

# FINDING MEANING

*Kaona and Contemporary  
Hawaiian Literature*

BRANDY NĀLANI MCDOUGALL

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BRANDY NĀLANI MCDUGALL

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*Kaona and Contemporary Hawaiian Literature*



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## 2

### KAONA CONNECTIVITY TO THE KUMULIPO

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Pō

*Before the land was tamed by industry,  
the oceanside resorts and pineapple plantations,  
before the cane knife's rust, the dark time of sickness,  
the coming of cannons, the bitter waters drunk,  
before the metallic salt of blood, the rain emptied  
into rivers, the winds carved valleys and mountains,  
before the earth spurted fire, birthed islands,  
her churning magma and her inner core of iron,  
before the stars dwarved, their coronas ignited,  
before the centripetal spin of galaxies,  
the unwinding gestures of time and space,  
before the light and heat—*

*There was darkness without breath and Pō,  
Pressing the entirety of a universe into a shell  
the size of an atomic nucleus, waiting.*

**A**S AN OLI OF OUR BEGINNINGS, the Kumulipo has had a profound impact on how I view our history, how I view my own identity as a Native woman to Hawai‘i, and how I view our future as people of this pae ‘āina (archipelago).<sup>1</sup> In writing the above poem, I was inspired by the Kumulipo to compose an anticolonial genealogy, one that, in its recitation, undoes and challenges American colonial normativity by emphasizing the historical depth of all that came before its recent establishment—our own ‘Ōiwi

culture and lāhui, the ‘āina and our oceans, and Pō, the creative force from which the entire universe sprang, according to the Kumulipo. I intended the kaona of this poem to connect Pō and the Kumulipo with more recent discussions of the big bang theory, which theorizes a massive turning of heat and energy that exploded the universe into existence.

In this chapter, I examine the kaona connectivity that contemporary authors John Dominis Holt, Imaikalani Kalahēle, Sage U‘ilani Takehiro, and Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio employ between the Kumulipo and issues of sovereignty and governance. The selected authors use English, Hawaiian, and HCE to craft their kaona, while also drawing from a shared cultural knowledge base about the Kumulipo as a creation and genealogy chant, as well as the various mo‘olelo associated with the Kumulipo’s writing and translation. Together, their works comprise three generations of contemporary Kanaka Maoli writers. First, however, some cultural and historical background on the Kumulipo is needed so we may engage in the critical reading practice that kaona demands.

## THE KUMULIPO

The Kumulipo is arguably the most important literary work in the Hawaiian canon and among the most significant contributions to Indigenous literature. A 2,102-line mele ko‘ihonua (creation and genealogical chant), the Kumulipo provides an evolutionary account of creation and traces the beginnings of the Kanaka Maoli concept of the universe, from degrees of darkness to the births of plants and animals, to the births of the gods from whom came the first Kānaka. Although the Kumulipo is not the only mo‘okū‘auhau, nor is it the only one relating the creation of the universe, the Kumulipo is thought to be most complete and best preserved.<sup>2</sup> The Kumulipo is divided into sixteen wā, or eras of creation, with the first seven wā describing the time of Pō (darkness, night), when the heaven and earth were created, as well as the plants, animals, and gods; and the final nine wā occurring in the time of Ao (light, day), when human ali‘i genealogies emerge from the gods, beginning with the first woman, La‘ila‘i. Ao and Pō are among several unopposing dualisms, or “complementary pairs,” expressed throughout the Kumulipo as a kind of paired balance, or pono—Kāne/Wahine (Male/Female); Akua/Kanaka (God/Human); and ‘Āina/Moana (Land/Ocean).<sup>3</sup> This relationship of pono, rather than a Manichean structural hierarchy indicating dominance of one side of the pair over

the other, emphasizes how both sides of each duality are necessary and equally important in their roles and functions.

