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‘Ai Pono Project:

Educating the Next Generation of Farmers in Mānoa Valley

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
in Asian American Studies

by

Kathleen Aspillaga Corpuz

2021

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2021

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

‘Ai Pono Project:

Educating the Next Generation of Farmers in Mānoa Valley

by

Kathleen Aspillaga Corpuz

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Keith L. Camacho, Co-Chair

Professor Randall Akee, Co-Chair

The ‘Ai Pono program was established in 2016 to promote food sovereignty in Mānoa Valley by restoring the ‘āina (land or that which feeds) to a lo‘i kalo (wetland taro farm) and practicing traditional and organic mahi‘ai (farmers or the act of farming) methods. This research engaged college students who work with Native Hawaiian farmers from the Kumuola Foundation. I interviewed farmers and college students to measure their knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and their willingness to participate in regenerative practices of farming. By conducting community-based participatory research, I focus on centering Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies to provide a holistic approach for addressing the impact of settler colonialism as well as reclaiming Native Hawaiian and spiritual relationships to ‘āina. Mānoa Valley can serve as a site of analysis regarding the ways in which aloha ‘āina (love for the land and people) may restore the reciprocal relationship between Hawaiians and ‘āina. Furthermore, honoring Indigenous worldviews and governance is necessary to address food sovereignty issues. The student volunteers and mahi ‘ai alike can creatively enrich communities to design their own strategies and solutions for a healthy lāhui (people, Hawaiian nation).

This thesis of Kathleen Aspillaga Corpuz is approved.

Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns

Randall Akee, Committee Co-Chair

Keith L. Camacho, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2021

For my lola and extended family in the Philippines, Hawai'i and beyond

## Table of Contents

Glossary .....	vii
Acknowledgements .....	ix
Introduction: Restoring Traditional Foodways.....	1
Chapter 1: Returning Currents of Aloha ‘Āina.....	18
Chapter 2: Perpetuating ‘Ike Wai .....	41
Chapter 3: Becoming a Life-Giving Tree.....	62
Conclusion .....	84
Appendix A.....	88
Bibliography .....	90

## Figures

Figure 1.....	12
Figure 2.....	42
Figure 3.....	58
Figure 4.....	59



## Glossary

Ali‘i - chiefs

‘Āina – land, that which feeds

‘Aloha ‘āina – love for land and peopl

Ahupua‘a – land division from mountain to sea

Akua – God(s), spirits or deities

‘Auwai – irrigation systems

‘Ai Pono – to eat right

Ea – life, breathe and sovereignty

Hana no‘eau – Hawaiian arts

‘Ike – knowledge

‘Ike Wai – water memories

Kāhuna – master healer

Kalo – taro

Kaona – hidden meanings

Kuleana – rights, responsibilities, obligations

Kumu – teacher

Kumuola – Tree of Life

Kūpuna – ancestors or elders

Lāhui – people, Hawaiian nation

Lau kalo – leaf of the taro

Lo‘i kalo – taro patch

Lōkahi – balance, harmony

Mahi ‘ai – farmers or the act of farming

Maka ‘āinana – common people

Mālama – to care and protect

Mauka – upland, mountain

Makai - ocean

Mele – songs

‘Ohana – extended family

‘Ōlelo no‘eau – phrases, proverbs

‘Olena – turmeric

Pono – just, balanced and righteous

Pua kiele – gardenias

Wapine – lemongrass

Maile Hohono – ageratum or white weed

‘Ulu - breadfruit

Wai – water

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Tongva-Gabrielino Nation and their lands that sustained me during my time at UCLA. Many thanks to the ‘āina and the waters of Mānoa Valley for nourishing our communities: Lua‘alaea, Waihi, Naniuapo, Waiakeakua, ‘Aihualama, and Wa‘aloa.

To my committee, Professor Keith L. Camacho, Professor Randall Akee, and Professor Lucy Burns, your collective care and guidance motivate me to pursue this project. I truly enjoyed and appreciate our time spent in our classrooms and zoom meetings. Keith, thank you for your energy to support my academic journey and willingness to review my work. I benefitted enormously from our discussions and opportunities to deepen my understanding of what it means to be a scholar activist in the Pacific. Kumu Randy, thank you for sharing your important insights as well as affirming my dedication to the organization. Lucy, I am grateful for encouraging me to reflect on my positionality as a Filipinx settler and to creatively explore our shared futures.

Many thanks to those who read drafts of this paper, offering me invaluable feedback, including June Kuoch, Micaella Libunao, Edward Nadurata, Christian Gella and Demiliza Saramosing. I also want to acknowledge my mentors who offered moral support and paved the way to complete my graduate studies: Rod Labrador, Noenoe Silva, Vernadette Gonzalez, Kim Compoc, Candace Fujikane, Jonathan Okamura, May Rose Dela Cruz, JoAnn Tsark, Dean Saranillio, Eryn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, Nenita Domingo and Katherine Achacoso. Salamat to the Asian American Studies Department former and current staff members – Kristine, Greg, Kylin and Wendy. I would like to extend my gratitude to my writing partners Aree, Carl, Christie and Hannah and to fellow study partners along the way in Los Angeles: Josephine, Sam, Pōmaika‘i, Becka, MacKenzie and Luis.

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I am deeply indebted to Kumuola Foundation, the Navales family, Hui 'Imi Waiwai, and Atherton YMCA family. Mahalo nui loa for talking story with me and allowing me to work with all of you. I appreciate all the student volunteers who shared and entrusted me their feelings and experiences at Mānoa. I hope that we will continue to aloha 'āina together. I cannot extend enough thanks to my friends in Kalihi who drove me around the island to conduct my research and to pick me up from the airport. Finally, agyamanak to my parents and brother, Anthony Kyle who continuously give me such joy and love. It is an honor to work alongside all of you.

## Introduction: Restoring Traditional Foodways

In the quiet neighborhood of Mānoa Valley, a green and lush forest can be found just past a bridge over the free-flowing Waihi and Lua‘alea streams. The “no trespassing” sign marks the entrance where student volunteers can walk around the gate and be immediately immersed in mud. After a ten-minute hike up the road, an open tent can be seen with plastic tables set up in the middle. Boxes of gardening gloves, boots, and mosquito repellants were neatly tucked under the tables. To the left of the tent was a huge Matson container and a congregation of bamboo and albizia trees. The sound of water from the Lua‘alaea stream flowing through the lo‘i kalo (taro patches) echoed around the area. Once again, my friends and I have gathered at Kumuola Foundation in October 2020 several months after the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had reached the island of ‘Oahu.

This project examines contemporary experiences of Kanaka Maoli or Native Hawaiian farmers and their values and practices in restoring ‘āina (land, that which feeds). The question that drives this work is: How do Kanaka Maoli cultivate and sustain ‘āina-based relationships between student volunteers and the ‘āina in contemporary times? While the United States remains reliant on the occupation and control of the Hawaiian Islands through settler colonialism, Kanaka Maoli and their allies are leading the efforts for the collective renewal and continuity of their Indigenous beliefs, culture and livelihoods.<sup>1</sup> More Indigenous peoples in places like American Sāmoa, Guam and Puerto Rico also actively organize around issues

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<sup>1</sup> Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, “Introduction,” in *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land and Sovereignty* ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Ikaika Hussey and Erin Kahunawaika‘ala Wright, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 12.

affecting their people and nations.<sup>2</sup> This work is informed, as well, by a broader body of knowledge about social movements and by the Native Hawaiian values of aloha ‘āina (love for the land and its people), healing and regenerative actions.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the thriving sovereignty movement in Hawai‘i, I had multiple opportunities to collaborate and engage with Native Hawaiian scholars and community members. Wright and Balutski in their essay “Ka ‘Ikena a ka Hawai‘i: Toward a Kanaka ‘Ōiwi Critical Race Theory” offer a framework for settlers like myself to incorporate a self-reflexive and praxis-oriented approach toward academic research.<sup>4</sup> They emphasize that the actions of a student researcher evoke purpose and integrity, and that the contributions of a student researcher remain transparent and relevant for the community of participants involved. In reflecting on my personal journey for this project, I am aware that my positionality as a Filipinx scholar is one that acknowledges the sacredness of the Mānoa Valley. Therefore, I frequently ask for continual guidance from the community participants (the aunties, uncles and student volunteers) as well as listen to their stories and experiences in order for us to weave our connections to the ‘āina. My kuleana (rights; responsibility) is to pay close attention to the needs of the community and support what they perceive is important because I value the development of our long-term relationships.

As we waited under the tent, Pauline Kaiwi Navales or “Aunty Kuki,” one of the Native Hawaiian farmers deliberately introduced herself while handing out our gardening tools. She also reminded us about the history of the Kumuola Foundation. From 2009-2010, Kumuola was

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<sup>2</sup> JoAnna Poblete, *Balancing the Tides: Marine Practices in American Sāmoa*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Noenoe K. Silva, *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen: Reconstructing Native Hawaiian Intellectual Thought*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Erin Kahunawaika‘ala Wright, and Brandi Jean Nālani Balutski. "Ka ‘Ikena a ka Hawai ‘i: Toward a Kanaka ‘Ōiwi critical race theory." In *Kanaka ‘Ōiwi Methodologies*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016), 94.

first established at the International Market Place in Waikīkī as a venue for Hawaiian cultural arts and practices.<sup>5</sup> This all-volunteer 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization then relocated to the Mānoa Valley in 2010, educating people of all ages about food and land sustainability in order to facilitate healthier lifestyles. Kumuola commits to preserving and spreading the traditional Native Hawaiian practices of caring for the ‘āina, indigenous and endemic plants, and people. Thus, the knowledge shared among Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners and farmers laid the groundwork for the resurgence of subsistence farming in Mānoa.

A long-standing relationship between Atherton YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association) and Kumuola Foundation led to this project in 2015. Three of us from the Atherton YMCA student board then began restoring the ‘āina back to lo‘i kalo (wetland taro patch) once a month. Our community service coordinator from Atherton YMCA connected us to Kumuola Foundation because of our general interest in health and environment. It then became a habit for us to talk with the mahi ‘ai (farmers) to propagate native plants that were once abundant in Mānoa. But it was a challenge for us to distinguish between native and non-native plants as well as to remember their healing abilities. To assist us, the farmers required that we speak their Hawaiian names - knowledge and traditions that were passed down from generation to generation since time immemorial. With the help of Aunty Kuki, we decided to lead the ‘Ai Pono project with her family and to educate college students about the importance of traditional and organic farming. Thereafter, student volunteers quickly confronted the reality that it is now our kuleana, namely, our responsibility to share the information we learned with one another.

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<sup>5</sup> Kumuola Foundation, “History,” *Kumuola Foundation*, 2010, <https://www.kumuolahawaii.com/purpose>.

This thesis references the executive members of Kumuola Foundation as mahi ‘ai or farmers based upon the six years I have worked alongside them in striving to grow food and medicine in the valley. Truthfully, they are in every way Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners because they are Hawaiian language teachers, hula dancers and musicians. I use the term mahi ‘ai to reference their ongoing struggle to restore the ‘āina and feed communities in Hawai‘i. I stray away from framing the goals and activities of the mahi ‘ai through a state-rights discourse because they rely on their collective power to mobilize residents into getting their hands back to the ‘āina.<sup>6</sup> While the Board of Water Supply (BWS) is recognized as the state entity that regulates how Kumuola Foundation conducts its activities, the mahi ‘ai enacts self-determination by rebuilding structures that sustain our communities. Current partnership between Kumuola Foundation and Foodland Supermarket also demonstrate their groundwork for economic growth because the mahi ‘ai generate income through the production and distribution of pua kiele (gardenias). In matters of cultural identity, quality of life and community, there are Kanaka Maoli-led organizations such as Ke Ola Mamo and Papa Ola Lokahi that work in tandem with Kumuola Foundation to retain and expand opportunities for the health and well-being of the lāhui (people, Hawaiian nation).

These expressions of continuity are what Corntassel et al. call “everyday acts of resurgence,” which declare for self-determination and sovereignty.<sup>7</sup> Here, Kanaka Maoli are building a set of relationships with students and other farmers that are suited to meet their needs and desires for the future. Growing culturally traditional food also echoes Maile Arvin’s (2020)

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<sup>6</sup> J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Corntassel, Taiiaki Alfred, Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Hokulani Aikau, Noenoe Silva and Devi Mucina, “Introduction,” in *Everyday Acts of Resurgence: People, Places Practices*, eds. (Olympia: Daykeeper Press, 2018), 17.



articulation of regeneration within an Indigenous feminism frame because the set of actions employed by Kanaka Maoli farmers “seek the return of function, balance or power.”<sup>8</sup> Because settler colonialism further disrupts their abilities to define sovereignty, I recognize their efforts to organize inside and outside of their respective community as a means to assert their political identity as an Indigenous people.<sup>9</sup> They are imparting knowledge that values our collective well-being. Moreover, we, as a group, intentionally destabilize U.S. authority and legitimacy so as to allow allies within the movement to uphold the health of the people and the environment.

### Urbanization and Traditional Food Systems

From our conversations with the mahi‘ai, we realized that growing up in urban Honolulu has ruptured our connection with the ‘āina. There is an urgent need for young adults to know where their food comes from as well as the historical processes that shape how food is cultivated. Urbanization and development constantly shape how we interact with the spaces we live in. Our dependence on industrialized food resources, the contamination of streams and beaches and overall environmental degradation can be connected back to the U.S. overthrow, annexation and statehood.<sup>10</sup> Kanaka Maoli were greatly impacted from the overthrow, for it has limited their ‘āina-based practices in their everyday lives. In fact, European missionaries and their descendants weakened the traditional land tenure system. Kanaka elites were forced to privatize land and establish a criteria that Hawaiian commoners were unable to fulfill.<sup>11</sup> With settlers

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<sup>8</sup> Maile Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai‘i and Polynesia*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 21.

<sup>9</sup> Maile Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai‘i and Polynesia*, 15. According to Arvin, settler colonialism is reliant on the domination and exploitation of land. Its power usually operates through economy, law and ideology.

<sup>10</sup> Dean Itsuji Saranillio, *Unsustainable Empire: Alternative Histories of Hawai‘i Statehood*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2018), 8.

<sup>11</sup> Kauanui, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex and Colonial Politics of State Nationalism*, 83.

controlling the majority of the land and spreading diseases, many Kanaka Maoli did not retain ownership title of their ancestral lands.<sup>12</sup>

Often referred to as ‘Āina Momona (succulent land, rich, and fat with food), ‘Oahu was home to loko i‘a (fishponds) and valleys filled with lo‘i kalo (wetland taro) about 800 years ago.<sup>13</sup> We must contend with the fact that the U.S. empire transformed the relationship of Indigenous people with the environment and other beings with which they share their lives. More specifically, land dispossession compelled Native Hawaiians “to live in areas that lack healthy food retail outlets and face higher rates of nutrition-related chronic diseases, such as childhood and adulthood obesity, type II diabetes, and cardiovascular disease” compared to Chinese, Japanese and whites.<sup>14</sup> These negative health outcomes suggest the reconfiguration of food systems that can disentangle the impacts of settler colonialism. In the future, the mahi ‘ai aspire to improve our reliance on for food sourcing and retailing by local communities. Fruits and vegetables that come from the farm may impact health because they do not use pesticides or chemicals; involve less handling and contact with machinery; retain beneficial nutrients because of minimal processing; contain few additives; and represent culturally appropriate food.<sup>15</sup>

Further, the mahi ‘ai are determined to fill Mānoa back to its abundance of food and medicinal plants. They often expressed the cultural significance of kalo as a life-giving source for Kanaka Maoli. Author Noenoe K. Silva retells the following:

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<sup>12</sup> Kauanui, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty*, 90.

<sup>13</sup> Candace Fujikane, *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future: Kānaka Maoli and Critical Settler Cartography in Hawai‘i* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 9.

<sup>14</sup> N. Kau‘i Baumhofer and Cherry Yamane. “Multilevel Racism and Native Hawaiian Health,” In *Racism: Science and Tools for the Public Health Professional*, ed. Chandra L. Ford, Derek M. Griffith, Marino A. Bruce and Keon L. Gilbers (Washington DC: American Public Health Association, 2019), 380.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew D. Jones, Lilly Fink Shapiro and Mark L. Wilson, “Assessing the Potential and Limitation of Leveraging Food Sovereignty to Improve Human Health,” 3.

One of the most powerful stories in the Papa and Wākea complex is that of Hāloanaka (a.k.a. Hāloalaukapalili), the kalo, and Hāloa, his younger brother. Hāloanaka is the offspring of Wākea with his daughter, Ho‘ohōkūlani. At birth he resembled a cord rather than a child so they buried him near one of their houses. From the spot grew the first kalo, whom they named Hāloa after the first offspring. Hāloanaka represents the ‘āina and Hāloa is the older sibling to feed the younger, which the ‘āina does with kalo. It is the younger sibling’s kuleana to care for the older, which humans do through mālama ‘āina, or caring for and making productive the ‘āina.<sup>16</sup>

Based on this continuity of belief with their relationship to ‘āina, Kānaka farmers perpetuate their traditional practices for the long-term survival of future generations.

Prominent haole businessmen and officials were not at all interested in preserving the traditional ecological system. In fact, one of the well-known businessmen during the territorial period of Hawai‘i, Benjamin Franklin Dillingham, led the construction of the Ala Wai Canal because of his vested interest in urbanizing Waikīkī.<sup>17</sup> Supposedly, the canal would manage the runoff from nearby streams and prevent future floods. While Dillingham’s Dredging Company threatened the residents and the ecosystem of the area, his intentions were undeniably about domination over the islands.<sup>18</sup> Dillingham planned to accumulate more land and capital in other areas of Honolulu. Dillingham used his connections in the territorial government to collect, reconstruct and sell land to potential buyers who were interested in expanding the tourism industry and the United States military. The construction of the canal exhibited haole settler hegemony in the islands, as well as relocated, subordinated, and exploited non-Haole residents.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Noenoe K. Silva, *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen: Reconstructing Native Hawaiian Intellectual History*, 86.

<sup>17</sup> Gaye Chan and Andrea Feaser. *Waikiki: A History of Forgetting and Remembering*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 103.

<sup>18</sup> Nicknamed as the No.1 Tycoon of the Islands, Dillingham acquired land and destroyed Indigenous food systems throughout the Hawaiian Islands. Sophie Cocke, “Ala Wai Canal: Hawaii’s Biggest Mistake?” *Honolulu Civil Beat*, May 20, 2013, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2013/05/ala-wai-canal-hawaiis-biggest-mistake/>

<sup>19</sup> Gaye Chan and Andrea Feaser. *Waikiki: A History of Forgetting and Remembering*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 102.

This is one of the many examples in which haole settlers mismanaged water and divided ethnic communities from building meaningful relationships with the ‘āina and from each other.

