Questions about the Question of “Authenticity”

Notes on Mo’olelo Hawai’i and the Struggle for Pono

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We know that we are a distinct people that was once protected by its own government. We know that once that government was removed there was nothing to prevent the Americans from defining us however they wished, and nothing to keep us Hawaiian except our own determination.


Democracy and “Authenticity” in Occupied Hawai’i

The democracy of colonies. For the foreigner, romances of “Aloha,” For Hawaiians, Dispossessions of empire.

—Haunani-Kay Trask, “Dispossessions of Empire” in Night Is a Sharkskin Drum
O'olelo Hawai'i (literature, stories, histories) by those with mo'oka'auhau (Hawaiian genealogy) connecting them to the 'āina (land, environment) participates in an enduring social movement that asserts the distinctiveness of Hawaiians as a lāhui (race, peoplehood, nation) and that is implicitly or explicitly involved in the pursuit of pono (righteousness, justice, well-being), one dimension of which is a call for self-determination or ea (sovereignty, independence, life, breath). From the nineteenth century to the present, mo'olelo and the arts (in particular, mele [song, poetry, chant] and hula [dance]) have played a vital role in the lāhui's struggle, in the face of U.S. noho hewa (wrongful occupation), to perpetuate its values and maintain its convictions about distinctiveness—convictions upon which political claims are arguably grounded. Virtually every politically engaged kānaka maoli (Hawaiian) writer asserts that kānaka maoli look at the world from a different vantage point than settlers, one secured by the vertical narrative of genealogy rather than the horizontal presentism of U.S. blood-quantum definitions. The struggle to nurture a distinct space of articulation—seen as central to a re-integrated lāhui-to-come—has marked kānaka maoli political and cultural expression since the illegal overthrow of the Kingdom in 1893.

At that time Hawaiian difference was emphasized putatively by haole (foreigners, Caucasians); assumptions about kānaka fitness for self-rule provided “moral” justification for seizing the Islands. In one sense, then, it is both an irony and a fraught legacy of the history of U.S. Empire that, since the resurgence of nationalist claims in the 1970s, Hawaiians have had to engage civil and uncivil questions about the “authenticity” of the mo’olelo of kānaka maoli as a people from both inside and outside of the lāhui. (These questions resemble those about “authenticity” raised in relation to other indigenous peoples, but take forms specific to the political situation of Hawaiians inside and outside of the Islands on identity/authenticity issues for Hawaiians in the diaspora, who currently make up roughly forty percent of the lāhui, see Halualani [195–243].) In another sense, for the occupying power there is no irony in questioning Hawaiian claims to distinctiveness as politically meaningful. The ideology of U.S. Empire requires a delegitimization of the “authenticity” of indigenous claims to special relation to fellow kānaka maoli and ʻāina through genealogy; U.S. law divides Hawaiian culture (decontextualized aspects of which the state invests in for millitouristic purposes) from political claims, without regard for the consent of those “democratically” included. Empires (in seeming opposition to colonial systems with dual systems and center/periphery models) seek to fully incorporate lands, offering the encapsulated indigenes the right to join and prove loyalty by identifying with the occupying force as its borders expand: settler scholarship narrates this as not only for Hawaiian good, but as understood to be such by Hawaiians. However, the remarkable extent of Hawaiian resistance following the overthrow and occupation, including kūʻī petitions by different Hawaiian political parties that collected the signatures of nearly every adult Hawaiian, has been fully documented by Noenoe Silva (1998, 2004). This kūʻī (protest, resistance), which delayed annexation, was occluded within settler scholarship, little of which had any regard for Hawaiian perspectives as recorded in the extensive Hawaiian-language archive (including roughly one million pages of newspapers). From annexation through the Statehood Drive, U.S. public discourse mystified the events surrounding the overthrow, ultimately coming to romanticize Hawai‘i as a realized example of what the United States as a whole (cleansed of black/white tensions) aspired to be: a multicultural nation united by democratic principles. As a University of Hawai‘i scholar wrote in 1955, “neo-Hawaiians” were “outstanding proof of the power of American ideals to build citizens even on islands far from the continental coast” (quoted in Day 237).

