

MĀKUA VALLEY

An anthropocenic story of restoration and reconnection

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on ecological restoration and Indigenous re-claiming practices in the Valley of Mākua, on the island of O’ahu, Hawai’i, an area currently occupied by the US military. The island ‘welcomes’ an average of 6 million tourists a year seeking the so-called, ‘*aloha* experience.’ However, staging “Paradise” comes with a cost, the denial of a colonial past and an exploitative present. The aim of this article is to analyse Indigenous sovereignty eco-cultural practices through the activities of the Mālama Mākua association in the Valley of Mākua, which propose a new kind of relationship with the land a new ‘experience’ based on responsibilities and obligations rather than enjoyment and consumption.

KEYWORDS: eco-cultural practices, sovereignty, sense of place, indigenous ecology, militourism.

I. The Anthropocene and places

*In Hawai’i, tourists
continue arriving
aboard cheap flights:
reservoirs of disease.
Not even a pandemic
can cancel paradise.*

(Craig Santos Perez, 2020: online)

As I am writing this article, the world is experiencing a pandemic. COVID-19 has forced nearly 6 billion people into enforced or voluntary isolation on the planet, pollution levels are decreasing and for the first time ever there are more planes on land than in the sky. In the Pacific in current times there is nothing more pressing than talking about the Anthropocene and tourism. If analysing the Anthropocene in Hawai’i means entering the geo-political dimension of sovereignty and Kanaka Maoli resistance, talking about tourism, on the other end, means dealing with the trope of Pacific paradise. The latter is a subject critiqued and addressed by many authors:

The visual tableau of an idyllic environment inhabited by a carefree society living in a ‘state of nature’ articulates with images that today continue to circulate. Paradise, after all, sells and it is a profitable commodity. (Deckard, 2007, in Tamaira and Fonoti, 2018: 3022)

The trope of paradise has been used to seize, exploit and profit from Indigenous land and today:

tourism, as a form of hedonistic imperialism, replicates, colonial process of conquest, commodification, and exploitation... Pacific tourism imagery involves commodified representations of Edenic lifestyles, natural beauty, and bounty, which are all available to tourists for the price of an air ticket and the cost of resort accommodation. (Alexeyeff and McDonnell, 2018: 276)

Tourism, particularly – but not only – in Hawai'i is inextricably linked with militarism, a bond well expressed by Teresa Teaiwa in the term *militourism* (1994: 2011), and the material appropriation of, in this case Hawaiian, land and natural resources:

For her, the hypervisibility of sexuality and exposed bodies in bikinis veiled and deflected attention from the violence of imperial occupation, militarization, and nuclear testing. Mass tourism, with its promise of endless pleasure and leisure, is co-present with and helps to hide the raw military might of the United States in the archipelago. (Gonzalez, 2013 in Jolly, 2018: 369)

On the other hand, to address the Anthropocene in Hawai'i means re-focusing the geological and anthropological discourse on humankind's relationships with the extra-human world, with all those natural actors that dwell, populate and construct the world humans live in. According to Manulani Aluli Meyer, a Hawaiian native epistemologist:

What we have to do now is to go back to ancient systems. Indigenous ideas are necessary on the planet, because they are different ways of seeing, a different empirical understanding of the shape of the world. Indigenous sensitivities are needed on the planet. (p.c 2017)

The invitation is to turn to native knowledge and sensitivity towards the planet, translated into an everlasting dialogue with 'other-than-human-beings,' a recognition of the concreteness of extra-human relationships. Bruno Latour seems to agree with this proposition, writing that the ecological practices of Indigenous Peoples today have become valuable models for knowing how to win in the future (2017: 98). As Latour reminds us in *Facing Gaia*:

This is what it means to live in the Anthropocene: 'sensitivity' is a term that is applied to all actors capable of spreading their sensors a little further and making others feel that the consequences of their actions will fall on them, coming to persecute them. (ibid: 141)

Leon No'ea Peralto talking about Hawaiian culture states:

If we continue to poison the 'āina in which our genealogical trees are deeply rooted, our children and grandchildren will surely be confronted with a harsh reality... In neglecting our kuleana to mālama this 'āina, we ultimately neglect our kuleana to the future generation of our Lāhui. Our time of reconnection and renewal is upon us. (2014: 241)

What those authors are saying is that the time has come for taking responsibility for those relationships that at least a part of humanity has tried to deny by creating ecological regimes

in which humans deluded themselves that they could control, exploit and manage Nature at will. The Anthropocene and the COVID-19 pandemic are a wake-up calls for humankind, emphasising that humans are only one of the interconnected components of the world and are not in the position to exercise any control. As Latour states “it is no longer a matter of a system of production picking up again or being curbed, but one of getting away from production as the overriding principle of our relationship to the world” (2020: online). Yet the damage has been done and no financial compensation can repay the destruction of an ecosystem or soil poisoning or hydrological pollution or the tragic and abrupt passing of an entire elderly generation. The need therefore is to change the paradigm, to change the way in which human beings in industrialised societies see themselves in relation to the environment and to imagine a new ecological regime that considers interconnection and participation. A regime in which the concept of responsibility could play an important role:

To resolve the Anthropocene... we must also revise the ecological soundness of our political and economic practices and ideologies, establish a new understanding of the collective codetermination of human and other forms of life, and educate our species about its newfound responsibilities for both the human world and the nonhuman earth. (Conty, 2016: 19)

Kumu Taum, an Indigenous Hawaiian cultural practitioner, expresses an alternative response to the Anthropocene:

I believe we are all indigenous to some places, not the political indigenous definition, but we are places, we come from places and those places are in us. The common place we are all from is Papa Honua, Earth, and when we look at Earth as an island, surrounded by a sea of space, that means we are all islanders. (Taum, p.c 2014)

