

MOANAAKEA

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We are the young generation of 'Ōiwi Hawai'i, conscious of the past and living in the present, with the desire to regain the pilina of our kūpuna to our 'āina through language and practice.

Our kūpuna (ancestors) bestowed names on every type of wind, rain, and sea. Some names were specific to particular places, while others were generally descriptive (Andrade 2008). For example, the general term *ua 'awa* is used to describe a cold, bitter rain. However, on the island of Hawai'i, the people of Waimea refer to a rain with similar characteristics more specifically as *kīpu'upu'u*. We find these names in mele (songs), oli (chants), mo'olelo (stories), and within our mo'okū'auhau (genealogies). The natural phenomena for which the names were given were observed and cherished by our kūpuna. While some 'Ōiwi Hawai'i (Native Hawaiians) continue to follow the legacy of our kūpuna by using the names they gave and by creating a pilina (relationship) with the land and the ocean, the majority of us no longer know how to engage at this level. The reasons for this lack of connection are varied and complex, but stem in large part from a series of significant events. First, the Māhele (Land Division) of 1848 led to the privatization of 'āina (lands) that had previously been held communally by 'Ōiwi Hawai'i. Then, in 1893, American businessmen overthrew the Hawaiian Kingdom illegally with the complicity of the United States government. Three years later, 'ōlelo Hawai'i—the Hawaiian language—was officially banned. Such sweeping and traumatic changes meant that many 'Ōiwi Hawai'i were geographically and socially displaced.

Our ability to recognize the many types of winds and rains that exist, or the varying ocean conditions—indeed, the act of simply and consciously observing the elements that surround us—has fallen into neglect. While our kūpuna fostered deep connections with the 'āina (which, for 'Ōiwi Hawai'i, includes both land and sea), many of us now casually reside on it. *I ka wā kahiko*, in past times, a relationship was formed between the people and places in which they lived. That relationship was strengthened over many generations through a process of reciprocity. Names reflected and preserved the memory of the relationship between the people and their natural environment.

For present generations of ‘Ōiwi Hawai‘i, the relationship with the natural world is no longer as strong as it was for our kūpuna. This is not to disclaim the connections preserved by mahi‘ai (farmers), lawai‘a (fishermen), po‘e hula (hula dancers) and many other practitioners, who not only recall important aspects of nature but also rely on them for physical and spiritual sustenance. Many ‘Ōiwi Hawai‘i desire to have this same type of a pilina with the ‘āina. While some resources are available for us to learn many of the ‘Ōiwi Hawai‘i names bestowed on the natural world by our kūpuna, not all have been recorded or remembered. When names cease being spoken, new ones are created. In some cases, the new names are inappropriate and do not capture the pilina that existed between our kūpuna and their environment. We now live in a world where we refer to our own ocean by a name that was created not even six centuries ago by a foreign voyager who passed through it once.¹ We descend from a legacy of voyagers who frequently navigated this same ocean for thousands of years and survived in it for countless generations. Their pilina i ke kai—relationship with the ocean—is our ancestral foundation.²

In order to honor our kūpuna and their heroic voyaging, and to claim this sea once again as our home *and* our sustenance, we must rid our vocabulary of the name “Pacific” as the sole label for the ocean in which we live. So what shall we call the road of our people, the provider of our sustenance, the water that connects us? ‘O wai kona inoa? *What is his/her name?* We already have hundreds if not thousands of names for the types of seas that have been observed and experienced by our kūpuna. An inoa (name) for our particular ocean should encompass all the variations that exist: ke kai malino (calm sea), ke kai hohonu (deep sea), ke kai hānupanupa (surging sea), ke kai ko‘o (rough sea), and so on. The name should not attempt to bottle up or compromise the vastness of the sea’s many characteristics. *Pacific* implies simplicity, calmness, tranquility; however, while there is no doubt the ocean does most certainly exhibit these qualities at times, it is my contention that such a label is ultimately limiting. The energy of this great ocean cannot be controlled or overpowered by any individual or people, and in its many forms only a few can survive it. Such a powerful entity should be acknowledged properly and respectfully—simply referring to it as the Pacific is inadequate. While there are several names that exist for the body of water popularly known as the Pacific in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, including kai ‘ele‘ele (the black sea), kai Pōpolohua mea a Kāne (the purplish-blue reddish-brown sea of Kāne) and so on, many other Pacific Island peoples

who consider it their home refer to it by other names. For example, Māori in Aotearoa call this great sea Te Moana nui a Kiwa.

