Against Extinction:
A Legacy of Native Hawaiian Resistance Literature

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Mo‘okū‘auhau (Genealogy)

Davianna Pōmaika‘i McGregor once wrote that during the 1970s, when the Hawaiian movement was “emerging,” some kūpuna (elders, grandparents) denounced the political activism of the ‘ōpia, the younger ones. They said it was “un-Hawaiian.” McGregor questioned whether it was really true that no legacy of Hawaiian resistance existed, that instead Hawaiians had either passively or enthusiastically accepted the changes to the culture and the Islands (McGregor 1985:44).

The decade of the 1970s is popularly recognized today as a time when modern Hawaiians began to come into their own. We had undergone the pressures of assimilation and somehow remained loyal to our “Hawaiianess,” as different as we were from our mākua (parents) or kūpuna. One of those differences did seem to be our belligerency, our haole contentiousness, our outspokenness. Most of us had been raised to be ‘olu’olu (polite, courteous), to show aloha (kindness, love), to be generous. We had been raised to obey our parents. How could we therefore be so un-Hawaiian in our Hawaiianess?

The apparent contradiction did not stop the political activists of the 1970s. They carried within them the fire of conviction. They also began to carry the deepening knowledge that they were, indeed, perpetuating a legacy of resistance. Hawaiian resistance has taken many forms, from the defiant and wrathful ways of Pele to the stubborn continuation of traditional practices. McGregor herself, along with others, went on to develop a form of resistance that claimed the status of nation for the Hawaiian people. In her research, she traced the legacy of Native Hawaiian nationalism to the 1870s, where she recognized “the beginning of an organized and persistent nationalist movement aimed at preventing the American takeover of Hawai‘i” (1985:45). McGregor concentrated firstly on electoral political resistance, defined by the actions of Hawaiian politicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and royalists such as Robert Wilcox (the most famous leader of the Counterrevolution of 1895, popularly known as the “Wilcox Rebellion”), and secondarily on the maka‘āinana (commoner, citizen) petitions of the 1840s, five decades earlier.

I would like to flesh out that genealogy to include other evidence of a Hawaiian nationalist movement in the form of a “resistance literature” by Hawaiians, while at the same time recognizing that further evidence is being rapidly uncovered by Hawaiian scholars in their research into Hawaiian- and English-language documents. This article only continues to add to the genealogy of resistance which others have already traced in part, and in no way pretends to have located more than a fraction of its whole. I also do not pretend to understand completely the significance or ramifications of this genealogy.

Resistance Literature

The phrase “resistance literature” was first coined and popularized by Barbara Harlow to apply to the broad spectrum of narrative, poetic, and analytical writings produced by resistance and national liberation movements in their struggles against repressive forms of ideological and cultural production (Harlow 1987:xvi,29). Such writings carry the potential to wrest back from the repressive authorities the control over cultural production. Harlow quotes Hugo Blanco, who worked as a political organizer in Peru, about the use of paper as a means of cultural and political oppression: “There is a famous saying: Qelgan riman (What is written is what is heard). We fight this fetishism to the death. And one of the ways to fight it is precisely to show the peasant that, just as the enemy has his papers, so do we have our papers. To the paper that contradicts the reason and logic of the peasant, we counterpose [sic] the paper that bears that reason and logic” (Blanco in Harlow 1987:12).

When writing was first introduced by the missionaries to the Hawaiians in the 1820s, it was rapidly embraced, to the point that the Hawaiian nation in the last century was quite possibly the most literate nation in the world. I am convinced that one of the central reasons for this phenomenon was that Hawaiians understood the magic and power of language. One of the most well-known of Hawaiian proverbs, for instance, goes: I ka ‘ōlelo ke ola; i ka ‘ōlelo ka make, “In the word, there is life; in the word, there is death.” But words were subsequently used by foreigners to trick and rob Native Hawaiians of their
land and political power. As with the Indians of Peru, the foreign palapala (a Hawaiian word that means “document” or “writing of any kind”) became the currency of power and crushed the Natives through the courts, the Legislature, the offices of commerce and land distribution. Until today, distrust of the palapala runs deep.

Yet the palapala has also come to be wielded in the struggle for liberation to help us grapple with the ambivalence of our cultural identity. John Dominis Holt, in his book On Being Hawaiian (1974a), explains this ambivalence as arising from the near, but not complete, extermination of Hawaiian culture:

Always, here in the land of our ancestors, we are psychologically captive to the spirit of the past. The harsh legacy of early observers, who endlessly shouted the myth of superiority of their beliefs over those of Hawaiians, we must constantly live down. [...] The weight of classic mores and beliefs (not as potent, nor as functional anymore, as they were in the time of the kapu system, the chiefs, the kahuna, and the heiau) is nonetheless a burden that Hawaiians must still bear. We are inescapably the heirs to this welter of tradition, whether we like it or not. Some of us try to understand it – to accept and keep those aspects of tradition which we like, and discard the rest. Many of us are confused. We do not know how to think about the past, even if we have some glint of knowledge of what happened then. [...] Hawaiians in Hawaii are inescapably a part of the living tissue of island history. In some respects, it is a terrible burden. We are, to some extent, the walking repositories of island antiquity: living symbols of a way of life long dead, but which strangely persists in shaping the character of life in the fiftieth state (Holt 1974a:17-18).

