

KANAKA 'ŌIWI METHODOLOGIES

Mo'olelo and Metaphor



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HAWAI'INUIĀKEA

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He Lei Aloha 'Āina

Mehana Blaich Vaughan

He lei pa'iniu no Kīlauea.

A lei of pa'iniu, signifying that the wearer has visited Kīlauea Crater.

He lei pahapaha no Polihale.

A lei of pahapaha limu, signifying that the wearer has visited Polihale, Kaua'i.

Throughout Hawai'i, lei symbolize certain places and show that the wearer has experienced them. Lei offer a way to see and know a landscape because each lei is unique to the place where it is made. Like the process of making lei, my research in the field of environmental studies seeks to gather a variety of materials and put them together in stories that build knowledge and ways of seeing certain 'āina.

My Tūtū, Amelia Ana Ka'ōpua Bailey, taught me to pay attention to 'āina, with a focus on what type of lei could be made from each place. Riding with Tūtū in the car was an adventure because she was always looking out the window, her eyes tracing the trees, the bank along the side of the road, even the median strip of the freeway. I remember waiting in the car as she darted across four lanes of H-1 to pick salmon-colored bougainvillea, a *Times* supermarket grocery bag trailing behind her. Whether driving the saddle road on Hawai'i Island or the streets of her own Mānoa Valley, Tūtū was watching for flowers. To her, every landscape offered a tantalizing vision of its own lei just waiting to be made.

I have a similar craving to weave stories of certain landscapes. Since I was a child, everywhere I went, I remember wondering, Who are the people of this place? What did it look like before? What parts of it (plants, views, fish, rock walls) are still here? Will they be here in the future? Now I address these questions through interdisciplinary environmental research focused on relationships between people and places in rural parts of Hawai'i and on how these relationships have changed over time. Most of my work has centered in the Halele'a moku and Kīlauea area of Kaua'i, where I grew up. This chapter begins by sharing an experience of one place in Halele'a, Lumaha'i Valley. This experience inspired me to go back to school at age thirty to pursue a degree in

environmental studies, and continues to shape my approach to research in this field.

Mo'olelo 'Āina: Stories of a Place

In high school, I moved away from Kaua'i, then spent nearly fifteen years living away from home, studying sociology in college, traveling, and teaching at a Hawaiian language immersion school on O'ahu while pursuing a master's degree in Hawaiian education. In 2003, I finally moved home to Kaua'i, where I had a job running mālama 'āina education programs at the Waipā Foundation on Kamehameha Schools lands. The foundation works to restore the 1,600-acre ahupua'a of Waipā as a community learning center for culturally based stewardship and Hawaiian cultural practice. At Waipā, I worked with students of all ages, including a group of nine local high school students funded to intern with us through Alu Like, a nonprofit to assist native Hawaiians in their efforts to achieve social and economic self-sufficiency. That summer, we had the opportunity to take the interns on a four-day trip to explore possibilities for conservation work at the very back of Lumaha'i, the large valley that wraps around the much smaller neighboring valley of Waipā, both trust lands of Ke Ali'i Pauahi. Most of the students grew up swimming regularly in the muliwai on the beach, Ho'ohila, where Lumaha'i's river lazily meets the sea. However, none of us knew anyone who had ever been to the very back of the 1,600-acre valley, which we planned to reach by helicopter. Though the flight was less than ten minutes just over one ridge, getting us there would require five expensive helicopter trips: three for people and two to sling-load our gear.



My Tūtū, Amelia Ana Ka'ōpua Bailey, preparing lei for a gathering at 'ohana home in Namahana, Kaua'i, 1980. Photo courtesy of Beryl Leolani Bailey Blaich.

In preparation for the trip, the students began to ask their families what they knew of Lumahai. A few kūpuna had been to the area on hunting trips or recalled older family members who went there, however, knowledge of the place and what it was like was sparse. Our searches of maps and the sources we knew for mo'olelo turned up only a few place names and vague references. The students became aware that they were going to a place that generations of their family members had only heard about, yet somehow still felt connected to and thought of as powerful. They worked hard to prepare, encouraging one another by researching native plants, memorizing place names, practicing getting in and out of the helicopter, packing meals, learning cultural protocol, and making ho'okupu. They scrubbed their boots and froze their clothing so as not to introduce new weeds to the area.

