Permission to Know

by Julie Chung '20

Last summer, during my third week of senior-thesis fieldwork in Honolulu, I visited a kalo (taro) patch, Ka Papa Lo'i O Kānēwai, at the Hawai'i 'Ulu'Ukā School of Hawaiian Knowledge. Our group had spent only a few minutes shuffling single-file along the narrow mountain trail before our guide stopped us. As we settled into a silence, the rest of the scenery came alive. I could hear the freshwater stream tumbling downhill beside me, and I watched hundreds of frantic ants, emboldened by my stillness, scramble over my exposed feet and legs. Until that point, my eyes and senses had been fixated on the rocky path, which had tested the limits of my foam flip-flops.

After our guide had arranged us in a large circle, she asked, “I would never go into your house without knocking, right?” I shook my head, unsure why we were discussing this. “No, that’s trespassing,” she reminded us.

She continued, “We are in the same situation here. Just because there aren’t any doors or walls, doesn’t mean that anybody can come and enter this mountain. We need to introduce ourselves to the āina (land).”

We would normally introduce ourselves with an oli, or chant, but given we did not have enough time to learn one, our tour group each shared our first and last names, our genealogy, our family’s place of origin, and our educational pursuits. I welcomed the change of pace from the standard “Harvard introduction” of name, year, House, and concentration.

Even after a greeting as simple as an “Aloha, my name is...” our guide told us, “The land will tell you if you have permission. You might hear the sounds of a songbird or maybe you just get a bad feeling inside telling you not to go farther.” She pointed to her na'au (gut), which is the center of thought, intellect, and instinct for Hawaiians.

When I arrived in Honolulu on May 31, I had a bad feeling in my gut. I was conducting my 10 weeks of fieldwork at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Department of Native Hawaiian Health (DNHH), the only medical-school department devoted to researching indigenous health disparities in the United States. The department hosts an interdisciplinary team of psychologists, public-health researchers, physicians, and bench scientists from both Native Hawaiian and non-native backgrounds with the common purpose of addressing the striking burden of disease in Native Hawaiian communities that stems from generations of historical and cultural trauma. Intrigued by the DNHH’s emphasis on cultural revitalization and community engagement, I initially planned to interview Native Hawaiian community members about their experiences participating in health research, and their opinions of the integration of Western biomedical and Native Hawaiian healing traditions.

On my second day at DNHH, I sat on the third floor of the medical school overlooking skyscrapers and the gorgeous blue skies of Honolulu and reflected on my relationship to the place. All 10 undergraduate interns had gathered for two introductions: of ourselves and of the land. After giving a brief history of the colonization of Hawai‘i and the mission of the school of medicine, our DNHH presenter pulled up a slide on the projector screen. ‘O Wāi Aui? Who am I? The slide had images of various natural landscapes in Hawai‘i. Our presenter asked us to introduce ourselves “the Native Hawaiian way”: “My name is... My mountain is... My river/ocean is... My rain is... My wind is... I am from...”

As my turn approached, I was nervous. The six interns before me had all given the Hawaiian names of places around them, while two of them had spoken their entire introductions in Hawaiian. I was the only student who did not grow up in Hawai‘i. My mountain, my river, my ocean, my valley, and my wind were all scattered across California and New England. What was my place in Hawai‘i?

My unease about my initial plans had actually begun six months before, when I sat with other juniors in the anthropol—
Early in the past century, Harvard’s Eugenics Era, which at times has legitimized and reinforced harmful ideas, including eugenics, often granted to Harvard-approved knowledge, expectations, and practices that have had innumerable times her family had provided blood samples, survey responses, and hours of interviews to researchers—and never learned anything about the benefits or results of those studies.

When I relayed my plans to interview Native Hawaiians to my internship adviser, she warned me that representations of Native Hawaiians by Westerners have often resulted in harmful consequences for the group. That reminded me of a tutorial reading describing how Captain James Cook’s eighteenth-century account of indigenous Australians as uncivilized because they lacked a land-tenure system later became the legal basis for seizing their land—a decision overturned in the Australian High Court only in 1992. During my time in Hawai‘i, I learned how academics in the mid-1900s “proved” the theories of early European explorers, who believed humans first reached the Pacific islands by passively drifting on currents. These theories fed into prevailing stereotypes about the inferiority of Native Hawaiians—until the revival, starting in the 1970s, of knowledge about ancestral Polynesian navigational techniques—wayfinding—as used on traditional double-hulled canoes.

After talking to several people at DNHH, I rethought my initial research plans. My internship adviser had told me, “In Native Hawaiian culture, there is a sense that this knowledge is knowledge that is not for everyone. You are chosen to be given knowledge, rather than simply seeking it.” In other words, I had to question whether I was even allowed to know what I was seeking. I decided to exclude all Native Hawaiian lay people from my study, and to focus instead on how health professionals at DNHH have reshaped their scientific practices as a result of navigating their roles as scientists and individuals accountable to Native Hawaiian communities.

As I conducted my fieldwork, I learned the importance of transparency and long-term engagement with consent. Permission relied on a robust self-introduction to the people I worked with, especially given the political stakes of my academic work. As the American Anthropological Association states, the consent process is “necessarily dynamical and reflexive.” Several times, my oral-history participants forthrightly asked, “I want to know who you are. Why are you doing this project?” In anthropology, we often discuss how we cannot enter our fieldsites or write our pieces as “objective” researchers. Our identity markers, our gender, race, and political views, all influence the ways in which we interact with our interlocutors and collaborators. When we sit down to write, these same identities, life experiences, and educational backgrounds all shape how we perceive and therefore represent the communities, cultures, and histories we are studying—just as occurred in Australia, where colonial academics failed to recognize how their culturally inscribed assumptions about property warped the way they understood indigenous land relations.
Rejecting any thin veil of objectivity, I therefore introduced myself as Julie Sun Young Chung, a Korean American from Los Angeles who supports current Native Hawaiian political movements, the niece and granddaughter of Korean traditional medicinalists, and an undergraduate at Harvard. One of my first interviewees, a Native Hawaiian researcher and activist, generously offered to provide feedback on my work and reached out to her own contacts to encourage them to work with me as well. Although I do not yet fully trust myself, I’m reassured that such advisers will guide me in the right direction.

