

Lessons from Aloha ‘Āina Activism

Visioning and Planning for Our Islands and Communities in the Wake of COVID-19

Davianna Pōmaika‘i McGregor, Noa Emmett Aluli, and Rosanna ‘Anolani Alegado

Hulihia

The Kāne rains that flooded Hā‘ena and the eruption of Pelehonuamea in Puna in 2018; the emergence of Kūkia‘imauna as a movement to stop the TMT on Mauna a Wākea; the rising Kanaloa of King Tides; and the COVID-19 pandemic—all are signs of an intense period of hulihia, a phase of upheaval signaling both crisis and opportunity leading to transformative change. We are living in the time when our akua/natural elemental cycles and phenomena are rising as the consequence of and a counterbalance to the cumulative damage wreaked upon the earth beginning with the industrial revolution and culminating in the globalization of capitalism. These events are the bellweather, the ouli (or auguries) that humans are not acting in harmony. Imbalance in the activities of kānaka (humans) has led to an imbalance of the akua, manifested in hulihia. As kānaka, we must accept that we are entwined with, not separate from the Earth, and expand our understanding of and respect for global systems and cycles to achieve balance and sustainability on our islands for future generations.

Living in balance with nature with respect and aloha is the Hawaiian belief and practice of aloha ‘āina. Together with the Edith Kanaka‘ole Foundation, the Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana revived this understanding of aloha ‘āina through the movement to stop the bombing and heal the island of Kanaloa Kaho‘olawe. Integral to this movement was a process through which we as kānaka reconnected with nature’s elemental forces that our ancestors honored as akua. From Kanaloa Kaho‘olawe to Mauna Kea, we are now into the third generation of kānaka committed to aloha ‘āina and upholding a kapu of aloha. Our lessons from aloha ‘āina activism, as well as tourism’s utter failure to sustain Hawai‘i’s economy, now inspire us to redirect and realign Hawai‘i’s overall economy. We must move away from extractive tourist activities, and toward an economy rooted in sustainable aloha ‘āina principles and best practices.

We now share our experiences, the lessons derived, and their implications for the future.

Kanaloa Kaho'olawe

Noa Emmett Aluli, MD

My mana'o, begun by my great grand-aunt Emma Aima A'i and her husband Joseph Nāwahī, leaders of the Hui Aloha 'Āina (Hawaiian Patriotic League) and editors of the *Ke Aloha Aina* newspaper, led me to Moloka'i and Kaho'olawe and reconnected me with our akua Kanaloa and Lono and my own kuleana of aloha 'āina. The occupation of Kaho'olawe in 1976 was originally planned to draw Congressional recognition to the reparations and restitution claims due Kānaka 'Ōiwi (Native Hawaiians) because of the illegal overthrow of our Kingdom. When we got there, however, we felt a deep cultural connection, and became driven to preserve the island as a spiritually and culturally significant place. As suggested by Aunty Edith Kanaka'ole, the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana was organized in a Hawaiian manner, as an extended family with a cause. We chant oli and conduct cultural protocols gifted by the Edith Kanaka'ole Foundation that call upon Lono for the Makahiki rains and Kāne for the nāulu rains to heal and green the island. We chanted for Kanaloa to remove the US Navy's destructive force. Fishers evoke Kū'ula with offerings at fishing ko'a. On the island, we observe a kapu of aloha for her and each other as 'ohana.

As we protested the US military's bombing of Kaho'olawe for fourteen long years (1976–1990), we ignited a cultural renaissance which radiated out, like the arms of a he'e (octopus), to all the islands under the aloha 'āina banner. This awakening increased interest in Hawaiian language, hula, music, lo'i kalo (taro fields), loko i'a (fishponds), lā'au lapa'au (herbal healing), and lā'au kahea (spiritual healing). Lua (fighting arts), kapa (bark cloth) making, and other traditional practices reemerged. Heightened awareness and pride also took political forms, as Hawaiians fought for greater autonomy and recognition of traditional and customary practices and rights of access through Hui Alaloa (Group of the Long Trails), Nā Lima Hana o Nā 'Ōpio (Youthful Working Hands), Mālama Mana'e on Moloka'i (Protect East Moloka'i); Hilo Airport, Kapu Ka'ū, and Pele Defense Fund—Wao Kele O Puna on Hawai'i island; and Honokahua on Maui (Hui Mālama I Nā Kūpuna O Hawai'i Nei/Native Hawaiian Burials Councils). All succeeded as aloha 'āina issues because we mastered grassroots organizing, won most of our law suits, and maneuvered and navigated local, national, and international bipartisan politics. We have reserved Kanaloa Kaho'olawe from commercial development, and declared it as the first sovereign lands for the Native Hawaiian nation in Hawai'i Law (HRS 6-E). We have trained new generations to mālama, take care, and elevate Kanaloa Kaho'olawe as a sacred island that continues to teach us about endurance, resilience, and sustainability. Blasted by US naval forces for five decades, the island is now a center for learning about the restoration and stewardship of our cultural and natural resources, and especially our marine resources and their sustainable harvest. I Ola Kanaloa!

