FORUM

THE CANOE, THE WIND, AND THE MOUNTAIN: SHUNTING THE RASHOMON EFFECT OF MAUNA KEA

Vilsoni Hereniko
University of Hawai'i

Philipp Schorch
State Ethnographic Collections of Saxony, Germany

The Rashomon Effect

Akira Kurosawa, one of Japan's famous directors, made a movie in 1950 about a murder and a rape in a forest that was witnessed by four people, all of whom have contradictory interpretations of what happened. Titled *Rashomon,* this film became one of the best-known movies by cinephiles around the world (1). Soon, different and conflicting accounts of a particular incident or event became generally known as the Rashomon effect (2). In this paper, we deploy this term to refer to the present controversy surrounding Mauna Kea, a mountain in Hawai'i, and conflicting interpretations about what it is or should be. Our goal, however, is to find a methodology for resolving conflicts that transcend the particularity of Mauna Kea. In this paper, we offer the double-hulled canoe of Oceania as a metaphorical method for resolving difficult and challenging circumstances.

The controversy around Mauna Kea is similar to many other controversies in Oceania and beyond. Deep-sea mining, fisheries exploitation, strip mining, sacred rivers and hydroelectricity, the rising of the seas over sacred lands—there

Pacific Studies, Vol. 41, No. 3—Dec. 2018

is a seemingly endless list of comparable situations and places. By putting the clash over Mauna Kea under a microscope, we hope to bring into visibility various elements, influences, and worldviews that are in conflict, not just in this controversy but also in similar others worldwide.

The Mauna Kea Controversy

Mauna a Wakeā is the proper name for Mauna Kea, which loosely translates as "white mountain" because of the snow that often covers its summit. There are older Hawaiians who believe that the real meaning has more to do with the mountain's famous summit, the piko (navel or belly button) that "ties this earth to Wakeā, the god father who is the sky" (3). We use the latter term here mainly because it is used among the public and the media to refer to the mountain. We are aware, however, of how important it is to call "earth beings" (De La Cadera, 2010) by their indigenous names and point out that the choice we have made is intended to open up for everyone a space that is inclusive. Everyone could and should be able to engage with the issues at hand without feeling that the "mountain" or the issues it has unleashed should not be their concern since they are not Hawaiian. We feel that the issues associated with this controversy are relevant to other contexts and places beyond Hawai'i and the Pacific and as such, transcend ethnicity, race, class, or gender.

The name Mauna a Wakeā suggests that for many native Hawaiians, not just those who lived thousands of years ago but also many still living today, the mountain belongs to Wakeā, the sky father. According to Pua Kanahele, a revered and well-respected cultural expert and practitioner who lives on Hawai'i island, "The mountain belongs to Wakeā. You and what you want to do with it doesn't matter. The mountain is sacred. It is Wakeā. It is not Mount Joe. It is not Mount Kilroy. It is Mauna a Wakeā." She goes on to add that "Wakeā is the broad expanse, the sky father, partner to Papahanaumoku, earth mother, who gave birth to the islands. Hawai'i island is their hiapo, or eldest child. And Mauna Kea is that child's piko, or navel. Because of its place in our genealogies, Mauna Kea is a kupuna, an ancestor" (4).

A dormant volcano on the island of Hawai'i, Mauna Kea rises 9,750 meters (32,000 feet) from the ocean floor to an altitude of 4,205 meters (13,796 feet) above sea level. The summit is made up of cinder cones on a lava plateau, with its highest point above 40 percent of Earth's atmosphere. The extremely dry and cloud-free conditions above the mountain for long periods permit "more detailed studies than are possible elsewhere, while its distance from city lights and a strong islandwide lighting ordinance ensure an extremely dark sky, allowing observation of the faintest galaxies that lie at the very edge of the observable Universe" (5). This unique astronomical observing site makes Mauna Kea

special and is the primary reason scientists all over the world have a particular interest in this location. It is also the main reason that the University of Hawai'i is embroiled in this controversy over the mountain's management and use.

The Stewardship of Mauna Kea

As the state's only public-funded university, the University of Hawai'i took a leadership role in the management of Mauna Kea beginning in the 1960s. Its Institute for Astronomy "provided the scientific impetus for the development of Mauna Kea into the world's premier site for ground-based astronomical observatories." More telescopes are located there than on any other mountain peak. Mauna Kea is therefore recognized as the premier site for "optical, infrared and millimeter/submillimeter measurements." In June 2000, the University of Hawai'i's Board of Regents adopted what is called the Mauna Kea Science Reserve Master Plan, which marked a critical milestone in the management of the mountain (6).