On the helicopter ride, my first, we soared over plunging ravines in every shade of green. When I was able to catch my breath, I noticed clumps of la'i, ti, planted high on the steep sides of each gully we passed. When the chopper made its descent, dropping suddenly, I looked down and saw no space in which to land. We set down on an uluhe-covered slope, disembarking into a tangled mat of thigh-high scratchy fern quivering in the wind from the chopper blades. Dwarf lehua adorned a spongy bog at the base of towering pali. Five small streams emerged from rocks at the piko of the deep valley below. I was afraid to take a breath, lest I disturb something.

When the sound of the helicopter trailed off, our group offered oli komo, asking to enter. We also addressed Laka, all around us in the dwarf lehua, flowering 'ie'ie, and three different vining maile sisters. As we gave our lei and ho'okupu, I was reminded of one community member's question as we were getting input for the trip: "If you believe in Laka, why go? You don't believe she can handle the forest on her own?" To me, our offerings, our presence in that place were a means of ho'omana, giving strength to Laka, just as she gave strength to our efforts. Still, each step in the bog felt tender, and no matter how carefully we walked, we stomped on the moss, leaving indentations for mosquito puddles. Each sling load that brought tents, cereal boxes, coolers, the wok, and our other gear further flattened uluhe under the weight, sound, and wind of the chopper.

Yet signs of the need for conservation work were everywhere. Invasive Australian tree ferns showered spores on our heads and shoulders as we cut them. Their light green fronds peeked above the tree canopy in every direction, gullies away threatening to spread into an impenetrable sunlight-blocking ceiling. Strawberry guava seedlings sprang by the fistful from clumps of goat dung. Over the next few days the students set to work, scaling ridges to reach those far-off ferns. We climbed down from the bog and into the dryland forest to weed. Soon, uprooted clydimia plants and thimble berry bushes hung roots

toward the sky, lacing fallen tree branches. Students counted as they pulled. Only their voices and the shaking bushes gave away their presence amidst the thick vegetation and towering old 'ōhi'a: "One-thousand, four-hundred thirty-seven clydimia, one-thousand, four-hundred thirty-eight clydimia, one-hundred ninety-three thimble berry."

Conservation and research efforts that focus on intact native forests and areas with high concentrations of rare species often assume that these remote and pristine sites—wao akua, realms of the gods—are disconnected from humans. The environmental organization partnering in our work was proceeding on the assumption that this place was untouched and unvisited, because it was upstream of a precipitous cliff and waterfall. After our trip, an archaeological study was conducted to evaluate the feasibility of constructing a helicopter landing zone and camping platform. The first sample pit uncovered a large chunk of mana mana, branch coral, very deliberately carried from the ocean to honor and enhance the mana of this place. Yes, people certainly had been there before.

This trip, unlike many conservation and environmental research efforts in Hawai'i, incorporated means of acknowledging the sacredness of our "work site" and asking its guidance; of accessing people's stories and connection to this place, however tentative and distant; and of reconnecting the place to community by training younger generations descended from the area to take care of it. These three threads gleaned from our trip continue to shape my attempts at 'āina-based research: 'āina as source, 'āina as people, and 'āina as ongoing connection and care.

'Ike 'Āina: Three Strands

Wili, or wrapped, lei are distinct from other styles of lei such as kui (to string with a needle) or hili (to braid one type of material) because they require fiber strands, hau, and, more recently, raffia to wrap and bind the lei. As a child, I often sat on the cold cement steps next to Tūtū's lei table in the garage. The flower refrigerator hummed along under Hawaiian mele on KCCN as I watched the definitive wrap and pull of her wrist. The beauty of lei wili comes from combining materials of different sizes, shapes, textures, and colors. The three-strand raffia structure allows for finesse in the binding. Tūtū's finished lei highlighted each different flower and fern she used, while producing something more beautiful than the sum of these parts.

