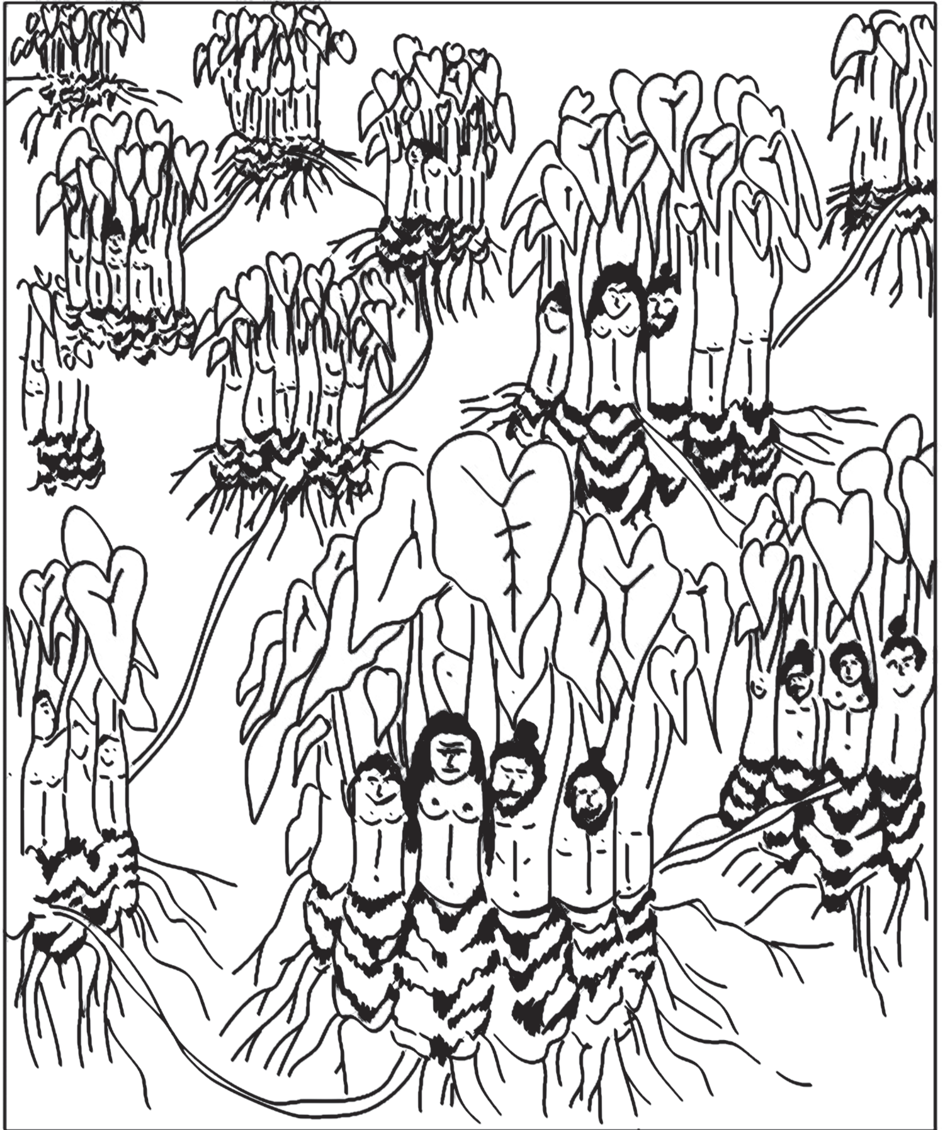
ALOHA



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TŪTŪ'S ALOHA 'ĀINA GRACE

KAMANAMAIKALANI BEAMER

It may be a uniquely Hawaiian relationship celebrated in moʻolelo like Kamapuaʻa, Laʻanuimamao, and Kamiki, which illustrate the pilina paʻa mau (enduring love) of a tūtū wahine (grandmother) and moʻopuna kāne (grandson). In each of these moʻolelo, the kūpunahine are a fundamental part of the moʻolelo as a foundation, mentor, and even akua to their moʻopuna kāne once the kūpuna have passed into pō (the realm of spirits). In fact, as I came to better understand these moʻolelo, I also better understood why many Hawaiian men today often recall their relationship with their tūtū as being one of the most important. In ways similar to this pilina, my grandmother had always been my champion. She had a vigor and determination that were not easily matched. Her name was Winona Kapuailohiamanonokalani Desha Beamer. Throughout her life she served both Hawaiʻi and my ʻohana in more ways than I could express in this essay; some of those roles included being a single mother, kumu hula, educator, composer, and activist. She was affectionately known as "Aunty Nona."[1]

