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Hui Nalu, Beachboys, and the Surfing Boarder-lands of Hawai'i

Isaiah Helekunihi Walker

Ka po'ina nalu (the surf zone) constitutes a Hawaiian realm, a space overlooked by outsiders that was and is extremely significant to Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians). While surfing was a thriving aspect of Hawaiian culture in ancient days, in the twentieth century it served as both a refuge and a contested borderland (or “boarder-land”) for many Native Hawaiians. It was a place where Hawaiian men felt free, developed Native identities, and often thwarted colonial encroachment. As Hawaiians successfully contested the haole (white) elite in the po'ina nalu, colonial control remained ineffectual there. On land, Hawaiians were increasingly marginalized from political, social, and economic spheres in the twentieth century. Yet in the ocean, Native surfers secured a position on top of a social hierarchy. Because Hawaiian surfers contended for this autonomous cultural space, they had the freedom to defy colonial prescriptions for how Hawaiian men should behave. As they transgressed haole expectations and categories in the waves, Hawaiian surfers simultaneously defined themselves as active and resistant Natives in a colonial history that regularly wrote them as otherwise.

In this article I provide a history of the Hawaiian surfing boarder-lands by focusing primarily on Hawaiian Waikīkī surfers of the early 1900s: the Hui Nalu and Waikīkī beachboys. In contrast to Jane Desmond's assessment of the beachboys (1999), I argue that these men were empowered in the Hawaiian surf zone—enough to defeat and defy colonial notions of what it meant to be a Hawaiian man. The po'ina nalu is a place where resistance proved historically meaningful and Hawaiian men regularly flipped colonial hierarchies and categories upside down.

BORDERLANDS AND BOARDER-LANDS

A borderland is a place where differences converge and social norms are often fluid. Because state-sanctioned authority is often absent from the borderlands, unique social and cultural identities are formed there. In such a place, established hierarchies are often undermined. Susan Lee Johnson found this in the southern mines of the Sierra Nevada foothills during California's gold rush (2000). Before US hegemony existed in the region, Chinese, French, Navajo women, Mexicans, Blacks, and Anglo-Americans filled social roles that shattered conventional categories of race and gender. Johnson concluded that this borderland was a place where social categories were "turned upside down" (2000, 100). Likewise, in the pre-twentieth century American Southwest James Brooks found a borderland where American slavery and hegemony were in flux (2002). Unlike the usual story of slavery in America, the Southwest was a place where Indian, Mexican, and Euro-American communities all enslaved each other in a captive exchange economy.

Hawaiian boarder-lands are both similar to, and different from, North American borderlands. Like the regions Johnson and Brooks studied, the Hawaiian boarder-land was a place where white hegemony was uncertain and Natives inverted dominant social categories. In particular, Native surfers violated colonial expectations of how Hawaiian men should behave, accomplishing all that they were expected not to. For example, in the early twentieth century Hawaiian surfers in Waikīkī successfully combated elite haole annexationists, had sex with elite white women, ran lucrative beach concession businesses, beat up American and European soldiers, and dictated what haole could and could not do in their aquatic kingdom. All this was done in the plain sight of public spectators. But unlike the frontiers described by others, where gender and ethnic fluidity confounded authority, the Hawaiian boarder-land was a place where Hawaiians subverted white hegemony by enacting their Hawaiian identity. Although several Hawaiian surfers were of multiracial origins, it was their Hawaiian-ness, rather than their being mixed, that united and fueled their objectives.

What made this borderland community more intriguing was that it flowed like powerful waves against a haole hegemony on land. The beach was not just a physical buffer between the land and the ocean, but a cultural and metaphysical border, as Greg Dening has theorized about the significance of the beach in the Marquesas Islands (1980). For Dening, the beach was a place where the apparently "unbridgeable" worlds of

Te Aoe (haole, Spanish, and English in particular) and Te Enata (indigenous Pacific Islanders) collided (1980, 16). Beaches divided their worlds; they were “beginnings and endings” and “the frontiers and boundaries of islands” (Dening 1980, 32). According to Dening, the beach was also the place where both peoples struggled to make sense of the other, and, as each considered the other’s world incomprehensible, violence became the language of reason, and many Marquesans were slaughtered (1980, 18, 11). In the end, Te Aoe crossed Marquesas beaches and brought with them baggage of all sorts. Hoping to make the island intelligible by giving it new names and civilizing its Natives, Te Aoe remade the islands in their own image with each beach crossing.

This is a useful, though incomplete, model for understanding Hawaiian beaches and surfers. The beach was historically a place where haole and Hawaiian worlds collided, and violence was sometimes a substitute for mutual understanding. But the beach has a particular historical burden in Hawai‘i—why else would Australian surfer “Rabbit” Bartholomew (1996) re-member Captain James Cook and the Kealakekua beach where he was killed, while he himself bled on Sunset Beach in 1976 after a struggle with a Hawaiian surfer there? (Bartholomew and Baker 1996). Waikīkī Beach was also a place where both Hawaiian and haole worlds were redefined and reconstituted. And the ocean was not simply a place from which haole, from the decks of their ships, transposed their image of the islands onto Hawaiians, as Dening has suggested. It has been and remains more significant than that. The ocean has been a place of autonomy, resistance, and survival for many Pacific Islanders. While some have more recently analyzed the significance of the moana (vast ocean) as a place of resistance and survival—especially in regard to seafaring and navigation (D’Arcy 2006; Diaz 1997; Hau‘ofa 1993; Teaiwa 1994)—thus far scholars have overlooked the surf. The po‘ina nalu constitutes another zone. Beyond Dening’s islands and beaches, we must immerse ourselves in the waves.