The purpose of the Kumulipo was to trace the mo‘okū‘auhau of the ali‘i Ka-I-i-mamao, also known as Lonoikamakahiki, to the origins of the universe and to a long lineage of ali‘i to establish his high rank.<sup>4</sup> The Kumulipo traces more than eight hundred generations of ali‘i before Ka-I-i-mamao.<sup>5</sup> The chanting of the Kumulipo also served as a means of consecrating the mana of the ali‘i; thus, the Kumulipo is also described as a “pule ho‘olaha ali‘i,” a prayer to consecrate ali‘i, by Lili‘uokalani in her translation. Aside from its recitation at the birth of Ka-I-i-mamao, the lengthy chant is known to have been recited twice from memory before it was recorded in written form—for Captain James Cook by the famed kahuna Puou, who was a genealogist of the Hawai‘i ali‘i Kalani‘ōpu‘u, and at the deathbed of Ke‘eaumoku by reknowned kahunas Hewahewa and Ahukai (Lili‘uokalani, *Kumulipo*, introduction). Though neither of these events involved consecrating an ali‘i, both called for demonstrations or displays of authority, honor, and power, and chanting the Kumulipo more than fulfilled this need.

#### KING KALĀKAUA AND THE KUMULIPO’S REVIVAL

Aside from having great cultural and spiritual significance, the Kumulipo has also had great political significance: mo‘okū‘auhau were used in the late nineteenth century to help Hawaiian constituents determine claims to rule within the constitutional monarchy system (as they had prior to this mode of ‘Ōiwi governance). After King Kamehameha V, the last direct descendant of Kamehameha I in line for the throne, died on December 11, 1872, William Charles Lunalilo and David La‘amea Kalākaua both ran as candidates to succeed him. Lunalilo was the more popular of the two and was elected as king largely because of his close lineage to Kamehameha I. His grandfather was Prince Kalaimamahu, a half brother of Kamehameha I, and thus he was a cousin of King Kamehameha V.<sup>6</sup> Lunalilo died just a little over a year later, and an election was held with Kalākaua as a candidate once again, this time against dowager queen Emma Naea Kaleleonālani Rooke, a beloved ali‘i who descended from Kamehameha I’s full brother, Keli‘imaika‘i. While Kalākaua was elected as Hawai‘i’s monarch by the legislative vote, Emma held the popular vote in part because of her Kamehameha lineage. Kalākaua could not claim as close a link with the Kamehameha line, so he chose to reinforce his succession to

the throne by emphasizing his descent from the illustrious Keaweikekahiali‘io-kamoku line through the Kumulipo. Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio explains, “For Hawaiians, the king was not an office of the government; he was the symbol of the Hawaiian people, the bodily link to divine ancestors and the greatness of the Conqueror [Kamehameha]” (*Dismembering* 150). After being elected, Kalākaua hoped he could convince his detractors of his rightful claim to rule. Two exclusive intellectual societies, the Hale Nauā, dedicated to the study of Hawaiian religion and science, and Ka Papa Kū‘auhau o nā Ali‘i, the Board of Royal Genealogies, created under Kalākaua’s reign, researched the Kumulipo from 1886 to 1889, when the chant was printed for distribution. A handwritten version believed to be from Kalākaua’s grandmother Kamokuiki had been part of his inheritance and provided a strong foundation from which the scholars could work to validate the mo‘okū‘auhau.

Kalākaua’s reign (1874–1891) can be characterized by its emphasis on Hawaiian cultural traditions, which he recognized could strengthen the spiritual and political sovereignty of Hawai‘i, a nation that had been threatened by aggressive foreign interests since the 1820s. He ushered in the first Hawaiian Renaissance by reviving and promoting the hula, which had been banned with the first generation of missionaries; reviving and funding Ka Papa Kū‘auhau o nā ‘Ali‘i and the Hale Nauā, both societies composed of ali‘i and kāhuna; and celebrating and recording the traditional arts of oli, mo‘olelo, and mele (chant, hi/stories, and song) in writing. He also worked to frame Hawai‘i as a sovereign nation within a global market. Tiffany Ing details Kalākaua’s efforts as “spectacles of display,” which were intended “to convince those inside and outside of Hawai‘i that he possessed the intelligence and ability to lead, to revive Hawaiian culture, and to make other peoples and nations recognize Hawai‘i as an independent nation.” She writes:

First, he displayed himself, his people, and their culture to the world through events like the World Exhibitions. Second, he made a traveling spectacle of himself through public appearances and journeys. Third, he made a variety of visual reproductions of himself that his people—Hawaiians and haole alike—would see as assertions of his kingship. And finally, Kalākaua proclaims the beauty and dignity of his kingdom, and its forms of self-government, through music. (4)

Along with revitalizing Hawaiian cultural productions, he also affirmed Hawai‘i’s sovereignty through spectacles that would be recognized as “civilized”

and “progressive” by European nations, such as building a royal palace, ‘Iolani Palace, and embracing the latest technology, like the telephone and electricity.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the Kumulipo had generated some international interest because of German scholar Adolf Bastian’s *Die heilige Sage der Polynesier: Kosmogonie und Theogonie* (1881), which included several translated passages of the Kalākaua’s personal copy of the Kumulipo into German before it had been published. Bastian considered the Kumulipo to be offering an Indigenous evolutionary account of creation far predating Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. Thus, the Kumulipo may also be seen as one of Kalākaua’s spectacles.

The writing of the Kumulipo also served several domestic interests. In publishing the Kumulipo in 1889, Kalākaua was able to continue asserting his legitimacy and authority as ruler of the Hawaiian Kingdom to foreign corporate factions in Hawai‘i and to ideologically resist the haole discourse that “the king, his institutions, and in fact, his own people were anachronous relics waiting to be replaced” (Osorio, *Dismembering* 224). Moreover, he was able to encourage Kānaka ‘Ōiwi to “Ho‘oulu Lāhui,” or “Increase the Nation,” the motto of Kalākaua’s reign. During this period, Kānaka ‘Ōiwi were also commonly perceived to be a “dying race, after suffering massive depopulation since contact with Cook and his men in 1778. David E. Stannard estimates that the population was “only 10% of its pre-contact population just 100 years later” (51). The writing and sharing of the Kumulipo was the king’s response to this massive depopulation and the cultural decline of his people by providing an example of the continuing strength and survival of the Hawaiian people and nation. Thus, though the Kumulipo was considered to be among the most precious (and private) of possessions of an ali‘i and the special property of Kalākaua’s family, Kalākaua allowed the genealogy to be shared with his people as a national mo‘okū‘auhau.

#### QUEEN LILI‘UOKALANI’S TRANSLATION OF THE KUMULIPO

As her brother’s successor, Queen Lili‘uokalani also saw the political significance of the Kumulipo. She began translating the text into English in 1895, two years after the overthrow of our Hawaiian Kingdom (1893), while she was imprisoned in ‘Iolani Palace for “misprision of treason” by the Republic of Hawai‘i. She finished the extensive translation in 1897 while traveling to Washington, DC, to petition against the American annexation of Hawai‘i and to regain internationally recognized sovereignty for our country.

Rather than articulating political reasons for the translation, Lili‘uokalani emphasizes Indigenous historical and cultural preservation as her motives:

There are several reasons for the publication of this work, the translation of which pleasantly employed me while imprisoned by the present rulers of Hawaii. . . . The folk-lore or traditions of an aboriginal people have of late years been considered of inestimable value; language itself changes, and there are terms and allusions herein to the natural history of Hawaii, which might be forgotten in future years without some such history as this to preserve them to posterity. Further, it is the special property of the latest ruling family of the Hawaiian Islands. (*Kumulipo* n.p.)

Lili‘uokalani was a clever rhetorician, and her introduction abounds with carefully worded protests against the hostile takeover of her country and her subsequent imprisonment alongside the reasons she gives for the translation; she is also careful to emphasize that her translation is an effort at preservation.