Before the adoption of the master plan with its management guidelines for the next 20 years, meetings and public hearings were held to gather the input of individuals and cultural groups, as well as organizations with a vested interest in the mountain's management and use. This process "reflected the community's deeply rooted concerns over the use of Mauna Kea, including respect for Hawaiian cultural beliefs, protection of environmentally sensitive habitat, recreational use of the mountain, as well as astronomy research" (7). In 2014, like a dormant volcano that has become active, the present controversy erupted when the media announced the construction of a 30-meter telescope (TMT) on Mauna Kea. Somehow, the building of an astronomical observatory with an extremely large telescope (ELT) became the "straw that broke the camel's back." Native Hawaiians who had acquiesced to the state's use of Mauna Kea for astronomy's scientific explorations up to this point discovered the lightning rod they needed to openly protest against the use of their "sacred mountain." These protests struck a nerve among indigenous communities around the world where similar controversies had been happening, and for a period spanning many months, the hot lava of dissent flowed freely, not just in Hawai'i but also internationally, fanned by opposing points of view carried by broadcast television, radio, and print media.

Why do astronomers want a TMT on Mauna Kea? Aren't the telescopes that have already been built on the mountain sufficient for their purposes? It is a truism that with each passing year (or years), technological inventions become allegedly bigger and better, more efficient and more capable than before. In a similar vein, scientists have desired since the 1980s to build a "telescope with a light-gathering mirror larger than 20 meters in diameter." This desire eventually resulted in the US National Academy of Sciences recommending that a

30-meter telescope be the focus of US interests, seeking to see it built within the decade. Such an ELT would "enable astronomers to conduct research which is unfeasible with current instruments," because it would be designed for "near-ultraviolet to mid-infrared (0.31 to 28 μm wavelengths) observations, featuring adaptive optics to assist in correcting image blur." Positioned at the highest altitude of all proposed ELTs, this 30-meter telescope has government-level support not just from the United States but also from several other nations, including China, Japan, Canada, and India (8). When certain native Hawaiian individuals, groups, and organizations started protesting, such as by setting up camp or blocking access to the top of Mauna Kea, the scientific agenda was sabotaged.

The residents of Hawai'i, in one way or another, became embroiled in this controversy over the mountain as it became an issue of increasing concern. Everywhere one turned, people wanted to discuss and air their opinions. Occurring at the same time was another controversy concerning the building of a rail system in Honolulu for mass transit purposes. Many residents wondered about Mauna Kea's worldwide attention beyond what some considered a worse blight on Hawai'i's beautiful landscape. What makes the mountain more important than other sites? How can we make sense of this Rashomon effect?

In summary, the different perspectives of Mauna Kea can be distilled to two points of view: the sacred and the secular. The sacred perspective views the mountain as an ancestor or "earth being" (9), while the secular view sees the mountain's height and its location as providing perfect conditions for scientific exploration. These two colliding perspectives have resulted in a controversy with seemingly irreconcilable differences.

Our Position

We do not claim to have special knowledge of the issues at hand; we do claim, however, to be interested in examining the large number of academic articles, essays, videos, and other materials that have been circulating about the controversy surrounding Mauna Kea (10). Second, we want to shine a spotlight on a specific controversy in a specific locale with a specific history to understand its implications for other similar situations in which there are different perspectives of the same event or same being. Third, we want to explore a methodology for reconciling different perspectives in a way that is respectful of different or contradictory points of view. Our positionality figures into this third reason, because our dual focus as indigenous community allies who are also academics interested in the broader concerns of humanity affords us (for better or for worse) with a vantage point that is open to exploring different points of view in order to discover the best solution to the present impasse. We feel pulled into this controversy from the inside and the outside at the same time. The

Rashomon effect is therefore happening not just in the larger society but in our minds as well. This paper is our contribution to this important discussion, our way of figuring things out for ourselves as much as for anyone else interested in matters in which the sacred and the secular intersect and collide.

In our search for clarity, the Oceanic double-hulled canoe appears to be an apt metaphor, with one hull representing the secular, unrestricted pursuit of scientific knowledge by humans and the other hull representing the sacred, restricting values of other-than-human entities. Although the Mauna Kea conflict would have us believe that these two main perspectives are radically different from each other, the hulls of the double-hulled canoe look more alike than unalike, suggesting that these two main points of view have more in common with each other than is readily apparent (10).