To fully understand the contribution of ecological Indigenous Knowledge in facing the challenges of this new era, we must rethink, redefine and refocus the concept of 'place'. Jonathan Pugh, in an article title 'Relationality and island studies in the Anthropocene', writes, “place is not merely a backdrop or container, but rather constructed out of dynamically interweaving spatial relations” (2018: 97). Keith Basso in 'Wisdom sits in Places' affirms that places “served humankind as durable symbols of distant events and as indispensable aids for remembering and imagining them, and this convenient arrangement is with us still today” (1996: 7). The focus on the dynamics of relationality is the theoretical framework I use to analyse and re-think the concept of 'place'. If we look at the definition of place in the *Oxford Dictionary* we read: place, position, point, or area in space; at location. 1.1 A particular area on a larger surface. 1.2 A building or area used for a specified purpose or activity. 1.3 (informal) A person's home. The word 'place' refers to several scenarios: a singular geographical area, a building, a specific place, one's own home; all these possible meanings have a commonality: defining the location or a location. In the term 'place' there is a geolocation mechanism that acts on multiple levels and dimensions, spatial, cultural, relational and spiritual. Places are, according to most indigenous cultures, inhabited first by spirits and then by all other beings; these entities, with particular characteristics depending on the different cultures, live simultaneously in a shared place and in a plurality of times, acting as a generational link for the human and non-human collective. Places, moreover, are cultural constructions that establish inevitable relations based on the position, location and disposition of the elements that constitute them. Diatopy, the relationship with a place, shapes and characterises the tensions between the elements of a landscape that combine to build a specific cultural space. These elements can be human and non-human, living and

non-living and, while sharing the same place, they can live in different historical times. A 'place' does not only allow synchronic relationships between metaphysical planes but permits diachronic relationships since the spatial continuity dialoguing with the temporal one allows the coexistence of distant historical plans in the same place. Furthermore, each element of a place has its own individuality that is often forgotten in the observation of the environment as a whole: each element has its own story, an island has a story, a stone has a story, a tree has a story and even the oxygen has a story, the environment is a thicket of stories. "Stories are not simply hermetically sealed archives of the past; rather, they are dynamic cultural *truths* that change over time as a result of human intervention" (Taimara and Fonoti, 2018: 305). Among these stories some are visible, others invisible, but they are all stories that human beings, in many cultures, have felt the duty to tell, to pass on and to protect since the care of these stories guarantees the continuity of their cultural identity. What are at stake in the time of the Anthropocene on the island of O'ahu today are the stories preserved in places threatening by excessive tourism and militarisation like Mākua Valley.

II. Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i

The Hawaiian archipelago is made of eight major islands. Based on the latest estimates, released by the US Census in 2019, the population amounts to 1.42 million¹ with O'ahu being the most densely populated island with 953,207 residents. Popular mass tourism developed in Hawai'i after World War II and jet planes were mainly responsible for tourism's growth and the increase of the accommodation capacity between 1950 and 1990. The development of accommodation facilities was left to private US and foreigner investors, as well described by Haunani-Kay Trask in 'From a Native Daughter,' who describes tourism in Hawai'i as:

a mass-based, corporately controlled industry that is both vertically and horizontally integrated such that one multinational corporation owns an airline and the tour buses that transport tourists to the corporation owned hotel where they eat in corporation owned restaurant, play golf and "experience" Hawai'i on corporation owned recreation areas... The mass nature of this kind of tourism results in megaresorts complexes on thousands of acres with demands for waters and services that far surpass the needs of Hawai'i residents. (1993: 139)

¹ According to the most recent American Community Survey (ACS), an annual survey taken by the US Census Bureau, the racial composition of Hawai'i is made of Asian: 38.02%, White: 25.13%, two or more races: 23.81%, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 10.03%, Black or African American: 1.82%, and other races: 0.99%. However, this division is based upon the US blood quantum policy. In 1922, when Hawai'i was a US territory, under the 'Hawaiian Homes Commission Act' the US Government defined the criteria by which it recognized Kānaka Maoli as "any descendant of not less than one-half part of the blood of the races inhabiting the Hawaiian Island previous to 1778" (HHCA, 1922, 10). Kēhaulani Kauanui, an American Studies professor and anthropologist explains the logic behind the classification on the blood quantum, which invests in the diluent action of mixed marriage to reduce the number of native Hawaiians recognized by the State: "the exclusionary logic of blood quantum has profoundly affected cultural definitions of indigeneity by undermining more inclusive Kānaka Maoli notions of kinship and belonging." (Kauanui, 2008, 25). This means that the percentage of native Hawaiians changes based upon the criteria that is chosen, if we follow the customary native logic, the Indigenous population rises above 20% of the total population compared to the 10% listed in the census.

The above-mentioned resort areas are usually concentrated in the best (ie sun oriented and wind protected) coasts and bays of the island, in the case of O‘ahu: Waikiki, Ko‘olina and Kawela (also known as Turtle Bay). Tourism generates around 30% of Hawai‘i’s Gross State Product and employs about 30% of working population in the state (Bardolet and Sheldon, 2008: 909). In 2018 the number of tourists in Hawai‘i reached 9 million, spending \$17.82 billion in 2018, an increase of 6.8 % compared to 2017, according to preliminary year-end statistics released by the Hawaii Tourism Authority. Spending by visitors generated \$2.08 billion in state tax revenue in 2018. Total visitor days (+1.8%) and arrivals increased to 910,060 (+3.4%) but the average daily spending of visitors declined to \$190 per person (-5.2%) in December 2018 compared to December 2017. Arrivals by air service increased to 9,827,132 visitors (+5.9%) in 2018, with growth from US West (+9.6%), US East (+7.9%), Canada (+2.7%) and All Other International Markets (+2.0%) offsetting a slight decrease from Japan (-1.0%) (Hawai‘i Governor, 2019: online).