Holt was writing in the 1970s, the beginning of that period of political activism that many people mistook for an “invented” Hawaiianess. But Holt had his finger on the heart of the movement: an acceptance in these islands of what Hawaiians call our kuleana and the necessity to work our way out of our confusion to a more lucid understanding of ourselves as modern Hawaiians. That the word “kuleana” denotes both privilege and responsibility, as well as the actual plot of land upon which we subsist, is not mere coincidence. Our “inescapable” link to the land as part of its “living tissue” is, I would argue, the driving force of the Hawaiian movement.

McGregor recognized that force when she wrote:

The ‘āina of Hawai`i including the ocean and environment is important to Hawaiians primarily because it provides us with the basic necessities of life – food, shelter, recreation and economic livelihood. However, it is also important to us as the source of our mana, the spiritual strength that we experience when working in harmony with the life forces of nature. Moreover, control of our ‘āina is a critical measure of our political sovereignty and the potential to determine our future as a people. Our ancestors were put to rest within the ‘āina and their spirit lives on in the remnants of their house sites, ko`a, heiau, lo`i terraces and burial sites – places of ‘ohana life, work, recreation and worship (McGregor 1985:44).

Because many believed that it was only in the last few decades of the struggle against US imperialism that the term aloha ʻāina ("love of the land") was first articulated, critics such as anthropologist Jocelyn Linnekin claim that it has been "invented" by modern Hawaiians as a slogan, as opposed to a "real" cultural value, for the purpose of political maneuvering in struggles over competing claims to land (Linnekin 1983). In her book From A Native Daughter (1993), Haunani-Kay Trask takes Linnekin to task for misapprehending Hawaiian culture: "Hawaiians assert a traditional relationship to the land not for political ends, as Linnekin argues, but because they continue to believe in the cultural value of caring for the land. That land use is now contested makes such a belief political" (Trask 1993:168). Linnekin is not alone in seeing modern Hawaiians as "invented" in their cultural beliefs of self, however. Nor is that view confined to non-Hawaiians, as McGregor discovered when Hawaiian kūpuna in the 1970s criticized the "un-Hawaiian" behavior of Native Hawaiian political activists.

Voices of the Makaʻāinana

Although, as McGregor points out, Hawaiian nationalists first organized themselves in electoral politics in the 1870s in order to resist the American takeover of Hawai`i (1985:45), the makaʻāinana
petition movement of the 1840s reveals an earlier period of Hawaiian nationalism. An organized opposition to the loss of Hawaiian nationhood in the sense of political sovereignty was first given voice in these petitions. They were written in response to the proposals of Kauikeaouli (Kamehameha III) to adopt a more Western form of government in the way of a constitutional monarchy in order to gain the respect, and subsequent protection, of the imperialist powers. Up to then, conflicts with foreigners had characteristically been resolved through gunboat diplomacy, under whose terms the Hawaiian government was invariably forced to concede property and commercial rights to foreigners. In 1843, a British Captain by the name of George Paulet had actually forced Kauikeaouli to cede the Islands to Great Britain (Kuykendall 1938:210-19). Hawai‘i’s independence was only restored with the help of an American challenge to the British just short of open conflict (ibid.:219-21), making Hawaiians keenly aware of the precariousness of their political sovereignty.

In a petition from Kona, Hawai‘i, to Kauikeaouli in 1845, the admonition contained in all the petitions against selling ‘āina (land) to foreigners is elaborated upon in a way that explicitly links political sovereignty to love for the land:

There is aroused within us love and reluctance to lose the land, with love for the chiefs, and the children, and everything upon the land. We believe we will soon end as homeless people. Therefore we kiss the soil of the land and petition you at the legislature. […] We think that the land is not for the foreigner, only for us, the true Hawaiians. […] Do not give laws covenanting to give away our own Hawaii. There is the entry [puka; sic] where the foreigners get into the body [opu; sic] of our own Hawaii. […] Perhaps they all will say, “We are true Hawaiians, therefore it is not your land. […] We are naturalized Hawaiians, therefore the land is ours, not yours, because you are brown skinned and we are white!” (“Petitions” 1985[1845]:55-56; this and other petitions quoted in this paper were published in English translation.)

The maka‘āinana perceived a difference between the loyalties of “true Hawaiians” and “naturalized Hawaiians” to the Native government. “In times of war,” they ask, “will they die together with us, the true Hawaiians? They will run, perhaps, and not stay and help us true Hawaiians. They will not wish to die with us all, and give their lives, and their dollars to the war” (ibid.:56). At the same time, the maka‘āinana recognized those foreigners who had been in Hawai‘i a long time and who “understand the nature of the Hawaiians [and who] are like us, [unlike] the foreigners who acquire wealth” (ibid.:57). The maka‘āinana were clear about the ephemeral nature of monetary wealth compared to the natural wealth of the land. They continue:

The earth continues to receive its wealth and its distinction every day. There would be no end of worldly goods to the very end of this race. But, the money from the sale of the land is quickly ended, by ten years time. Listen to the voice of wisdom announcing to you in this petition. Withhold [aua – be stingy; sic] the land as it is very valuable. Withhold the people and the independent government and the rule of the King over Hawaii from the foreigners (ibid.).