The Canoe as a Metaphorical Method

A double-hulled canoe gains stability because it has two hulls that are joined together, as well as kept apart, by a wooden platform. Apart from the two hulls and the platform, the canoe has a sail that propels it forward on the ocean. These four parts of the canoe—the two hulls, the platform, and the sail—symbolize for us a methodology not only for understanding the controversy surrounding Mauna Kea but also a way of navigating differing and conflicting perspectives (11). The secret to success, however, resides in a technique called shunting—best described as relational flexibility—in which the sail is flipped from one end of the hull to the other, depending on the direction of the wind (12). Shunting brings one and then the other hull (the sacred and the secular) into focal visibility from the observer's point of view.

Sacred and Secular Hulls

The first hull of our canoe embodies the sacred. The sacred views mountains, rivers, rocks, etc., as things imbued with a life force, and as living beings. Many indigenous cultures around the world are known for holding this kind of perspective about nature (12). However, this view could be held by anyone, including European or American scientists. Similarly, there are many Hawaiians who believe that using Mauna Kea for scientific research is consistent with Pacific people who navigated using their knowledge of astronomy to settle Oceania, long before Europeans arrived in the Pacific (13).

Then there is the second hull of our canoe that represents the secular. This perspective makes a clear distinction between humans and nature. In this view, humans have dominion over birds, animals, trees, rocks, and even mountains. Humans therefore have the right to dominate nature and bring it under control.

Other proponents may also hold a different view, which could be that of trying to live in harmony with the natural world around us. What separates this perspective from the sacred is not believing that other-than-human entities, such as rocks, trees, and mountains, have a life force that makes them equal (or almost equal) to humans. The view that humans are superior is associated mostly with contemporary Western cultures, but it is one that could be held by many indigenous people today, many of whom believe in economic development and the pursuit of scientific knowledge.

The sacred and the secular hulls are different but equal—neither is better than the other. Much like the film *Rashomon,* each is a different interpretation of the same mountain. But unlike the film *Rashomon,* these different perspectives need to be bridged.

The Platform That Separates and Connects

The canoe's two hulls—symbolizing the sacred and the secular—are connected by a wooden platform or bridge that binds them to each other. What then does the bridge symbolize in relation to the Rashomon effect? For us, this bridge is akin to a "method translator" (14)—someone who could draw on, engage with, and speak to the sacred realm, as well as the secular realm—that is a key figure in connecting both dimensions. We do not assume that such a person would succeed on his or her own, and accept that this person could conceivably bring biases or an agenda (real or imagined) to this role. Finding the right individual to take on such a challenging role is difficult, and it is common for one side or the other to object. However, finding an individual acceptable to all sides is imperative. This human bridge or connector is responsible for the translation of different positions to find common ground.

We also wish to suggest that the platform that connects but also separates is analogous to Mauna Kea, the mountain. The impasse that has occurred as a result of two hulls that are not connected could be resolved if the mountain, as a bridge, could be restored to its rightful place and viewed as a method translator, the equivalent of an expert navigator. This could be achieved by asking the mountain what it wants. But how could we know what the mountain wants? The first requirement is a willingness to listen and an openness that the mountain might want to participate actively, instead of passively, in its own affairs.

Nainoa Thompson, a native Hawaiian, as well as an expert navigator and president of the Polynesian Voyaging Society, has spoken about navigating the Hokuleʻa canoe with his naʻau (15). Like many other Pacific people, he believes that the naʻau—located "in the belly"—is where the truth resides. The truth that resides in this part of the body is not the result of intellectual knowledge or

rational thought; instead, it is an assurance founded on intuitive knowledge. According to Thompson, when everything else fails, the moon and the stars have disappeared, or the sky is dark or a storm is raging, he has no other means to steer the canoe but to resort to listening to his na'au. Similarly, because negotiations over the use of Mauna Kea have failed (at the time of this writing), it is imperative that we listen to our na'au. In listening, we might hear the mountain speak, as in this poem (16):

LET THE MOUNTAIN SPEAK

Did you ask me what I want?
Or are you going to speak for me?
I was here before you arrived
And I'll be here today and tomorrow.

Some say I have eyes and teeth,
Others say I'm the perfect mountain,
But have you asked me what I want?

Lay down on the ground!
Feel my truth
Below your belly button

Then crawl on your hands and knees,
Climb to the top of my summit
Where I wait patiently for your arrival
To break YOU open.

Now that you're broken open,
I will send you down.

Embrace your mothers and your fathers
Your brothers and your sisters
Your aunties and your uncles
Your children
Even your children's children.

See enemies with new eyes,
That's when you'll hear
What I want.

The poem suggests it is possible to know the truth about Mauna Kea in our na'au. However, accessing this knowledge is not easy, because as humans we tend to navigate differing perspectives with our intellect, not with our na'au. Furthermore, we have a tendency to speak instead of listening. The poem also suggests that when we listen, and listen with intent, we may hear the mountain speak to us.