The island of O‘ahu alone ‘welcomes’ an average of 6 million tourists a year but “staging paradise depend upon a massive denial of the violence of a colonial past and a neocolonial present” (Marshall, 2011: 112). The military-tourism complex, as argued by many scholars (Davis; 2007, Gonzalez, Lipman; 2016, Cachola, Grandinetti, Yamashiro; 2019), keeps the military ‘hidden in plain sight’ asserting its present to the locals and camouflaging its existence to the visitors. While weekly tourists do not perceive the military presence in Hawai‘i, for locals it is an uncomfortable reality. The US military controls approximately 231,000 acres, or 5.6 % of the state’s total area, occupying 24.6 % of the island of O‘ahu, where military personnel represent about 17% of the population. The Army is Hawai‘i’s second largest industry after tourism. Tourism and militarism in Hawai‘i conjointly consolidate an ongoing US occupation² and uphold the trope of a paradisiac location. Cynthia Enloe suggests that “[m]ilitarism and tourism, and the ways they serve each other, illustrate the sometimes brutal and sometimes supple work of US domination in the region” (Gonzalez and Vernadette Vicuna, 2013: 5) and Kanaka ‘Oiwī scholar-activist Kaleikoa Ka‘eo “likens the military in Hawai‘i to a giant *he‘e*, or octopus; its brain nestled in the hills of Aiea at Camp H. M. Smith, the headquarters of the Pacific Command, its tentacles reaching across the Pacific and beyond” (Cachola, Grandinetti and Yamashiro, 2019: 70). Militarisation in Hawai‘i impacts in many ways: on immigration, the seizure of land and water, noise pollution, modifications to local diet and on internal family frictions. The military presence in Hawai‘i has a long history that cannot be further explored in this article; however, it will be useful to outline some key moments that have enabled a long and continuous presence of the US military on the Hawaiian territory. In a very interesting conference organised by the association Hui Aloha ‘Āina entitled ‘Hawai‘i the pivot of the US Empire,’³ the historian and activist Kyle Kajihiro outlined the history of the American interest in Hawai‘i, starting with the displacement of native people for colonialist aims and subsequently analysing the theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mahan was an American historian who believed that sea power was essential to the great empires of the past and advocated for a transformation of the US from a land-based to maritime power. In 1873 a secret survey of the Hawaiian island by US military personnel revealed that Ke awa lau o Pu‘uloa, today known as Pearl Harbor, was the key to the Central Pacific Ocean. In the process of re-negotiating the Treaty of Reciprocity between the Kingdom of Hawai‘i and United States, and after the adoption of the Bayonet Constitution in 1887, King Kalakaua was pressured by the white sugar-planter lobby to grant exclusive use of Ke awa lau o Pu‘uloa

² For discussion of this subject see Sai (2008, 2011).

³ Conference organized by Hui Aloha ‘Āina ka Lei Maili Ali‘i in the Kanaina Building on the ‘Iolani Palace ground, Honolulu, March 2nd, 2018.

to the United States in order to lower the import duty on sugar. The Kingdom of Hawai'i never willingly joined United States, indeed the subjects of the Kingdom, indigenous and not, succeeded in stopping the unlawful annexation with a collection of signatures, the The Kū'ē Petitions, in 1897. But in 1898 the United States "went to war with Spain and it needed a support base in the Pacific, after two failed attempts to annex Hawai'i by a treaty of cession" (Sai, 2011: 94) and on 6th July 1898 a Joint Resolution was passed in the US Congress and Hawai'i was seized as a military necessity. The United States had an ambivalent relationship with Hawai'i, it could have been the United States' greatest defense outpost but at the same time it was a threat to national security, so in the US perspective it needed to be taken. This was the dawn of militarisation of Hawai'i, particularly on O'ahu island. Today the ongoing military presence is part of the prolonged illegal occupation of the Kingdom of Hawai'i since 1893,⁴ the continuity of which is strongly advocated by many Kanaka Maoli groups.

The Kingdom of Hawai'i was an internationally recognised state before a coup d'état led by a handful of foreign landowners, with the complicity of US diplomats and the US Army, put an end to the reign of the last sovereign, Queen Lili'oukalani in 1893. The Kingdom of Hawai'i was "traditional" only in the Western colonial view, since its sovereignty had been recognised with a treaty, signed in London in 1843 by the United Kingdom and France, it was a member of the Universal Postal Union and had proclaimed two different constitutions that established freedom of religion and abolished slavery. Furthermore, in those years the Kingdom of Hawai'i had diplomatic treaties with half of the world⁵. The annexation of Hawai'i as the 50th state of United States took place in 1959 after a referendum strongly opposed by the native population. In 1993 President Bill Clinton with the United States Public Law 103-150, better known as the 'Apology Resolution', apologised "to Native Hawaiians on behalf of the people of the United States for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii on January 17, 1893 with the participation of agents and citizens of the United States, and the deprivation of the rights of Native Hawaiians to self-determination" (107 STAT; 1993: 1513). Based upon these historical events and facts many sovereignty movements today, consider Hawai'i under US occupation and seek to reclaim the Hawaiian territory under the authority of international law, since the legality of the annexation to the United States and

⁴ In June 1898, when the debate on the annexation of Hawai'i in the US congress opened, the Texan parliamentarian Thomas H. Ball declared: "the annexation of Hawaii by means of a joint resolution is unconstitutional, useless and reckless". The pro-tempore assistant attorney general of the United States Douglas W. Kmiec concluded in 1988 that "it was unclear which constitutional power Congress exercised when it acquired Hawai'i by joint resolution" (Sai, 2013: 91). Still today, "the legality of this action therefore to be debated by academics Hawaiian organizations and legal experts" (Beamer 2014; 195). Keanu Sai states in his text *Ua ma uke ea* (2011) that there is a solid legal basis to believe that Hawaii continues to be one sovereign state under international law, even if unilaterally annexed to the United States by a joint resolution. According to Eyal Benvenisti, professor of international law at the University of Cambridge, the support to the solid legal basis of which Sai speaks is the principle of inalienable sovereignty over a territory that establishes the constraints that the international law imposes on the occupying state (Sai, 2013: 95). The continuity of existence of the Kingdom of Hawaii is guaranteed under international law even if it has been illegally occupied by the United States since 1898. Bradford Morse and Kazi Hamid write in an article entitled 'American Annexation of Hawaii: An Example of the Unequal Treaty Doctrine' that the US "has forcefully occupied the nation of Hawaii for a century that has effectively displaced the legitimate government" (1990: 449).

⁵ Hawai'i signed treaties of friendship, trade and navigation with the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1875), Belgium (1862); Denmark (1846); France (1858); Tahiti (1853); Germany (1879); The United Kingdom (1846); New South Wales (1874); Italy (1863); Japan (1871, 1886); Holland (1862); Portugal (1882); Russia (1869); Samoa (1887); Spain (1863); Sweden and Norway (1855); Switzerland (1864) and the United States of America (1849).

the subsequent federal recognition are questioned. This long historical premise was necessary to argue the central theme of this contribution, the military present in the islands has caused significant environmental, social and cultural damages. The binomial military and tourism have sacrificed areas on the islands either to tourism, through the western narratives of “paradise” or to militarism, with the excuse of national security. This occupation model is expressed in the anthropisation of oceanfront bays like Waikiki or Ko’olina; in touristic parks, customised for the enjoyment of foreign tourists; and of internal areas, hidden from view in military bases such as Camp H. M. Smith, Fort Shafter, Schofield Barracks and Wheeler Army Airfield. There are of course military installations such as Pearl Harbor (Ke awa lau o Pu’uloa) and the Marine Corps Base Hawaii at Kaneohe Bay in clear sight, but their purpose is to confirm and celebrate the US domain in the past and present.

