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Nahenahe (Soft, Sweet, Melodious): Sounding Out Native Hawaiian Self-Determination

KEVIN FELLEZS

Abstract
In this essay, I explore the ways in which kī hōʻalu (Hawaiian slack key guitarists) articulated Native Hawaiian aspirations for self-determination and reterritorialization during the Second Hawaiian Renaissance. I argue that Hawaiian music speaks to a liberatory politics that is embedded within an aesthetic of nahenahe (soft, sweet, melodious). Nahenahe invests slack key guitarists with the mana (power, authority) to invoke a Native Hawaiian perspective that empowers and sustains Kanaka Maoli (native Hawaiian) efforts for self-determination and political autonomy. The connections between music and political activism were highlighted and strengthened throughout the period. Indeed, although numerous political groups organized throughout the period, providing the modern foundations to the struggles for sovereignty today, at the forefront of it all were the musicians.

> "I believe that what we need is to get Hawaiians active and off their ass. Music is the easiest way I know because people tune into music."
>
> —George Helm[1]

In 1920, William K. Kaleihuia wrote a letter to the editor of *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*, a Hawaiian-language newspaper, lamenting the lack of knowledge about Hawaiian songs by Hawaiian youth, ending his letter with these words: "These Hawaiians that I speak of before you, O True Hawaiians, have nearly reached adulthood, but the incomprehensible thing is that they do not know and cannot sing Hawaiian songs; they are versed in Haole [literally, foreigner but used to mark whites/whiteness in Hawaiʻi] and Paele [Black] songs, whereas these true Hawaiians have dismissed the Hawaiian language and Hawaiian songs."[2] When the boys answered him affirmatively that they were, in fact, "true Hawaiians" (the term used throughout the letter is "Hawai oiaio"), Kaleihuia then admonished them,

> 'Some of you might be aware that I am a true Hawaiian, and not a Haole, so you should sing Hawaiian songs; and not just for me, but at all of the Hawaiian homes that you visit; and when you do this, the hearts of the true Hawaiians will be filled with joy at your singing Hawaiian songs, and good shall be repaid with good, and this will be remembered and not forgotten; forget not the song of our lahui [nation], and let that be the very last thing you sing when you go visiting about.' After I was done speaking to them, we sang Hawai Ponoi, and we concluded our singing with me embracing them with aloha on this birthday of my beloved king.[3]

[1] Kimo Turner, "George Helm and the 'Language—Pain Revolution,'" *Haʻilono Mele* 2, no. 6 (June 1976): 2.

[2] William K. Kaleihuia, "He Pue Kanaka Hawaii Oiaio, Aole Nae E Hiki Ke Himeni I Ka Himeni Hawaii," *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*, June 25, 1920, 3.

[3] I will be adhering to current usage of diacritical markings unless quoting texts that do not use them, including historical texts such as Kaleihula's letter. I provide a short definition of Hawaiian terms the first time they are used. I will also be using the terms Kanaka Maoli, Native Hawaiian,

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There is no indication of the songs the boys sang—at 3 a.m., no less!—but we might make an educated guess that the songs were of the Tin Pan Alley and minstrel or vaudeville type, perhaps including a blues or ragtime song as well. In any case, Kaleihuia was dismayed by the boys' lack of knowledge of Hawaiian song, though they knew the national anthem, "Hawai'i Pono'ī ("Hawai'i's Own")." The lyrics to the anthem were written in 1874 by Mō'ī (King) Kalākaua in which he praises Mō'ī Kamehameha I and Hawaiian ali'i (chiefs, elites) with an explicit martial sensibility in reference to their opposition to haole encroachment, which became a cause of concern to the haole editors of the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*. In 1894, the year after the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and roughly a year before the deposed Mō'ī Wahine (Queen) Lili'uokalani sat imprisoned within 'Iolani Palace, the *Advertiser* proposed a new set of lyrics in a column, which began: "Hawaii Ponoi is a good old song, but it contains too much feudal sentiment to suit these progressive [i.e., annexationist] days" before offering a text that "strikes out the too effusive references to the Alii, etc."[4] An angry rebuttal in the Hawaiian language newspaper, *Hawaii Holomua* (*Hawai'i Progress*), offered its own set of original lyrics, giving both the Hawaiian language text as well as this English translation: "They plunder Hawaii / Conspire against the people / Those missionary descendants / the P.G. [Provisional Government] / How vile he is / That Kole kaaka [raw, red cavity; thought to be a derogatory reference to future Territorial Governor, Sanford Dole] / Pushing aside beauty / With his cruelty."[5]

The debate waged through the lyrics of "Hawai'i Pono'ī" offers a glimpse into the ways in which Hawaiian song has a long history of being a part of the political ferment in the islands. Much more than the soft, inviting sounds easing harried tourists into their exotic reveries, Hawaiian songs, despite their easy melodicism, gentle rhythms, and major tonalities, have been signal elements in the struggles of Hawaiians to maintain their culture and presence in Hawai'i. As Kaleihuia's letter demonstrates, Kanaka Maoli (literally "True People," but used to designate indigenous Hawaiians) have long linked music and politics; indeed, if one considers the political valences given to traditional mele (chant) in which ali'i (chief or elite) genealogies and religious concepts were articulated, this linkage proves an enduring legacy for contemporary Hawaiian musicians. During the 1960s and 1970s, music would provide the torch leading Kanaka Maoli decolonization efforts that continue to this day. This essay is written with a desire to speak *with* (rather than *for*) the Kānaka 'Ōiwi (People of the Bone, or Native Hawaiians) and *about* the struggle to regain their homeland, Kō Hawai'i Pae 'Āina (Hawaiian archipelago), and the role of music in those struggles.[6]

and Hawaiian interchangeably as terms for naming indigenous Hawaiians. Relatedly, I am Kanaka Maoli from my paternal side of the family with ties to the Panaewa 'ohana on the islands of Hawai'i and Kaua'i.

[4] *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, XIX, No. 3580, January 8, 1894, 4.

[5] *Hawaii Holomua* (*Hawai'i Progress*), January 9, 1894, 2.

[6] There is a wide variety of political movements that can reasonably fall under the umbrella term "Hawaiian sovereignty movement." Due to space constraints, I can only hint at this larger complexity, which I detail more fully in my forthcoming book on kī hō'alu, or Hawaiian slack key guitar, titled *Listen But Don't Ask Question: Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar Across the TransPacific* (Durham, NC:

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In this essay, I explore the ways in which the music of the Second Hawaiian Renaissance with an emphasis on kī hōʻalu (Hawaiian slack key guitar)—and the nahenahe (soft, sweet, melodious) aesthetic, in particular—articulates Native Hawaiian aspirations for self-determination and reterritorialization in efforts dubbed the Hawaiian sovereignty movement.[7] The Second Hawaiian Renaissance—which can be roughly framed by the 1964 publication of John Dominis Holt IV's *On Being Hawaiian* and slack key guitar master Gabby Pahinui joining the ancestors in 1980—was a period in which a growing sense of Hawaiian pride motivated a Native Hawaiian resurgence in cultural practices, including slack key guitar, which were thought to be in danger of disappearing. By the late 1960s, Hawaiian music was difficult to find in Waikīkī clubs. Away from Waikīkī and the tourist music market, Kanaka Maoli–led social protests began to coalesce around land rights, environmental policies, and the militarization of Hawaiʻi.[8] Although conventional notions of political struggle animated much of the activities of the Renaissance, the cultural arena did more than simply lend an affective frame to social issues. The Renaissance period saw a cultural rejuvenation of all the Hawaiian arts—not only

Duke University Press, 2019). Because my research focused primarily on contemporary slack key performers, I relied on Kanaka Maoli and non–Native Hawaiian scholars such as Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Dean Itsuji Saranillio, Haunani Kay-Trask, Francis Boyle, and many others who have delineated the various Hawaiian political movements. Noenoe K. Silva and Tom Coffman, in particular, bring to light the political *and* armed struggles of Kanaka Maoli against settler colonialism from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that speak against the rhetoric of Native Hawaiians' resigned acquiescence to (or even welcome embrace of) US imperialism. Activities I recount in *Listen But Don't Ask Question* that I align with the nahenahe aesthetic range from the efforts of Mōʻi Wahine Liliʻuokalani's efforts through her musical and literary compositions to the non-violent strategies—including the use of mele—used by activists in their opposition to the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna a Wākea (Mauna Kea) on the island of Hawaiʻi today.

