Activist Genealogy

Visions and Enactments of Solidarity Across Black and Kanaka Maoli Movements

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June 6, 2020: Over ten thousand people have come to the Hawaiʻi State Capitol in protest. They come from all of Hawaiʻi's many families—Kanaka, Filipino, Japanese, Chinese, Sāmoan, Chukese, Vietnamese, Thai, Korean, and so many more. They are here in answer to my people's call to join us in our grief and rage at the murders of our brothers and sisters, to end four hundred years of police and vigilante terror against us. To make Black lives matter.

Dr. Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua sits on the grass at Ala Moana Beach Park before the march begins. She is making a sign. Her five-year-old son, Moku, sits close beside her, watching her intently as she works. They are talking about why they are here, why they are making this sign, and what it means. The sign says, "FUCK WHITE SUPREMACY." Moku wears a baseball hat pulled low across his serious eyes. The words on his hat say "KAPU ALOHA."

Eleven months earlier, Noelani lay chained to a cattle grate at Mauna Kea Access Road. This time our Kanaka brothers and sisters issued the call, an invitation to all of us to protest the Thirty Meter Telescope's construction, to join their lāhui in protecting a sacred ancestor from desecration by an imperialist, capitalist, militarist state. "Kū Kiaʻi Mauna," they chant. "We plan to be here as long as Mauna Kea needs us." Thousands responded to this call. For more than eight months, Kānaka gathered to defend the Mauna. They danced and chanted, organized a university, built a small city to house and feed the protectors, and their allies came from across Hawaiʻi and Oceania to join them in struggle. They used Kapu Aloha: disciplined, non-violent, love-filled resistance, to build a movement, to make a revolution, to plant the seeds of a new and old sovereignty.

What is the meaning of these two scenes of anti-racist, anti-colonial struggle in Hawaiʻi? What do we learn as we watch these people's movements call out and respond, each to the other's calls, with mutual understanding and care? How do the rallying cries "Black Lives Matter" and "Kū Kiaʻi Mauna" speak to and of one another? How do they manifest and contest a shared oppression? How do they envision and enact solidarity and coalition across the Hawaiian sovereignty and

Black liberation movements? What vision of the future do they imagine and portend?

The familial relationship between Black Lives Matter and Kū Kiaʻi Mauna begins with its origin in slavery, colonialism, and empire. The American nation/empire was and is established and constituted through the plunder, extermination, and exploitation of human beings. The United States Constitution made property ownership basic to individual freedom. The nation's economic growth and territorial expansion were achieved through slave labor and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Racism and the narrative of Black inferiority were essential to the hegemony of a Constitution that claimed to "establish justice" while its provisions valued property over human life.

The very presence of Black human beings represented a revolutionary challenge to a nation whose law made ownership of Black bodies essential to white freedom. The defiance of Blacks who ran away by the thousands were concrete challenges to the system of slavery. They defied its power. They robbed its profits. They challenged the primacy of property over humanity as well as the ideology of Black inhumanity that rationalized the Constitution's contradictions.

The Mauna Kea movement articulates and enacts a similar radical challenge to American empire. The empire's law begins with a premise, an assertion, about the justice of existing title in property. The law grants the State title to the land and makes the Mauna's protectors trespassers who deny the owner the right to exploit his property. The Protectors contest the law's premise on two levels. First, their protest makes a sovereignty claim that invokes international law to demonstrate the illegality of the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi in 1893 and its unilateral annexation in 1898. Second, and more fundamentally, the Protectors proclaim a worldview or ontology, a definition of the Native Hawaiian self and nation, that treats the mountain, Mauna Kea, as an animate, living being, as ʻohana, ancestor, and spiritual being. Just as my own ancestors' defiance of the law of slavery challenged the morality and justice of human property, the Protectors' enactment of Kapu Aloha defies and contests the morality of law that treats the Mauna as inanimate property that can be owned, possessed, and exploited.