The Hawaiian Nationalist Press

The maka‘āinana petitions of the 1840s are testimony to the radical changes confronting nineteenth-century Hawaiians. Helen Chapin, in her work on the newspapers of Hawai‘i, describes the nineteenth century in the Islands as a time when a “non-literate, memory-based culture was rapidly displaced by codified laws, written constitutions, historical data, and newspapers” (Chapin 1984:49). One of the changes instituted by Kauikeaouli was the legislation of freedom of speech and the press. By the middle of the century, “the earlier goal of universal literacy in Hawaiian took a new direction, with English becoming the medium of business, government, education, and diplomacy” (ibid.). American Protestant missionaries brought the first printing press with them, and ran off their first publication in Hawai‘i in 1822, a schoolbook in Hawaiian. Books, pamphlets, and government documents followed, including a Hawaiian translation of the Bible. The first newspaper in Hawai‘i was produced in the missionary Lahainaluna school in 1834. From then to 1850, the American Protestant missionaries ran the only Hawaiian-language press, in the last decade producing bilingual papers in response to a growing English-language readership.
At mid-century, secular newspapers in English appeared representing the haole elite (a combination of missionary, planter, and business interests). The first major newspaper of this kind was the Pacific Commercial Advertiser, started in 1856 by Henry Whitney, a descendant of the original Protestant mission. It is still published today as the Honolulu Advertiser, until recently also by descendants of early Protestant missionaries. The two newspapers were both commonly referred to as the Advertiser (Chapin 1996:53). Among the Advertiser's original editors were W. R. Castle, W. C. Wilder, W. N. Armstrong, and Lorrin A. Thurston, men who had engineered the Bayonet Constitution, the overthrow of the monarchy, and the annexation of Hawai'i.

Twenty-six years after the establishment of the Advertiser, Whitney also began the Daily Bulletin, which eventually became the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, the second major twentieth-century newspaper. These newspapers, along with other minor English-language secular newspapers, opposed the Hawaiian government, itself represented primarily by the Polynesian and the Hawaiian Gazette. The Polynesian was begun in 1840 by James Jackson Jarves and adopted by Kauikeaouli in 1844 so the King could “explain his positions directly to the foreign community” (Chapin 1996:26). It survived until 1864, a year after which the Hawaiian Gazette became the government paper until it was dropped during the Kalākaua era and taken up by the haole elite, who “mercilessly sneered at and malign[ed] Kalākaua’s policies and his personal character” (Chapin 1984:61).

The year 1861 marks the beginning of a “vernacular Hawaiian language press,” when Hawaiian-language newspapers appeared that were edited by Native Hawaiians, and that “spoke directly for native Hawaiians” but which were not controlled by the government or Protestant missionaries (Chapin 1996:59). Most of these 70 newspapers were produced between 1861 to 1900 by Native Hawaiians and their haole allies, and were opposed to the haole elite or missionary-controlled newspapers. “The unifying thread through 40 years, although the papers held diverse opinions,” Chapin writes, “was a growing sense of nationalism; that is, a devotion to the interests of Hawaii as an independent nation” (Chapin 1984:67). Although most were royalist and opposed to American annexation, some “when the Monarchy’s survival seemed doomed, adopted alternative positions” (ibid.). They were “more than just crusading organs,” for they also contained stories, advertising, illustrations, and – something unique to Hawai‘i – legends, mele (chants), and genealogies (ibid.). Many even had English sections for those not fluent in Hawaiian.

The first of these nationalist papers to be edited solely by Native Hawaiians was Ka Hoku o Ka Pakipika (Star of the Pacific), started by David Kalākaua before he became king. Kalākaua would come to be known as the “editor king” by his subjects because of the number of publications he would eventually support (Chapin 1984:67). The major concern of Ka Hoku o Ka Pakipika was the loss of population and survival of the Hawaiian race. The paper actively supported the expression of Hawaiian culture and the use of the Hawaiian language, and “considered itself a voice for the ‘common people’” (ibid.:68). Only weeks after the birth of Ka Hoku o Ka Pakipika, Henry Whitney began another newspaper to run simultaneously with his Pacific Commercial Advertiser, the Hawaiian language Ka Nupepa Kuokoa (The Independent Newspaper), which in its 66 years of publication was “the longest-running and most successful Hawaiian-language journal” (Chapin 1996:54). Whitney also liked to claim that the Advertiser was “independent and free,” but in fact what he meant was that it was “free of government, but not haole-elite, control” (ibid.:53).

Ka Nupepa Kuokoa was popular among Native Hawaiians who otherwise largely rejected the establishment press, even reaching a circulation (of 5,000) that was far beyond that of the Advertiser (Chapin 1996:57) because it was a rich source of Hawaiian culture. Yet Whitney, like many of his haole contemporaries, still looked down on Hawaiians as inferior and pagan. He possessed a “love for the Islands and the Hawaiian language [but] contempt for Hawaiians” (ibid.). Ka Nupepa Kuokoa held to the same loyalties as the Advertiser and “illustrated a widening gap between mission interests and those of Native Hawaiians and showed the political, economic, and racial mazes of the century’s last decades” (Chapin 1984:53). Ka Hoku o Ka Pakipika openly accused Whitney of being “rich and well-situated” and his Ka Nupepa Kuokoa of being the voice of haole businessmen (ibid.:68). According to Chapin, Whitney was a contradictory and complicated personality. “The single unifying thread in him was a total belief in American culture and values” (ibid.:54), even boasting in his reminiscences that the Advertiser “was independent in politics always, but an ardent advocate of annexation to the United States” (ibid.:54).