OCEAN AND SURF AS HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT SPACE

While Europeans obsessed over exploring and later colonizing the Pacific, they defined the islands as specks of land in a faraway sea. According to Tongan scholar Epele Hau‘ofa, this limited perspective overlooked the importance of the ocean, which was far more significant to indigenous peoples of Oceania (1993). He argued that European-constructed boundaries, which divided the islands into separate and isolated regions like

Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia, and definitions of the islands as small and limited in resources, undervalued historic interactions between Pacific Islanders and mistakenly represented the ocean as merely a space to be crossed. According to Hau'ofa, rather than a border—generating isolation and restriction—the Pacific Ocean is (and always has been) a highway linking the myriad islands and their peoples to each other and to the bordering continents of the Pacific (1993; see also Jolly 2007).

As Natives of Oceania, Hawaiians viewed the moana as essential to their existence. Since the first encounter with Hawaiians, Westerners have acknowledged Hawaiians as masters over their aquatic domain and have revered them as ocean experts—in swimming, fishing, wave riding, canoe racing, sailing, and long-distance ocean navigation (Cook 1784, 146). While other Hawaiian cultural practices like hula were vilified and observed less frequently, Hawaiian ocean traditions like he'e nalu (surfing) continued. Hawaiian surfers still identify with the ocean, waves, and surfing traditions. One Hawaiian surfer explained, “Surfing has been a part of our history for thousands of years, and when you surf you have that connection, you connect spiritually and physically to all the elements around you, this is a part of you, it's a Hawaiian thing” (Andrus 2004).

Historically, he'e nalu has been an integral part of being Native Hawaiian; it has also been a cultural identity marker for Kanaka Maoli surfers, both male and female. For many Native Hawaiians, the ocean surf has been a window for looking into their precolonial Hawaiian past, and a place where contemporary identities have developed in relation to both the past and present. The identities fostered in the po'ina nalu are significant in contrast to perspectives commonly envisioned through colonial lenses. These unique identities were accomplished, in my opinion, because the surf became a pu'uhonua—a historic Hawaiian place of refuge from strict colonial laws. And in such a pu'uhonua, identities could be constructed in opposition to colonialism. This is not to say that colonialism had no influence on the shaping of such identities. Rather, Native Hawaiian identities fostered in the surf zone were developed in contrast to the colonial conquest on the shore. And, as a large part of this terrestrial conquest involved emasculating Native men (Hokowhitu 2004, Sinha 1995, Tengan 2003), the po'ina nalu was a location where Hawaiian men redefined themselves as active agents, embodying resistant masculinities.

This process of re-membering linked Hawaiians' past to their present. We all make sense of our present through our understanding of the past, and our articulations of the past are “the medium of our present relation-

ships” (Denig 1996, 34). Thus Hawaiian surfers approached their present and future while looking back toward their past (see, eg, Kame‘eleihiwa 1992; Osorio 2002, 7). Although people often romanticize, idealize, and even invent tradition when re-membling the past (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992), Kanaka Maoli surfers found strength in a living Hawaiian art and a tradition that was celebrated by Hawaiians from ancient times, through the annexation of Hawai‘i, and down to the present.

David Malo, a nineteenth-century Hawaiian historian, described he‘e nalu as a “national sport for the Hawaiians”; it was a pastime that all Hawaiians could enjoy regardless of status, age, or gender (1951, 223).¹ The importance of surfing in ancient Hawaiian society can be seen in the many historical stories (mo‘olelo) about Hawaiian surfers, who were celebrated as heroic, strong, and clever. One of these was Pa‘ao, a warring Tahitian colonizer who introduced the kapu system in Hawai‘i sometime between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries (Fornander 1981, 33).² He was also a surfer, and in fact he named his priesthood after the surf, Kanalu. Mary Kawena Pukui recorded a story of another great surfing chief, Naihe of Ka‘u (1949). As other Big Island chiefs grew jealous of his great surfing abilities, they devised a plot against him at a surfing competition in Hilo. They altered the contest rules, so that surfers were forbidden to ride a wave until their personal chant (oli) called them forth. Since Naihe was informed of this rule only after venturing far into the ocean (beyond the breaking waves), he drifted hopelessly in the sea. Fortunately his chanter, who had been napping, was awakened in time, got wind of the plot, and quickly shouted his personal oli into the Hilo sea (Pukui 1949, 255–256).

Hawaiians chanted both for large waves and for success in surfing competitions. While some chants blessed surfboards for optimum performance, and others were prayers that opened surfing tournaments, many chants praised individual surfers.³ But perhaps the most common surfing chant was the pōhuehue. While lashing the ocean water with pōhuehue vine (beach morning-glory, *Ipomoea* sp.), a chanter called forth the great waves from Tahiti:

Ku mai! Ku mai! Ka nalu nui
 mai Kahiki mai,
 Alo po i pu!
 Ku mai ka pohuehue
 Hu! Kai koo loa.

