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*“Aloha Spirit” and the Cultural Politics  
of Sentiment as National Belonging*

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“Aloha Spirit required here,” reads a sign on the door of the Friendly Market in downtown Kaunakakai, an old-time grocery store on the island of Moloka‘i. “If you can’t share it today please visit us some other time.” The folksy kitchen-plaque humor reflects so perfectly the ambiance of this most laid-back of Hawaiian Islands that tourists, I imagine, are invited to chuckle. Only a cynical mainlander like me, for whom the enchantment of the Islands has long since faded, would snicker that the Friendly Market on “The Friendly Island” is expressing the very opposite of what “aloha spirit” is understood to mean.

Back home in Honolulu, I am made acutely aware every day of my want of aloha—a quality I once tried to emulate by speaking softly and smiling a lot—as I sit honking my horn on the H-1 Freeway, a fifteen-mile commute that often takes nearly an hour in the congested, poorly planned gridlock that is the Aloha State. “Live Aloha,” reads the ubiquitous bumper sticker on the minivan in front of me—a reminder that what makes Honolulu appear so civilized to outsiders is this willingness to accept patiently and silently the many daily irritations that come with rapid, uneven development, crumbling infrastructure, a third-world economy, and an entrenched political regime hell-bent on luring more tourists, industry, hotels, and military installations—all in the interest of exemplifying that gracious social lubricant that has been called Hawai‘i’s “gift to the world” (Trask 1962).

The “Live Aloha” bumper sticker, part of a campaign by a citizens group in 1994 to reawaken “a sense of community” in Hawai‘i, is still often sought out in letters to the editor of Honolulu’s two daily newspapers. The group advocated twelve Acts of Aloha “intended to directly respond

to our day-to-day problems and sources of irritation.” The list begins, “Respect your elders and children,” and advises: “Return your shopping cart.” “Plant something.” “Create smiles” (Alm and others 1994). The panacea of aloha is not limited to social campaigns, however. In 1986 the governor of Hawai‘i signed into law an “Aloha Spirit” bill (Hawai‘i Revised Statutes, section 5-7.5), which advises that lawmakers and state workers “contemplate and reside with the life force and give consideration to the ‘Aloha Spirit,’” defined as that “coordination of mind and heart” that “brings each person to the self.” All three branches of government, the law says, “must think and emote good feelings to others.”

Such dewy-eyed sentimentality tends to call forth a tender indulgence on the part of hard-boiled observers from elsewhere, who find it a refreshing change from the places they have escaped in order to relax and rejuvenate in Hawai‘i. The *Guardian* of London defined aloha spirit cheekily as “hello, welcome and everything warm and squidgy” (Tran 1996). For longtime Hawai‘i residents, however, aloha is no joke. Not only does it point, as we shall see, toward the things closest to people’s hearts—family, church, nation—but it also does so in a way that is understood to be uniquely Hawaiian, to “belong” to Hawai‘i, as so few things outside the realm of fad and fashion do. While aloha has been synonymous with the Islands for so long now that few people bother anymore with its myriad definitions—George Kanahale mentioned one study that counted 123 (1986, 469)—this very taken-for-grantedness often serves to evoke closure where one would expect to see debate and dissent: in cases of conflict. While it is true that evocation of such sentiments as love or compassion similarly defy definition through an efflorescence of excessive meaning, I propose that the signification of aloha eludes us rather because it has served to obscure a history of traumatic meanings, all carrying political investments that remain hidden beneath the seemingly transparent universality of such private sentiments as love and kindness. As such, aloha spirit continues to serve as both social lubricant and glue, sticking people together while deflecting attention from the problems of proximity.

As a metonym for the Aloha State, “aloha spirit” bridges the gaps in the story of who we are and how we got here—migrant, Native, tourist, or refugee—by taking refuge in love, which finds a way through or across difference rather than against it. In this way, aloha spirit works to bind a cultural and political entity whose membership is contested. Unresolved historical contests run beneath the surface, however, driving an economy of lack that keeps aloha in motion. For example, I learned only months

after my visit there that the Friendly Market posted its sign requiring aloha spirit of all who enter because of recent conflicts involving “attitude” by outsiders moving to an island that had been predominantly Native Hawaiian (Monson 2005). On Moloka‘i today, aloha spirit speaks a code that would not be understood by tourists in Waikīkī. It is in the interest of tracing such hidden histories that I undertake this genealogy of the banal trope of aloha, as one analyzes dream figures to strip them of traumatic power.

## ORIGINS

Word meanings change over time, of course, taking on inflections that reflect shifting values in the culture in which they operate. The term “aloha,” according to a number of Hawaiian sources, did not have its current prominence in precontact Hawai‘i (Kanahele 1968; Ahlo 1996, 11). Michele Nalani Ahlo reported that older Hawaiians she interviewed for her 1996 master’s thesis on the “Aloha Spirit Past and Present” told her the word was not used much by previous generations, and that it was “a slang” taken up by tourists (65, 105). Kanahele reported, in perhaps the only treatise on the subject, that while the root word is found throughout Polynesia to mean love, compassion, sympathy, or kindness (*aroha* in Māori, *alofa* in Samoan, *aroha* in Tahitian, etc), its earliest recorded uses in Hawai‘i emphasized “love of kin,” which included ancestors (1986, 470). *Aloha* also is used in expressions that describe the welcome that should be extended to strangers (Kanahele 1986, 477). Kanahele concluded, however, that although some Hawaiians today claim aloha was the most important of ancient Hawaiian values, evidence suggests it was just one among many important values (1986, 479). Elsewhere (Kanahele 1968), he noted that such humanistic ideals “did not operate in a highly undemocratic, feudalistic society with a rigid system of taboos”; it was with Christian conversion that Hawaiians began to invest aloha with a new centrality. The term plays a similarly secondary role in the canonical contemporary account of postcontact history written by a Native Hawaiian, Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa’s *Native Land and Foreign Desires* (1992). Kame‘eleihiwa expanded on a number of metaphors central to the ordering of ancient Hawaiian society; aloha is not one of them.

It was early Western explorers to Hawai‘i who first seized on aloha to describe their complicated admiration of Hawaiians as the “ideal natives”—the “noble savage” who represented Europe’s deep, relinquished past—as reported and repeated in the work of such chroniclers

as Jack London, Robert Louis Stevenson, Somerset Maugham, and Mark Twain. Generations of Europeans who waxed effusive on what they called Polynesian hospitality not only discovered in the Islands what they came to expect but also projected subjectivity in terms of their own culture. A revisionist Western history of the Pacific has since proposed that the “welcome” shown to Europeans was not so much a traditional outpouring as a product of careful strategy and experimentation on the part of Islanders confronted with a situation outside the norm (Campbell 2003). Polynesian reciprocity in the exchange of food, land, and other resources was likewise viewed by Europeans through the lens of Christian virtue; gift-giving and sharing do not appear to have had such moral ramifications within an economic system of clearly delineated obligations that required careful private accounting (Kanahele 1986, 377). All these aspects of the European-projected ideal—its Rousseauian desire for an Edenic “Other” intimately connected with, but wholly separate from, the modern Christian—found expression in the term “aloha.”