After decades of these processes, post-statehood institutions promoted the belief that “Kānaka ʻOiwi [Native Hawaiians] had become too racially mixed, too acculturated and assimilated” to be constituted as a distinct entity: “the only place to find a Hawaiian was in the ground” (Tengan and White 392). Today, this view is espoused by writers like Ken Conklin, who argues that Hawaiians are “fully assimilated, happily intermarried, living and working side by side with everyone else. They are everyone else” (quoted in Osorio 2001, 377). Alani Apio dramatizes how such assimilationist ideology interpellates and divides Hawaiians from each other in his play Kānae Aʻe (1998), in which the protagonist says, “We’re too much of everybody and everything else... We may learn Hawaiian but we think american” (67). His uncompromising cousin’s response is to “ʻoki” him from “Ka ʻOhana” (sever him from his family [68]). Likewise, Thurston Twigg-Smith, descendant of Lorin Thurston, who was instrumental in the overthrow, argues against the legitimacy of “a class of people called ‘Hawaiians’” because “percentage Hawaiians... have no historical origin other than having been created by federal and state statutes” (2005). Such claims against Hawaiians as “authentically” distinguishable from non-Hawaiians argue that there can
be no collective "self" to claim land, "self-determination," or "entitlements" to government funding. 3

This chapter, written by a non-Hawaiian and concerned with clarifying tendencies in "authenticity" discourse for other non-Hawaiians, emphasizes that, given what continues to be at stake, there is a marked difference between questions about "authenticity" brought by non-Hawaiians and questions about "authenticity" raised among sectors of the Hawaiian community. For non-Hawaiians, I argue, questions broached about the "authenticity" of aspects of Hawaiian history and culture as objective tend to be as politically irresponsible and narrowly objectifying as they are philosophically incoherent. Such questions are generally bad objects, category mistakes, confusions about the possibility of disinterested scholarship within the political/epistemological economies of Empire, in which fear and desire about what "authenticity" might entitle are anxiously mixed. Media obsession with literary identity hoaxes indexes the split between a desire for literary "reservations" and a need to read indigenous claims as fiction. To pursue this line, I question the question of "authenticity" itself by briefly exploring why, how, when (and under what political conditions) and for whom (and under what institutional auspices), and with what effect (to whose benefit or detriment or at what cost) questions of "authenticity" arise.

This suggests that to the extent that "authenticity" and "indigeneity" are today linked in what is inherently a contest over representation—aside from nostalgic senses in which authenticity might be longed for—it should be acknowledged that the terms have multiple, non-intersecting, and context-bound forms and functions, and that they are valuable primarily as a way of discussing the articulations of voices within social movements (on "articulation" theory see Clifford, 97–98). I thus note differences in the ways that questions of "authenticity" are raised about Hawaiians by non-Hawaiians become scenes of contestation between Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians, and are engaged within the lāhui. Most Hawaiian scholars who address the topic regard questions about "authenticity" as effects of occupation that could be legitimately discussed only in contexts in which Hawaiian epistemological categories and language were placed on an equal footing with the cultural knowledges and practices of the occupiers. Were such a public sphere to be achieved, Laina Wong argues, "authenticity" as currently conceived "might become a non-issue, or one that is discussed solely as an academic exercise" (112). To show that Hawaiians never stopped desiring spheres that prioritized Hawaiian values, I mark assertions of lāhui over the last century, and suggest that stories and mele have always been one defense Hawaiians mobilized against harmful aspects of the question of the question of "authenticity" (see Osorio 1992; Basham; Stillman).

It is important to foreground in this respect the urgency with which nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Hawaiians recognized the challenges to distinctness that would be faced by future generations of Hawaiians. These writers address the hanauna (generations) with a resolute sense that genealogy weaves together kūpuna (ancestors, elders) with descendants through whom the lāhui lives. They saw that remaining connected to Hawaiian knowledges was critical to the lāhui's survival. The myriad ways in which the materials gathered enable Hawaiian cultural revitalization today are testimonies both to the mana of the stories and the foresight of artist-patriots. Among the invaluable materials perpetuated in the mo'olelo are oli (chants), mo'olelo of wahi pana (legendary places), names of winds, accounts of cultural practices, and 'ōlelo no'eau (proverbs) from a period before settler institutions dispersed materials and interrupted the living stream of Hawaiian thought. 4 As Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman demonstrates, "Re-membering" knowledges, and recognizing how "the fabric from which ... fragments were torn [by settler scholarship] lies virtually intact," is today a vigorous "act of advocacy" (201).