My great-grandparents traveled from Nāpoʻopoʻo in South Kona to Honolulu so that she could be born at Kapiʻolani hospital. Born on August 15th, 1923, she was the eldest of five children and was the first moʻopuna and punahele of her grandmother, Helen Kapuailohia Desha Beamer. Almost from birth, she learned our family traditions of music and hula. It was this foundation that she drew upon and promoted throughout her life. She came of age in a time that would be nearly unrecognizable to many keiki today. Most of Hawaiʻi was relatively undeveloped, with many ʻohana thriving from the abundance of the ʻāina, with intimate knowledge of their places and fisheries. At the same time, institutionalized racism and systemic oppression of Hawaiian culture and language were in full force.

In 1937, Kamehameha Schools administrators expelled her for performing standing hula and chanting. I can recall her telling me how an administrator had told her she was to be expelled because Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop had written in her will that students at Kamehameha were not to speak or

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practice things Hawaiian. When my grandmother requested to see that section in the will, administrators refused to allow her to access it, likely because they were being dishonest and no such content existed in the will. When she left the office that day, she slammed the door behind her with enough force to break the door pane, and she heard the shards of glass crash behind her. Suffering through outrage and public humiliation, she later returned to graduate from the school, and years later, in 1949, was hired as an instructor of Hawaiian music and culture at Kamehameha.

Her courses provided a safe space for many students at Kamehameha to better understand Hawaiian music and culture, and simply to *be* Hawaiian. She was a tireless advocate of things Hawaiian. Alongside others, she systematically fought for the inclusion and valuing of things Hawaiian at Kamehameha and in the broader Hawaiian community. She would compose mele as a means to show the children their special connection to Hawaiʻi, their genealogy, and place, while teaching personal compositions such as "Pūpūhinuhinu" to countless school children while conducting workshops in public and private schools across Hawaiʻi.

Her love for nā mea Hawaiʻi and Kamehameha Schools did not cease following her retirement in the 1980s. In the late 1990s, she risked much when, as a kupuna, she publically challenged Kamehameha trustees, catalyzing a movement that led to changes in leadership and direction at Kamehameha. I had recently graduated from Kamehameha in 1996, when she called me to discuss the climate of the school and the morale of students. Structures that I thought immovable and forces that seemed all-powerful to an adolescent, she confronted with courage, grace, and aloha. As a former employee of Kamehameha and current professor at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, when I reflect on the positive change that she helped to create for Hawaiʻi, and in particular its children, her legacy is awe-inspiring. While being her only moʻopuna is simply humbling.

EXTRAORDINARY ALOHA

"It's just aloha, dear," my tūtū told me after spending time with the Dalai Lama during his first visit to Maui in April of 2007. My grandmother had moved to Maui following a long stay in Queen' hospital. She had regained her strength amidst complications from diabetes that included heart surgery and fights with renal failure. I remember feeling less than fulfilled with her summary of her meeting with this global figure, the Tibetan religious leader who managed to frame the story of his exile from his homeland and the plights of his people into global discourse. I didn't understand how she could characterize their meeting with the simple phrase—*it's just aloha, dear.*

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My grandmother is no longer here for me to seek clarification. To be completely honest, I feel as if I am still coming to know the depth of her phrase. My essay will discuss my thoughts on what she was trying to convey by reminding me, "it's just aloha, dear," and the ways in which this phrase relates to Aloha ʻĀina as a movement for a better island world. I will discuss Aloha ʻĀina as a movement for social, cultural, and ecological justice in Hawaiʻi while highlighting its uniqueness and value for the world.

I was in my truck on the mauka road winding my way from my home in Waimea to Kona. As I was nearing Puʻuwaʻawaʻa, I gazed at the utter beauty of Mauna Kea, Mauna Loa, and Hualālai. It was an amazingly clear, tradewind day, and I felt nearly overwhelmed at the privilege to see and feel the beauty of this place. It was at that moment that I began to think about the ways that we use the word aloha, and was struck that we use this word to express what in English seem to be very distinct kinds of relationships. How is it that we use the word "aloha" to express the feeling a grandchild has for a grandmother, a husband for a wife, a father for his daughter, the empathy for a sick child, and the relationship between a person and the land?

THE FULLNESS OF ALOHA

The concept of Aloha ʻĀina is quite holistic. While environmentalists and conservationists often advocate for nature as an entity distinct and separated from human culture, and social justice movements are not usually concerned with ecological health, Aloha ʻĀina links social, cultural, and ecological justice.