We believe that the “Health of the Land, is the Health of our People and the Health of our Nation”! As one kupuna put it, “ma‘a, la‘a, pa‘a.” We’ve been there, done that, and will do it again—experienced, dedicated, and strong.

Pelehonuamea and Wao Kele O Puna

Davianna Pōmaika‘i McGregor

When I spent my summers in Hilo in the late 1950s and 1960s, Pele was always a dynamic presence—and especially during the 1959 Kilauea Iki eruption and the fountaining flow at Kapoho in 1960. Our family had pasture land in ‘Opihikao, Puna, and we always felt that our tenure there depended upon Pele. She created Queen’s Bath, Warm Springs, and Kapoho Ponds, and she reclaimed them when creating new lands. When the Kapoho flow came very close to our ‘āina, we acknowledged Pele’s inherent claim, and felt blessed that the flow stopped before reaching us.

The University of Hawai‘i’s Geothermal Project in Puna generated three megawatts of electricity when it came on line in 1981, but it also produced noxious wastes and toxic gases. It had to be shut down. The proposed development of 500 megawatts of geothermal energy at Kahauale‘a and later at Wao Kele O Puna was an abomination—reckless, unrealistic, irreverent, and an affront to Native Hawaiian Pele practitioners. In the contested case hearing opposing the conditional use permit for drilling in the forests of Kahauale‘a, Dr. Pualani Kanaka‘ole Kanahale testified that developing geothermal energy violates the natural law of E kua ‘ā Kanawai—the edict of the burning back—that admonishes humans to respect the gestating landscapes where creation is occurring—hot spots, steaming areas, marshes, coral heads. As the hearing ended, Pele erupted at Kahauale‘a, halting all plans for geothermal development. The Campbell Estate then prevailed upon the State of Hawai‘i to substitute the pristine Wai Kele O Puna rainforest for Kahauale‘a’s now lava-covered lands. Pele practitioners formed the Pele Defense Fund (PDF), filing suits and organizing processions into the rainforest, calling upon the nature deities to protect Pele from drilling into her life form that would suck out the steam that is her life force. In March 1990, 1,500 persons reverently entered the rainforest, and 141 were arrested. The PDF also filed ten lawsuits. These actions succeeded in upholding Native Hawaiians’ access rights for subsistence, and for cultural and religious purposes, ultimately terminating the large-scale geothermal/cable project (Aluli and McGregor).

In response, Campbell Estate sold the Wao Kele O Puna rainforest to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), with the kōkua of the Trust for Public Lands as their first aloha ‘āina project. OHA now manages these lands with the surrounding community, holding them like Kaho‘olawe in trust for eventual transfer to the Native Hawaiian sovereign entity.

We learned that “alter-native” energy that extracts natural resources we honor as deities on an industrial scale for a central grid violates Native Hawaiian belief systems. Geothermal energy assaults and desecrates the volcanic elemental life force that we revere as the god Pele. Because the generation plant must be on a live volcano and spews out toxic gases, it is dangerous and vulnerable to shut-downs, making it NON-renewable and UN-sustainable. Hawai‘i seeks to wean itself from imported fossil fuel, but geothermal energy cannot be part of the renewable energy portfolio.