Arise! Arise, ye great surfs
 from Kahiki [Tahiti]
 The powerful curling waves.
 Arise with the pohuehue
 Well up, long raging surf.
 (Fornander 1999, 206–207)

He'e nalu is significant to Hawaiians because it is one of few traditions to continuously survive the destructive power of colonialism.⁴ Although Hawaiians continued surfing in the early decades of the nineteenth century, by the mid-1800s, physical and cultural epidemics thinned surfing crowds at even the most popular breaks. As diseases took the lives of hundreds of thousands of Native Hawaiians (Stannard 1989; Bushnell 1993),⁵ and the missionaries frowned on "idle and sensuous" practices such as the hula, Native sports, and surfing (see Bingham 1981; Kame'eleihiwa 1992; Grimshaw 1989), he'e nalu was limited to select beaches—primarily on the islands of Maui and O'ahu. However, surfing was not dead. Several Hawaiians, even members of the royal family, still made time to surf in the late nineteenth century.

Although he'e nalu was practiced by men and women, chiefs and commoners, Hawaiian histories suggest that there was a connection between nobility and power and surfing well. This notion prevailed throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s. Among those who frequented the waves during this time was Queen Lili'uokalani's niece and designated heir to the throne, Princess Victoria Ka'iulani.⁶ According to William A Cottrell, a Hui Nalu surfer of Waikikī, the princess was an expert surfer in the late 1890s (quoted in Blake 1983, 60). Her cousin, Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole, was also known for regularly riding the Waikikī surf at this time. He was also one of the first to ride California waves. A local newspaper reported that, while attending St Matthew's Military School in San Mateo, California, Prince Kūhiō and his brothers, David Pi'ikoi Kupio Kawananakoa and Edward Kawananakoa, were observed surfing on redwood surfboards at a beach outside the mouth of the San Lorenzo River: "The young Hawaiian princes were in the water, enjoying it hugely and giving interesting exhibitions of surfboard swimming as practiced in their native islands" (*Santa Cruz Surf*, 20 July 1885).

HUI NALU VERSUS OUTRIGGER

On 17 January 1893, a company of US Marines stormed the Hawaiian Kingdom's 'Iolani Palace. Without clearance from Washington, US Minister John L Stevens used these troops to help a cohort of haole businessmen overthrow Hawai'i's Native government. While their Gatling guns and cannons were pointed at the palace, Queen Lili'uokalani surrendered her kingdom to the United States. Although US President Grover Cleveland admonished the provisional government to return Hawai'i's administra-

tion to the queen, the monarchy was never restored, and Hawai‘i was declared a republic on 4 July 1894 (see Nā Maka o ka ‘Āina 1993). In 1897, a coalition of three Hawaiian political organizations (Hui Aloha ‘Āina for Women, Hui Aloha ‘Āina for Men, and Hui Kalai‘aina) initiated petitions to oppose (kū‘ē) annexation. The kū‘ē petitions reveal that a spirit of protest and resistance was prevalent among Hawaiians during this time (Silva 2004). Despite these petitions and protests, Hawai‘i was annexed to the United States by a joint resolution of Congress on 12 August 1898.⁷

While the haole perpetrators nestled into stolen seats of government, disillusioned Hawaiians flocked to the Waikīkī surf. Over the following decade, the popularity of surfing surged in Honolulu. For many Hawaiians, he‘e nalu historically provided solace and escape from the political injustice and colonial conquest that came with annexation. Native Hawaiian surfers like George Freeth, the Kahanamoku brothers, the Kaupikos, Keaweamahis, and many others, popularized surfing and advanced the sport to new heights (Finney and Houston 1966). The resurgence of he‘e nalu was most noticeable in Hawaiian ocean-based communities like Waikīkī. At the opening of the twentieth century, many loved and took pride in he‘e nalu as a Native Hawaiian art.⁸ However, this Hawaiian realm was challenged when a haole surf club attempted to wrest the surf from Native Hawaiians. Thereafter, it became a zone of contestation and rivalry, a pu‘uhonua Hawaiians defended against some of the same individuals who had overthrown their kingdom in 1893.

A former Chicago newscaster, Alexander Hume Ford, arrived in Honolulu in 1907, moved into a grass shack that adjoined the old Seaside Hotel, and immediately took an interest in Hawaiian aquatic sports. While staying in Waikīkī, Ford learned from accomplished Hawaiian watermen to surf on canoes and surfboards. Ford then propagated the sport among other haole residents and visitors. In an article in *Mid-Pacific* (a magazine Ford created to promote tourism in the islands) and reprinted in the *Hawaiian Annual* (Ford 1911, 143), he chronicled the Hawaiian pastime of surfing and determined that “the white man could learn all the secrets of the Hawaiian [surfer].”⁹ In 1908, Ford founded the Outrigger Canoe Club to promote healthy outdoor Hawaiian sports and activities among haole in Hawai‘i.

In the beginning, Ford claimed he was organizing the Outrigger club to preserve surfing for the “small boy of limited means,” but as it grew the club quickly became a racially segregated organization for the elite

haole in Hawai'i. Membership in this whites-only surf club grew to twelve hundred in 1915, including several Honolulu politicians and businessmen. Ford boasted that among the surf riders in his club were "Judges of the Supreme Court in Hawaii with their wives and daughters, ex-Governors and their families, and the greater portion of the prominent businessmen" (1909, 17). In 1910, a former president of the Republic of Hawai'i, Sanford B Dole, was elected president of the Outrigger club (Ford 1911, 146).¹⁰ Other leading annexationists like Lorrin Thurston and J P Cooke also became club members and leaders. Though several of the Outrigger's members despised the Hawaiian monarchs and had been active participants in the 1893 coup that ousted the queen, they learned the Hawaiian pastime of he'e nalu in the early 1900s. Purporting now to be inheritors of traditions they participated in condemning, elite haole were caught in a paradox of negation and appropriation, a paradox that Houston Wood called the kama'āina (native-born) anti-conquest (1999, 45-52).