Because Kanaka Maoli remain at the frontlines of this struggle for self-determination, we cannot wait for someone else to solve the inequalities that have been shaped by colonialism and imperialism. As shown earlier, different valuations of land affect the resurgence of Native Hawaiians because settlers want to take part in determining how land should be managed. Desires for the expansion of U.S. imperial control is solidified from former colonial plantations to the founding of capitalist agribusinesses.<sup>20</sup> Their vision of racial capitalism and exploitative economies make it difficult for Hawaiians and their allies to restore ‘āina as they fight systemic forms of erasure within the public sectors of agriculture, education and government. U.S. imperial forces and sugar planters who were involved in the overthrow recruited migrant laborers from Asia and the Pacific.<sup>21</sup> Plantation camps enforced a taxonomy to classify racial and ethnic groups for the expansion of the imperial white hegemonic project of the United States. Indigenous peoples were continually made to suffer in the present as consequences of settler futures.<sup>22</sup>

Today, more scholars and activists are informing the public that growing and consuming food is our collective responsibility.<sup>23</sup> The simple act of creating our food is an expression of freedom or self-determination. We must also understand that our natural resources are crucial in nurturing our foodways; thus, we must manage and respect our environment for the next

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<sup>20</sup> Andrea Brower. "From the Sugar Oligarchy to the Agrochemical Oligopoly: Situating Monsanto and Gang's Occupation of Hawai'i." *Food, Culture & Society* 19, no. 3 (2016): 590.

<sup>21</sup> JoAnna Poblete, *Islanders in the Empire: Filipino and Puerto Rican Laborers in Hawai'i*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Saranillio, *Unsustainable Empires: Alternative Histories of Hawai'i Statehood*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Leah Penniman, *Farming while Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*. (Vermont, Chelsea Green Publishing, 2018), 34.

generation. This perspective has been consistent among communities of color who transfer their skills and knowledge to radically create a different future where food is abundant in order to have a healthy lifestyle.

The traditional ahupua‘a (land management system) is resilient, but politicians and businesses insist in relying on food imports. Further, policymakers and settler institutions left the responsibility to handle the food supply chain to large multinational private food companies. In the case of Hawai‘i, the missionary-descendant Big Five still control banking, utilities, shipping and imports.<sup>24</sup> Disruptions to the food supply chain can be a disaster for communities for it is not a reliable infrastructure for production. Jonathan Okamura (2012) has also pointed out how the democratic revolution of the 1950s challenged the haole elite, but those in leadership roles such as the Japanese remained invested in the corporate tourism-development economy.<sup>25</sup> This shift in power causes ethnic inequality and a stratified class structure where recent immigrant populations (e.g., Filipinos and Micronesians) are greatly affected.<sup>26</sup> Understanding how ethnic relations affect aina-based practices is increasingly becoming important because the underlying structural conditions have not been dismantled.

The impact of an unsustainable economy is likely to grow throughout the next century. Holding onto capital investments in agriculture such as trade policy, price supports and government subsidy will not provide long-lasting solutions for communities who are food

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<sup>24</sup> Brower, “From the Sugar Oligarchy to the Agrochemical Oligopoly: Situating Monsanto and Gang’s Occupation of Hawai‘i,” 592.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Y. Okamura, *From Race to Ethnicity: Interpreting Japanese American Experiences in Hawai‘i*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), 83.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Y. Okamura, *From Race to Ethnicity: Interpreting Japanese American Experiences in Hawai‘i*, 103.

insecure.<sup>27</sup> The task of dismantling the legacy of the capitalist plantation system is a priority for Kanaka Maoli and ethnic minorities who are seeking political autonomy.

Through the commercialization of land and water in Hawai‘i, it has taken lengthy and expensive citizen-initiated litigation to implement the protection of selected areas. For generations now, Kanaka Maoli communities have been working to regain control over their natural and cultural heritage, including fresh water, to rejuvenate both the resources themselves and the thriving culture and ways of life that depend on them. Kanaka Maoli recognized that lush forests and healthy watersheds have abundant rains to feed streams and seep deep into the earth to recharge drinking water supplies. Fresh water flowing down streams and bubbling up as springs, especially in coastal areas, was vital to feed an estuary system where stream and marine life could thrive. Moreover, cultural practitioners understand that the caring for their elder sibling Hāloa by cultivating kalo requires an abundant supply of fresh water to flow through irrigated patches and back into streams. Both student volunteers and Hawaiians acknowledge that Lua‘alea’s stream flows through Mānoa Valley in the lo‘i kalo. These fundamental truths were cultivated through generations of listening and caring for the ‘āina.

### **U.S. Food Industry/Agriculture**

While the food industry and agriculture operate in meeting the demand for food, they still falls short in supplying for individuals and families in a pandemic. According to Huff et al., the long process of delivering food and other farm products to food processors, packagers, markets, and exporters can cause larger systemic issues.<sup>28</sup> They also declared that the U.S. food system is

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<sup>27</sup> Andrea Brower, “From the Sugar Oligarchy to the Agrochemical Oligopoly: Situating Monsanto and Gang’s Occupation of Hawai‘i,” 595.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew G. Huff, Walter E. Beyeler, Nicholas S. Kelley, and Joseph A. McNitt. "How resilient is the United States' food system to pandemics?" *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* 5, no. 3 (2015): 337-339.

not resilient and cannot function to support U.S. residents. As the COVID-19 pandemic shows, individuals who do not have adequate amounts of food stored in their homes become anxious and panic by buying cases of bottled water and low-quality processed canned food.<sup>29</sup> With only a handful of companies controlling the most volume of food, they created barriers for other entrepreneurs who are interested in diversifying the food industry and cannot compete with such large corporations. Government and policymakers also have limited options to stabilize food production and improve food access, availability and affordability. In fact, laborers in the industry are at greater risk of getting sick in a pandemic. Their sickness will cause high levels of absenteeism. They can no longer process, distribute, and sell food, leaving the greater population at higher risk of starvation.<sup>30</sup> For those who have low socio-economic status and identify as ethnic minorities, disruption in the food supply chain can have far-reaching health implications.

Given these circumstances, the Kumuola Foundation highlights the need for residents to build the intergenerational knowledge and skills necessary to leverage themselves out of hunger and obesity-related diseases. The organization also prides itself in welcoming volunteers of all ages across the globe. To date, more than 2,000 volunteers have visited the farm. Atherton YMCA paved the path for college student volunteers in deepening our relationship with the ‘āina and to each other. Emalani Case, a poet, shared that Indigenous peoples and their allies are here “not to hold space, but to hold us down together.”<sup>31</sup> We begin to understand our role in support

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<sup>29</sup> Andrew G. Huff, Walter E. Beyeler, Nicholas S. Kelley, and Joseph A. McNitt. "How resilient is the United States' food system to pandemics?" 340.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew G. Huff, Walter E. Beyeler, Nicholas S. Kelley, and Joseph A. McNitt. "How resilient is the United States' food system to pandemics?." 344.

<sup>31</sup> Emalani Case, “On Being Indigenous in a Global Pandemic,” *It’s Lit with PHDJ*, Ep. 28, 2020, <https://itslitwithphdj.wordpress.com/2020/11/08/ep-128-emalani-case/>

of a thriving Hawaiian nation, for our actions and visions for the future should not be constrained within the fences of colonialism.

Layout of Kumuola Farms Manoa  
3837 Haukulu Rd., Lua‘alaea



Figure 1. Layout of Kumuola Farms in Mānoa featuring lo‘i kalo and Lua‘alaea stream, 2016. Reproduced by permission of Kumuola Foundation.



At a moment when U.S. imperial interventions in the Pacific and elsewhere persist, Kanaka Maoli are revitalizing their culture and connection to ‘āina. More people during these unprecedented times are returning to plant their own food because of prolonged financial and material aid from government agencies and non-profit organizations.<sup>32</sup> Ethnic communities who have the space to grow food are stepping up to revive traditional foodways such as restoring soil and rebuilding waterways. This approach to survival differs from settler colonialism, white science, and technology of agribusiness.<sup>33</sup> Visual culture, specifically, reinforces the white gaze toward farmers and the privatization of water and land. Agribusinesses, as mentioned earlier, are celebrated as heroes along with the machinery of production and the farm workers they possess at their disposal.<sup>34</sup> The picture of the map at Kumuola Foundation shown above is in contrast to the rhetoric expressed by agribusinesses and their media technology. Here, Native Hawaiian farmers assert the innovation of their ancestral farming practices in reshaping the agricultural system in Mānoa. The Navales family jokingly stated to me, “sorry it’s not high-tech, we drew it with crayons.” As we join in the laughter, we realize they employed familiar methods to help students visualize the work ahead. That is, they trusted the students’ capacities to widely disseminate ‘āina-based approaches in their own terms.<sup>35</sup> We can confirm that this partnership is a long journey for both the mahi ‘ai and student volunteers. Clearly, the best technology to dismantle settler colonialism in agriculture is our own bodies and minds. The process of

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<sup>32</sup> Yoohyun Jung, “COVID-19 Is Changing ‘The Face of Hunger’ in Hawai‘i, November 24 2020, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2020/11/covid-19-is-changing-the-face-of-hunger-in-hawaii/>

<sup>33</sup> Curtis Marez, *Farm Worker Futurism: Speculative Technologies of Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2020), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Curtis Marez, *Farm Worker Futurism: Speculative Technologies of Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2020), 6.

<sup>35</sup> Noelani Goodyear- Ka‘ōpua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 83.

rebuilding traditional foodways is complex, and our hope is to empower farmers and students in contemporary times.

## **Frameworks**

Building on the relationships between Atherton YMCA and Kumuola Foundation, this project centers the food sovereignty movement as a guiding framework for reclaiming the health, traditional practices, and the environment for Indigenous peoples. Dawn Morrison (2020), an Indigenous scholar from Canada, explains how food sovereignty addresses the many underlying social and environmental injustices experienced by Indigenous communities in relation to colonial governance structures and processes that negatively affect the ability to respond to the need for healthy and adequate amounts of Indigenous food.<sup>36</sup> A culmination of activism and relationships formed overtime with Indigenous communities can make food sovereignty a viable concept for people who are invested in social and environmental justice. This movement reflects the lived realities of Indigenous peoples and their responses to colonial policies and structures that attempt to limit their ability to declare their futures.

By linking food sovereignty to the demands of working at the farm in Mānoa, we become familiar with the natural environment, analyze the weather, and identify the moon phases to track waterways in the valley. Through the guidance of the mahi ‘ai, student volunteers become aware of their kuleana over time. They can take on tasks given to them and make sense of our personal ties to the ‘āina and the overall food system. Yet miscommunication with the farmers and persistent absence among student volunteers could easily lead to the delay of the project. While every hand is needed in the farm, those who missed opportunities to learn with the mahi ‘ai may

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<sup>36</sup> Dawn Morrison, “Reflections and Realities: Expression of Food Sovereignty in the Fourth World” In *Indigenous Food Systems Concepts, Cases, and Conversations* (2020): 25.

not be given leadership positions in the future. It is necessary for student volunteers such as myself to be held accountable to the conversations that transpired, meaning that we must be prepared with questions to ask in our next gathering and share ideas based on the lessons we learned. Our numbers are growing and we are getting more people back to the ‘āina.

The potential threats of preserving knowledge and remembering characterizes the volunteer work because there are some people who do not return at the farm and they are not obligated to do so. Some people take on altruism as a disadvantage in this project for not having been rewarded monetarily and immediately for their time and dedication. The entirety of this project contrasts with tourism because the knowledge and behaviors gained from the experience of farming are not solely for entertainment. At the Kumuola Foundation, the cultural practitioners and student volunteers catalyzed the food sovereignty movement to honor the Native Hawaiian subsistence practice of growing and providing food for communities. Our collective is slowly providing concrete and actionable steps for the next generation of farmers.

The ‘Ai Pono project showcases Native Hawaiian leadership and their food sovereignty movement. This goes hand in hand with settlers who have been feeling distraught from unsustainable efforts of the occupying state.<sup>37</sup> While we reflect on our histories of struggle in living in the ‘āina, there is opportunity for us to learn from each other so that we can find joy and heal ourselves from the violent remnants of the past. I specifically use Candace Fujikane’s concept of settler aloha ‘āina to describe the work of the student volunteers and myself given the time spent in clearing the land from invasive species, sharing our intentions to make things pono (just, balanced, and generationally secure) with the mahi ‘ai and teaching our own communities

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<sup>37</sup> Saranillio, *Unsustainable Empire: Alternative Histories of Hawai‘i Statehood*, 4.

about the greater struggle of farming in Hawai‘i.<sup>38</sup> This is not to romanticize our efforts to learn alongside the mahi ‘ai because we also have the privilege to attend college and explore their teachings in our field of study. As we cultivate and harvest kalo, mamaki, ‘olena and other medicinal plants, we feel reinvigorated to expand our capacities to support decolonial projects.

This thesis narrates the passion and care involved in reclaiming our place in this movement because Native Hawaiian practitioners have called upon the youth to step up and rebuild structures that feed people. To farm throughout the past six years is an act of refusal against exploitative economic systems and a means to honor the intellectual and physical labor of Indigenous peoples who are improving our futures.

During a typical workday, we arrive at the farm ready to get into teams to learn hands-on farming tasks by doing kalo prep, moving rocks, finding and transplanting huli (kalo planting slips) and sharing what we have learned in our circle. I will reiterate some of the stories shared in our collective by the way of my life experiences as a student volunteer, recognizing that each member of our team has their own equally rich story of continuing this movement. For the harm that may come from the limitations in my perspective, I sincerely apologize. As such, I will do my best to respect the voices of Indigenous cultural practitioners who offer more fluid approaches and narratives.

The organization of this thesis is based upon the themes presented about the purpose of the farm, the life histories of the Kumuola Foundation family, and the role of student volunteers. Within these chapters, I include quotes and statistics from current research to contextualize the actions presented in this narrative. Chapter 1 involves the background of each cultural

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<sup>38</sup> Candace Fujikane, *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future: Kanaka Maoli and Critical Settler Cartographies in Hawai‘i*, 16. In line with Fujikane’s statement, student volunteers are planting seeds with the guidance of the mahi ‘ai continuously to improve our well-being.

practitioner and farmer in the Kumuola Foundation. I pay attention to the places they come from and how that shaped their perspectives as stewards of Mānoa Valley. With particular attention to their methods in teachings, I also highlight their notions of temporality and space based on the activities that student volunteers perform in the farm. This section ends with a discussion of the existing tools such as mele (Hawaiian songs) and technologies that shape their ways of thinking and approaches about community healing.

Chapter two examines at the ‘Ai Pono project as a whole in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restoration of foodways in Hawai‘i. I observe how music guides farming in conjunction with the goals of ‘Ai Pono to provide healing plants for the people. From there, I refer to Native Hawaiian ideologies that are characterized as a place-based ethical framework that support reciprocal social relations between human and the elemental forms present in Mānoa. The concluding section of the chapter explores at the regenerative focus of the farm in everyday practice. The mahi ‘ai provide measurable goals that can meet the demand of working-class people in an economy of abundance.

Chapter three puts the spotlight on six returning student volunteers who are female and gender non-conforming from Atherton YMCA for the expansion of the ‘Ai Pono project. Specifically, I listen to their intentions and their responses to the call for subsistence farming as they embark on their given tasks in our monthly gatherings. Their educational journeys have redirected them back to farm. What is at stake is their own family histories of migration and settlement that they bring and share with the mahi‘ai. I focus on their stories and actions so that we can recognize their potential to heal their relationships to their communities, the ‘āina, themselves, and to each other. They find creative solutions to address the ongoing ecological crisis in the islands.

## Chapter 1: Returning Currents of Aloha ‘Āina

Among the groves of bamboo and tall California grass, there is an abandoned black jeep with broken windows. The placement of this vehicle reminds us of the tenants who once lived in the valley: the new tenants, Kumuola Foundation, lease the land from the Honolulu Board of Water Supply (BWS). While wet conditions in the upper Mānoa Valley make it ideal for farming, it is also difficult to haul large bulky items out of the area. After ten years of clearing albizia, parasol leaf trees, and honohono grass with machines and tools, the mahi ‘ai (farmers) and student volunteers and visitors can now witness the sun rays resting on the lau kalo (leaf of the taro plant). When examining closely the red silty clays near the riverbank, antennas of crayfish can also be found swaying along the wind as they rest their tiny bodies in the mud. Those familiar with the rebuilding of irrigated kalo patches understand the role of water or wai in kalo cultivation.<sup>39</sup> Wai is considered a “helping hand.”<sup>40</sup> For the mahi ‘ai, they carefully dig the soil to create an ‘auwai or an open channel of water engineered to connect the streams to a kalo patch or fishpond. By redirecting the water, the stream brings along nutrients for the wetland kalo such as the Lehua Maoli, Elepaio and Haokea varieties of kalo. This restoration follows what Kānaka have been perpetuating in recent decades in the leased lands of Hawai‘i. These actions showcase Native Hawaiian ingenuity.

Growing wetland kalo informs the relational approach of the mahi ‘ai toward the ‘āina (land, that which feeds) and other natural elements and vice versa. The Kumuola Foundation also understands the cultural significance of the plants and the elemental forces present in the valley. Their activities focus on mālama ‘āina (to care and respect land) and educating students of all

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<sup>39</sup> Katrina-Ann R. Kapā‘anaokalaōkeola Nākoa Oliveira, “Ka Wai Ola: The Life -Sustaining Water of Kanaka Knowledge,” 2014, 73.

<sup>40</sup> Pauline “Aunty Kuki” Navales, interview, March 20, 2021.

ages. This vision was already established before the organization formally formed in 2010. Their website details the journey of the Navales family:

Kumuola Foundation originated from a Hō‘ailona, a message received by both Pauline Kekukiha Kaiwi Navales and husband, Nicholas Jon Navales. The phrase “The Tree of Life” were words shown to them continuously for over a month. Pauline sought the advice of her Kūpuna, Adam Lupi Kaiwi from Kīpahulu Hāna Maui. “The Tree of Life” was translated into Hawaiian as Kumuola. Many kaona, or levels of meaning are present. Kumu means teacher, not only the ones in school but the ones in the environment we grew up in. The Land, Water, Mountains, Oceans, Plants, and most importantly our Family are our Teachers. Ola means Life, and they hold the Keys to Life.<sup>41</sup>

The organization was set on the path of cultural renewal and the assertion of their sovereign right to mālama ‘āina during that year. Knowing the productive advantages of restoring what was given to them, they cultivated and collaborated with students to visit and engage in the activities of the farm. After the lease expired in 2015, BWS then proposed an idea for “the possibility of creating a place-based, hands-on learning area to promote the goals of forest restoration, watershed protection, water conservation and sustainable agriculture.”<sup>42</sup> The institution then conducted an environmental assessment and published its report to determine the impact of constructing a learning center, entitled Hālau Wai Mānoa. BWS proposed to establish a learning center in the Mānoa community focusing on: 1) forest restoration; 2) watershed protection; 3) water conservation; and 4) sustainable agriculture.<sup>43</sup> The findings suggest that “loi kalo will improve water quality in the streams by serving as sedimentation basins to mitigate stormwater runoff and erosion, and the ongoing removal of invasive species and restoration of native forest and vegetation would likewise aid in reducing stormwater impacts while improving water

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<sup>41</sup> Kumuola Foundation, “History,” Kumuola Foundation, 2010, <https://www.kumuolahawaii.com/purpose>.

<sup>42</sup> Honolulu Board of Water Supply, “Hālau Wai Mānoa,” 2020, 145.

<sup>43</sup> Honolulu Board of Water Supply, 2020, 145.

quality.”<sup>44</sup> BWS (2019) acknowledges that Kumuola and its programs have preserved the quality of the water in the area.