Wao Kele O Puna also strengthened our belief in organizing in a Hawaiian manner, with respect and reverence for our natural life forces, our akua. The preeminence of natural law—E kua ‘ā Kanawai in this case—was also established. The Pele Defense Fund v. Paty lawsuit determined that Native Hawaiian traditional and cultural practices are not limited to gathering the five items listed in the 1850–51 Kuleana Act, or to the ahupua‘a in which people live. Such practices include whatever resources are needed for traditional and customary subsistence, cultural, and religious purposes, regardless of where they are.

Challenging False Dichotomies: Culture vs. Science

Rosanna ‘Anolani Alegado

As the daughter of grassroots community organizers, I’ve been immersed in the aloha ‘āina movement my whole life. I remember my first trip to Kanaloa Kaho‘olawe when I was eight, participating in my first Makahiki, preparing the ho‘okupu to Lono to stop the bombing of that sacred island and bring back the life-giving rains to green the land once more. The imprint of being surrounded by those living, practicing, and perpetuating aloha ‘āina forms the foundation of my scholarship. As I have evolved as an Indigenous scholar scientist, I do not distinguish between ancestral and scientific knowledge. Integrating cultural practice into designing my hypotheses is essential.

Historically, STEM fields have failed to acknowledge their systemic racism and complicity in disenfranchising Indigenous communities. Much of this failure arises from problematic normative discourses and philosophies underpinning Western science practice. For instance, the culture of “objectivity” centered in the dominant framework of whiteness dehumanizes minoritized individuals for medical experimentation. Likewise, *terra nullius*, the myth of a pristine wilderness informing much conservation biology, has been “weaponized against Indigenous people . . . resulting in the delegitimization of our traditional knowledge and the displacement from our traditional lands” (Crawford). Such harmful applications have engendered intergenerational fear and distrust in Indigenous communities of all Western science. Such dogmatic practices continue to insinuate themselves into such struggles between research entities and Native Hawaiian communities as the

Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) on Mauna Kea. These tensions promulgate false dichotomies, such as science vs. culture.

In the summer of 2019, a collective of scientists, Native Hawaiians, and allies from across disciplines reclaimed the narrative of what science should be used for. Foregrounding ethical concerns raised by Hawai'i communities but previously dismissed, we leveraged our unique and diverse positions to challenge the notion that the scientific community universally supported the TMT, creating space for Hawaiian scientists to own our culture within our fields, and to critique the TMT during the National Academies of Science's decadal review of astronomy (Kahanamoku et al.).

Community-embedded science requires Western science to recognize the legitimacy of other knowledge systems, and of kinship relationships to land in Hawai'i. This requires equitable, reciprocal, and dynamic partnerships between kama'āina and kua'āina and higher education researchers to produce mutually beneficial knowledge that honors aloha 'āina. Several Hawai'i organizations have developed standards for engaging with researchers. In 2014, the nonprofit Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo (KUA) convened graduate students working across Hawai'i to articulate the challenges of community-based research. Communities want and need to collaborate with university researchers to develop solutions—but on their own terms, not as research “subjects,” or as a checkbox for outreach. In 2017, KUA and the UH Mānoa Sea Grant College Program developed a guidance document, *Kūlana Noi'i*, for 'āina-based researchers and stakeholders. Over the past three years, Sea Grant and KUA have trained over 500 researchers in *Kūlana Noi'i*, proving that scholars are ready to adopt practices that align with community needs.

Collaborative knowledge coproduction will be critical to generating the solutions needed to combat climate change. Because such changes tend to be localized, Indigenous local knowledge (ILK) is critical to establishing monitoring baselines. When, for example, scientists say “it's the worst El Niño on record,” they mean the Western instrument record, which goes back less than 150 years (McGregor et al.). Consulting ancestral Hawaiian knowledge through research into *oli* (chants), *mo'olelo* (histories), and Hawaiian language newspapers offers unparalleled access for expanding climate data. Between 1834 and 1949, intellectuals, political and religious leaders, historians, cultural specialists, and everyday *kānaka* recorded over 125,000 pages of testimony about their lives, lands, *lāhui* (nation), and environment in nearly one hundred newspapers, purposefully documenting the knowledge of their *kūpuna* (ancestors) for the benefit of their *mo'opuna* (descendants) (Nogelmeier). As epidemics decimated the Indigenous population, these writers preserved traditional knowledge about fishing, navigation, canoe carving, and other skills, and recorded the epics of renowned warriors and legendary chiefs to forge intergenerational links. These primary source materials not only contain data about the environment and Indigenous resource management of their own time, but function as repositories for deep ancestral knowledge reaching back centuries.