The Outrigger club built beachfront facilities, surfboards, and began boasting supremacy over Hawaiians in Waikīkī waves.¹¹ Threatened by haole colonial jostling and racism, Native Hawaiian Waikīkī surfers organized another club to offset the Outrigger. Although loosely organized in 1905, the Hui Nalu club was officially formed under a tree in Waikīkī in 1911,¹² for the purpose of preserving he'e nalu from an exploitive haole constituency. Considered a rival to the Outrigger club, Hui Nalu was "composed almost exclusively of Hawaiians or part-Hawaiians" (Timmons 1989, 26). Speaking of Outrigger and Hui Nalu relations, one Hui Nalu member recalled, "Back in the old days, they were not too friendly. The Moana Gang [Hui Nalu] stuck together by themselves. They would not mix with the old Outrigger gang" (HCOCC 1986a, 24). Many Hawaiians who gravitated to the Hui Nalu resented the prejudice displayed by Outrigger members. William "Knut" Cottrell described how he, along with Duke Kahanamoku, Kenneth Winter, Edward Kaleleihealani "Dudie" Miller, and other Hawaiians, created the Hui Nalu club after being "disgusted" by offensive remarks by Outrigger members (HCOCC 1986b, 6-7). And as Hui Nalu expanded, Hawaiian political elite joined their ranks as well—most notably Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole.

The two clubs eventually competed against each other in surfing and canoe-racing events. Tom Blake called the rivalry between the two clubs "intense" (1983, 66). As Hawaiian surfers pursued victory over haole surfers in these events, Ford taunted, "Once again the native Hawaiians are seeking to wrest the laurels from the white men and boys" (1911,

145). Native Hawaiian surfers and haole annexationists went head to head in the Waikīkī surf. One observer wrote that the Hui Nalu surfers were the “favorites in the senior events, as their club has among its members most of the oldest and cleverest riders on the beach” (Blake 1983, 66). Although some called it a friendly rivalry, it was in reality a tense arena where Native Hawaiians and elite haole contended with each other over a Native Hawaiian domain.¹³ Ben Finney, a contemporary scholar, explained in a coauthored book, “A certain ethnic pride, however, lay at the heart of their competition: haole vied with Hawaiians in ancient water sports which were considered to be the domain of the latter.” In the end, the Hawaiian surfers came out on top, and “in this way, the Hawaiians eventually regained their place on the beach” (Finney and Houston 1966, 71).

These Hawaiian surfers claimed their dominance over the surf zone in more than just surfing contests. During this time, as John M Lind recalled, it became apparent that Hui Nalu surfers like John Kaupiko and Duke Kahanamoku “controlled Waikiki.” Lind continued, “There was a pecking order, like chiefs of old. . . . Everyone did what they said” (quoted in Hall 2004, 89). Hui Nalu surfers were often seen as intimidating to haole, especially as they stood up for Hawaiian rights in the ocean. Most Hui Nalu surfers are remembered as physically fit and strong, and several had reputations for being extremely tough—like George “Tough Bill” Keaweamaahi, who could open a beer bottle with his thumb, and others like “Ox” and “Steamboat,”¹⁴ who were remembered for their size and strength. Although physical battles between Hui Nalu and Outrigger are less spoken of today, some historians, such as Grady Timmons (1989, 27), recorded that fistfights between Hawaiian surfers and other haole in Waikīkī during this time were common.

By the 1910s and 1920s, haole hegemonic authority in the Territory of Hawai‘i claimed that Native men were submissive and compliant American subjects (Trask 1993, 53; Tengan 2003, 7–13; Walker 2005). Although contemporary researchers such as Noenoe Silva have more recently shown that Hawaiian resistance to US colonialism was much more prominent and active than portrayed by twentieth-century historians, the power of US colonialism increased in the early 1900s (Silva 2004). In spite of this, Hawaiian surfers refused colonial categories that emphasized Native passivity. In fact, they directly fought against those who authored such colonial discourse. In resisting haole elites, Hui Nalu surfers defied and subverted colonial boundaries placed on Hawaiian men. But these Hawai-

ians were not merely fighting colonial discourses; they were fighting for Hawaiian autonomy in the surf. In essence, the conflict between the two clubs was a continuation of the political battle that had taken place on land a few years earlier. But this battle had a different outcome. As Outrigger annexationists were unable to snatch this Hawaiian space from the firm grip of Hui Nalu surfers in the early 1900s, Hawaiians continued to reign in the po‘ina nalu.

BEACHBOYS: PUSHING WOMEN AND BOUNDARIES

Starting in 1915, Hui Nalu surfers opened lucrative beach concession businesses in Waikīkī. Through these concessions, Hui Nalu surfers found regular and profitable work and became known as Waikīkī beachboys. The beachboys were lifeguards, bodyguards, instructors, entertainers, and tour guides for visitors in Waikīkī. For a relatively high price, they took customers out into their Waikīkī surf to ride waves on canoes and surfboards. One beachboy recalled, “[You] could make as much as five dollars a day. Oh, boy, was that big money. . . . We go out and catch three waves. But we fill the boat up with as much as six paying customers. Six dollars!” (Oral History Project 1985, 17). By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the beachboy concession evolved into a bigger business, catering to higher-paying customers, as some beachboys became constant companions/tour guides for visiting families and made very good money. Louis Kahanamoku explained, “Us boys would go down the ship. And we’d buy leis for them. . . . We come out of there, twenty, thirty, forty bucks by the time we got out” (Oral History Project 1985, 871).