[7] I refer to this period, 1964–1980, as the Second Hawaiian Renaissance in recognition of the earlier "First" Hawaiian Renaissance that occurred during the reign, 1874–1891, of Mōʻī (King) David Kalākaua (1836–1891). I discuss this historical link at more length in my forthcoming book, mentioned in the previous footnote (*Listen But Don't Ask Question*). References to the "Hawaiian Renaissance" or more simply "Renaissance" will refer to the Second Hawaiian Renaissance unless otherwise noted.

[8] See Kekuni Blaisdell, Nālani Minton, and Ulla Hasager, "Ka Hoʻokolokolonui Kanaka Maoli, 1993: The Peoples' International Tribunal, Hawaiʻi," in *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty*, ed. Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, Ikaika Hussey, and Erin Kahunawaikaʻala Wright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 283–302; Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller and Noenoe K. Silva, "Sharks and Pigs: Animating Hawaiian Sovereignty against the Anthropological Machine," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (April 2011): 429–46; Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, "Hawaiʻi: An Occupied Country," *Harvard International Review* 35, no. 3 (Winter 2014): 58–62; Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, Ikaika Hussey, and Erin Kahunawaikaʻala Wright, eds., *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa, "Preface: The Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement," in *Islands in Captivity: The International Tribunal on the Rights of Indigenous Hawaiians*, ed. Ward Churchill and Sharon H. Venne; Hawaiian-language editor, Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2004), xvii–xxvii; David Keanu Sai, "American Occupation of the Hawaiian State: A Century Unchecked," *Hawaiian Journal of Law and Politics* 1 (2004): 46–81; David Keanu Sai, "A Slippery Path towards Hawaiian Indigeneity: An Analysis and Comparison between Hawaiian State Sovereignty and Hawaiian Indigeneity and Its Use and Practice in Hawaiʻi Today," *Journal of Law and Social Challenges* 10 (Fall 2008): 68–133.

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in music but also in hula, mele (chant), the martial arts, and other native Hawaiian cultural practices—through a self-conscious cultural revitalization by young artists who actively sought out kūpuna (elders) and kumu (teachers) of the "old ways" as a means to reconstitute the Hawaiian lāhui (nation).

These young artists accomplished more than simply revive older Hawaiian arts or older artists' careers and public profiles. More importantly, they revivified older traditions by integrating contemporary forms and styles of performing to Hawaiian music and dance, infusing Hawaiian culture with a renewed vitality and vigor. Certainly, not all of these fusions were successful, either commercially or artistically. However, these artists' search for making their heritage relevant to contemporaneous sociopolitical concerns unleashed the creativity that had been subsumed in work produced primarily for the tourist trade, energizing the local Hawaiian music scene and gaining a young local audience who had been increasingly turning to continental US and European popular music acts.

Kanaka Maoli were not alone. Inspired by groups such as the Black Panthers and the American Indian Movement, young Hawaiians were organizing to demand land, reparations, and independence in organizations such as Kōkua Hawai'i (1971), the Aboriginal Lands of Hawaiian Ancestry (1972), and Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana (1976).[9] Numerous sovereignty groups organized, providing the foundations to the continuing struggles for sovereignty, self-determination, and political and territorial autonomy that were forfeited in the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893.[10]

Relatedly, the University of Hawai'i began its Hawaiian Studies in 1970, the culmination of attempts for a number of years to establish the study of Hawaiian culture in Hawai'i's leading research university or, in fact, anywhere in the island archipelago.[11] The Polynesian Voyaging Society's launching of the double-hulled canoe, the *Hōkūle'a*, and its successful journey from Hawai'i to Tahiti in 1976 without the use of navigational equipment was a significant achievement in the cultural revitalization of the time, proving the validity of early Polynesians' ability to travel throughout the Pacific. The revival of hula kahiko (ancient hula) and the Hawaiian language, institutionalized with the formation of the 'Ahahui 'Ōlelo Hawai'i

[9] See Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, "Protectors of the Future, Not Protestors of the Past: Indigenous Pacific Activism and Mauna a Wākea," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 1 (2017): 184–94; Kame'eleihiwa, "Preface: The Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement"; Norman Meller and Ann Feder Lee, "Hawaiian Sovereignty," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 27, no. 2 (1997): 167–85; Haunani-Kay Trask, "The Birth of the Modern Hawaiian Movement: Kalama Valley, O'ahu," *Hawaiian Journal of History* 21 (1987): 126–53.

[10] Due to space limitations, I am unable to fully delineate all the activities and groups participating in the various strains of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement—a term that covers a heterogeneous and often contentious grouping of political efforts (see the references cited above to more fully explore the complicated history of Hawaiian opposition to settler colonialism in the nineteenth century as well as through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries).

[11] According to the "History" webpage of the University of Hawai'i (UH), in 1970, "At UH Mānoa, Hawaiian Studies was formally established under liberal studies," https://www.hawaii.edu/about-uh/history/. There were various Hawaiian subjects taught at UH but they were not formally organized until 1970. Some of my informants—as well as one of the anonymous reviewers for *Listen But Don't Ask Question*—also referred to 1970 as a landmark year for "official" Hawaiian Studies at UH.

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organization in 1972, were also significant achievements of the Renaissance. And at the forefront of it all were the musicians.

The Sons of Hawaii

The beginnings of the Hawaiian Renaissance in terms of music can be traced to the group, the Sons of Hawaii, founded by ʻukulele virtuoso Eddie Kamae. Kamae's great-grandfather was a Hawaiian who immigrated to California during the mid-nineteenth century Gold Rush and married a Cherokee woman. His grandfather, Samuel Kamae Sr., was born in Sacramento, California, but had moved to the island of Hawaiʻi, where Eddie Kamae's father, Samuel Hoapili Kamae, was born, completing a circle of goings and returnings between Hawaiʻi and California that continues today.[12]

Eddie Kamae's first public recognition came as a young ʻukulele performer while in his early twenties, incorporating jazz and Latin music rhythms and picking styles to create a new hybrid soloing style for the instrument. His early professional musical life did not involve Hawaiian music. He and Shoi Ikemi, a Japanese American ʻukulele performer, formed the ʻUkulele Rascals, touring the continental United States to some success. During the 1940s, the ʻUkulele Rascals would become a top-drawing act in Hawaiʻi. At this time, Kamae began studies with Barbara Smith, a newly hired ethnomusicologist at the University of Hawaiʻi, trading ʻukulele lessons for tutorials in music theory. Soon, Kamae was adding Ernesto Lecuona's "Malagueña" and Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto to his repertoire. At the time, Kamae's interests in non-Hawaiian music was driven by his view of Hawaiian music as "vapid and unchallenging."[13]

By 1958, Kamae was a featured soloist in a show headlined by Hawaiian vocalist Haunani Kahalewai. Kahalewai suggested that he perform a Hawaiian song during his solo spotlight and gave him the sheet music for "Kuʻu Pua I Paoakalani," a composition penned by Mōʻī Wahine Liliʻuokalani. Although Kamae would later learn much of the older repertoire by visiting kūpuna throughout the islands, it is noteworthy that the first piece of Hawaiian music he would learn was due to continental US music publishers' realizing Liliʻuokalani's music was of enough public (and thus, profitable) interest, as well as Kamae's ability to read notated music.

The Sons of Hawaii came together by happenstance. In 1959, Hawaiian musician Charles Philip "Gabby" Pahinui had grown ill and was recuperating at the home of two sisters, Mabel McKeague and Nani Ho. Kamae stopped to visit the two women on the way to a gig in Honolulu, unaware that Pahinui was in ill health. Alarmed by Pahinui's weakened appearance, Kamae sat with the ailing guitarist, who asked to play some Hawaiian songs with him. Kamae agreed to sit with his friend while confessing that he didn't know much Hawaiian music. As they began to play, their mutual admiration for each other's musicianship grew into a new appreciation for Hawaiian music by Kamae and a slow recovery to health for Pahinui, the

[12] James D. Houston and Eddie Kamae, *Hawaiian Son: The Life and Music of Eddie Kamae* (Honolulu: ʻAi Pōhaku Press, 2004), 3–5.
[13] Houston and Kamae, *Hawaiian Son*, 8.