Providing an archive in the process of retelling popular stories was the express aim of scholars like S. N. Hale'ole, who wrote in his preface to Lateikawai (a newspaper serial printed in book form in 1864) that he aimed to "hooike'ike i na mea kahiko a keia lahui kanaka, me ka aua mai hoa mai ka naowale loa ana o kekahi o na moolelo punihei a lakov" ("depiut ... ancient customs of the people [Hawaiians/the nation] for fear lest otherwise we lose some of their favorite traditions") (342–43). The author-collectors of these stories differentiated their audience as Hawaiians and interested "foreigners." In his kanaenae (dedication, supplicating chant, preface) to both "Moolelo Hawaii o Pakaa a me Ku-a-Pakaa" ("The Hawaiian Story of Pakaa and Ku-a-Pakaa") and "Moolelo Hawaii no Kalapana," Moses Nakuina addresses "ka iwi o ku'i iwi a me ke koko o ku'u koko, ke kupa, ka iwi ponoi o ka aina, Aloha oukou" ("bones of my bones, blood of my blood, natives, the true children of the aina, Aloha to you all") (Nakuina). In 1906, P'ilani Kaluaik'olou likewise opens Ka Moolelo Oiaio o Kaluaik'olou (The True Story of Kaluaik'olou) with a kanaenae addressed to "o'u Oiwi o..."
ka pupuu hookahi; aloha na kini o ka ewe, ka i'ō, ka iwi a me ke koko o ka iwikuamoo hookahi” (“Aloha to my people of the same womb; aloha to the multitudes of the same lineage, the flesh, the bone and the flood of the same family” [3]). The message of these scholar-patriots was clear: so long as the stories and the language lived in the hearts of “ke kanaka ike aloha ‘aina” (those who loved the land), the lāhui would live as well. That message echoes today: “To me those newspapers [in which the stories appeared] are direct ancestors of this journal,” claimed Māhealani Dudoit, founding editor of ʻOiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal, whose achievement of a venue for Hawaiian expression will be touched on in my conclusion.

Forms and Functions of the Question of Authenticity

Identity (who we think we are) is the foundation on which Native Cultural Studies is based. No other question is as important to us, and no other question is so seriously contested by others.


The first thing that non-Hawaiians who question the authenticity of aspects of Hawaiian self-representation should realize is that, however much they avow disinterested concern with accuracy, as the product of the ongoing U.S. occupation, and with the legacy of skewed settler histories, researches about Hawaiians are always already situated in the political realm; there are inherent senses in which the project of indigeneity forms against that which aims to extinguish its political meaning (Sissors 13). Whether charges of inauthenticity intend to do so, they are thus intrinsically deployable in both the court of public opinion and court itself against Hawaiian benefits or struggles for recognition (see Trask 1993, 161–78; and Guenther et al.). The implication tends to be that since Hawaiians do not practice their cultures exactly as they once did, they are no longer what they claim to be and thus their claims are groundless. Arguments by non-Hawaiians seeking to destabilize the “authenticity” of Hawaiian cultural definitions resonate against these contexts, and contribute to a hypochondric suspicion about invocations of tradition as part of the living narrative of indigenous people. Some confusion must be produced in fourth-grade students who read in Hawaiian the words of William Pila Wilson, a non-Hawaiian long committed to Hawaiian language revitalization, questioning the “authenticity” of the lāhui. In a pamphlet for Hawaiian immersion schools, Wilson poses the question, “He aha kēia mea he lāhui kānaka ʻōiwi? A he loaʻa a nei kō Hawaiʻi nei lāhui kānaka ʻōiwi, ʻaʻole pahai?” (“What is this thing, the Native Hawaiian nation? Does Hawaiʻi really have a native people or not?” [87, my translation]). Wilson answers his question by saying that Hawaiʻi has indigenous birds and plants, but that since Hawaiians migrated from different places, and intermarried, an “authentic” lāhui cannot be constituted. (For a critique of how Wilson’s pamphlet appropriates the authority to define “authenticity,” see Warner 85–86; and on non-Hawaiian appropriation of Hawaiian identity see Hall.)