Waikīkī beachboys were revered not only because of their keen knowledge of surfing, canoeing, fishing, and the ocean in general, but because they added flair to their skills. The typical Waikīkī beachboy was also a comedian who occasionally surfed in outlandish costumes or played practical jokes on visitors. As the tourist spotlight pointed on them, they shone. Whether surfing with a dog on a surfboard like Joseph “Scooter Boy” Kaopiki, or riding a surfboard while seated on a beach chair and playing an ‘ukulele like John “Hawkshaw” Paia, the beachboys were performers.

As they flaunted their surfing and social skills, they became local superstars who attracted more than just money. White girls and women flocked to the beach to learn to surf from the Hawaiian beachboys. “In those days,” recalled Louis Kahanamoku, “especially the haole wahines [women], they

all went for the beach boys” (Oral History Project 1985, 870). The beachboys were known for wooing various types of haole women—divorced women, wealthy women, showgirls, and daughters of wealthy visitors. Joe Akana said that parents would drop their daughters with the beachboys, saying, “Take them around Waikīkī.” He also remembered showgirls like Carmen Joyce, Hazel Guerrero, and “Peaches” Jackson of the Danny O’Shea Troupe. When these women came to Waikīkī in 1924 and 1926 they not only were shown a good time, but also ended up marrying beachboys: Hazel married Hiram Anahu, Carmen married Joe Akana’s brother, and “Peaches” married Tony Guerrero. Although most women saw the beachboys as romantic surfers, several haole men considered them “a bunch of lazy male prostitutes who made their living off mainland divorcées” (quoted in Timmons 1989, 17).

The beachboys impressed the ladies in Waikīkī by surfing with them on the same waves. When teaching women to surf, the beachboys preferred to ride tandem, or share the same surfboard (photos 1 and 2). Often, they would lift women on their shoulders and glide together across the glassy, turquoise waves. Louis Kahanamoku explained that the beachboys especially liked to surf with girls on their shoulders because tandem surfing invited exciting and intimate maneuvers (Oral History Project 1985, 863). While paddling back out for another wave some beachboys would ride up on haole girls’ ‘ōkole (behinds) as they lay faced down on the front of their surfboards. Another beachboy recalled teaching a client’s daughter to surf: she was a “Nice, cute girl, oh God. Nice figure and everything. And she liked me. We got along swell. We joked and we have fun surfing. After I get her on my shoulders and the wave dies off, I push—I grab her legs like that and throw her off in the water like that” (Oral History Project 1985, 46).

After the sun went down the beachboys swept haole girls off their feet with music and sharp outfits. Most beachboys were gifted singers who played an array of instruments and wore tuxedos. Joe Akana said, “You never heard anybody sing until you hear the old beachboys. They used to habituate the Moana pier on Sunday nights. And people used to wait for ‘em, you know, on Sunday nights. The pier used to be so crowded, you’d think it would go down” (Oral History Project 1985, 20). On other nights they congregated at the beach, the pier, or the stone wall in the evenings to sing, dance hula, and play ‘ukulele. Beachboy songs, like traditional Hawaiian music and dance, were often seen as seductive. The lyrics of one beachboy song is typical:

Won't you
Come teach me
How to swim,
How to swim
I'd like
To swim with you.
I'd like
To have you hold me.



PHOTO 1. Tandem Surfing in Waikīkī. Reproduced courtesy of Bishop Museum.

And that's all
You need to do.
Won't you
come teach me
How to swim, How to swim.
'cause I don't want
To swim alone. (Oral History Project 1985, 52)

In the second verse they would substitute “how to swim” with “how to surf,” in the third verse “how to ‘ami” (a hula move where the dancer rotates and sways at the hips), and the fourth verse was perhaps too explicit for Akana to say during the interview; instead, he burst into laughter and said, “Oh God. Oh, gee” (Oral History Project 1985, 52).

After finishing their music gigs on the pier, at the hotels, or on the beach, the beachboys were escorted home by seemingly mesmerized females. One beachboy explained, “When the moon was up and the pier music was going on, Oh God. When the thing broke up at night, when it was all over, one beachboy he went this way, one went this way with his wahine, and they all go in their different directions. (Laughs) Oh, chee. Boy” (Oral His-



PHOTO 2. Beachboys surfing in Waikiki in the early 1900s. Reproduced courtesy of Bishop Museum.

tory Project 1985, 20). As seen in the following story where William “Ox” Keaulani took a girl out for a midnight tandem surf, some beachboys even returned to the ocean for their moonlight after-parties.

It was a warm summer night, and as they paddled out into the darkness on his tandem board, Ox surreptitiously slipped off his bathing suit. Out near the reef, they caught a small but well-formed wave. When Ox told the woman to stand up on the board, she stood up. Suddenly, she turned and saw him, framed in the moonlight. “Ox!” she screamed, a look of horror and excitement crossing her face. “It fell off!” he shouted, laughing above the roar of the surf. Then, putting his arms around her waist and pulling her close, they rode the wave toward shore. (quoted in Timmons 1989, 17)

Through such interaction, Waikīkī beachboys violated social expectations of an American society governed by anti-miscegenation laws, and threatened haole hegemony by conquering women, whom haole men considered their “property” (Pascoe 1999). But this also highlights the fact that Hawaiians contested such “property,” especially women to whom surfers had access. In many ways, sexual encounters with white women in the surf became an identity marker for these men, as it meant they too could participate in engendered conquests. However, such Hawaiian conquests were rare and point to the unique nature of the surf and the Hawaiian men who reigned there. While the tourist industry promoted the islands as a woman to conquer (Desmond 1999; Trask 1993), the opposite was not the case. Thus, these Hawaiian men were not playing into or accommodating tourist expectations of sexual conquest; they were defying them.

