

*Between The Hui and Da Hui Inc.:
Incorporating N-oceans of Native Hawaiian Resistance
in Oceanic Cultural Studies*

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INTRODUCTION

When eighteen-year-old Makua Rothman dropped into a massive wave at Pe`ahi, the surf break also known as “Jaws,” he successfully rode the largest wave in the world, which won him the 2003 Billabong XXL Global Big Wave Award.¹ As he had grown up on the North Shore of O`ahu as the son of Eddie Rothman, co-founder of Da Hui Inc.,² the younger Rothman’s feat was symbolic of the surf company’s development from its local origins to a rise and expansion riding the global waves of the surfing industry. As a spin-off of the grassroots organization Hui o He`e Nalu, which extends Native Hawaiian resistance into ocean space, Da Hui Inc. owes much of its success to its incorporation of and literal capitalization on the ideas of the original club.

In this paper, I examine the entities of Hui o He`e Nalu and Da Hui Inc. as indigenous articulations, leashed not only to each other, but also to local and global forces. This study provides an example of the way in which Oceanic cultural studies can engage with issues of indigeneity. I first situate my research in the Pacific by arguing for an indigenous accent on cultural studies in Oceania in general, and Hawai`i in particular. I then discuss how Native Hawaiian resistance found expression in Hui o He`e Nalu, and I consider their signature black shorts as a cultural text that can be read. The implications of the club’s entanglement with localism is then explored, followed by an examination of the way indigenous resistance has been incorporated into the increasingly global surfing industry by Da Hui. I conclude by considering what is at stake for Native Hawaiians in the ways their resistance is incorporated at both local and global scales.

WAVES OF CULTURAL STUDIES IN OCEANIA

As Pacific scholars ride the waves of cultural studies that increasingly traverse Oceania, they will have to address questions of indigeneity. Despite the seemingly endless sea of possibilities, mainstream cultural studies has been reluctant to engage with indigenous issues (Shapiro and others 2002; Diaz and Kauanui 2001). This neglect surely results from the linkage of the multiple discourses of indigeneity to notions of “culture, community, shared experience, and national identity,” the elements that Stuart Hall referred to as “shoals and currents” in the “confusing and dangerous waters” of the late-modern world (1993, 352–353). In the Pacific, these “dangerous waters” are in part made up of the salt water that links the identities of the island peoples in the space that is Oceania:

We sweat and cry salt water, so we know
that the ocean is really in our blood.
(Teresia Teaiwa, quoted by Epeli Hau`ofa, “The Ocean in Us”)

Drawing on the collective heredity of what Epeli Hau`ofa has called an expansive “sea of islands,” indigenous Pacific scholars can confront this neglect by the cultural studies mainstream:

Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces which we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed places, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. We must not allow anyone to belittle us again, and take away our freedom. (Hau`ofa 1993, 16)

This re-visioned Pacific provides a space and context for the idea that Islanders are rooted in and routed through island-scapes and seascapes (Diaz and Kauanui 2001). Thus, while Teaiwa has suggested that the *routed* side of the dialectic—which includes migration, diaspora, and exile—is privileged by cultural studies (2001), I argue that an engagement with indigenous *roots* is unavoidable when considering Oceanic cultural studies.

The inter-, extra-, and anti-disciplinary field that is cultural studies should be viewed as a good fit for furthering Pacific scholarship for several reasons. First, the “un-disciplined” nature of cultural studies fits the intellectual context of the Pacific wherein “there are few indigenous scholars for whom disciplinary training, institutional location, research interests, and methods converge to produce an easy identification of disciplinary identity” (White and Tengan 2001, 401). Second, because of this character, cultural studies can accommodate what Wood has referred to as the “transformed, multiplied, and transmixed genres” created by visionaries in the region (2003, 356). These genres range from mixed prose to lyrical poetry, from theatrical plays to political analysis, and from fiction to filmmaking. The list of cultural studies pioneers in the Pacific who are using these genres to present an indigenous perspective constitutes the “critical mass” of Pacific scholarship today, including Albert Wendt, Epeli Hau’ofa, Konai Helu Thaman, Haunani-Kay Trask, Vilsoni Hereniko, Vicente Diaz, and Teresia Teaiwa.