There were other political implications of her translating the *Kumulipo* into English. English was the language of the corporate oligarchy that had overthrown the Hawaiian Kingdom, the same people who composed the Republic of Hawai‘i that had found her guilty by military tribunal and had imprisoned her in ‘Iolani Palace. English was also the language of power within the United States. As Lili‘uokalani was in the process of submitting to Congress two anti-annexation petitions signed by more than 90 percent of Hawaiian citizens, her translation of the *Kumulipo* reinforced Hawai‘i’s sovereignty by “explaining to the people of the United States the Kanaka Maoli were a people with a very long history . . . [and] counter[ing] the discourse that disparaged the Kanaka Maoli in order to justify annexation and the military occupation of Hawai‘i” (Silva, *Aloha Betrayed* 98). As Noenoe Silva argues, the translation of the *Kumulipo* contested missionary rhetoric that was used to falsely characterize Hawaiian history in terms of darkness, or *pō*, what was taught as “pre-Christianity,” and light, or *ao*, what was taught as the coming of and the embrace of the church. Thus, through Lili‘uokalani’s translation, it was shown that “*pō* . . . does not mean the time of ignorance and barbarism before enlightenment and (Western) civilization arrived, but rather the time of gods before the first human and out of which humanity rose” (100). Kamanamaikalani Beamer further suggests that the queen “offered her translation to a wide audience to demonstrate the depth of Hawaiian knowledge and to call attention to the record of hundreds of

generations of native rule over the islands—and she did this at a strategic time when the continuity of native rule was in question” (2). In this way, Lili‘uokalani’s translation of the Kumulipo may be seen through what Beamer calls “‘Ōiwi optics,” as an act of agency during a time when American colonialism was not considered inevitable, as it arguably tends to be viewed today.

As it did for Kalākaua, the Kumulipo affirmed Lili‘uokalani’s legitimacy as a sovereign of Hawai‘i by virtue of her genealogy. On the title page of her translation, Lili‘uokalani notes that the Kumulipo was “created for Ka-Ii-Mamao” and passed on to “his daughter Alapai Wahine[,] Lili‘uokalani’s great-grandmother,” and later she writes that the Kumulipo “connect[s] the earlier kings of ancient history with the monarchs latest upon the throne” and thus is “a contribution to the history of the Hawaiian Islands, and . . . the only record of its kind in existence” (n.p.). By including these notes, she further emphasizes her descent from a long succession of monarchs who ruled in Hawai‘i before U.S. involvement.

The queen’s translation was published by Lee and Shepard in Boston in 1897, and unfortunately, its circulation was very short lived, as it went out of print the same year. Though the reasons the translation went out of print so quickly are unclear, it may be surmised that the queen’s Kumulipo translation represented a counternarrative that challenged the American colonial occupation of Hawai‘i under the William McKinley presidency. Despite the success of Lili‘uokalani and the thousands of Hawaiians she represented in defeating the Annexation Treaty in the U.S. Senate, both houses of Congress passed the Newlands Resolution, signed by McKinley in 1898, to annex Hawai‘i so it could be further militarized during the Spanish American War. Any anti-imperialist challenges, especially from the lands targeted as a part of this expansionist era, were silenced, and the queen’s translation of the Kumulipo was no exception.

Just five years after the queen’s translation was published, scholar Joseph L. Kukahi published another version of the Kumulipo in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, *He Kumulipo, he Moolelo Hawaii* (1902). In 1928, a significant excerpt from Kukahi’s publication was reprinted under the title “Ke Kumulipo: Moolelo o ka hanauia ana o Hawaii Nei” (The Kumulipo: Legendary Story of Creation), in *Aloha: An English and Hawaiian Magazine*. In addition, scholar Joseph M. Poepoe discussed and interpreted the Kumulipo in his “Hoomaka ana o ka lahui o Hawaii Nei” (The Beginning of the Nation of Hawai‘i Nei) and “He mele kuauhau Kumulipo” (A Genealogical Chant of Kumulipo), and a few other, anonymous publications focused on the Kumulipo were written in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i in the very

late nineteenth and early twentieth century (they are not clearly dated). These publications show the continued demand for and interest in the Kumulipo as both a sacred text and a symbol of Hawaiian nationalism following annexation.

