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*Portrait.* Marie Beltran and Annie Pau

RESISTANCE TO EMPIRE, ERASURE, AND SELLING OUT

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Homeless at home, Marie Beltran and Annie Pau assert their rights to *ea* under the direst circumstances. They, and other Hawaiians who live off the legal and economic grid, represent a profound manifestation of *kū'ē*—resistance—against the U.S. occupation of Hawai'i. But because that resistance derives as much from the culture of poverty as it does from the politics of Hawaiian culture, their stories get lost in a media world that won't accommodate such fine distinctions. In highly competitive corporate media where space typically goes to the highest bidder, the nuances of complicated lives are too inconvenient to unpack. On a good day, claims of Hawaiian independence, if acknowledged at all, are typically perceived by most people as too esoteric to take seriously. When coupled with the tendency to shame or to fear impoverished Hawaiians, it's simpler to portray people like Marie and Annie as being preoccupied with the specter of a lost kingdom, rather than as citizens of an occupied country.

The dearth of Hawaiian representation in media is one measure of the success of the U.S. takeover of Hawai'i. That absence of Hawaiian stories is what motivated me to produce journalism and documentary film. And when I say stories, I'm referring to narratives about dissent. The danger of Hawaiian resistance not appearing in forms of media where most people get the story of Hawai'i is that our absence codes as consent to being American; we appear to want to assimilate, to like being ignored and relegated to the detritus of listservs, YouTube, and public access. Being indiscernible amid a sea of non-Hawaiian people and media, we're inundated with their issues and values, which renders us invisible to, and easily removed by, the dominant, settler society.

The now normalized American social order and economy requires Hawaiians to assimilate or disappear. One common form of the vanishing Hawaiian is evidenced by the ongoing mass desecrations of Hawaiian graves. In my documentary film *Noho Hewa*, Kaleikoa Ka'eo refers to these exhumations as evictions, saying, "Hawaiians, we can get evicted from our own homeland even when we're under the ground." And these *kūpuna* (elders, ancestors) are typically removed to make way for golf courses, resorts, vacation homes, or military expansion. Another example is the disproportionate number of homeless or, as some say, houseless Hawaiians, also linked to the real estate industry and military expansion.



Marie Beltran sits at a picnic table at Mokulé'ia, her ancestral home, where she and her family have asserted their right to remain even after several evictions by police. August 23, 1997.

Hawaiians constitute a little over 20 percent of the population, not counting the eight million tourists who pass through each year, or the thousands of itinerant military personnel. But about 70 percent of the people who live in the margins—along the shores, in cars and vans, in parks, and in the bushes that line highways—are Kānaka ‘Ōiwi, Hawaiian people. Homeless Hawaiians: unwitting warriors, conscripted and thrown onto the front line (possibly the only line) of resistance to the occupation.

Homeless Hawaiians like Marie and Annie exist in nomadic border towns that shift geographically to avoid capture by the occupying force, a.k.a. law enforcement. Their lives are a brutal paradox: they have a genetic and cultural knowledge of belonging, but foreign peoples and institutions have been coveting, undermining, and criminalizing that belonging for two centuries.

#### *Marie Beltran: Ancestral Connections and Settler Removals*

Marie Beltran and her ‘ohana have recently gone to live with one of her grown children in the Nānākuli homesteads. Prior to that, three generations of Beltrons lived for many years at the beach park in Mokulē‘ia, an area on O‘ahu that is their ancestral ahupua‘a (traditional land division). Marie’s tie to that place is so strong that even now she goes to Mokulē‘ia and camps regularly, without asking for a permit from the state.

Like every Hawaiian living out in the open, the Beltrons previously lived in a house. They were renters, struggling to get by on what they earned and occasional support from state programs. But at a certain point it became easier to forgo the struggles of that existence and reach for something else that doesn’t involve the occupying government, beyond the law enforcement arm of it.

To understand why people like Marie choose resistance over assimilation, it’s useful to look at the social, political, and economic milieu through which she and her ‘ohana developed their political consciousness.