Perhaps most important, scholarship in the region can be theoretically invigorated by the perspectives of cultural studies. As Teaiwa has commented: “Why is cultural studies providing the cutting edge in Pacific studies? Because Pacific studies desperately lacks homegrown theory, and because there are problems with the Native” (2001, 346). The problems of essentialized and reified natives and this apparent lack of grassroots theory have begun to be addressed by the emerging theorization of indigenous epistemologies (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001; Meyer 2001). Borrowing theoretical frameworks from cultural studies will enable Pacific studies to engage with other ways of knowing in the sea of knowledges (Wood 2003). I will now discuss some of the theoretical borrowings that can be brought to bear on indigenous issues in Oceania.

Gramscian cultural studies’ focus on hegemony theory and articulation has much potential for addressing indigeneity in the contemporary Pacific. Hegemony theory has been extended beyond Antonio Gramsci’s focus on class and can be an especially useful

way to look at the dialectics of indigenous culture and resistance. As John Storey has argued:

It is the “Gramscian insistence” (before, with and after Gramsci), learnt from Marx, that we make culture and we are made by culture; there is agency and there is structure. It is not enough to celebrate agency; nor is it enough to detail the structure(s) of power; we must always keep in mind the dialectical play between resistance and incorporation. The best of cultural studies has always been mindful of this. (1996, 11)

The idea that culture and people constantly remake each other is helpful in the Pacific in addressing the temporal and spatial fixing of indigenous peoples as well as the polemic of authenticity.³ In addition, without either celebrating indigenous resistance or dwelling fatalistically on the debilitating power of colonial domination, cultural studies can offer a “compromise equilibrium” between the agency of indigeneity and the structure of domination (Storey 1999, 150). A recognition of the way indigenous claims are complicit in and reinforcing of hegemony is also important in analyzing indigenous struggle.

As culture is a contested terrain wherein battles over meaning take place, Hall’s theory of articulation helps to illuminate how indigenous notions are both expressions and linkages in a particular context. James Clifford’s elaboration of “articulated sites of indigeneity,” as formulated in the context of the Pacific, is especially useful (2001, 472). This notion rejects both the essentialist assumption that indigeneity is predicated on primordial connections to land and sea, and the claim that indigenous discourse is symptomatic of a postmodern identity politics that is being played out through invented traditions. Instead, Clifford has argued, it is more useful to recognize the partial truths that both these positions represent and the politics they entail (2001, 472).

The links between identity and place, which are central components of indigeneity, can also be analyzed separately as indigenous articulations—these ideas can be hooked or unhooked from each other. Oceanic identities can be seen as fluid and contingent, existing betwixt and between tradition and genealogy on the one hand and decolonizing ideology and counter-hegemonic practices on the other. As Vilsoni Hereniko explained,

“Our cultural identities are therefore always in a state of becoming, a journey in which we never arrive; who we are is not a rock that is passed on from generation to generation, fixed and unchanging” (1999, 138). This cultural fluidity can be linked to Hall’s statement: “I believe irrevocably, identity is always an open, complex, unfinished game—always under construction. . . . it always moves into the future through a symbolic detour through the past” (1993, 362). Similarly, sites of indigenous articulation are also simultaneously constrained and enabled by the power of place and, as I discuss later, capitalism. Clifford explained it this way: “When thinking of differently articulated sites of indigeneity . . . one of the enduring constraints in the changing mix will always be the power of place” (2001, 481). Therefore, running through the fluidity of mobile and diasporic linkages to place in the globalizing world is an “enduring spatial nexus” of ancestral homelands—of Hawaiiki (Clifford 2001, 482).