Should we hear the mountain speak, we might discover that the mountain wants something different, maybe something that is a combination of different perspectives. For example, both sides (the sacred and the secular) could discover that what the mountain wants today is different from what it wanted when the first settlers arrived on these islands thousands of years ago. Or maybe not: maybe the mountain's wishes will always remain the same. Whatever the case may be, both sides must be open to being surprised, even shocked, if the mountain were to tell us what it wants. This approach could lead to each side discovering that it needs to rise above the narrow confines of its individualistic concerns to focus more on the broader concerns of humanity (17). To get to this broader and larger concern for our collective future together, we turn now to the sail of the canoe.

The Sail That Needs Shunting

In many parts of Oceania, women wove the sails of canoes, even though canoe building was generally the domain of men. Made usually from pandanus, the weaving of a sail was a labor of love, one that could take many months. Similar to the production of the hulls that are imbued with the mana of men, the production of the sail is imbued with the mana of women (18). This is true not just for so-called Polynesia but also for the rest of the Pacific, where sailing canoes were necessary for survival. For example, Marshall Islanders have a legend about the first sail of the canoe as one that was gifted by a mother to her kind son, the only one out of her many sons willing to give her a ride during a competitive race (19). As each son sailed by and saw that their mother had something heavy by her side, they ignored her request, thinking that her weight and her cargo would slow their canoe. But not so with the youngest son, who was more concerned with his mother's pleas for help than winning the race. Once on board the canoe, his mother hoisted the sail that she had been carrying with her, causing the canoe to overtake the others in front. The kind son won the race, the result of which is a story with a moral that has value not just to Marshall Islanders but to all of humanity.

In the Marshallese legend, the shunting technique was part of the reason the mother's kind son won the race. This ability to flip the sail from one hull to another allowed the canoe to travel into the wind and to travel fast. This technique, best described as relational flexibility, will allow humanity to be able to harness the power of differing perspectives. This is the secret to success, because the hulls, connected by a wooden platform, are rigid and inflexible, whereas the

sail, hoisted above the platform that connects the two hulls, will give the canoe the flexibility it needs to pivot in all directions to harness the power of the wind that will take it closer to its destination.

Similarly, to get to the broader concerns of humanity, humans could learn from the art of shunting the sail of a double-hulled canoe. After all, this technique of shunting made it possible for double-hulled canoes to traverse the Pacific Ocean and to settle its thousands of islands before Europeans arrived. The stable hulls, connected by a bridge that keeps them apart, suggests it is possible to hold firm to one's beliefs and yet be connected to other beliefs. But this is not enough if the canoe is to make landfall. It needs a sail, one that can be shunted, so that the stable canoe can pivot in all directions. This nimbleness, this ability to respond to the changing directions of the wind, is the canoe's special feature that sets it apart from the rest.

A Way Forward

We began this paper by referencing the Rashomon effect, used mainly to refer to differing perspectives about the same event—in this instance, differing perspectives about the mountain Mauna Kea. The film *Rashomon* has four points of view; similarly, this brief essay has four perspectives about Mauna Kea that are symbolized by the two hulls, a platform that connects them, and a sail (20). But unlike the film *Rashomon,* which makes no effort to reconcile the different points of view, this paper deploys a navigational technique from canoe voyaging called shunting to integrate the conflicting perspectives.

Shunting involves flipping the sail to harness the power of the wind and thus propel the canoe forward. To know when to flip the sail, one needs to be sensitive and responsive to the direction from which the wind is blowing, a call-and-response relationship that is best described as relational flexibility. Because the wind could shift at any time, flexibility saves the canoe from sinking. Shunting is therefore a process that requires sensitivity to the wind and, in our metaphor, recognition and awareness that humans and other-than-human entities must live in harmony with each other.

There is much that we can learn from the technique of shunting. Shunting the sails of a double-hulled canoe makes all the difference. This technique causes a canoe to win the race (21). In stormy weather, analogous to controversial situations in which the Rashomon effect is most evident, the canoe's sail must be shunted. These challenging and difficult situations call for expert method translators who are the equivalent of expert navigators of double-hulled canoes, the likes of Mau Piailug or Nainoa Thompson (22).

In conclusion, the relational flexibility of everyone who has a stake in Mauna Kea, or in similar conflicts across Oceania and the world, will resolve

the impasse that threatens to keep a double-hulled canoe beached on the shore instead of venturing beyond the reef to discover new lands.

