FORUM

KA ULU KOA MA KAI: THE KOA GROVE RISES IN THE SEA

Ty P. Kāwika Tengan University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa

TRAVELING ALONG THE KOʻOLAUPOKO MOUNTAINS OF OʻAHU with her female companions, Hiʻiaka—youngest sister of the volcano deity Pele—stopped at the area known as Mahinui and looked down to watch a group of men carrying a canoe seaward to the coast of Oneawa where other canoes were floating offshore. She chanted:

Waiho Mahinui mauka ē Ka ulu koa ma kai o Oneawa

Mahinui remains here in the uplands The koa grove rises in the sea beyond Oneawa¹

Hiʻiaka's "koa grove" was a reference to the Native koa hardwood out of which the canoe hulls were built. Here a set of observational practices led to the voicing of interrelationships between mountain and ocean, gods and people, women and men, and tree and canoe. I open with this story to suggest the significance of the koa that constitutes the Hawaiian canoe and Kānaka (People).

Vilsoni Hereniko and Philipp Schorch invite us to imagine a double-hulled canoe that in other parts of Oceania uses a shunting technique of flipping the sail from one end of the hull to the other according to the direction of the wind. The authors argue that this double-hulled shunting canoe can serve as a

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model for addressing the conflicts surrounding the development of astronomy at Mauna a Wākea (Mauna Kea) on the island of Hawaiʻi—to which I would also add the related struggles on Haleakalā on Maui—by encouraging all parties to adopt a "relational flexibility" that brings into "focal visibility" the multiple worldviews at play. Such an intervention would make space for alternative voices to be heard—including those of the mountain itself and other "earth beings" (a term the authors borrow from De La Cadena 2010).

Like Hereniko and Schorch (and numerous others before them)², I too have drawn inspiration from our wayfinding cultures and worlds in my collaborative work looking for new models of Indigenous anthropological praxis (Tengan, Kaʻili, and Fonoti 2010) and tracing the currents between Native Pacific Studies and American Studies (Lyons and Tengan 2015). Thus, I offer the following comments as a fellow voyager seeking to test the sea-worthiness of our theoretical and methodological vessels as we strive to make landfall on islands that may still only be in our minds' eye (Diaz 2015, 99). I write from a position of someone who for numerous cultural, political, and ethical reasons opposes the construction of the Thirty-Meter Telescope (TMT) on Mauna a Wākea and the Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope (DKIST) on Haleakalā. I speak also as someone who strives to bring out both sides of these debates in the Ethnic Studies and Anthropology classes that I teach at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa.

Although I agree that there is much to be gained by applying Oceanic sailing technologies to the present struggles atop Mauna Kea and Haleakalā, Hereniko and Schorch's model requires some revision and refinement. For them, the two canoe hulls represent the "sacred" and the "secular," a binary most frequently (and reductively) invoked in media coverage of Mauna Kea as a battle of "culture vs. science" (Brown 2016; Ladao 2017). Hereniko and Schorch rightly suggest that this dichotomy needs to be bridged to move past that false opposition. They further urge us to see that "[t]he sacred and the secular hulls are different but equal."

The problem here is that, in sailing and in life, not all hulls are built equally—at least when it comes to shunting. Whereas the shunt maneuver is usually associated with Micronesian single canoes (which have one hull and an outrigger), most traditional and contemporary double canoes in Polynesia and Eastern Melanesia (including the Hōkūle'a Hawaiian voyaging canoe) have two hulls of equal length with fixed sails (Finney 2006: 125–27). The historical development in Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa of a double canoe that used a detachable sail for shunting in fact had hulls of unequal size; the sail (along with the steering oar) would move from one end to the other of the longer main hull, with the shorter hull always on the windward side (Davis 2006; Finney 2006: 152–53; Neich 2006: 236–38). If this were to be the model applied to land issues today, we would find that the activities directing the movement of the craft/struggle would be very one-sided; both hulls would remain in the same position relative

to the prevailing winds even as the ends of the canoe designated as fore/front and aft/back would switch with each shunt.