In more than 100 years the US occupation of Hawai’i set aside chosen areas for what was and is still considered a higher good. Those chosen zones consist of different geographical areas that have been either contaminated and destroyed by weapons tests, war or aggressive concrete constructions, or transformed and protected for economic profit into national parks, resorts and golf courses. These chosen areas are stripped of their relationality, their history and their inhabitants (human and non-human) in order to fulfill their function or national purpose. Every society sacrifices some areas or geographical zones for cultural reasons in pursuit of religious, economic, social and/or environmental aims. The sacrifice imposed on those areas is arbitrary and has different outcomes at a local level. Mākua Valley is an exposed sea front military base, that breaks an existing model, or we could say a *balance*, by showing the continuity and unity of the territory (*‘āina*) from the hidden mountain range to the beautiful dolphin-frequented bay. Mākua reveals the presence and the coexistence of military and spirits. The cultural access documented in this article, shows and guides tourists, locals and natives to see and understand that spirits, *kupuna* (ancestors), endemic spices and bullets coexist and negotiate their presence in Mākua. Kanaka Maoli eco-cultural reclaiming practices in Mākua are countering the eco-profit US model of development with an Indigenous sense of place. This sense of place that could be the answer and the path to follow to develop new forms of relationalities instrumental in facing the challenges of the Anthropocene, not just in the Pacific but everywhere.

II. Mākua *ahupu’ua* (division), Wai’anae *moku ‘āina* (island district), O’ahu *moku* (island)

This section aims to tell a story, the story of the geographical and political transformation of the Valley Mākua on the island of O’ahu. Mākua is not the only example of a transformation from agricultural fields to bombing ranges in the archipelago, the island of Kaho’olawe and Pōhakuloa on the island of Hawai’i are also important sites that continue to produce meaningful stories and to call for cultural actions. Indeed, an entangled present is a good way to describe the daily life of the island of O’ahu, a territory that hosts a metropolis, Honolulu, with 400,000 inhabitants, a constant flow of 6 million tourists a year, and a presence of over 55,000 military personnel. Oahu’s landscape includes valleys, coasts, beaches and plains used for the monoculture of sugar cane in the past and pineapples nowadays, temples, burial sites, natural parks, amusement parks, resorts, golf courses, taro fields, rugby fields, a royal Palace and mausoleum, bird sanctuaries, military reserves, shopping malls and museums. This is the scenario in which the native population, the Kānaka Maoli, interacts in a ‘web of significance’, of cultural dichotomies and political claims. Mākua Valley is located along the leeward coast of the island of O’ahu, called

Wai‘anae, far from the bustling life of Honolulu and exiled in the past, and now semi-voluntarily, by the crowded tourist routes.

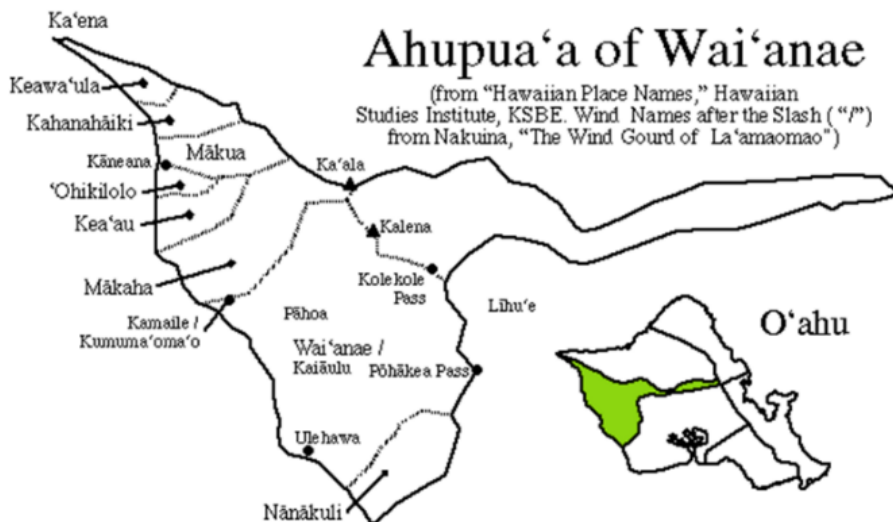


Figure 1 – Map of Waianae and inset of Oahu
 (<http://apdl.kcc.hawaii.edu/oahu/stories/waianae/index.htm>)

The main urban centre of the area consists of Wai‘anae, which is possibly the reason why the whole coast is referred to by the same toponym. The term Wai‘anae is a word composed of *wai* (‘fresh water’) and *‘anae* (‘mullet’). The same term defines territorially, referring to an *ahupu‘ua* (a land division), and is also used for the entire *moku* (district) that starts at Nanakuli and ends at Keawaula. This toponym indicates one of the characteristics of this area, the large quantity of fish resources. This region is located on the coastal side of the homonymous Wai‘anae mountain range formed about three million years ago among which the Kaala mountain spire at 1,220-metres high, is the highest point of the island of O‘ahu. This coast was chosen as one of the first Polynesian settlement sites on the island thanks to its dry, arid and sunny climate and wide dune beaches perfect for canoe landing. Tourist guides describe this region in somewhat negative terms, such as “[n]ot blessed with charm, Wai‘anae is this coast’s hub for everyday services, with stores, a commercial boat harbor and a well-used beach park (Lonely Planet, 2020: online) and the Waianae region:

is everything that Waikiki is not – untamed and largely unknown, the expanse of coastline has a less than friendly vibe. Unfortunately, there is a high crime rate in the Waianae town area, with reports of vehicle break-ins being commonplace. On the positive side, the climate along this coast is generally dry and sunny, there are many pristine, white sand beaches that are top locations for fishing, snorkeling, and swimming, and provide great spots to watch the sunset over the ocean. (Hawai‘i Guide, 2020: online)