For the purpose of this paper, however, I use the name *Moanaākea* as a replacement for the Pacific—a name that was provided in *Mo'okū'auhau 'Elua: A Genealogical History of the Priesthood of Kanalu* (Nāmakaokeahi 2004), and was documented in accounts in numerous nūpepa Hawai'i (Hawaiian newspapers). The first part of the name, *moana*, can be translated as ocean or open ocean. However, the addition of *ākea* as a suffix expands *moana* to mean “broad, wide, large, full”—something of great energy that cannot be harnessed, something unpredictable. As a descendant of ocean voyagers and as a student of the canoe myself, I offer the term *Moanaākea* as an empowering alternative for 'Ōiwi Hawai'i, as well as to encourage us all to seek out these ancestral names and proclaim them. While *Moanaākea* is my personal preference at this time, it is but one of many names to choose from.

'O WAI KONA INOA?

In 1520, Portuguese maritime explorer Ferdinand Magellan encountered *Moanaākea* and as he did so bestowed on it the name *Mare Pacificum* (peaceful sea), from which the name *Pacific* was later derived. Almost five hundred years later, this name is recognized and used by people all over the world, including the indigenous peoples who inhabit it. The term *Pacific* is not only inappropriate and Eurocentric in its application, but is degrading as well and leads to a common misunderstanding that the inhabitants of this vast ocean are themselves pacific. Use of this name also implies a kind of inertness or blankness of being. This is how foreigners have viewed our home, *Moanaākea*: “not as a place to live in but an expanse to cross, a void to be filled in with lines of transit: ploughing the sea” (Sharrad 1990, 598). Millions of ships from all over the world continue to power through these life-giving waters regardless of what they represent and provide for all *Moanaākea* peoples, not just 'Ōiwi Hawai'i.

In his 1990 article “Imagining the Pacific,” Paul Sharrad—an English professor at the University of Wollongong, Australia—drew critical attention to the use of two terms used in popular discourse: *Pacific Rim* and *Pacific Basin*. As Sharrad pointed out, the *Pacific Rim* is defined by the major continental powers that line the edges of the ocean. This is a site of economic gain, capitalism, and

international business exchange. It is from the *Rim* that European explorers launched their voyages of discovery, and in the contemporary period it is the *Rim* that sends ships of war and vessels laden with toxic cargo across what has been derisively referred to as the *Basin*. As Sharrad has asserted, the distinction between the *Rim* and the *Basin* derives largely from the economic and political interests of metropolitan powers. While the *Rim* is defined symbolically as an industrious port of transit, the *Basin* is understood as a vacant space—“a passive receptacle of observation, a space for European adventuring, an area of natural science, history, anthropology and ‘development studies’” (Sharrad 1990, 597).

But, from the perspective of those of us whose ancestral origins are in Moanaākea, the ocean that we call home is so much more. Moanaākea is an energy that no human can possess or control. This energy was revered by our kūpuna as something that assumed a mana (power/prestige) equivalent to that of the akua (gods).³ The akua for Moanaākea was recognized by ‘Ōiwi Hawai‘i as Kanaloa, who was rightfully honored and respected by all those who entered his realm. It is with this humility that our kūpuna loaded their wa‘a kaulua (double-hull canoes) and courageously sailed for thousands of miles across the vast surface of Moanaākea. Today there are a few of us who have been privileged to experience the kind of voyages our wayfinding kūpuna set out on. In 1976, *Hōkūle‘a*—the first replica of a traditional wa‘a kaulua to be built and sailed long distance in hundreds of years—was guided to Tahiti by Papa Pius Mau Piailug, a master navigator of the island of Satawal in the Caroline Islands.⁴ This humble man had never been to Tahiti before, yet with great confidence in his knowledge of Moanaākea and its many elements, he succeeded in “pulling” an island thousands of miles from his home out of the sea.