Kumuola Foundation had been approved for a five-year lease with BWS, and it became month-month when it ended in 2015. BWS has the authority to declare the space as a learning center, which the mahi ‘ai had already set up. In particular, the Navales family established the ‘Ai Pono project as part of the legacy that their ancestors have laid before them.<sup>45</sup> The Navales family tolerated the grit of restoring the valley and they aimed to continue their own plans to teach, and to produce and sell food grown in the farm. As the mahi ‘ai get close to their vision, I could not help but wonder what are the implications when BWS decides to halt their activities? And as more students and volunteers insist to remain in the ‘Ai Pono project, what will become of the organization? How can the Navales family generate enterprises that seek to build upon farming advantages based on natural resources, volunteer and labor costs, human capital and geographic position? We are left with more questions and it has not been clear what we will have in the end because we are too familiar with the institution’s intentions to prioritize Kumuola Foundation’s stance to expand kalo farming in the matter.

While BWS presents Kumuola Foundation with opportunities to participate in watershed conservation and environmental sustainability, their proposal does not guarantee the restoration of Indigenous foodways and education. There had been a lack of resources in invasive species removal, infrastructure for propagating native plants for medicine, transportation access, and support for families and communities. This is significant because Kanaka Maoli-led organizations like Kumuola Foundation are finding ways to help address the needs of their

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<sup>44</sup> Honolulu Board of Water Supply, 2020, 36.

<sup>45</sup> Kumuola Foundation, “Programs,” 2010, <https://www.kumuolahawaii.com/programs>.



people. Their programs like ‘Ai Pono project will have significant spillover effects for neighboring communities and schools emphasizing the possibilities for subsistence economies, health equity and related forms of social justice. Local non-profit organizations in Mānoa are aware of the labor the mahi ‘ai put into cultivating the valley (Mālama Mānoa, Kamehameha Shools).<sup>46</sup> Kumuola Foundation is continuing to embody indigenous pedagogy and methodology through metaphors in their stories and music. According to a report they conducted in 2016, the mahi ‘ai carried their responsibilities as teachers and imparted place-based lessons to at least 1,216 student volunteers.<sup>47</sup>

Though the proposal itself may be well-intentioned, a very fine line exists between a desire for the preservation of the watershed and the ecological system in the valley, and the issue of Indigenous rights. In conflating the two issues, it is too easy to reduce this to a matter of private property and thereby place Kānaka Maoli in the same conceptual frame as landowners. Indigenous activists and scholars have eloquently point out that they are fulfilling their kuleana (rights, responsibility, authority) as traditional stewards of the ‘āina.<sup>48</sup> Some Kānaka organizations navigate settler spaces in hopes of cultivating change in aspirations, experiences, and values for current and future generations.<sup>49</sup>

From the kumulipo, we learn that kalo is the elder sibling of Kanaka Maoli and he will feed us if we mālama (care for and nurture) him.<sup>50</sup> The Kumuola Foundation is founded on their ancestral connection to kalo and ‘āina. However, Kanaka Maoli remain constrained within the

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<sup>46</sup> Mālama o Mānoa. “Water Stewards of Mānoa.” *Mālama o Mānoa Newsletter* 25, no. 1 (April 2017): 6 <http://malamaomanoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/AprilWeb1.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> Kumuola Foundation; Kauanui (2019), 12; Silva, (2017) 83; Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2013), 5.

<sup>48</sup> Kauanui (2019), 12; Silva, (2017) 83; Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2013), 5.

<sup>49</sup> Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, (2013), 73.

<sup>50</sup> Silva, 2017, 4.

rules of the state, so they have limited capital and authority to participate in land use planning that allows them to freely use and transfer land. In most cases, Kanaka Maoli profoundly rely on traditions passed down intergenerationally, including forms of healing they learned from their kūpuna (elders) and in broad alliance with Native Hawaiian organizations such as Ke Ola Mamo, and other Hawaiian healing centers.<sup>51</sup> Kanaka Maoli also depend on market-based modes of exchange, forcing them to function in opposition to Indigenous modes of exchanges and relations. This means that Kanka constantly interact with global communities to generate and deliver services primarily for Native and Pacific Islander communities. Many Kanaka Maoli leaders respond to challenges accordingly and express varying social, political, and economic aims needed for cultural survivance and continuity.<sup>52</sup> I trace the ways Kānaka farmers in Kumuola Foundation created conditions of possibility out of which generation of farmers could emerge.

Observing the mahi ‘ai’s relationship to Mānoa Valley is deeply rested on the intimate and transformative wisdom of farmers who preceded them. Yet, mainstream society does not see contemporary Hawaiians and their concern to be valid or worth protecting. U.S. society has given up on solidifying Indigenous infrastructures because land use in general is burdensome and time-consuming.<sup>53</sup> But to completely ignore the demands of land stewardship is an injustice since they have long suffered from the delay to be formally recognized and authorized to claim land. It is important to put forth coordinated campaigns and collective action of mahi ‘ai and

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<sup>51</sup> Ke Ola Mamo, “About,” 2021 <https://www.keolamamo.org/our-mission>

<sup>52</sup> Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, (2013), 79.

<sup>53</sup> D. Kapua‘ala Sproat, “A Question of Wai: Seeking Justice through Law for Hawai‘i’s Streams and Communities, In *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty*, eds. Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Ikaika Hussey, and Erin Kahunawaika‘ala Wright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 203.

their allies as they fight for water rights as well as providing food, housing, and refuge for activists and displaced tenant farmers.<sup>54</sup> Kānaka farmers did not relinquish such rights because they are taking leadership roles in the food sovereignty movement.<sup>55</sup> While most settler landowners are often concerned about development and urbanization, Kānaka farmers and their allies employ an interethnic approach to offer material support for their communities, raise social justice awareness, and lead acts of civil disobedience.<sup>56</sup> The constant debate between the state government and Kānaka Maoli is shaped by the process in which state institutions are establishing a kind of ecological hegemony over Hawaiian lands. In fact, representatives from the state government often employ strategies that delegitimize ideals of Indigenous stewardship and innovation.<sup>57</sup>

Even without enough resources, however, Kanaka Maoli-led organizations exercise their sovereign powers, enterprises, and programs as well as enforce Hawaiian laws often via agreements and legal rulings involving international entities. Being more than a farm, Kumuola Foundation offers spaces for meetings, health, and teach-ins for others to learn. They engage in a variety of activities and relations to address circumstances in which they lived. The mahi ‘ai understand how the state of the ecological systems present in Mānoa are not expendable and should not be compromised for the well-being of future generations and historically disenfranchised communities.

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<sup>54</sup> Moanike‘ala Akaka, Maxine Khaulelio, Terrilee Keko‘olani-Raymond, Loretta Ritte, & Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, N. *Nā wāhine koa: Hawaiian women for sovereignty and demilitarization*. (Honolulu: Hawai‘inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge, 2018), 25.

<sup>55</sup> Amanda Shaw, “Gendered Representations in Hawai‘i’s Anti-GMO activism,” *Feminist Review*, 114, no. 1 (2016): 53.

<sup>56</sup> Akaka et al., , 26.

<sup>57</sup> Akaka et al., 27.

## The Mahi ‘ai Perspective

While the Kumuola Foundation is situated in the valley through a lease with BWS, their kuleana to mālama the space engaged through their connection with the valley. Aunty Kuki notes that Mānoa is often referred to as the realm of the akua (deities).<sup>58</sup> In fact, there is an ‘ōlelo no‘eau that describes their role: “He ali‘i ka ‘āina, he kauā ke kanaka.”<sup>59</sup> This tells us that the land is a chief and man is its servant. Kanaka Maoli have turned to their land, sea, and air to meet their basic cultural needs. Student volunteers have come to know the significant aspects of Kanaka geographical thought and religious practices. As maka ‘āinana (common people of the land), the mahi ‘ai have a distinct responsibility dedicated to Indigenous modes of land tenure. This connection between place and culture is well known to cultural studies experts where Indigenous culture has a different way of knowing the world. For example, creation stories often theorize and reveal a set of beliefs in which human beings are but one integral part of the natural order.<sup>60</sup> Humans are not assumed to be superior; nor do they exercise dominion or become the sole proprietors of spirituality.

Aunty Kuki continues to say, “the maka ‘āinana would come to mauka (mountain) where we need to gather our healing plants, rituals, wood to take down to makai (ocean/sea).”<sup>61</sup> Such actions are done collectively with feelings of assurance intensified among Kanaka Maoli because of their genealogical ties and respect for their akua (God and/or deities). Stories from the vast

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<sup>58</sup> Pauline “Aunty Kuki” Navales, in discussion with authors and student volunteers, January 27, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Mary Kawena Pukui *‘Ōlelo N‘oeau: Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings*, Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1983.

<sup>60</sup> Miye Nadya Tom, Elizabeth Sumida Huaman, and Teresa L. McCarty. “Indigenous knowledges as vital contributions to sustainability.” (2019): 5.

<sup>61</sup> Pauline “Aunty Kuki” Navales, in discussion with authors and student volunteers, January 27, 2021.

landscape also bring forth a constant reconnection between people and spiritual powers and generate stronger ties between the past, present and the future. Truly, this perspective underlines why access to and control over sacred landscapes is important for many Indigenous peoples.<sup>62</sup> We can turn to the aforementioned proverb in asserting claims to land and representing Kanaka Maoli actions as a deep obligation to new and ongoing projects like the ‘Ai Pono project.

The mahi ‘ai construct the issue of farming in Mānoa not only in terms of land access and control, but also in terms of mobilizing the community to have a political consciousness. They go to great lengths to illustrate how Kānaka people speak and sing to the natural environment in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. When they talk to visitors and student volunteers, they would also describe the ali‘i (chiefs) who used to govern the area. Some of the most notable figures are Queen Ka‘ahumanu, Kamehameha III, and Queen Lili‘uokalani.<sup>63</sup> They speak their names as a way of honoring them and recognizing Hawaii’s independence. Because they facilitate dialogue with student volunteers and visitors about the importance of doing the work they do, they reframe the conversation to state the viability of Indigenous leadership and governance amidst the state’s inaction in restoring the valley . Building consciousness about the history, status, and health of Mānoa equipped volunteers to take part in witnessing an Indigenous future.

Viewed through a western lens, Mānoa Valley and its waters might be effectively described as a highly efficient natural resource area to assist in the regulation and maintenance of Waikīkī. But to Kanaka Maoli scholars, this description fails to account for Indigenous cosmology and worldviews. The mahi ‘ai strongly felt that knowing the streams in Mānoa will take root among the volunteers if learning is relevant and enjoyable. For example, they

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<sup>62</sup> Loretta Ritte, “Loretta Ann Kawahineha‘ aheao Perreira Ritte,” In *Nā Wāhine Koa: Hawaiian Women for Sovereignty and Demilitarization*, 87.

<sup>63</sup> Bouslog et al., 1994, 24.

encouraged us to recognize the six streams flowing around us, especially Lua‘alaea stream named after the red clay best known for its healing properties and soil for farming. They claim that our voices are being heard as soon as we enter the valley. According to Silva, Hawaiian mo‘olelo often brim with bits of song associated with specific spots.<sup>64</sup> In her analysis of the literature by Kānaka writers such as Kānepu‘u, their writings show how they view certain places as a living being that will feel insulted or hurt if they are not recognized properly.<sup>65</sup> Mutual recognition and hospitality to travelers are central values of Hawaiian culture as often regarded in their oral tradition<sup>66</sup> Along with Lua‘alaea stream, student volunteers are expected to name the streams present at Mānoa while conducting our program activities.<sup>67</sup> The mahi ‘ai show us how the water from Lua‘alaea stream will actually extend itself with the rebuilding of the lo‘i kalo; in short, water will come freely when we ask it to help us. They give a message of hope and certainty that the ‘āina will provide for us if praised and treated respectfully. Aunty Kuki affirms this relationship by saying:

Aloha Aku No, Aloha Mai No (What you give is what you get). You can get knowledge and food. That is the physical exchange. And that is not only happening between teacher and student. But it is between the ‘āina and the person. And the spirit to the spirit. These are the things that happen beyond us.<sup>68</sup>

Conversations between the mahi ‘ai, students and the ‘āina become a means for language instruction but also satisfy curiosity about traditional land tenure management and values among

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<sup>64</sup> Silva, 162.

<sup>65</sup> Silva, 163.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Joy Enomoto, “Reclaiming the ‘Ili of Haukulu and ‘Aihuilama,” In *Detours: A Decolonial Guide to Hawai‘i* ed. Hōkūlani K. Aikau and Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 173.

<sup>68</sup> Pauline “Aunty Kuki” Navales, personal interview, April 1, 2021.

Native Hawaiians.<sup>69</sup> A great deal of information about the close link between physical landscape, the memory of historical events and strategies of survival is recorded about Mānoa as well. In the early twentieth century, past residents utilized the abundance of water in the valley to sustain themselves. Chinese and Japanese farmers who settled in the area adopted small-scale farming practices to plant rice and other tropical plants.<sup>70</sup> While the Hawaiian Sugar Plantation focused mostly on producing and exporting sugar and pineapple, ethnic minorities during that time diversified agriculture by planting bananas, sweet potatoes, kalo, and other culturally relevant crops. Chinese farmers knew the soil was fertile and were familiar with the intricacies of Kānaka architecture in diverting water and growing kalo.<sup>71</sup> They also recognized the exploitative tactics of the plantation economy, so they settled in areas where they could create their own wealth and consider their relations with the ‘āina. Though most rely to some extent on agriculture, some moved farther from the centers of population because of settler projects that capitalized on tourism and solidified the ethnic hierarchy in the islands. From these projects, recognizable foodways are concealed and movement over the landscape becomes difficult. Those who occupy positions of power in the public and private sectors define who has access in such landscapes.<sup>72</sup> One result is historical amnesia wherein many people forget how the geographical and social landscape have pushed and even evicted non-haole settlers aside to starve and abandon them.

Despite such violence redirected against ethnic communities, Kanaka Maoli are almost without exception opposed to further privatization of their ancestral land. For them, privatization represents the destruction of their livelihood and their very history. The topic of land use is one

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<sup>69</sup> Kauanui, 110.

<sup>70</sup> Buslog et. al., 1994, 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2013), 150.

that concerns many people who are frustrated with the lack of accountability and neglect on the part of the occupying state government. For the mahi ‘ai in Kumuola Foundation, they even share events of confrontations between themselves and other state entities. They recount the arguments put forth by themselves or others; what their goals are for each project; why they decided to conduct them; and who they believe would benefit from such programs. In one example, the National Resource Conservation Service invited farmers to join their meetings because they are interested in providing funds for small farms for the needs of local communities.<sup>73</sup> The mahi ‘ai then participate these public forums, often expressing their ideas about water shed protection and solutions that need to be enacted for them to thrive. They emphasize how the fate of organic farming and watershed protection is linked with the fate of Indigenous people. This rhetoric is also deployed in the aloha ‘āina movement.<sup>74</sup>

Like the Kumuola Foundation, more Kanaka-led grassroots organizations are feeling certain about their cultural approaches within their neighborhoods - that is to say, they uplift their people and values grounded in their epistemologies.<sup>75</sup> The knowledge the mahi ‘ai have regarding the streams and overall landscape is documented in their oral histories. They mention the names of streams in Mānoa and when traversing the area, they know their precise locations relative to the waters around them. This network of streams and place-names serve to inform them about animals, plants and other beings that perpetuate ea (breathe and/or life force).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Navales, in discussion with author, April 1, 2021.

<sup>74</sup> Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2013), 149.

<sup>75</sup> Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Hussey & Wright, “Introduction” *In a Nation Rising: Hawaiian movements for life, land, and sovereignty* (2014), 13.

<sup>76</sup> Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2013), 124



For foodways to be restored in Hawai‘i, settlers must respond to the social inequalities and injustices Kānaka Maoli have faced due to the settler urban projects forced upon them.<sup>77</sup> Kumuola Foundation and its members believe the ‘āina listens to them and it supports their projects because they are in an open dialogue with each other. However, the government is not acting in their interest and they are deemed to be unfit to participate in the agriculture sector. Among the mahi ‘ai, I repeatedly heard statements overtime such as, “We’ve always known everything is connected, why can’t they (settler institutions) see that?” and “We always do the work in this ‘āina.”<sup>78</sup> The work they are referring to is the maintenance of streams and clearing of invasive species for native plants. As Noelani Goodyear- Ka‘ōpua et al. (2014) remind us, settler institutions want to contain native spaces where they are not visible.<sup>79</sup> Yet Native Hawaiians refuse to relinquish their land and self to the forces of settler colonialism. The mahi ‘ai often clarify to us that they are the stewards of the land and they take on the roles of being stewards of the land by revitalizing their culture and educating the future generations. In fact, their own family members have made their grievances known toward government officials about the mistreatment of ‘āina in Maui and Kaua‘i.<sup>80</sup> After expressing their request to mālama the upper Mānoa Valley, they use their own resources and tools to carefully set up a place they can call their own for agricultural, educational, and cultural revitalization purposes.

Once they have established their organization formally in 2010, the mahi ‘ai reached out to schools, their known partners and university institutions to join them in their cause. There is no fee to visit the farm and it is open to the public. Contrary to the ways in which the farm was

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<sup>77</sup> Shaw, 55

<sup>78</sup> Personal communication, February 2021.

<sup>79</sup> Noelani Goodyear- Ka‘ōpua et al., 15.

<sup>80</sup> Personal communication with the mahi ‘ai, February 17, 2021.

“just a space” for the BWS, Kumuola Foundation behaves in a continuum of perpetual action.<sup>81</sup> Maile Arvin (2020) in her work, *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai‘i and Oceania*, describes the possessive nature of the settler state wherein the Pacific and its people are used in building the U.S. empire.<sup>82</sup> Indigenous peoples and their land are accumulated for the sake of sustaining the white settler project. In this case, the U.S. is invested in withholding the land and ocean to cater to the military and tourism.<sup>83</sup> Inevitably, most Native Hawaiian farmers resist settler projects that limit their mobility. It is more than just forgoing resources or opportunities to practice sacred rituals and customs. In their perspective, allowing others to dictate their movement will cause a deep rupture from what they understand about themselves as a people and as a nation.

When the mahi ‘ai discuss their programs, they express feelings of devotion to aloha ‘āina. They know that the current state of the farm can change depending on what BWS decides to do. But it does not mean they should halt their activities and wait for their decision. As the mahi ‘ai describe it, they act because they are certain that the projects will produce results for the Native Hawaiian community and surrounding residents.

#### Island Connections

When I first began thinking about how this project will inspire more thoughtful debate and action for the food sovereignty movement, I soon realized that the Kumuola and its volunteers have distinct stories made meaningful by our experiences planting together, learning each other’s names and celebrating our accomplishments and struggles. The two mahi ‘ai were instrumental not only in establishing the farm but also in supporting student activism at the local

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<sup>81</sup> Navales family in discussion with the author April 23, 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Arvin, 209.

<sup>83</sup> Arvin, 3.

level. A key figure is the president, Aunty Kuki, herself, a Kanaka farmer from Maui. She is a teacher in the Hawaiian Studies program at Nu‘uanu Elementary. Her family from Kipahulu Farm taught her how to grow kalo. Many of the native plants seen at Kumuola were brought to help with educational workshops offered to students and cultural practitioners.<sup>84</sup> Her family in Maui also visits Mānoa Valley as an effort to rebuild lo‘i kalo and participate in special events like the harvesting and pounding of kalo into poi. Her story describes how her family has had a significant impact in initiating programs to achieve self-determination. It also tells us that Kānaka Maoli families act as a collective, so they can navigate and reclaim settler spaces.