A more pressing issue is that the crew—which is the key component Teresia Teaiwa (2005) focuses on in her exploration of the classroom as a metaphorical canoe—is left unaddressed by the authors. Instead, they note that their "focus is more on the structure of the canoe and how the different parts function in harmony with each other" (fn 11). Yet the canoe's harmonious functioning can only occur with a properly trained and led crew. Commenting on the handling of the *Takitumu* shunting double canoe he had built in 1992 with members of his family in Rarotonga, former Cook Islands Prime Minister Sir Thomas Davis (2006) noted that "it took real sailors to sail her," and failure to perform the shunt correctly left the canoe "dead in the water" (314).

The figure of the navigator—who offers "radical possibilities of [an] archipelagic way of apprehending self and space" (Diaz 2015, 91)—receives a bit more attention from Hereniko and Schorch. They argue that the navigator represents a "method translator" that can bridge the two hulls of the sacred and secular; they also take inspiration from master navigator Nainoa Thompson who found that when all other voyaging signs were absent, he needed to listen to his na'au (gut, seat of knowledge, emotion, and wisdom) in order to arrive at his destination.

Although these ideals appeal greatly, the realpolitik is considerably more complex. As Tuck and Yang (2012, 3) remind us, "decolonization is not a metaphor"—and neither is decolonial voyaging. Despite Thompson's remarkable accomplishments as master navigator of the *Hōkūle'a* and president of the Polynesian Voyaging Society (PVS), his leadership on Mauna Kea has been more mixed. While serving as a regent for the University of Hawai'i, he abstained from the June 16, 2000 vote on the Mauna Kea Science Reserve Master Plan (which was developed in the wake of a scathing state audit highlighting UH's mismanagement of the summit), in part because "he keenly felt the opposing tugs of science and sacred lands" (Gordon 2001). His silence in the present debates over Mauna Kea stand in marked contrast to the whole-hearted support of TMT voiced by fellow master navigator Chad Kalepa Baybayan, who testified in a contested-case hearing that the telescope would represent a continuation of Hawaiian traditions of celestial navigation (Dayton 2016; Thomas 2017).

In contrast to Baybayan's position, Maui activist and writer Dana Nāone Hall (2018) notes that "[m]auna (mountain) protectors reject this facile proposition and point to the circumnavigation of the globe accomplished by . . . Hōkūle'a, relying only on traditional navigation methods." Going further, Iokepa Casumbal-Salazar (2017) argues that the "fictive kinship" drawn between "ancient Hawaiian voyaging" and "modern astronomy" by the University of Hawai'i, and its representatives is better understood as a settler move that

naturalizes the replacement of Native places and people with Western institutions and capital.

Although I tend to agree with Nāone Hall and Casumbal-Salazar, I admire the courage displayed by Baybayan and the late Paul Coleman (a Hawaiian astronomer from UH) who were at times the only Hawaiians to stand up in support of TMT and DKIST. In many ways, their stances highlighted the words of Mau Piailug, the master navigator from Satawal who trained Thompson, Baybayan, and countless others. Piailug famously explained that to brave the elements, the navigator needed a fierceness that came from "faith in the words" of the ancestors (Diaz 2015, 99; Low 2014, 56). Baybayan, Coleman, and other Hawaiian supporters of the two telescopes have been fierce in their faith that their positions follow the footsteps of their *kūpuna* (ancestors) who were innovators all the way back.