The number of inhabitants living below poverty in Wai‘anae, equal to 27%, is more than in the rest of the island, and the demography of Wai‘anae consists mainly of Kanaka Maoli 31.3%, Pacific Islanders mixed race (Kanaka Maoli and Fijians, Tongans, Samoans etc) 30.9%

and Hispanics 17.4%. Most of the inhabitants of this area work between Pearl Harbor and Waikiki in the tertiary sector, spending an average of two hours daily commuting to work because of traffic. Wai'anae is undoubtedly one of the richest areas from a cultural, social and environmental point of view and the problems listed above are translated into social negotiations that characterise the life of a Kanaka Maoli community on the overpopulated and ecologically stressed island of O'ahu. Social, economic and cultural hardships forced many islanders to leave genealogically bound places to move to this side of the island, a place of refuge, which welcomes and gives shelter, providing social support in exchange for a propensity to relationality and mutual help. Mākua is one of the last strips of land on the Wai'anae coast where the local community and the US immigrants are still negotiating their relationship, where Kanaka Maoli are not a minority and where tourism has not yet taken possession of all the beaches and valleys. However, the impact of marine tourism, highly affecting the marine ecosystem of Mākua Bay, must be mentioned. In fact, dozens of boats loaded with tourists sail on daily bases from Waikiki or Waianae in search of the thrill of swimming with dolphins, that often gather, mostly in the morning hours, in the sandy waters off Mākua beach. Wai'anae is a complex community made up of stories of resistance, unease and struggle, a community that nevertheless continues to produce and tell stories of acceptance and sharing.

There are several *mo'olelo* (oral histories) from this part of the island about Mākua, starting with the birth of the first human generated by the union of Papa (Father Sky) and Wākea (Mother Earth) in this valley, and there are stories of the arrival of the first Polynesian settlers, and historical records that recount the arrival of US, European and Japanese settlers by the end of the 19th Century. 1900 marks a crucial moment in the history of Mākua. The overthrow, the US occupation, the annexation and the consequent colonisation and denationalization, transformed the valley from agricultural fields to a plain of pastures and breeding areas. As might be expected, the two economies did not cohabit in harmony and US breeding won over native agriculture. The first ranches appeared, and with the arrival of the railway in Mākua, the economy, demography and physiognomy of the territory changed again. The Valley underwent another transformation with the outbreak of the World War II when martial law was declared over the entire coast of Wai'anae. The inhabitants of Mākua were forcibly relocated, with the promise of returning to their houses six months after the end of the war. The Valley has been used as an army training camp and bombing targets for troops preparing to see action in the Pacific and then Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Today there is nothing left of the houses, ranches and the gardens of Mākua except faded photographs. All the buildings including the Protestant Church of Mākua, were used as targets for bombing practices; only the small cemetery near the beach was spared. In 1959 Mākua became a Military Reserve used as a training ground and bombardment target and Mākua's inhabitants are still waiting for the promised return to their home. Jeffrey Sasha Davis rightly argues that:

Military use has altered the social practices in a landscape, altered what exists in a landscape, altered how people then interpret the naturalness of the resulting landscape, and how these all affect how people and institutions choose to manage and act in these places after the military activities have lessened or ceased. (2007: 132)

This statement could be easily applied to Mākua, which is perceived in several different ways. For geologists, it is an exploded crater that preserves the chronology of the geological origin of the island; for archaeologists, it is the cradle of the first civilisation that settled on O'ahu;

for botanists, a valley that holds the secrets of some of the last endemic species of the archipelago; for the Kanaka Maoli a sacred place of creation and rebirth; for the US Army a perfect field for live fire training; and for weekly tourists a pristine and ‘natural’ valley to explore and hike. Indeed, the valley of Mākua at a first look could be describe as pristine and unspoiled, what is hidden from the sight are the residues of the continuous bombing and military tests that have erased the social and cultural history of the landscape. The complexity of these perceptions have led to differing valuations of the landscape, and of possible economic, political, and cultural outcomes, not only by the military but also within the local community which is involved in a dispute between three different native associations from the Wai’anae coast that demand the return and management of the Valley. On the other hand, the archaeologists and botanists would respectively like to conserve the archaeological finds in museums and to protect the endemic flora and fauna. After more than ten years of legal battles, in 2011 an agreement was finally signed between the US military, which was defeated in court, and Mālama Mākua, a local association that filed and won the lawsuits. This agreement stopped the live fire training in the Valley and authorised Mālama Mākua to have two monthly accesses and two annual night accesses in under military escort for cultural practices. My research work focused on the participation and observation of the cultural accesses to the Valley from April 2017 to April 2018. The following description is my personal interpretation of what the valley represents for the different groups and was formed through interviews, informal talks and dialogues that took place in the field with those who claim to have a relationship with Mākua.



Figure 2 - Mākua, Oahu (courtesy of Megan Martens, 2018)

III. Cultural access as a place re-claiming practice

The late 1960s and early 1970s mark the beginning of the Hawaiian Renaissance, a grass roots cultural and political awakening of the native Hawaiian language and culture, thanks to a conjunction of events: the publication of essays recalling the pride of being Hawaiian, the recovery of the way finder art of navigation and last but not least the territorial disputes of the Kalama Valley where local inhabitants fought for the conservation of agricultural land against forced expropriation. Despite the defeat of the inhabitants, the Kalama Valley antieviction movement ignited other community fights for land in the second half of the 1970s among which there was the battle for Mākua and the occupation of the island of Kaho'olawe, used by the US army as a training ground and target for bombs:

Fighting for the sacredness and demilitarization of Kaho‘olawe was a key moment in the growing movement for Hawaiian identity and sovereignty. Beginning in 1976 a group of Kānaka Maoli calling themselves the Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana (PKO) began a series of legal maneuvers, community building, and, critical to their success, government-and military-unauthorized landings where many young Kānaka would risk their lives to occupy, protect, and be with Kaho‘olawe. The U.S. military had seized Kaho‘olawe in 1941 for live-fire training and target practice, and over the next fifty years, it became the most heavily bombed island on earth. The PKO’s efforts were critical to bringing an end to the bombing in 1990. Though the lands were returned by the military to be held in trust for a sovereign Hawaiian government, there still remain unexploded ordnance, a cracked aquifer, and generations of work to restore the island to abundant life. (Cachola, Grandinetti and Yamashiro, 2019: 76)