The Navales family worked tirelessly to learn from farmers and healers in Maui and Hawai‘i Island. It was not long before organizations began to seek them out. As Aunty Kuki and her family were making their situation known outside of Manoa, she was simultaneously acting as an instrument of encouragement for people in ‘Oahu to visit the farm. Hawaiian communities across islands had invested their energies in starting farms. Several years of conducting Hawaiian-language and cultural immersion programs in Waikīkī inspired them that the family needed to invest in a space where residents could call their own.<sup>85</sup> The Kipahulu farm in Hana, Maui, served as a model to maintain lo‘i kalo in Mānoa Valley where they could grow the same plants and incorporate their own cultural programs.<sup>86</sup> They also found better ways to nurture the health and well-being for their family, youth, communities and advance their culture into the future. The Indigenous-led organizations they partnered with emphasize the importance for place-based learning and impart to students that collaborations could occur at any point in time.

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<sup>84</sup> Aunty Kuki visits Kipahulu farms to ask for varieties of kalo and medicinal plants. In discussion with the author May 20, 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Kumuola Foundation, “History,” 2011.

<sup>86</sup> Aunty Kuki interview by author, March 17, 2021.

The decision powerfully reminds us about the transformative ways to have control of lands and resources. Aunty Kuki even reaches out to schools and tells them that groups of students can come with a bus. As long they find a way to come up, then the mahi ‘ai would lead the activities and provide food. Visitors would come from the islands and even from Japan because of their connections with the dancing and teaching of hula.<sup>87</sup> At these community workdays and gatherings, Kumuola representatives discussed the process in which they restored the area by bringing up containers for storage, receiving donations, and displaying specific methods like clearing albezia trees. The overall process of recruitment and travel was to gauge the degree to which residents of Hawai‘i understood the importance of food sovereignty. In her narration, she expresses the joy of becoming an effective communicator for people to understand what Kumuola Organization does in honor of their relatives who mālama wai (care and protect water).<sup>88</sup> Sometimes, the mahi ‘ai also expressed their dissatisfaction from the bureaucracy of state institutions like BWS because they must wait for their approval to restore a certain area at the farm.<sup>89</sup> Visits from students also became part of a rich oral tradition among Kumuola founding members who recount in detail the visits and their conversations with students and visitors from all over the world.

When I told Aunty Kuki about this project in the spring of 2020, I was struck with her generosity in letting me ask her questions. We reflected on the visible changes since the farm was established. She also made a clear statement: “I will not let my people die in this pandemic.” The status and health of the lāhui (Hawaiian nation) was too pressing for Aunty Kuki to ignore, so they halted their normal operations and informed the public that community workdays will be

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<sup>87</sup> Aunty Kuki interview by author, March 17, 2021.

<sup>88</sup> Aunty Kuki interview by author, March 17, 2021.

<sup>89</sup> Uncle Nick interview by author, March 17, 2021.

canceled until further notice. However, student volunteers who lived in the area came back to address the immediate needs of the farm and to further instill the vision of the ‘Ai Pono project. I reached out to her asking for permission about the possibility of working at the farm while following COVID-19 protocols.

Additionally, her children are always on the farm and her positionality as both a mother and farmer required hands-on-work and close attention. This program is truly a family endeavor that integrates the past, current and future generations. Both of her children are free to explore the farm and they ask for help when needed. They join us at the kalo patch and help volunteers remember concepts that their mother had stated in the beginning of each activity. The mahi ‘ai do not hesitate to point out times when we could do better such as planting the kalo in a ku style of fashion (slanting the huli 90° perpendicular toward the sun’s path across the sky).<sup>90</sup> Kumuola Foundation also attempts to foster a space for students to come up with their own ideas and solutions for issues that arise on the farm. The mahi ‘ai pose questions to student volunteers. For example, they ask us about better ways to transfer the huli of the kalo from one patch to another. Such expectations resonate with the hope for decolonization where those who are expected to stay are expected to become independent. Thus, the purpose of this mentorship is to instill interdependence. It is important that we become familiar with the Hawaiian language and culture to further incite memory, so that we can grow with the kalo and plants.

Aunty Kuki also outlines how the percolation of the water is feeding the aquifer system underneath and that in twenty-five years, somebody will be drinking it and ensuring our “quality of wai ola—waters of life.”<sup>91</sup> We talked once more about what it means to have this farm with

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<sup>90</sup> George Kahumoku Jr. “Dryland Kalo Growing (Taro) in South Kona,” 2021, <https://kahumoku.com/dryland-kalo-growing-taro-in-south-kona/>

<sup>91</sup> Honolulu BWS 2019, 42.

BWS. She clarifies, “They wanted to build a kind of outdoor learning structure.”<sup>92</sup> The environmental assessment took a few years to complete. The structure was not a surprise for Aunty Kuki. She delves into the process stating:

They call us champions. They approached us because we are already established, and they are concerned with the water component. And so, that’s not a problem for cultural people like us, cuz it’s all connected. And so that’s what’s happening. And it took them years to set that relationship up. We’re glad to be here. And they call us “cultural people” for 11 years now. We are not poisoning the water. We are not poisoning the land. And we built it.<sup>93</sup>

While accepting BWS as partners, the mahi ‘ai simply cannot be treated as tokens. Both sides must understand that the Kānaka voice should be addressed carefully to prevent any new problems as the proposal for a learning center becomes a reality in the coming years. For now, the mahi ‘ai sought to diversify their local economics by pursuing business creations that partner with retail sectors. With the concern of generating income for the farm, Aunty Kuki redirects our conversation in giving hope for what the organization is still doing for self-sufficiency. She says:

Gardenia is a money-making lesson, you know that. So that pop-up there can make \$15,000 to \$25,000 in three months. And that’s a blessing to wherever it can grow, you know that’s a mini-business plan there. But now you just need the workforce because the plants will grow. We took 400 cuttings that will be double what that is right now in 5 years.<sup>94</sup>

Of all the plants in the farm, gardenia is the most plentiful. Kumuola has been supplying gardenia flowers for Foodland Supermarket for more than five years, and the mahi ‘ai hope to expand this partnership with other local supermarkets. Because of the revenue generated from selling gardenias, they look forward to restoring the area and removing more invasive species. They are confident that if the health of the land is in good shape, they can subsist and survive,

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<sup>92</sup> Aunty Kuki interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>93</sup> Aunty Kuki interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>94</sup> Aunty Kuki and Uncle Nick, personal communication, February 17, 2021.

exercise creativity and production, and pursue other economic activities. It is their goal to be a source for Kānaka to have access to food and medicine.

The various forms of capital gained in the farm is difficult to assess. The mahi ‘ai try to keep things at low cost by even utilizing recycled wood, donated Matson containers, and upcycled furniture for planter boxes to cultivate native plants. Kānaka farmers commonly count political perpetuation, cultural practices, quality of life, and community health as important goals. But as long as poverty, unemployment and underemployment prevail, they will struggle to hold everything together.<sup>95</sup> Families will be forced to undertake extraordinary steps to access essential good and individuals will face an unwanted choice of seeking another site for modest economic opportunity. Persistent land regulations remain pressing concerns.<sup>96</sup> They are uncertain if they can further meet the standards and expectations of BWS once the proposal for a learning center is approved. But they know they can further pursue the ‘Ai Pono project based on the abundance of plants and water that they have nurtured as well as volunteers who support their mission for food sovereignty. The mahi ‘ai and their allies have exhibited their desires for Hawaiian culture to once again thrive in Mānoa.

### **The Aloha of Music**

Aunty Kuki’s pedagogy exceeds our expectations because we are only familiar with being formally taught in classrooms. As student volunteers, she motivates us to breathe slowly and move our bodies as if we were listening to Hawaiian music. Her hands would gracefully move along the wind as she points toward the sky and the earth. She moves with a rhythm

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<sup>95</sup> Joseph Keawe‘aimoku Kaholokula, “COVID-19, The Disease that Has Shined a Light on Health Equity,” In *Value of Hawaii 3: Hulihia The Turning*, ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Craig Howes, Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio and Aiko Yamashiro, (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press), 30.

<sup>96</sup> Kauanui, 109.

humming softly to herself. One time during our interview, she urged me to walk with her with gloves and shovels in our hands. We began digging the soil and transferring it to a pot. She pointed toward a thick bunch of wapine (lemongrass) and asked us to find its roots. We also counted how many plants we could transfer. As she demonstrates how to break apart each stalk, she holds the stalks in a firm grip, rejecting any expectations for affection and tenderness. This displays the multiplicity of her role in Kumuola. It is a matter of experience. She is a hula dancer, farmer and teacher who knows how to improve the dynamics between ‘āina and people intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. For the organization to meet its goals, Aunty Kuki points to the endless possibilities in Lua‘alaea as she realizes the dreams of her kūpuna in bringing Native life back to the valley. The student volunteers, visitors, and her family, most of whom had spent a significant time at the farm, have embraced the ways we can foster relations on our own terms. We are honing our skills communally while recognizing the ways in which the life stories of Aunty Kuki and her family guides us in the present.

The year 2017 was a moment of pride that transcended the Kumuola Foundation because the space to lo‘i had expanded and the mahi ‘ai had more productive results in the valley.<sup>97</sup> They had set up speakers, tables, washing stations and a cooking space. In that way, we have dedicated space to gather more than 50 volunteers each day. The sound system would help when the mahi ‘ai chant, sing, and converse with the ‘āina. We often feel the ‘āina’s reciprocal aloha through music. For Uncle Nick, his background as a hula dancer, singer, and performer upheld the personal and social needs of men who were also means of securing their own survival in a rapidly shifting society. Even though Uncle Nick did not grow up in a farm, he made it a habit to come to the farm. He explained, “nature is here to teach us. You know, that’s what it's really

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<sup>97</sup> Uncle Nick interview by author, February 17, 2021.



about. Kumuola is the teacher of life. Not just us human but the tree.”<sup>98</sup> Speaking in a calm manner, Uncle Nick regularly follows Aunty Kuki’s vision and instructions. He would hum to himself when he joins us in the kalo patch.

When seeing Aunty Kuki and Uncle Nick, it is impossible to forget they are musicians. They also dance hula whenever we finished planting huli (cutting of the kalo). Considering their experience of traveling the world to play music, they informed me that they would get inspiration for their music based on their interactions and conversations with the ‘āina. When asked about the role of music in his life as a farmer, he mentioned,

Music to me is a vibration. Yeah, it's the vibration, like setting, like, it's almost like, you know, these beautiful works of art that these people have created and connected to their higher selves. And, and it's part of this lineage, that, you know, it really is a manifestation of our universal principles, you know, and, to me, it's really, it's really vibe setting in that, like, you know, you listened to the right song, before, it just, it takes me to a certain place of a very high, you know, vibration, in that. it unlocks, I guess, inside of me, the certain chemicals in my chemical factory, you know, to keep me in the zone of what I need to do focus, and to really find that answer to any solution or problem that I have.<sup>99</sup>

Uncle Nick and Aunty Kuki are both attuned to the rhythm of the places though the intensity of music from (mele) Hawaiian songs and Hawaiian reggae. Their performances at the farm often represent the joy in working at the farm, and the mahi ‘ai often stated that “playing music is what our ancestors used to do.”<sup>100</sup> They are referring to how Kānaka bodies were not regulated by the state and they oppose the negative perception of white settlers that Hawaiians are lazy.<sup>101</sup> They

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<sup>98</sup> Uncle Nick interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>99</sup> Uncle Nick interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>100</sup> Uncle Nick interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>101</sup> Stepahanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, Michelle Raheja “Settler Colonialism” *Native Studies Keywords*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 291. Negative stereotypes about Native Hawaiians were disseminated by haole settlers to divorce people from their ability to provide for the basic need of life (i.e. subsistent farming) and forced to live through wage labor.

encouraged volunteers to be attentive to the moment and the environment when we do our activities.

As Native Hawaiian scholars have argued, listening and responding to the ‘āina is a part of culture and identity.<sup>102</sup> These practices depart from the entertainment of tourist industry where settlers capitalize upon and display Native Hawaiian bodies, songs, and food. Cultural change in music also varies among Kānaka Maoli communities, and this cultural variation is situated not only in motivation but also in time and place. Uncle Nick added:

So anything that keeps me in line, or keeps me in line with the universe, you know, is what I'm shooting for, or bringing into my being and it's just a constant. I realized that, that society keeps pulling me away from that alignment. You know, what I mean? In certain ways, and the foods or the chemicals and things that are forced upon us and things that I've been taught, or imprinted onto, my memories. It's not jiving with the universal principles that are happening all around us. So the things that I see around us is kind of just seeping in. And that the music is just another way to help us get there. Help me get there, you know, and, and then what? And then also to get that message across, right? Like when the music for me, like when I say, 'take a stand, live it authentic and stand like in my music'. It's an inspirational thing, you know, I need, we need warriors, we need other people in like-mind, you know, as us and to me, music always inspires me for that, that kind of higher realm. You know, so it's a vibrational setting tool that I use. And then I really, I think the same thing is with these, these plants, you know, it's an expression of joy. And they vibe to it to you know, they appreciate it just as much as we do.<sup>103</sup>

Before analyzing the recent development of the aloha ‘āina movement, Nick’s testimony affirmed the origins of indigenous life and death struggle for survival and liberation. Indigenous negative perceptions of the U.S. has always been determined through oppression and possession of their identity, culture, and space.<sup>104</sup> Because of the myriad forms of settler colonialism, Kānaka have embodied an adversary stance to western ideologies and have actively resisted in both dramatic and subtle ways.<sup>105</sup> And music is one of the avenues that Kānaka have

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<sup>102</sup> Silva, 32.

<sup>103</sup> Uncle Nick interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>104</sup> Arvin, 205.

<sup>105</sup> Arvin, 220; Silva, 155.

incorporated in their sovereignty movement since the overthrow. According to Adam Keawe Manalo-Camp (2021), for example, the Royal Hawaiian Band members refused to take the oath for the provisional government in 1893.<sup>106</sup> The bandmaster, Maestro Jose Sabas Libornio Ibarra, was inspired to compose a song entitled, “He Inoa Ka Keiki O Ka Bana Lahui: He Lei No Ka Lahui Hawai‘i.”<sup>107</sup> This song then became popular and its title has changed to “Kaulana Na Pua”<sup>108</sup> Hawaiian sovereignty movement has always taken music in some form to express their loyalty and to help regenerate the public’s feelings in building a future for Hawai‘i.

While the act of farming remains an element in the restoration of the lāhui in Native Hawaiian history, the Navales’ presence is an integral part of the revitalization of the Mānoa Valley. I track the pathways that lead these two leaders of the Kumuola foundation to consider the methods employed and the possibilities from enacting their vision in this section. For Aunty Kuki and women like her, the sharing of information and mentorship with other non-profit organizations and student volunteers involved expressions of intimacies. Their stories of farming are a means for securing the operations of the farm in a rapidly developing society. Because becoming farmers is not an aspirational mode of mobility among youth in Hawai‘i, there is a bigger burden among mahi ‘ai to tackle the barriers that disavow the value of ‘āina-based practices. Subject to overlapping demands of agriculture and state institutions like BWS, Native Hawaiians find themselves negotiating contemporary modes of oppression. Along with the streams that flow into Mānoa Valley, the mahi āi guide the spaces in which we collectively determine our everyday experiences on the farm. Chapter 2 will feature the healing and

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<sup>106</sup> Adam Manalo-Camp (@adamkeawe), “Maestro Jose SabasLibornio Ibarra,” *Instagram*, January 10, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ5nF7HDKFr/>

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

transformative power of the plants propagated by Kumuola Foundation to address chronic diseases and the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Chapter 2: Perpetuating 'Ike Wai

To welcome the year 2021, the mahi 'ai (farmers) invited our student volunteer group back to the taro farm. Uncle Nick led us to investigate one of the taro patches where water from the Lua'alaea stream was steadily flowing into the farm. He revealed a large hole in the corner that was about 10 feet wide. Aunty Kuki rushed into the scene and asked us to come up with the best strategies to "plug the puka" (hole). We carefully made our way to the lo'i kalo (taro patch) with the cold water passing through our toes. Confusion and uncertainty filled the air. A student volunteer yelled, "Does anyone know what we are supposed to be doing? Oh no, my slipper is stuck!" We responded with nervous laughter. Our shoes and slippers had accumulated so much mud from the red silty clay. As a result, we left our footwear behind as we advanced deeper into the taro patch. We also kept close to each other, leaning forward so we could avoid slipping. Galvanized iron sheets and plastic pipes served as fences of the taro. If we were not careful, the sharp edges of the iron sheets could cut us. As we moved, water surged out of the enclosure. Eventually, we brainstormed a plan to cover the hole with a rock wall and a plastic liner to trap the water inside.

Because we did not want to waste time, we rolled large rocks from the surrounding area and used the soil to mold a clay wall. When we dug into the ground, the red silty clay soil was unbreakable, so Aunty Kuki handed us a bucket of water to soften the clay. Some of us had to pull the honohono grass out of the way while taking turns using the shovel to transfer the soil to the puka. When we finished, Uncle Nick and Aunty Kuki discussed the strength of water and its ability to pave its own path.

As we retrieved our footwear, we wondered about the significance of our accomplishment. We rested and huddled around the tent as the mahi 'ai discussed how we had

worked around together to block the incoming source of water. They also emphasized the life-giving force of the water for kalo (taro), the people and other organisms in the world, thereby influencing how we ought to reflect on the political variations and socioeconomic changes in present Hawai‘i. In this chapter, I examine Kānaka Maoli’s deep relation with water and its significance to repair life. Water inspires the playful and vocal performances of the mahi ‘ai in farming and music, which informs their pride as Kānaka and resistance. Kalo farms embody more than just taro and Kumuola Foundation and its allied partnership find ways to improve health by using medicinal plants thriving in the farm. This chapter tracks the ways they cultivate the symbiotic relationships between water, kalo and the medicinal plants. Today, picturing the Mānoa Valley beyond the imagination of the occupying state and empire requires the emergence of Hawaiian thought and practice. The mahi ‘ai exhibited their commitment in their programs and emphasized that they view traditional healing plant to perpetuate hana no‘eau (arts and crafts) and feed their ‘ohana (family). Knowing that not all plants can grow in the valley, they mālama wai (care) as one way for medicinal plants to return once again.



Figure 2. Picture of lo‘i kalo with clay wall and white plastic liner (2021). Photo taken by author.

Relying on the past efforts and partnerships of the ‘Ai Pono program in 2010, the Kumuola Foundation continues to restore the foodways in Mānoa by increasing the knowledge and utilization of traditional healing plants among adults and by collaborating with master traditional healers and Native Hawaiian health centers (Appendix A). Kumuola Foundation plans to meet this goal through the framework of ‘ike wai (water memories) that can enhance the health of individuals, families, and communities. The mahi ‘ai and student volunteers are invested in this program, which will be soon adapted to support the needs of those most vulnerable for chronic diseases and COVID-19. In this way, we assert an intersectional and oceanic vantage point of view that frames the demand for food sovereignty and health equity for Kānaka Maoli. New priorities within this agenda increase the decision-making power among collaborators, the usage on subsistence crops, and the integration of the crops to local markets.<sup>109</sup> These efforts coincide with the reopening of the Mānoa Valley and the widening of opportunities for the mahia ‘ai at Kumuola Foundation to enhance and preserve agrobiodiversity and to diversify diets and generate healthier people.

