

On *ʔiptukilhiwatʔiptutʔiʔni*, *where are you from and where are you going?*

**kʔimitʔi, we are far away.**  
**tsʔiqiʔ, the tides are low.**

qšimuʔ, like many words in tinismuʔ tiłhinktitʔu, explains a story rather than a fixed or singular vocabulary. [1, 2] *Olivella biplicata* has a gorgeous shell, with colors that smoothly transition from stark white to milky lavender to rich honey golds, in combination or alone, along a softly curving spire. A being reflecting spiritual wealth and a symbol of exchange from our homelands spanning mountain ranges east to nitspu nakota ktitʔu, south well beyond recently imagined lines of occupying nations, and along margins of the sea north to nitspu unangan ktitʔu, qšimuʔ grounds yak titʔu titʔu yak tiłhini in a vast network of relation. [3] yakʔitinismuʔ wa yakʔitotomol, which echo the cadence, vocabulary, and sewn-planks of many other nations, extend these connections well across łpasini, the one ocean. [4]

*imagining*

*distance*

*in*

*constellations*

Most of my family is living in diaspora from our homelands due to dispossession – matriarchal lands now submerged by dammed rivers once glistening with rainbow trout, enclosed with barbed wire to herd the cattle that replaced us, or mediated entirely by military bases and removal to private collections. [5] Though privileged to be a visitor at xučyun nitspu chochenyo ktitʔu, within the range of extended neighbors, cousins, and kin, I make the four hour drive regularly to watch freshwater bloom in saltwater tides and gather along beaches our family has since time immemorial. We have always been well-traveled people.

*that tether us*

*to the spring*

*of who*

*we are*

qšimu? also situates us within the mirror of the sky. The word is also used to describe stars, each relation an anchor in constellations of movement, navigation, shifting tides, and shared ceremony. Indeed, it is this movement that iterates across waters and continents that brings me to this place again and again. Epeli Hau'ofa explained in *Our Sea Of Islands* that the “once boundless world” was transformed into a mythology of confinement. This extends to the edges of what is designated as “Pacific,” or “Atlantic,” “Carribbean,” “Arctic,” or otherwise – in yak?itinismu?, as in many of our languages, we know it as one connected being. In all our rupture and resilience, some have forgotten about the full expanse of relatives on other shores. But like the tides that call multitudes of stars to the softly churning surf at tsixala, yakitsuḥitsi?iša?, our world is in continuous motion, wa yatsnatšaqinismu? ts?isaqwa yak?ikinitʻaninitʻuspu, and this knowing makes our worlds whole. [6, 7]

**k?itutʻinaha, we are returning.  
ts?ilhini, the tides are full and high.**

*Notes:*

1. Originally published as “qšiqšimu, many stars, many shells,” *Artlink 40:2 : Kinship Constellations*, edited by Léuli Eshrāghi and Kimberley Moulton (Adelaide: Artlink Australia, 2020).
2. Renée Pualani Louis, author of *Kanaka Hawai'i Cartography: Hula, Navigation, and Oratory* offered this understanding of ‘Ōlelo placenames in a conversation at University of California, Davis on October 24, 2019.
3. nitspu nakota ktitʻu (in the the land/world of Nakota people [Montana, Alberta, and Saskatchewan]; nitspu unangan ktitʻu (in the land/world of Unangan people (Tanam Unangaa [Aleutian Islands, Alaska and Kamchatka Krai]); yak titʻu titʻu yak tiłhini (the people of tiłhini (place of the full moon [San Luis Obispo, CA]).
4. yak?itinismu? (our language) wa yak?itotomol (and our tomols). Tomols are sewn redwood plank canoes used throughout the Santa Barbara Channels Islands and the southern stretch of Chumashan cultural areas in the Central Coast of California (namely smuwic [the language of Santa Barbara region] and mitsqanaqaʻan [the language of Ventura region] speaking relations and cousins on Limuʻw [Santa Cruz Island] and Wiʻma [Santa Rosa Island]).
5. Namely, the dam on the Nacimiento River (tributary of the north-flowing Salinas River in Central California), Hearst Corporation, Camp Roberts National Guard Outpost, and the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at University of California, Berkeley.
6. tsixala (place of the big red ants [Cayucos, CA]), one of the author’s home villages.
7. Original artwork: Sarah Biscarra Dilley, *ʻiptukilhiwaʻiptuʻiʻni* [where are you from and where are you going?], video collage, 9:33, 2018.