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music seemingly nurturing him. Foregoing the gig to continue playing with Pahinui, Kamae remained with his friend for a number of days. As they continued performing the old Hawaiian songs Pahinui knew—it is estimated that he knew hundreds of Hawaiian songs—they recognized something special was happening between them. Introducing Pahinui to Johnny Noble's "Pua ʻAlani (Orange Blossoms)," Kamae persuaded him to sing it. As Kamae put it, "He had this beautiful, kind of old Hawaiian voice, you know. And he started to sing the words. And I'm looking at him, you know, I say to myself, 'Yes, you can do this.' I just fell in love. With the sound, his voice, and Hawaiian music."[14] One day, bassist Joe Marshall stopped by to check on Gabby. Told to go home to retrieve his instrument, Marshall returned and the trio began to shape a sound that, like hula kuʻi (joined hula), was both old and new.[15]

All three veterans of the music scene had been feeling somewhat despondent about their professional musical careers, searching independently for music that would feel authentically Hawaiian yet allow them to express themselves as contemporary players at the same time. As their music began to coalesce, Marshall suggested adding a younger steel guitarist, David "Feet" Rogers, who, though busy performing steadily as a first call musician, was also feeling dissatisfied by the music scene. The older musicians went to visit Rogers's father, George, a well-regarded steel guitarist himself, to ask for his blessing. Acknowledging their respectful adherence to protocol, he not only granted approval for his son to join the band but also gave "Feet" his personal steel guitar as a part of his blessing.

Initially calling themselves the Gabby Pahinui Band, the group landed its first engagement at the Sandbox, a working-class neighborhood bar at the edges of the industrial district of Honolulu, distant from the tourist clubs of Waikīkī. By the second weekend, there were crowds lining up outside to hear the kind of music that had been either forgotten or relegated to musical families' backyard lūʻau and kanikapila (jam session). Eventually, they would enjoy a mixed audience of neighborhood regulars, beach boys, college students, politicians, professionals, and other musicians—all barely contained within the small dive bar. Kamae describes the scene: "[You] just never saw this many kinds of people in one place at the same time. They stood for hours in lines that went out the door. I had no idea there was such enthusiasm for pure Hawaiian music, which was all we were playing."[16] Hula Records' Don McDiarmid Jr., recalled, "I think everybody kind of realized at the same time—they *felt* that this was something that everybody wanted and they didn't know they wanted it. [Because, at the time] the Hawaiian people themselves—and the kids especially, the kids were all going to rock 'n' roll . . . they didn't have the aloha for Hawaiian music that some of the tūtū [still

[14] Eddie Kamae, dir., *The History of the Sons of Hawaii* (2004; Honolulu: Hawaiian Legacy Foundation, 2004), DVD, 11:08-11:27.

[15] According to Betty (Elizabeth) Tatar, hula kuʻi was formed by combining "traditional hula movements . . . with new, western-influenced ones"; "Questions and Answers," *Haʻilono Mele* 3, no. 2 (February 1977): 7. The hula kuʻi form was the basis for the majority of traditional slack key song.

[16] Houston and Kamae, *Hawaiian Son*, 37.

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held] . . . the families played music at home. They played their own music, family music. But they didn't share."[17]

McDiarmid became involved with the recording industry because, as he put it in a documentary film about the group, "[The Sons of Hawaii] were the toast of the town . . . and it was my luck to get it out and bring it to the attention of the people in the islands, which, of course, was the basic reason we had a recording company. 'Cause, as I say, in those days, Hawaiian music was, you know, not really important to anybody. *Especially the Hawaiians*. And, at that particular time [the late 1960s], it just started to turn" (emphasis added).[18] The intersecting lines between commerce and nurturing Hawaiian music would prove pivotal once again.

The Sons' first album, *Gabby Pahinui with the Sons of Hawaii*, was released in 1960. The original lineup of the band—Eddie Kamae, Gabby Pahinui, Joe Marshall, and David "Feet" Rogers—released one more recording in 1962, *Music of Old Hawaii*, with another recording, *This is Eddie Kamae*, credited to Eddie Kamae and the Sons of Hawaii in 1966 (with frequent Pahinui collaborator Leland "Atta" Isaacs covering the slack key guitar duties in Pahinui's absence and the addition of Robert Larrison on vocals). Waikiki Records released two recordings, *The Best of Hawaiian Slack Key Vol. 1* in 1960 and *The Best of Hawaiian Slack Key Vol. 2* in 1962, which were compilations culled from recordings which featured Pahinui's slack key work.

Other notable slack key recordings to appear in the 1960s include Leonard Kwan's *Slack Key: The Old Way*, released in 1960, and an album on which the tracks are divided between Kwan and Raymond Kane titled *Slack Key in Stereo*, released the following year. Sonny Chillingworth released *Waimea Cowboy* in 1964, as well as 1967's release simply titled *Sonny Chillingworth*, both of which featured his facile fretwork and warm vocals. Gabby Pahinui and Leland "Atta" Isaacs teamed up in 1969 to record *Two Slack Key Guitars*, which featured a variety of songs, including humorous songs such as "I'm-A-Livin'-On-A-Easy" that are less often performed today by young slack key guitarists.

But the recording which announced the musical aims of the Renaissance and reclaimed pride of place for Hawaiian music writ large was the Sons' best-known release, as well as their final recording with Gabby Pahinui, 1971's *The Folk Music of Hawaii*, with the addition of Moe Keale on vocals, guitar, and 'ukulele. The recording was released as a box set with a hardcover book titled *On Hawaiian Folk Music* celebrating older, rural Hawaiian musicians, as well as a glossy paperback book with bios and pictures of the band members, giving the release a gravitas that Hawaiian recordings had not received prior to this date. This album was not an overly slick Hawaiian music recording of hapa haole songs nor was it a raw field recording.[19] *Folk Music* was an artful blend of "pure Hawaiian music,"

[17] *The History of the Sons of Hawaii*, 19:33-20:00.
[18] *The History of the Sons of Hawaii,* 18:33-19:01.
[19] "Hapa haole" is literally "half foreigner" but is used to categorize Hawaiian-themed popular music that is based on continental US popular music forms. Because most of this music was composed in the early twentieth century in attempts to cash in on the Hawaiian craze of the time, the songs follow vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley forms rather than traditional Hawaiian mele (chant) or hula forms. For a more detailed investigation of the "hapa haole" song phenomenon, see Charles Hiroshi Garrett's

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as Kamae described it, and modern record production. The vocal and instrumental abilities of the Sons were exceptional and gave Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians alike aural proof of the continuing vitality of Hawaiian musicking. With its documentation and original artwork, the recording's presentation granted a new appreciation for the kind of Hawaiian music that had once been the sole province of private performances in Hawaiian families' homes.

Known as the "Five Faces record" because of its cover, the recording was a phenomenal success in the local market and helped spur the Hawaiian Renaissance with its then rare blend of old Hawaiian songs and up-to-date record production. *The Folk Music of Hawaii* was a breakthrough in terms of production, presentation, and popularity and would give a younger generation of musicians a model to which many would aspire. Many of the younger artists that followed in their wake in the 1970s point to the Sons of Hawaii as their predecessors and the inspiration for attending to Native Hawaiian song, aesthetics, and concerns.