For many years, po‘e Hawai‘i (the people of Hawai‘i) were not able to read Moanaākea’s signs, nor were we able to embark on long-distance voyages as Papa Mau and his people had continued to do. However, when we were ready and felt the need to reconnect with our voyaging heritage, Papa Mau came to Hawai‘i to teach us the ways of the sea. He taught us many great lessons: that courage was necessary for survival (Low 1983), and that trust in our kūpuna and ourselves would provide focus, determination, and calmness in times of fear. Papa Mau expected this type of courage and commitment from his crew as well as from himself. His interpretation of courage is in many ways equivalent to faith, the power of which is illustrated in figure 1. The photograph depicts two courageous men steering the vessel *Alingano Maisu* from Chuuk to Satawal.⁵ On

Lincoln Maielua • **Moanaākea**

this day, Moanaākea was certainly not “pacific.” The men steering the vessel are inherently skilled; they are wayfinders, connected to the very sea they sail on. With undoubting respect for Moanaākea, they—like their ancestors—eventually reached their destination safely, and were forever changed by their experience with Kanaloa. Through Papa Mau’s many lessons, ‘Ōiwi Hawai’i have grown to understand that Moanaākea binds us to all people who thrive in this dynamic ocean.



FIGURE 1. *Ma Ka Hana Ka 'Ike* (In the Doing there Is Learning). Voyagers steering *Alingano Maisu*, 2007. Photo by author.

‘ĀINA...THE LAND AND THE SEA: THAT WHICH SUSTAINS

The *Pacific Basin* has been viewed by metropolitan centers as “a vessel that exists to be filled or emptied” (Sharrad 1990, 599). However, Moanaākea is not so easily managed; there is no option to refill what is lost. The idea of a constant flow of resources, a never-ending supply of sea life, is a concept foreign to our kūpuna. What sustained us as a people was the ‘āina, which, as mentioned previously,

encompassed both land and sea. A complete meal in a Hawaiian setting consisted of 'ai (often poi, a substance made from the pounded root of the taro plant) and i'a (often fish).⁶ Therefore, it was vital to protect both environments equally. The metaphor of mālama 'āina (to care for the land) extended past the cultivated kula lands (open country) and well into Ke Kai Pōpolohua mea a Kāne, the purplish-blue, reddish-brown sea of Kāne (Pukui and Elbert 1986, 520). Though the inhabitants of Moanaākea, the po'e Moana (the people of the ocean) are required to have such a respect for their home, I contend that those who blithely pass through it perceive it differently. The residents of the *Rim* understand that the *Basin* is a provider of sustenance, yet they treat it as a wasteland. The same ocean used "to engage in whaling, sea-bed mining and drift-net fishing" is also where the "dumping [of] toxic wastes and urban rubbish" occurs (Sharrad 1990, 599). The abuse extends to the disposal of chemical weapons in Moanaākea. As Sharrad has intimated, what is assumed and astonishingly believed by Western powers is that "the sea can take it" (Sharrad 1990, 599). Such an approach to this fragile region has had a dire impact on Moanaākea and its inhabitants.

Between 1946 and 1962 the United States conducted a series of eight nuclear tests in what it called the Pacific Proving Grounds. This area included a number of Marshall Islands, including Bikini Atoll and Enewetok Atoll, as well as islands further to the east, such as Johnston Island and Christmas Island. The nuclear tests affected not only the islands on which the bombs were detonated but also neighboring islands and ships that passed nearby. In 1963, this testing was officially banned, but not until the lives of thousands of inhabitants had been negatively impacted and their lands and seas irrevocably changed. After the ban, the United States targeted other areas it deemed to be remote and vacant, such as Ka Pae 'Āina o Hawai'i (the Hawaiian Archipelago's) island of Kaho'olawe, Mākua Valley on the island of O'ahu, and Pōhakuloa on the island of Hawai'i. Like Moanaākea, these lands were perceived as free to be used for any purpose. No doubt government officials justified the destruction of these places with the assumption that "there [was] no-one around anyway," or if so, they were insignificant, pacific people (like the sea in which they lived) and their lives would not be disrupted (Sharrad 1990, 599).

ĀKEA: SITUATED KNOWLEDGE

From the beginning of European exploration in Moanaākea, visitors took on the roles of cartographers, ethnologists, and anthropologists. As scholar Margaret Jolly has asserted, these observers “discerned among the ‘nations’ of the South Seas, differences of race and differences of place” (2007, 516). They then took it on themselves to place each island into what they believed to be the culturally appropriate groupings of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia, the formulation of which was based on “racial and cultural typologies” (Jolly 2007, 516).

In the early years of foreign exploration, “the Europeans plotted the peoples of the Pacific at various removes from themselves and, thus, from each other” (Jolly 2007, 516). The power that their maps possessed over po’e Moana actions and thought processes isolated us from each other, creating unstable relationships, and diluting our power as a single ocean nation.