Through everyday interactions with the environment, the mahi ‘ai are learning more about themselves and those with which they share their existence.<sup>110</sup> For the mahi ‘ai to uphold the names of the elements such as Kahaukani (wind) and Kauakuahine (rain) of Mānoa, they evoke the importance of caring for the ‘āina (that which feeds) by singing and reciting their true names.<sup>111</sup> This practice is central to Kanaka Maoli pedagogy because it illustrates their

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109 Andrew D. Jones, Lilly Fink Shapiro and Mark L. Wilson. “Assessing the Potential and Limitation of Leveraging Food Sovereignty to Improve Human Health. *Frontiers in Public Health* 3 (2015): 2.

110 Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, Honolulu, January 27, 2021.

111 The union of Kahaukani and Kauakahine is known to have brought Mānoa rainbows and showers according to the legend of Kahalaopuna, the Princess of Manoa. King David Kalākaua,

genealogical continuity and their ability to impart knowledge to student volunteers and visitors who benefit from the contributions of these natural elements. Further, recognizing the elements prevents their cultural practices from being stripped of their meanings when settlers attempt to assimilate them by converting their names to English.<sup>112</sup> The mahi ‘ai thus encourage volunteers to honor their native language since it can be used to illustrate a map for the protection of water and the reformation of lo‘i kalo in the valley. Noenoe K. Silva explains, “for settlers learning to pronounce these [elements] correctly would be one step towards their part in native resurgence.”<sup>113</sup> Kanaka Maoli artists, activists and scholars are refusing the erasure of their political identity as Indigenous people of Hawai‘i when they reclaim their language.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, the concept of ‘ike wai (water memories) reignites the desire for kalo farming in the ahupua‘a of Waikīkī where water is redirected to fuel the hotel and tourist industries.<sup>115</sup>

By nourishing taro, the winds and rains are acting as stewards of this ahupua‘a. The Kumuola Foundation calls attention to and disrupts how corporate and agribusinesses neglectfully use water. The conceptual framework of ‘ike wai serves as a reminder of the sacredness of water. Aunty Kuki asserts,

‘Ike wai is the water cycle, our ancestral knowledge, and memories. It is in the universe, all around us, carried by the wind, here at the lo‘i (taro patches), the kalo (taro), the

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Kalakaua, David. *The Legends and Myths of Hawaii: The Fables and Folk-Lore of a Strange People*. Edited by Rollin Mallory Daggett. New York: C.L. Webster, 523  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/56597/56597-h/56597-h.htm#ch21>

<sup>112</sup>Noenoe K. Silva, “Recovering Place Names from Hawaiian Literatures.” In *Everyday Acts of Resurgence: People, Places, Practices*, ed. Jeff Corntassel, Taiaiake Alfred, Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Noenoe K. Silva, Hokulani Aikau, Devi Mucina (Olympia: Daykeeper Press. 2018), 60.

<sup>113</sup>Silva, “Recovering Place Names from Hawaiian Literatures,” 61.

<sup>114</sup>Silva, “Recovering Place Names from Hawaiian Literatures,” 62.

<sup>115</sup>Candace Fujikane, *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future: Kanaka Maoli and Critical Settler Cartography in Hawai‘i* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 68.



ocean, and in our bodies. There are messages in the water that guide us. Water keeps us connected to the rest of the world. We must understand and mālama wai (care for water).<sup>116</sup>

For the Kumuola Foundation, the Lua‘alaea stream fuels their commitment to aloha ‘āina (love for the land), which asserts their self-autonomy and self-determination for the people, land, and waterways. As water flows continually in the valley, the mahi ‘ai and the student volunteers are learning to exert a collective voice for the advancement of our shared futures.

### **Stories of Healing and Music as Art**

As mentioned in the first chapter, Aunty Kuki comes from a family of farmers. Her Papa was also known to practice lāau (healing arts). Over the course of his life, he had twelve children and they relied on his knowledge and skills to heal. Their family believes they can improve their health through traditional healing methods even though western medicine and health professionals were available in Maui. From Aunty Kuki’s perspective, her Papa’s use of lāau put an emphasis on lōkahi (balance; harmony of body, mind and spirit), necessary for Hawaiian health.<sup>117</sup> They stand firm that lāau needed to be kept alive in contemporary times. So even though many Hawaiians converted to Christianity and the traditional healing methods were discouraged, their family sought ways to maintain the epistemological value of lāau.<sup>118</sup> In fact, the healing plants at the Kipahulu farm informed their relationship with the ‘āina because they knew the history, location, and significance of each plant. Aunty Kuki describes her childhood searching for native plants:

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<sup>116</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, January 27, 2021.

<sup>117</sup> Amanda Lokelani Donlin, “When All the Kāhuna Are Gone: Evaluating Hawaii’s Traditional Hawaiian Healers’ Law,” *Asian-Pacific Law and Policy Journal*, 12 (1): 215.  
[http://blog.hawaii.edu/aplpj/files/2011/11/APLPJ\\_12.1\\_donlin.pdf](http://blog.hawaii.edu/aplpj/files/2011/11/APLPJ_12.1_donlin.pdf)

<sup>118</sup> Hawaiian Healing was discouraged when King Kamehameha II abolished the kapu system. Donlin, 217 [http://blog.hawaii.edu/aplpj/files/2011/11/APLPJ\\_12.1\\_donlin.pdf](http://blog.hawaii.edu/aplpj/files/2011/11/APLPJ_12.1_donlin.pdf)

We always knew from our Papa that we will be fine. He didn't formally teach it to us. When someone was sick and Papa get some plants, we just pay attention. Because this is what you got to do. Papa will tell you 'okay, now using got to do this, continue with this, pick this plant from this place and take it for five days in a row. And this is how you prepare it, you know, so we always have instruction. And the thing about that kind of learning was, it was always available in there. But you have to ask, just like before. Although a lot of my cousins like go to the doctor, and it was their way of healing.

Through this process of gathering herbs and plants, she reaffirms her Hawaiian identity and way of life. Aunty Kuki uses a sentimental tone her testimony above, which is vital for what Silva and Godlberg-Hiller theorize as the emergence of Hawaiian thought and practice . The concept of emergence is defined by “an ethical dimension outside of capitalism and colonialism.”<sup>119</sup> The plants and elements at the farm are not commodified because they become essential to the understanding of one's purpose and exertion of ea (life, breathe and sovereignty). Aunty Kuki's Papa instilled within her the that the 'āina can sustain them and having access to land with healing plants meant they did not have to spend money on medicine. Her memory with her Papa led her to honor Hawaiian ancestral wisdom and intuition for healing.

Her brother, Dr. Kaiwi, also contributes to the role of Kumuola Foundation because he is a trained physician who upholds Hawaiian healing practices, and he encouraged its utilization with his patients. According to Aunty Kuki, her brother found a way to integrate the knowledge he gained from their Papa into western medicine. The duty to nurture these connections to those ancestors and communities fall under Hawaiians. One of the ways they preserve such sense of relationality is to ensure that both Kanaka and the 'āina are in good health and cared for. Today, picturing the Mānoa Valley beyond the imagination of the occupying state and empire requires the emergence of Hawaiian thought and practice. The mahi 'ai exhibited their commitment in

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<sup>119</sup> Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller and Noenoe K. Silva. “The botany of emergence: Kanaka Ontology and biocolonialism in Hawai'i,” *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 2, no. 2 (2015): 5.

their programs and emphasized that they view traditional healing plant to perpetuate hana no‘eau (arts and crafts) and feed their ‘ohana (family). Knowing that not all plants can grow in the valley, they mālama wai (care) as one way for medicinal plants to return once again.

The mahi ‘ai first noticed the upper valley was full of Helekonias, ginger and palm trees when they were rebuilding lo‘i kalo. Both mahi ‘ai claim, “those plants were not Hawaiian.” They indicated that these plants could not feed their people and only served to naturalized the idea that Hawai‘i is a tropical paradise. According to Elizabeth DeLoughrey, such utopian island narratives, degrade ecology and serve to mystify the violence of empire.<sup>120</sup> The tropical plants bolsters the idea of the vanishing native and within it the mahi ‘ai could falsely be utilized as tools for “salvage environmentalism.”<sup>121</sup> In the previous chapter, the Board of Water Supply proposal called the mahi ‘ai cultural champions. There is a danger associated with this notion because they fall under surveillance and policing under a state institution. The colonial practices are antithetical to the commitment of the mahi ‘ai who are genealogically related to the ‘āina.

To illustrate the mahi ‘ai’s methods on the ways that farming uplifts the Hawaiian community and reestablishes the path toward self-determination, Uncle Nick performs a Hawaiian reggae song entitled “In the Hills.” This song caught the attention of the student volunteers after scouring the lo‘i kalo (taro patch) for *anabaena azollae*.<sup>122</sup> A student volunteer requested for his performance when she discovered that Uncle Nick is in the “Ooklah the Moc” band. The lyrics from an excerpt of the song are as follows:

In the hills  
Where I do my farming  
Over the mountain

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<sup>120</sup> Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 167.

<sup>121</sup> DeLoughrey, 170.

<sup>122</sup> *Anabaena azollae* is a type of algae that provides nitrogen and cools the water at the lo‘i kalo.

Is where you can see a man planting  
Near the stream  
That you can see country rock comin' in  
So long I am sowing  
And now's the time for reaping  
With Jah giving me a helping hand  
The likes of Jah land  
With the flowin' water

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They never know me as a farmer  
And with the crops running over  
Kalo, 'ulu, mamaki, and gardenia  
Awa, pohole and 'olena  
The city life is too much for me  
But in the hills it comes mystically  
In the inner valley

[Chorus]

In the hills  
Where I do my farming  
Over the mountain  
Is where you can see a man planting  
Near the stream  
That you can see country rock comin' in  
So long I am sowing  
But now's the time for reaping

Don't get me confused  
I don't wanna poison the youth  
Nobody want genetic modified  
Because Jah people wanna stay alive  
We don't want no poison, lead in the water  
It will only cause disease and cancer  
Just let me sow all the seed Jah from the 'āina

[Chorus]

In the hills  
Where I do my farming  
Over the mountain  
Is where you can see a man planting  
Near the stream  
That you can see country comin' in  
So long I am sowing  
And now's the time for reaping

Because born-free  
Here in Hawai‘i  
We are born-free

-Kali Navales, “In the Hills,” [unpublished] performed in April 2021

During the performance, Uncle Nick serenades Auntie Kuki reveals their intimacy and gestures to the audience to love each other as well. The lines “in the hills, where I do my farming” demands political consciousness about the agricultural landscape of ‘Oahu where Hawaiian farmers are located far from the urban core of Honolulu. Uncle Nick motions toward the mountains while swaying his hips to playfully demonstrate that farmers are not simply laborers, but are also artists and dancers. He challenges the U.S. racist perceptions that Native Hawaiians are inherently weak and deserve to be domesticated.<sup>123</sup> This song archives the injustices Native Hawaiians face under U.S. settler colonialism, noting that his people have not forgotten the ways that settler institutions abuse and “poison” the ‘āina, especially its waterways.

Hawaiian Reggae is integral to the discursive construction of Hawaiian identity and is used to form a collective voice against empire. The genre also sounds fundamentally Hawaiian because of its ties to Hawaiian sovereignty and its reference to being “born-free.”<sup>124</sup> Moreover, the performance pay respects to the RasTafari faith as Uncle Nick expresses gratitude toward Jah

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<sup>123</sup> As an attempt to regulate heredity, haole researchers insisted that Native Hawaiians were inherently dishonest, diseased, foolish, lazy, and weak. Settlers aim to change the conditions in which Native Hawaiians have close relations with the ‘āina. In addition, Ty Kāwika Tengan and Dean Saranillio investigates how the trope “lazy Kanaka” influenced the perception toward Kanaka Moali men who were imagined as incapable of becoming equal to haole settlers or Chinese or Japanese men. Arvin, 71. Saranillio, 151.

<sup>124</sup> Reggae was adopted into Hawai‘i-based music in the political context of the Hawaiian Renaissance and sovereignty movement.

and his people.<sup>125</sup> Thus, he displays solidarity for colonized peoples across the globe. In this sense, Hawaiian reggae records important lessons learned from histories of struggle and paves the way for people to embody aloha ‘āina and join the movement.

#### COVID-19 Subsistent Ecologies

Since the mahi ‘ai are concerned with the health of their people and and ‘āina, Kumuola Foundation seeks to collectively promote food sovereignty among residents in ‘Oahu who are either at risk for nutrition-related diseases such as diabetes, chronic diseases, and COVID-19. Native Hawaiian health promotion interventions that reintegrate traditional practices may be impactful in reducing risks of nutrition-related disease among Native Hawaiians.<sup>126</sup> While dictated by the state’s demands to rescue unsustainable structures like tourism, Kumuola Foundation redirected the ‘Ai Pono program to prioritize the growth of plants that heal such as mamaki, maile hohono, and ‘olena. The mahi ‘ai follow the path that the Lua‘alaea stream constructed – a path that values and protects the ives of future generations. This program will function for the sake of protecting a healthy functioning ecosystem and lāhui (people; Hawaiian nation). In the hope that Mānoa evolves into a larger gathering space, Kumuola calls for the elements, plants, and human to act rhythmically.<sup>127</sup> All the elements aid to breakdown the soil for the native plants in the area to flourish on land and in our bodies when consumed. There are

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<sup>125</sup> Robbie Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 127. Rastafari faith pays respect and calls for justice for the children of Legba who were kidnapped trafficked across the oceans.

<sup>126</sup> N. Kau‘i Baumhofer and Cherry Yamane. “Multilevel Racism and Native Hawaiian Health,” In *Racism: Science and Tools for the Public Health Professional*, ed. Chandra L. Ford, Derek M. Griffith, Marino A. Bruce and Keon L. Gilbers (Washington DC: American Public Health Association, 2019), 388.

<sup>127</sup> Nick “Kali” Navales, interview by author, January 27, 2021.

more of us who are expanding our consciousness to cultivate resistance against forces that cause instabilities in our relationship to ʻāina and the wider Pacific.

For all the perseverance, hard work and sacrifice Kumuola Foundation had employed since 2010, the organization determined efficient ways to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing to strive for health equity. The ʻAi Pono project emerged as a response to the state’s top-down approach in managing Hawai‘i residents and its abandoning of those urgently in need of direct health services, food, supply, and other resources.<sup>128</sup> Non-profit organizations endure the most of providing services from already depleted funding sources serving low-income communities.<sup>129</sup>

For the COVID-19 campaign in Hawai‘i, there are remaining issues about the involvement of lāau lapa‘au, or any form of Native Hawaiian traditional healing practices. The first was simply the government’s intransigence toward health equity for ethnic populations who have historically been treated inherently as inferior and undeserving of quality housing, healthcare and a healthy environment.<sup>130</sup> The second was the absence of traditional healing and culturally relevant food that cater toward “kinships, reciprocal relationships, and responsibilities

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<sup>128</sup> Kaholokula, “COVID-19, the Disease that Has Shine a Light on Health Equity.” In *The Value of Hawai‘i 3: Hulihia, the Turning*, ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Craig Howes, Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio and Aiko Yamashiro (Honolulu, Univeristy of Hawai‘i Press, 2020), 31.

<sup>129</sup> Anita Hofschneider, “Kalihi Has The Worst COVID-19 Outbreak in Hawai‘i. Here’s How The Community Is Responding,” *Honolulu Civil Beat*, September 9, 2021, accessed March 18, 2021.

<sup>130</sup> Dian Million, “WE ARE THE LAND, AND THE LAND IS US: Indigenous Land, Lives, and Embodied Ecologies in the Twenty-First Century,” In *Racial Ecologies*, ed. Leilani Nishime and Williams Kim D. Hester (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 29.

that form a way of acting toward something larger than individual human bodies and lives.”<sup>131</sup>

The third was the inability to renew food systems to reproduce healing plants.

In the past year, Kumuola was approached by Ke Ola Mamo, a Native Hawaiian Health center, to request for Hawaiian medicinal plants to share with their clients. Ke Ola Mamo and Kumuola Foundation have a longstanding relationship because master healers held a series of workshops entitled “Na Kumu Ke Ola: The Plants is our Teachers” at the farm and helped identify native species in the area such as the maile hohono (*Ageratum*, white weed). After receiving their requests, Aunty Kuki went through the process of packaging and delivering herbs. She wanted to fulfill her kuleana (sense of obligation) during these times in whichever way possible. She prepared mamaki leaves and ‘olena for distribution in the coming months.<sup>132</sup> The sharing of resources between the two organizations occurred because their mission to feed and heal Hawai‘i’s people aligned.

There was no fee associated with the exchange because both organizations were implementing the best method to protect and serve Native Hawaiians. Describing the process, Aunty Kuki says, “Why would we charge when plants and life are priceless? These plants can be life-saving for many.”<sup>133</sup> Based on their past experiences, the mahi ‘ai prefer to be interdependent among organizations and Kānaka Maoli practitioners rather than be isolated for this type of work. In addition, they trust that Ke Ola Mamo will not treat the plants as expendable commodities for individuals. These plants are allocated to communities who need it most. The mahi ‘ai did not have direct contact with kūpuna but nevertheless expanded the pathway for

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<sup>131</sup> Dian Million, “WE ARE THE LAND, AND THE LAND IS US: Indigenous Land, Lives, and Embodied Ecologies in the Twenty-First Century,” In *Racial Ecologies*, ed. Leilani Nishime and Williams Kim D. Hester (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 29.

<sup>132</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, January 27, 2021.

<sup>133</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, March 17, 2021.



healers to have direct access to herbal medicine. Moreover, Aunty Kuki did not invoke publicity because of the symbolic nature of the project, which was to relay the message that Kānaka, especially the kūpuna (elders), are treasured deeply within the aloha ‘āina movement.<sup>134</sup>

The mahi ‘ai deemed the initiation of the project as a success and they asked for my feedback about the potential for student volunteers to take part in propagating healing plants. I was enthusiastic about the idea because of its urgency. Other student volunteers also told me that they wanted to contribute more of their time into the mission of Kumuola Foundation. Aunty Kuki describes my role, “So I talked to you about the expansion of our teas and herbs. Knowing your passion and your studies is in health.” We could do more of the research about the plants like the maile hohono.” She then suggested that I take the lead in communicating the objectives of the project to my peers. I hesitated at first given my own limitations in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i and I was worried that I would be a barrier for the project to continue. But Aunty Kuki and Uncle Nick reassured me that they would rather cultivate student leaders than allow state officials to appropriate such roles.