The renowned Hawaiian scholar David Malo notes that "ma ka noho ana a kanaka, ua kapa ia he aina ka inoa"[2] [it is because people live and interact with a place that it is called ʻāina]. Unlike the Euro-American concept of nature, ʻāina" is interconnected with people. Given that one literal translation of ʻāina is "that which feeds," one can begin to see how a movement built on the principles of Aloha ʻĀina would distinguish itself in crucial ways from a movement focused on conserving nature as distinct from human interaction. This becomes even clearer when one looks to Hawaiian origins and genealogies that make islands, coral, plants, birds, and fish the elder siblings of kānaka.

I am often fearful of my work being lumped with or boxed into categories that end with the suffix *-ist*. However, I think I could find some level of comfort with being boxed into a group called ʻāina-ist or aloha ʻāina-ist, where the concept of Aloha ʻĀina was defined as a movement toward the *union of culture and ecosystem*. This was the true beauty and utter genius of the resource and economic system of Hawaiʻi prior to the arrival of Cook. Language, culture, social structure, resource management, and land tenure were entirely

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embedded in and organized to be in harmony with ecosystems. Agricultural systems like loʻi (wetland taro fields) complemented systems of aquaculture, while culture and social systems recognized the uniqueness of place and environment. Distinct resource management systems were refined for place, like the food systems of Waipiʻo on Hawaiʻi Island that maximized stream-fed water resources. These systems differed from those in dryland field systems in places like leeward Kohala and Kona.

As I type this essay on my MacBook Pro 2013, I also understand that with all of our tools and modern technologies it is a sobering realization to know that these elder systems, and labor systems that relied on tools made of stone and natural materials, fed more people on every island from their local resources than the systems we have today. It is also empowering to know that we can do better than we do today; the knowledge and resource practices of the elder systems remain, and of course, we have access to better tools. Large physical remnants of ʻŌiwi land tenure systems and vast resources still exist to help us understand indigenous resource management practices that are island and place specific. The archival records which document specific Hawaiian land divisions such as moku, ahupuaʻa, ʻili, moʻo, and so on, should not be seen as capturing ancient relics of the Hawaiian land system, but rather, as *living models* for today. How can we reorganize our living conditions and social structures to make use of these divisions of resource and place? Hawaiʻi's quest for sustainability and Aloha ʻĀina has the advantage of building on an earlier successful structure. Much work needs to be done, however, to create the political will and leadership that embody the values of Aloha ʻĀina, to bring closer the union of culture and ecosystem.

THE UNIQUENESS OF ALOHA

"Many parts of the world would long to have the same acceptance of others, you know, the diversity of people that you have," uttered Archbishop Desmond Tutu during a visit to Honolulu in August of 2012.[3] The United States occupation of Hawaiʻi can be compared to the Chinese occupation of Tibet. The systemic oppression of Hawaiian culture and language after the US-backed overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom can be compared to similar policies enforced in colonial Africa. However, the ethnic diversity and continued strength of Hawaiians makes our situation unique. My grandmother would often begin a public speech by saying she was French, Scottish, English, German, and *all* Hawaiian. Today, there are many examples of members of the lāhui (genealogically Native Hawaiian) who, according to US racial classifications and stereotypes, appear to be white, black, Asian, or Hispanic. The ethnic diversity of Native Hawaiians can challenge US racial classifications

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that demand we pick just one way to be, or divide our bodies by percentages. It is powerful that we can be so ethnically diverse while at the same time hold common sets of values and cultural affiliation, which are largely centered around aloha, the collective, and the ʻāina.

There are differing levels of violence against culture and the environment inherent in imperialism, colonial settlement, and occupations. It would be foolish to try to measure or compare the degrees of evil inflicted on the populations of Tibet, South Africa, or Hawaiʻi, or to try and measure the difference between the murdering of humans and the bombing of a mountain that is an ancestor, or the creation of a gated community where there once existed a communal fishing village. However, there may be nothing that speaks more directly to the Hawaiian situation from the lessons of the South Africans and Tibetans than the idea that it takes love, compassion, and fearlessness to endure your way out of an occupation. Perhaps the fact that the Hawaiian movement has been peaceful while also being incredibly fearless and ethnically diverse might make it unique to the world while giving it the strength to endure. As other places around the world will only become more ethnically diverse while also struggling to maintain natural resources and quality of life, Hawaiʻi and Aloha ʻĀina will be able to offer solutions.