Several major historical shifts occurred simultaneously between the mid-1980s and 1990s: the modern Hawaiian sovereignty movement, heavily influenced by postcolonial Pacific movements and the American civil rights movement, spilled into every corner of the Hawaiian community; the state and federal governments were actively seeking ways to co-opt and weaken the movement, one example being the 1993 Apology Resolution (and later, its offspring, the Akaka Bill); and Japanese and U.S. investments in real estate were quickly pricing average working Hawaiians out of the market.

Even as Hawaiians protested tourism and real estate expansion, and the resulting mass desecrations of Hawaiian burials, many who had previously been able to keep a roof while living below the poverty line were going homeless. Although the rhetoric from the Hawaiian intelligentsia was about rights for all Hawaiians, the impact of the

psychological and material oppression informing that discourse was nowhere close to being equally distributed. Neither was the need for true self-determination.

Hawaiians like Marie had a choice: assimilate, like the middle-class Hawaiians who were translating the threat of the sovereignty movement into professional and economic power within the U.S. system; or make the radical decision to insist on their rights to the land and to live as Hawaiians without asking for permission from the occupiers.

There are certain events in our history that we know have been bad for the 'āina (land) and the 'Ōiwi, the most obvious being the arrival of Captain Cook and his syphilitic merry men, Christianity, and the overthrow. But on that list should also be the plantation era and the Great Māhele. These are just two systematic processes that were visited upon the maka'āinana (common people of the land) by haole Christians and Hawaiian converts of the ali'i (chiefly) and privileged classes. Whether they intended to dispossess Hawaiians or not, the privatization of the land has proven to be the most powerful mechanism for Hawaiian removal.

Even though Hawaiians, as a people, have yet to recover from the changes in land use and valuation, many individual Hawaiians obscure the fallout of that history by straddling the fence between being American citizens with class privilege and Hawaiian nationals. Some strut about as if capitalism has improved the quality of Hawaiian life, deploying concepts of ali'i infallibility that could rival the papacy in Rome. And these disingenuous Hawaiians mask their privilege by giving the false impression that it derives from Hawaiian culture and genealogy, when in reality their positions of power and prosperity are granted to them through American values and state institutions.

When Marie and her 'ohana lived at the beach and on the side of the road near the park, she never wavered from her personal commitment to her rights as a subject of the Hawaiian Kingdom. It was a position she raised consistently in the courtroom, whether or not she had legal counsel, often invoking Kānāwai Māmalahoe. Known as the Law of the Splintered Paddle, established by King Kamehameha the Great, it originally protected noncombatants during war, but also gave women, children, and elders the right to sleep near a road if they need to.

Marie's life without a house was somewhat different than Annie Pau's, in that members of sovereignty groups became involved with the Beltrons on a number of occasions and more than once were present with Marie in and out of court. But that political support evaporated because, as Marie explained it, she wasn't willing to agree to one party line of sovereignty politics. While being homeless may be a result of the occupation, it didn't lead Marie to seek membership in any of the many competing sovereignty groups.

Life for Marie and her 'ohana at Mokolē'ia was simple: they collected recyclable cans and bottles; her husband John had the occasional job as a laborer or in construction;



Marie Beltran, her husband, John Keawemauhili, and their 'ohana at their home on Mokulé'ia Beach, August 10, 1997. They flew their Hawaiian flag upside down as a sign of distress and protest against U.S. occupation.

Marie made shell necklaces to sell to tourists who visited the beach. It was a day-to-day existence, but for Marie it was as close to a traditional Hawaiian life as she could get, actually living on the land and limiting the degree to which she and her 'ohana had to assimilate.

Yet even without "normal" housing, the Beltrons' daily life wasn't that different than that of most people. On a weekday, she woke up her mo'opuna (grandchildren) and got them ready for school. She then showered herself with a hose that was connected to a series of hoses hooking up to a faucet some distance from her camp. She wore a *pareu* and soaped up and rinsed off. The kids collected their homework and books into their backpacks as the school bus pulled into the parking lot. The bus driver stopped first at Marie's van, then at the half-dozen cars scattered throughout the rest of the lot, picking up kids the way he would pick up any child waiting outside a home.