On the eve of the overthrow, nationalist newspapers like Ka Oiaio (The Truth) and Ka Makaainana (the Citizen, or Commoner) appeared. Many newspapermen, such as Robert Wilcox, were also insurrectionists struggling to restore the old Constitution, which was more favorable to Native Hawaiians. After the overthrow, the haole oligarchy tried to stifle the opposition by bringing libel suits against the
nationalist newspapers and their Hawaiian and haole editors and printers. Another wave of libel and conspiracy suits followed the Counterrevolution of 1895, resulting in imprisonment of several nationalists. One of these nationalists was Joseph Nawahi, who criticized Kalakaua and Lili‘uokalani, but who was committed to Hawaiian independence. Nawahi ran Ke Aloha Aina (The Patriot) with his wife, Emma, until his death in 1896. Emma continued the newspaper until the turn of the century. Robert Wilcox and his second wife, Theresa Laahui Cartwright, also formed a husband-wife team and ran several newspapers, including the post-annexation Home Rule Republika, which promoted the election of Wilcox as the Territory’s first delegate to Congress.

Chapin identifies the nationalist newspapers as the leaders in the fight for Hawaiian independence in the 1880s and 1890s. It was this press, she says, “that laid the foundation for the arguments for Hawaiian sovereignty that would reemerge in the late 20th century” (Chapin 1996:59). Although the nationalist press contained a diversity of views, they shared several basic themes in opposition to the haole-elite newspapers: “one, a conviction that Hawaiians knew what was best for themselves; two, an awareness that the decline of the Native population was a serious matter; three, an insistence that Hawaii remain an independent nation; four, a deep respect for the monarchy; and five, a great love for their land” (ibid.:61).

Mele Aloha ‘Āina

The themes of the Hawaiian nationalist press were also expressed artistically in the form of nationalist songs written in response to the overthrow and Counterrevolution. One of the more well-known compilations of nationalist songs was the Buke Mele Lahui (Book of National Songs; 1895), which was compiled by F. J. Testa, editor of the pro-royalist Ka Makaainana, from songs that had been printed and circulated in several Hawaiian-language newspapers. According to musicologist Amy Stillman, in “History Reinterpreted in Song: The Case of the Hawaiian Counterrevolution,” the songs repeatedly express the hope for the eventual restoration of the Hawaiian monarchy (Stillman 1989:5). The values of “pride (ha‘aheo), love of land (aloha ‘āina), and glorification of the chiefs” are invoked (ibid.:13), values which were intensified following the monarchy and reintensified following the Counterrevolution.

The first song in the book is “Mele Aloha Aina.” Stillman writes that “aloha ‘āina was a sentiment which pervaded Hawaiian poetry. Poems and songs about aloha ‘āina were called mele aloha ‘āina or also mele lāhui (national songs), as in the title Buke Mele Lahui” (1989:17).

“Mele Aloha Aina,” also known as “Mele Ai Pohaku” (Stone-Eating Song), “was a statement of rebellion,” according to Eleanor C. Nordyke and Martha H. Noyes in “Kaulana Nā Pua: A Voice for Sovereignty” (1993:27). Soon after the haole oligarchy established the provisional government, they issued a mandate for all government workers to sign a loyalty oath. Many people resisted, including members of the Royal Hawaiian Band. They approached Mrs. Ellen Keho‘ohiwaokalani Prendergast, a celebrated Hawaiian poet and lady-in-waiting to the Queen (Patrimonios 1995:87). Eleanor Prendergast, Ellen’s daughter, describes the way the band approached her mother in her rose garden at her home in Kapalama: “We will not follow this new government,” they asserted. “We will be loyal to Liliu. We will not sign the haole’s paper, but will be satisfied with all that is left to us, the stones, the mystic food of our Native land.” So they begged her to compose their song of rebellion” (Nordyke and Noyes 1993:38).

According to John Charlot, as a song of protest between Hawaiian and western culture, “Mele Aloha Aina” has no precedent (Charlot 1985:27). The song draws attention to the palapala, “a word used bitterly by some Hawaiians to describe the rules established by an alien culture to favor its own members” (ibid.). The palapala is ʻānunu (greedy), and the enemy would kūʻai hewa (wrongfully sell out) the Natives’ pono sivila (civil rights). Hawaiians, on the other hand, do not minamina (cherish) the puʻukālā (hill of dollars) of the capitalist provisional government. Hawaiians instead kūpaʻa ma hope o Liliʻulani (stand firm in support of the Queen).