THE FUTURE OF ALOHA

"The word aloha is very simple but the real meaning is quite vast. You need a lot of effort to implement the real meaning of aloha," said the Dalai Lama on a subsequent visit to Hawaiʻi in April of 2012.[4] Aloha isn't easy. In fact, people like Kekuaokalani, Manono, Boki, Liholiho, Eddie Aikau, George Helm, Kimo Mitchell, and countless others have given their lives for Aloha ʻĀina in Hawaiʻi. The aforementioned people have exhibited important qualities of aloha: to be fearless and unwavering when one's values and ʻāina are threatened. Aloha requires one to speak and act out in the face of injustice. Aloha is active and something that needs to be put into practice, not something that is a state of being. The problems around social, cultural, and ecological justice in Hawaiʻi are not insignificant, nor are they something that we can will away through selfless compassion.

The social and environmental issues are serious, though often it takes a few additional steps to recognize them. One such issue is that of the "ceded lands." One of my favorite shirts, created by the Hawaiian Force in Hilo, reads "Live Aloha/Return Stolen Lands." This slogan highlights the active parts of aloha as well as the links between social and ecological justice. By the reign of Queen Liliʻuokalani, the Hawaiian Kingdom managed roughly 1.8 million acres of government and Crown lands that held the specific

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reservation of being "koe naʻe ke kuleana o nā a kanaka," or, "subject to the rights of Native Hawaiians." These lands are some of the most culturally and environmentally important lands in Hawaiʻi, and have fed generations of Native Hawaiians. Following the US-backed overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom government, these lands were confiscated, renamed the "Public Lands," and the constitutionally vested rights of Native Hawaiians to these lands were hidden behind nomenclature that suggests they were owned by the general "public." The renaming of these lands was a deliberate attempt to sever genealogical connections to Native Hawaiians. This has also caused confusion for those who do not know Hawaiʻi's social and political history, and has been a powerful tool to mask the United States history of injustice in Hawaiʻi. People who move to Hawaiʻi from another place and hear the phrase "Public Lands," often are confused as to why Native Hawaiians suggest a special connection to and ownership of them. However, future Aloha ʻĀina will one day regain control of our ʻāina. Of course it will not be enough to solve this social justice issue alone. Once stolen lands are regained, these lands also must be managed differently in ways that seek to bring a union to culture and ecosystem.

My tūtū fought for Aloha ʻĀina until her passing in 2010. Following her recovery from triple bypass heart surgery, renal failure, and constant complications with diabetes, she found the strength to compose and deliver a protest to the "President and Congressmen of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA," which sought to rid Hawaiʻi of future United States military installations, and declared, among other things, that the United States must:

> Give heed to our voices. We have extended aloha to you, and you seek to extinguish our very being. Respect us; be aware that we were once a sovereign international nation. We are descendants of a mighty civilization and deserve to be listened to in our own homeland.

Aloha ʻĀina is a powerful ideology, one that I believe can transcend race, culture, and environment. I know if I can be a better aloha ʻāina, if I can live with aloha and wiwoʻole (fearlessness) as did my kūpuna before me, and mentor those who come in my path to stand on a similar foundation, I can create a better island world for my keiki. I, however, will never let them forget, *it's just aloha*.

NOTES

1. See the "Resources" of this essay for more stories about Nona Beamer.
2. Davida Malo, *Ka Moʻolelo Hawaiʻi* (Honolulu: First People's Productions, 2006): 11.

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3. Sarah Zoellick, "Tutu embraces island life," *Honolulu Star-Advertiser,* August 3, 2012: A-19.
4. Audrey McAvoy, "Dalai Lama: Real effort needed to implement aloha," *The Maui News* April 17, 2012, available at http://www.mauinews.com/page/content.detail/id/560258/Dalai-Lama-Real-effort-needed-to-implement-aloha.html?nav=5031.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION

1. Nona Beamer, *Nā Mele Hula: Hawaiian Hula Rituals and Chants,* Vols. 1–3 (Honolulu: U of Hawaiʻi P, 1987).
2. Nona Beamer, *Talking Story with Nona Beamer: Stories of a Hawaiian Family* (Honolulu: Bess, 1984).
3. Winona Beamer, *Nā Hula o Hawaiʻi: The Songs and Dances of the Beamer Family* (Norfolk Island, Australia: Island Heritage, 1976).
4. George S. Kanahele and John Berger, eds., *Hawaiian Music and Musicians: An Encyclopedic History* (Rev. ed., Honolulu: Mutual, 2012).
5. Jon Van Dyke, *Who Owns the Crown Lands of Hawaiʻi?* (Honolulu: U of Hawaiʻi P, 2008).

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