Christian missionaries arriving in the early 1800s thus found aloha to be a useful concept for “converting” local, pagan deities into a single Christian God (Kanahele 1986), and bridging the ontological gap from a hierarchical system of identity to discourses about the individual soul as determined by its moral choices. Arjun Appadurai noted that it was with the New Testament that “for the first time in Western history, a major normative claim was made about the separability of act and actor, intention and action, ‘inner states’ and ‘outer forms,’” leading to “a complicated repertoire of discourses about the ‘individual,’ the ‘self,’ and ‘personality’” (1990, 92). Christian influence thus contributed an important trajectory of meaning to aloha spirit, deployed by the missionaries to bridge the considerable lacuna between two models of community: the Western, which upholds the supremacy of the individual, and the Hawaiian, in which religion is not a set of beliefs separate from civic society, but part of the very structure of social organization. Given Europe’s role in constructing Hawai‘i through narrative and imagery, Kanahele concluded that the concept “we feel or perceive as aloha today is the product of evolution, even the child of the marriage of an ancient, traditional Polynesian concept with its Christian counterpart” (1986, 482). We still feel the discordance in this stretch from “love of kin” to “brotherly love” (*agape*) in the contemporary slogan “Aloha ke akua” (God is love), given that the Hawaiian cosmological hierarchy was more likely to arouse in the commoner “fear,

awe, respect, loyalty, obedience” than the emotion we call love (Kanahele 1986, 478).

Discordant as the pagan and Christian cosmologies might be, the missionaries succeeded in quickly Christianizing a number of influential Hawaiian monarchs, most importantly Queen Ka‘ahumanu, who toured the countryside in the late 1820s ordering temples destroyed and churches built over them, after she engineered an end to the *kapu* (taboo) system (Kame‘eleihiwa 1992, 68, 74, 154). The attraction of Christianity for most of the population initially was learning *palapala* (to read and write), for the missionaries introduced Hawaiians to a written language. “Once the *Ali‘i Nui* [chiefs] had approved it, learning the palapala became a national pastime,” so that royalty and commoners alike thronged the mission schools long before they felt any interest in the church sermons (Kame‘eleihiwa 1992, 142). Based on Benedict Anderson’s evolutionary history of nationalism and nationhood as turning on the development of print capitalism, I would argue that it was the advent of a written language and the flowering of a Hawaiian-language press beginning in the 1830s, more than Christianity itself, that filled the void after the *kapu* system was abandoned.<sup>1</sup> With the decline of ancient ways of life and their “interlinked certainties” around organic community and religious hierarchies, print capitalism filled the need for “a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together” (Anderson 1991, 36). Printed texts encourage growing numbers of people to think about themselves in profoundly new ways—as connected to other readers of the same language, forming “in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community” (Anderson 1991, 44). To quote Timothy Brennan paraphrasing Georg Lukács, with the breakdown of authoritarian hierarchies and the disintegration of organic community in antiquity, “When the bourgeois individual became the dominant myth, the external became the internal, the worldly became the textual” (Brennan 1990, 54).

Some Hawaiians have maintained that until the eighteenth-century European explorations, Islanders had no notion of belonging to a particular nation, race, ethnicity, or people, because Hawai‘i was cut off from even other Pacific Islands for hundreds of years (Campbell 2003, 65). “The concept of nationality was completely alien to my people,” wrote Samuel Crowningburg-Amalu, a *Honolulu Advertiser* columnist and descendant of Hawaiian royalty who waxed philosophical on the Hawaiian cultural renaissance of the 1970s; “There were only the *Ali‘i* [chiefs] who were

heaven born and the Maka‘ainana [commoners] who were born of Earth. No other” (1974).

This idea of nationhood and “Hawaiian-ness,” born of the printed word, forms an important proprietary connection to aloha and the discourse that forms around it with the arrival of immigrants and other settlers in the decades that follow. Both groups, however, construct the nation around aloha retrospectively. For the four decades until Hawai‘i became an American state in 1959, Honolulu’s daily newspaper index contains no such subject heading as “aloha spirit.” After about 1962, by contrast, “aloha spirit” became a burning subject of public debate, spawning a steady stream of newspaper reports about initiatives, declarations, public and private forums, and the ubiquitous letters to the editor from tourists who did, or did not, experience aloha on their visit—a genre unique to Hawai‘i that seems to owe its existence to the fact that aloha is indeed a newspaper subject category. This preoccupation continued through the 1970s into the early 1980s, marked always by a sense of anguish and urgency related to the question of loss: Is the aloha spirit lost? Is it dying? Does it exist?

The need to construct a discourse around aloha in the decade after statehood clearly reflected anxieties about how different social groups stood to gain or lose after the change in Hawai‘i’s status. Community hopes and dreams, political goals, and historical traumas come to bear on such moments of transition, bringing to the surface internal conflicts that might have remained hidden. At the same time, there arose within Hawai‘i a new self-awareness about being part of, but different from, the union—an awareness brought home by the sudden influx of curious tourists attracted by newly affordable jet travel.

It was the tourism industry, in fact, that issued the first warnings about a loss of aloha, which it “branded” as Hawai‘i’s most important competitive edge against other beach resorts worldwide. Aloha spirit is “that extra warmth that conveys a personal interest in satisfying the customer’s needs,” according to a University of Hawai‘i tourism professor who conducted a survey in 1962 to measure the growing impersonality of store clerks (*Honolulu Advertiser* 1962). Among residents, by contrast, debate about the aloha spirit evokes something quite different. As a way of life said to be lost or dying, it is associated with “the good old days,” before the accelerated arrival of modern influences that are seen as precipitating a decline in friendliness. This meaning, which encompasses myriad aspects of Island life in “small-kid time” (depending on the speaker, anytime

before 1970), resonates strongly to this day. And it is under this heading that aloha spirit—still connoting “love of kin” through nostalgia for rural life in the extended family—proliferates in forms of Christian love unique to Hawai‘i, such as “seeing a friend off at 3:00 a.m.,” “the smell of kalua pig” (Kanahele 1976, np), or the “Hawaiian practice of setting political campaign posters not on sticks, but in the hands of human campaigners who establish eye contact with commuters passing by on the way home” (Mathews 1986).