“Mele Ai Pohaku” still exists as a popular song a century later, now called “Kaulana nā pua,” after the first line of the song. It has been recorded by a wide variety of musicians, including Jack DeMello, Marlene Sai, the Hawaiian Nation, Peter Moon, Ozzie Kotani, Keola Beamer, Palani Vaughn, The Brothers Cazimero, and Don Ho, and in 1964 was performed by Noelani Mahoe and Kaʻupena Wong at the Newport Folk Festival (Noyes 1993:23). It has also continued to be danced, once by ‘Iolani Luahine in a black holokū (dress; ibid.). In January 1993, during the centennial observance of the overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani held at ‘Iolani Palace, “Kaulana nā pua” was sung at the opening ceremony as a renewed commitment of loyalty to the sovereignty of Hawai‘i.
Home Rule

One of the most widely respected leaders of the Hawaiian opposition in the late nineteenth century was Joseph Nawahī. Soon after the overthrow, he formed the nationalist party Hui Aloha Aina and with his wife, Emma, founded the nationalist paper Ke Aloha Aina. Emma Nawahī was one of the leaders of Native Hawaiian women activists, the topic of Noenoe Silva’s “Kūʻē! Hawaiian Women’s Resistance to the Annexation” (1997). Hui Aloha Aina had a women’s branch of 11,000 members (Silva 1997:8). In one of their announcements published in Ka Leo o Ka Lahui, they send out a call to women of the Hawaiian nation to come to a meeting to discuss the work of tending to (aloha ʻāina) the continued independence of the islands (“no ke kuka ana no na manao aloha aina, me ka hiipoi ana i ke kuokoa mau o keia Pae Aina,” ibid.). Silva, who does her own translations of Hawaiian-language texts, offers these insights to the term “aloha ʻāina”:

I have translated “aloha aina” as “patriotic” here, which is how the Hui itself translated its name: Hui Hawaii Aloha Aina as Hawaiian Patriotic League. However, like many sayings in Hawaiian, aloha ʻāina has a multitude of layers of meaning, and the word “patriotic” is not an exact fit. [...] These aloha ʻāina convictions are not merely feelings of love or pride; they also require action, as can be seen in the next phrase, “me ka hiipoi ana i ke kuokoa mau o keia Pae Aina.” The word hi’ipoi means “to tend, feed, cherish, as a child” (Pukui & Elbert 1986). In other words, the women plan to “tend to” the continued independence of their nation (Silva 1997:8).

Silva elucidates the way the traditional value of aloha ʻāina was being linked to political sovereignty as a response to the threat posed by the annexationists to ka lāhui Hawai‘i (the nation of Hawai‘i). Amy Stillman explains that same link in regard to the Buke Mele Lahui:

It is not surprising that nationalism would intensify among the Hawaiian people as political polarization increased, aggravated by the power struggle between royalists and annexationists. The Hawaiian poets were adhering to pre-existing values of attachment to the land. The degree to which they expanded it, however, to embrace all of the Hawaiian islands as one political unit, was unprecedented in poetry. National consciousness was a necessity only as the Hawaiian nation was striving to maintain its endangered sovereignty as it was in the late 19th century. The texts in the Buke Mele Lahui are evidence that poets were using traditional poetic means to reflect this emerging concern (Stillman 1989:19).

With the annexation, the key players in the Hawaiian nationalist press reorganized their efforts around the new nationalist issue of “home rule” (Chapin 1984:72). According to McGregor in her dissertation, “Kupa’a I ka ‘Aina: Persistence on the Land,” one of the most active organizations was the Native Hawaiian Home Rule Kuokoa, or Independent Home Rule Party, which arose out of the alliance of Hui Kalaiaina, Hui Aloha Aina, and several royalist Hawaiian political clubs who had formed at the time of the overthrow to oppose the provisional government, restore the monarchy, and protest the annexation (McGregor 1989a:201). The delegates from the royalist clubs had been called together from various districts throughout the Islands to redefine their purpose in light of the annexation, when the last hope for the restoration of the monarchy was extinguished in most Hawaiian minds, including the Queen’s. The clubs were asked to decide if and how to use the new voting franchise that left Native Hawaiians with two-thirds of the votes in the Territory (a franchise that had been unsuccessfully fought against in Congress by the haole oligarchy). Up until annexation there had only been one party – the Annexation Party – which had since split into the Republican and Democratic parties. The delegates were asked whether they should align with either party, form an independent party, or “stand aloof” (ibid.:202-03) and not exercise the privilege to vote.

The decision to establish the Independent Home Rule Party was unanimous, and the alliance proceeded to form a platform dedicated, among other things, to opening up homesteads in the ceded public lands; encourage education, farming, and commercial development; oppose monopolies; oppose efforts to restrict the voting privileges of Native Hawaiians, and encourage the importation of Americans as laborers (McGregor 1989a:205). One of their major goals was to strive for statehood, which they
believed would provide the greatest opportunities to exercise political power, because the Hawaiian majority could then elect the governor and congressional delegates of their choice (ibid.:205-06).

Although Hawaiians did join the two major parties, McGregor says that “voting for the Home Rules Kuokoa candidates was portrayed to be a matter of love and loyalty to one’s country and countrymen and a stand for Hawaiian independence. It was a vote against the haole elite who had overthrown the Hawaiian monarchy” (1989a:205). However, the party’s delegate to Congress, Robert Wilcox, soon discovered that an independent party would not be taken seriously in a two-party national Congress. The power of the Home Rule Party declined after 1904, when Prince Kūhiō left the Home Rule Party (along with other Hawaiian leaders) and made an alliance with the former enemy, the haole Big Five, through the Republican Party. Kūhiō hoped that Native Hawaiians would gain more clout in Congress and more political and commercial employment positions (ibid.:222-23) while the Republican Party hoped to gain more Native Hawaiian votes (ibid.:217). Kūhiō concentrated much of his effort on the homesteading program, intended to lift urban Hawaiians out of their impoverished conditions and put them back on the land. In 1920, he succeeded in establishing the Hawaiian Homes Commission. But haole politicians maneuvered to designate only the very poorest of lands for homesteads, and the department charged with its operation never seriously attempted to fulfill its stated objectives.

