	Mā!	Audience's heeding reply!
4.	Hanuj 'ākia 'inosot ne noh 'e ta hanuet.	Here is a story of a couple who lived at a place, unknown.
5.	Ea fā ta on asa le Pusi ma as 'on hān ta le Ruru.	It is said that the husband's name was Pussycat and the wife's name was Owl.
6.	Inos te' kat noh 'oaf'oaf ra.	This couple did not have a happy marriage.
7.	'E te' ne terāni, Pusi ma Ruru la haipeluag	Every day, Pussycat and Owl would fight
8.	'e reko Ruru ka luag'en ma fāat on asa le Armea.	because Owl was sleeping around with the honey eater, Rotuma Myozela.
9.	Iriā rua la haipeluag 'e av ne 'amaha.	They would fight while having breakfast.
10.	Iriā rua la haipeluag 'e av 'ate ianina.	They would fight while having lunch.
11.	Iriā rua la haipeluag 'e av ne 'omoe.	They would fight while having dinner.
12.	Ma ta terānit, Pusi 'ea se Ruru,	So, one day, Pussycat said to Owl,
13.	'Gou ravātia 'e haipeluga ma gou tā la 'ania 'āe'.	'I am tired of fighting so I am going to eat you'.
14.	Ma le Ruru kat re tārtār ra.	So, Owl wasted no time.
15.	Iā fer mij pau se Armea ma haipeluag ta to'ak'āk fakapau.	She flew very quickly to that Rotuman honey eater and the fighting stopped immediately.
16.	Ma iriā rua noh 'oaf'oaf 'e te' ne ava	And they lived happily ever after.
17.	ma tape' ma se le Pusi.	And so did Pussycat.
18.	Ma tā'ma morea' ma öfse'ea.	And here the story ends.

The Rotuman language is currently assessed as 'vulnerable' by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2017). The extent of this vulnerability demands critical analysis, but this is outside the scope of this paper so I will resist digressing. The macaronic use of Rotuman in Part II is measured and reactive to its UN status of vulnerability. Part II is the *centre* of the poem and has the lion's share of lines (Part I 11 lines (English), Part II 17 (Rotuman), Part III 4 (English)). It stands as an unremorseful act of resistance, defiance, and revival. The display of plot-based, discourse patterns of Rotuman oral hanuju (story) is also deliberate. These discourse patterns are the storyteller and audience's reciprocal codes of verbal conduct in the commencement of a hanuju (lines 13 and 14), and markers of narrative hook (Hanuj 'ākia ... line 15), character naming ('Ea fā ta on asa ... line 16), plot progression (Ma ... lines 23, 25, 27–29), and narrative closure (... tā'ma morea' ma öfse'ea ... line 29).

What is not intentional, on the other hand, is the injection of infidelity, quarrel, and the threat of devourment into the union of Owl and Pussycat (lines 18, 20–22, 24). I flipped Lear's version of avian-feline love and subjected it to a thorough knocking on its head. This seems counter-intuitive to the theme of kotahitanga and teag 'esea. What was *I* thinking?! Could it be that the natural prey-predator relationship between a bird and cat prevents me from softening to Owl and Pussycat sailing off into the sunset in little wee row boat? Growing up in Fiji, I have witnessed on many occasions mynah birds locked in the jaws of feral and domestic cats. Cat eats bird. Bird is fearful of cat. Bird and cat can never be lovers. What was *Lear* thinking?! Or is it because Rotumans have a penchant for narratives of blood and gore? Titifanua's (1995) collection of Rotuman stories titled *Tales of the Lonely Isles* seems to point

to a ‘narrative appetite’ for carnage and butchery, which in a peculiar way, delights me to no end. Cannibalistic *atuas* (gods, devils) and giant-slaying heroines like Kirkirsasa are far more interesting than protagonists who sit in the shadows of themselves sipping tea. Whatever the reason, this serendipitous inversion felt suspiciously good.

To clarify, I centre Rotuman hanuju in Part II as *another way* of storytelling: not for the purpose of renouncing literary fiction. It is my way of *elevating* our ‘other ways’ of telling and knowing to the level of the written narrative. This act of elevation has resulted in the intentional embedding of hanuju within the frame of the poem. Even though I have a ‘soft spot’ for oral fictions, I am cautious about claiming that oral storytelling is *the* definitive form of the Indigenous narrative: it is *one* form, not *the* form. Indigenous storytellers also write; we have been scribing and writing for generations. In Justice’s (2018, p. 35) description of Louise Edrich’s work, we learn of the Ojibwe people who were “great writers from way back” and who “synthesised the oral and written tradition by keeping mnemonic scrolls of birchbark. The first paper, the first books”. The Marsden-funded research *Writing the New World* (2020) led by Alice Te Punga Somerville is also essential testament to the long-held practices of writing for Indigenous storytellers. My creative mind warms to the idea that centring, elevating, and embedding (like the Ojibwe people) are creative strategies of address, that can be aimed at the English language and its contemporary literary forms to call out: ‘Oi! *U’tutuf* (Move over)! My language and stories are here.’

Part III—conced-*ing* (because it is the right, not the obedient thing to do)

A call to ‘move over’ brings us to the issue of conced-*ing*: letting go of power, shifting power, returning power, and sharing power. A precursor to concession is the sincere recognition of suffering and loss, and the genuine commitment on the part of mainstream and governing groups to address lasting repercussions of historical harm, at all levels of society. In the context of kotahitanga and teag ’esea, what do recognition and commitment look like? Here is a summarised list.