### **Healing Plants**

The information and healing properties described in this section provides a broad portrait of the plants grown by the Kumuola Foundation. I explore their background characteristics, purposes, their historical contexts, and their relevance during the pandemic. In “The Food Systems in the Era of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Crisis” Galanakis gives some details about the infectious disease:

The COVID-19 pandemic has similar characteristics to the well-known outbreaks of the last 20 years, such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV, from 2002 to 2004) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS, from 2012 until now) outbreaks. These two outbreaks were diseases of the lower respiratory tract with a similar clinical

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<sup>134</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

presentation at their early stages of infection (e.g., cough and fever), leading to significant mortality among vulnerable individuals (e.g., those who do not have a robust immune system and those who smoke) and older people.<sup>135</sup>

Given that Native Hawaiian healers are protected and recognized through the 1988 Native Hawaiian Health Care Act,<sup>136</sup> there is a possibility for them to collaborate with doctors who practice western medicine. The following plants mentioned below attempt to offer alternative options for people who seek help to boost their respiratory and immune system. Mānoa Valley has resilient foodways that have the capacity to improve nutrition and galvanize residents to consume sustainably and live healthy lifestyles. Kumuola Foundation has identified the following as alternative and safe sources for traditional healers to promote the health of the general population. This chapter is about the ways in which the healers may use them to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

The awapuhi, shampoo ginger, is a Hawaiian soap. The awapuhi is also comfortable in the valley, if not in the water from which they feed. As such, this plant does not need attention and care. They produce mostly during the rainy seasons. Native Hawaiian voyagers purposefully brought around 30 plants to the Hawaiian Islands purposefully to survive and adapt to the condition of the islands.<sup>137</sup> Awapuhi are thus self-supporting, favoring wet tropical climates, thus, supporting the next generations. Researchers found that,

“Saponin molecules in awapuhi act like soap and detergent because they have one end that can hang on to water molecules (hydrophilic, water loving) and one end that can hang on to oil molecules and repel water (hydrophobic). This dual ability gives a saponin,

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<sup>135</sup> Charis M. Galanakis, “The Food Systems in the Era of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Crisis,” *Foods* 9, no. 4, 2020, 523.

<sup>136</sup> While many kāhuna practice traditional Hawaiian healing practices, they had to seek permission from state government and undergo through a certification process with Papa Ola Lokahi. Patients today could visit a kāhuna if they desire.

<sup>137</sup> Kaleolani Hanohano, Alison Ka’olinokaimana Yasuoka, Kyle Nakatsuka, Riley Wells, and Pauline W.U. Chinn, “COVID-19: 8 Lessons for PREK-12 and Community,” July 4, 2020 (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa: unpublished), 12.

soap, or detergent molecule the name amphiphile, meaning to like both oil and water. This makes amphiphiles ‘bridge molecules’ that hang on to oils and viruses, lift them from our skin and form little globules (micelles) with oily substances attached to the oil-loving end with the water-loving end outside hanging onto water molecules.”<sup>138</sup>

In this manner, the awapuhi can remove COVID-19 because the virus’ coat has oily characteristics much like our skin’s natural oils.<sup>139</sup> At the farm, handwashing is taken seriously given that it can stop the spread of COVID-19. As a simple and life-saving task,<sup>140</sup> washing hands with awapuhi also connotes geographic ancestral knowledge because earlier Native Hawaiian voyagers created a foundation for future generations to enact healthy behaviors and practices.

‘Alaea: Lua‘alaea stream stretches out the farm and is named after ‘alaea, the iron-rich red soil. The traditional healers from Ke Ola Mamo have used alae to help people who have problems with internal bleeding or hemorrhage including women who have long or heavy menstrual periods. This plant can also be used to build the blood to assist people with anemia, cancer, and with AIDS.<sup>141</sup> ‘Alaea is stretched along the stream by the rains in the valley. Today, ‘alaea is used to make red Hawaiian salt in Kauai. It can also be used for a dye.<sup>142</sup> The significance of ‘alaea is told to remember the ‘akua (Gods and their elemental forms), ali<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Kaleolani Hanohano, Alison Ka‘olinokaimana Yasuoka, Kyle Nakatsuka, Riley Wells, and Pauline W.U. Chinn, “COVID-19: 8 Lessons for PREK-12 and Community,” July 4, 2020 (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa: unpublished), 12.

<sup>139</sup> Hanohano et al., “COVID-19: 8 Lessons for PREK-12 and Community,” 12.

<sup>140</sup> Shamila Sharma, “Handwashing an effective tool to prevent COVI-19, other diseases,” World Health Organizations, October 15, 2020, accessed March 20, 2021.

<https://www.who.int/southeastasia/news/detail/15-10-2020-handwashing-an-effective-tool-to-prevent-covid-19-other-diseases#:~:text=To%20stop%20the%20spread%20of,handling%20animals%20or%20animal%20waste.>

<sup>141</sup> Kalua Kaiahua, *Hawaiian Healing Herbs: A Book of Recipes* (Honolulu: Ka‘imi Pono Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>142</sup> Kaiahua, *Hawaiian Healing Herbs: A Book of Recipes*, 2.

(chiefs) and maka ‘āinana (commoners) who live among us and watch and protect the waterways and the future of Kānaka.<sup>143</sup>

Māmaki: Māmaki leaves are used for making a medicinal. Its bark can also be used to make kapa. Many traditional healers associate māmaki with alleviating of stomach aches.<sup>144</sup> The tree provides opportunities for large harvests, groundwater recharge and has aesthetic value. Māmaki grows in the edges of forest and in forest clearings where water is plentiful. Typically, the leaves can be dried and potent used as a laxative.<sup>145</sup> It is naturally caffeine free. Māmaki promotes healthy cardiovascular function and immune system. The availability of māmaki also contributed to the increased efficiency of the project because the plant can easily regrow its leaves to grow again between three to six weeks.<sup>146</sup> They are planted at the entryways of the farm and along borders of the lo‘i kalo to compliment the annual crops like kalo.

‘Olena (Tumeric): The root of this ginger plant can be used for earaches or sore throats.<sup>147</sup> A traditional healer claims that it helps people clear their sinuses. The root of the ‘olena could be made into a yellow dye for kapa.<sup>148</sup> ‘Olena dwells naturally in wet forest valleys. It likes shade and wet soil. It is easiest to grow ‘olena from a piece of the root.<sup>149</sup> The leaves will then sprout up from the root. ‘Olena can be found in local stores because farmers can produce it with little maintenance. Vitamin C is known to support the immune function and lowers the

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<sup>143</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, February 17, 2021

<sup>144</sup> Kaiahua, *Hawaiian Healing Herbs: A Book of Recipes*, 15.

<sup>145</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>146</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>147</sup> June Gutmanis. *Kahuna Lā’au Lapa’au: Hawaiian Herbal Medicine* (Honolulu: Island Heritage Publishing, 2018), 12.

<sup>148</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>149</sup> Kaiahua, *Hawaiian Healing Herbs: A Book of Recipes*, 20.

susceptibility of the lower respiratory tract infection.<sup>150</sup> Current research from public health scholar, Galanakis, reveals that “foods rich in vitamins and of functional foods can boost the immune system to help fight off viruses.”<sup>151</sup> ‘Olena is also rich in Vitamin C and may be an essential tool to support the human immune system against COVID-19.

Pōpolo (Black Nightshade): While it is common in Hawai‘i, many people think of it as a weed. Traditional healer Kaiahua narrates, “When I was young many people ate the leaves of the popolo for food, cooking them the same way they prepared sweet potato leaves for eating. Nowadays, not very many people eat popolo leaves. I have used the leaves and berries to help people with cancer, and to help strengthen the immune system. I have also used it to treat high or low blood count levels.”<sup>152</sup> Pōpolo grows like a small bush, usually to about four feet tall, but it can grow as tall as six feet.<sup>153</sup> It grows fast in the late spring and through the summer. It grows abundantly in the wild, especially in the wetter parts of the islands. It can be transplanted by taking the stem out of the ground with its roots. Pōpolo likes to have some shade and does not do too well in complete sunlight. The presence of rainfall does not necessitate manually watering the pōpolo. It can be found flourishing at the farm.<sup>154</sup>

Wapine (Hawaiian Lemon Grass): This plant has long thin fragrant leaves that smell like citrus fruit. It is used medicinally in many parts of the world. The leaves can be used to make tea, and can aid against stomach ache, problems with colon, bladder, and livers.<sup>155</sup> Farmers plant

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<sup>150</sup> Charis M. Galanakis, “The Food Systems in the Era of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Crisis,” *Foods* 9, 2020, 523.

<sup>151</sup> Charis M. Galanakis, “The Food Systems in the Era of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Crisis,” *Foods* 9, 2020, 523.

<sup>152</sup> Kaiahua, *Hawaiian Healing Herbs: A Book of Recipes*, 21.

<sup>153</sup> Kaiahua, *Hawaiian Healing Herbs: A Book of Recipes*, 21.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> Kaiahua, *Hawaiian Healing Herbs: A Book of Recipes*, 24.

wapine early in the season, covering the soil with black net to trample the honohono grass, and cut wapine several times for harvest. Also, the leaves can be used for food flavoring, especially in Filipino and Thai foods.<sup>156</sup> This plant can grow within four to six months.<sup>157</sup>

Maile Hohono (*Ageratum*):



Figure 3: An abundance of maile hohono rooted next to the lo‘i kalo on top of ‘alaea (red soil).

The small, fuzzy flower heads are dense and may have lavender or white flowers. This plant is also high in nitrogen. It prefers cool weather conditions and tolerates compacted wet soils. Maile hohono can be used for treating sore throats, colic, artery of the digestive tract and can be used as a tonic.<sup>158</sup> The leaves are put into water and could be infused as tea. The white plant has anti-inflammatory and anti-allergen properties and is best for those with asthma.<sup>159</sup> Tea made from flower heads can generally treat cough, cold and high blood pressure. According to

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<sup>156</sup> Kaiahua, *Hawaiian Healing Herbs: A Book of Recipes*, 24.

<sup>157</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>158</sup> Medicinal Herb Info, “White Weed,” 1996-2021, accessed April 1, 2021.  
<http://medicinalherbinfo.org/000Herbs2016/1herbs/white-weed/>.

<sup>159</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

the mahi ‘ai, they discovered the increased presence of maile hohono since the clearing of the space. Maile hohone then began to sprout along the banks of the restored lo‘i kalo.<sup>160,161</sup> Aunty Kuki articulates, “One hundred years ago the healers used this [maile hohono] for the influenza epidemic and this plant came out, showcasing itself so that the people can go and use it.”<sup>162</sup> Their presence at the farm thus signals regenerative justice for the environment and Kānaka who reclaim their way of life.



Figure 4: Photo of Black Gold resting near the entry way of the farm. Taken by author.

Black Gold is “the compost that comes to provide life after death. Among compost’s talents, it improves soil texture and structure, adds macro and micronutrients, controls erosion, protects against drought, stabilizes toxins, and controls weeds.”<sup>163</sup> The mahi ‘ai use a passive slow-composting method with ingredients such as dry leaves, wood chips, food waste and

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<sup>160</sup> Maile Hohono is a tropical plant in Hawai‘i.

<sup>161</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>162</sup> Pauline “Kuki” Navales, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

<sup>163</sup> Leah Penniman, *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm’s Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*, (White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing), 96.

manure, Indigenous microorganisms then eat the detritus, forming new soil in the process.<sup>164</sup> It has taken the mahi ‘ai eight years to have massive piles of compost and they sometimes inoculate lactic acid bacteria (LAB) to enrich their soil.<sup>165</sup> The mahi ‘ai then shovel the soil into beds transferring the compost to planting areas.

### **Working Rhythmically with the ‘Āina**

In the end, the strategic and financial imperatives of the project seek to be resolved by partnering with other community organizations. Kumuola Foundation, Ke Ola Mamo and our future partners can have a direct collaboration with one another to enact a community-driven approach in ‘Oahu revitalizing cultural practices and existing strengths for better health.

Based on our observations, plants are supposed to be autonomous and the mahi ‘ai have been honoring their existence to perpetuate life itself. The water is also there to sustain this movement. Yet the mahi ‘ai understand that improving peoples’ access to water has not been realized globally. This indicates that there is a need for programs to help people, the environment and our overall ecologies that mitigate the risk factors for diseases. Such efforts would bring about social and spiritual benefits. Uncle Nick testifies to the elemental forms in Mānoa that inspires his artistry:

“And sometimes you have to do it, you know, not to run away from life. The things around us are kind of just seeping in, like on the farm. And that music is another way to help us get there. And then get that message across right? We need warriors, we need other like-minded people. Music always inspires me for that kind of higher realm. It’s a vibrational setting tool that I use. I think the same thing with these plants, you know, it’s an expression of joy. And they vibe to it, you know, they appreciate it as much as we do.”

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<sup>164</sup> Nick “Kali” Navales, interview by author, April 1, 2021.

<sup>165</sup> Lactic acid bacteria are groups of microorganisms used in food fermentation and are capable of surviving in acidic (low-pH) environment). Applying LAB can accelerate the decomposition of organic amendments in soils. Ikeda et al., 1-3 <https://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/sa-8.pdf>; Pauline “Kuki” Navales and Nick Navales, interview by author, April 1, 2021.



As we immerse ourselves in the music, plants, soil and waters of Mānoa, we are nurturing our own conscience of the universe. Kumuola Foundation is modeling how we can create harmonious relations with the environment. Indeed, the forces in the valley tell us that they determine the conditions of possibility for Hawai‘i and its people.<sup>166</sup> While this pandemic demands more robust and resilient forms of affinity between our communities, Kanaka Maoli knowledges and experiences will intimately show us a plurality of possibilities that protect our shared histories and fulfill our desires for an abundant future.

The next chapter exemplifies the attitudes and behaviors of the student volunteers in Kumuola Foundation toward our goal for food sovereignty. They shed light on how their encounters at the farm are shaping their perspectives by routing their family histories, retaining traditional knowledge and practices, and embodying settler aloha ‘āina.

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<sup>166</sup> Dean Itsuji Saranillio, *Unsustainable Empire: Alternative Histories of Hawai‘i Statehood*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 204.

### Chapter 3: Becoming a Life-Giving Tree

Clearing up the ‘āina (that which feeds) and its waterways for lo‘i kalo can have varied significance between student volunteers and the mahi ‘ai (farmers). For those of us who have been returning to the farm for more than a year, we feel that our sense of community and responsibility grows stronger. Loosely translated as the Tree of Life, Kumuola has been framed through the language of regeneration and enacted in interethnic collaborations.<sup>167</sup> Kānaka Maoli utilize their ancestral knowledge for the next generations to become stewards of the ‘āina and for settler allies to dismantle structures of imperialism and settler colonialism. Student volunteers have come to realize the elemental forces present in the valley and the ways in which the mahi ‘ai embody their teachings in their lifestyles, and practices. Because Kānaka Maoli’s pilina (relationship) and kuleana (responsibility) to land is incommensurable, I explore how young student volunteers grapple with settler aloha ‘āina as a framework that they hope would account for the ongoing state violence toward the ‘āina and reveal a pathway to amplify the demands for self-determination alongside Kānaka Maoli leaders within and beyond the Pacific.<sup>168</sup> In doing so, they acknowledged the limitations of the liberal multiculturalism discourse generated by the occupying state of Hawai‘i based on their own stories of migration and community building.<sup>169</sup>

Both Aunty Kuki and Uncle Nick demonstrate an array of personalities rooted in the beauty of the lands as Indigenous peoples who have rich cultural heritages and resistance. They

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<sup>167</sup> Kumuola Foundation, “History,” Kumuola Foundation, 2010, <https://www.kumuolahawaii.com/purpose>.

<sup>168</sup> Noenoe K. Silva, *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen: Reconstructing Native Hawaiian Intellectual History*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, 83.

<sup>169</sup> Liberal multiculturalism refers to the integration of historically oppressed and marginalized into the current structures of power for socioeconomic mobility. Roderick N. Labrador, *Building Filipino Hawaii*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015, 30.

described the analogy of being Kumuola to others. Specifically, they said student volunteers can become “a life-giving tree for others” and pass knowledge that is “not just being pulled out of the air, but it’s also the knowledge of our kūpuna (ancestors) that has been going for generations today.”<sup>170</sup> This implies that we treat Indigenous knowledge as fundamental for achieving genuine security and sovereignty. In Jeffrey Carroll, Brandy Nālani McDougall and Georganne Nordstrom’s *Huihui: Navigating Art and Literature in the Pacific*, they state that colonial powers “discount the value of Indigenous cultural and material productions and to reinforce systems of silencing.”<sup>171</sup> As Carroll et al. explain, the barriers imposed on the Pacific are based on the logics of empire.<sup>172</sup> White settler institutions devalue and degrade Indigenous contributions to advance their own interests and deprive people of land. In contrast to settler desires for private property and expropriation of lands and its resources, the Kumuola Foundation celebrates the love of ‘āina, its peoples, and its natural features through mo‘olelo (origing stories) and mele (songs).<sup>173</sup>

## Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyze the pedagogies implicated in Kumuola’s activities while supplementing testimonies from student volunteers in the ‘Ai Pono project. The student volunteers are associated with Atherton YMCA and are aged  $\geq 18$  years old with at least 1 year of experience farming in Mānoa. They also reside in ‘Oahu, Hawai‘i. Those who participated previously in the organization were contacted via telephone and email.

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<sup>170</sup> Pauline Navales (mahi ‘ai) in discussion with the author, February 2021.

<sup>171</sup> Jeffrey Carroll, Brandy Nālani McDougall, and Georganne Nordstrom, *Huihui: Navigating Art and Literature in the Pacific*, Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2015, 4.

<sup>172</sup> Empire is understood to be the force that subjected Indigenous systems and organizations for exploitation, dispossession, and cultural assimilation.

<sup>173</sup> Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2014, 55.

Eligibility was determined over the phone and if they were willing to be included, an appointment for an interview was made. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Student volunteers provided descriptions of the activities and the contexts in which they are exposed at the farm. This chapter is also based on the concepts the mahi 'ai shared among students. For example, we can recognize the well-known Hawaiian literary devices the mahi 'ai used such as *ōlelo no'eau* (Hawaiian phrases and sayings); repeated sounds or assonance; allusion to other *mo'olelo* (tales or history); and *kaona* (layers of meaning).<sup>174</sup> The mahi 'ai assert these literary methods as we progress along the farm. What makes our interactions memorable is the constant repetition of exchanges between the mahi 'ai and student volunteers. We also frequently attempt to figure out the meaning behind the phrases they communicated. Clearly, the responsibility to remember these phrases falls among student volunteers. Thus, we draw from our memories, experiences, melodies and tunes as we collectively document the lessons we learned. While the process of unpacking their *mana'o* (thoughts and opinions) may seem intimidating, the play in language and tone are exhibited in their speech, songs and dance. Most times, we are expected to do our own research to understand the sayings that may have been rather more obvious at the time the mahi 'ai formulated them.

Depending on personal circumstances, the student volunteers interpret these teachings in their own ways. They also shared their lessons with their families and social networks, as well as learned strategies to navigate Indigenous spaces. Their testimonies constitute the essence of settler *aloha 'āina* and desire for food sovereignty. Of importance is how they grappled with their

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<sup>174</sup> Silva, *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen: Reconstructing Native Hawaiian Intellectual History*, 6.

families' immigration stories and settlement to Hawai'i, a matter that they continuously learn to articulate in their lifetime.

