



## No ka pono o ka lāhui

In the title of her 1992 landmark book, *Native Land and Foreign Desires*, Dr. Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa posed a pointed question that has motivated much of the research on Hawaiian well-being over the past two decades: “Pehea lā e pono ai?” This concise but profound question is essentially asking, how can we restore balance and maintain our ancestral relationships with our ‘āina, against rapacious and historically rooted forces of dispossession? Implicit in this question is an acknowledgment that healthy relationships with our lands and waters are foundational to healthy Hawaiian communities and individuals—which invites us to contemplate how we protect, nurture, and live such relationships in the contexts of our times.

Today, more than twenty-five years after Kame‘eleihiwa first posed this question, we have made tremendous gains on many fronts. Still, our lāhui continues to face significant political and economic barriers that keep us from full health and pono. Studies completed in the early 1980s, such as the *Native Hawaiian Educational Assessment* project and the *Native Hawaiians Study Commission* report, showed that Kānaka Maoli had the highest rates of family poverty, incarceration, school absentee rates, and various negative health indicators, including suicide and depression.<sup>1</sup> Both the 2014 edition of *Ka Huaka‘i: Native Hawaiian Educational Assessment* and the 2015 *Native Hawaiian Data Book* show that, for our people as a whole, many social and economic trends remain seriously inequitable and have not changed much since the early 1980s. Moving from statistical to experiential data, one only has to look around to see that the number of houseless or near-houseless Kānaka has dramatically increased in the last generation. Many Hawaiian scholars and community leaders describe these conditions as part of an ongoing and multifaceted US occupation.

Despite these injustices and complex challenges, our lāhui has enacted massive resurgences, such as mobilizing to protect Mauna a Wākea, restoring fishponds and lo‘i, articulating ‘āina-based Education, and initiating self-governance efforts at neighborhood, ahupua‘a, moku, and national levels. All of these issues are taken up in this special issue of *Hūlili*.

This volume highlights how Kānaka Maoli and our allies are striving, across disciplines and our pae ‘āina, for justice and balance for our lāhui. The theme of this special issue, “No ka pono o ka lāhui,” foregrounds this work in our communities to restore pono to our people and ‘āina. Conventional academic articles and creative nonfiction pieces reveal ways that Kānaka struggle with and build alternatives to historically rooted systems of power—whether in research practices, environmental regulatory frameworks, or refusals of structures that harm ancestral relationships.

In the initial call for papers, we encouraged submissions that draw on community-based research. This resulted in a range of topics such as urban planning, fisheries, houseless community organizing, and constitution writing. A common theme emerged from these submissions: Authors are engaging with Hawaiian communities and are working on specific, real-world issues that matter to the lives of everyday Kānaka. As guest editors for this special issue, we also made a specific call for articles on tough, contentious issues, such as natural resource management in a time of climate change, the proposed construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) on Mauna a Wākea, and the Na‘i Aupuni-hosted ‘Aha of 2016. This volume provides much-needed perspectives on these and other issues and offers guidance for moving forward as a lāhui.

Additionally, this special issue introduces frameworks that are not yet common in existing scholarship but are

critical to envisioning the ways we restore pono in our lives as individuals, families, and lāhui. For instance, articles by Kauanui, Maile, and Young use anarchism and queer theory as tools for understanding contemporary Hawaiian life and Hawai'i's nuanced political context. Other articles in this volume build new/old lexicons that bridge ancestral knowledge with disciplinary traditions that developed outside of Hawai'i, such as urban planning and marine biology. The contributions of Freitas and La Valle et al. are examples of this syncretic work.

Woven throughout the volume are short stories about realities faced by everyday Kānaka: Caregiving. Trying to make ends meet. Suffering various forms of violence. But, most of all, living with dignity. We include these stories to ground our discussions about Hawaiian well-being and pono in the diverse, lived experiences of Hawaiian people. These creative nonfiction pieces were written by University of Hawai'i students in Noelani's Contemporary Native Hawaiian Politics course. The authors, of varying ages and backgrounds, wrote these accounts in response to the book, *Big Happiness: The Life and Death of a Modern Hawaiian Warrior*.

In *Big Happiness*, Mark Panek tells the story of his friend, Percy Kipapa, a young man from Waikāne, who was a professional sumo wrestler in Japan from 1991–97. Percy's life came to a tragic end when he was murdered, after returning home at the conclusion of his sumo career. The book unravels the story of Percy's death and related addictions, connecting these events to a long history of violence stemming from the US occupation, settler colonization, and capitalist exploitation of Hawaiian lands and bodies. In a dialogue with Noe's students, Mark told us about how and why he wrote the book:

I started writing about Percy to honor his memory for his parents, but all of my research revealed his position in the middle of land-use issues that

have been ruining Hawai'i since at least statehood. . . . Percy had grown up on kuleana land that should have included the 59 acres stolen during my own lifetime. After you absorb the pain of this knowledge . . . words like "historical trauma" and "colonization" are far too abstract. But Percy's story is as compelling as stories get, and it makes us pay attention to all of these abstractions and hopefully do something about them rather than dismiss them as "politics" and move on. . . . We all know a Percy.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the premise that "we all know a Percy," students wrote stories about a Kanaka whom they knew well and whose individual life could be connected to larger structures of power. Some of the stories, like Percy's, are tragic, and others are hopeful.

We hope this special issue of *Hūlili* will provoke readers to think about how macro-level social and historical forces impact the individual lives of everyday Hawaiian people. We also hope this volume will add to the toolbox of ways to uplift the collective lāhui Hawai'i and the 'āina that gives us life. In the end, we hope the articles and stories gathered here contribute to the stirring of more efforts no ka pono o ka lāhui.

Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua  
Erin Kahunawaika'ala Wright

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1. Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate. (1983). *Native Hawaiian educational assessment project report*. Honolulu, Hawai'i: Author; Native Hawaiians Study Commission. (1983). *Native Hawaiians study commission: Report on the culture, needs and concerns of Native Hawaiians, pursuant to public law 96-565, title III*. Final report, Vol. 1. Washington, DC: Author.
  2. Mark Panek, personal communication, September 17, 2015.