My efforts at 'āina-based research also draw on varied materials and information gathered through mixed methods—interviews, focus groups, surveys, meeting observations, document analysis, archival work, and ecological monitoring—to create a holistic and, I hope, new view of a place. Like Tūtū's

raffia, three unifying strands bind everything together: 'āina as source, the place itself; 'āina as people, those connected to that place; and 'āina as ongoing connection and care, the strengthening of connections between people and place. Here, for each of these three strands or sources of 'ike, I offer lessons to guide the gathering process of research.

'Āina as Source

The stream crossing is so overgrown with hau bush that we have to bend and wade with our bellies against the cold brown water. We hold on to the slippery hau branches, feet skidding on mossy rocks as the stream rushes to plunge over the falls ten feet below. We are already wet from the sodden leaves and branches we pushed through to get here, and it looks as if it will start pouring again any minute. Before stepping into the frothing stream water I motion to Beth, my research assistant, to wait. It is time to offer our oli. Beth, an undergraduate student raised in Seattle, has never been to Hawai'i before this summer internship helping with my research. She stops reaching for the sample bottle in her backpack, straightens up, trying not to scratch the skin between her pants and tennis shoes where a cluster of mosquitos circle angrily, and takes a breath to chant.

We are stream sampling today to build skills and understanding of water systems vital to the community where I was raised. We want to understand the effects of land use change, resulting in erosion and sediment, on streams and ultimately the corals reefs and inshore fisheries still so essential to survival, food security, and the way of life on this coast. We need to collect samples on the rainiest days, the waimea, reddish-water days of swollen café au lait channels clouding the bay, slowly pushing the line between blue and brown farther toward the horizon.

We stand facing the lunging water, teeth chattering, and find our voices. Yet the purpose of this chant is more than just a request for protection. This oli asks permission of this place, of the wai, the water itself, for our work. We explain the purpose of our study, why the water will be used, and how. May we take just a small sample from its home in the kahawai, the stream? Just as a pōhaku, rock, needs to know the function for which it is being selected so that it may lend its mana to the effort, wai should be asked to come along too. Whether my students' work involves collecting wai, pōhaku, leaf litter, fish gonads, or soil, I ask that they learn oli to first ask permission.

Once removed, these aspects of 'āina must continue to be treated with respect. The water samples we are collecting will leave Kaua'i, frozen and packed in dry ice for shipment to California. There, a highly sensitive spectrometer will shine light through the water, measuring the wavelength of emerging beams. Each color will correspond to various nutrient levels. Silica will show the pres-



Tracked, by Maui printmaker Abigail Romanchak, 2010, traces the footsteps of conservationists, wearing GPS trackers, as they moved through one protected native forest over the course of a year. Romanchak enlarged maps of their tracks, carved segments onto plates, and then printed them on rice paper. The prints use reddish paint made of soil from the same Maui forest. *Tracked* earned the most outstanding artist award in the Biennial IX exhibit at the Honolulu Contemporary Museum of Art in 2010. Image courtesy of artist.

ence of groundwater. Calcium is likely from evaporated ocean water returned as rain. Nitrate and nitrite will indicate the presence of fertilizers or possible sewage. Most of the wai in our six-ounce sample bottles is extra, collected in case samples need to be retested. Once they finish the tests, I ask research assistants not to dump this surplus wai down the drain: Instead, carry it out of the lab, water a tree, and give thanks. Where possible, we have shipped unused samples home and returned wai to the spot where it was collected. All environmental research focuses on 'āina, often collecting and analyzing the land itself. In the work I strive to do and encourage my students to do, 'āina should be not only subject but also partner, source, inspiration, and guide.

'Āina as People

I conduct most of my research through interviews and site visits with longtime residents who have multigenerational ties to the places I study. As in Lumaha'i Valley, it is rarely easy to identify the community of people with connections to a place; this community is often unseen. However, every place in Hawai'i has people attached to it who care about and hold deep wisdom of it. These people, worth seeking, offer a vital strand in the lei.

People's connections to places are often built through use. In one example of research conducted to understand human use, I worked with lawai'a, or fishermen, of Hā'ena, Kaua'i, who were engaged in community planning efforts for their local fishery. Our research team had already spent a year and a half counting users of the coastline and thought we had a clear picture of the "community," a handful of fishermen and many recreational users who accessed the area to surf, kite surf, snorkel, sunbathe, and gather shells.