NATIVE HAWAIIAN RESISTANCE AND INCORPORATION

Indigenous notions of culture, identity, and place are salient in Hawai`i. As is the case when considering the broader Pacific, it is crucial that the practice of cultural studies in Hawai`i engages with indigenous issues. As Michael Shapiro and his coauthors explained:

Whereas “indigenous” identities and concerns are largely absent from much of the “mainstream” of Euro-American cultural studies, in Hawai`i that is the arena where issues of culture, power and representation are most acute. (2002, 234)

Given the political climate in Hawai`i, an important question regarding cultural studies and its engagement with indigeneity is what it has to offer Native Hawaiians. One way cultural studies can engage with indigenous issues in Hawai`i is through a critical analysis of Native Hawaiian resistance. Before I examine the way in which it has been enacted and incorporated into the surfing industry in particular, I first provide a general overview of indigenous Hawaiian resistance.

Native Hawaiian resistance to US colonization—latent for much of the century following the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893 and, later, the annexation of

Hawai`i by the United States in 1898—came to a head in the 1970s in response to urgent land issues. The most vocal protests were against the bombing of the island of Kaho`olawe by the US military and the eviction of Native Hawaiians from their lands in order to make way for tourist and residential development. Indigenous resistance also manifested itself as a revitalization of Hawaiian culture—a “Hawaiian cultural renaissance”—which over the last three decades has seen a re-flowering of the Hawaiian language, and a resurgence of traditional practices and cultural arts. The movement for Native Hawaiian sovereignty has sparked much political debate and captured the attention of local and national hegemonic forces in the islands and beyond. This resistance has been, and continues to be, driven by the recognition that many Native Hawaiians have been dispossessed of land, systematically alienated from their culture, and marginalized in terms of health, education, political power, and socioeconomic status. Reconnecting to the `āina (land) and culture has been an essential part of the Hawaiian renaissance and related activism, reinvigorating a sense of indigenous identity. Resistance has manifested itself in all aspects of life, ranging from protest marches to the occupation of sacred sites, and from promoting Hawaiian language education to dancing hula and surfing.

Native Hawaiian resistance found expression in the world of surfing through the creation of Hui o He`e Nalu. Emerging in the 1970s alongside the groundswell of Native Hawaiian political activism and cultural revitalization, the club was created by Native Hawaiian surfers and other watermen on the North Shore of O`ahu. Hui o He`e Nalu, which also included non-Hawaiian, “local” men, was formed to reassert local control of the ocean at a time when the North Shore had become the crowded mecca of surfing. The sport was becoming a popular global phenomenon; thus, the club represented a grassroots response to larger forces. Also known as the “black shorts” because of the black surf trunks that were worn exclusively by members of the club, the Hui became notorious for their aggression in the water, which was characterized by intimidation tactics and physical violence.

However, it would be a mistake to view this behavior simply as a kind of territorial turf war. More than this, Hui o He`e Nalu was formed as an outlet for

indigenous resistance to a longer history of colonization and displacement by outside forces.⁴ As Isaiah Walker explained:

Hawaiian North Shore surfers . . . were reacting to a larger threat, one with a new yet familiar face: another wave of colonialism in a fight to preserve a significant cultural space, *ke kai* and *ka nalu* (the ocean and the surf). Unlike the land, this ancient playground had not yet been over-developed or exploited. (2005, 579)

In addition to random skirmishes with non-Hui members in the water, the Hui directed its resistance at the colonizing activities of the International Professional Surfing (IPS), established by Fred Hemmings and others in 1976. Hui o He`e Nalu protested at the IPS-sponsored competitions for several reasons. First, the competitions required exclusive use of the ocean and were dominated by non-local competitors. Second, the profits from the competitions did not trickle down to the North Shore community. Protests by members of the club resulted in violent confrontations between the Hui and the security guards who were hired by International Professional Surfing. A compromise was reached in 1978. After a tumultuous surf season, the organization agreed to hire members of the club as employees of the competitions, working as security, water patrol, and lifeguards. The Hui worked the competitions until 1987 when Hemmings contracted with the Hawaiian Water Patrol, founded by North Shore lifeguard and former president of the Hui, Terry Ahui.

Da Hui Inc, was created as a for-profit spin-off by some of the co-founders of Hui o He`e Nalu. Da Hui broke away from the club in 1993. This was a significant development for the club and the “black shorts.” From 1979 to 1993, Quiksilver had been supplying the club with free black shorts, but since the break up, Da Hui has been producing its own clothing line. In the time that has passed since the schism, the presence of the club on the North Shore has seemed to wane as the presence of Da Hui has waxed. While these days the “black shorts” are not as visible on the North Shore, Da Hui’s presence has been especially strong due to its sponsorship of events like “the Eddie,” the Eddie Aikau Big Wave Invitational held at Waimea Bay.