The recording's legacy is probably best described by Panini Records co-founder Steve Siegfried, reminiscing in the documentary film *The Sons of Hawaii*: "Things in Hawai'i that are gone now, the music represents. And they can hear that in the music. They can't see it anymore . . . in Hawai'i, but . . . they can hear it on the record."[20] James Houston recalls the importance of *The Folk Music of Hawaii* recording for the Hawaiian Renaissance as well as the role of musicians in revitalizing Kanaka Maoli sovereignty struggles: "But in this land where music has always been a key, it is true to the culture that the early voices in the renaissance were not writers or politicians or campus activists; they were dancers and singers, musicians and performers—like the Sons of Hawaii, like the Sunday Manoa, a younger band that also released an album [*Guava Jam: Contemporary Hawaiian Folk Music*, Hula Records, 1969] that . . . has since come to share this significant moment in the long story of island music."[21]

The Sunday Manoa was a highly influential band whose original members were Peter Moon, Cyril Pahinui, Palani Vaughan, and Albert "Baby" Kalima Jr. Their debut recording, *Meet Palani Vaughan and the Sunday Manoa* (Hula Records, 1967), signaled the interest in older Hawaiian song by a younger generation of musicians. Through all the various iterations of the group (only Peter Moon remained a constant), the group's recordings were largely filled with updated covers of older Hawaiian songs because, as Moon put it, "The Sunday Manoa's thing was interpretation. We weren't really a composing group. We never composed that much. . . . But, Eldon, and this is a point to remember—I would say that in the Hawaiian music world, most groups will sing songs that have been written in the last 50 to 100 years anyway. . . . And therefore it becomes . . . a matter of interpretation rather

"Sounds of Paradise: Hawai'i and the American Musical Imagination" from his *Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music and the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008), 165–213; and George S. Kanahele, "Hapa Haole Songs," in *Hawaiian Music and Musicians: An Encyclopedic History*, rev. ed., ed. George S. Kanahele, revised and updated by John Berger (Honolulu: Mutual Publishing, 2012), 244–46.

[20] *The History of the Sons of Hawaii*, 41:28-41:39.

[21] Houston and Kamae, *Hawaiian Son*, 125.

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than composition."[22] The lineup with Roland and Robert Cazimero produced the group's most well-known recordings—*Guava Jam*, *Cracked Seed* (Panini Records, 1972), and *Sunday Manoa 3* (Panini Records, 1973)—all of which helped redefine Hawaiian music in contemporary terms.

Besides the Sunday Manoa, there were other successful young bands and musicians picking up on the template laid down by the Sons of Hawaii. Bands such as Hui ʻOhana, a trio consisting of two brothers, Ledward and Nedward Kaapana, and their cousin, Dennis Pavao, which cut a similar path as the Sons and the Sunday Manoa with an updated, contemporary approach to older Hawaiian songs; the Mākaha Sons of Niʻihau (now simply the Mākaha Sons), which included future superstar, Israel "Iz" Kamakawiwoʻole as well as his brother, Henry Kaleiʻaloha "Skippy"; and the Gabby Pahinui Hawaiian Band, better known as the "Gabby Band," which included Gabby's sons, Bla, Cyril, and Martin, as well as "Atta" Isaacs, and eventually, guitarists Sonny Chillingworth and Peter Moon. The Gabby Band also enjoyed extensive collaborations with guitarist Ry Cooder. Keola Beamer's debut recording in 1972, *Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar in the Real Old Style*, featured a number of older Hawaiian songs, including a slack key version of the hapa haole song "Lovely Hula Hands," along with a handful of originals.

There were other bands less interested in traditional Hawaiian music but who produced music concerned with Hawaiian issues in addition to more conventional popular music concerns, such as romantic love. Rock-oriented bands such as Olomana, Kalapana, Summer, Seawind, and Country Comfort enjoyed success in Hawaiʻi and made attempts to expand their audience to include the continental United States. Cecilio and Kapono were a soft-rock duo that enjoyed success outside of Hawaiʻi, including in Japan, where they have remained consistent draws. Keola Beamer joined forces with his brother, Kapono, for a time, composing the Hawaiian soft rock classic "Honolulu City Lights" in 1978, which was recorded by the Carpenters in the same year, though their version was not released until 1986. Throughout the 1970s, a number of young Hawaiian musicians of various types were drawing on current pop and rock as well as traditional Hawaiian music, producing a wide range of music that spoke to social issues.

Palani Vaughan, one of the original members of the Sunday Manoa, became interested in music of the Kingdom period, reviving a tradition of song that is neither "traditional folk" music nor hapa haole popular music but is music composed by Mōʻī Kalākaua or inspired by it. Vaughan eventually released a four-volume work entitled *Iaʻoe E Ka Lā*, beginning with the first volume in 1973. Two other one-time members of the Sunday Manoa, Robert and Roland Cazimero, continued their musical careers as the Brothers Cazimero while continuing in the Renaissance mode of updating traditional Hawaiian songs and composing original music that fit seamlessly together.

Peter Moon gave a sense of the Hawaiian market in the late 1970s: "In '73 and '74, Gabby, the Sunday Manoa, and Liz Damon were the biggest selling groups in the

[22] Eldon Akamine, "Moon Bridges Gap: An Interview with Peter Moon, Part I," *Haʻilono Mele* 3, no. 2 (February 1977): 6.

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state, local groups, that is. We were selling yearly 20–25 thousand apiece. There were 600,000 people living in the state then. Now, Kalapana is the largest selling local group. They sell 60–70 thousand records with 750,000 people living in the state."[23] The success Moon describes for Renaissance-era bands helped make visible the political movements at the time, connecting the musical revolution with the re-emergence of a vocal Kanaka Maoli community concerned with social issues, including Hawaiian sovereignty.[24]

A True Hawaiian

A decidedly political recuperation of aloha can be found in the term aloha ʻāina (love of the land).[25] The link between the music and the politics of aloha ʻāina during this period may have been most explicitly drawn in the life of George Helm. Helm, a leo kiʻekiʻe (falsetto) singer and guitarist, helped form the Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana (PKO) and was a key figure in articulating aloha ʻāina before his untimely death in 1977. The PKO was established in order to stop the US military from using Kahoʻolawe as a bombing test site.[26] In 1976, the PKO began efforts to reclaim the island of Kahoʻolawe from the US Navy, which had been using it for live ordinance exercises, including missile testing, beginning in 1941. Incredibly, Kahoʻolawe experienced the most bombing during the Second World War despite not a single enemy firing on the island.

PKO was inspired by a group called the Aboriginal Lands of Hawaiian Ancestry (ALOHA), another organization formed to reclaim territory and political self-determination for Hawaiians.[27] At the time, Helms and Walter Ritte's occupation of Kahoʻolawe was a bold attempt to force the US Navy to stop shelling the island. They were not only confronting the US military industrial complex head-on but also the Hawaiian Civic Clubs, who had taken out ads against the PKO actions (the members of the Clubs would eventually change their minds and support the PKO and the ideology of aloha ʻāina).[28]

Kahoʻolawe was banned for public use by the Navy after World War II, ostensibly because of the volume of live ordnance still on the ground from the numerous bombings.[29] On January 3, 1976, George Helm, along with eight others, organized a landing on the island. Anticipating their arrests, which occurred almost

[23] Akamine, "Moon," 7.

[24] George H. Lewis, "Da Kine Sounds: The Function of Music as Social Protest in the New Hawaiian Renaissance," *American Music* 2, no. 2 (1984): 38–52; George H. Lewis, "The Role of Music in Popular Social Movements: A Theory and Case Study of the Island State of Hawaii, USA," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 16, no. 2 (1985): 153–62; and, George H. Lewis, "Storm Blowing from Paradise: Social Protest and Oppositional Ideology in Popular Hawaiian Music," *Popular Music* 10, no. 1 (January 1991): 53–67.

[25] Kameʻeleihiwa, "Preface: The Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement."

[26] Rodney Morales, ed. *Hoʻihoʻi Hou: A Tribute to George Helm and Kimo Mitchell* (Honolulu: Bamboo Ridge Press, 1984).

[27] Meller and Lee, "Hawaiian Sovereignty," 1997.

[28] Lewis, "Role of Music," 157.

[29] In fact, as one reader pointed out, the US Navy continued to use Kahoʻolawe as a bomb testing site throughout this period.

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immediately after they landed, the PKO's primary agenda was to raise public awareness. Arguing that the island was sacred to Kanaka Maoli, the Navy finally relented and allowed for a small party of Hawaiians, including Helm, to perform religious rites on the island on February 13, 1976. On March 7, 1977, Helm disappeared, along with fellow activist Kimo Mitchell, in a failed attempt to land on Kahoʻolawe for a third time, but his catalytic work in shaping the PKO and his public advocacy for the reclamation of Hawaiian lands renewed Kanaka Maoli attempts to regain political and territorial sovereignty.