In a speech given on the occasion of statehood, the Reverend Abraham Akaka, Hawai‘i’s “shepherd” and leader of the august missionary Kawaiaha‘o Church for three decades, attempted to fix aloha in strictly Christian terms, emphasizing the missionary parallel between Polynesian “love of kin” and brotherly love, or the Golden Rule: “Aloha seeks to do good to a person, with no conditions attached. . . . A person who has the spirit of aloha loves even when the love is not returned. And such is the love of God. . . . Today, one of the deepest needs of mankind is the need to feel a sense of kinship one with another. Truly all mankind belongs together, for from the very beginning all mankind has been called into being, nourished, watched over by the love of God, who is aloha. . . . The real Golden Rule is aloha. This is the way of life we must affirm” (Joesting 1979).

The uncomplicated lineage drawn here from ancient ways of life to the present situation of statehood demonstrates what Eric Hobsbawm called the “invention of tradition.” According to Hobsbawm, claiming a link to “a suitable historic past” in times of great change helps call forth certain values or norms that have “the sanction of precedent, social continuity and natural law as expressed in history” (1983, 2). The missionaries’ conversion of pagan gods to the Christian God “invented” such a tradition; subsequently, the discourse of aloha was reiterated and institutionalized by Akaka in the moniker ultimately adopted for Hawai‘i, “The Aloha State.” Indeed, while Hobsbawm described the phenomenon of invented tradition as widespread throughout history, he noted that it is especially conspicuous as a strategy of nation building, “when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed” (1983, 4). This is clearly the case with “love of kin,” which cannot extend the extended family large enough to encompass mass tourism.

Rev Akaka established yet another inflection of meaning on aloha in the decade that followed his statehood speech. In many ways the first architect

of the Hawaiian cultural renaissance, he addressed the group's myriad social problems—poverty, crime, poor health, breakdown of the family—through a program of “Hawaiian uplift” aimed at restoring a sense of “identity” (Akaka 1970). Acknowledging the stereotype that Hawaiians remain at the bottom of the social ladder because they are “noncompetitive” and “happy-go-lucky” (*HSB* 1962b), he recast these tendencies under the Christian paradigm “blessed are the meek,” noting: “Out of drab little Nazareth, the hope and faith of Christianity came. Out of our Hawaiian people great things will come” (*HSB* 1963). With this move, aloha begins to transform an internal, psychological orientation into a political identity—an operation that continues to underwrite the significance of, and hide the investments in, aloha spirit today.

### FROM TOURISM COMMODITY TO STATE IDEOLOGY

The Christian lineage of aloha, so important symbolically at the inception of statehood, was nearly overwhelmed in the decades that followed by the powerful twin interests of state government and its economic growth engine, tourism. It is the commodified aloha that most people know best—emblazoned across the landscape of Waikīkī, announced in the bus driver's distorted “a-lo-o-o-o-ha!” and stamped across every retail welcome mat. Concerns about disappearing aloha had no sooner opened the public conversation than tourism began to balloon exponentially, growing twenty-three-fold from 1960 to nearly seven million tourists a year in 1990 (DBEDT 2004). Business, government, civic groups—and especially the Hawai'i Visitors Bureau—rushed to keep pace, erecting educational projects designed to ensure that workers and residents would do their part to deliver on Hawai'i's “destination image” (Desmond 1999, 13).

“You've got to give it that extra pizzazz,” a class of airport workers was told in a 1976 state tourism seminar. “We really are a fragile business, and that's where all of you come in. Aloha spirit is our most valuable visitor attraction” (Harpham 1976). As a fetishized commodity, aloha did not yet manage to obscure capitalism's dependence on workers enjoined to show their patriotism by underwriting the state's top export—with lingering implications for the kinship community of old. The message was repeated in public-service ads in 1982, again sponsored by the state-funded tourism bureau, which reminded residents: “Aloha. The more we give, the more we've got”—a self-evident “we” that the head of the Hotel Workers Union unmasked by saying it would be better if “tourist industry execu-

tives practice[d] the aloha spirit with their employees instead of promoting [it] in an advertising campaign” (Catterall 1982).

While the tourism office now known as the Hawai‘i Visitors and Convention Bureau claims to serve a range of public and private interests, the State of Hawai‘i has always had a clear stake in promoting tourism and the commercial aspects of aloha. Noel Kent noted in his critical history of modern Hawai‘i that the state’s “economic model was based from its beginnings on the utter primacy of tourism, since outside investors would only direct their funds to this profitable sector, while government capital resources had to be focused on infrastructural activities aimed at attracting these same investors” (1993, 125).

But it was not just as an economic engine that aloha spirit became interesting to the emerging State of Hawai‘i after 1960. With the “Democratic revolution” of 1954, the offspring of immigrant plantation workers had finally succeeded in forging a working-class coalition that could take control of the territorial legislature from the haole (white) sugar plantation elite. This Democratic coalition—which still holds political power in Hawai‘i today—consciously undertook the promotion of both tourism and statehood to underwrite its political project, one that has elevated the older Asian immigrant groups socially and economically through synergistic relationships between government, law, tourism, and real estate. Jocelyn Linnekin summarized: “Though historically debatable, the notion that Hawaiian society had overcome ethnic divisiveness became a dominant public ideology during the territorial period. . . . As a public ideology in and about Hawaii, aloha became particularly salient after World War II. . . . The rise of mass tourism and lobbying for statehood were more-or-less concurrent movements in the 1950s, and the idea of interethnic harmony was advantageous for both. As the descendants of immigrants moved off the plantations, local people too came to share this sanguine vision of Hawaii as a unique place, and aloha became the normative ideal for civil behavior” (1997, 227).

In other words, debate about the loss of aloha spirit could not only be turned toward founding Hawai‘i as a specifically Christian state (with Calvinist implications for the moral value of work), but could equally be used in service of a political ideology that claimed to transcend ethnic difference under a flag marked Democratic, local, and working class (Wilson 2000, 75). The tourism industry, which originally fixated on aloha as that “extra something” of hospitality, quickly realized that what Americans found unique about Hawai‘i was its multiracial population coexisting

in apparent harmony. Promoters of statehood and state interests seized on the equation of aloha with multiculturalism—or “melting pot,” as it was called then—with evangelical fervor, declaring it Hawai‘i’s gift to the world. Beginning with a state-appointed commission in 1973, efforts to institutionalize this difference culminated in the “Aloha Spirit” wording added to the state constitution in 1986. Such a visibly successful recipe for melting-pot integration, brought to the world courtesy of America, land of immigrants, presented a striking argument for Hawai‘i itself as the American ideal. “Hawaii stands as a symbol of what America could be,” according to the state’s top education official in 1962 (*HSB* 1962a).<sup>2</sup>

Aloha as commodity continues to excite in white America the fascination with the Other that began with Europeans in the 1800s. This is the aloha that tourists experience as the “almost, but not quite” of Native hospitality, a distance that keeps them coming back for the experience of pleurably negotiating the gap of racial difference (Desmond 1999, 140)—“a nonthreatening, alluring encounter with paradisaical exoticism” that is “primitive (but delightfully so)” (Desmond 1999, 4, 7). Selling Hawai‘i as neither black nor Asian but rather belonging to Europe’s deep past corresponded politically to “assertions of nationalism—how and in what ways Hawai‘i . . . was just the same as the rest of the United States, and how and in what ways it was different” (Desmond 1999, 7, 56). Aloha as a claim to racial tolerance also tied in to a larger discourse about America’s commitment to democracy and racial equality, especially with the growth of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and ‘70s, a point to which I return later.

