



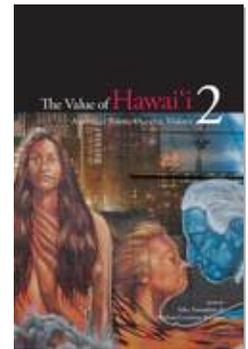
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The Value of Hawai'i 2

Yamashiro, Aiko, Goodyear-Ka'opua, Noelani

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NO SEED LEFT UNTURNED

JAMAICA HEOLIMELEIKALANI OSORIO

I.

*The day my mother promised me the gravity
of the moon was the day i found my body
was meant to be an ocean
but was only a hollow shark skin drum
only pillars of stories that never stuck,
a belly that would never swell, tides
that never pulled, kuabiwi
i couldn't conjure, scars
where hips should have been, beauty
was the lie our mothers told to us in tradition
and truth was a story that left
a bitter taste
like sour poi, on our tongue*

WHAT THEY CANNOT SEE: HE MELE NO HŌPOE

i saw you dance in the distance
pulling my glance with the diction of your stance
gliding over the land like water
over itself

If the saying is true, that “history is recorded by the victor,” women of color are history’s biggest losers. Racism, colonization, sexism, and the controlled institutionalized nature of education has developed a culture of silencing any threats to the scripted hegemonic, colonial narrative. That is to say, communities of power control what is “normal” by undermining the very existence of alternative narratives.

With a name that speaks too much of your magic
 Nānāhuki,
 too heavy for the diphthong of my tongue
 instead, let me call you Hōpoe
 i have seen you gathering parts of yourself in the form of
 yellow lehua there
 i have been with you from the beginning
 only waiting for the pahu to sound for our ha'a to begin

 You created of this stranger in me
 a lover
 let me cover your body in the sacred skin of this nahele
 plant you a fortress of rumbling lehua trees
 each blossom a promise to return.
 my love
 to move your rhythm again
 for your hā to find home in my mele

 Can you see those strange men
 watching from beyond the page
 see the way they have drawn us naked and grown
 how they miss your skin feathered with yellow lehua

 They write us into stillness
 it seems through them,
 we have been forgotten

 i wonder how it is they cannot see
 i wonder
 what has made them so blind

 into silence

Imagine then, the potential power we might wield by harnessing our mo'olelo and using them as a weapon against this single-sided writing of history. Hawaiians have long been constrained to one-dimensional, lackluster, and often disrespectful caricatures. There are many images we must first overcome to reclaim our wonderful bodies. Our intention must be to work to overpower the images of our Queen, Lili'uokalani, depicted as a monkey in nineteenth-century political cartoons. We should show our disgust that the producers of the 2009 film, *Princess Ka'iulani*, had the audacity to first propose the name "Barbarian Princess," as their title. And ultimately, we strive to outshine generations of literature and films inspired by the nauseating oversimplification of the kanaka maoli kino (body) as primitive, as in the 1966 George Roy Hill film, *Hawaii*. We need only gloss over the many films and images depicting Hawai'i to realize that nearly the entire corpus of industrialized Hawaiian filmography and imagery was created without kanaka maoli participation and authority. The result is that the kanaka maoli kino is often represented, to its detriment, by a set of rules and images that have been constructed without the powerful influence of kanaka maoli voices.

We must fight to reclaim our right to reveal and tell our own stories in meaningful and positive ways, toward healing and honoring our kino. If we can heal and take ownership over the presentation of our bodies and stories, we can build a nation. With this in mind, I offer you my own mo'olelo, which is a story of uncovering what has been hidden, of calling that which has been spackled over to the surface. In this mo'olelo, I imagine a new telling of the Hi'iakaikapoliopole epic, through the voice of Hi'iaka, in poem and song composed out of love for her Hōpoe.