It is my belief that as the indigenous people of this ocean we call home, we must stand firm with the knowledge of place that our kūpuna have left us. Our indigenous names must be reinvigorated and reintroduced into our everyday thinking, language, and practices; as we remember them, pilina will once again be formed. The way we reimagine and reimage the Pacific through our respective indigenous lenses will generate new ways of seeing and understanding the ocean that sustains us. For ‘Ōiwi Hawai’i, if we begin to perceive the ocean as our kūpuna did, we will create relationships like those they had with Moanaākea. By our nurturing such bonds with the ocean, the world will come to know that it is not a vacant space for bombing or dumping waste. In the words of the late Epeli Hau’ofa: “We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically” (1993, 160). In many ways Hau’ofa interpreted the very essence of Papa Mau’s teachings in academic form. His many writings remind us that our ocean is our link to each other, to our past, and to our future.

A reinvigorated image of Moanaākea should be based on an indigenous perspective, while at the same time capturing movement and travel. The majority of images that have been rendered of Moanaākea stem from the objectivity of cartographers, who mathematically plotted the islands from a bird’s-eye view. Prior to Western contact, ancient voyagers of Moanaākea relied on their situated knowledge of the environment: “lying low in a canoe, looking up at the heavens,

scanning the horizon for signs of land, and navigating the powerful seas with the embodied visual, aura, olfactory, and kinesthetic knowledge passed down through generations of navigators” (Jolly 2007, 509).

On this page, I have included a diptych to illustrate for readers the modern-day voyagers’ perspective of Moanaākea (figure 2). Sitting at the bow of the canoe on the palekai (bulwark located at the bow of the canoe), looking out to the ‘alihilani (horizon)—it is from this perspective that the island will appear and be identified, not from above. Titled *He Wa’a He Moku, He Moku He Wa’a* (the canoe is the island, the island is the canoe), the diptych emphasizes the meaning of ākea.⁷ Look to the left, toward the ama (port hull) and you will see only ocean, but widen your perspective, make it ākea, and you will see the island you are searching for. It is important for a navigator to be able to visualize the island as the wa’a sails toward it. This technique prepares the navigator spiritually, and connects the entire body to the purpose of the voyage.



FIGURE 2. *He Wa’a He Moku, He Moku He Wa’a*, 2007. Diptych by author.

Moanaākea is just one of many beautiful names that exist in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i for the ocean that surrounds and sustains us. Every island group that finds sustenance in it has formulated names to honor its power and importance. The challenge for all who are of this ocean is to seek out these ancestral names and proclaim them. Eō Moanaākea!

Notes

1. Ferdinand Magellan was the first person from the West to lead a voyaging expedition from Europe to Asia.
2. Without the kai (the sea) we would not have been able to travel from one island to another, or sustain ourselves nutritionally. This relationship established with the kai was vital to the survival of Hawaiians.

3. For further discussion on how 'Ōiwi Hawai'i perceive akua, see for example Kame'eleihiwa 1992, 19–49.
4. Pius Mau Piailug was given the name *Mau* by the people of his island, because of his commitment and perseverance in the tradition of navigation. When he arrived in Hawai'i, Mau was the name commonly used to address him. Today, many voyaging students refer to him as *Papa Mau*.
5. *Alingano Maisu* was built under the auspices of Nā Kālai Wa'a Moku o Hawai'i to fulfill a promise made to Papa Mau by Captain Clayton Bertelmann. In January 2007, the *Alingano Maisu* departed the island of Hawai'i and, along with *Hökūle'a*, was sailed to Satawal where it was given to Papa Mau as a gift in his honor.
6. In Hawaiian culture, 'ai is the word for food, "especially vegetable food as distinguished from i'a, meat or fleshy food" (Pukui and Elbert 1986, 9). While i'a is popularly equated with fish, it is actually "any food eaten as a relish with the staple (poi, taro, sweet potato, breadfruit), including meat, fish, vegetable, or even salt" (Pukui and Elbert 1986, 93).
7. The phrase "he wa'a he moku, he moku he wa'a" was often used by Captain Clayton Bertelmann during my training with the voyaging canoe *Makali'i*. The idea is that when at sea, the canoe becomes one's island and the people on board one's family. In order to survive one must mālama (care for) fellow crew members and keep the pono (balance). Once back on land those same values of honoring one's 'ohana, mālama 'āina (caring for the land and the ocean), and instilling pono must be continued.

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