The day I filmed Marie, John, and two of their grown children being arrested for trespassing, they were living on the side of the road about a mile from the beach park entrance. This was about two weeks after they and all the others were evicted from the parking lot and a chain was installed to block the entrance after 7 p.m. Anyone found in the park after that time would be subject to arrest. Marie's family had already been threatened and she talked to me about her fear that cops would come in the middle of the night and kill her. She had a genuine concern about this. The frustration and anxiety Marie and her family suffered was juxtaposed with a clear understanding of ancestral, aboriginal rights to live in Mokulē'ia, and their right as Hawaiians under Hawaiian Kingdom law to live in a public area.

On the day of the arrest I witnessed, as they were handcuffing her husband and son, and then herself and her daughter, Marie's mind was clear about what the state was doing to her and exactly what she was standing for. She said, "They want me to be afraid of them, but I'm not gonna be afraid of them no more, for who I am and for who my ancestors are."

After they were carted off to jail, it took the police and the tow truck operators about ten minutes to confiscate all of Marie's belongings. All that was left behind was a cooler, a plastic chair, some odds and ends, and a bicycle. The removal happened so quickly that when it was over it was as if Marie and her family had never been there. (This scene appears in *Noho Hewa*.) Now when I see what looks like an abandoned bike or ice chest on the side of a road, I imagine that moments before I drove past a family was living there that was either evicted or arrested.



Annie Pau was living in the Hale'iwa Boat Harbor parking lot at the time this photo was taken in 2011. Months later, she died of a stroke during one of the Honolulu Police Department's sweeps of homeless people from public parks and streets, in preparation for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders' conference on O'ahu in November 2011.

### *Annie Pau: Military Expansion and Ethnic Cleansing*

In Hawai'i, military and nonmilitary are partners in the theft and decimation of Hawaiian land and resources. Every single day the occupiers' housing and material needs are met as countless Hawaiians go homeless, and even larger numbers of Hawaiians live their lives on the verge of becoming homeless. Hawaiians are terrified of ending up under a blue tarp on the beach or pushing a shopping cart down King Street. That fear, itself a form of oppression, keeps Hawaiians from taking on the system that causes Hawaiian homelessness in the first place. It's humiliating because it silences us to such an extent that we don't even talk about it with each other. It's this silence that makes us cowards, though, not the violence of the oppressor. And as we agree to remain silent, we are further divided as a people into Hawaiians living in squalor and those striving to achieve assimilated glory.

Annie Pau was living in a tent on the Wai'anae Coast with her husband, John, and their two dogs in August 2008 when we first met. I was looking for an interview subject for an Al Jazeera show and she was kind enough to agree. Our first introduction took

place at Starbucks on Farrington Highway, which felt like meeting at colonizer central, but we had to meet someplace and it was the easiest thing to do at 6 a.m. on a Sunday. Annie's camp was across the road and about half a mile down at a place called Sewers. It's actually Luualalei Beach Park, nicknamed Sewers because it stinks from the nearby sewage treatment facility.

Having resided in a rental unit nearby for years, and admittedly not having sympathy for the homeless people she saw on the beach, Annie and John were evicted after their landlord raised the rent. By 2003, the largest military expansion in Hawai'i since World War II was underway, which included a huge influx of new military personnel, even though the existing military housing was not enough to accommodate them. To compensate for the housing shortfall, the Department of Defense took over the rental market by allocating rental stipends of up to \$1,300 per month to personnel willing to live off base (that number is \$2,000 and higher now). That meant that apartments that were \$700 a month, already very competitive in a tiny housing market, skyrocketed to \$1,300 overnight. Annie and others were literally shaken loose from their homes. In Wai'anae, where the poverty rate is already higher than on the rest of O'ahu, the alternative was to live on the beach. My friend Jamaican filmmaker Esther Figueroa calls it "ethnic cleansing by real estate."

Indeed, the high cost to rent on O'ahu is subsidized, and the poverty of people like Annie is manufactured, by the American system of economy, policies, laws, and weaponry. And the military's foray into the real estate market took place simultaneously with a new wave of Americans buying or building second homes in Hawai'i. In the span of just a few years, former tourists who would ordinarily stay in hotels, and military personnel who customarily lived on base, were creating an ugly and permanent spike in Hawai'i's property values reminiscent of what transpired in the 1980s.