Contemporary Native Hawaiian Political Activism

The period between passage of the Hawaiian Homestead Act and the political activism of the 1970s is marked by a general absence of visible Native Hawaiian political activity. McGregor attributes this to a certain degree of appeasement, since many Hawaiians now held government positions, or were connected to friends and relatives who did (1980:32). She adds, however, that a greater factor can most likely be attributed to the systematic process of assimilation in the compulsory schools, including the official banning of the Hawaiian language (ibid.:33). The legacy of resistance was increasingly replaced by a new legacy of shame, where Hawaiian culture was denigrated or outright outlawed and Hawaiians were “stereotyped as lazy low-achievers” (ibid.). Many Hawaiians retreated or remained in remote rural communities, further away from the racist haole government, where they could stay connected to the ʻāina and to traditional practices (McGregor 1989a:468-70). But many who moved to urban areas found they lacked the educational and social skills to compete for good jobs (ibid.:473). The acceleration of tourist, commercial, and industrial development after statehood in 1959 led to an increased assault on Hawaiian communities, including evictions of Hawaiians from leased lands slated for development, the pollution of fishing grounds, the diversion of stream waters, the cutting off of traditional access rights, the destruction of forest habitats, the annihilation of ancient burial grounds and settlements, and the loss of property from foreclosures brought on by the inability to pay property taxes (ibid.:474).

By the 1970s, the principal factor that gave rise to the Native Hawaiian movement was the impoverished living conditions of Hawaiians compared to other ethnic groups in Hawai`i (McGregor 1989b:85). World War II and then statehood (once thought to be a way to gain more political influence) had only opened the door to more foreign influence. The Democratic Party took power in the 1950s and replaced Hawaiians with Japanese in government and commercial positions. Rural Hawaiians moved to the city. Many Hawaiians moved to the continent because life was too expensive in the Islands. The ideology of US patriotism waged psychological warfare on Hawaiian consciousness. Compulsory education denigrated Hawaiian culture. The development boom of the 1960s assaulted the ʻāina in unprecedented ways. The prophecy contained in the makaʻāina petition of the 1840s was coming true of Hawaiians being made into a homeless people as the government adopted western ways.

The 1960s was also the era of the great social movements in America regarding civil rights, Native Americans, and Vietnam. The movements inspired a new cultural and political consciousness among Hawaiians. In the 1970s, a grassroots movement began to coalesce around land rights issues, simultaneous with a “cultural renaissance” of Hawaiian music, dance, language, and traditions.

The period also marks the beginning of what Haunani-Kay Trask believes is “the greatest outpouring of Native literary creativity since annexation” (Trask forthcoming:17). The outpouring – focused on Hawai`i and composed by Hawaiians – is set apart from colonial literature “by ancestry, form, and subject” (ibid.:1) and is underscored by “Native resistance […] partly as a result of the nationalist political movement that has been growing in our islands since the 1970s” (ibid.:7). Trask writes of this outpouring as covering a wide spectrum of new and old forms, but all celebrating certain nationalist themes. While musical composition in Hawaiian has flourished, a Hawaiian nationalist literature has also
been appearing in Hawaiian and English, including pidgin English. Embracing scholarship, fiction, poetry, essays, and other work, this budding field reflects certain common themes: celebration of Hawai‘i and her Native people; preservation and re-invigoration of things Hawaiian (nā mea Hawai‘i); resistance to the destruction of the natural beauty of Hawai‘i; and demands for restitution of the Hawaiian lāhui or nation (ibid.:8). Trask includes Native Hawaiian orature and other forms of non-written artistic creativity in this body of creativity. At the same time, she points to the necessity for Native Hawaiians to publish: “Publishing for the indigenous writer, then, is not only an ambitious dream, as it is for most writers. It is a necessary struggle against extinction” (Trask 1984:81).

John Dominis Holt, whom many recognize as one of the great pioneers of contemporary Hawaiian literature written in English, began publishing his work in 1964, when he was nearly fifty years old. Holt had perceived an intellectual and artistic absence in Hawai‘i, and attributes it to the “rat race of change” that left no time to develop our intellectual and artistic capacities (Chock and Manabe 1981:6). His first published statement was On Being Hawaiian (1974a), a reaction to a local news article that had angered him. He submitted the piece to the same newspaper, but they returned it to him, “unwanted” (ibid.:7). Holt decided to publish it himself. Trask says that the book “was a harbinger of Hawaiian renaissance yet to come” (Trask forthcoming:24). In it, Holt writes:

We have been wronged cruelly and now we ask that we be given back what is ours: our self-respect, the right to be ourselves as Polynesians of today […] the right to win back our lands. We will devote ourselves to the preservation of heritage as it relates to land. […] We must lead in the fight to prevent rivers of concrete and steel ravaging the unspoiled wilderness of sacred valleys. We must stop leaving it to other people to do the grueling ugly work of righting vested interests in further despoliation of ancestral lands; the earth of our forefathers (Holt 1974a:9).