The Navy would eventually cede the land back after they attempted to thwart the federal court judgment ordering them to do so by failing to comply with the order to clear the island of any remaining ordnance as part of the condition to return the land—an effect that continues to keep Native Hawaiians from living on the island. Land restoration efforts continue nonetheless, as well as cultural practices such as the annual Makahiki, a celebration of the harvest and a time of spiritual renewal, which, before Europeans arrived, was a period in which war was outlawed and the aliʻi would circuit their islands to receive tribute as well as participate in various festivities.[30]

The only extant recordings of Helm performing music are culled from his live performances in 1976 at the Gold Coin, a restaurant where Helm held a regular gig. These were released posthumously the following year on two separate recordings by the venue's owner, James Wong. Originally planned as nothing more than private recordings without any intention to release them publicly, the recordings contain a number of anomalies such as songs getting cut short before they end. Nevertheless, the raw recordings capture an exceptional leo kiʻekiʻe singer and fluid guitarist with a deep facility in the Hawaiian language. More importantly, Wong also managed to capture some of Helms's song introductions in which he describes the history of a song's composition or the meaning of the lyrics—the songs' moʻolelo (story, history)—revealing the depth of his knowledge and concern for Hawaiʻi even when entertaining diners at a restaurant.

As his recordings reveal, Helm performed not only repertoire we might readily call traditional Hawaiian folk song but also a large number of hapa haole songs. As this essay's epigraph reads, Helm argued, "I believe that what we need is to get Hawaiians active and off their ass. Music is the easiest way I know because people tune into music,"[31] and his song selections indicate an open-eared non-dogmatic approach to Hawaiian song. Remembered today more for his activism than his musicking, it is fitting that the only surviving record of his expressive leo kiʻekiʻe

[30] See Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa, *Native Land and Foreign Desires: Pehea Lā E Pono Ai*? (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1992); Patrick V. Kirch, *Shark Going Inland Is My Chief: The Island Civilization of Ancient Hawaiʻi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Melody Kapilialoha MacKenzie, Susan K. Serrano, and Koalani Laura Kaulukukui, "Environmental Justice for Indigenous Hawaiians: Reclaiming Land and Resources," *Natural Resources and Environment* 21, no. 3 (Winter 2007): 37–42, 79.

[31] Kimo Turner, "George Helm and the 'Language—Pain Revolution,'" *Haʻilono Mele* 2, no. 6 (June 1976): 2.

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vocals and dexterous fretboard fingerwork also presents him as a politically conscious Native Hawaiian.[32]

There were other songs and other songwriters. In 1970, the politics of aloha ʻāina were mobilized by the Kōkua Hawaiʻi organization in an effort to stop developers from removing 150 families from Kalama Valley, Oʻahu, who were served relocation orders by the Bishop Estate, slotting the area for resort development.[33] Although the protesters lost this battle in the end, the action was a turning point in Hawaiian politics and gave focus to a growing sense of Native Hawaiian pride and acknowledgement of alienation from their past, their land, and their collective mana (power, authority). Liko Martin, a musician involved with various Hawaiian issues, composed "All Hawaiʻi Stand Together" as a response to the forced removal. "All Hawaiʻi" became one of a handful of songs associated with the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. "Nanakuli Blues" was another song written by Liko Martin with Thor Wold in 1974 in response to the resort developments in Nanakuli, but when the band, Country Comfort, recorded the song on their debut album, *We Are The Children*, that same year, they changed the title to reflect their hometown; the song has been known as "Waimanalo Blues" ever since. The resigned sentiment, however—"Spun right around and found that I lost / The things that I couldn't lose / The beaches they sell to build their hotels / My fathers and I once knew"—remained the same. Both "All Hawaiʻi Stand Together" and "Waimanalo Blues" continue to be sung as part of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement.

Yet these young musicians managed to recover some of "the things they couldn't lose," reviving older songs that spoke to and about Hawaiian history and self-rule. A song composed by Samuel K. Kamakaia in 1897, "Ka Naʻi Aupuna," was revived by activists and has continued to be sung as a reminder of Kanaka Maoli political autonomy. "Ka Naʻi Aupuna" honors various Hawaiian kings and includes the words from Mōʻī Kamehameha III which now form the Hawaiʻi State motto, "Ua mau ke ea o ka ʻāina i ka pono" ("The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness"). A song composed in 1893 by Eleanor Kekoaohiwaikalani Wright Prendergast to protest Queen Liliʻuokalani's forced abdication titled "Kaulana Nā Pua" was revived during the Hawaiian Renaissance and expressed the ongoing struggles for decolonization and independence.[34] The links between musicians and protest can be traced in the history of this song, through an event which inspired Prendergast. When the bandmaster for the Royal Hawaiian Band demanded that the members sign an oath of allegiance to the new Provisional Government—formed in the wake of the illegal US annexation of Hawaiʻi—or they would "eat rocks," a number of the musicians walked out in protest, declaring that the "rocks" (i.e., ʻāina, or land) would sustain them.[35]

[32] In 2009, Helm's musical and political legacy was honored by an Hawaiʻi Academy of Recording Arts' Lifetime Achievement Award despite his lack of formal recordings.

[33] See Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa, *Native Land*; Neal Milner, "Home, Homelessness, and Homeland in the Kalama Valley: Re-Imagining a Hawaiian Nation Through a Property Dispute," *Hawaiian Journal of History* 40 (2006): 149–76; Trask, "The Birth of the Modern Hawaiian Movement," 126–53.

[34] Amy Kuʻuleialoha Stillman, "'Aloha Aina': New Perspectives on 'Kaulana Nā Pua,'" *Hawaiian Journal of History* 33 (1999): 83–99.

[35] Eleanor C. Nordyke and Martha H. Noyes, "'Kaulana Nā Pua': A Voice for Sovereignty," *Hawaiian Journal of History* 27 (1993): 27–42.

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The Hawaiian Renaissance was "a movement spearheaded by a new form of Hawaiian music that was, at the same time, emergent in its ideological implications, residual in its ties to traditional forms, and oppositional in its challenges to the political, social, and cultural assumptions of the dominant mainland-created ideology," of which slack key played a major role.[36] As George Lewis points out, even the band names reflect a turn away from the types of group names then dominant—Lewis calls them "cute"—such as the Hawaiian Surfers, the Maile Serenaders, or the Waikiki Beachboys, in order to emphasize a number of political stances emergent at the time, including the importance of place, the ʻāina, community, and the use of the Hawaiian language. Beyond recognition of Native Hawaiian claims to Hawaiʻi, a number of songs were written at the time that articulated Hawaiʻi as home—"Hawaiʻi '78," "Hawaiian Awakening," and Roland Cazimero and Keliʻi Tauʻā's song cycle, *Hōkūleʻa*—lending support to a growing opposition to further land dispossession as well as pride in Hawaiian culture.

The Renaissance was not welcomed by everyone in the Native Hawaiian community, however, with some viewing George Helm, Walter Ritte, Bumpy Kanahele, and others as either individuals more interested in self-promotion than in solving the dire material conditions faced by the Kanaka Maoli community or upstart rabble rousers without a clear agenda or plan beyond "making trouble." Toward the end of the 1977 film, *Kahoʻolawe Aloha ʻĀina—George Helm*, Helm defends the notion of aloha ʻāina against those characterizations at a public rally in front of the ʻIolani Palace, declaring,

> It's very important that we get together. We got to shed off a lot of the images that have been thrown on top of us by newspapers, by television. We just want one thing to talk to you folks about. This is the seed, today, of a new revolution. And we not talking about the kind like the Pilgrims came over here and run away from England, go wipe out the Indians, y'know, and call this America and celebrate two hundred years with firecrackers. *The kind of revolution we're talking about is one of consciousness*—the consciousness, awareness, facts, figures. And like Walter [Ritte] said, "We're going to the ʻIolani Palace to make hoʻokupu [offerings] to our kupuna [ancestors], yeah? Our aliʻi. We hope to put somebody back in there. We serious! We gotta think this way, we gotta talk that way because that's the only facts that allow for change. And change is synonymous to revolution. And revolution comes from the word, revolving, turning in and out so that you have something better, better to live with. And we say again, we want to get rid of that image—radicals—we don't know what that word means but I know a lot of people get turned off by us. Not giving us a chance. You know, we're not getting our kicks doing this. This is the beginning. After this, pau [finish]! We're going down to something else. What we're looking for is the truth. The truth, the truth, the truth, the truth. Aloha nō.[37]

[36] George H. Lewis, "Style in Revolt Music, Social Protest, and the Hawaiian Cultural Renaissance," *International Social Science Review* 62, no. 4 (Fall 1987): 172; see also Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Allan Moore, "A Hermeneutics of Protest Music," in *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, ed. Jonathan C. Friedman, 387–99 (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[37] George Helm in *Kahoʻolawe Aloha ʻĀina—George J. Helm*, produced by Ken Yasso (Hawaiʻi: Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana Productions, 1977), 21:29–22:54, https://oiwi.tv/oiwitv/kahoolawe-george-helm/.