In all of these inflections, aloha spirit as a state ideology effectively serves to contain or dissipate political resistance, as Linnekin pointed out (1997, 228). The commonsense commandment to love one’s neighbor inhibits calling attention to the ways that certain ethnic groups in Hawai‘i have fared much better than others. Indeed, melting-pot aloha was the dominant ideology for so many years that it was not until the 1980s that Native Hawaiian activists, political analysts, and sociologists started to quantify the huge gaps becoming apparent between the status of the early Asian immigrants—some subgroups of which now have higher average incomes than whites—and Native Hawaiians, Filipinos, and Pacific Islanders. By camouflaging such differences under the banner of multicultural harmony, and partitioning political discourse according to moral mandates to “show aloha,” aloha discourse has served to stoke

the sale of Hawai'i as a commodity destination while distracting attention from the lopsided economic model at its foundation: outside capital invited to speculate in real estate while funneling profits to political insiders, in exchange for publicly funded infrastructure and eased barriers to development (Kent 1993).

### ALOHA 'ĀINA AND THE "LOCAL NATION"

The melting-pot myth has been discredited in recent decades as failing to acknowledge the uncelebrated root causes of Island ethnic diversity: the armed takeover of the indigenous population and an exploitive contract labor system (Okamura 1998; Edles 2004, 40). Since the late 1990s it has given way to a more critical understanding of what is known in Hawai'i as "Local" identity. A product of the postwar immigrant labor coalition that defeated the haole elite, "Local" became a popular identity for native-born nonwhite residents in the 1960s and '70s to express their resistance to growing outsider influence, especially by mainland whites. The popular press still celebrates markers of Local solidarity such as Hawai'i Pidgin English, and customs like removing shoes indoors, the omnipresent multi-ethnic potluck, and greeting visitors with lei.

From another perspective, "Local" as an assertion of multiculturalism also formed in reaction to the growing Hawaiian sovereignty movement of the 1970s, which barred non-Natives from identifying as "Hawaiian" (Fujikane 1994). Formulated as a 1970s-style cultural nationalism that sought to express resistance to being subsumed under a continental "Asian-American" identity (Fujikane 1994), Localism is often criticized now as a problematic claim to nationalism whose discourse of pride and rights serves to occlude how Asian immigrant settlers, specifically, have profited from the colonial enterprise under the cover of anti-haole sentiment (Trask 2000).<sup>3</sup> Hawaiian activist Haunani-Kay Trask wrote that "the 'local' identity tag blurs the history of Hawai'i's only indigenous people while staking a settler claim" (2000, 4). She elaborated:

Calling themselves "local," the children of Asian settlers . . . claim Hawai'i as their own, denying indigenous history, their long collaboration in our continued dispossession, and the benefits therefrom.

Part of this denial is the substitution of the term "local" for "immigrant," which is, itself, a particularly celebrated American gloss for "settler." . . . Hawai'i, like the continent, is naturalized as but another telling illustration of

the uniqueness of America's "nation of immigrants." . . . Exploitative plantation conditions thus underpin a master narrative of hard work and the endlessly celebrated triumph over anti-Asian racism. . . .

For our Native people, Asian success proves to be but the latest elaboration of foreign hegemony. (Trask 2000, 2)

The discourse of aloha contributes to the Local project by subsuming ethnic difference under the banner of aloha spirit. A skillful example is found in a 1993 celebration of Hawai'i multiculturalism by Local apologists Glen Grant and Dennis M Ogawa (1993). The authors held that *aloha kanaka*—the love of one's fellow human beings, as exemplified by the Hawaiian monarchy—curtailed prejudice and interracial violence among immigrant groups, so that all folded into a "pidgin culture" that formed "the basis for a powerful self-perception of islanders that they are uniquely multicultural in their lifestyles" (1993, 149). Grant and Ogawa evoked "points of commonality" between immigrant children and Native Hawaiians, especially rural life in the extended family, which "transcended specific ethnic groups." Aloha as emblematic of the "good old days" that were centered around the extended family in "small-kid time" taught all of Hawai'i's children the hegemonic aloha values of "reliance on group interdependency, reciprocal obligations, an open attitude toward sharing, and a reluctance to engage in self-promotion or aggression" (Grant and Ogawa 1993, 150). The rubric of "love" greases this semantic slide by naturalizing the link between family and nation: Idioms of kinship and home both "denote something to which one is naturally tied," so that "nations inspire . . . often profoundly self-sacrificing love" (Anderson 1991, 143, 141).

What is notable about Grant and Ogawa's proposal—along with others by the "children of Asian settlers"—is an emotional cadence barely contained within the language of scholarly objectivity. Its tone can range from conciliatory to abject, and at critical moments threatens to displace the text from the author's argument to how he or she *feels*. Later in this article I return to this appeal to feelings that occurs around aloha. Here I would simply point out that for Asian Locals, evocations of aloha seem intended to answer an irreconcilable gap in political identity—in contemporary psychological jargon, anxiety, guilt, or shame (Isaki 1996; Fujikane 1994, 30)—which for many years was manifested as an overweening eagerness to champion the cause of aloha and stamp the nation-state with its brand.<sup>4</sup> To me, a Japanese-American raised on the US continent, such easy owner-

ship of a communal egalitarian principle still resonates as part of the disorienting Hawai'i experience of being mistaken for a large insider "we"—like being white in America. To my ears, rather than political identity, aloha as pronounced by Asian Locals carries a tone of wishful nostalgia for the culture-wide "small-kid time" before Asian immigrants were coerced into renouncing their homelands (as Japanese-American internees during World War II were advised) or modeling the dominant capitalist paradigm as evidence of their rehabilitation (Kent 1993, 130). As an imaginary construct, this longing for a long-lost coherent unity appears to be an instance of what is called in subaltern politics "fetishization of the wound." In Wendy Brown's terms, the wound—in this case, renunciation of past identity—"comes to stand for identity itself" as something that just *is*, outside of history, cut off from a history of injury and substituted by the sign of pain as spectacle (Brown quoted in Ahmed 2004, 32). Under the discourse of aloha, the fetishized sacrifices of nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans) and other Locals—symbolized by the World War II heroism of the Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the iconic loss of Senator Daniel Inouye's right arm—undergoes conversion as a repeatable individual act of "choosing" love, a salve that promises "safety, comfort, caring and coming to terms that can underwrite experiences that would otherwise be traumatic" (Isaki 2006, paraphrasing Berlant 2001, 448). Here again, aloha serves to smooth over an otherwise traumatic transition from the past, reenacting identification with the injured community as a politically astute manifestation of personal autonomy.

