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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Aloha 'Āina

Dear Editor:

Aloha 'Āina means more than “love of the land.” It’s an epistemological battle cry of modern-day warriors willing to sacrifice their lives for the environment. According to the Hawaiian language and thought, the land is chief, and we the maka’ainana, or commoners, are servants to the land. There is no distinction from the chief that we love and our self-concept. We are one in the same. So, when the local government continuously co-opts privatized corporate development to desecrate the landscape in the name of progress or civilization, we feel it tear into our very bodies. It tears apart our families, rips into our communities, and destroys our lens of purpose and existence in this world.

Hawaiians have endured centuries of coercion, colonization, military occupation, and genocide in this place called paradise. Aloha 'Āina and its engineers, known as kia'i or protectors, have stood against corruption, mismanagement of natural resources, and racist policy that has continued to abuse Hawaiians for decades. Aloha 'Āina is the basis for the deep-rooted commitment of consistently sacrificing our bodies, livelihoods, and mental health in the name of serving our chief, which is the land that bore our ancestors.

Protectors like George Helm personified Aloha 'Āina when the U.S. military used the island of Kaho'olawe as a bombing range in the 1970s; a battle that ultimately ended his life at the age of 27. Decades-long protests, lawsuits, and the protectors' willingness to sacrifice their entire lives for Kaho'olawe resulted in the eventual end of our chief being used as target practice for the U.S. military. This is just one of countless struggles of resistance throughout our history.

Today, we see social media and the Internet allowing Hawaiians to participate in a type of technological and resurgent resistance and empowerment for our families. We are no longer silenced by the shame of generational, religious, and political oppression from stereotypes like “dumb savage Hawaiians.” Kia'i today can live-stream an educational gathering, a spontaneous rally, or document violent use of force against peaceful protectors. Kia'i can post a call to action and see results in real time. Supporters from across the globe can tune in, donate financially, and stay up to date on issues such as racist policy, state level corruption, and collusion between the TMT corporation and Governor David Ige, for example. They can weep with us as we watch our revered and

respected elders zip-tied and taken to jail for peacefully protecting a mountain considered to be our relative.

Aloha ‘Āina exemplifies the Hawaiian Kingdom. But it’s also relevant in addressing climate change and political practices that facilitate planetary destruction for economic gain. There are *kia‘i* who are quite literally willing to die for our land. There are families on Mauna a Wakea from toddler to eighty-plus years old sleeping in forty-degree weather, standing in simultaneous sun, rain, and wind three times a day for protocol. Protocol consists of ceremonial dance, prayer, singing, and gift giving because even when threatened with jail, violence, and desecration we continue to honor the reciprocal relationships between humanity and nature. Aloha ‘Āina welcomes us all. Aloha ‘Āina calls for us to live with higher standards. Join us, share your voice with us, tell us your story, and listen to ours. We are Aloha ‘Āina and we ask you to be too.

Sincerely,
Rosanna Prieto¹

¹ Rosanna Mahealani Prieto is Kanaka Oiwi descendant of Hana, Maui; Ka‘u, Moku o Keawe; and present day Kapālama, Oahu. She is also Jiwere Nudatchi of Red Rock, Oklahoma; Chicana descent of present day Second Ward Houston, Texas; and Rarāmuri of present-day northern Mexico. She is a Master’s in Social Work candidate specializing in Behavioral Mental Health at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work. As a mother to a toddler, daughter of a combat veteran, relative to family members suffering with mental illness, addiction, and overcoming generational poverty, I am emboldened to share my story, reduce stigma, and raise educational awareness.