Although it's an unpopular and inconvenient reality check, occupiers aren't just military personnel or haole people we hesitate to consider as locals because we hold their whiteness against them. Every non-Hawaiian in Hawai'i is an occupier and a settler, and many have profited for generations from the U.S.-backed overthrow and what followed. That event developed into the fraudulent annexation to accommodate the American war and genocide in the Philippines and every war the United States has waged or threatened to wage since.

In a place where the finite supply of land and water is visible to the naked eye, the U.S. takeover enabled subsequent settler policies and laws that are designed to stabilize the military occupation and commercial exploitation of these resources. So the entrenched military presence is in partnership with the settler-occupier population. It's a lovely, symbiotic relationship—send in the cavalry to secure a perimeter and after that it's all real estate, pilgrim. Add to that a willing class of Hawaiian gatekeepers and sellouts and the demise of anything that even resembles Hawaiian self-determination



is inevitable no matter how many as-yet unenforceable international laws of occupation we invoke.

Like Marie, Annie's choice was born out of economic necessity and a deep sense of political and cultural agency. But Annie's resistance was also about choosing between sanity and insanity and organizing her life between degrees of oppression.

One of Annie's strongest character traits was her pride. But she did talk once about how a sibling forced her out of the Nānākuli homestead house that had belonged to her mother, and that she had expected to live there with John. It sounded like typical pilikia (trouble, problem), the kind that lots of us have likely experienced. Thing is, when the trouble happens inside an 'ohana where some members are barely getting by, the damage can be irreparable.

And while the journalist part of me wanted to press her about other means, such as financial support, whether from her or her husband's siblings, or their adult children, I would have been ashamed; it would be like framing her life through the standard, cherry-picked "Hawaiian value" of 'ohana, just one in a series of magic-native culture-screws thrown at downtrodden Hawaiians.

Annie and John could have entered a shelter, but they would have had to give up their dogs, and as she put it, "They aren't just dogs—they're like my children." For Annie, going into a shelter would have constituted another form of misery, and why trade one misery for another that would hurt more than the one she already knew intimately? Another matter was that she would not have passed the drug test imposed as a condition of entrance to some programs and shelters. Her husband was a medical marijuana user and she said, "Sometimes he asks me to smoke with him. . . . I'm not gonna say no."

To an indifferent observer these seem like small things to forfeit, and the expectation is that an indigent person has no right to prioritize emotional wellness and mental clarity ahead of material needs. On the day Ed Greevy shot the photo of Annie that appears here, Annie told me what, in addition to the matter of her dogs and the occasional toke, kept her out of the system: "I was born Hawaiian, but that was taken away by America. As an American I have my rights, whether the police do things legally or illegally. Civil rights, I don't have. Only ones who have freedom are politicians and companies. They can rewrite laws for their clans, the corporations. We [homeless Hawaiians] are discriminated against. They label us homeless, not disabled [both John and Annie have serious medical conditions]. I don't have food stamps, I have SSI \$225 a month. John has Social Security, \$412 a month." Her understanding about class structure included the belief (or fact) that laws exist to further oppress people like her, while helping people who already have the advantage.

Why is it everybody that's rich getting richer, richer, richer? And look at that cop who had the DUI, all he got was a slap on the wrists. Only the poor pay. John got

a ticket and because he has Social Security income he had to pay the ticket. If every government official, like, stand there in front of me and take the drug test, I will. But in the [homeless shelter] system you go into lockdown. They not giving us help. They gotta lock us up to help us? It's like a concentration camp. Where is OHA? Where is Hawaiian Homes? They should step in and help Hawaiians like us. I don't believe in nonprofits—they all profiting.

I said, "Okay, Annie, you've established that the system is corrupt. How do you move past that realization and get your needs met?" Her answer: "I can't. I won't. I stay right here. That way I have my sanity."

Annie equated government corruption with the individuals who participate in the running of it, and her choice not to enter the government's system was how she kept her sanity. She referred to it several times and I realized that for her, no matter how challenging it was to stay healthy and safe living on the edge, this was the most dignified way she could be, given the economic constraints. Being personally self-determining, with or without international recognition, was something Annie needed more than a roof or a flag.