A similar contestation can be seen in tensions between beachboys and haole military men in their Waikīkī boarder-land. Prior to World War II, the Hui Nalu/beachboys got into several brawls in Waikīkī with haole soldiers, many of whom were stationed at nearby Fort DeRussy.¹⁵ One Hui Nalu surfer, who was a resident of the Kālia area of Waikīkī and a Kahanamoku relative, explained that drunken soldiers stationed at the fort would often trample through the yards of Hawaiian families in Kālia, yelling and often passing out on their lawns (Oral History Project 1985, 532). As drunken young soldiers caroused, trespassed, and chased Hawaiian girls, Hui Nalu surfers confronted them. According to Akana, fights between Waikīkī Hawaiian surfers and US servicemen were common because the soldiers were “cocky people” who “came down in our

neighborhood and sometimes got nasty with our girls.” He continued, “so we always protected our girls” (Oral History Project 1985, 11). By most Hawaiian accounts, the soldiers were easy opponents, soon vanquished.

In one such account, Hui Nalu surfers trampled a group of German sailors from the cruise liner SS *Great Northern* in Waikīkī. After eighteen to twenty of the all-German crew marched down Kalākaua Avenue, they provoked a fight with Hui Nalu surfers. Louis Kahanamoku said that once they approached the Hawaiians, “The head guy gave a whistle. He yells, ‘Charge!’ But we were ready. And we were fast. Bam. Bam. Bam. The whole thing happened so fast. Pretty soon the head guy gave another whistle, Retreat!” (quoted in Timmons 1989, 30). According to this account, the soldiers retreated because the Waikīkī surfers had overcome the Germans. Though Hui Nalu surfers were generally characterized as lovable and generous Hawaiians, they protected themselves and their beaches with bravado when necessary.

While Hawaiian surfers often justified these fights as acts of protection, their motives appear paradoxical—since many whites may have had the same motive. While such protective acts, on both sides, were reciprocal acts, linked with preserving “their women,” Hawaiian surfers still wanted to have access not only to Hawaiian women but also to haole women, a sexual privilege usually presumed by haole men. As Hawaiian surfers defined themselves as both protectors and conquerors of women, their identifications flowed on an unusual current, challenging colonial presumptions and even arrogating such privileges to themselves. Few other Hawaiian men defined themselves in this way in the early 1900s. The po‘ina nalu was indeed a unique place.

CRASHING OVER BOUNDARIES AND ACADEMIC MODELS

Hawaiian surfers, and the beachboys in particular, thus subverted colonial representations of Hawaiian men as passive and submissive; but their story also complicates scholarly arguments about media and tourist representations of Native Hawaiians. Over the last two decades, scholars like Haunani-Kay Trask, Elizabeth Buck, Houston Wood, and Jane Desmond have rightfully criticized the commodification of Hawaiian culture and the sexualization of Hawaiian women by the tourist industry (see Trask 1993; Buck 1993; Wood 1999; Desmond 1999).¹⁶ Most effectively, Trask argued that the tourist industry uses sexualized images of Hawaiian women to

promote the myth that Hawaiians are “happy” and inviting Natives. She claimed this was not only a ploy to entice visitors, but to “disparage Native resistance” (Trask 1993, 53).

In this, Island women are seen as heterosexually alluring to white men, while Native Hawaiian men are airbrushed out of the picture. Analyzing early twentieth-century images of Hawaiians on postcards and stereoscopes, Jane Desmond noted that “Native Hawaiian males were rarely pictured, and when they were, almost never with Hawaiian women” (1999, 47). The reason for this, she concluded, was that the Hawaiian male disrupted the tourist industry’s “ideal native” equation: Hawai‘i = woman = sexual availability.¹⁷ More recently, Ty P Kāwika Tengan and I have separately argued that Hawaiian men have been repeatedly emasculated through Euro-American media. Such representations helped to justify colonial dominance and maintain the idea that Hawai‘i was a place of white male consumption—the US military and the tourist industry being the primary utensils for this feast (see Tengan 2003; Walker 2005). Although these views have some truth, the Waikīkī beachboys do not fit this representation. Rather than emasculated or invisible, the Hawaiian surfers were sexually alluring, manly, and actively responding to the changing society around them.

While acknowledging the beachboys as unique and thus complicating a view of Hawai‘i as feminized by conquest, Desmond offered an inadequate explanation. She accurately noted that representations of these Hawaiian men were uncharacteristic—especially because of their intimate access to wealthy Caucasian women during a time when miscegenation laws reigned in the United States. Because of this, she called the beachboys “striking” (1999, 122). After briefly discussing the beachboys’ popularity and their visible romances with white women, and how they were so often described as masculine, “bronze athletes,” she rightly argued that unlike other Hawaiian men, the beachboys were depicted as “strong, competent, completely in control of the situation” (1999, 124–125). However, instead of conceptualizing these men as Hawaiians who had broken out of the cage of colonial discourse, she concluded that such representations reflected a tone of “celebratory primitivism,” and that because surfers were seen as “at one with the forces of nature” in these portrayals, they were “akin to the hula girl” and became objects of tourist desires (1999, 125). Unable to fit them into her model of “ideal natives,” she concluded that Hawaiian surfers were simply being used by white women to “‘go native’ in a limited way” (1999, 126). Although she recognized that the

beachboys were represented as empowered and sexually attractive men, she concluded that they were seen as sexually soft, primitive, and thus nonthreatening. Ultimately she erroneously lumped together empowered beachboys with images of disempowered sexualized women, saying that “by the 1930s the hula girl and the beachboy had become prototypical icons of the tourist industry’s version of this utopian vision” (1999, 129).