Another form of ancestral courage led Samuel Kaleikoa Ka'eo to remain steadfast behind his mother tongue as he stood up and spoke in Hawaiian to affirm his being as a Kanaka 'Õiwi (Native Hawaiian) in a Maui District Court on January 24, 2018. The University of Hawai'i Maui College Hawaiian Studies Professor and *aloha 'āina* (love of land/country) activist was on trial for his role in attempting to block an August 2, 2017, construction equipment convoy going to the top of Haleakalā for what was slated to be the most powerful solar telescope in the world. Ka'eo was one of six individuals arrested at 3:45 AM by heavily armed Maui police officers. Ironically, the Maui police had earlier played a prerecorded Hawaiian language message warning the *kia'i mauna* (mountain protectors) to disperse.⁵

This "weaponization of language" (Rafael 2012)⁶ seems to have been a response to a 2016 court case on Hawai'i Island where Hawaiian language teacher and kia'i mauna Kaho'okahi Kanuha successfully defended himself using 'Ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian Language) in a trial that ended with his acquittal of obstruction charges during a 2015 blockade of construction crews at Mauna Kea (Associated Press 2016). Because 'Ōlelo Hawai'i had been declared in 1978 an official language of the State of Hawai'i on par (supposedly) with English, Kanuha's use of Hawaiian in court was a double defense of identity, culture, and place.

Kanuha's actions, like those of Ka'eo subsequently, framed the Mauna a Wākea and Haleakalā struggles within a broader resurgence of aloha 'āina (Casumbal-Salazar 2017; Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2017). Aloha 'āina is an activist praxis born of a love of the land and nation that centers Hawaiian ways of being and knowing, including the significance of the concept of "piko" that refers to both "mountain summit" as well as the "umbilical cord." Hawaiians past and present reaffirm intergenerational connection when we bury a baby's piko on the summits of the two mountains (Maunupau 1998, 78,147; Peralto

2014, 238). Ka'eo (who was also arrested at Mauna Kea) followed Kanuha's precedent by situating his protection of the piko of Haleakalā within a wider assertion of the proper legal and cultural standing of Hawaiian language, culture, and sovereignty.

By the time Ka'eo entered the Maui courtroom on January 24, 2018, Judge Blaine Kobayashi had already granted a motion made by the prosecution to hold the trial entirely in English attributable to the alleged inconvenience of hiring a Hawaiian language interpreter who was deemed unnecessary since Ka'eo could speak English if he chose (Hiraishi 2018). Nevertheless, when faced with the judge's order to "identify in fact that your name is Samuel Kaeo," Kaleikoa Ka'eo responded with the statement "Eia nō au ke kū nei ma mua ou," (Here I am standing before you). To follow the canoe metaphor offered by Hereniko and Schorch, one might view this as an attempt to shunt the sail of the justice system so that 'Ōlelo Hawai'i would come to the fore and English language move to the back—and to do so without access to a translator (method or otherwise).

Kobayashi refused to acknowledge Kaʻeoʻs use of Hawaiian—and thereby his presence—and instead issued a bench warrant for his arrest for failing to appear in court (Hurley 2018). As Hawaiian Studies professor and legal scholar Kekailoa Perry (2018) commented, "Though the man was physically present, his Hawaiian language made him legally, socially and politically invisible." Speaking outside of the courtroom to the crowd that had shown up in support—many of them young children enrolled in the Hawaiian language immersion program accompanied by their teachers and parents—Kaʻeo explained:

This is about our right as human beings, yeah. We are human *beings*. We demand to be treated as human beings. All human beings have a *language*. There is no justice when other human beings tell another human being, "You cannot speak the language" Especially the language of this *land*. Yeah, ka 'Ōlelo 'Ōiwi, the real language of this land (Maui Now 2018; emphasis added).

Although the bench warrant was dropped the next day and the State Judiciary revised its policies to provide for more Hawaiian language interpreters (Tsai 2018), the deployment of Hawaiian language by Maui police forces to clear the highway of Haleakalā protectors suggests that "official" recognition of 'Ōiwi culture and peoplehood will occur only as it works to validate rather than question structures of settler colonialism that invariably seek to erase and replace the Indigenous (Wolfe 2006). However, the move to grant equal standing to Hawaiian language in the Hawai'i State Judiciary may also represent a return

to the language of the Hawaiian Kingdom courts and renewed possibilities of sovereign speech. It's hard to tell which end of the hull is facing forward in these conditions.