To delve further into the compensations of aloha for Local identity, even the contrite settler's version that owns up to complicity in Native dispossession still makes claims on either end of what I would call the Hawaiian/haole semiotics of desire. For when it comes to the mythic landscape of aloha uniting the white European with his "soft primitive," the Oriental has always been excluded. Jane Desmond's study of the construction of Hawai'i as a tourist destination finds the Islands personified as a welcoming hula girl who is hapa haole—half white, half Polynesian, "literally embodying the fantasy of the nativizing trope, melding the two bodies into one" (1999, 8). Adria L Imada has written of the "imagined intimacy" between Hawai'i and Americans fostered by mainland hula shows, in which live bodies delivered a powerful message of Hawai'i and the United States as "inseparable and dependent on each other," while usefully cleansing Asians from America's Pacific territory (2004, 135). While Hawaiians were considered by haole to be "their" ideal natives,

Asian immigrants were pictured as coolies “unable to assimilate and prone to socially dangerous habits such as opium smoking and cockfighting,” which were “seen as threatening to the fragile moral capacity of the Native Hawaiians” (Merry 2003, 215). Unable to be pictured alongside the object of the desiring European gaze, the tens of thousands of mostly male immigrants working the plantations in the early part of the twentieth century “were rendered all but invisible” in tourist promotions (Desmond 1999, 58).

The image of the hated Oriental, desexualized and undesirable (to whites), permeates Asian immigrant calls for aloha that paradigmatically (through association with a “Local nation”) invite a shared mistrust of and disgust toward the outsider, read here as white. Jonathan Y Okamura pointed to that strain in Local culture and identity that expresses “resistance and opposition to external forces of development and change . . . that have marginalized Hawaii’s people” (1998, 273). If markers of belonging in America or to an increasingly transnational cultural elite fail to be achieved, the Local can take refuge in the uniqueness of aloha—“the essence of local integrity and authenticity . . . which alone is his” (Farrell 1982, 351).

Such Local and Western claims to aloha clearly pose problems for the Hawaiian nationalist movement that took shape in the 1970s. As a Hawaiian word rooted in Polynesian ways of life, aloha belongs first and foremost to Hawaiians, who are uniquely situated to determine its applications. Yet aloha spirit as constructed works against Hawaiian interests in multiple ways:

- (1) by subsuming the asymmetrical political claims of immigrant-settlers and indigenous people under the umbrella of Christian equality;
- (2) by containing any political resistance that would foreground such claims;
- (3) by continuing to invite the exploitation of land and other resources by the tourism industry; and
- (4) by substituting feel-good intentions for any material remediation of colonial exploitation.

It can be no coincidence that the contest to define aloha heightened in step with Native Hawaiian efforts to “take back” what was stolen—specifically land, and by extension culture—beginning in the 1970s. But an aloha taken back and revitalized for a restored Hawaiian nation had

to be divested of meanings that opened rifts in the fabric of Hawaiian nationalism, such as citing aloha to explain why land was “given away” or rights were not asserted. Accordingly, Rev Akaka proposed as part of his “Hawaiian uplift” campaign: “The old way of Aloha was to give away everything—even 90 percent of our life, and then to give away about 80 percent of our living space. There obviously is something wrong with that kind of Aloha. The new Aloha will need to be according to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ: Love yourself as you love your neighbor. . . . We must add the quality of rational foresight to our Aloha, so that we will have a vital and important place in the future of our homeland” (Akaka 1970). Further complicating aloha was any reference to the Hawaiian monarchs’ decision to “abandon the violent path of [the war god] Kū” in favor of Christian pacifism, a “turning point for the Hawaiian nation” (Kame‘eleihiwa 1992, 153). Invoking aloha at such moments might emphasize historical agency on the part of Hawaiian forebears, but at the price of further sacrificing the trope as a symbol of Hawaiian strength.

The Hawaiian nationalist movement has instead inflected the origins of aloha in a completely different direction, reinstalling the concept of *aloha ‘āina* from the anti-annexation movement of 1898. *Aloha ‘āina*—literally, “love of the land,” a coinage that Noenoe Silva traced to the political group Hui Hawai‘i Aloha ‘Āina, formed in 1893 to protest the overthrow of the Hawaiian government (2004, 11)—has usually been translated “patriotism,” as in the Hawaiian Patriotic League. But this obscures the genealogical, cosmological inflections to “nation/land” in Hawaiian (Silva 2004, 130; Trask 1999, 128; Pukui 1974, 269). Kame‘eleihiwa identified *aloha ‘āina* with the Hawaiian reciprocal duty to love, honor, and serve one’s ancestors (1992, 25). Here “patriotism”—or, more properly, nationalism—expresses a duty to care for the earth from which the people originate, to reciprocate its support of the people. The idiom thus underscores an important difference from the claims of immigrant settlers asserting a “Local nation,” for it establishes a genealogical origin in the land as the true basis for territorial rights. *Aloha ‘āina* works to “take back” aloha from collusion with capitalist exploitation and alienation, renaming the nation as *land—Hawai‘i nei*, the material basis for culture—rather than as *place*, or “a shared space of . . . ‘homogeneous, empty time’” (Fujikane 1994, 29) in the metaphorical imaginary.

In practice, this renaming corresponds to reclaiming a land base to perpetuate Hawaiian culture, a political project that began in 1973 with the Homerule Movement and a group suitably dubbed ALOHA (Aboriginal

Lands of Hawaiian Ancestry), and culminated in the fourteen-year campaign to take back the island of Kaho‘olawe, used as a US Navy bombing range since World War II. Amid academic challenges by white anthropologists as to whether this volcano southwest of Maui was considered sacred “traditionally,” as Hawaiians claimed, or as part of an “invented tradition” serving political ends (Linnekin 1983, 246), Haunani-Kay Trask asserted the right precisely for Hawaiians to define what belongs to their culture, as “the only residents with a genealogical claim to their place,” and whose cultural survival depends on the right to such self-determined standards for ethnicity (1999, 127, 132; see also Tobin 1994, 116).

Complications arise, however, in representing such standards of authenticity by means of a decolonized aloha, for the term’s history already contains within it competing markers of nationhood. Rey Chow wrote of the struggle between the dominant and subdominant within postcolonial Native culture: “To argue for the autonomy of a historiography by the ‘natives’ themselves, so that the past that has been usurped from them can become available and accessible once again in the ‘native’ language, we would need at the same time to acknowledge (1) the impurity of that ‘past’ and (2) the vicissitudes of the ‘native’ language, which is also impure and multiple because it is in constant practical use” (1998, 153).