Besides becoming the first of his generation to write and publish a significant body of creative literature in English that reveal a pervasive concern for his Hawaiian heritage, Holt also established his own press in 1974 – Topgallant Publishing Company – under which he published his own works and those of other Native Hawaiian writers. His play “Kaulana nā pua” was originally performed in 1971 and published in 1974. Holt’s intention was to express the kind of Hawaiian thoughts and feelings about the political events of the nineteenth century leading to the overthrow that had until then been “blindly ignored” (1974b:vi).

Novels and collections of stories followed and, when Holt was sixty, so did his first poems. His long poem, Hanai, a tribute to Lili‘u which Richard Hamasaki notes is the longest contemporary published poem in English written by a Native Hawaiian (in Holt 1986:9), became another stone in the foundation of the modern literature. Holt explains that the title refers first to Lili‘u, who was “affectionately called hanai among court circles, because of her hanai relationship to Pāki, Konia, and their daughter Bernice Pauahi Bishop” (ibid.:51). Furthermore, the ancient and widely used practice of hānai (adoption) allowed for social advancement and strengthened the relationship between people. The title therefore also draws attention to the Queen’s relationship of hānai to “ka lāhui ka po‘e Hawai‘i” (the Hawaiian people; ibid.). Holt bases Hawaiian nationalism on the link between political sovereignty and love of the land as a hānai relationship when he writes:

As we grow up, our consciousness and identity about who we are as Hawaiians is fed, nurtured and shaped by the bitter knowledge of the loss of our sovereignty as a people when our Queen was overthrown by American settlers backed up by U.S. marines. In our na‘au, deep within each of us we feel pain, anger, hurt, because we do not have control over the resources of our ‘aina to provide for the welfare of our people (Holt 1986:51).

Holt finds in the history of resistance to the changes that eventually “strangled” the Kamehameha and Kalākaua dynasties (ibid.:68-69) a source of inspiration, and concludes by explicitly stating his own political position: “We look to all of our ali‘i and kupuna as we work for our future as a people – not to restore a monarchy, but to attain control over our ‘aina so that we can provide for the welfare of our people, as Hawaiians for Hawaiians” (ibid.:70). These words recall the position of the Hawaiian nationalists who in 1874 ran for political office under the slogan of “Hawaii for the Hawaiians” and won control of the Legislature.
The outpouring of creativity by contemporary Hawaiians is illuminated by several anthologies which for the first time partially or exclusively feature Native Hawaiian writers and editors: Mana (1981, edited by Wayne Kaumuali'i Westlake and non-Hawaiian ally Richard Hamasaki); Mālama, Hawaiian Land and Water (1985, edited by Dana Naone Hall); Ho’omānoa (1989, edited by Joseph Balaz); and the Aloha ‘Āina special issue of Hawai‘i Review (1989, edited by Chenoweth). Literary journals featuring Hawaiian writers also began to appear, including Ramrod, Seaweed and Constructions, Kapa (later Hawai‘i Review), Hapa, The Paper, Bamboo Ridge, The Chaminade Literary Review, Kaimana, and Mānoa.

In his master’s thesis, “Singing in Their Genealogical Trees: The Emergence of Contemporary Hawaiian Poetry in English” (1989) Richard Hamasaki examines the works of Dana Naone Hall, Wayne Kaumuali‘i Westlake, and Joseph P. Balaz, whom he identifies as the first contemporary Hawaiian poets published in English who have produced a significant body of literature. Their works as poets, literary editors, and teachers demonstrate a movement from “apparent non-regional and non-Hawaiian themes toward a more explicit Hawaiian consciousness” (Hamasaki 1989:3), a theme unique to modern literature in English. The three poets are significant because although their works represent a relatively small number in a growing body of Native Hawaiian poets writing in English, “the three have been major catalysts and contributors to the development of contemporary Hawaiian literature” (ibid.:41).

While all three poets are landmarks in the legacy of Native Hawaiian resistance, Dana Naone Hall is the one most explicitly associated with themes of nationalism, mostly having to do with the resistance to the desecration of ancient Hawaiian grave sites and traditional access rights to land and sea on the island of Maui, where she lives. Her most well-known and most frequently cited pieces are “Hawai‘i 89” (1989) and “Ka Mo‘olelo o ka Alanui” (1985). In “Hawai‘i 89,” which she dedicates to her daughter Leahi, Hall laments the changes brought by development. The lo‘i kalo (taro pond fields) have been replaced by graves of immigrants and fields of sugar cane. Pili-grass hale (houses thatched with pili grass) are replaced by houses with “window frames out of joint and towel racks hung crooked on the walls.” Tourists indulge in fantasies of Hawai‘i, “when gods and goddesses walked the earth,” while people sleep homeless on the beaches. But despite the changes and loss, something enduringly Hawaiian and transformative abides:

All night, Kānehekili
flashes in the sky
and Moanono‘ikalehua changes
from a beautiful woman
into a lehua tree
at the sound of the pahu.

It’s true that the man
who swam with the sharks
and kept them away
from the nets full of fish
by feeding them limu kala
is gone,
but we’re still here
like the fragrant white koki‘o
blooming on the long branch
like the hairy leafed nehe
clinging to the dry pu‘u
like the moon high over Ha‘ikū
lighting the way home.
(Hall 1989:75-76).