The first time I read *Ka Mo'olelo o Hi'iakaikapoliopole* (Awaiaulu, 2007), I was in college. I had heard bits and pieces of the story throughout my childhood but never read any version of the story for myself. It is important to note that the nature of mo'olelo and Hawai'i's oral literary tradition has allowed for many versions and ways of telling our stories. The Hi'iaka epic alone has been published upwards of thirteen times within our Hawaiian-language nūpepa (news-papers). Beyond those written publications, storytellers and other historical figures tell these mo'olelo orally, or through dance, and attach specific details to mo'olelo that may not exist in other versions. I chose this published version, translated and compiled by Awaiaulu Press, because of the process in which it was translated. The project was envisioned to train new translators with the intention that more kānaka maoli would be prepared to take ownership over the translation of our historical texts. I also chose this particular text because of the way it highlighted hundreds of mele and oli that specifically gave voice to the wāhine in the mo'olelo.

WHILE I LEAVE YOU, LOVE
 i will sing for you
 only one song
 in my departure
 only one promise in this severing
 that leaving
 with you behind
 will be my truest sign of aloha
 nothing will ever eclipse
 the shadow that shakes from this lehua
 the way the yellow of it
 stills the chill settling in our koko
 you and i never were
 'a'ole
 we always are
 chose instead of the still of past
 the shiver found in this forest
 threw every part of these temporary bodies into this home
 this valley crater that grows us
 in every direction
 e ku'ū ipo,
 watch the parts of us as we feather into flowers
 your lips
 how they fold into this soil
 how you are every part of this home i love
 and fear to leave
 watch the way growth happens all around
 and how the birth of us turns me to song
 turns you to dance
 turns us both
 together

forget that i am leaving
forget that there is more beyond the walls of this 'āina
this ahu
extending into sky
remember the calm of this movement
the forever of this voice
and know
that i will return
in body
spirit
and song
so that our dance
shall never end

Immersing myself in this text allowed me a unique perspective and opportunity while researching and writing a thesis focused on wāhine in Hawaiian literature. I was painfully unprepared and blissfully ignorant to what such a project would uncover. I found that the more I read and looked into myself, the less I wanted to write, analyze, and theorize. I wished to breathe these mo'olelo in—to become the mo'olelo and allow them to become me.

2.

*Everything was brown when i was born
family was a gradient ocean that was too wide to understand
but by age 6
my eyes learned to polarize and measure
i learned the difference between mother and father
was a continent
and 15 points on a chromatic scale
i knew then
i would spend the rest of my life
trying to fit into the craters crumbling between them*

PAE KA LEO O KE KAI

i arrive to find the kapu man dead
 sending songs into the 'āina before me
 scripture composed to the rhythm of your pahu
 they land on the ears of friendly hosts
 they claim i am the deity of their dance
 the akua they marvel to for this movement
 and yet,
 they are ignorant to the source of my mele

They forget you
 do not see the shadows your palms left
 pressed against my hips
 don't feel the cool brush of wind to the sweat collected
 between our skin
 they know nothing of the way you fed me your body
 how i drank of you until every step
 every twist was an instinct to praise you
 every kāhea
 a song strung from the shift your kino pressed into papa
 how you became a kumu only by allowing your body to be
 lā'au lehua planted in earth
 so that you may dance every time the Moaniani Lehua wind
 blows

They are stranger to you
 and our song
 and i wonder
 how they might call themselves dancers
 and not know your name
 not have felt the pressure of your poho to their hips
 not the whisper of your voice saying, "pela" against their
 chests

Getting to know Hi'iaka pushed me to become more acquainted with my own body. For the first time in my life, I imagined a picture of womanhood that stretched far beyond any definition I had previously understood. I saw so much of myself in Hi'iaka's spirit, tenacity, adventure, and deep commitment to love. I found myself comforted by the way she loved. Mostly, I identified with the way her aloha inspired growth in herself and her environment. I came to see myself as a piece of Hi'iaka, that I was one of the many magnificent realities born from her aloha. I believed our stories were the same, that the both of us were two small women fighting our way through the page, trying with all our might to scream something between the lines. We were fighting for the strength to tell our own story. Hoping we might teach someone enough that they would carry us, the way I have learned to carry Hi'iaka, in the body.