In Hawai'i and the Pacific, climate change affects the strength and predictability of our akua. Kāne, the element of heat, will be stronger, so storms and flooding will increase. Kanaloa, the ocean, will rise. As Pacific people, we need Pacific Island-specific, not continental solutions. Embracing aloha 'āina will be essential. But because our ecosystems are not the same as ka wā kahiko, having been degraded by agribusiness, subdivisions, and resort development, Western science also has its role in deconstructing and monitoring altered systems, and reconstructing improved systems.

Beyond COVID-19

At the moment that the State gradually reopens the kama'āina economy, policy and decisionmakers need to connect local and Indigenous communities with private business to partner in opening pathways for rebuilding as an 'āina momona (abundant and self-sufficient) economy. We must go beyond aspirations to implementation, building upon successful models to implement strategies for a truly sustainable economy. Tourist industry workers will need new job opportunities, retraining, investment, and capacity building.

Previously successful community-private-public efforts yield important lessons. Between 1998 and 2008, the Moloka'i Enterprise Community received more than \$25 million government and private funds for twenty-five projects, including solar energy systems for 300 homes, purchasing farm machinery, and starting the Molokai Land Trust. Still functioning at the state and county level, the Enterprise Zones Partnership Program I provides tax exemptions and credits to encourage businesses to operate in community Opportunity Zones.

In June 2018, 120 representatives from over eighty community-based groups, nongovernmental organizations, traditional Hawaiian practitioners, private companies, and government agencies participated in the Ho'olau Kānaka 'Āina Summit. Co-sponsored by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Kamehameha Schools, and the Department of Land and Natural Resources, and planned with community representatives, the summit identified the three most needed forms of support as long-term funding, training, and collaboration across sectors. Addressing these needs will be key to economic recovery, and enlisting our communities in monitoring climate change indicators will be critical to planning for resilience and sustainability.

A key recommendation in the Governor's Moloka'i Subsistence Task Force Report was to establish Community-Based Subsistence Fishing Areas (CBSFA) as a DLNR designation for managing marine resources. Hā'ena, Kaua'i became a CBSFA in 2006. Mo'omomi, Kīpahulu, and Miloli'i have drafted plans and are working with DLNR on the administrative rule making to establish their own CBSFAs, which will be critical for sustaining subsistence and supporting food sovereignty in rural Hawaiian communities (Matsuoka et al.).

Over the last three decades, a new generation of aquaculture practitioners has been combining traditional practice and contemporary tools to restore loko i‘a for future fish farming. Connecting and leveraging conversations regarding planning and action between such key partners as the DLNR Division of Aquatic Resources, Department of Agriculture, and the University of Hawai‘i Sea Grant program will make such restorations a reality.

The Mala‘Ai ‘Opio Organic Farms (MA‘O) are growing high quality produce while nurturing a healthy community through a social enterprise weaving together agricultural economic development and educational programming. Its mission of community empowerment is supported by outside funds and its organic farming business revenue.

Kua‘āina Ulu ‘Auamo (KUA) has compiled a working list of ideas for a post-COVID-19 ‘āina momona economy from the community-based natural resource management networks it facilitates—E Alu Pū, Hui Mālama Loko I‘a, and the Limu Hui—which touch over seventy communities statewide, as well as civil society partners, individuals, and organizations. A prominent proposal, similar to one on a national scale advocated by presidential candidate Joe Biden, is to fund a Hawai‘i Agricultural, Aquacultural, Marine, and Land Conservation Corps (Stabilization phase) that would employ community members who have lost their jobs or are re-entering society in permanent, publicly funded, living wage mālama ‘āina and food system jobs from mauka (production, processing, and distribution; invasive species removal; stream and ecosystem system restoration, etc.) to makai (community-based natural resource management, invasive seaweed removal, native propagation, fisheries observation and management, cleaning beaches, reef management and coral propagation, etc.).

I Ola Nā Akua, I Ola Kākou

Island-based economies require island-based solutions. When our akua (natural elemental life forces) flourish, our society and economy will flourish. Aloha ‘Āina Ho‘i E!

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