Critical Race theorist Anthony Farley writes,

> The genealogy of any object of property leads back to an original accumulation . . . the violent capture of peoples and lands that must take place for there to be property, appears in the legal system as a time out of mind . . . . The Middle Passage and Manifest Destiny, the original accumulation that provides the owners the initial capital, belong to that time out of mind.
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> Ownership divides space into mine or yours or his or hers or theirs or ours . . . .
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> Ownership does something else as well. Ownership also makes us forget that things were not always this way. (151)

The Mauna Kea Protectors will not allow us to forget the violent capture of their lands, the overthrow, dispossession, and accumulation that transformed their ancestor, Mauna Kea, into property that can be owned. They talk back to the law's time-out-of-mind narrative that tells us things were always this way and that keeps us from imagining that things could be different. The politics and activism of Black Lives Matter and the Hawaiian Sovereignty movement are rooted in the same defiance and contestation of American empire's plunder and white supremacy's justification of that plunder.

August 20, 1972: a crowd of 112,000 Black folks fills the Los Angeles Coliseum for the Watts-Stax Music Festival, a concert to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the 1965 uprising in the Black community of Watts. A young Jesse Jackson, resplendent in a dashiki and huge, gorgeous afro, speaks of Black power and community control. "We may be in the slum, but the slum is not in us. We may be in prison, but the prison is not in us. . . . We've gathered here today to celebrate our homecoming and our somebodyness." And then, all 112,000 stand as one and raise their fists, as Jackson leads them in a call and response that marries the soul of Black Lives Matter to Hawaiian Sovereignty.

> I am . . .
> Somebody . . .
> I may be poor . . .
> But I am . . .
> Somebody . . .
> I may be on welfare . . .
> But I am . . .
> Somebody . . .
> I am . . .
> Black . . .
> Beautiful . . .
> Proud . . .
> And must be respected . . .
> I must be protected . . .
> I am God's child . . .
> When we stand together . . . what time is it?
> [Nation time!]
> When we stand together . . . what time is it?
> [Nation time!]
> What time is it?
> [Nation time!]
> What time is it?
> [Nation time!]

Twenty years later, and three thousand miles across the Pacific, Haunani-Kay Trask stands before her Kanaka brothers and sisters at a commemoration of the centennial of the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom. She echoes Jackson's call and response. "We are not American," she calls, reminding her audience that empire has imposed American identity upon them, stealing not just their land, but the human right of self-governance and self-definition. Her brothers and sisters respond to her call, "We are not American," affirming their sovereignty, proclaiming their right and competence to rule themselves, renouncing white supremacy's assertion that Kanaka lives are neither capable nor worthy of self-governance, of self-definition.

There is a final lesson of relationship to be found in these scenes of sibling movements—the lesson and practice of genealogy. Genealogy is relational. Identity is contingent, strategic, and always shifting. It weaves together physical, spiritual, and social ties to place and people to land and sea. Dr. Heoli Osorio speaks of an intellectual/activist genealogy, of her own teachers, taught by Haunani-Kay Trask, who introduced Fanon, Malcolm, and Angela Davis to her students as family. When we do the work of justice together, when we answer one another's call to join our several separate struggles, we learn justice from one another and we learn that those struggles are one. We discover that we are related. We choose this family.

"Black Lives Matter!" "Kū Kiaʻi Mauna!" "I am Somebody!" "We are not American!" "Fuck White Supremacy!" "It's Nation Time!" "Kapu Aloha!" Each of these rejects the primacy of property, ownership, plunder and profit, and white supremacy's narrative that denies the beauty, love, and worth of our lives. Each also imagines a future where we are sovereign because we continue to struggle, where we learn to love one another, to love the land, and love ourselves over and over again, where we are sovereign because we choose the family and lāhui of freedom fighters.

What time is it?
Nation Time!

Work Cited

Farley, Anthony. "The Station." *After the Storm: Black Intellectuals Explore the Meaning of Hurricane Katrina*, edited by David Dante Trout, The New Press, 2006.

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