NOTES

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashomon

2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashomon_effect

3. http://www.mauna-a-wakea.info/maunakea/F2_whitemountain.html

4. http://www.mauna-a-wakea.info/maunakea/F2_whitemountain.html

5. https://www.ifa.hawaii.edu/mko/about_maunakea.shtml

6. https://www.ifa.hawaii.edu/mko/about_maunakea.shtml

7. https://www.ifa.hawaii.edu/mko/about_maunakea.shtml

8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty_Meter_Telescope

9. De La Cadena (2010). See also http://sites.coloradocollege.edu/indigenoustraditions/sacred-lands/sacred-lands-mauna-kea/. In addition, Vilsoni Hereniko's 2004 film *The Land Has Eyes* explores the belief among Rotumans that the land is like a human and that it has eyes and teeth. See http://www.thelandhaseyes.org. The belief that the land has its own life force is common among many indigenous cultures around the world.

10. We are aware that the canoe may be seen as useful only for parts of the world where voyaging on the ocean is possible. We think otherwise, because the canoe in this paper is metaphorical and is deployed only to suggest a methodology for resolving different perspectives.

11. We do not include the rudder here, because it was not essential in the ancient models in which steering was done using either paddles or sails. Necessary for a successful journey is an expert navigator, but that too is not elaborated upon in this paper, because our focus is more on the structure of the canoe and how the parts function in harmony with one another.

12. See, for example, Eduardo Kohn's work *How Forests Think* (2013) and the resulting debate (De La Cadena 2014), as well as the burgeoning literature on cosmological perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 2012) and the ontological turn (Henare (Salmond), Holbraad, and Wastell 2007).

13. See, for example, http://www.keckobservatory.org/recent/entry/manu_imiloa_modern_ancient_ways_o f_navigating_our_universe.

14. See the discussion of Agnes Wegner's idea of a "Methodendolmetscher" or "method translator" in Schorch and Kahanu (2015).

15. http://www.samlow.com/sail-nav/wayfinding.html

16. We resort to poetry because it seems to us to be the most appropriate medium for accessing the spiritual dimensions that transcend the limitations of empirical thought.

17. This is an observation made famous by Martin Luther King Jr. The full quote reads: "An individual has not started living until he [sic] can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." See http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/martinluth400049.html.

18. For a historical perspective on mana, often understood as ancestral or spiritual energy and force, see Sahlins (1985); for a contemporary perspective, see Tomlinson and Tengan (2016); also see Schorch, McCarthy, and Hakiwai (2016) and Schorch and Hakiwai (2014).

19. This is a well-known legend, made even better known when the Marshallese poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner referred to it in a speech on climate change that she delivered to the United Nations in 2014. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4fdxXo4tnY.

20. In some contemporary canoes such as the Hokule'a, there are not only two hulls and a platform that connects them but also two sails.

21. See Jetnil-Kijiner (2014).

22. Mau Piailug was an expert navigator from the Carolinian island of Satawal, and Nainoa Thompson's mentor.

REFERENCES

De La Cadena, Marisol
2010 Indigenous cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual reflections beyond the 'politics'. *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (2):334–370.
2014 Runa Human but not only. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4 (2): 253–59.

Henare (Salmond), A., M. Holbraad, and S. Wastell, eds.
2007 Thinking through things: Theorising artefacts in ethnographic perspective. London: Routledge.

Hereniko, Vilsoni
2004 *The land has eyes*. Te Maka Productions. http://www.thelandhaseyes.org.

Kijiner, Kathy-Jetnil
2014 Address to the United Nations Climate Change Leaders Summit. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4fdxXo4tnY

Kohn, Eduardo
2013 How forests think: Toward an anthropology beyond the human. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

Sahlins, Marshall
1985 *Islands of history*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

Schorch, Philipp, and Arapata Hakiwai
2014 Mana Taonga and the public sphere: A dialogue between Indigenous practice and Western theory. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 17 (2): 191–205.

Schorch, Philipp and Noelle M. K. Y. Kahanu
2015 Forum as laboratory: The cross-cultural infrastructure of ethnographic knowledge and material potentialities. In *Prinzip Labor: Museumsexperimente im Humboldt Lab Dahlem,* 241–48. Berlin: Nicolai.

Schorch, Philipp, Conal McCarthy, and Arapata Hakiwai
2016 Globalizing Māori museology: Reconceptualizing engagement, knowledge and virtuality through mana taonga. *Museum Anthropology* 39 (1): 48–69.

Tomlinson, Matt, and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan
2016 New mana: Transformations of a classic concept in Pacific languages and cultures. Canberra: Australian National Univ. Press.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo
2012 Cosmological perspectivism in Amazonia and elsewhere. *HAU Masterclass Series: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 1: 45–168.