- Nurture empathy for the oppressed and marginal.
- Be an ally.
- Foreground their histories.
- Learn their histories.
- Hear their languages.
- Foreground their ways of knowing.
- Learn their ways of knowing.
- Advocate these histories, languages, and ways of knowing in workplaces, classrooms, hospitals, courtrooms, parliaments, ministerial agencies, and any other social, political, and economical spaces where people gather to achieve common goals.
- Make room.
- Move over.
- Rewrite policies and legislations to shift the balance of power.
- Return illegally appropriated possessions.
- Concede.

These affirmative actions are condensed in the lines ‘... learn to write ‘**me**’ as I have learnt to write ‘**you**’ (line 32 and 33). Form-wise, Part III’s brevity is deceptive of the scale of work required for the achievement of kotahitanga and teag ’esea at all levels of society.

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1. it is my hope
2. that sooner rather than later
3. you will learn to write ‘me’
4. as I have learnt to write ‘you’.

I consider conceded *-ing* power and redressing the consequences of historical harm as an uncorrupted and therefore pure form of kindness. This is the version of kindness I prefer—the difficult one: the one that demands sleeve-rolling and deep reflection by everyone, especially mainstream and governing cultures. The media-spouting type of kindness that is, ‘be kind to one another’ is fickle and almost borders on insult and arrogance, despite its good intentions. To arrive at this conclusion, that is, a *something*, creatively processing the acts of ‘remember-*ing*’ my obedience of learning and ‘mov-*ing* over’ in the name of disobedience were necessary.

The full poem and all its parts (without translations)

Writing each other

I

you have shown me **‘your’** literary-ness
since forever
in the Norton Anthology of Poetry
from the feet of kai valagi teachers
swaying on the unconventional relationship
of Lear’s ‘Owl and the Pussycat’, p. 750, 3rd ed.
i have swallowed your personifications and metaphorical loads,
fastened your meter and rhyme behind my ears like a hearing aid,
lathered my pages with modernist playfulness and ambiguities.
this was how to ‘make it’ into your literary canon, you said.
be mysterious. show don’t tell. release the visceral goddess.

II

now let me show you **mine**.
Hanuj!
Mā!
Hanuj ‘ākia ‘inosot ne noh ‘e ta hanuet.
‘Ea fā ta on asa le Pusi ma as ‘on hān ta le Ruru.
Inos te’ kat noh ‘oaf’oaf ra.
‘E te’ ne terāni, Pusi ma Ruru la hāpeluāg
‘e reko Ruru kālūāg‘en ma fāat on asa le Armea.
Iriā rua la hāpeluāg ‘e av ne ‘amaha.
Iriā rua la hāpeluāg ‘e av ‘ate iānina.
Iriā rua la hāpeluāg ‘e av ne ‘omoe.
Ma ta terānit, Pusi ‘ea se Ruru,
‘Gou ravātia ‘e hāpeluga ma gou tā la ‘ania ‘āe’.
Ma le Ruru kat re tārtār ra.
Iā fer mij pau se Armea ma hāpeluāg ta to‘ak‘āk fakapau.
Ma iriā rua noh ‘oaf’oaf ‘e te’ ne ava

ma tape' ma se le Pusi.
Ma tā'ma morea' ma öfse'ea.

III

it is my hope
that sooner rather than later
you will learn to write 'me'
as I have learnt to write 'you'.

Conclusion

Writing each other was a commissioned poem for Creative Waikato's Kotahitanga United Through Creativity project. Within the socio-political environment of COVID-19 and the BLM movement, the mostly serendipitous process of writing *Writing each other* allowed me to dream a vision of kotahitanga and teag'esea. I gave myself up to the unpredictability of the creative writing process, trusting it to take me to unpremeditated spaces. I unconsciously rummaged through my memories of higher learning as I 'travelled', and dropped my haul into an imaginary candy floss machine to reveal the pure-spun sticky fluff of seemingly sweet and obedient years of Western tertiary conditioning. I sat in an imaginary meeting and watched Jane Ricketts do her thing with Lear's *The Owl and the Pussycat* and then I reached out to my mapiga's mana to deliver a mov-ing over protest in disobedient, Rotuman hanuju style. Acts of remember-ing and the call for mov-ing over have led me to the conclusion that kotahitanga can only be achieved through sincere and genuine conced-ing of political and social power, at all levels of society. This was the *something* that arrived in time for the deadline of June 19.

I would like to think that during the 14 days of the think-wait-think-wait-write process, I did not lose sight of who I was writing *for* nor *to*. COVID-19 and the BLM movement clearly marked the *for* and *to* in our universal awareness. This distinction enabled me to engage in the creative writing process as both a practitioner as well as a reader-consumer. I was not only writing to meet a deadline: I was writing because, like many during the periods of COVID-19 lockdown and recent resurgences of the BLM movement, I was a human hurting: distraught and angry at the ugliness of racism; dejected at the disparities of health, education, and employment experienced in our lockdown lives; fatigued at my multiple roles of home-school teacher, family cook, supermarket shopper, and university worker; and highly anxious at the proximity and presence of death in our communities. Poetry, as a form of cope literature, graciously gave me an out to sense-make during the crafting of *Writing each other*.

Ma tā'ma morea' ma öfse'ea.
And here the story ends.

Every hanuju ends with a call marking the end of a story, even tumultuous ones recounting the birth of a poem. My mapiga Lilly taught me this. She taught me to say 'Ma tā'ma morea' ma öfse'ea' with my mouth wide open and with gratitude. And don't forget the hanisie (love) she'd say. Always bring the hanisie. The hanuju experience is richer because of it.

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