ARTICULATING RESISTANCE IN THE BLACK SHORTS

The theory of articulation is helpful for analyzing the way in which Native Hawaiian resistance is expressed through the “black shorts,” and for seeing how it is linked to larger structures and contexts. Members of Hui o He`e Nalu articulated meaning in both the production and consumption of the shorts because they designed the shorts and were the only ones to wear them. The black shorts were made and structured in such a way as to link them to Native Hawaiian resistance. Wearing the shorts in the ocean constituted a kind of cultural consumption, which could be interpreted as a spatial practice that reclaimed indigenous space. I will now briefly describe the design of the black shorts, after which time I will provide a critical reading of the black shorts as a cultural text, whose meaning emerges from a process of articulation.

The black board shorts are overlaid by a single red and a single yellow stripe running down the left seam of the shorts. The shorts also sport the Hui o He`e Nalu logo, which appears as a yellow petroglyphic human figure on a surfboard embroidered on the bottom front right side of the shorts. Above the petroglyph are the words “Hui o He`e Nalu” and below it are the words “North Shore, Oahu.”

While I recognize that alternative readings of the shorts as a text can be made, I suggest a “preferred reading” can be decoded from the way the material expression of the shorts is structured (Storey 1999, 157). To begin with, the black shorts can be read as connoting claims to Native Hawaiian heritage and authority. The colors red and yellow were markers of the chiefly class in ancient Hawai`i. Thus, the stripes on the shorts suggest not only a connection to ancient Hawai`i, but also a link to a specific class of Hawaiians—the ali`i (chiefs). The chiefs wore red- and yellow-colored helmets, capes, and malo (loin cloths) as markers of their status. In the kapu system,⁵ the ali`i were set apart from commoners, who were required to avoid or show deference because of the chiefs’ greater mana (spiritual power and authority), or face the consequences, which on some occasions was death. As an interpretive exercise, we might view the black shorts as modern-day loincloths that can be read as Hui o He`e Nalu’s claiming to be the new chiefs of surfing, commanding respect and avoidance in the ocean. Like the ali`i of old, the contemporary Hui o He`e Nalu decreed the ocean kapu by sporting their black shorts and excluding nonmembers. Stories abound in the local Hawaiian surfing community

about Hui o He`e Nalu members both physically and verbally intimidating outsiders as they instituted and enforced a new kapu system in the ocean.

Linked to the indigenous resistance of Hui o He`e Nalu is a connection to a kind of authentic Hawaiian surf culture—an essence uncontaminated by outsiders. The petroglyph suggests a primordial link between the wearers of the shorts and the ancient Hawaiians who surfed these waters. That this is the preferred reading of the shorts is confirmed by statements on the Da Hui Web site, which claim: “After all, some of our ancestors did create the sport of surfing” and that Da Hui is trying to “keep it real.” The use of the petroglyph suggests an authentic genealogy “written in stone” by the ancients. Genealogy serves as a primary means by which Native Hawaiians claim their indigenous identity, and thus the shorts may be viewed as a signifier that is worn on the body to distinguish them from other bloodlines. In this way, both the act of resistance and the display of the authentic are inserted into the popular imagination.

Meaning was also produced in the consumption of the shorts as Hui members acted to “produce in use” by their spatial practices in the ocean (Storey 1999, 165). As members of the Hui used the shorts in the water, they constituted moving texts and living bo(a)rders, signifying a claim to ocean space. By paddling out to surf breaks and dominating the peak through intimidation and violence, the Hui reclaimed or reoccupied the ocean as a fluid extension of the `āina as Native Hawaiian territory. Their black shorts became metaphorical and physical boundaries that demarcated Hawaiian territory. The black shorts were worn to warn outsiders and represent the spatial extension of Native Hawaiian resistance from the land into the ocean.