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Disavowing the image of the radical, Helm argues that the truth is on the side of Native Hawaiians. After two centuries of US imperialism and settler colonialism, Helms argued that Hawaiians needed a change of consciousness—a change in thinking and feeling, a transformation of ideological and instinctual reflexes. At the conclusion to his emotional speech, Helm and some of his compatriots began singing "Hawai'i Aloha." If this were to occur today, the audience would begin to hold hands and sing along. However, even at the height of the Hawaiian Renaissance, only a handful of people seem to be singing, and no one is holding hands. Most of the audience stand motionless, merely listening. Although Helms's organizing in the 1970s galvanized Kanaka Maoli and introduced the ways in which music and protest could be aligned in the service of Native Hawaiians' political rights, the full impact would take some time to ripple out. But because the 1980s saw increasing Japanese and other non-Hawaiian investment in resort developments and increasing numbers of tourists, Hawaiian activists and their sympathizers renewed efforts to highlight Hawaiian territorial rights into the set of issues covered by the Hawaiian sovereignty movement.

Slack key was a key component in the cultural revival of the Renaissance as it emerged from the protected enclaves of once-secretive 'ohana. Keola Beamer's 1973 publication of the first slack key method book coincided with the era's resuscitation of traditional Hawaiian culture. Given Gabby Pahinui's stature in the Renaissance period, slack key was one of the primary musical components of the cultural revival of the times. Along with the renewed interest in hula kahiko (ancient hula), oli (chant without dance), use of Hawaiian instruments such as the 'ūlili (gourd rattles), 'uli'ulī (gourd or shell rattles), and the ipu (gourd drum), slack key signified traditional Kanaka Maoli culture. Younger musicians followed the Sons of Hawaii's example, incorporating contemporary forms of popular music and state-of-the-art record production techniques with traditional repertoire, use of the Hawaiian language, and adherence to Hawaiian aesthetics and concerns. Even when composing original music using rock as its main referent, the use of the Hawaiian language by Renaissance-era bands signified a turn away from the tourist trade. The focus was on solidifying Hawaiian cultural norms and establishing solidarity or, in Hawaiian terms, re-establishing the 'ohana (family) as a way to reconstitute the lāhui (nation).

Beyond their political leanings, there were debates about whether the music of the young musicians qualified as Hawaiian music or not. In the pages of *Ha'ilono Mele*, the newsletter for the Hawaiian Music Foundation, Eldon Akamine wrote an article spread over two issues titled, "It Sells Records . . . But Is It Really Hawaiian?" Akamine examined a number of the new bands and performers—Peter Moon's Sandwich Isle Band (which included Cyril Pahinui), the Beamer Brothers, the Brothers Cazimero, Olomana, Country Comfort, Melveen Leed, the Sunday Manoa, Palani Vaughan, Nā Keonimana, Kanaka, as well as the then recently reformed Sons of Hawaii with Dennis Kamakahi in Gabby Pahinui's former guitar chair. In the first installment, Akamine details what he terms the "cross over effect," by which he means the integration of rock, folk-rock, and country music with Hawaiian themes, lyrics, and musical elements such as slack key guitar by many of these bands. In the second installment, he is more concerned with bands that

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are writing new Hawaiian songs, by which he means songs with Hawaiian lyrics that are not new arrangements of older Hawaiian songs nor the sort of "cross over" music he discusses in the first installment. These new Hawaiian songs were primarily acoustic, used Hawaiian lyrics exclusively, and were concerned with topical issues such as the launching of the *Hōkūleʻa*. Admitting that there "will be some who bemoan all this change," Akamine, clearly a fan of some of the bands, concludes on an equivocal note, writing, "There is a deep-down feeling that following a long period of some dormancy, Hawaiian music is up and moving again."[38]

Not everyone was quite as charitable about these musical changes, however. In an interview in 1979, venerated Hawaiian singer Kahauanu Lake decried much of the music Akamine championed, including Gabby Pahinui's Hawaiian Band, stating, "The Gabby I knew and grew up listening to had soul and sang beautiful, you know, and his first recordings, like 'Hiʻilawe,' there's never going to be another one who can sing like that. Today he's, oh, it's just sad, because it's Gabby that's getting popular today with the music of his children."[39] Lake, a venerable Hawaiian musician, was not alone among older musicians.

Nahenahe and the aesthetics of Native refusal

These debates leave unasked a fundamental question, namely, what about the *sound* of kī hōʻalu? How does slack key's central aesthetic of nahenahe, or "sweet, gentle, melodious," translate into "protest, resistance, opposition"? Slack key's appeal is often drawn from its congruence with the "aloha spirit." However, I want to pursue other meanings for nahenahe in this essay in order to refigure it as the sounding out, or aural articulation, of Hawaiian self-definition, challenging the stereotyping of softness as acquiescence and gentleness with weakness. I want to consider that the nahenahe aesthetic, which is often characterized as narcotic rather than energizing, even by some of its practitioners, is actually a sounding out against settler-colonialist logics. Indeed, I want to suggest that the central nahenahe aesthetic of slack key guitar (and, by extension, Hawaiian music more broadly) can be heard as protest music, as a sonic challenge to settler colonialism, and one possibility for rethinking the way Hawaiians' "soft, appealing sounds" can signal defiance rather than acquiescence, sounding out and articulating indigenous agency rather than native victimization or nostalgic indulgence. Although Kanaka Maoli are certainly capable of aggressive and confrontational opposition to US hegemony in the islands and can point to a legacy of warriors with an almost continuous history of armed struggles (though leavened by the annual Makahiki), Hawaiian music's central nahenahe aesthetic is often misinterpreted as "merely" soft and gentle, incapable of expressing the kind of forceful agitation necessary for "protest music."

Unlike noise, for example, slack key never registers as abrasive, even to ears unfamiliar with the music. Anodyne, simple, pleasant, perhaps, but it would take

[38] Eldon Akamine, "Music Renaissance Brings New Era of Singer-Songwriter," *Haʻilono Mele* 4, no. 7 (July 1978): 5.

[39] Eldon Akamine, "A Hawaiian Music Interview with Kahauanu Lake," *Haʻilono Mele* 5, no. 5 (May 1979): 4.

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highly contrary listeners to find slack key guitar "noisy" or "disturbing." I am asserting a counterintuitive notion, namely, that slack key guitar's nahenahe sound is oppositional precisely because it offers an alternative to modernity's penchant for hyperactivity and overwrought tension. I hear nahenahe as a refusal to link "disturbance, opposition, resistance" to "noise" and to, instead, announce a Hawaiian call for strategies of beauty and gentleness, promoting nahenahe as the sound of decolonization and the political empowerment of Kanaka Maoli regardless of the overwhelmingly long odds.

I want to suggest that, today, noise is non-threatening, quotidian, even banal.[40] The "shock of the new" that noise purportedly announces is daily regurgitated and merely reiterates its obliviousness to its own complacency, often reproducing forms of dominance and power that can therefore be heard as reactionary rather than progressive.[41] By contrast, nahenahe offers listeners alternatives rather than mere excesses, being gently persuasive rather than aggressively argumentative. Guitarists invested in a nahenahe aesthetic are uninterested in wielding power or dominating a listener. Rather, the nahenahe aesthetic invites listeners to explore alternatives, reminding us of compassionate, dialogical possibilities through its merging of six voices—each individual string of the guitar split into independent parts and reconceived back into a harmonious whole, particularly if one takes into account the nature of "open" tunings. Open tunings, as the name suggests, allow for the strings to reverberate harmoniously when struck together without fretting, unlike standard tuning. We might also think of open tuning as free, liberated, uninhibited yet amicable, consonant, and empathetic. It is not without its tensions—slack key guitar does not offer mere sonic pabulum for it is born from the agonistic world of the rural Hawaiian, unlikely to be swaddled in anaesthetizing material comfort. Nahenahe can appear delicate, yet its strength is derived from the resilience forged from flexibility and the quiet assurance of those who have endured in a homeland from which they have been made to feel alienated and dispossessed.