In a more typical charge of “inauthenticity,” Scott Whitney claimed in Honolulu Magazine that “Everyone thinks the word ʻohana expresses an ancient Hawaiian value. Not so. It turns out we made it up.” Whitney presented this invention as representative of how “our public version of Hawaiian culture is a shared fiction, and an arbitrary story that depends on who the narrator is.” The mistake occurred, Whitney argues, because Hawaiian activists of the 1970s “had to learn to be Hawaiian” and fooled themselves “into thinking that a modern value [was] really an ancient one” (2001a, 42, 43, 45). Among the respondents to Whitney’s claim were Davianna Pomaikaʻi McGregor, who argued that while activists of the 1970s adapted the ʻohana concept for political ends, ʻohana was not a twentieth-century invention. Other scholars provided numerous examples of nineteenth-century uses of the word, including dictionary entries, along with cognates of ʻohana in other Polynesian languages. While apologizing for not checking old dictionaries carefully, Whitney maintained his view that many contemporary Hawaiian concepts today amount to “New Age mush” (2001b, 22), cleansed of the harsh practices of pre-missionary Hawai’i. That practices were discarded or modified during the century in which Hawaiians entered the global system as an internationally recognized nation with multiple treaties, for Whitney signifies irrevocable cultural rupture.

This reasoning—by which “authentic” indigeneity must be premodern, primitive, and unself-conscious (see Jolly) or a repressive, constricting eco-indigeneity (Sissors), requiring the replication of prior and stabilized entities—tilts progressive intellectuals, consciously or not, against indigenous claims. “The return to ‘authenticity,’” Masao Miyoshi argues, “is a closed route. There is nothing of the sort extant any longer in much of the world. How then to balance the transnationaliza-
tion of economy and politics with the survival of local culture and history—without mummifying them with tourism and in museums—is the crucial question" (747, emphasis added). "Authenticity" here implies the purity of peoples to whom tourism (self-conscious performance of culture) has not come. In Miyoshi’s borderless world, postcolonial globalization accelerates colonial modernity’s smashing of the “aura” of an “authenticity” whose culture at best avoids existing as stuffed remnants that haunt museums. Peoples classifiable as “authentic” are (once only) like the objects of “First Contact trips” (the name of a tour company, one of whose excursionists recently described his adventures for readers of The New Yorker). Within this economy of “authenticity,” the “romantic nationalist” appears, like the tourist promoter (though with different investments), the perpetrator of culture charade.

In only seeming opposition to this logic are destabilizations of “authenticity” offered by proponents of the idea that tradition is always self-conscious invention: since genuine cultures evolve and are never self-identical to what they were at a previous moment, they are either not actually “authentic,” or else everything is always “authentic” in the sense that “authenticity” refers to whatever people actually do. “Authenticity” seen through this lens becomes either an empty (tautological) category, or one in which claims to “authentic” tradition could only be strategic essentialism. While “invention of tradition” arguments refigure Edward Sapir’s (1924) notion that all genuine traditions are spurious, it is notable that in Oceania such arguments emerged in historical competition with indigenous activist-scholarship. Only when Oceanic categories in political contexts did non-indigenous scholars feel it incumbent on them to expose movement viewpoints as constructs.

Not surprisingly, “invention of tradition” arguments are challenged by Hawaiian scholar-activists and become public battlegrounds. That the arguments involve seemingly non-intersecting rhetorics is beside the point, which for Hawaiians is primarily about helping the lāhui in the present, and about maintaining Hawaiian relations, and Hawaiian authority over Hawaiian definitions. Given this history, it ought to be axiomatic that when non-indigenous scholars pronounce on the “authenticity” of indigenous practices their reasons for doing so will be as worthy of consideration as their cultural insights. The desire to “help” in such matters, No’eau Warner argues, will not prove an adequate reason for entering into such discussions if the terms of involvement are not defined by those the non-Hawaiian “claim[s] to want to help” (79).