Even as the State attempts to shunt us aside, we stand firmly planted in mountains like the koa tree that is the embodiment of Kū, the god of nation and canoe builders⁷. The term koa, which names "the largest of native forest trees," also means "warrior," "bravery," and "courageous" (Pukui and Elbert 1986, 156). In the precolonial period, the massive trunks of the koa trees were ceremonially felled in the mountains and hauled to the shores where they were carved into canoe hulls—thus the allusion that Hi'iaka made to the koa grove in the chant given above. Because of the impact of large-scale postcontact logging, ranching, farming, development, erosion, wild animals, and invasive species, very few koa remain that are long or straight enough for use as hulls for large voyaging canoes.⁸

Against the historical decimation of koa, there has been a new regeneration of this "earth being" (which for us is also an ancestral deity) in a wide range of environmental, cultural, and political activities. Drawing upon the multiple valences of the term, Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada (2015a) explains that "[k]oa seeds can remain viable in the ground for twenty-five years or more" and germinate only after being "scarred or cracked;" thus, he sees a new growth of koa in the courage demonstrated by the protectors in the battles on the mountains and in the courtrooms. This, in turn, has inspired new sentiments and sentinels of aloha 'āina across the islands and beyond as people kū kia'i mauna (stand to protect the mountains). The efforts to stop TMT and DKIST articulate with other stances on the land, including the formation in March 2018 of the Kanaka Rangers who called out the state for failing to follow through on plans to restore Native forests and create Hawaiian homesteads on the lower slopes of Mauna Kea (Lyte 2018). As Kuwada states, "We are a grove of trees."

Although warriorhood is frequently masculinized, the koa of the past, present, and futures becoming are found not only in *kāne* (men) but importantly also in *wāhine* (women), *māhū* (transgender), and queer aloha 'āina whose courageous stances on their mauna refuse systems of heteropatriarchy that come with neoliberal settler science (Casumbal-Salazar 2017). In this regard, Hereniko and Schorch rightly point to the significant role that Native Pacific women's knowledge and labor play on the canoe, particularly in regards to the weaving and shunting of the sails. At Mauna a Wākea, *kumu hula* (teacher of traditional dance) Pualani Case and her daughter Hāwane Rios, a performer and cultural practitioner, alongside Mauna Kea Anaina Hou president Kealoha Pisciotta, have been notable *wahine mana* (powerful women leaders). Renowned *māhūwahine* (transwoman) kumu hula and educator

Hinaleimoana Wong, who has been at the forefront of the movement, composed a song that has become the anthem of the kū kia'i mauna. Wahine mana Kahele Dukelow, Hawaiian Studies professor at UH Maui College, and Kahala Johnson, a poly-queer PhD student in political science, have been prominent figures in the Kākoʻo Haleakalā group. Johnson explains that for himself, his wahine (female companion) Māhealani Ahia (PhD student in English), and their punalua (unnamed partner), it is "decolonial love that grounds our activism on the mauna" (email to author, April 11, 2018). Many more have lent support through organizing testimonies at the University of Hawaii or the State Legislature, including 'Ilima Long (faculty specialist in Native Hawaiian Student Services) and Healani Sonoda-Pale (organizer with Ka Lāhui Hawai'i Political Action Committee). Māhūwahine anthropologist Kalaniopua Young notes that the voices of the Mauna a Wākea goddesses such as Lilinoe and Poliahu remind us of the importance of the mist and clouds for a wayfinding "that moves beyond binarism" and points to the liminality of space, gender, and sexuality on the canoe (email to author, April 10, 2018). Indeed, koa is coming back in all forms imaginable on land, sea, and sky.