Nahenahe is not a call for a return to a utopian or naïve Romanticism nor is it a narcotic beautifying of the world that ignores the difficulties of human interactions. Although suffering from a remarkably low profile despite its overwhelming presence in the short-lived Hawaiian Grammy award or the involvement of Ledward Kaapana, Rev. Dennis Kamakahi, and Cyril Pahinui in Hollywood film soundtracks for films such as *The Descendants* (2011), slack key has managed to remain a genuine Hawaiian musical tradition, complicated somewhat by its association with the commercial music industry. This is especially true since the 1990s and its rise in visibility as a commercial music genre. It may have helped that slack key was given its highest commercial visibility at a time when the music industry was being transformed by the digital makeover of a musical world the industry had helped establish little over a century prior, unlike hapa

[40] Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

[41] Barry Shank, *The Political Force of Musical Beauty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

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haole which had its heyday on the opposite end of the recorded music industry's historical run.[42]

Yet as George Helm observed, "Hawaiian music reflects the attitudes toward life and nature. *These are basically clean protests and not harsh*, for example, 'Kaulana Nā Pua,' but with a deep hidden meaning.[43] Unfortunately modern Anglo-Saxon reasoning cannot truly appreciate the deep meaning of a song such as 'Kaulana Nā Pua.' Many of the Hawaiian songs that are now openly played were once hidden from those who were not of the culture. Many of the songs now openly express, if one understands the words, the language—pain revolution; *it's expressing the emotional reaction the Hawaiians are feeling to the subversion of their life style. It's an immediacy of feeling*" (emphasis added).[44] Critical of both the Bishop Museum's "mummification" of Hawaiian culture and the Polynesian Cultural Center's "commercial preservation," Helm, emphasizing the spiritual outlook of aloha ʻāina, called for a vibrant, living Hawaiian cultural revolution, which, when compared to the American Revolution, is "mild by comparison,"[45] though no less forceful in its demands for self-determination and autonomy. Additionally, it is the moʻolelo that inform slack key songs with their revolutionary, decolonizing sensibilities. The nahenahe sounds of slack key, similar to lyrical kaona (hidden meaning), especially in a time when noise or direct lyrics are conventionally thought to convey protest, subvert our modern understanding of oppositional or "protest music."

Admittedly, slack key guitar does not *sound* like conventional ideas regarding the ways in which protest or opposition *should* sound. Nahenahe, or sweet and gentle, is offered up by guitarists to describe slack key so often that it has become a cliché of interviews and artist profiles. Similar to any generalization, one easily finds counterexamples, such as Sonny Chillingworth's virtuosic "Whee Ha Swing," which is a showcase tune for slack key artists to display their chops (technical skills), Keola Beamer's neoclassical arrangement of "Hi'ilawe" from his 1997 Dancing Cat release, *Mauna Kea: White Mountain Journal*, or Ozzie Kotani's studied arrangements of Mōʻī Wahine Liliʻuokalani's music on his 2002 recording, *To Honor A Queen (E Hoʻohiwahiwa I Ka Moʻi Wahine)*. These counterexamples reflect other facets of slack key. "Whee Ha Swing" is a tour de force that portrays the exuberant paniolo ranch culture and slack key's resonance with bluegrass and other country and western repertoires that emphasize rural virtuosity with its competitive macho sensibilities (think rodeos) that is both good-natured and evidence of difficult "hard

[42] Garrett, *Struggling to Define a Nation*; David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); John Troutman, *Kīkā Kila: How the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Changed the Sound of Modern Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

[43] There have been many recordings and approaches to the song, "Kaulana Nā Pua"—some of which provide distinct readings from Helms. As Amy K. Stillman points out in her article, "'Aloha Aina': New Perspectives on 'Kaulana Nā Pua,'" the song itself has undergone a number of changes in title, for example, that underscore the historical vicissitudes of Hawaiian song. I am primarily interested here in giving Helm space to articulate what he meant in his own words and am highlighting his version of the song. However, as one reviewer noted, it is important to foreground the dynamic nature of Hawaiian song.

[44] Turner, "George Helm," 3.

[45] Turner, "George Helm," 3.

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country" lives.[46] Beamer and Kotani, on the other hand, gave notice to slack key's inherent aesthetic value in terms more widely held in the broader musical world external to Hawai'i.

Nahenahe remains the core aesthetic and it is easy to hear the sweet, gentle quality in a majority of recordings and performances, which register even less as "protest music" to most contemporary listeners than the counterexamples cited above. Although in an earlier publication I compared slack key to flamenco and the blues as other acoustic guitar traditions hardwired to specific communities and the frequent use of identical open tunings, the similarities fall away before nahenahe.[47] Where the blues and country music offer energetic rhythmic pulses built for dances quite distinct from hula, Hawaiian rhythms are supple and relaxed. By comparison, the unhurried tempos accentuate the gentle rhythmic pulse of slack key in contrast to the blues and flamenco. Although the blues or flamenco are often entangled with notions of primitivist savagery, the devil and the dark side of spiritual or religious belief encased within a threatening erotic appeal, slack key music offers a far gentler seductive pose and an erotics of languid pleasure, if wrapped in similarly primordial cloth (I am drawing distinctions here between stereotypical perceptions by white observers and listeners rather than the actual aesthetics articulated by Hawaiian and Black American musicians). The gruesome cannibals of Cook's apotheosis have long been softened by the feminization of Hawaiian culture as it has been transformed into the inviting brown hula maiden. Both the fearsome Kanaka Maoli warrior and the rough riding paniolo have largely disappeared from historical memory and popular representation of Hawai'i and Hawaiians.

I want to continue to suggest that nahenahe is an aesthetic resistant to hegemonic understandings of musical value and beauty because it offers a vision of the world which privileges gentleness, empathetic interpersonal interaction, and representational modesty. Correspondingly, Hawaiians are often circumspect in their verbal communication. It is one reason kaona (hidden meaning) is so widely practiced. As an oral culture, Hawaiian epistemology accepts that words convey more than they denote and that multiple meanings and interpretations accompany any spoken word. Words are also spoken through the ea (breath), an important spiritual concept for Kanaka Maoli, giving spoken words an importance beyond surface meanings. Traditional Hawaiian pedagogy, especially for slack key, entails a "no questions" attitude by kumu (teachers), meaning students were expected to simply "nānā, ho'opili" ("look, imitate") without any explicit instructions given. Similar to most Hawaiian communication, verbal communication is minimal while subtlety is privileged, with listeners and speakers shaped by a social world in which much is communicated through non-verbal means.[48] Indeed, the western or US ideology

[46] Aaron A. Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

[47] See an earlier essay of mine: "Playing Guitar, Performing Hawaiian," *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 4–5, 12; I also expand on this comparison in my forthcoming book, *Listen But Don't Ask Question*.

[48] Various accounts list the four principles somewhat differently, although they all carry similar meanings. Joseph Keola Donaghy, in his article, "Hawaiian Slack Key Instruction: Moving Forward

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of "speaking one's mind" is at odds with the traditional transmission of slack key within select ʻohana, particularly in its early history.