In contrast with logics that consign “authenticity” to unself-conscious primitivity or tautology, for Hawaiian scholars “authenticity” rarely resides in single truths that exclude other truths, and instead affirms shareable principles that benefit the lāhui. A given mo’olelo is “a fragment of a story” whose teller “recognizes that he is not saying everything there is to say about the subject” (Osorio 2002, 250). Nor is invention seen as cultural rupture: rather, it is “necessary for survival and does not render the product inauthentic” (McGregor 12). It is not a question of whether such processes occur, but of minding for whom and for what they claim place. Within the Hawaiian community, that is, there are rigorous disagreements about culture in which questions about “authenticity” or “accuracy” surface around aspects of memory and practice, with some more committed to—and better situated to maintain—literal and direct transmission from kūmu (teachers) and kūpuna within families. However, in these discussions—in which non-Hawaiian contributions may be found valuable—the stakes are different, and the procedures for doing scholarship differ from those of outside investigators of “authenticity.” In-community debates implicitly or explicitly function in the opposite direction of settler-colonial scholarship. Where the former tends toward the politically deconstructive and culturally debunking, in-community Hawaiian debates about “authenticity” tend toward construction, toward clarifying both the sources and poetics of contemporary practices within the lāhui.

A case in point is the touchstone mo’olelo of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language), recognized as integral to expressing Hawaiian consciousness and ways-of-seeing. U.S. settlers involved in the overthrow banned Hawaiian as a medium of instruction in 1896, teachers punished students for speaking Hawaiian in school, and the number of native speakers rapidly declined; Hawaiian was “almost completely wiped out” as a living language by the mid-twentieth century (NeSmith 69). With the scarcity of native speakers today, the revitalization of the language involves linguistic and educational activism and, as Laiana Wong describes, “legitimate concerns have been raised about the authenticity of the product being promoted throughout the community as ‘Hawaiian’” (94), given that most Hawaiian speakers today have learned Hawaiian as a second language from second-language speakers. As in many similar revitalization efforts, the politics of usage (prescriptivist/traditionalist versus flexible/adaptive) are as vigorously argued as the nature and purpose of the debate are agreed upon. What are prized are “clearly
discernable link[s] to traditions” (Wong 98), however rigidly defined, that meet community needs. For NeSmith, who distinguishes sharply between Traditional and Neo-Hawaiian, and urges commitment to the former, the Hawaiian that Kānaka Maoli acquire will be less important than its use to substantively help Hawaiians to “maintain their distinct identity as one people” (75).

“Authenticity” in such arguments, in other words, relates to a broader, decolonization movement (on this context of Hawaiian literary production see Trask 1999); it resonates with efforts around Oceania in which, as Fijian scholar-poet Pio Manoa put it, “authentic” expression must “become the voice of the people feeling in a new language” (quoted in Hereniko). As in other locations, “authenticity” involves individual speech acts resonating within the emerging language spoken by a collective body living out the effects of a shared history. For Eduardo Galeano, “Our authentic collective identity is born out of the past and is nourished by it—our feet tread where others trod before us; the steps we take were prefigured—but this identity is not frozen into nostalgia... our identity resides in action and struggle” (121). In Hawaiian struggle, collective identity is a shared genealogical connection to the 'aina and lāhui in which being resonates with (and recognizes itself in terms of) doing. To “be Hawaiian,” Kaleikoa Ka'eo argues, is an “active verb, not a noun.” Being active, in terms of interpreting, extending, and adapting the legacy, then, is less about being “shackled to mindless repetition” than about finding “a clue on your path toward liberation and right action” (Meyer 2003, 53).

**Contemporary Mo'olelo Hawai‘i and the Struggle for Pono**

Art is the life that made that thing of paper or clay or stone.
It is the lives that the individual life is moving forward into another
stage of being.

—Māhealani Dudoit, “Carving a Hawaiian Aesthetic”

Lest we be lost
In someone else’s story

—Imaikalani Kalahaile, “Somewhere in the Swirl of History”