Local concern for the Valley of Mākua starts in conjunction with the battle for the island of Kaho‘olawe and with the anti-eviction protest at Mākua Village, a community of mainly Kanaka Maoli settled on the Mākua Beach. Even though the Mākua Beach community was well organized and represented by a council they were labeled by the state Department of Land and Natural Resources as squatters. The community endured three waves of land clearance in 1964, 1977 and 1983, and by the early 1990 Mākua village was considered by many a *pu‘uhonua*, a place of refuge. Niheu writes that in “modern times, places like Mākua, Wiapukua on Hawai‘i, and Kalua‘aha in Moloka‘i are critical examples of cultural, political and economic power based upon land that provided a means for the ‘*ohana* – functioning, extended family – to remain intact”. (2014: 165). Mālama Mākua, a not for profit association, was founded on June 18th, 1996 following the last eviction at the village, by the union of a group of Kanaka Maoli members of the Mākua Village Council and a group of non-native pacifists. Today, Mālama Mākua consists of native Hawaiian and non-Kanaka Maoli local residents, mostly from the Wai‘anae Coast, involved in the protection of the Valley, striving for preservation, community access and the return of Mākua Valley for culturally appropriate use. The agreement signed in court allows Mālama Mākua to access the Valley with a maximum of 40 visitors per time. Cultural access to the Mākua Military Reservation involves being escorted by military personnel, an unexploded ordnance (UXO) specialist and one or more archaeologists. The group that is formed at each access is different and heterogeneous as the experience of each visit is quite unique. After an obligatorily military security briefing, the group is invited to follow Hawaiian cultural protocols to gain access to the valley. The co-presence of two distinct cultural protocols living on parallel planes in an arm-wrestling dynamic is immediately evident. Much depends on the personalities represented by both the Army’s and the Association’s members. Subsequently the group heads towards the interior of the valley preceded by the unexploded ordnance (UXO) expert and followed by one or more military cars which, however, are not available to be used to transport elderly or disabled people who cannot walk many hours in the scorching sun and on the steep paths of the valley. This is just one of the many examples of contentious issues between the parties involved in the access. The cultural access allows participants to visit particular sites, altars rebuilt by the Association, *kuleana* walls, ruins of temples used in the past by the valley’s population or structures whose function is no longer known. Time is marked by ritual actions, moments of listening to the stories guarded and produced by the valley, moments of consumption of food and chatting and moments of personal connection. The cultural access is a personal but also collective full-day experience in which the participants are invited to learn, listen, reconnect and discover the Valley of Mākua in her multilayered personality and through her many *mo‘olelo* (oral stories) and interactions.

One day I was corrected by one of the members of Malala Mākua who told me:

Don't call what we are doing performance. We are practicing our culture. You can call it culture in action. When we dance, we are doing a re-enactment of our ancestors. We become them. (Lynette Cruz, p.c, 2018)



Figure 3 - Mālama Mākua, Cultural Access, February 2018 (photo by the author)

Cultural access to the Valley can be described as an ecologically based cultural restoration practice. Culture in action is not performative but is a practice in the making and, in this sense, is transformative. In this perspective, visiting Mākua is re-claiming a territory interpreted as a living element of a relationship between human beings, the environment and the ancestors. Cultural access visitation to the sites does not only mean experiencing a relationship or weaving a bond, but it means being in the relationship itself, that is, feeling and recognising yourself a part, a matter, a substance of a whole that contributes to the construction of the landscape through participation. A member of Mālama Mākua during one of the access visits told me: "I am a Mākua *wahine*" (a woman of Mākua)", meaning that she recognised herself genealogically linked to the valley. She also explained that Mākua was healing her. As she had to be in a good physical shape to get to the altars and to place offerings on them, she had lost more than 3 kilograms, stopped using drugs and quit drinking. She confided me that thanks to the reconnection practices with the valley she was rediscovering her genealogy and the connections with people and organisms that she did not know were her relatives. The ecological restoration of the Mākua Valley ecosystem, heavily bombed by the US military and destroyed by frequent fires, starts with processes of re-connection, the acknowledgment that the Valley expresses forms of relationality with all the elements that participate in its essence. Taking care of the altars, walking, eating, talking and touching the land (even if is not permitted by the Army) perpetuates the connection with the inaccessible Valley. In doing so members of Mālama Mākua become gardeners, guardians, historians, keepers and tellers of *mo'olelo* (oral stories) that are shared with the participants during the cultural access. Restoring lost connections, growing new ones and

building models of local level governance emphasise caretaking rather than ownership. Undoubtedly, cultural access in the Valley of Mākua is also a form of resistance to US cultural and spatial occupation of Hawaiian values and territory. It is a creative way to continue to exercise forms of responsibility (*kuleana*) and sovereignty that derive from being in a relationship with a place.

I was struck by the definition of 'reclaiming a place' given me by one of the members of Mālama Mākua: "to reclaim a place is a process". Reclaiming a place in this frame of significance is a method or practice that begins with listening and paying attention to the stories of the place, since this indicates the actions that need to be implemented. Interacting with the natural environment awakens memories that translate into responsibility. *Kuleana* (responsibility, duty, privilege, obligation in Hawaiian) is a concept at the heart of the native Hawaiian ecology, according to which Kanaka Maoli's universe, was first populated by the natural world and only later saw the arrival of the gods and lastly human beings. The Kumulipo, the genealogical chant of Hawaiian mythology "is a history of interrelatedness – all plants, animals, kānaka, and akua are genealogically connected" (Kapā'anaokalāoikeola Nākoa Oliveira, 2014: 4). According to native ecology, all incarnations or expressions of nature – including rocks, trees and water bodies – are animated, therefore aware and capable of interacting with each other and with the human collective. This interaction or better participation is the reason why in Hawaiian there is not an equivalent term to that of Nature, as the non-human collective composed of the atmosphere and its agents: water, plants, animals, spirits, earth and humans combine in the living family of which humans are just the youngest members. The native ecological approach does not recognise the equality of living species but postulates a particular ontological status for humans. Humans are perceived as interconnected in a network of relationships with nature of which they share the same genealogy, we could say matter, but towards which they have intrinsic *kuleana* (responsibilities). Communication takes place through what Eduardo Kohn, an anthropologist interested in intra-species communication in Brazil, calls "sylvan thinking", a concept that extends well beyond the human, one that challenges the colonisation of ideas about the relationality that conditions us. According to Kohn "forests think," allowing an interaction with the other elements of the Earth's ecosystem. I argue that in order to approach and understand Native Hawaiian ecology in the time of Anthropocene, is important to dwell on thinking 'with' a forest: an act of participation, a formal recognition of the co-essence of human beings and the environment. This participation makes well-being dependent on the practice of the *mālama* (taking care) of everything that participates in the construction of the landscape:

It is hard for the modern intellectually [rigid] and extroverted mind to sense the subjective relationship of genuine Hawaiians to Nature, visible and invisible. But without some comprehension of this quality of spontaneous being-one-with-natural-phenomena which are persons, not things, it is impossible for an alien (be he foreigner or city-hardened native) to understand a true country-Hawaiian's sense of dependence and obligation, his "values," his discrimination of the real, the good, the beautiful and the true, his feeling of organic and spiritual identification with the 'aina (land) and 'ohana (kin). (Handy, Handy and Puku'i, 1972: 233)

Native Planters in Old Hawaii: Their Life, Lore, and Environment, from which this excerpt is taken, is the first book on Hawaiian ecology written by Handy and Handy in collaboration with a Kanaka Maoli scholar, Mary Kawana Puku'i. In just few sentences, this extract, collects the key concepts of relationality: i) a subjective relationship with the visible and

invisible reality, which ii) recognises natural expressions as people, not objects, and iii) a relationship of dependence made of obligations and responsibilities. Acknowledging and honoring this responsibility means to re-connect and re-store the relationship with the land inhabited by ancestors and re-covering, re-imagining cultural tools that allows this communication.

IV. *Ike 'Āina* and Sense of Place

Ku'ualoha Ho'omanawanui writes:

Remembering, recovering, and writing about a place as another dimension of 'ike 'āina, knowledge from and about the lands we live on, and to which Kānaka Maoli are culturally and genealogically connected." (2012: 188)

According to the Kanaka Maoli ethics, the actions that convey cultural practices, draw upon the knowledge of and about the land, *'ike 'āina* precisely, which allows the re-appropriation of communication methods with Mākua Valley. This communication leads to a rediscovered psycho-physical well-being, often documented in interviews. Some people have stopped drinking and taking drugs; others have made healthier dietary choices thanks to the renewed and sought-after communication with Mākua; others have rediscovered unknown connections with their culture; and others have found their *kuleana*, responsibility, their own *kulana*, (role/position) in the island's society and in family genealogy.

Here in Hawaii we have lost the connection with past and future generations, because culture has been taken from us, this has led to an abuse of drugs and alcohol; the main problem on this island, is that the ability to survive is not allowed anymore, due to landownership and change of places' names. (Mālama Mākua, p.c, 2018)

The central aspect of *'ike' āina*, as a re-imagined cultural tool to re-connect, is the interpretation of ecosystems as guardians of memories considered lost because traumatically transformed by foreigner colonisation and occupation. *'Ike' āina* in this perspective is, not only a local knowledge to draw upon for social well-being but a mnemonic cell that enables access to a collective local archive. In fact, *'ike' āina* can be translated as the 'knowledge of the land', where the term land assembles land, sea and air. *'Ike' āina* is the knowledge of the resources, the climatic and morphological characteristics, the habits of the inhabitants of a place. Place-based memories translate into practices of sustainability inspired by local knowledges, that invite not to take more than what a territory can give, teach when to take and when to give, when to listen and when to act. *'Ike' āina* is to learn to relate and listen. Sustainability is not possible if there is no relationship with the territory, if the names of the places are not known, if the stories are untold. This relational void has led to the appropriation of Hawaiian culture by foreigners. In this context sustainability is articulated in a relationship of mutual well-being between beings: human, maritime, terrestrial and aerial. A relationship where responsibility – *kuleana*– becomes a bond through which the same destiny is faced. From a Hawaiian perspective, all natural and cultural resources are interrelated and culturally significant (Pearce and Louis, 2008: 114) because the *'āina* (land) is alive, embodied with a spiritual essence and genealogically linked. "Land is alive – it breaths, moves, reacts, behaves, adjusts, grows, sickens, dies" (Kanahele, 1986: 187). However, this relationship with places, reactivated by the *'ike' āina* in the Mākua Valley is hampered by the current limitations of the military and by unexploded ordnance

dumped in the Valley, the presence of which is not noticeable at first sight. Indeed, the Valley appears almost untouched, it is only by listening to the stories of the Valley that one learns the presence of war residues. War waste, bullets and unexploded bombs have a life of their own in the ecology of the valley, they also tell stories, tales of explosion and transformation. Unexploded ordinance of different kinds and calibres move with every downpour in an anthropic movement that makes the valley unstable. To describe the valley of Mākua as a 'natural' place serve to obscure the destructive and damaging activities of the US Army, as highlighted by Davis, and also obscures the fact that these 'natural' areas were lived in for centuries before the people were forcibly removed. This is the reason why the contamination of Mākua is not only chemical but also cultural:

Conceptualizing the island as a contaminated and stolen landscape, however, is dependent on knowing a history that is not easily seen. That history includes the previous agricultural activity on the island prior to the military's expropriation, and the bombing and chemical contamination from military use. (Davis, Hayes-Conroy and Jones, 2007: 173)

The access to the stories of the early inhabitants of Mākua is granted only by listening and learning from the people who lived in the past and are re-connecting in the present with Mākua, because the landscape alone doesn't reveal any signs of them at a first sight. It is thanks to participation in the cultural access that is possible to listen and learn these stories, sometimes told by the words of the former resident collected in interviews read by a member of Mālama Mākua during the access or by learning about the action of the association in the past decade.

Places, in native traditions of understanding and interpreting the world, "contain three specific characteristics: 1) they hold sources of wisdom (Basso, 1996), truth, and insight in culture (Meyer, 2001), 2) they perpetuate values (Kanahele, 1986), and 3) they build community voice" (Trinidad, 2012: 4). The Valley of Mākua well represented in all of those three components: the *mo'olelo* (story) form in the Valley is a form of oral history that recovers the ecological ancestor's knowledge of the place and the practice of re-claiming and re-visiting the cultural sites perpetuate cultural values and builds a strong community voice advocating for demilitarisation closely tied with the restoration of Hawaiian sovereignty. Cultural access to Mākua, in this sense, is indeed a process of decolonisation. Kapā'anaokalāokeola Nākoa Oliveira asserts that place "holds memory for people who share an intimate relationship with their environment" (2014: 66). Therefore, the re-appropriation of communication with the Valley of Mākua often leads to the protection of the environment through practices of claiming native sovereignty.