But just like the real “hula girls,” the beachboys were not lifeless objects laid out on a pūpū (hors d’oeuvre) platter for tourist consumption. From Desmond’s perspective, perhaps peering toward the surf from the shore (as in the canonical photos of the period), one might see bronzed bodies as models of “commodified performative practices” (Desmond 1999, 130). But gazing from the opposite direction, we can see that this was not so. They were pleasure seekers, romancers, athletes, watermen, Hawaiians. These Hawaiian surfers did not fall into the submissive, “ideal native” category prescribed by Desmond. As she recognized, they defied the usual portrayals of Hawaiian men as passive, nearly invisible Natives. Instead of forcing them into a model that insists on the hegemonic power of colonial discourse over Hawaiians, I argue that there are examples, like the beachboys, where Native peoples successfully forged their own identities in opposition to colonial categories. Rather than being exploited victims of tourism and sexually soft primitives, the beachboys were empowered agents who challenged, rather than bolstered, common stigmas and defied restrictive haole categories.

Despite racist American laws and people, the Hawaiian beachboys broke barriers. Though noted for their kindness, and their attractiveness to women of various national and ethnic origins, they were also aggressive, empowered, and successful. They also worked to preserve their surfing culture, space, and Hawaiian identities. Instead of sexualized primitives of nature, the beachboys were respected athletes in their aquatic domain. Rather than exploited laborers who commodified their own surfing culture, these Hawaiian surfers operated their own businesses in the 1920s and 1930s as historical agents who made a decent living in Waikīkī, often at the expense of haole.

MALE SURFERS AND THE HUI O HE‘E NALU

Although Hawaiian surfers continued to ride waves in Waikīkī after World War II, O‘ahu’s Westside and North Shore waves became more appealing to Hawaiians—not only because they were larger, but because they were

further away from tourist enclaves. As surfing remained a thriving tradition in the second half of the twentieth century, Hawaiian surfers prided themselves on their *he'e nalu* and continued to advance the sport to new heights.

The increase in surfing pride correlated with a cultural and political renaissance that grew in the islands in the late 1970s. During this time, Hawaiian cultural restoration projects were undertaken in which more people learned to speak the Hawaiian language and dance hula. Called the Hawaiian renaissance, Hawaiian political activism also surged during this time. It was through such activism that a Hawaiian sovereignty movement was later created—where groups sought reparations and political autonomy from the United States (Trask 1993). However, in both the cultural and the political movements, such restoration projects were more often headed by women than by men (but see Tengan 2003).

Throughout much of the twentieth century, several Hawaiian men saw cultural restoration art forms, like the hula, as soft and unmanly expressions of their identity. In 1977, Hawaiian historian and cultural advocate George Kanahale noted that although more Hawaiian men were dancing hula in 1977, in earlier years “no local boy would be caught dead dancing the hula for fear of being called a sissy” (1982, 3). In his work on the Hale Mua of Maui, Tengan explained that starting in the early 1990s Hawaiian male groups, originally called *Nā Koa* (the courageous ones, the warriors) and often based on traditional Hawaiian martial arts training, formed in direct reaction to the perceived feminization of Hawaiian culture (2003, 7–13). While many expressions of Hawaiian culture were seen as unmanly to several Hawaiian men, groups like *Nā Koa* sought to create a space for men in a modern and cultural context.

The *po'ina nalu* was a place where Hawaiian men forged identities prior to, during, and since the twentieth century. At the turn of the last century, surfing was a sport that was cultural, and an activity where Hawaiian male participants were perceived (by others and themselves) as manly. Perhaps because colonial and missionary influence generally stopped at the shoreline, the ocean was one of few places where Kanaka men could feel Hawaiian and masculine. By the 1970s, Hawaiians were not only starting a cultural and political renaissance, but a group of Hawaiian men on O'ahu's North Shore formed an activist organization called the *Hui O He'e Nalu*—a group of Hawaiian male surfers who ardently protested a burgeoning haole community and industry that threatened their North Shore surfing boarder-land (see Walker 2005).¹⁸

CONCLUSION

The po‘ina nalu was (and is) a significant space where Native Hawaiian identities have surged. In the nineteenth century the ocean was a place Europeans and Americans could not colonize with fences and deeds, and a domain in which Hawaiians were seen as masters. During a time when many Hawaiian practices were dismantled, he‘e nalu survived, and the surf zone remained a safe place for Hawaiians. But in the early 1900s it became a contested domain, a place where colonial men challenged Native respite and Native surfers vehemently fought haole over waves, women, and beach properties. Through such interaction and because of their successes, the identities of these Hawaiian surfers were distinctive. Perhaps because Hawaiians controlled the ocean and the waves (unlike the land), they were able to define themselves as empowered agents in colonial struggle. They felt entitled to things both Hawaiian and haole in the surf-zone. Respected and given priority in this Hawaiian domain, they rode on top of a social hierarchy in the ocean. Because of their accomplishments they regularly subverted colonial categories—which insisted on Native passivity and compliance—and asserted anticolonial identities as Hawaiian men. Thus, despite other colonial conquests, the contested surf zone called po‘ina nalu has remained a place where Hawaiian surfers like Kealoha Kaio, Jr, “can feel relaxed . . . you know all the problems that are on land? You can forget about them in the ocean” (Kaio 2002).