In *Native Lands and Foreign Desires*, Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa argues that “The question that arises continually for Hawaiians is and has been ‘Pehea lā e pono ai?’ that is, ‘How is it that we shall be pono?’ (10). While pono has a range of significations (goodness, uprightness, morality, moral qualities, correct or proper procedure, excellence, well-being, prosperity), Kame‘eleihiwa clarifies that the word is intimately bound up with land and sovereignty, so that loss of pono follows the loss of either. Noenoe Silva notes that pono refers to “justice” and “rights” as well. In this sense, the common and telling mistranslation of the state motto (“‘Ua mau ka ea o ka ‘aina i ka pono”) as, “the life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness,” drains the political valences of pono. When Kauiakeaouli (Kamehameha III) wrote the motto, he clearly meant that the sovereignty of Hawai‘i was protected by pono behavior.” Written for “Lā Ho’iho’i Eā” (restoration of sovereignty day), after the Paulet affair in 1843 (in which a British admiral seized the Hawaiian Islands without his government’s permission), the motto weaves together multiple meanings of the word ea: the life-breath of the land is in being pono, protecting the rights of the people; pono authenticates productive relation between individual acts and the lāhui (see Kame‘eleihiwa, 184–85; Silva 2004, 37).

It can only be asserted here that even a cursory look at the historical mo‘olelo—in particular those recorded in Hawaiian language newspapers that ran continuously from the 1840s to the 1940s—shows that Hawaiians, no matter how dispirited in the decades following annexation, never stopped connecting pono with justice and rights for the lāhui, and never stopped thinking of themselves as a distinct people connected to the ‘aina. A few examples must suffice. In 1927, an article written in *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa* asked,

O ka inana, aia kakou, ka lāhui, mahea? Heaha ko kakou kulana ma loko o keia, ka aina i noho hanohano ia e ko kakou kupuna? Ma ko makou noono, aia kakou i lalo loa... ke nonoi nei ia oukou e hana like kakou no ka pono, pomaikai a holomua o ka lāhui.

We have a question: where are the Hawaiians? What is our position in this, the land where our ancestors lived nobly?
In our thinking, we are very subordinate, and... we ask you to labor as we do for the righteousness and good fortune and progress for the race. (In Johnson 425)
In the 1940s, Alvin Kaleolani Isaacs wrote “E mau”—mau includes the senses of “unceasing, perpetual, persevering, enduring, steady, constant”—a song picked up by later activists, that blended references to Kauikeouli’s motto and Kalākaua’s urge to Hawaiians to “Ho’oulu lāhu” (increase the nation, make the nation grow):

E mau ko kakou lahui, e ho’omau.
E mau ko kakou ’olelo, e ho’omau.
E mau ka hana pono o ka ‘aina
I mau ka ea o ka ‘aina i ka pono.
I ka pono—o ka ‘aina.
Ho’oulu ka pono o ka ‘aina, e ho’oulu
Ho’ola ka nani o ka ‘aina, e ho’ola
Ho’ola la, Ho’ola la, a ho’olaha
I mau ka ea o ka ‘aina i ka pono.
I ka pono—o ka ‘aina.
Perpetuate our lāhu, persist
Perpetuate our language, persist
Continue the pono work of the land
So that the sovereignty of the land is perpetuated through pono.
Through pono—of the land.
Increase the pono of the ʻāina, nourish its growth
The beauty of the land lives, nourish its life
Let it live, let it live, spread this
Perpetuation of the sovereignty of the land through righteousness
Through pono—of the land.

(My translation, text in Morales 38)

These lines were written at a time when Hawaiians were broadly represented as “happy-go-lucky ‘ukulele strummers” or sullenly, self-destructively disengaged. Lawrence Fuchs’s influential Hawaii Pono (1961)—a book at once liberally rueful of Hawaiian demise and celebratory of U.S. democratic achievement—argued that since the 1920s the “Hawaiians’ dominant response to the new and hostile environment of the Islands was withdrawal into the past” (68)—a past Fuchs determined to be an “unreal past in which fact and fiction were often blurred” (75). Nevertheless, Fuchs acknowledged that Hawaiians remained race consciousness and practiced core values: Hawaiian candidates in the 1930s used the slogan “Nana i ka ‘ili” (“Look for the skin”) (80), and even “Hawaiians who resented the overthrow of the monarchy by American haole might welcome and feed a malihini haole stranger for weeks” (85).