The fishermen wanted to extend our study to understand where fish from the area ended up. We worked together to track what fish they caught, who they gave them to, and where. This work revealed a network of families connected to Hā'ena's coast by receiving gifted māhele, or shares of fish, even though they lived on the other side of the island or even on the mainland. Most of these fish recipients had ancestral ties to the area, but many had moved away due to construction of luxury vacation homes and resulting increases in property taxes. Had the lawai'a not wanted to share their catch and giving practices, we could have missed an entire community of fish recipients who remain connected to Hā'ena's fishery. Though easily overlooked in management and policy efforts, this community will nonetheless be affected by such planning. Research like mine, focused on "human dimensions" of the environment, can help illuminate unseen communities and their interactions with a place. This research is much richer if it not only studies but also engages these communities.

ʻĀina as Ongoing Connection and Care

Throughout Hawai'i, people are actively engaged in community-based efforts to take care of places they love and are fed by. My students and I aim not only to study but also to strengthen their efforts. I work with mālama 'āina organizations in my home community and in others that have invited our research team to document their efforts, lessons, and challenges. We try to conduct this research in a participatory way, working as partners with these organizations to develop research questions, collect and analyze data, discern answers to our questions, and decide how to use this information. As much as possible, I attend regularly scheduled community meetings and workdays to get feedback on research progress and share preliminary findings. These sessions usually include food and informal discussion, often yielding valuable insight into whether our findings ring true, potential explanations for them, and future directions for research. I also hold formal community presentations to share research in forms that can be utilized to support community efforts.

One trend in environmental research is the remote collection of large data sets across many sites. In contrast, my research emphasizes helping people add to in-depth knowledge of places where they have kuleana, responsibility. In the ongoing stream monitoring project described earlier, we hire community mem-

bers to collect water samples, take photos, and conduct visual assessments of stream health using indicators such as water color, flow speed, and vegetation cover on banks. Over time, our goal is to correlate data on nutrient levels obtained through targeted sampling with these more holistic observations, thereby connecting the data we collect to what people already know about the stream system. We aim to strengthen the community's ability to observe and assess stream health using convenient and inexpensive methods, without needing to rely on scientific teams or a laboratory. This effort builds capacity for community-based management and for real-time, day-to-day decision making, such as whether or not it is safe to allow one's children to swim.

Pani a Pa'a: Conclusion

The sky lit gold over the distant glimpse of ocean at the mouth of Lumaha'i Valley as we walked back up the trail after that long final day of weeding. Likely we had friends and cousins swimming at the river mouth even as we stood here ma uka of its source. Three students said they had decided after this trip they wanted to work in conservation. Returning home, I began to consider doctoral programs in environmental studies, even though I had not taken math since high school and never took chemistry. Now a professor, my motivation remains preparing students for jobs taking care of places they love and are connected to.



Waipā youth mappers and kumu on work trip to the back of Lumaha'i Valley in the summer of 2003. Left to right: Namolokama Osakoda, Kai Fu, Titi Giltner, Noe Wong, Kaili Chandler, Olena Asuncion, Kamealoha Forrest, Mokihana Martin, Uncle David Sproat, Adam Hussey, Mehana Blaich Vaughan, and Pa'ula Chandler. Photo by Auli'i George Dudoit, courtesy of Kai Fu.

‘Āina: source, ‘aina: people, ‘aina: ongoing connection and care—three unifying strands, like the raffia that binds together one of Tūtū’s lei wili. Learning from Tūtū’s example and teaching, I approach environmental research the way she taught me to gather a variety of materials and to wili lei. My research often comes together in mo’olelo, storytelling, and in poetry, avenues our kūpuna used, like lei, to make beloved places seen and felt. These lei can only be made from the places from which their elements were gathered. Each ‘a’ali’i bush is sculpted by a certain direction of wind, the day’s length of sun, and weathering of soil on its side of a ridge. Multiple bushes yield a lei entirely different from one made from ‘a’ali’i just one ridge over.