In “Ka Mo‘olelo o ke Alanui” (1985:147-48) Hall recalls the long history of the Mākena road, first built 400 years ago by Kiha‘api‘ilani, “who spread his cape over Maui.” Over the centuries, the road would “catch the falling sound / of the runner’s feet” as messages were carried past “petals of cliffs opening in mist.” Offerings to Lono would be placed on the ahu along the road during the Makahiki. Later, cattle crossed the road and “hands / exchanged things over the counters” of the one store. Now, the people are
being told the road will be closed (to build a hotel). “Those who propose it / don’t know that the road is alive.” By cutting off the road, they will sever the relationship between the land and the people, and bring death and sterility. The sacredness and vitality of the land the developers ignore is expressed in the last stanza:

At night,
when the island is deep
in the crater of sleep,
across the channel
the mo‘o
raises its head
one eye reflecting the moon.
(Hall 1985:148).

Both poems envision the land as alive and in active, ancestral relationship to the Native people. The sovereignty of both land and people are co-dependent.

Haunani-Kay Trask is another Native Hawaiian activist-writer, whose most famous works are her book of essays From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai‘i (1993) and her collection of poems Light in the Crevise Never Seen (1994), although she is even more well known for her fiery oratories. Trask, who was groomed by her family for political activism, always knew that she had “a historical mission” (Chapman 1997:A4). She says that her main mission was the creation of the new Center for Hawaiian Studies building at the University of Hawai‘i in Mānoa. “The university for a long time was a completely colonial bastion,” Trask says. “We’ve changed that a bit. That’s our beacon for Hawaiians. The best achievement of our program is not just that we continue to speak and publish and teach, but that we got the building. The building is very important” (ibid.:B2).

Trask has had more than a few confrontations with the University establishment over her blunt political statements. The University at times has even tried to silence her in a way not unlike the attempt by the haole oligarchy of the last century to silence the opposition expressed in the Hawaiian nationalist newspapers. Trask’s uncompromising nationalism does not seem compatible with the beauty and lyricism that have come to be expected from poetry. One of her most discussed poems, “Waikīkī,” begins:

all those 5 gallon
toilets flushing
away tourist waste
into our waters

Waikīkī home
of all‘i
sewer center
of Hawai‘i

8 billion dollar
beach secret
rendezvous for
pimps

Hong Kong hoodlums
Japanese capitalists
haole punkers

condo units
of disease
drug traffic
child porn
(Trask 1994:60).
But Trask’s poetry, as writer Tino Ramirez points out, “fleshes out her politics with history and myth, and memories, scenes and loved ones from her own life” (Ramirez 1994:F6). For Trask, “the whole Hawaiian movement is poetic. *Aloha ʻaina* (love for the land) is poetic” (ibid.). She attributes the source of her angry poems to her outrage over the destruction to the ʻāina when she says, “The same source of the anger is the source of beauty. For me, the land is the most inspiring thing, but when you see the [new trans-Koʻolau] freeway, it’s horrendous. It’s an outrage and it inspires outrage” (F6).

The explosion of Native Hawaiian creativity has also embraced the performing arts in ways that cover a wide spectrum between traditional and multicultural forms. One of the most common sites of Native Hawaiian resistance is music. Protests against the loss of land and a Hawaiian way of life came to be popularly expressed in what might be called protest songs that many believe began in the late 60s, but which Hawaiian scholars are discovering represent a much longer legacy of resistance through song. Some of the more familiar contemporary protest songs are Jerry Santos’ “Kuʻu Home o Kahaluu”; the late Israel Kamakawiwoʻole’s “Hawaiʻi 78”; Sudden Rush’s “ʻOni Paʻa.” On the jacketcover of Sudden Rush’s first CD, *Nation on the Rise* (1995), the rap group states its purpose as “to educate people of the history and culture of the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi.” Their cut “ʻOni Paʻa” (sung in both Hawaiian and English) expresses feelings found in all their songs: “Unite, unite! Don’t listen to the government (hoʻohui, hoʻohui mai hoʻoloe i ke aupuni). / They like build another street [...] / After they destroy a heiau. / Listen that’s what’s wrong. / Take care of the land, take care of the people (mālama i ka ʻāina, mālama i ka poʻe), / Take care each other.”

ʻOnipaʻa (Stand Firm)

The contemporary Native Hawaiian nationalist movement has often been accused of an inability to unite. That view fails to recognize that although we may differ in our strategies and personalities, we all nonetheless are fighting for the same goal: to protect our culture and land and the sovereignty that guarantees that protection. This was demonstrated most visibly during the 1993 gathering at ʻIolani Palace on the anniversary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom under the theme ʻOnipaʻa, stand firm. Contemporary Native Hawaiian nationalists realize that as long as the struggle continues to protect the ʻāina and the kuleana of Native Hawaiians to the ʻāina, the Hawaiian nation will continue to exist.

In the petition from Kona addressed to Kauikaeauli in 1845, the makaʻāinana wrote that it offered the people the means and “the time [in which] we can all discuss pleasantly with you [King Kauikaeauli]” (“Petitions” 1985:57). As they try to come to grips with the turmoil in the Islands caused by the haole, they point out to the king that “We are divided amongst ourselves. An independent race according to our own nature” (ibid.:57). I think it is not surprising that an independent people should strive for their independence as a people. Nor is it surprising that Hawaiians should have called forth their tremendous powers of spiritual and intellectual expression through words in their struggles to protect their kuleana. For precisely in our struggle to preserve our political sovereignty and our relationship to the land do we struggle against our extinction.

References