As one of the few Hawaiian words in the English-language dictionary, *aloha* draws attention to the “impure and multiple” elements in Hawaiian identity itself, interrupted only recently by cultural renaissance and political nationalism. Christianity, for example, can hardly be spoken of anymore as a foreign imposition on an “authentic” Hawaiian culture. Hawaiian gatherings often open with a Christian blessing, while teachers of hula and other Hawaiian spiritual practitioners frequently profess strong Christian faith (Viotti 2001; Adamski 1997). The figure of the “good Christian” who supports Native self-determination dates to the missionary era, with David Malo, and Joseph Nāwahī, whom Jonathan Osorio called “the living promise of the Calvinist mission and an exemplar of that mission’s contradictions” (quoted in Silva 2004, 139). For Native Christians, conversion plays a central role in the story of how their people have assimilated change, and aloha as “brotherly love” has perhaps the widest resonance in the public at large.

Likewise, Hawai‘i’s identity as what Michel Picard has called a “touristic culture” (1997), in which tourism has played a developmental cultural role, persists in the performative history of such revived Hawaiian practices as hula and surfing (Desmond 1999, 99). The Mossman family, for

example, mounted entrepreneurial extravaganzas at their reconstructed Hawaiian village in Waikīkī in the early 1930s to satisfy tourists' thirst for "authentic" native performances such as hula dancing, poi pounding, and watching boys climb coconut trees; they also intended this forum to educate fellow Hawaiians and resurrect disappearing cultural practices (Imada 2004, 119). Imada has concluded that tourism development was largely responsible for the revival of hula, and that tourism and cultural activism did not pose contradictions for many Hawaiians in the entertainment business (2004, 123). Like Christianity, tourism has helped shape contemporary Hawaiian culture, and its influence persists in the Hawaiian cultural gloss on aloha today.

### THE PROBLEM WITH LOVE

Earlier I mentioned the "Live Aloha" campaign from 1994—the product of public meetings that concluded that driving with courtesy, returning your shopping cart, and other personal actions would counteract a growing sense of powerlessness in public life. This campaign demonstrates how aloha has become the vehicle in Hawai'i for a phenomenon described by Lauren Berlant, among others, as a retreat from the political to the domain of "personal acts and identities performed in the intimate domains of the quotidian" (1997, 4). For social conservatives, such a retreat is manifest in recourse to the moral certainties of the church; on the liberal side, it is seen in a New Age psycho-spiritual paradigm claiming continuity with an authentic American tradition that defends against capitalist modernity (which I would trace to the transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau). Both of these positions tend to be couched in the rubric of love. Bianca Isaki paraphrased Berlant: "In American political culture today, love is . . . a social ligament between fantastic signs of intimacy that are terrorized into privacy. That is, it offers the hyperbole of its promise as cause for relinquishing a public life. The promise to defend love's normative private forms is exchanged for a public that forfeits political community as yet another concession to a mood of diminished expectations" (2006).

In Hawai'i it is aloha spirit that facilitates this retreat from political life. The "Live Aloha" campaign's private "Acts of Aloha," for example, deflect attention from questioning how hegemonic ideologies such as aloha itself might contribute to "the crippling sense of powerlessness, the all-too-pervasive attitude in this state that our individual acts do not matter" (Alm and others 1994). Similarly, two recent books that purport to teach aloha

wrap together a mishmash of past meanings under the privatizing project of New Age healing and what Frank Furedi has called “therapy culture,” in which “management of emotions involves intervening in areas hitherto regarded as private” (2004, 50).

*The Lessons of Aloha: Stories of the Human Spirit* by Hawaiian musician and social activist “Brother Noland” Conjugacion is a coffee-table book that through its descriptive/prescriptive gloss on a state ideology participates in the political project of nation building. Brother Noland collected several dozen stories by prominent or socially active Hawai‘i residents who narrate, in the first person and with Pidgin inflections intact, stories of hardship overcome or bad decisions forestalled through an internal orientation that reflects “their passion for life” (Brother Noland 2005, xi). “What’s this book all about? Mostly, it’s about how each of us might live Aloha to the fullest. Aloha is always there, of course, nestled deep within our inner spirit. Our challenge is to bring it to the surface. The magic of Aloha happens when your best and highest expression can flow naturally and honestly. It might be as simple as the look in your eyes, or as deep as the gift of unconditional love. Aloha can be acquired, discovered, learned, earned, given, shared and passed along—and that’s the idea behind *The Lessons of Aloha*, a survival tool for the 21st century . . . saimin [noodle soup] for the soul” (2005, xiv).

Like the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* franchise to which it refers (one of whose hundreds of titles is *Chicken Soup from the Soul of Hawai‘i: Stories of Aloha to Create Paradise Wherever You Are* [Canfield and others 2003]), Brother Noland’s collection operates on the idea that one’s ability to be moved by reading stories about others’ experiences and expressions of love is *itself* an act of aloha. This is because *feeling* demonstrates that deep inner quality of aloha being moved to the surface, which can then be manifested publicly (according to the text) by “phrases like ‘Thank you,’ ‘Forgive me,’ ‘I’m sorry,’ ‘We can work it out,’ . . . . It weaves itself into the next step, which is questioning our actions: Did I ask permission? Am I being too nosy? Am I imposing?” (Brother Noland 2005, 2). The signs of aloha collected in the stories do not so much demonstrate a philosophy as enact what could be summed up by our British cynic as “hello, welcome and everything warm and squidgy.” We learn that aloha is finding the answers to life “deep within”; it’s not compromising your values, not taking life for granted, valuing your friends, and finding humor in everything (2005, 7, 15, 23, 27, 30). Most of the stories are just heartwarming, like the *Chicken Soup* stories, serving to realize the modern understanding

of emotion as constructing our individual uniqueness through “access to some kind of inner truth about the self” (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990, 6).

The same tone runs through the gift-type volume *A Little Book of Aloha: Spirit of Healing* (Provenzano 2003). Renata Provenzano interviewed Hawaiian healers “as to how the spirit of aloha is in fact the key to Hawaiian well-being” (2003, 10). Here, too, aloha is an internal orientation: “It’s an inner knowledge, by birth, to be loving and genuine in all interactions”; it is kindness, honesty, empathy, and a willingness to love (Provenzano 2003, 14). It begins with the self: “The answer is when you look inside yourself—do you feel good about yourself, are you secure of who you are?” (Provenzano 2003, 21) This orientation is described by Furedi as part of a growing tendency in the West to construct identity on the basis not only of emotion, but also of emotional deficit (ie, “low self-esteem”) as a “version of the self . . . marked by powerlessness and vulnerability” (2004, 144). Like Berlant, Furedi linked the current preoccupation with monitoring individual emotions to a loss of faith in politics, and a concomitant erosion of private life (2004, 40, 48). As the public sphere is reduced to the intimate, domestic, and emotional, what becomes important in public life is “gestures of being down to earth, warm and emotional rather than the quality of ideas, strategic thought or leadership” (Furedi 2004, 60).