Despite this demand, Lili‘uokalani’s translation remains fairly invisible, though it was republished in 1978 by Pueo Press, an independent Hawaiian-run press with limited distribution. Head of the press, Kimo Campbell, shares in the preface that he felt Lili‘uokalani’s translation of the Kumulipo ought to be made available as “a useful tool for modern Hawaiians attempting to understand, preserve, and revitalize Hawaiian culture” (n.p.).<sup>8</sup> By 1978, the second Hawaiian Renaissance was well under way, celebrating and calling for a reawakening of Kanaka ‘Ōiwi cultural and political consciousness and creative and scholarly expression to resist American colonialism. In Hawai‘i, as in other parts of the world, people were actively interrogating government policies that promoted white supremacy and colonial oppression while also renewing cultural preservation and revitalization efforts. After nearly a century of English-only policies in Hawai‘i’s schools, the majority of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi spoke only English but yearned for ancestral reconnections. Pueo Press’s republication of the queen’s translation of the Kumulipo answered this call, both as an act and as a product, signifying a powerful means of resistance through mo‘okū‘auhau and Hawaiian national identity.

American folklorist Martha Beckwith published another English translation of the Kumulipo with commentary (I would argue that her book is primarily commentary) in 1951. Unfortunately, Beckwith’s translation continues to be the most widely used and distributed despite its colonial misreadings, plagiarism of the queen’s translation, mistranslations, and depoliticizations. Beckwith’s assertions that Kalākaua’s Kumulipo was falsified to support his rule and that the Kumulipo does not “represent a succession of generations” but of “events arranged” (*Kumulipo* 149) and is therefore historically inaccurate according to Western standards work to discredit the Kumulipo as a political or national genealogy while framing it with aesthetic distance. While it is true that the Kumulipo is not necessarily linear in its chronology of events (though its alinearity would also be difficult to prove), this sacred text’s pitfalls in meeting Western standards of “historical accuracy” do not and should not discredit the Kumulipo as a genealogical record, nor should they limit readings of the Kumulipo to poetry only. Rather, as is the case for many other sacred and Indigenous ancestral texts, we must develop new ways of reading and broaden our understanding of history to account for multiple meanings, including those that are

figurative or offer alternative realities. Though Beckwith's translation isn't even the most recent (Rubellite Kawena Johnson's partial translation was published by Topgallant in 1981), the wide distribution of Beckwith's translation, the comparatively limited accessibility of Lili'uokalani's and Johnson's, and colonially enforced Hawaiian language loss has meant that most readers, Kānaka and non-Kānaka, come to read the Kumulipo only through Beckwith's depoliticized and colonial translation (McDougall, "Mo'okū'auhau").

The Kumulipo continues to be taught in hula hālau and other schools in terms of both its content and its performance and can be heard chanted at Hawaiian cultural and political gatherings. Noenoe Silva writes that the Kumulipo continues to figure "in the national consciousness of the lāhui and . . . continues to function as resistance to colonization and the attendant project of assimilation" (*Aloha Betrayed* 97). As this chapter demonstrates, the Kumulipo is an important part of Kānaka literary genealogies, often referenced through kaona and used to emphasize loyalty to the Hawaiian Kingdom and a deep sense of connection to our 'āina, our ali'i, and the generations of our kūpuna before us.