Where then does this leave us with the voyage we embarked on with Hereniko and Schorch? I'm on board with the assertion that canoes are good to think with. When sailing into resurgent waves of Indigeneity, the dual hulls and shunting sails will undoubtedly come to represent more than just the sacred and the secular as a whole host of relationships between state and subject, gods and people, male and female, human and nonhuman, and time and space come to the fore and then recede to the back like the "moving islands" that navigators use to constantly re-triangulate their position with (Diaz 2015: 97–99). Given these conditions, the relational flexibility that Hereniko and Schorch call for is critical. So too is the ability to manifest koa and kū, to stand steadfast against the forces that would swamp one's vessel.

The essential tie that binds all of this together—both materially and metaphorically—is the 'aha (sennit cordage), a mode and symbol of genealogical connection across Oceania that in Hawaiian also references a gathering of people and a ceremony (Tengan Ka'ili, and Fonoti 2010). Indeed, it was Mau Piailug's quick action with cordage that allowed him to repair the broken booms of the Hōkūle'a on the open ocean before currents could carry the crew off course (Low 2014, 56). It is in the spirit of gathering us all together to address such challenging environments that I restate a call that the late Paul Lyons and I made "for coalition building, solidarity among Oceanians and the peoples who encircle the ocean, that pays special attention to the place-based knowledge that emerges from the large and small currents of the Moana Nui (Pacific Ocean), including the dangers and opportunities for movement that currents present" (Lyons and Tengan 2015, 546). Referencing back to the chant of Hiʿiaka,

Kuwada (2015b, 576) has articulated a new poetics of voyaging into sovereignty as follows:

Koa has always grown on this sea, in our masts, our hulls, our hearts Leaving only the question of crew We accept only those who will step bravely into darkness For we have the generations to light our way

On double hulls, we stand, maneuvering sails bound by cordage and courage as we journey on the currents—koa groves rising in the sea.

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NOTES

- 1. Hoʻoulumāhiehie (2006a, 147; 2006b, 156).
- 2. Wendt 1976; Diaz and Kauanui 2001; Teaiwa 2005; Hauʻofa 2008; Diaz 2015; Kauvaka 2016 to name only just a few.
- 3. Summarizing the audit (Office of the Auditor 1998), Casumbal-Salazar (2017,10) states that it "found that after thirty years of construction on the mountain, the University of Hawai'i's management was 'inadequate to ensure the protection of natural resources,' controls were 'late and weakly implemented,' historical preservation was 'neglected,' and the 'cultural value of Mauna Kea was largely unrecognized."
- 4. Ka'eo was the first person I heard quote Piailug on courage. At the 2010 'Aha Kāne Native Hawaiian Men's Health Conference, Ka'eo gave a keynote speech on the importance of knowing ones history to know ones place in the world. Among other things, he discussed Mau Piailug's leadership of the 1976 crew of predominantly Hawaiian men, whose fears he allayed with the words, "If I have courage, it's because I have faith in the teachings of my ancestors" (Ka'eo 2010).
- 5. Video (https://vimeo.com/228127405) of the arrests include footage of the Hawaiian language warnings issued at minute 2:05 and an officer motioning with his hand at his neck to "kill it"—presumably he is telling this to whoever was playing the recording because the message stops at 2:20 when he is returning to the group of the other officers, but the additional meanings one could derive from that command are profound.
- 6. I thank Vernadette Gonzalez for pointing me to this citation.

- 7. Kū took many forms and covered many aspects of human activity, including governance, building, farming, fishing, healing, and war; he has also served as a primary deity of men's work and activities, both in the past and present (Tengan 2016). Although a number of male and female gods were invoked by canoe builders, the greatest number were manifestations of Kū (Malo 1951: 127–28; Polynesian Voyaging Society [PVS] n.d.)
- 8. Ben Finney (2003, 15–21) describes how the failure to find a suitable koa tree for the construction of the *Hawaiʻiloa* voyaging canoe led the Polynesian Voyaging Society (PVS) to enact transindigenous relations and receive two spruce trees donated by the Alaskan Nativeowned Sealaska Corporation.

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