Notes

1 However, there were some restrictions for commoners. Commoners were generally not allowed to ride on the same wave as a chief or use a board designed specifically for a chief. Also, a few surfing breaks were kapu, or off limits, to commoners.

2 The kapu was a Hawaiian religious system of laws that promoted balance between the earth, gods, chiefs, and maka‘āinana (commoners). This translated into regulated fishing, eating, and interaction between men and women, and between people of high and low rank.

3 Mary Kawena Pukui explained that many surfers had individualized chants that praised their surfing abilities (1949, 255–256).

4 There were many Hawaiian cultural practices that survived through recuperation and revival; other practices survived through underground preservation efforts.

5 For specific numbers, see debate between Stannard (1989) and Bushnell (1993).

6 She was the daughter of Princess Miriam Likelike, sister of Lili'uokalani and Kalākaua. Her father, Archibald Cleghorn, was of Scottish ancestry and was the governor of O'ahu during Lili'uokalani's reign.

7 As J Kēhaulani Kauanui made clear (2005), the joint resolution was for domestic policy making only, and according to United States law, a treaty was required for such an act. Thus a joint resolution vote in Congress was unconstitutional and illegal.

8 Native Hawaiian surfers George Freeth and Duke Kahanamoku became famous surfers as they traveled outside Hawai'i and showed off their surfing skills to the world. Freeth was hired by Henry E Huntington to hold a surfing exhibition in Redondo Beach, California, to help promote the Redondo–Los Angeles Railway in 1907. Kahanamoku introduced surfing to a variety of American and Australian beaches while he was en route to the Olympic Games of 1912 and 1916.

9 Previously, haole believed they were incapable of learning the Hawaiian sport. This idea was popularized by Mark Twain in the 1860s when he wrote, "I tried surf-bathing once, subsequently, but made a failure of it. I got the board placed right, and at the right moment, too; but missed the connection myself. The board struck the shore in three quarters of a second, without any cargo, and I struck the bottom about the same time, with a couple of barrels of water in me. None but the natives ever master the art of surf-bathing thoroughly" (1981, 523).

10 Sanford B Dole was a descendant of early American missionaries, a leading annexationist, and the first president of the Republic of Hawai'i.

11 Ford said of canoe races, "Crews were organized, and at the regattas, in which both whites and Hawaiians contested, the Outrigger boys were almost invariably victorious" (1911, 144).

12 At first, they called themselves the VLS, for "Very Lazy Surfers" and "Volunteer Life Service."

13 Fred Hemmings, Ben Finney, and others have called the rivalry friendly. However, most older accounts called it an "intense rivalry" (see, eg, Blake 1983, 66).

14 The nickname "Steamboat" had more than one meaning; it was also a direct translation of his Hawaiian last name, Mokuahi.

15 After condemning and confiscating an eighty-acre parcel of land in Kālia, Waikīkī, the US Army built a bunker on that property in 1911. Although they justified their actions by claiming they needed to protect the "Waikiki harbor," it quickly became the army's rest and relaxation center in the Pacific. Called Fort DeRussy, this center was located next to, and on top of, a community of Hawaiian families, and most notable among them was the Kahanamoku family.

16 Others, like Teresia Teaiwa (1994) and Margaret Jolly (1997), have also

argued about the sexualization of women in places like Bikini Atoll and Tahiti. Both Teaiwa and Jolly cogently concluded that the female body became an effective tool for hiding colonial violence.

17 I am not suggesting that tourism's image of women as passive is an accurate view. In Hawaiian mo'olelo, there are many examples of women as empowered agents, even in the ocean surf. The story of Kelea, a female surfer who out-surfed everyone in Waikīkī and eventually became mō'ī wahine (queen) of Waikīkī (partially because of her skills on waves), is one of many examples. (For more about Kelea, see Kamakau 1991, 45–49). It is important to note that surfing has not historically been seen as a man's sport.

18 A few years earlier, the Hawaiian sport previously known as he'e nalu gained global popularity. By the early 1970s a professional surfing industry promoted O'ahu's North Shore as the mecca of the surfing world. As this part of the Hawaiian countryside was increasingly inundated with haole surfers and professional tournaments, Hawaiian surfers organized to preserve North Shore surf for Native Hawaiians. They protested with vigor and successfully maintained their position as chiefs over a Hawaiian surfing village (see Walker 2005).

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Abstract

In this article I argue that the Hawaiian conceptual, cultural, and physical space called po'ina nalu (surf zone) was a borderland (or boarder-land) where colonial hegemony was less effectual and Hawaiian resistance continuous. Through the history of Hawaiian surfing clubs, specifically the Hui Nalu and the Waikiki beachboys, Hawaiian male surfers both subverted colonial discourses—discourses that represented most Hawaiian men as passive, unmanly, and nearly invisible—and confronted political haole (white) elites who overthrew Hawai'i's Native government in the late 1800s. My ultimate conclusion is that the ocean surf was a place where Hawaiian men negotiated masculine identities and successfully resisted colonialism.

KEYWORDS: Hawai'i, history, masculinity, surfing, borderlands, resistance