LOCAL M(OCEANS) AND GLOBALIZATION

Hui o He`e Nalu and Da Hui primarily represent “local” entities. While both groups are predominantly made up of Native Hawaiians, they have always been articulated with “local” members who were not Native Hawaiian. The problem of overcrowding in the ocean, which stemmed from both the popularity and professionalization of surfing, has been felt by Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians alike, and they have banded together in a common cause. Jonathan Okamura’s comments on “local” identity are important here:

Local identity has gained greater significance and has come to represent the common identity of people in Hawai`i who have an appreciation of and commitment to the land, peoples, and cultures of the islands. Local culture and identity have emerged as expressions of resistance and opposition to external forces of development and change that are perceived as threatening the quality of life in the islands and that have marginalized Hawai`i's people. (1998, 273–274)

Thus, Hui o He`e Nalu was forged out of a sense of a shared connection to Hawai`i and a common attachment to the land and sea. Da Hui, the company's name itself, connotes a "local" identity through the use of Pidgin (Hawaiian Creole English), which may be viewed as one of the quintessential markers of local identity in Hawai`i. From this perspective, then, Da Hui could be celebrated as a "local" business.

Localism arose from historically shared resistance to subordination by the haole-dominated plantation economy,⁶ and as a defensive response to outside pressures. In addition, it has been championed because of the benign nature of ethnic relations in Hawai`i, compared to ethnic conflicts on the US mainland or abroad. Local identity in Hawai`i is celebrated by some as a heritage that *all* residents of Hawai`i share, implying harmonious ethnic relations characterized by a ubiquitous "aloha spirit."

However, in light of these romanticized notions of a multiethnic paradise, it is important to point out that the indigenous claims of Native Hawaiians are different from those of locals, and localism may be viewed as obscuring that critical difference. As Okamura has outlined (1998), localism denies and distorts the tensions that exist in interethnic relations; it also has major shortcomings, among which is the maintenance of hegemonies which keep Native Hawaiians in a subordinate status in the social stratification of Hawai`i. Localism in Hawai`i thus masks the real differences between ethnic groups in terms of power relations. As Haunani-Kay Trask has argued (2000, 4), the use of the "local" identity tag blurs the history of Hawai`i's only indigenous people" at the same time that it denies the way in which non-Hawaiians benefit from the subjugation of Native Hawaiians. Thus, the Native Hawaiian resistance practiced by Hui

o He`e Nalu has been incorporated by a localism that continues to subordinate Native Hawaiians.

The increasing importance of localism worldwide is the major paradox of globalization and its homogenizing effects. However, this waxing of localism may be deceptive, as Hall has explained:

the strengthening of “the local” is probably less the revival of the stable identities of “locally settled communities” of the past, and more that tricky version of “the local” which operates within, and has been thoroughly reshaped by “the global” and operates largely within its logic. (1993, 354)

From the beginning, the Hui was involved with a “tricky version of the local,” and Da Hui’s recent activities to compete in the global market operate within the logic of capitalism. That Da Hui acts locally but thinks globally was expressed in this quote from their Web site (www.dahui.com) in February 2005:

[Da Hui] is a profit organization which helps and sponsors local surfers. It competes on the world marketplace with all the other companies that want to have a Hawaiian look and feel. It is the only company owned by 90% Hawaiian people of its kind that competes on the world market. After all, some of our ancestors did create the sport of surfing.

Thus, in addition to its local incorporation, the indigenous resistance found in the Hui o He`e Nalu has become commodified by Da Hui to satisfy the demands of a global capitalism, where there is a market for “lifestyle” items. Da Hui sponsors both local and not-so-local surfers, and in this way its products can be found on surfboards, products, and bodies in and out of the ocean throughout the world. Its fluid logo, like graffiti in local waters, also surfs the Net, as it claims space in the global market as an advertisement of a “local” and authentic Hawaiian lifestyle. The local, authentic, and indigenous difference feeds into the demands of global capitalism and Da Hui deftly rides both local and global waves to shore on the back of Native Hawaiian resistance.

