

## Caught in the Crossfire

The laminate floorboards felt damp  
beneath my bare feet –  
stained blood red from the oxidized Anahola soil.  
Through the sheer curtains,  
a kaleidoscope of broken bottles glistens under the sun  
on the dusty shoreline  
of the surrounding sea of buffalo grass –  
abandoned cars, partially submerged.

The walls of the portable classroom caved inwards  
while the hot, sticky air poured into my lungs like molten tar,  
weighing them down as if they were bait on a silver hook,  
tied to lead sinkers and cast into the black abyss.  
I squirmed in my seat –  
afraid to move, but too nervous to sit still.  
The familiar taste of iron filled my mouth  
as I gnawed the inside of my cheek.

The room reeked of Uncle Kala's leftovers,  
slathered with beef stew to mask the sour stench of expired rice.  
I tugged on the neck of my brown cotton uniform,  
trying to hide inside of it.  
Endorsed by the school,  
my peers wore red in protest of TMT,  
a tin foil dome in all its glory,

soon to be perched on the summit of Mauna Kea.

I felt out of place,  
caught in the crossfire of an underground war  
between conflicting cultures,  
native and haole,  
locked into a vicious cycle of hate and distrust.

Children, with all their innocence,  
stood on the street like ventriloquist dolls,  
strings attached –  
their tiny hands grasping battered signs.

The message,  
freshly painted by their teachers,  
read loud and clear:

“A’ole TMT.”