My relationship with Hi'iaka is evolving every day. I cannot tell you where it will take me but I can pinpoint its beginning. There is a moment in the mo'olelo when Hi'iaka learns that the origin of Nānāhuki's (Hōpoe) name comes from her love of gathering lehua at Hōpoe. In learning this, Hi'iaka offers what I believe to be one of the grandest gestures of aloha I have ever encountered: a lehua grove—grown entirely out of her love for Hōpoe. In this moment, Hōpoe herself becomes the lehua that Hi'iaka will carry with her and draw inspiration from throughout her journey and life.

they know not how all of this became the dance i would
compose to the rhythm of your breath
only that i have been singing the same song ever since

They call me their akua
their kumu
all i can do is wonder
as a haumana of your ha'a
as a student of this bend at the knees praise
if i have spent enough time in your arms
in the center of your swaying scripture
if i have made a home permanent enough in your body
to give mana to this 'ami
of this curve and hinge of the hips

i send my voice to you over the ocean
praying for reply

the voice of the sea sings

the female bends

she turns the sea of nānāhuki

reminding me

i have much still to learn of your body

When I read Hi'iaka I did not find the story I had been told so many times before—a story of a young girl traveling off to Kaua'i to fetch a lover for her sister. 'A'ole. Instead I found a young woman who was changed forever by a love so pure and tangible that it not only changed the path of these two women, it transformed the physical landscape of their home. In that moment, I was so captured by the ability of this love, so far beyond my own understanding, to birth life in 'āina and body, reminding all of us that the two (earth and body) are the same. Hi'iaka's aloha for Hōpoe inspired creation—whether it was the composition of mele, oli, hula, or in this case, a forest. We see Hi'iaka's power to give life through aloha, and in seeing such a love we are inspired to love and create in the same way.

I honor Hi'iaka for sharing a mo'olelo of two women, so fiercely enchanted by each other that the universe around them could not help but grow in their presence. Their love was expressed in nature in a way that we are unable to ignore; through the whisper of the Moaniani Lehua wind, or the dancing of lehua at Hōpoe, to the pōhaku that remain strong for generations to show the sacrifice of love.

Pae ka leo o ke kai

Ha'a ka wahine

'Ami i kai o Nānāhuki

NO SEED LEFT UNTURNED

When attempting to lull a foreign body
 leave no seed unturned
 scatter language over skin
 let every song that resists to be put to tongue
 come to life in the shake of hips
 conjure wahine Hōpoe
 sweet lehua nectar that
 insists on being remembered

As you pass through, in danger
 make wind of metaphor to brush chill against the nape of
 his neck
 let him not forget the sharp sting of the 'Ūkiu rain
 make sure the seeds will stick

Sing your way through valley and cliff's edge
 bring vision to places you've come to in darkness
 that your kaona may be memorialized in pōhaku's
 premonition
 insure that women will repeat the words you have written
 that you will be remembered
 as the wahine
 who left Hōpoe's lehua grove
 but never forgot the taste
 of sweet nectar on your tongue
 a seed that insists to flower

The aloha between Hi'iaka and Hōpoe exists beyond the human body and is projected tangibly as an extension of the personal kino to the body of our 'āina. How magnificent must a love be that everything it touched, brushed against, or breathed upon would be changed, forever? I truly believe that this aloha is the story Hi'iaka is fighting to tell—a story that shows the depth and possibility of love to transform all. A story that certainly has the mana to transform the narrative that surrounds our bodies. This is something I have experienced personally.

Getting to know Hi'iaka allowed me to start to understand myself through a new vocabulary. I learned that Mana Wahine meant, to me, that I too could identify wholly as a wahine through my intimate relationship with this 'āina, without sacrificing any bit of my sexuality, or masculinity. I learned that to do so allowed me to come to a fuller, more fantastic understanding of the manifestation of womanhood. This understanding fully transformed the way I would come to see, imagine, and approach my own body. Hi'iaka allowed me to marvel at my body for my ability to live inspired by the past and still create for myself and others in the present and future.