These tendencies find a perfect vehicle in aloha spirit, which currently gathers under a new formulation: Where one stands in relationship to belonging in Hawai‘i is negotiated through *feeling*: through one’s passion or sorrow over injustice, and one’s willingness to enact public confessions and undertake a redemptive path that fulfills the new terms of citizenship. That is to say, it is a matter of *choice*. As citizenship in the capitalist state is increasingly equated with consumption, and identity with a marketing niche, belonging is understood to issue from choosing specific beliefs, acts, and behaviors performed to substantiate any claim to political legitimacy. Hence the imperative, in Hawai‘i, of “showing aloha”: there is indeed a triumph to the idea of “choosing” love in an era when personal behaviors and choices resonate politically. Aloha spirit stands with nationalist difference against cultural imperialism, with emotion and fellow feeling against the cold, hard objectivist claims of Western knowledge. In a cultural environment that militates against either self-aggrandizement or shaming, “living aloha” subtly reaps the rewards of publicly performing virtue. As such, it also requires the contrasting presence of others who fail that ideal.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed cited Freud's theory of how love bonds groups around a shared ideal, in order to explore its application to phenomena such as the abstract love of nation. Briefly, when the earliest emotional tie—identification—is frustrated, the subject develops a secondary form of love based not on being but on *having*—in the case of a boy, being the father through having the mother. Idealizing the loved object allows the subject to *be* through a fusion with what it *has*. So by determining who one would like to be, one also limits the field of whom one would like to have. This economy of the self, which orients the subject toward some and away from others, helps to construct a group through identification with the same ego-ideal—the nation, for example. Moreover, as it is the initial *loss* of the loved object that is compensated through taking on the qualities of that object (introjection), love works through an economy of loss. The failure to be “loved back” or to realize the ideal actually increases investment in that ideal by making felt the pain of its loss. That is why, in the case of nationalism, we see patriotism strengthened when the nation fails to deliver on its promise for the good life (Ahmed 2004, 131). So it is also with aloha spirit, which one loves “out of hope and with nostalgia for how it could have been” rather than to recognize that love's promise has not been realized (Ahmed 2004, 131). This also explains why love narratives must continually threaten the loss of the loved object—to make felt the injury that would follow if that object were given up.

The same economy works in the case of multiculturalism. Here the external threat is defined by requiring that all the diverse others “refuse to keep their difference to themselves, but instead give it back to the nation, through speaking a common language and mixing with others” (Ahmed 2004, 134). In other words, they must “show aloha” and fit in—contribute ethnic foods to Island potlucks, “talk story” and not stand aloof, so they can join the fold (and construct the identity) of the Local. We can see how aloha might be central to constructing the state as a multicultural ideal: Love becomes the shared characteristic that is put in the place of the ego-ideal. “It is now ‘having’ the right emotion that allows one to pass into the community. . . . It is ‘love,’ rather than history, culture or ethnicity that binds the multicultural nation together” (Ahmed 2004, 135).

Notice that this setup still requires that certain others be perceived as a threat, while disguising behind a discourse of loving everyone the requirement to perform aloha. “In such a narrative, ‘others’ . . . in their perceived

failure to love difference, function as ‘a breach’ in the ideal image of the nation. Their failure to love becomes the explanation for the failure of multiculturalism to deliver the national ideal” (Ahmed 2004, 139). This also explains why aloha must be constructed under the constant threat of disappearance, despite its claims of being bountiful right under the surface. Whether it evokes love of kin, hospitality, reciprocity, or multicultural tolerance, aloha as a vulnerable, precious difference that can be “given” to the world or “shared” with others relies on others who are *not* part of the fold to be brought in, thereby defining the nation and its citizens through these very acts of aloha.

Another way of looking at it is to say that projecting onto others the negation that sustains the ideal maintains the illusion of self-containment, a certain form of subjectivity. Jennifer Harding and Deidre Pribram have argued that emotion, as an expression of hegemony, not only makes felt the circulation of power but also thereby constructs the subject, and is thus critical to establishing social relations and constructing discursive and institutional formations (2004, 879). Indeed, the state’s involvement in dictating the terms of citizenship already declares subjectivity as something fit to be imposed. “It represents skepticism toward the ability of people to act as responsible citizens, without the support of professionals who know best what is in their interest” (Furedi 2004, 158). As a discourse about inclusion and the choice to belong by activating one’s inner goodness, the discourse of aloha spirit hides investments in the nation’s need to exclude, in the state’s jurisdiction over subjectivity, and in the presumed need for both nation and state to govern sentiment. Under the socially leveling category of the New Age, aloha spirit thus succeeds in accommodating dominant, archaic, and residual meanings, serving as the sign of a bridge between past and present that can span gaps in understanding through a strategy of deflection, like a mirror. Aloha spirit expresses an intention to reflect your projected desire back from the other as an ideal image of yourself—but at the expense of history.

Ultimately we cannot know precisely what “aloha” meant before it was written down, and it is not germane anyway to this genealogy, which is about the construction of a discourse. “Aloha spirit” entered the vernacular as the product of an idealized Western gaze on the Native, and it has retained through all its inflections this mirrored identity—an ideal constructed through desire. Jack London wrote that “the love of the Islands, like the love of a woman, just happens. One cannot determine

in advance to love a particular woman, nor can one determine to love Hawaii” (1970, 387). London longed to earn the title *kama‘āina*—“one who belongs”—an epithet that can be bestowed only by those who do belong, on the basis of “the heart and the spirit” (1970, 401). Yet, this aloha, John R Eperjesi noted, “projects a difference, and distance, no matter how warm and gracious, between the insider and the outsider” (2005, 112)—which forms part of its allure. Eperjesi sensed in London’s love for Hawai‘i what Jacques Lacan called “specular jubilation”—“the process by which a subject comes to recognize itself through the projection of wholeness onto the other, thus introjecting lack, incompleteness, or inadequacy” (Eperjesi 2005, 116). To the degree that Hawai‘i—as state, as nation—has been constructed through a history of introjection, the specter of loss and insufficiency will continue to haunt evocations of aloha as a likeness that surrounds all meanings. For aloha spirit, strictly speaking, can never be claimed for oneself, just like London’s take on *kama‘āina*. Aloha thus works to deflect eternally onto others the terms of inclusion.