This mix of “racial” pride and futility blend dramatically in the public sphere with the “Hawaiian Renaissance.” Iked by newspaper articles stereotyping Hawaiians, John Dominis Holt, in “On Being Hawaiian” (1964), wrote one of its founding documents. Holt conceded that, in the face of a “haole culture” that they found “a farce,” many of his generation “cowered or smoldered in their bitterness,” but then celebrated a “vast awakening among us Hawaiians” that “whether we agree or not we want to run our own show—at long last—as an ethnic and political conglomerate on our own terms” (8). Holt stresses his belief in Hawaiians’ “right to win back our lands, those belonging to us, as ‘reservations’ ‘belong’ to our Indian brothers and sisters” (9). For Holt, whose works include the landmark novel Waimea Summer, Hawaiian writing involves “fusing the aesthetic image of the past with the present” while prioritizing “the land itself” (13). Holt argued that while Hawaiians in the 1940s and 1950s felt “psychologically captive to the spirit of the past,” young Hawaiians sensed “as only Hawaiians can sense this particular thing, that a greatness, something intangible yet powerful and enduring belonged to our people. . . . We are links to the ancients” (17). To this generation links with the past guided political activism. “We are talking about Aloha ʻAina ʻOhana,” singer-activist George Helm said in a speech to the State House, “and if you cannot understand it, go and do your homework.” As Harry Kunuhi Mitchell wrote in “Mele o Kahoolawe,” the people were “Pa’a pu ka mana’o / No ka pono o ka ‘aina” (“Together in one thought / to bring prosperity to the land”) (in Morales 71, 86–87).

What this sketch suggests is that perhaps a better way to ask what is “authentic” about a Hawaiian expression is how it relates to the struggle to find what is pono for the lāhu. To the degree that this involves Hawaiians reactivating lines of connection, and solidifying a lāhu that was never ceded to the occupiers, it is a collective coming to terms with how the legacy of Hawaiian knowledge and ways-of-knowing resonates in the present. “Authenticity” is arrived at collectively and contextually; it is not a checklist of qualities, but rearticulations of qualities in relation to a movement seen as diverse and as “breathing in the many
aromas of influence” (Meyer 2001, 128). “Although it is tempting to offer universalisms that would portray Kanaka ‘Ōiwi as one people and one mind,” Manulani Meyer writes, “to do so would ignore the multiple realities within the group” (2003, 85). This is the point emphasized in ‘Ōiwi, a remarkable print-media expression of láhui. As founding editor Māhealani Dudoit recalls, the journal was conceived of with “two key words” in mind—mo‘okūauhau and kuleana (responsibility, privilege)—and has been guided by a need to clarify “our kuleana today within the mo‘okūauhau of our people” (“Kūkākūkā” 1). While the journal’s editorial dialogues do not engage specific legal/political issues, ‘Ōiwi (native) assumes discursive sovereignty and exists to gather “the literary, artistic, and scholarly work of the ‘ōiwi, the Native People of Hawai‘i, to express the endurance and vitality of the nation” (back cover to issue 1).

Dudoit’s vision of a journal open to all forms of Hawaiian expression, that would reach out to different segments of the Hawaiian community, has been realized in three issues (1998, 2002, 2003) with such success that it clearly answers a community’s call. ‘Ōiwi publishes works in Hawaiian, Hawaiian Creole English, and English, often combining all three, displaying the trilinguality of much of contemporary Hawaiian writing: it gathers poems, stories, personal essays, biography, translated documents, testimony at legislative hearings, art work in various media, pule (prayers), such as Kanalu Young’s “Pule no ka ea” (Prayer for Sovereignty) or kanikau (death chants), profiles of notable Hawaiians, and much else. The heterogeneity of mo‘olelo suggests a project that attends less to laws of genre than to the larger social and movement contexts within which individual works of kānaha maoli expression take form.

In design, organization, and content, ‘Ōiwi attempts to translate traditional practices “into the language of today” (Dudoit 22), often adapting oral and visual conventions to journal format. The issues start with oli (chant), and works are generally prefaced by a note from the author, introducing contributors to their audience (or to each other); a regular contribution is an editorial “talk-story,” expressing various thoughts within the editorial hui (group, collective). Several of the issues have included essays by graphic artists on “Native Hawaiian Design.” Graphic designer for the second issue ‘Ailikā McNicoll explores ways in which aspects of Hawaiian protocol inform design asking, “What would an approach look like that uses Hawaiian cultural sensibilities perceptually and conceptually different from one guided by Western sensibilities” (11). For Kamaka Kanekoa, graphic designer of the third issue, visual symbols are important in forming meaning, and one aspect of design is “the marriage of opposites or complementary pairs exhibited in the concept of pono” (9). New technologies allow a diversifying of “our communicative systems and create new forms of visual language based on our traditional knowledge of ‘ōlelo and kākau” (12).