Da Hui products have become the commodified form of Hui o He`e Nalu in the global marketplace by clever textual strategies, which have enabled the spin-off to represent a commodified kind of resistance and authenticity. Da Hui has fashioned the resistance of the club into commodity form by textually obscuring the difference between the club and the corporation. The separation of the two entities is made murky by the fact that some of Da Hui's owners are also founding members of the Hui o He`e Nalu. In this way Da Hui is doubly authentic—first as part of an authentic surf culture and second as a creation of authentic and original members of the club. The difference is further blurred linguistically (as mentioned earlier, “da hui” is the way one would say “the Hui”—the shortened form of the Hui o He`e Nalu—in Hawai`i Pidgin) as well as textually. Da Hui's logo is identical to the Hui o He`e Nalu logo except instead of reading “Hui o He`e Nalu,” it reads “Friends of Da Hui.” The Da Hui Web site subtly explains the difference between the club and the company, but it is in the interest of Da Hui to downplay this difference in order to allow consumers into this exclusive club as “friends of Da Hui.” Consumers can “buy into” the club and become friends of the Hui o He`e Nalu by simply buying Da Hui products. However, they can't actually buy or wear the black shorts, which are restricted to members of Hui o He`e Nalu. What consumers *can* buy are the commodified forms of the black shorts as authentic and resistant texts.

WATERED-DOWN RESISTANCE

In addressing what is at stake for Native Hawaiians, the resistance found in both hui—the company and the club—can be seen as watered down. This is not to make the claim that there is any kind of *pure* resistance, but instead to argue that because of the way both organizations have both local and global indigenous articulations, the resistance within them is complicit in and reinforcing of local and global hegemonies. From a native perspective, this demonstrates the way that indigenous claims can be co-opted, incorporated, commodified, obscured, and minimized. This sense of being “closed out”—a surfing term referring to when a wave breaks all around the surfer leaving no room to maneuver and often resulting in a wipeout—is nothing new to Native Hawaiians. However, as the case of the Hui and Da Hui demonstrates, cultural studies has theoretical

tools to offer, which, in conjunction with indigenous theorizing, can help to maneuver through the whitewash of cultural phenomena operating at local and global scales.

Most of the power of a breaking wave is at the peak of the wave (the center) and the surfer “cuts back” between the peak and the shoulder of the wave (the margin). If too close to the center, the surfer wipes out, and if too far on the margin, she loses the wave. Indigenous resistance finds agency to maneuver on the structured hegemony of the wave, beginning on the margins, incorporated by the center, and constantly cutting back between the peak and the shoulder, on local waves in a global ocean.

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Notes

1. The Billabong XXL Award is given to the surfer who rides the single biggest wave of the year. Judging is based on the analysis of images of the ride, and the photographer who captures the wave is awarded \$5,000. The surfer’s prize is awarded in the amount of \$1,000 per foot, with a minimum award of \$60,000. Makua’s ride earned him \$66,000 (www.billabongxxl05.com).
2. As a noun, *hui* means “club” or “organization” and as a verb, it means “to gather.” Da Hui Inc. is a for-profit surf company, which I also refer to as “Da Hui.” Hui o He`e Nalu means club of wave riders, or, literally, “wave sliders,” and in this paper I will also refer to the club as simply “the Hui.”
3. See White and Tengan 2001 for an insightful discussion of the polemics of authenticity.
4. The brief history of Hui o He`e Nalu presented in the next two paragraphs is derived mainly from Isaiah Walker’s more detailed account, “Terrorism or Native Protest? The Hui `O He`e Nalu and Hawaiian Resistance to Colonialism” (2005), and his 2006 dissertation, “North Shore Reign,” which was a history of the Hui. Isaiah is a friend of mine and we have surfed together many times. However, we came upon the subject simultaneously from different angles—catching the same wave as is common, going in different directions and making our own maneuvers in our approaches.
5. The kapu system was a social, political, and religious ordering of society in which status was based on the possession or lack of mana. The paramount chief was at the top of the social hierarchy and the commoners were on the bottom, with the priestly/artisan class and lesser ali`i in the middle.

6. Haole, literally “without breath,” by tradition refers to foreigners, but in the contemporary local Hawaiian context refers to white people (both local and non-local).

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