## Background

The desecration of land and waters has led us to face an ecological crisis in the Pacific.<sup>175</sup> To disassociate ecological crisis from social crisis is to ignore the distinctive ways in which soils, plants, animals, waters, and land function through the violent processes of empire.<sup>176</sup> Architect Sean Connelly points toward urbanization as one of the driving factors for these intersecting crises.<sup>177</sup> It can be observed that more diverse ethnic groups are living in urban cities where they can seize public resources and opportunities, but the physical separation of urban and agricultural zones sever people from 'āina.<sup>178</sup> As recent immigrants and local settlers shape the sociopolitical culture of the islands, Kānaka Maoli and their cause for self-determination become insignificant. Indigenous-led organizations like Ho'oula 'āina and Ma'o Organic Farms actively promote the restoration of threatened food systems in urban spaces.<sup>179</sup> Student volunteers in Kumuola Foundation also vocalize their concerns over these circumstances. Raised in Kalihi, Mary commented on the difficulty of maintaining foodways such as vegetable gardens and makeshift market stalls as they are looked down upon since "the food is smelly and it's not American

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<sup>175</sup> Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey. *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2019, 5.

<sup>176</sup> DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, 7.

<sup>177</sup> Sean Connelly, "Our City as Ahupua'a: For Justice-Advancing Futures." In *Value of Hawai'i 3: Hulihia*, the Turning, ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, Craig Howes, Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 231.

<sup>178</sup> Sean Connelly, "Our City as Ahupua'a: For Justice-Advancing Futures." 233.

<sup>179</sup> Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services, Ho'oula 'Āina, 2021, <https://www.hooulua.com/>

looking.”<sup>180</sup> Describing her family’s subsistence practices, she mentions how her father cooked every morning with Filipino food, collected ingredients from their backyard with their neighbors, and shared vegetables.<sup>181</sup>

Jeremiah similarly reminisced about her life in the Philippines and her experiences there as compared to their family’s small apartment in Kalihi. She recalled moments with her family growing up on a farm and seeing her grandmother interact with the environment from “gardening to fishing to a nearby river.”<sup>182</sup> She expressed missing these intimate forms of survival because they no longer live in proximity to a farm. They could only plant malunggay and papaya trees in their “tiny” backyard.<sup>183</sup> The strict regulation for gardening and the lack of available farms imposed by settler structures shapes the ways that particular groups like Filipinos utilize current food systems, which proceeds to feelings of shame. Nevertheless, the families of Jeremiah and Mary have alternatives to purchasing food in supermarkets and other forms of capitalist consumption. However, they are encouraged to assimilate in the capitalist mode of production (i.e. shopping at supermarkets) rather than reproduce their agricultural traditions and foodways. Colonizing racial ecologies perpetuate the idea that historically marginalized groups are incapable of having ecological experiences and concerns.<sup>184</sup> The subsistent culture of Kalihi is

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<sup>180</sup> Mary (student volunteer) in discussion with the author, April 21, 2021. It is important to note that liberal multiculturalism is also at play in her statement since ethnic and racial stereotypes persist in contemporary Hawai‘i. These negative stereotypes such as being Fresh off the Boat and having accents have material consequences for Filipinos and Pacific Islanders.

<sup>181</sup> Mary (student volunteer) in discussion with the author, April 21, 2021.

<sup>182</sup> Jeremiah (student volunteer) in discussion with the author, April 21, 2021.

<sup>183</sup> Jeremiah (student volunteer) in discussion with the author, April 21, 2021

<sup>184</sup> DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, 9. Those from western cultures deem Pacific peoples outside of modern time and overlook the history of European empire and capitalism.

even further discouraged.<sup>185</sup> As Mary jokingly comments, her parents are “not supposed to plant in the apartment complex because we don’t own anything.”<sup>186</sup> This indicates the reality of living in a working class environment where they are intended to live away from the natural environment rather than to explore the abundance and capacity of the ‘āina to feed generations of residents in urban areas.<sup>187</sup> While there are indeed networks that connect multiple ethnic groups with Kānaka Maoli, the social, economic and physical aspects conjured by settler forces restrict opportunities for traditional foodways to respectfully emerge under the guidance of Kānaka farmers.

On the other side, Jake described how living in the city made it easier to transition to his new home because he relied on his friends and older mentors to seek a safer shelter away from his family. He did not have adults in his family to guide him when they moved to Kalihi. The lack of involvement of his parents and older siblings made him interdependent. As such, Jake approached individuals in organizations for their mentorship. His family’s migration could also be traced to the post-1965 immigration act where an influx of immigrants settled to Kalihi, creating an enclave of Filipino immigrants.<sup>188</sup> Nonetheless, Kalihi inflicts the possibilities of regenerative practice and of reshaping capitalist geographies.<sup>189</sup> Jake utilized his social capital to formally establish clubs in them as intrinsic groups of “individuals who have passion for serving

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<sup>185</sup> Candace Fujikane, *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future: Kanaka Maoli and Critical Settler Cartographies in Hawai‘i*, 156.

<sup>186</sup> Mary (student volunteer) in discussion with the author, April 21, 2021.

<sup>187</sup> Fujikane, *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future: Kanaka Maoli and Critical Settler Cartographies in Hawai‘i*, 166.

<sup>188</sup> Roderick N. Labrador, *Building Filipino Hawai‘i*, 12.

<sup>189</sup> Silva, *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen: Reconstructing Native Hawaiian Intellectual History*, 200. Fujikane, *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future: Kanaka Maoli and Critical Settler Cartographies in Hawai‘i*, 173.

the community.”<sup>190</sup> His leadership attracted youth to explore other educational and career possibilities beyond Hawai‘i. From this perspective, community building gave rise to social struggles, movements and acts of resistance in spaces where they may seem unlikely.<sup>191</sup>

Another interviewee, Cuong, is from Lahaina, Maui, and was raised in an urban area that catered to the tourism and hospitality industry. He noted that his parents were “very poor” and they depleted their money to move to a place they could fit in.<sup>192</sup> He remembered growing up, actively playing sports, and recognizing his mother’s love for growing herbs such as mint and green onions. He stated that his mother could not plant anything else bigger even though she desired more access to food because of the place she lived in Vietnam.<sup>193</sup> According to public health scholars, immigrants like Cuong and his mother play important roles in developing community gardens because of the lack of access in culturally appropriate stores and markets.<sup>194</sup> Home gardening can also lead to healthier diet patterns due to the availability of culturally-valued fruits and vegetables.<sup>195</sup>

In his interview, though, Cuong outlines his family’s plan to “own property in Maui” when they attain success and secure wealth. This wish highlights their individual persistence and entrepreneurship or hard work, but such actions can be dangerous claims among settlers. That is, Cuong’s statement is a common phrase utilized by local residents who distance themselves from

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<sup>190</sup> Jake (student volunteer), personal interview, 2021.

<sup>191</sup> Fujikane, *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future: Kanaka Maoli and Critical Settler Cartographies in Hawai‘i*, 151. Dean Itsuji Saranillio, *Unsustainable Empire Alternative Histories of Hawai‘i Statehood*, 207.

<sup>192</sup> Cuong (student volunteer) personal interview, April 29, 2021.

<sup>193</sup> Cuong, personal interview, April 29, 2021.

<sup>194</sup> Opal Buchthal, Denise Nelson-Hurwitz, Laura Hsu, Melissa Byers, and Jinan Banna. “Identifying Urban Immigrant Food-Cultivation Practices for Culturally-Tailored Garden-Based Nutrition Programs.” *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 22, no. 4 (2020): 779.

<sup>195</sup> Buchthalet al., 778.



haoles (white settlers) who participate in settler structures that have differential consequences for Kanaka Maoli and recent immigrant groups such as Micronesians.<sup>196</sup> While the Vietnamese community are still largely excluded from the prosperity of the tourism industry, the desire for private property may cause ethnic conflict in the future due to the erasure and violence inflicted toward Kanaka Maoli within the settler state.<sup>197</sup> As Cuong and his family reflect on what lies ahead beyond this desire, more student volunteers and activists hope that invoking land-based restoration projects would overcome the dominant paradigm of a capitalistic fantasy for settlers to claim. These ahistoric and presumably local approaches often evade the history of settler colonialism and state violence in Hawai‘i.

#### Honoring Pilina and Fulfilling a Promise

As stated earlier in the chapter, it was established that the student volunteers were affiliated with Atherton YMCA, and it was the main force responsible for advertising the farm to high school and college students. Atherton YMCA built on earlier campaigns by other branches like the Kaimuki leadership who organized workdays to clear invasive plants from areas. The students belong to first generation and working class communities, as observed by Jheanelle who spearheaded the recruitment at the college level. She, along with the other four interviewees, have been volunteering since 2012 when they participated in the College Camp program through the YMCA to learn about sustainability and to explore opportunities in their local college campus. Jheanelle felt kinship with her fellow members who kept returning to the farm. She was asked to facilitate the partnership with Kumuola because she served in the YMCA student board.

Jheanelle notes:

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<sup>196</sup> Saranillio, *Unsustainable Empire Alternative Histories of Hawai‘i Statehood*, 5-6.

<sup>197</sup> Saranillio, *Unsustainable Empire Alternative Histories of Hawai‘i Statehood*, 79.

I was still on the board. And so we got this grant called Mālama Mānoa. And it was basically a \$1,000 grant. And then you have to choose like an organization of who you want the grant to go to in terms of like, of course, resources, the tools, manpower, anything like that. So we decided to choose Kumuola because that was one of the organizations that we were closely working with. And obviously, most of us have that personal relationship with them, like Kristy Lam. But for some reason, we didn't get to, like, do the grant like it didn't fall through. I mean, we obviously wrote the letter, we got the grant, we applied for it, we got it. And it was already promised to Kumuola. But there's some, but for some reason, it didn't go through. I don't know if it was the lack of volunteers.

Before stepping into the role, Jheanelle consulted with Kristy for advice and help communicating to undergraduate students about the opportunities offered at the farm.<sup>198</sup> Atherton YMCA asked for her leadership to fulfill her promise of building planter boxes and propagating native plants with the Kumuola Foundation from the grant. She then took the initiative to conduct outreach among Atherton YMCA members and other college organizations so that they could establish the presence of student volunteers at the farm.

In her testimony, she pursued the project to honor Atherton YMCA's intention for collaboration with Kumuola Foundation. Her dedication resulted in attending the service days "every Saturday of the entire month for the academic year." At the same time, she was fulfilling service hours needed for a scholarship and so she appealed to underrepresented college students from the Hawaii Undergraduate Initiative organization who were also looking to complete their service hours. The farm then became space for college students to gather and get to know more information about the Native Hawaiian stewards of Mānoa. Volunteers were recruited into farming by their desire for service and completing hours for scholarship. They followed leaders from the Atherton YMCA to the farm. Common promises about free food, meeting new people

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<sup>198</sup> Jheanelle (student volunteer) interviewed by author, April 21, 2021. Kristy is a Native Hawaiian graduate student at UH Mānoa and a former student board president of Atherton YMCA.

and working in the land primarily motivated them. In fact, these tactics are common among organizations who are reliant on volunteers.

From the beginning of the project, Jheanelle pointed to the challenges she faced when organizing volunteers for the farm in Mānoa. For example, she offered 100 hours “as a great opportunity for them” to learn more about Native Hawaiian culture while working on sacred land. Yet she mentioned that even though Atherton YMCA was growing, its student board was not familiar with Kumuola Foundation and could not be the bridge for the two organizations. She thus felt responsible for introducing the project to volunteers, who, in turn, built planter boxes and removed invasive plants. Jheanelle observed that most of the first-generation and underrepresented college students were modeling allyship by conversing and interacting with each other. At the same time, her organization were dependent on volunteers who were inconsistent with their attendance and participation because they had many duties at home and school. Even though the mahi ‘ai were supportive of the students’ schedules, there were outside barriers that prevented them from returning. Jheanelle’s testimony revealed that while the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UH Mānoa) provided scholarships for students to perform community service, it was not enough to first-generation students to overcome financial and social restraints.

These lesser known stories of working-class and immigrant politics highlight the issue among ethnic groups who are marginalized within the college universities. In 2020, it was reported that 22% of enrolled students at UH Mānoa were first-generation.<sup>199</sup> Tuition for four-

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<sup>199</sup> University of Hawai‘i News, “UH stems enrollment decline despite pandemic and economic fallout,” accessed April 18, 2021, <https://www.hawaii.edu/news/2020/10/15/uh-enrollment-pandemicfallout/#:~:text=Native%20Hawaiians%20or%20part%2DHawaiians,started%20tracking%20in%20fall%202015>.

year colleges is still not affordable for certain ethnic groups given the high cost of living in Hawai‘i and the low wages earned among Native Hawaiians, Filipinos and Pacific Islanders.<sup>200</sup> In average, a graduating student can acquire estimated loan debt of \$25,000 per borrower as compared to the national average debt per borrower of \$29,000.<sup>201</sup> To alleviate the financial burden among students, the Financial Aid Services offer the Mānoa Service Award worth \$1,000 each year for those who are not eligible for Pell Grant Funding as an incentive to complete one hundred hours of community service per semester with a non-profit organization.<sup>202</sup> This means an awardee approximately received ten dollars per hour, which leaves students like Jheanealle financially insecure when they should be focusing in their studies. Coming from families who are on public assistance, many first-generation students often worked while in school and have obligations to fulfill in their families. In thinking about Indigenous-led organizations that are dependent on volunteers, the economic struggles of first-generation students place them in precarious situations and hinder their mobilization efforts with Kānaka farmers.

Coalitions thus need to better acknowledge and support the socioeconomic mobility of working communities. For example, ‘Oahu saw the rise of student activism in the 1970s focused on issues of educational access, worker’s rights, and protecting sacred land and waters.<sup>203</sup> Many

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<sup>200</sup> Noe Tanigawa, “Ethnic Inequality in the Aloha State,” accessed April 18, 2021, <https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/post/ethnic-inequality-aloha-state#stream/0>

<sup>201</sup> University of Hawai‘i News, “UH Mānoa ranks high for low student debt,” accessed May 15, 2021, <https://www.hawaii.edu/news/2019/09/13/manoa-ranking-student-debt/#:~:text=Among%20the%20nation's%20public%20universities,per%20Class%20of%202018%20borrower>

<sup>202</sup> University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Civic and Community Engagement, Mānoa Service Award, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://manoa.hawaii.edu/undergrad/civic-engage/manoa-service-award/>. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the total number of hours needed to complete have been reduced to 50 hours per semester.

<sup>203</sup> Davianna Pōmaika‘i McGregor and Ibrahim Auodé, “Our History, Our Way!”: Ethnic Studies for Hawai‘i’s People.” In *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty*

activists developed ways to make legible the U.S. imperial violence and U.S.-backed regimes of water and occupation to a larger public. This effort trained youth to be critical thinkers and become involved in community-driven approaches to research and activism.<sup>204</sup> Jheanelle's testimony showcases feelings of frustration whenever she organized volunteers with limited resources from Atherton YMCA and UH Mānoa. The emotions she expressed translated into a political action, producing moral values and principles for 'āina-based, interethnic, and intra-class collaborations and projects.

#### A Nurturing Environment

The Kumuola Foundation is a well-intended site to explore the politicization of college students because most said they did not experience food insecurity while growing up in their homelands and neighborhoods. They felt they had the necessary resources in terms of social capital to withstand poverty and persisted in accomplishing their dream to attend college. It was the welcoming environment of the Kumuola farmers that attracted all the interviewees. For example, Darlene, whose grandparents were Filipino sakadas who grew up in Kalihi, reflected on the impact of reconnecting with people she used to work with and getting to know more about Aunty Kuki and Uncle Nick's dedication to the farm:

They are always so welcoming. And they are trying to teach you to do their best and they always seem to be passionate about knowing what we are doing too. And they can relate. I kind of feel insecure about not really knowing much about Hawaiian cultural practices, but whenever I go there, like, it doesn't matter because they like teaching you and they are letting you do work. They want all of us to contribute.<sup>205</sup>

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ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, Ikaika Hussey and Erin Kahunawaika'ala Wright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 70-71.

<sup>204</sup> McGregor and Auode, "Our History, Our Way!": Ethnic Studies for Hawai'i's People," 72.

<sup>205</sup> Darlene (student volunteer), interviewed by author, April 21, 2021.

Some of the volunteers I spoke also noted that the farm was a place they would recommend to their close friends. Jeremiah, who was the only volunteer that began in college, said:

It was the importance of sacred space for the Hawaiian people that drew me in. It's a very significant place for them to have access to share Indigenous knowledge, culture and their way of life. Especially when they are producing and planting kalo. The younger generation can continue this task. So that's something we can share to people who might not be aware of what we do as volunteers.

The phrase, "sacred place," signals a language for honor and respect that enacts solidarity for Kānaka Maoli struggles beyond the essence of community service in academic institutions. The association of Mānoa Valley as a sacred space for Native Hawaiians destabilizes the colonialist construction of property and the colonial history of watersheds within western epistemology. Sacred space calls for an alternate genealogy birthed to the era of Hawaiian renaissance in the 1970s during the Protect Kaho'olawe movement among Hawaiians against the U.S. military regime.<sup>206</sup> It also echoes a recent moment for Asian settlers asserted by Candace Fujikane and Kyle Kajihiro and other scholar activists who are calling out against imperial projects such as the construction of Thirty Meter Telescopes and the biennial Rim of the Pacific military exercises construed by Asian settler colonialism.<sup>207</sup> Jeremiah's statement resonates with the passion to oppose U.S. occupation along with Kanaka Maoli community members. The fact that sacred places have yet to be protected leads some to focus on an anti-colonial approaches in their activism. Clearly, the feeling of gratitude expressed by the student volunteers reflects their inclusion in the contemporary Hawaiian movement as evidenced in the term settler aloha 'āina.

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<sup>206</sup> Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, *Nā Wāhine Koa: Hawaiian Women for Sovereignty and Demilitarization*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 1-3.

<sup>207</sup> Fujikane, 89. Kyle Kajihiro and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, "The Future is Koa" In *Value of Hawai'i 3: Hulihia, the Turning*, ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, Craig Howes, Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 62-65.

That is, students evoke a sense of ethical responsibility through the experience of restoring lo‘i kalo and planting native plants.

Students also indicate that organizational and family ties were key vehicles for recruiting other students, especially during the beginning of the academic year. Darlene joined her friends to learn the necessity of farming and contemporary social struggles in the islands. Additionally, their volunteerism support the findings from Hōkūlani K. Aikau’s research about critical positionality and kuleana. Aikau says that “kuleana is both a set of ethical principles and material practices that fundamentally re-form and in-form our home and other-than-human relationship in places.”<sup>208</sup> Truly, the mahi ‘ai guide student volunteers to ethically lead activities in the farm. In turn, we can be fluent in honoring Kanaka Maoli leadership, repair our own relationships with the ‘āina, be proud of our heritage, and infuse a politics of solidarity. This notion of kuleana sets in motion the ways settler and Kānaka Maoli strategically assert sovereignty where they can expose the hypocrisy of the U.S. empire.

Among the six student volunteers, farming and fishing are also embedded in their families’ lifestyle from living in proximity to the natural environment in their homelands. They rely on their family memories of growing up in their homelands with abundance of food and living off the land. In one instance, Darlene mentioned her active life in North Cotabato, Philippines, where she played with her cousins at her family’s fruit farm. Her great grandfather was also sakada, one of the earlier Filipino laborers at Kahuku plantation in 1920. He returned to the Philippines where they expected to live comfortably from their earnings. However, the low

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<sup>208</sup> Hōkūlani K. Aikau, “From Malihini to Hoa‘āina: Reconnecting People, Places and Practices” In *The Past Before Us: Mo‘okū‘auhau As Methodology*. Indigenous Pacifics Edited by Nālani Wilson-Hokowhitu, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2020, 84.

wages they saved for their family was not enough to sustain the next generations. Her parents had decided to return to O‘ahu to venture educational opportunities for their children. This is not surprising as both the Philippine and U.S. regimes collude with another to regulate the importation of Filipinos as a result of U.S. colonialism in Hawai‘i and the Philippines.<sup>209</sup> Her parents are now in a landscaping business where the work is physically demanding and the wages are low. The U.S. employs the multicultural narrative of success and wealth for those in impoverished states. The prioritization of the economic rights of individuals – namely, the rights to a free market-is used to mask the settler violations of the imperial state toward Indigenous peoples and their lands.