For these reasons, aloha spirit probably cannot cross the divide between competing political interests, for it necessarily belongs to all and none, making a “community of spirit” the authority. In the case of Hawaiian nationalism especially, a differentiation that cuts dangerously close to a history of hybrid forms steeped in projected and introjected desire will likely be rejected wholesale in order to further its projects. Kame‘eleihiwa suggested as much when she aligned aloha with the peaceful path of Lono, noting, “It is Kū whom we have forgotten; the *Akua* of war, confrontation, political power, and debate. . . . It is the Calvinists who taught us to reject Kū and all that he symbolized” (1992, 324). An aloha that constructs the social and political self through feeling, especially, is detrimental to the Hawaiian nationalist project, which must make its terms of inclusion increasingly discriminating, even at the cost of refusing aloha. As Okamura pointed out, the state ideology of aloha spirit/multiculturalism basically argues “for stability and continuation of the status quo rather than for substantial change in the current structure of race and ethnic relations” (1998, 283). As Hawaiians deploy the term toward the cause of sovereignty and cultural revival, and away from more inclusive meanings, aloha discourse must respond with increasingly diffuse applications separated from the political. Where aloha once spoke of the organic relationship between religion and society, it now calls attention to a gap that it cannot bridge, between personal and political self-determination.

## CONCLUSION

Lest my analysis come across as being altogether too negative, I would point out that an ideology of love is preferable to what we see ascendant in America today, an ideology of fear. Aloha spirit has survived dilutions of meaning precisely because it has *worked*—to sell Hawai‘i and its people as a destination while preventing interracial conflict, incendiary nationalisms, or violent uprising against tyrannical state control. The discourse of aloha manages to discourage dissent partly because it also restrains expressions of hegemony, requiring that they take the form of “soft chains.” People raised in Hawai‘i freely profess such Local sentiments as “Lucky you live Hawaii” or “Maui no ka oi” (Maui—it’s the best); it is newcomers who are prone to express discomfort or rage at the discourse of power smoothed over by such slogans. One reason for this is an instinctive understanding among people who have made Hawai‘i their home—especially those for whom there can be no other—that all groups must coexist on an island, real or metaphorical. In fact, there is some evidence that close-knit communities previously acknowledged what Teresa Brennan called the “transmission of affect”—the idea that angry feelings or beliefs could endanger the well-being of all (2004, 117); Kanahale also concluded as much from his research into the origins of aloha in ancient sayings (1986, 474).

Moreover, despite continual attempts by reactionary or opportunistic factions to exploit aloha, the trope still is held in high esteem worldwide, which opens a space for creative rewriting. I would echo Berlant in saying that the reason for critiquing affirmative emotions such as compassion or empathy is not to invalidate them but to see how forms of “progress” can at the same time be destructive, supporting social antagonism, for instance, by “enforcing normative projects of orderliness or truth” (2004, 5). Instead of the “fantastical optimism central to the sentimental narrative,” Berlant suggested a “sentimental radicalism” that speaks the “powerful language of rageful truth-telling” (quoted in Woodward 2004, 72). Similarly, Ahmed, citing Kaja Silverman, drew a distinction between love and idealization, as the latter restricts the ideal to certain subjects (2004, 140).

In the case of aloha, I would further distinguish between prescriptive and descriptive deployments. As a value assigned by others and that

reflects their idealization, aloha spirit belongs to the one who speaks, so its subtexts belong also to the speaker as a more or less conscious intention. Since the action of aloha is to bind some people and not others under an invisible “we,” advocacy for aloha spirit is always politically suspect, as it hides such investments behind the premise that everyone always already belongs. As a learned response to discomfort or outrage, aloha spirit also serves to deflect attention from the site of trauma toward reforming internal feelings about it. Rather than get angry about economic inequality, government corruption, or social injustice, we are encouraged to realign subjectivity in order to fit on the inside of the good nation, where problems are not seen because our eyes are directed toward the vision of paradise, past or promised. Above all, aloha values comfort and equilibrium; it cannot incite or sustain revolutionary change—as the legacy of *aloha ‘āina* has shown. In the end, aloha spirit, an empty signifier promising a new nation, fulfills as do other commodities—by soothing injury with the layers of hope and myth that constitute the product itself.

### Notes

1 By contrast, Native activist Haunani-Kay Trask saw written language as having contributed to the demise of Hawaiian culture. “Where the language had once been inseparable from the people and their history, . . . it now came to be used as the very vehicle of alienation from their habits of life. The missionaries used the language to inculcate in Hawaiians a yearning to be Western and a sense of inferiority regarding the Hawaiians’ own culture” (Trask 1987, 160).

2 Aloha continues to be promoted as a solution to the world’s problems. A resolution that passed the state House of Representatives in 2003 called for “reaffirm[ing] the value and meaning of aloha in the face of military action in Iraq” and support[ing] alternative proposals made in the spirit of aloha that promote nonviolent solutions in the current crisis in Iraq” (Zimmerman 2003).

3 Candace Fujikane, who had earlier asserted a “Local nation” as a cultural nationalist construct defined in contradistinction to the Hawaiian sovereignty movement (1994), has since acknowledged the primacy of Hawaiian nationalist claims (1997, 57), joining a corps of Local Japanese apologists who seek to reposition the Local as a coming to terms with “yellow guilt” (see note 4).

4 Today, largely in response to criticisms by Trask (1999, 2000), “yellow guilt” is manifested as a self-denunciatory structure of feeling. See, for example, articles by Kosasa, Fujikane, and Okamura in an *Amerasia* special issue on Asian settler colonialism (2000), Fujikane 1997, and Kosasa 2002. Isaki proposed a “shame-

less theory of agency” in Asian settler colonial politics to “[beg] the question of how shame, and feelings generally, are involved in the decolonial endeavor” (2006). In what follows, I am indebted to her understanding of the role of shame in Local subjectivity.

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### *Abstract*

From the “Live Aloha” bumper stickers seen throughout Hawai‘i to the state constitution advising lawmakers to “give consideration to the Aloha Spirit,” the panacea of aloha is trotted out to answer every source of conflict in the Islands, from political to spiritual. The trope has been synonymous with Hawai‘i for so long that few people are bothered by its resistance to definition, its tendency to evoke closure where one would expect to see debate and dissent. I propose that this is not only because aloha points toward the things closest to people’s hearts—family, church, and nation—but also and more importantly because it succeeds in obscuring a history of traumatic meanings, all carrying political investments that remain couched beneath the seemingly transparent universality of such private sentiments as love and kindness. As a metonym for the Aloha State, “aloha spirit” serves as both social lubricant and glue, binding a cultural and political entity whose membership is contested. Unresolved historical contests run beneath the surface, however, driving an economy of lack that serves to keep aloha in motion. It is in the interest of divesting the figure of its traumatic power that this genealogy attempts to unpack some of the signifier’s hidden histories.

KEYWORDS: aloha, Hawai‘i, multiculturalism, nationalism, politics of sentiment