To further the self-discovery of identity and kanaka maoli culture, I urge kānaka to return to the intimate study of our mo'olelo. It is imperative that we also continue to engage with mo'olelo and literature in new ways, specifically through the acts of composition and storytelling. Our mo'olelo provide a framework and an outline that can assist in the initial finding of the body, but it is only through original composition and performance that the kanaka maoli voice lives.

HŌPOE I KA POLI O HI'IAKA

Many men have told my story
 have uttered your name into speech
 some have carved it into pōhaku and pepa
 a part of you and
 i live forever
 in the margins between sound and solid

But the hua we shared
 those parts of us were held in kino
 in leo
 stay carved in the creases of my poho
 so that every part of
 this earth i hold has a moment
 to know your touch

'Ae,
 maybe our words are best kept for two
 but the manner in which you glided over and danced with
 Papa deserves to be shouted from my hallowed hands

So i will resist
 the letting go of the ocean that tries to fall through
 even when i am tempted to destroy this temple
 allow feelings to rise like tides
 swell the fractures at the base of my 'ōpū
 hallow a crater once full of fire
 transform Kilauea's heat into a forgotten story
 instead i choose to
 hold so tight these hua
 our only pua

Uncovering, translating, and re-visioning our existing mo'olelo is only the first step in a process of re-occupying the kanaka voice and body. The second, and I argue, more significant step in this nation-building movement is that we begin to create for ourselves with the inspiration and guidance of the past. It is our kuleana to create, to name, and to live these mo'olelo—to bring life to our culture. We can unlock our greatest potential if we can dedicate ourselves to becoming primary sources of 'ike for our mo'opuna, just as our kūpuna are for us.

It is also increasingly important that our fellow residents and visitors to Hawai'i take an interest in these mo'olelo. These stories, whether historical or cotemporary, are the script to this 'āina. Not only do these mo'olelo tell the story of the birth and flourishing of the kanaka maoli ancestry, they tell the story of the birth of the 'āina itself. To live in Hawai'i and benefit from all her wonder without seeking an intimate understanding of what created her, of how kanaka maoli cared for her and lived in harmony with her, is to wholly misunderstand the kuleana that comes with calling Hawai'i home.

The future of Hawai'i is a mo'olelo we must write together. As I continue to grow and create, it is my hope to give other wāhine the opportunity to find themselves between the lines of our shared stories. In that pursuit I offer these poems, as a gift, something I have created out of love for you all. I hope you will see my contribution to our mo'olelo as a grand gesture of aloha that may bring you closer to understanding and identifying with your own kino and 'āina and all its outstanding potential.

Aloha nō.

that they may lay
in the center
of my poli
a place once reserved for ali'i
but ahi and 'ā have left me
an open cavity
for your memory
i promise
that those parts of you we shared in quiet
they will not spill open

It is right that only this earth knows of the words we
planted
that they lie rooted in the kumu of our mo'o
only my gift of lehua can ever claim our love

It is right
even if they too
are gone
now

3.

*Our skin tone kept us
quiet
from questioning these bodies
wondering which parts were broken
we learned to be
complacent in our difference
while we soaked in the silence
let the salt seep into our skeleton
leave its mark
make us feel like we belonged to the ocean.*

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION

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2. Albert Wendt, "Towards a New Oceania," rpt. in *Seaweeds and Constructions* 7 (1976): 71–85.
3. kū ualoha ho'omanawanui, "Mana Wāhine, Education and Nation-building: Lessons from the Epic of Pele and Hi'iaka for Kanaka Maoli Today," *Multicultural Perspectives* 12.4 (2010): 206–212.
4. Noenoe K. Silva, "Pele, Hi'iaka, and Haumea: Women and Power in Two Hawaiian Mo'olelo," *Pacific Studies* 30.1–2 (March 2007): 159–81.
5. Steven Edmund Winduo, "Unwriting Oceania: The Repositioning of the Pacific Writer Scholars Within a Folk Narrative Space," *New Literary History* 31.3 (Summer 2000): 599–613.