In my environmental research, I am guided by Tūtū’s informal, mostly unspoken, instruction in gathering for lei. Oli first: Ask and explain the purpose for your gathering. Look. Listen. Take only what you need. Clean your materials before you depart, leaving as much as you can with the plants to rejuvenate and replenish. When the process is complete, and the lei dries, bring it back to this spot or return it to some other ‘āina to bring growth.

The poem that follows brings together individual bits of material gathered from the area where I grew up. Woven with three strands—place, people, and the connection between them—I hope this lei tells a textured story of ‘āina, ma uka to ma kai (mountains to sea) and the human footprints it bears, both seen and unseen. Research, like lei, should bring growth along with beauty, should weave disparate elements together in a way that shows new perspective and creates new life. Lei are to be given and shared, not to remain the property of the maker. Like any other haku of mele, of inoa, once given, this lei belongs to its recipient: Nou kēia lei. He lei wili ‘ia me ke aloha, no ku’u Tūtū, no ka ‘āina aloha, aloha nō.

Pu’unahale

WAO NAHELE—UPLAND FOREST, 140 ACRES, TMK #13–531

Name lost

Bird catchers’ camp

Where orange lehua once bloomed

Branch coral laid gently on an altar

The place where the hunting dogs froze

Road launching power lines over the mountain

Straightest guava branches for kalā’au

The spot the Pleiades first crest the ridge

In October’s crisping dusk

KULA—FLATLANDS, 10.2 ACRES, TMK #13–458

Below Pu’u Māheū, hill-raking winds

Sweet soil for growing 'uala
Sunset view meditation spot
Place to check surf at "Wires"
Night path of the spirits returning from shore
Where we kids used to ride our bikes
The first gated driveway that we'd ever seen
Former route of the sugar cane train
Field #45, best yield per acre
State land-use classification . . . Ag.

KAHAWAI—RIPARIAN ZONE, 1.4 ACRES, TMK #13-172

A taro patch called Nāhiku
'Auwai with 'o'opu mouths big as a fist
First place to flood, now so much less water
Where the cousin on crystal meth hides
Rocks the women scrubbed clothing clean on
Roof dropped there by the tsunami
Perch for the child scaring rice birds
Stand up paddle right out to the beach
Option to construct two ADUs
Vacation rentals with kitchenettes

KAHAKAI—COASTAL LANDS, 0.2 ACRES, TMK #13-890

Kamakau, the long curving hook
Line of shells swept up by first swell
The hill used to kilo, direct them to moi
The space to spread nets out to dry
Two turtle eggs hatching one March morning
Outflow of bagasse from the mill
Shearwater flyway that stopped power lines
Where the sand departs from in the fall
'Āholehole caught for baby's lū'au
Eel circling the spot Uncle cleaned them
Those "champagne pools" the guidebook named
Six visitors swept away this last winter
Private beach view, price \$2.7 million dollars
Right where the fishing trail used to descend

GLOSSARY

ADU additional dwelling unit
'āholehole fish form of god Lono
'auwai irrigation ditch

<i>bagasse</i>	fibrous waste product from sugar milling
<i>ho'okupu</i>	offerings to cause growth and thriving
<i>'ike</i>	knowledge or insight
<i>kalā'au</i>	hula implement made of two sticks
<i>kilo</i>	to spot fish, a fish spotter
<i>kūpuna</i>	elders, those who stand at the source
<i>Laka</i>	goddess of the forest and of hula
<i>lehua</i>	Native Hawaiian forest tree used in lei
<i>limu</i>	seaweed
<i>ma uka</i>	upland
<i>moi</i>	Pacific threadfin fish, once reserved for chiefs
<i>mo'olelo</i>	stories, history
<i>muliwai</i>	river mouth
<i>Nāhiku</i>	"the seven"; also the name for the Big Dipper
<i>oli komo</i>	entrance chant
<i>'o'opu</i>	freshwater goby fish
<i>pali</i>	cliff
<i>piko</i>	center
<i>pōhaku</i>	rock
<i>'uala</i>	sweet potato
<i>wai</i>	water