This year, I also plan to share copies of all my thesis drafts with my oral-history participants. They will have full liberty to redact parts of it and give me feedback. I was partly inspired to do this by stories told by my ethnographic-methods instructor, postdoctoral fellow Kaya Williams. In her own process of sharing dissertation drafts with her interlocutors, she sometimes had to remove quotes and anecdotes that might have been the strongest pieces of evidence for her argument. If consent is more than a bureaucratic checkmark, it demands long-term commitment.

This summer, I also joined hundreds of Native Hawaiian activists to protest the construction of the Thirty-Meter Telescope (TMT) on the sacred Maunakea Summit on Hawai’i Island. Adding TMT to the existing telescope array there poses potentially damaging environmental consequences and would further deny Native Hawaiians access to areas used for cultural and spiritual practices on the mountain. Meanwhile, some University of Hawai’i administrators and government officials argued that the telescope would advance science and therefore benefit all the people of Hawai’i and the world. In their view, permission to use the sacred summit for TMT stemmed from the intrinsic and universal benefits of scientific knowledge. Scientific progress seemed to be taking precedence over all other concerns. News accounts depicted the controversy as “science versus religion,” casting Native Hawaiians aside as backward and superstitious. Rather than automatically agreeing, “The more knowledge, the better,” I listened to people questioning: Whom will this knowledge actually benefit? Upon what kinds of values should that knowledge be built? Who decides what kinds of knowledge to seek, and will that involve the indigenous people of this land?
the knowledge in the world. As I step through their endless bookshelves, the stacks of Widener Library illuminate, quietly inviting me to explore. No research question seems too far-fetched or impractical, given Harvard's wealth and resources. My curiosity is compounded by academia's constant demand to publish: a criterion of individual and institutional success. Even in the College's mission to "educate the citizens and citizen-leaders for our society," the power to influence our world too often seems to lie only in our effort to build up vast reservoirs of knowledge and establish our expertise.

In my summer thesis research in Hawai'i, however, I found a bit more of my role in changing this world—not in the knowledge that I uncovered, but in the knowledge that I chose not to seek.

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### SPORTS

**Reload and Fire**

*In the early season, an infusion of new talent and a hot quarterback buoyed the Crimson football team.*

In Tim Murphy's 25 years as Harvard's football coach, every four-year player has won or shared at least one Ivy League title. So far, this year's seniors, the class of 2020, have been championship-less. The early part of the 2019 season—which featured a 31-23 loss to the University of San Diego and a 42-7 blowout win over Ivy rival Brown—showed that it would be a challenge to extend the streak, but perhaps not impossible.

During the first half of this decade, Harvard was the bullyboy of Ivy football, winning or sharing four titles in five years. But in the past three seasons the Crimson slipped back into the pack, going 7-3 in 2016, 5-5 in '17, and 6-4 in '18. A major cause: parity has engulfed the Ivies. Every game is a dogfight. The results in the conference's preseason media poll had the Crimson fourth, probably justifiably, behind Yale, Dartmouth, and last season's undefeated champion, Princeton.

As he approached his twenty-sixth season on the Crimson sideline, Murphy needed to restock his roster. He had lost 30 seniors from his '18 team, including howitzer-armed quarterback Tom Stewart and many stalwarts from the powerhouse offensive and defensive lines. To compound Murphy's task, two star offensive players—running back Aaron Shampklin, the Ivy League's rushing leader in 2018, and speedy wideout Tyler Adams, who scored a sensational long touchdown on an end-around against Yale—did not enroll in school for the fall semester.

Harvard was not without weapons. Senior defensive back and captain Wesley Ogsbury was one of the league's top ballhawks, with six interceptions in 2018. Junior Jordan Hill was one of the Ivies' best linebackers. On offense, with Shampklin absent, his backfield mate, junior Devin Darrington, was capable of running over or jetting past defenders. Even without Adams, the receiving corps was deep, featuring senior speedsters Jack Cook and Cody Chrest. Senior Jake McIntyre was a trusted placekicker from 40 yards and in. Back for another stint at quarterback was junior Jake Smith, who had many good moments as a freshman and sophomore before ceding the starting job to Stewart early last year. How much Smith had matured would be crucial to the Crimson's progress.

In an intriguing twist, Murphy decided to begin the season by inserting into the defensive-line rotation a quartet of promising but inexperienced sophomores: Truman Jones, Anthony Nelson Jr., Jacob Sykes, and Chris Smith. The coach knew it was a gamble, at least as far as the 2019 season was concerned.

In the opener against San Diego, which was playing its third game of 2019, the Crimson showed its flaws—and its rust. Twice previously a Harvard football team had traveled to southern California, which has become fertile recruiting territory (see Tidbits). In 2013, the Crimson had thrashed the Toreros 42-0 (and also beat them again in Cambridge, in 2014 and '18). But the more memorable appearance came 100 years ago, on January 1, 1920, when Harvard, the 1919 national champion, played in its only bowl game, defeating Oregon 7-6.

This time, in sunny 70-degree conditions, the Toreros didn't even give the Crimson defenders time to apply their sunscreen. Harvard was playing the first half without Ogsbury, who was serving out a suspension as a result of being called for a target-