Soft Sounds

When Hawaiian musician George Helm helped found the PKO, he insisted, "I reject the notion . . . that Hawaiian musicians should only stick to music. There is no dichotomy in my mind between my music and my life and my involvements."[49] As described above, Helm was part of a vast movement shaped by an idea, aloha ʻāina (love of the land), which places Hawaiian spirituality in direct connection to the ʻāina and continues to motivate struggles against Kanaka Maoli dispossession.[50] This is especially poignant given that the Native Hawaiian community remains at the bottom of every social metric (educational achievement, employment, health outcomes, etc.) relative to every other population group, despite living in their homeland.[51]

Guitarists today position their music along a wide ideological spectrum, ranging from wholehearted embrace of various visions of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement to those who are ambivalent at best about Kanaka Maoli efforts at political autonomy or land repossession. Sometimes a reticence to speak on political matters is merely a reflection of a musician's concern about their musical careers or that their political beliefs are private and separate from their public musicking, while for others there is a hesitancy to align themselves with political movements entirely. Most slack key guitarists I have spoken with in my research in Hawaiʻi, Japan, and California were hesitant about speaking of political matters in general and the Hawaiian sovereignty movement in particular with two groups of exceptions. One group included the Native Hawaiian guitarists of the Renaissance generation—Cyril Pahinui and Rev. Dennis Kamakahi—who readily shared their views in support of various forms of Hawaiian sovereignty and have recorded music reflecting their politics. The other group included young musicians such as Makana, a slack key artist

By Looking Back," *Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being* 8 (2012): 82, lists "Nānā ka maka, hoʻolohe ka pepeiao, paʻa ka waha" (The eyes watch, the ears listen, the mouth remains shut)," which he credits to Mary Kawena Pukui, *ʻOlelo Noʻeau: Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1983), 248. Some lists replace hana ka lima (use your hands) with hoʻopili (to imitate).

For an expansive and detailed study of traditional Hawaiian pedagogy, see John Charlot, *Classical Hawaiian Education: Generations of Hawaiian Culture* (Lāʻie, Hawaiʻi: The Pacific Institute, Brigham Young University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2005). Charlot quotes Mary Kawena Pukui, E. W. Haertig, and Catherine A. Lee (*Nānā i ke kumu [Look to the Source], Volume 2*, Honolulu: Hui Hānai, 1979), to list, "*Nana ka maka. Hoʻolohe. Paʻa ka waha. Hoʻopili*. ʻObserve. Listen. Keep the mouth shut. Imitate.'" (Charlot, "Classical Hawaiian Education," 177), as central tenets of Hawaiian pedagogy.

[49] Turner, "George Helm," 3.

[50] Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, "Kuleana Lāhui: Collective Responsibility for Hawaiian Nationhood in Activists' Praxis," *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action* 5, no.1 (2011): 130–63; Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, *The Seeds We Planted*; Lewis, "Da Kine Sounds"; Lewis, "The Role of Music"; Lewis, "Storm Blowing"; Turner, "George Helm."

[51] Kekuni Blaisdell, "Historical and Cultural Aspects of Native Hawaiian Health," in *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific*, ed. Paul Spickard, Joanne L. Rondilla, and Debbie Hippolite Wright (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2002), 279–85.

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who has used his musicking in support of the Occupy, the Hawaiian sovereignty, and the environmental movements. Most, however, were likely concerned about the impact any political stance might have on their musical careers.[52] Hawai'i is a deeply politicized space, especially since the Renaissance, and with the rise of the sovereignty movement, even families can be divided on issues of Native Hawaiian concern. The Renaissance period, in fact, was not entirely free of internal conflicts of various kinds, and there remains a fractious factionalism within current Native Hawaiian political efforts. I do not mean to dismiss any of these efforts but want to acknowledge that there is a range of perspectives to defining and achieving Hawaiian self-determination.

However, as I have been suggesting, Hawaiian music speaks to a liberatory politics that is embedded within an aesthetic of nahenahe. In other words, regardless of their hesitancy to speak explicitly to Native Hawaiian rights and political activism of any kind, the music they perform makes the case for them. Nahenahe continues to invest slack key guitarists with the mana (power, authority) to invoke a Native Hawaiian perspective that empowers and sustains Kanaka Maoli efforts for self-determination and political autonomy. If a guitarist is expressing herself in a genuine way, tapping into and articulating nahenahe, the resulting music invokes Kanaka Maoli freedom, not necessarily in an overtly political sense but surely by embodying Hawaiian sensibilities that are contrary to, for example, acquisitive capitalism.

Nahenahe offers a vision of beauty and consonance, a sounding out of a better world, though not one that is utopian. Rather, it is one based on the historical precedence of a Kanaka Maoli "subsistence" way of life that was hardly one of deprivation. Indeed, it was one that allowed for the flowering of a culture that prized hula, surfing, and the fecund materiality of human life expressed in a multitude of ways, from mele ma'i (chants praising genitalia and reproductive fecundity) to songs about lovemaking (Hawaiian musicians often joke that *all* Hawaiian songs are about sexual pleasure). It is not insignificant that the richness of Hawaiian celebrations of the physical aspects of human connection was one reason Calvinist missionaries found Hawaiian ways of life repugnant. More importantly, a subsistence economy "emphasizes sharing and redistribution of resources, which creates a social environment that cultivates community and kinship ties, emotional interdependency and support, prescribed roles for youth, and care for the elderly."[53] Glen Grant observes that the so-called subsistence life of Native Hawaiians "was one of leisure and abundance. . . . This prosperity allowed time for recreation and rest. Surfing, canoeing, and swimming have always been an important part of [Kanaka Maoli] life."[54] We can hear within Kanaka Maoli songs with their

[52] I do not mean to suggest that from 1980 until Makana's self-titled debut recording in 1999 (or through today) that Hawaiian musicians removed themselves from Hawaiian sovereignty efforts or Kanaka Maoli political activities. Many, if not most, Hawaiian musicians are committed to various conceptions of Hawaiian sovereignty and political autonomy regardless of the particular genre in which they primarily perform (e.g., Jawaiian, mele, hip-hop, etc.). In the main text, I am speaking of the guitarists I spoke with throughout my fieldwork in Hawai'i, Japan, and California.

[53] Davianna Pōmaika'i McGregor, *Nā Kua'āina: Living Hawaiian Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 17.

[54] Quoted in Houston Wood, *Displacing Natives: The Rhetorical Production of Hawai'i* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 85.

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moʻolelo of aloha ʻāina expressed through a nahenahe aesthetic, the glimpses of life as it might be lived, even as indigenous decolonization efforts across a globe that faces a changing climate offer us a way to reconnect with one another and to seek healthier ways to re-connect with the larger non-human world around us.[55]

As Hawaiian scholar George Kanahele observed toward the end of the Renaissance:

> The [Hawaiian] Renaissance can best be understood in terms of before and after, comparing the level of activity on or prior to 1970 and now. Take Hawaiian music as an example. In January, 1971, I wrote in the *Honolulu Advertiser* that 'Hawaiian music was in its death throes.' There was only a handful of steel guitar players, all of whom were aging; young people were turned on to rock 'n' roll and could care less for Hawaiian music; only one radio station in Honolulu bothered to play it regularly; slack key guitar music was almost unheard of; there was only one hotel featuring a Hawaiian show; and outside Hawaii, Hawaiian music, once so popular throughout the world, was all but dead.
>
> Today, the resurgence of Hawaiian music is one of the strongest evidences for the Renaissance. Young people are now turned on to Hawaiian music as they had once been turned on to rock earlier. . . . There are more students taking slack key guitar than you can shake a stick at, and there are more youngsters leaning to play the steel guitar—an instrument invented by a Hawaiian student from Kamehameha [School], Joseph Kekuku—than ever before.[56]

Hawaiʻi musicians of the Hawaiian Renaissance inherited more than a global stage from which to perform the "soft, sweet sounds of paradise"—they used it as a platform from which to give Kanaka Maoli concerns a wider hearing. Although the US state continues to occupy Hawaiʻi, it is no longer able to contain the dissenting and opposing voices raised from the islands in the soothing discourse of the tourism industry or the official language of a happy multiculturalist state. The hula maidens and beach boys of yesteryear have been replaced by Hawaiʻi activists and artists claiming Kanaka Maoli priority. During the Hawaiian Renaissance, the seductive strains of older Hawaiian music were being reinvigorated by young bands such as the Sunday Manoa or artists such as Keola Beamer and George Helm while new music was being created by bands such as Country Comfort and Olomana. Slack key was an important part of that new, challenging sound, decolonizing the airwaves and broader soundscape of Hawaiʻi. Musicians in post-Renaissance Hawaiʻi gathered new constellations of meanings, positionings, and issues related to Hawaiian belonging and cultural imperatives. And they accomplished it, in large part, through their nahenahe music.

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[55] Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, Hussey, and Wright, *A Nation Rising*; McGregor, *Nā Kuaʻāina*.

[56] George S. Kanahele, "The Hawaiian Renaissance (May 1979)," accessed June 15, 2016, http://kapalama.ksbe.edu/archives/pvsa/primary%202/79%20kanahele/kanahele.htm.

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