Conclusions

I am not Kanaka Maoli, I am not in the position to argue what else needs to happen for Mālama Mākua to fulfill its goals, or what should be the future of Mākua Valley. It is not my *kūlana* (title, condition, position, place) to speak on such matters. My contribution, my *kuleana* (responsibility) as a cultural and environmental anthropologist, is to document the practices taking place in Mākua and involve academics, policy makers, activists and environmentalists in a critical discussion of the effectiveness and the limits of cultural access as a strategy of reclaiming places. Even nowadays, when people are invited not to visit the island to prevent the spread of COVID-19, hundreds of tourists visit O'ahu looking for the

'aloha experience', beautiful sunny beaches, warming local culture, perfumed flowered welcome garlands and crystal-clear waters. However very few of them realize that O'ahu is not just white sandy beaches and sunsets and the island also hosts the largest US military presence in the country:

All sacred places, wahi pana and wahi kapu, of O'ahu have become places for the entertainment of foreigners and tourists. They take photos and selfies. Tourists appropriate it without any respect for the native culture. If tourists went to Rome to San Peter and climbed on the altar to take a selfie would it be normal? The Honolulu aquarium was built on a sacred temple, the Honolulu golf club occupies a sacred valley where Papa and Wakea lived and I could continue with numerous other examples. Today, to practice our culture in these places we need to ask for permits, the tourist don't. This is called cultural appropriation without respect. Hawai'i is a paradox: the aloha experience is possible because we have the largest military presence in the country, the second in the world after Okinawa. People are not looking! We have to start to be honest, if they (the tourists) can lay in the sun on Waikiki beach is thanks to the bombing and devastation of Mākua. (Kumu Ramsay Taum, p.c, 2019)

When Ramsay Taum, a *kumu lua* (teacher of traditional Hawaiian martial art) and cultural practitioner speaks of 'aloha experience', he refers to a preconceived idea made for tourists and sold through tourist guides and postcards of a paradisiacal place, created by social, economic and ecological dynamics. However, staging comes with a cost, the denial of a colonial past and an exploiting present. The experience and enjoyment of these fictitious places, built to satisfy tourists' imaginary, can only exist in a circumscribed reality like Waikiki, at a high price - the price of hosting the largest US military presence in the world, the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), the Unified Command of the United States Armed Forces responsible for the Pacific Ocean area and much of the Indian Ocean Indian whose headquarters is located at Camp HM Smith, about 10 km from Honolulu. Tourism in Waikiki is made possible by the military use of Mākua and other chosen areas, because it was the military skills and tools developed and tested in those places that allowed the US status as a military power in the world, granting the US control over the islands. This political control allows for the encouragement, incentivisation and promotion tourism, which is equivalent to inviting someone in somebody else's home. But tourism relates to Mākua in a more critical aspect, because attempts to regain access to Mākua valley are for a cultural purpose, to offer an alternative experience that is also available to the tourist. The experience that a visitor to the island can undergo in Mākua allows for connection with its history, its stories (*mo'olelo*) and the land. Thanks to the reclaiming practices, Mālama Mākua proposes a different kind of 'aloha experience' that might be referred to as a 'kuleana experience' - a form of tourism accessible to everyone that impose, requires and demands responsibilities from the visitors. Indigenous Hawaiian associations and groups are not homogeneous, they differ and pursue different claims and express their culture through different protocols, however they share the centrality, the importance of the land (*āina*):

Even in the context of contemporary indigenous communities, there is a unique bond between indigenous people and the land. Two implications of this bond are particularly important in the context of tourism. First, because indigenous people tend not to see the land as a possession, they are very wary of treating it as a commodity, even in the purportedly benign context of alternative or environmentally sensitive tourism. Secondly, because of their deep attachment

to the land, indigenous people see the landscape differently. They attach unique and often complex meanings to place that go beyond its physical properties. Often, these complex meanings include a spiritual dimension. (Hollinshead 1996, in Hinch, 2018: 248-249)

Cultural access to Mākua is a process of re-connection and cultural restoration built upon a relationship of dependence made of obligations and responsibilities. Acknowledging and honoring the mutual responsibility toward Mākua allows for re-connection and re-stores the relationship with the land. What is lacking in Mākua today is a shared understanding of how to live, occupy and relate to the land. Reclaiming places and sense of place goes together. “When we relate to a place, we deal with it, we make it our own and we become a part of it, we feel the need to be able to access it unconditionally and make decisions about its management” (Hina, p.c 2018) - decisions that are the expression of a Kanaka Maoli cultural approach and must have political legitimacy. It is not a question of models of coexistence, but of bullets and taro,⁶ involving two completely different environmental relational ethics. Places like Mākua for the United States government are landscapes not burdened with any symbolic value but are simply zones chosen to be used for bombing and armaments testing, to confirm US political and economic power. Such an ecological regime is in open contrast to the Native one, that sees the environment as a network of relationships that link each element into an autonomous and self-sustaining system not in harmony, but in balance. When a tourist arrives on O’ahu and drinks a glass of water, according to the Kanaka ethic, he or she becomes responsible for water resources. In Hawai’i the water supply is scarce due to the excessive use of water for resort pools, thousands of towels washed daily and to maintain green golf courses. Drinking a glass of water, in the Kanaka Maoli prospective, makes every tourist responsible for the island. Ecological responsibility is geo-localised and becomes active in the relational moment, in this case the consumption of water. When visiting Mākua, which is a living reminder of the military use in the past and in the present of the island, the cultural access protocols recall the tourist attention to his/her responsibilities rather than to his/her enjoyment. Aiming to reaffirm the relationality that links human, places and spirits everywhere, responsibility can be only temporary, but it must be recognised, in order to condition the actions of the individual towards the environment:

When understood as relational spaces of interconnection and potentiality, islands are seen as providing new resources for knowledge of how to better govern complex systems. In the Anthropocene, understanding of relationality emphasizes human “response-abilities” (Haraway, 2008), sensitivities and “attuning-to” (Morton, 2017) rather than enabling imaginaries of human control (Chandler, 2018a). (Pugh and Chandler, 2018: 77)

There is nothing more urgent than re-discovering our relationality. Tourism in the time of Anthropocene could be an educational experience in an island like O’ahu and in cases like the Valley of Mākua, indigenous re-claiming practices are leading the way toward a new ecological approach based on responsibilities and relationalities rather than ownership and unlimited exploitation.

⁶ Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) known as kalo in Hawaiian language is a tropical plant grown throughout Polynesia primarily for its edible corms.

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