The selection processes that animate the journal are well suggested in dialogues among ‘Ōiwi’s hui. Current editor Ku‘ualoha Ho‘omanawahine describes the journal’s work as “opening a community dialogue in a new way. We are Hawaiians talking to other Hawaiians” (“Hulua” 1). Kimo Armitage invites community participation with the words, “show us your unique, valid Hawaiian perspective and we’ll try to take care of you in the next issue. You’re Hawaiian and what you say counts. There is power in your voice” (“Hulua” 6). For Michael Puleloa, “‘Ōiwi offers Hawaiian people a chance to represent themselves in print. It’s our hale, a house that we have built. You know when you read ‘Ōiwi that you will find a real definition of what it means to be Hawaiian today and what it meant to be Hawaiian in the past. It also allows visitors the chance to find our hale and learn about who we really are. And it offers Hawaiian readers an opportunity to learn so much about themselves and about other Hawaiians, to see our diversity and our commonalities” (“Hulua” 10). Clearly, looking for an “authentic” Hawaiian voice within the journal would go against the spirit of openness and community inclusiveness that it fosters, yet the editorial hui agree that Hawaiian voices count as Hawaiian voices, and that stories Hawaiians tell about their lives move in alliance with a will—call it “authentic”—to ho‘oulu láhui. What counts, as No’eau Warner argues about language revitalization, is that mo‘olelo be “perpetuated among its own people, in its own context and environment” as part of “what can help make Hawaiians whole again” (77).

Notes

1. Hawaiian definitions in this chapter are checked against Elbert and Puku‘i’s Hawaiian Dictionary, to which readers should refer for additional resonances to invoked terms. Lāhui, for instance, is also a stative verb: “to assemble, gather together, the act of being together.” “Literature” is not a Hawaiian category; mo‘olelo, the word the dictionary provides, refers as well to history, tradition, essay, article, path, or minutes from a meeting, among other
meanings. Likewise, as Ku‘ualoha Ho‘omanawanui notes, the word for poem, mele, refers as well to song, anthem, chant (of various kinds). Except where noted, I have used translations provided in bilingual editions, following the use of diacritical marks in those editions. Mahalo to Kahealani Clark for several references, and to Noenoe Silva and Laiana Wong, kumu (teachers, sources) whose class discussions have informed my ideas about authenticity and the importance of mo‘olelo.

2. The multiple orders of sovereignty claims today (see Kauanui 2005b) all maintain the illegality of the 1893 overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, a fact acknowledged in "Apology to Native Hawaiians on Behalf of the United States for the Overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i" (Public Law 103–150). All express continuity of spirit with the nationalist mele lāhu‘i (anti-annexation songs) of the 1890s (see Stillman and Basham, whose work most specifically explores continuities and transformations in the meaning of the term lāhu‘i).

3. Hawaiian so-called entitlements (some eighty-five statutes) are under persistent legal attack by proponents of a "color blind" society, whose funding comes in part from right-wing Conservative groups; riding on the back of threats to legal dissolution of Hawaiian "distinctness" as a lāhu‘i, the Akaka Bill (Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Bill) has emerged as a stopgap measure. For those who oppose it, this bill would for the first time offer Hawaiian consent to the ongoing U.S. occupation of Hawaiian lands (see Kauanui 2005 and Ka‘eo 2005).

4. On the politically invested ways in which an orientalist settler scholarship refigures mo‘olelo—distancing them from living practice by converting them into "legend" that can be appropriated by state tourism—see Bachchilega.

5. For a critical overview of the Joycelyn Linnekin–Trask debate, in which Linnekin argued that the concept of malama ‘aina (take care of the land), among others, was a contemporary construct, see Tobin, who emphasizes the importance of outsiders positioning themselves "relative to a Nationalist movement. We are not free to choose the location from which we write" (168).

6. For complementary definitions see Dudoit; Ho‘omanawanui; Trask 1999.

Works Cited


Ka‘eo, Kaleikoa, panel discussion. “We Are Satisfied with the Stones: The Perils of the Akaka Bill.” Kamakakūkōkalani Center, Honolulu, 14 October 2005.