For example, sugar plantations coincided with the Americans gaining military, political and economic control of the islands and facilitating the dispossession and disenfranchisement of Kānaka Maoli. For Asian settlers, the history of labor in the plantation is often seen as a point of entry for understanding the oppression of and resistance against haole/white settler hegemony. The traditional use of land had plummed down from settler encroachment in the government. In the farm, the effects of indigenous genocide and land theft are revealed through the teachings of the mahi ‘ai. The student volunteers I spoke to realized how labor and settlement are preconditioned by settler colonialism and that there are deep contradictions in the promises of the state.

Their experiences within the food sovereignty movement slowly unearth the intersections of race, gender and citizenship. They are expanding their views about systemic barriers that

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<sup>209</sup> Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, “Toward A Critical Filipino Studies Approach to Philippine Migration.” In *Filipino Studies: Palimpsests of Nation and Diaspora*, edited by Martin F. Manalansan IV and Augusto F. Espiritu (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 36.



facilitate land dispossession and mobility. Student volunteers locate discriminatory state practices faced by ethnic groups based on the issue of U.S. occupation in Hawai‘i. They acknowledge the arduous labor that the mahi ‘ai experience to mālama wai (care for water). Cuong states,

Kumuola was partially impactful to me try to pursue environmental science as an undergrad, including the trip to Maui (at Kipahulu Farms), those were the biggest influences. Aunty Kuki shares the history of ahupua‘a from the mountain range to ocean especially the plants there, like every plant has a purpose. Especially like the very small plants that we know, we think that they don’t belong, thinking they are weeds but they actually serve a purpose. Take care of the land and its waters and they will take care of you. Don’t have bad intentions toward the land you live on. So the way you take care of the land matters.<sup>210</sup>

Other volunteers further recognized the deep connections between land and people. They reflected, as well, a growing activist impulse to connect their studies with the histories and movements of the Kānaka Maoli. While students insist on the welcoming nature of the mahi ‘ai, their attitude and behavior deeply contrasts with the Hawaiian hospitality as advertised and abused by the state because of their advocacy for food sovereignty. Profiling Hawaiians as amiable natives within the discourse of progress and development validates claims to property ownership, and the overall domestic and global technologies of the U.S. empire. Simply put, student volunteers do not downplay the efforts of the Kumuola Foundation in restoring foodways for settler and Indigenous populations.

Pa‘ahana (To work hard joyously)

At times, the mahi ‘ai sing and perform mele with the student volunteers, reminding each one of us about the progress we are making from clearing weeds around the gardenia tress to rebuilding a lo‘i kalo or taro patch. The feeling of joy and relief are produced as a necessary outcome to turn to the next project. They also perform a playful sensuality that invites all

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<sup>210</sup> Cuong, interviewed by author, April 21, 2021. Kipahulu farms is managed by the Aunty Kuki’s family in Maui.

listeners in, as with the students, the plants or the elemental forces around us. Student volunteers stated that their worries about planting (i.e. cutting the huli of the kalo and harvesting the gardenia) from the start soon became pacified when they get to know the mahi ‘ai. Cuong chimes in: “Nick is very energetic, eager to teach us, and like they always seem like very happy to want us to do something and help around the farm. They know we are curious and are willing to learn.”

While listening to the mahi ‘ai’s teachings, we are compelled into the urgency of the organization’s mission and its social and cultural impact. So the organization’s social and intellectual positioning can be thought of as an articulation of solidarity. Since the activities require volunteers to perform as a group, each student infuses their own persona with the group to signify the potentialities of our contribution. For Jake, a young Filipino who was born in the Philippines and lived in Kalihi and Waimanalo, he describes the rhythmic activities of the mahi ‘ai:

What catches my attention is when Aunty Kuki and Uncle Nick say they are hula dancers. When you are planting the kalo, you walk around and look at its placement. You have to treat the process like you are getting ready to dance hula... like when you are flattening and stomping your feet to even out the soil, you have to be on beat. You become more into your senses. And when I think of the way I interact with other people it has to be similar too. This whole experience changed my perspective about the environment. I think about the plants around us ...I wonder what stories they hold and how farmers have spent their time taking care of them.

Jake commented that he is becoming more self-conscious about the process of being in the ‘āina through a collective of scholars who are willing to spend a weekend at a farm. He also felt a stronger connection with the Native Hawaiian community and what it takes to be in better harmony with the aloha ‘āina movement. Singing and dancing according to some of the student volunteers illustrated the importance of “freedom” or self-determination among the mahi ‘ai at Kumuola Foundation. By dancing along with the farmers, the student volunteers supported the

rights of farmers, spoke about the issues affecting Kānaka, and connected their histories of oppression with the ‘āina-based struggles in Hawai‘i.

Student volunteers also acknowledged the ways the mahi ‘ai promote aloha ‘āina in their activities at the farm. Cuong states:

Planting takes a lot of work, the biggest lesson is working together, focusing on the same goal and Nick often asks us like how can we work on that? We joke around most of the time while planting. And the lo‘i is very symbolic, both like trying to build relationships with one another to reach a goal. And that is very important for food sovereignty too.

Here, it is clear the back-and-forth exchange between students and the mahi ‘ai break the dichotomy between native and non-native by implementing playful and joyful activities that foster interethnic collaborations. This is a creative methodology employed at the farm to also signify the potentialities of an Indigenous future.

In addition, students praised the mahi ‘ai for their ability to nurture students who are unfamiliar with Kanaka Māoli epistemologies. Mary described her thoughts about kalo farming:

Because I hear how hard it is and when you actually go there, see for yourself and then commit to farming. It's hard. So I really appreciate you know, when I see Kalo or things that I know that come from a farm in Hawai‘i I could understand that so much has gone into it. Like, kalo takes nine months to grow from the pregnancy to the birth of a baby. This really made me appreciate the kind of work understand how much muscle it takes and dedication. Aunty Kuki and Uncle Nick are the main knowledge sources of Hawaiian culture and values like mālama ‘āina for me. I learned so much because of them. It really helps shape who I am in this space, even though I'm not from here, I can still help.

Mary's statement, like those made by other college students in this study, highlighted the uncertainty about what constitutes kuleana and the extent to which self-doubt is present in these narratives about their role in dismantling ongoing state violence against Native Hawaiians. Even if Mary expresses any doubt about not coming from Mānoa, she actively waits for the guidance of Kānaka Maoli to initiate action.

Further, she explained when she can “step back” in moments where native voices can say their own narratives and for volunteers like herself have to “step up” in the activities at the farm, as with the removing of the weeds around the gardenias or being attentive to the demonstrations of the farmers on how to cut the huli of the kalo correctly. The insistence that immigrant communities can be accountable demonstrates that the political agency and privileges of settlers can be leveraged to foster genuine security and food sovereignty. The leadership of Kānaka motivates settlers like the student to seek permission from Kānaka Maoli on how best to dismantle hegemonic structures in Hawai‘i.

### **Future Implications**

Rather than asking student volunteers about their thoughts regarding certain lessons found in Kumuola Foundation, I relied on their interviews to allow my peers to identify what is relevant to them and in what regard. A few examples of my interview questions are: describe what you consider your home; how did you get involved with Kumuola Foundation?; and what is your favorite memory at the farm? These prompts allowed me to explore a broader universe of native-related concepts and practices as well as a more expansive range of responses that are not normally considered about food sovereignty. I also examined their activities (e.g., lo‘i kalo, harvesting gardenias, planting medicinal plants) and how such engagement concretely affected their understanding of Indigenous epistemologies and decision-making processes to remain in the organization. My interviewees then revealed a broad range of skills gained from the farmers. From their perspective, the students believed that the Kumuola Foundation immersed them in Indigenous farming. The students soon became delighted to return and commit more hours at the farm. Once they became familiar with the operations of the farm, their dedication to aloha ‘āina takes on new meaning. Of particular concerns are their interpretation of the ‘Ai Pono program,

their recruitment of new volunteers, their perceptions toward the mahi 'ai and institutions that determine their access to food, and their overall attitudes to food sovereignty in Hawai'i.

First-generation and working class students usually qualify for scholarship support-based on their financial needs. Thus, they should have more information about the requirements of scholarships and reduce the burden imposed on them when the monetary award is not sustainable. Take, for instance, the Mānoa Service Award, should consider reducing the number of hours completed per semester and have a set of guidelines that cater to the needs of both the students and organizations. Such guidelines can be instrumental in offering organizational and epistemological models for transforming relationships between students and community-based organizations. This will prevent student volunteers from abandoning the sites they have chosen to partner for the civic engagement requirement.

Another critical intervention for college campuses to adopt is to provide a stipend of \$10,000 a year for the work they conduct with Kumuola Foundation. This was calculated to be the equivalent of \$15 per hour for part time work during their year-long commitment. As a former student volunteer, it is critical to also include fringe benefits such as health insurance, reimbursement for mileage and gas, and subsized meals. More incentives should be offered for students who have assumed leadership positions and conduct academic research as ways to help reduce college expenses, fulfill their kuleana to organizations and persist in their studies.

Importantly, there is a danger involved in the growing expansion of the University of Hawai'i as a whole toward Kanaka Maoli 'āina-based projects because it could imply that they champion a liberal multiculturalism discourse that does not align with the political goals of the aloha 'āina movement. Saranillio warns that the university has been persistent in articulating

“Hawai‘i as a melting pot in light with the U.S. ambition for global hegemony.”<sup>211</sup> The administration even declared that the university is committed to “Aloha ‘Āina - A Native Hawaiian Place of Learning,” which serves to reproduce violence toward the ‘āina and the Native Hawaiian community because of construction of the TMT.<sup>212</sup> This strategy to call themselves a Native Hawaiian Place of Learning dismisses the ongoing demands of its Kānaka students, faculty and staff.<sup>213</sup> Indigenous peoples and their allies will have to remain vigilant in the university’s efforts to intrude in decolonial projects and move toward settler innocence. After all, Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang clarify, that the university and the United State operate as an empire “utilizing external forms and internal forms of colonization simultaneous to the settler colonial project.”<sup>214</sup> With this in mind, current and incoming student volunteers will have to be transparent in their intentions to support Indigenous futures.

As the Kumola Foundation rebuilds the farm and takes on new restoration projects, the student volunteers featured in this chapter have expressed how they have consciously developed their political thoughts and actions with the ‘āina. This is an important argument to make, as settlers become better attuned to the mahi ‘ai’s mission to empower the current and future generations. The scholarship and activism being produced in Mānoa Valley clearly creates a harmonious setting for decolonization. Many student volunteers even cherished moments when they honored their own traditional practices as well as those of Kānaka. Their kuleana shows how we, as settlers, can restore an ‘āina filled with joy and life. As a growing collective, student

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<sup>211</sup> Saranillio, 138.

<sup>212</sup> Native Hawaiian Place of Learning Advancement Office. “The Kū Makani Commitment: Aloha ‘Āina.” University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/nhpol/language-option/pathways/auamo/aloha-aina/>

<sup>213</sup> Arvin, 224.

<sup>214</sup> Eve Tuck and K.W. Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), 7.

volunteers and mahi 'ai alike can creatively enrich communities to design their own strategies and solutions for a healthy lāhui (people, Hawaiian nation).

## Conclusion

There is much to celebrate at Kumuola Foundation. In April 2021, a group of new student volunteers arrived and they were excited to finally being invited to the farm after it was closed to the public for more than a year since the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. We huddled around the tent enjoying the breeze of the wind and talking story about current events. One of the mahi 'ai (farmers), Uncle Hale, utters to me, "What are you all doing? You are burning daylight!" The rest of the mahi 'ai laughs and nods in agreement. Embarrassed, I ushered the student volunteers and repeated Uncle Hale's words. Leaving no time to put on mosquito repellants, they had puzzled looks on their faces, awaiting for information about the tasks we were about to perform. I began leading them to the gardenias where weeds were overgrown. The hot sun was piercing our skin and the mosquitos were ruthless in attacking us. I then presented on how to pull and trim the weeds and explaining the plants around us. Aunty Kuki and Uncle Nick soon followed us, as well as described the importance of farming in the valley. Feeling relieved for the mahi 'ai's presence, the student volunteers tuned in to hear them speak and I ran back to retrieve the mosquito coil at the tent.

One may think that Uncle Hale is simply indicating to us how we were wasting time and resources. Yet the phrase "burning daylight" reminds us of the urgency of the aloha 'āina movement. There is a long list of activities to execute from maintaining the lo'i kalo to harvesting gardenias and medicinal plants. As the farm expands itself, I am reminded that we are not in the position to feel at ease and disregard the guidance of the mahi 'ai. Uncle Hale directed this comment to me to ponder on the possible repercussion of the choices I am about to make as more student volunteers and guests visit the farm. It means, for one thing, that I have still yet to break free about what I know and open myself up for change. This means that I am transitioning



from being a student volunteer to becoming a leader in my community. This transformation is also about a refusal of normality, hierarchy, and the status quo because the ‘āina deserve more of our attention. Uncle Hale was signaling that if student volunteers are committed to this struggle, we needed to seriously be ready for any challenge and to use the right tools and technologies to assist us.

Many Kanaka Maoli farmers have expressed that they are regenerating an Indigenous and subsistent future for their descendants and us to live in. The mahi ‘ai are more than capable of sustaining their work. They function with a different a state of mind; thus, a Hawaiian orientation of the world informs how we grow food and navigate our time spent in the ‘āina. Restoring this valley and utilizing their ancestral knowledge is both a survival strategy and a form of resistance to U.S. settler colonialism. From my conversations and experience, the mahi ‘ai have mapped out their instructions about what we must do as allies and settler aloha ‘āina. It is understandably about materializing our contributions politically for Kanaka Maoli to thrive as a lāhui (people; Hawaiian nation). While other groups are only now exploring this option as a strategy, we take the time to gather our energies and strength to develop our own voices before the daylight ends.

The future direction that Kumuola Foundation can take to expand its programs across the islands of Hawai‘i involves financial investment trainings and counseling. The mahi ‘ai and their allies will need to create their own business plans with public and private entities for economic growth. This strategy to collaborate with other institutions generates additional income and most importantly, increases community access to Kumuola Foundations’s food and medicine. Private investors and banks can also provide literacy courses about the potential to establish public and commerical facilities for capacity building. More flexibility options for investments could be made available to the mahi ‘ai as well. Furthermore, financial incentives in the form of sale

profits coupled with business coaching could be offered to make farming easier to perform, increasing the potential to reach underserved populations.

I would hope that this project represents the possibilities in conducting community-driven research. The activities at the farm put a spotlight on the nonlinear process of unpacking our intersecting histories and honoring the elements that have brought us together. The question needed to address now is how we can further send the message of aloha ‘āina in the context of food sovereignty outside of the farm? The student volunteers have been introducing their friends, coworkers and other people in their social networks to Kumuola Foundation. It is, in fact, a common expectation from the mahi ‘ai that we share these lessons. This approach generally presumes that our communities are already constituted in predetermined ways based on socially assigned categories (ethnicity and/or race, gender, and class), and affiliations produced through shared struggles and experiences. In my view, settlers and Indigenous peoples in the U.S. should build more alliances with one another based on this desire to engage in subsistent practices.

However, it is crucial for us to convey the day-to-day work of implementing activities at the farm. I aim to broaden our horizons about the unspoken complicities performed outside of the farm in the future. Moreover, we have to think about expressing our support beyond the premise of affinity, collectivity or an affective bond. Tensions arise when student volunteers come uninvited without seeking permission or following protocols because it tells the mahi ‘ai that they dismissed the “no trespassing” sign at the entrance of the farm. It may be overlooked among others since more people are willing to explore what is occurring in this space, but the mahi ‘ai and their allies cannot assume those who visit the farm understand what is generally at stake in this matter. This is a sacred place. In this respect, we must further explore our

possibilities to act in accordance with Native Hawaiians who are reviving Indigenous food systems in the islands.

The lack of legitimacy surrounding Kumuola Foundation is also underscored here. When settlers institutions and other people do not recognize the organization as the rightful stewards of the 'āina, the mahi 'ai face a threat of harrassment from oncoming visitors and volunteers. There is a risk associated with people who do not understand their kuleana (rights and responsibility). This is a challenge posed to us in these times. Here, I am suggesting that the subsistent ecologies that occur in the farm compel us to reflect on our sense of relationality to regenerate a Hawaiian world. We have to come to terms about what the mahi 'ai declared to us about the value of life-giving elements and sources around us because it has the potential to transform our lived realities.

Appendix A

Ohana	Inoa (Name): Hawai'i	Common	Scientific	Category: Endemic, Indigenous, Introduced
Araceae	Kalo	Taro	Colocasia esculenta	Intro – Malaysia
Aracaceae	Niu	Coconut Palm	Cocos nucifera	Intro- Indo Malay
Asparagaceae	Ki, La'i	Ti, Cabbage Palm	Cordyline fruticosa	Intro – Southeast Asia
Asteraceae	Maile Hohono	Whiteweed	Ageratum conyzoides	
Convolvulaceae	'Uala	Sweet potato vine	Ipomoea batatas	Intro – South America
Cucurbitaceae	Ipu	Calabash Gourd	Lagenaria siceraria	Intro- Polynesia
Euphorbiaceae	Kukui	Candlenut Tree	Aleurite moluccana	Intro – Indo Malaysia
Malvaceae	Hau		Talipariti tilaceus	Intro- Polynesia
Moraceae	Ulu	Breadfruit	Artocarpus altilis	Intro – Malay
Moraceae	Wauke	Paper Mulberry	Broussonetia papyrifera	Intro – China
Musaceae	Ma'ia	Banana		
Myrtaceae	'Ohi'a 'ai	Mountain Apple	Syzygium Malacense	Intro – Southeast Asia

Oxalidaceae	‘Ihi ‘ai	Yellow sorrel, clover	Oxalls corniculata	Intro – Polynesia
Pandanaceae	Pu Hala	Pandanus	Pandanus tectorius	Intro – Polynesia
Plantaginaceae	Laukahi	Broadleaf Plantain	Plantago major	Intro – Polynesia
Poaceae	Wapine/Lapine, Lukini	Lemon Grass	Cymbopagan citratius	Intro – Polynesia
Solanaceae	Nioi	Firecracker, Hawaiian Chile Pepper	Capsicum frutescens	Intro
Solanaceae	Popolo	Nightshade	Solanum Sandwicense	Endemic, Endangered
Urticaceae/Nettle	Mamaki	Waimea pipturus	Pipturus albidus	Endemic
Zingiberaceae	‘Olena	Turmeric	Curcuma long	Intro – India, SE Asia
Zingiberaceae	Awapuhi	Shampoo Ginger	Zingiber zerumbet	Intro -South Asia

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