### **'O KA LIPO O KA LĀ, 'O KA LIPO O KA PŌ: JOHN DOMINIS HOLT'S "PRINCESS OF THE NIGHT RIDES"**

Born in 1919, John Dominis Holt was a writer (of several genres), publisher, and activist descended from Kūho'oki'eki'e through his maternal lineage and Ha'ole through his paternal lineage, both lines connecting him to Kamehameha. In addition, John Dominis, the husband of Queen Lili'uokalani, was Holt's grand-uncle, so Holt also enjoyed familial ties with Hawai'i's last monarch (to whom the Kumulipo belonged). Holt's creative and scholarly work reflect his ali'i lineage as afforded him through his family and their intimate stories of Kalākaua, Lili'uokalani, Ka'iulani, and other ali'i, while his 'ōpū ali'i, or ali'i stature, is reflected in his dedication to publishing Hawaiian literature and arts through his Topgallant Publishing and Ku Pa'a Press when other publishing venues for Hawaiian writers were virtually nonexistent. To his tremendous credit, Holt published twenty-nine books under Topgallant and fourteen books under Ku Pa'a Press between 1965 and 1993, when he passed away at the age of seventy-three. Though not all of Holt's publications are by Hawaiian authors, the majority are, with the rest of the works focused in some

way on Hawai‘i. Holt is also noted for several other self-publications, many of which also emphasize the importance of genealogy, including a historiography, *The Hawaiian Monarchy* (1971); his novel, *Waimea Summer* (1976); a short story collection, *Princess of the Night Rides and Other Tales* (1977); *Hanai, A Poem for Queen Lili‘uokalani* (1986); and his memoir, *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt, 1919–1935* (1993).

Holt started Topgallant Publishing in 1965 by publishing *On Being Hawaiian*, which featured his pivotal essay of the same title.<sup>9</sup> “On Being Hawaiian” characterizes colonized Hawaiian identity as constructed out of deep and irrevocable loss of country; of family and loved ones; and of culture, language, and history, amid ongoing colonial hegemony and racism designed to further marginalize and dispossess. Still, Holt asserts that refuge can be found in connections with our kūpuna and ‘āina, our land:

We are links to the ancients; connected by inheritance to their mana, their wisdom, their superb appreciation of what it is to be human. This is the foundation of the aloha spirit. It comes from many things, from knowing what it is to care, to truly care about other people. To understand the value of loving what is in nature: living with it in a balance of coexistence; respecting all things of the earth, including rocks and dirt as living things related somehow through a cosmic connection to ourselves. (9)

Though Holt does not explicitly name the Kumulipo here (he does elsewhere in the essay, however), his affirmation of our “cosmic connection” to “all things of the earth” is likely informed by this genealogy.

The title story of the collection *Princess of the Night Rides and Other Tales* (1977), featuring Princess Ka‘iulani as the protagonist, similarly emphasizes genealogy through kaona connections to the Kumulipo. The story takes place in Honolulu and Nu‘uanu Valley on the island of O‘ahu. Ka‘iulani is twenty-three years old in 1898, the year that Hawai‘i was annexed to the United States despite the efforts of the deposed Queen Lili‘uokalani and more than 90 percent of Hawaiian citizens, who signed a petition against annexation. Hawai‘i was annexed to the United States on August 12, 1898. Princess Ka‘iulani, who was in Hawai‘i during annexation, died just seven months later, in March 1899.

The story begins by describing Ka‘iulani’s night rides on her horse, Damozel. Though grief stricken from the loss of her country to American annexation, she feels “a powerful sense of freedom” riding through an “unrevealing darkness,”

foreshadowing the princess's death by having her comfortable in the darkness, but also aligning the princess with the creative darkness from which the universe was created according to the Kumulipo. As the story progresses, the princess is shown to be riding at night also because after "spending seven long years in the wintry temperatures of Northern Europe, she found the languid tropical air of her island birthplace almost intolerable. It was a luxurious joy to ride in the sunless dark of the night" (37). At the time of her death, Ka'iulani had been in Hawai'i for only a little over a year after returning from seven years in Europe. Sadly, what became Ka'iulani's exile in Europe coupled with the loss of Hawai'i as a nation led to an exile in her own homeland. In the story, she writes in a letter to the "ex-Queen," "I guess I am no longer a native Hawaiian in this respect; my body is at odds with the warm air of the tropics" (38). Her own body's discomfort at home is symbolic of this exile, while her feelings of no longer being a "native Hawaiian" illustrate her feelings of displacement and dispossession, as her birthright and her very identity have been stripped from her.

