Book and Media Reviews

Noenoe K Silva’s recent book, The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen: Reconstructing Native Hawaiian Intellectual History, offers a master class on how to use an archive. Drawing on the corpus of newspapers written and published by Kānaka Maoli in the nineteenth century, Silva tracks the contributions of two prolific figures, Joseph Ho’ona’auao Kānepu‘u and Joseph Moku‘ōhai Poepoe, across their political, intellectual, and literary lives. To do so required the painstaking effort of reading through voluminous pages of sources written in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language) in fragile newprint, not only to locate Kānepu‘u’s and Poepoe’s works across decades and different publications—which have not yet been fully indexed—but also to read these works within the context of the publications in toto. Such a methodology exhibits the indelible marks of Silva’s background in librarianship, with meticulous attention paid to the placement of articles in specific paper layouts, the broader influences of Honolulu’s publishing industry, and how implicit debates about Hawai‘i’s future operated across documentary space and time. The result is an exquisite account of cultural preservation in a time of great political uncertainty, as the pressures of US settler colonization exerted increasing force on Hawaiian culture, monarchical rule, and everyday life as the twentieth century drew near.

This mode of cultural preservation—whereby the publishing of mo‘olelo (stories, histories) and accompanying editorials help us to know the worlds of our kūpuna (ancestors)—comprises what Silva theorizes as mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogical) consciousness: that the chronicling of ancestral knowledge in Hawaiian-language newspapers were meant as much for us now as they were for readers then. Foreseeing the impending erosion of language and intellectual history signaled by events like the forced signing of the Bayonet Constitution in 1887 and the unilateral annexation of the Hawaiian Kingdom by the United States in 1898, writers like Kānepu‘u and Poepoe took pains to record the hi/stories that embed Kānaka Maoli within their pae ‘āina (archipelago) in their native tongue, thereby producing a blueprint for Hawaiians to reconstruct the intellectual and embodied landscapes necessary for today’s decolonization efforts.

Those familiar with ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i will know its complexity. Words printed in the newspapers without diacritical marks become ambiguous signifiers; translations of single words do not produce neat English analogs but often require multiple overlapping concepts to get at their author’s meaning. And so Silva does provide quotes in both languages so that nuance is not lost. While readers who do not possess fluency in Hawaiian may be challenged by its prodigious use—key-words necessary for analysis will be accompanied by an English translation at first mention only—they will grasp easily enough the important reasons
why the text is so pointedly bilingual. Rather than water down the intellectual legacy of the archive, Silva allows the passages to continue speaking for themselves in what I interpret as an act of generosity and humility: rather than assert her own translations as definitive, she allows readers the opportunity to produce their own interpretations of works that are filled with kaona (hidden or double meaning), assonances, and references beyond our present comprehension. In this way, she fulfills her kuleana (rights, responsibility, obligation) to maintain the liveliness of Hawaiian knowledge while also perpetuating the political efforts of nineteenth-century writers. Just as Kānepu‘u and Poepoe saw themselves as epistemological bridges between the past and the future, Silva takes on that same role for *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen*.

The book is structured into two main sections, with the first focusing on Kānepu‘u and the second on Poepoe. Each part comprises three chapters, providing an overview of each author’s life and oeuvre followed by in-depth analyses of the works themselves through rich comparisons to a broad scope of outside sources: ‘ōlelo no'eau (metaphorical sayings), chants, geographical details, and definitions taken from reference works both popular and obscure. Interwoven throughout are the lessons implicit in detailing these two remarkable publishing careers. Chapter 3 in the section on Kānepu‘u provides an especially powerful discussion of “Kanaka Geography and Aloha ‘Āina,” in which Silva articulates Indigenous mapmaking as an ontological practice. Looking to place names and descriptions embedded in mo‘olelo, Kānaka are able to keep alive the sensorial knowing and kinship structures that animate the practice of aloha ‘āina (caring for their land). And, in being able to recognize intimate relations in more-than-human forms of plants, animals, and land formations, the stakes are raised for how we reckon with the systemic challenges of ecological destruction today. This key intervention is then carried forward into part 2 of the book, which takes up the relationality of Kānaka Maoli and ‘āina through mo‘olelo kahiko (ancient histories) more thoroughly. Unpacking Poepoe’s versions of prominent mo‘olelo drives home the central importance of speaking, reading, and studying the words of ancestors: that in remembering Hawai‘i’s intellectual history, we are re-membering the lāhui (nation, people) of the future.

This book—Silva’s second and a follow-up to her ground-shifting monograph *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (2004)—will undoubtedly become required reading for anyone interested in the fields of Hawaiian history or Hawaiian studies. It joins a growing corpus of works by scholars like David Chang, ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui, and Leilani Basham aimed at undoing generations of scholarship that ignored ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i resources in their telling of the past. The specificity of the material and concepts may offer greater utility to specialists over those more generally oriented toward Indigenous or decolonial studies, but it will nevertheless do much to push forward academic conversations about envi-
ronment in the Pacific (particularly those concerned with the Anthropocene), human-nonhuman relationships, and sovereignty struggles. Silva’s call to others to take up and expand the research laid out in *Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen* is unmistakably present in her analysis. For that, the project is not meant to be definitive but instead is offered as a starting point for future scholarship. Indeed, Kānepu‘u and Poepoe are but two figures out of many who contributed to the pages of Hawai‘i’s newspapers, which remain a critical and underutilized resource for strengthening mo‘okūauhau consciousness going forward.

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In their new anthology, *Archipelagic American Studies*, editors Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens deliberately embark from the continental bias of American studies into the world’s waters. With a reenvisioning of the American imaginary as one of relational assemblages across and between land and sea, this collection interconnects disparate and distant oceans, shores, canoes, “moving islands,” and even the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. In a transformative series of essays from scholars around the world, the collection destabilizes, reorients, and expands conceptualizations of an America defined by/as imperial territorialities. Methodologically diverse and challenging, it takes up central questions ranging from fields related to area studies (specifically Pacific and Caribbean studies), to postcolonial studies, to Native American and Indigenous studies. In a collection that examines both the metaphoric and the material impacts of colonial rhetorics, each of the essays presents new and dynamic methodological approaches for scholars interested in the afterlives of empire.

This lengthy and detailed collection traverses the globe and challenges its readers to contemplate the ways in which they conceptualize islands. Roberts and Stephens’s extensive introduction, “Archipelagic American Studies: Decontinentalizing the Study of American Culture,” begins the book by examining versions of American history dominated by narratives of continental centrality. These narratives, fueled by the colonial mapping of oceans, ignore an islands-oriented or archipelagic view of America, the Americas, and American studies, broadly. To counteract these omissions, Robert and Stephens “decontinentalize” through a presentation of new planetary topographies and topologies. Through a variety of case studies, including maps, fractal figures, digital images, and Marshallese stick charts, they present an extensive literature review of where nissology (the study of islands) has been, and where it might be headed. Assemblages of islands, archipelagos, and