### *Courage, Class, and Consistent Resistance*

Like many Hawaiians, Marie and Annie chose to exercise their right to self-determination without permission from the state apparatus that steals full time from Hawaiians. Organized Hawaiian political events and marches, on the other hand, never take place without first being sanctioned by the state with a permit. There was more law enforcement on hand to arrest Marie and her family than I've ever seen at any rally or march, even when those events were attended by thousands of Hawaiians. Which begs the question: Why are four homeless Hawaiians who live in an isolated part of O'ahu more of a threat to the state than thousands of Hawaiians marching, chanting, and speechifying for their rights?

Although *ea* is something Marie and Annie strived for in their lives, the poverty that forced them to take a stand is just hard, ugly, and despairing. Yet many people are confused by the dignity and political consciousness of Hawaiians like them and are eager to view homelessness as a lifestyle choice rather than resistance to empire.

The respective struggles of these women to survive without housing span many years, and their refusal to enter into the poverty industrial complex has meant having to challenge and subvert the occupier daily. In so doing they make the state give up the one thing the state truly cares about: money. It's expensive to monitor, harass, evict, and arrest Hawaiians. When Hawaiians deprive the state of money, while exercising their rights as Hawaiians, that's an act of *ea*.

Conversely, a self-proclaimed pro-independence Hawaiian professor, whose middle-class life is funded by the state, once said to me that paying taxes to the government is the right thing to do because even if the kingdom were the governing entity, taxes would still be required for roads and other infrastructure. To use that economic, class advantage to subvert the state never enters into the minds of privileged Hawaiians. They'll talk sovereignty as long as it doesn't interrupt their lives.

Frantz Fanon says, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, "The unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness, and, let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishaps."<sup>1</sup> It's an apt statement that applies to us.

By any standard of economic power, be it global or local, one group of Hawaiians is living in the first world, while the other lives in the third. Whether they already are, or are standing in line to be, CEOs, politicians, directors in the nonprofit industrial complex, or members of the academic elite, many in the Hawaiian intelligentsia identify more with the occupiers than they do with Hawaiians like Marie and Annie.

Ea means sovereignty. But isn't working for the entity whose first order of business has always been to contain, subvert, and end Hawaiian sovereignty the opposite? Hawaiians can't indigenize state institutions, but the state can certainly institutionalize Hawaiians, because rather than build the infrastructure of a sovereignty movement, first-world Hawaiians are busy shoring up the institutions of the occupier. Audre Lorde was right: the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.

Too many Hawaiian academics and nonprofit industrialists benefit from the occupation, so they're not inclined to do more than talk about international laws and nationhood. Or they preach a philosophical alignment with indigeneity, but back it up with no political action even though throughout the world indigenous peoples are putting their lives on the line to save their respective homelands and cultures daily. Politely coifed discourse about our rights instead of demands for a liberation generations in the making; published words on paper that lead to paychecks from the state instead of inspiring a resistance movement. Doctorates and law degrees have academicized Hawaiian sovereignty, pressed it like a flower between the pages of a book written by the state. Twenty years ago, the Hawaiian sovereignty movement was palpable. Today, any actual physical resistance to the occupiers is left to the most vulnerable Hawaiians, the most impoverished, those who have no choice but to hold their ground.

There's a scene in a play called *The Lion in Winter* where Geoffrey and Richard believe they're about to be executed by their father, King Henry II. Richard stands up, pulls himself together and says, "He's not going to see me beg," and Geoffrey says, "You fool, as if it matters how a man falls down." Richard's reply is, "When the fall's all that's left, it matters a great deal."

Courage isn't showing up to a staged protest for a few hours, or parading down

Kalākaua Avenue wearing uniform red shirts, chanting “I Kū Mau Mau.” Courage is standing up for what’s right even when you’re broke and afraid. Hawaiians like Marie and Annie live in that space of courage. Every time they confront the American system, they knowingly, intentionally, and unapologetically risk everything. They put themselves on the line, and by doing that they, not their oppressors, define themselves. Theirs is the most consistent resistance to the occupation and the most unambiguous manifestation of ea I’ve witnessed as a journalist in more than a decade.

### Notes

Annie Pau died on August 6, 2011. She had suffered a stroke and collapsed in the dirt outside her van the night before. Annie was koa wahine (a woman warrior), a strong voice of the disenfranchised maka’āinana, and a soulful resister of empire and complicity. She is missed, loved, and forever appreciated, and she was honored to be included in this book.

1. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 148.