Holt further emphasizes this theme of exile in another letter to "her friend, the Marquise de Crecy," wherein Ka'iulani describes how she feels ill treated, even mocked, by the Americans following annexation:

[S]ome Americans came to my house and knocked rather violently at the door, and when they had stated their cause, they wished to know if it would be permissible for the EX-princess to have her picture taken with them. . . . They have taken everything away from us and it seems there is left but little, and that little our very life itself. We live now in such a semi-retired way that people wonder if we even exist anymore. I, too, wonder, and to what purpose? (40)

Holt nearly reproduces a letter written by Ka'iulani word for word, though the original was intended for the queen during her 1898 trip to Washington, DC, to regain the Crown lands after annexation. The Marquise is a fictional character, perhaps used to show Ka'iulani's worldliness, as well as how accepted Ka'iulani was among the European aristocracy. In using the letter, Holt highlights how cruelly she has been turned into a fetishized colonial object, as well as the tremendous grief of Ka'iulani as an ali'i raised since birth to lead and care for her people, who are now impoverished since the overthrow five years earlier. As shown in her letter, Ka'iulani questions her very existence, as her purpose

had always been defined as an ali‘i. Thus, her grief from exile, loss of country, and the suffering of her people lead her to an existential crisis.

The story fictionalizes Ka‘iulani’s final night ride, when she travels farther than usual, up into Nu‘uanu Valley. On this ride, Ka‘iulani delights in the change of rains and the fragrance of the ‘āina in its abundance:

At Mamalahoa the frizzy mist turned into rain—a heavy, cold, upper Nuuanu rain.<sup>10</sup> . . . Wild nature—unspoiled, unexpurgated; budding and leafing, flowering and ripening; decaying leaves, twigs, blooms in brown masses formed thick layers of compost under shrub and tree; kukui trees and ferns—pulu, pala palai, ho-io made the more fragrant with the fall of rain—grew in profusion here. (55)

Here, Holt uses imagery of the ‘āina to emphasize how death nourishes life, allowing the ancient to live on in the modern, in much the same way that our ancestors live on through us. In particular, ferns such as the pulu, or hāpu‘u pulu, used for healing; the palapalai; and the hō‘i‘o, are mentioned to collectively symbolize ancestry and healing. Ka‘iulani notes how the ferns “were another link with the deep past. They had been celebrated, time and again, in the ancient mele, the epics of classic Hawai‘i which were preserved by the people remembering them word for word” (55). A kaona connection to the Kumulipo, ferns are listed in the first wā and come right after the first life on earth, the coral polyps, mollusks, and worms. This is a place of prominence, recognizing the ferns as being among the oldest life on the ‘āina.

Following intense displays of sorrow and anger while on her ride, Ka‘iulani comes face-to-face with Nā Huaka‘i Pō, the Night Marchers, a ghostly procession of kūpuna. Ka‘iulani, in bearing witness to the ali‘i procession, is in danger of being punished by the guards of the ali‘i should she not be able to demonstrate her mana as an ali‘i herself. She knows that to save herself she must identify herself in the traditional Hawaiian way—that is, she must chant her mo‘okū‘auhau:

Unexpectedly, two chiefs broke the ranks of the procession and stood silently confronting her. . . . “Keiki hua owau—Kepookalani, Aikanaka, Kamanawa, Kamaekalani, Kameeiamoku, Kamehameha nui—” she shouted all the names of ancestors she could remember. One name came through the mist of time. . . . “Kaneikawaiilani” she said with authoritative firmness. (57)

Upon demonstrating her descent from these ali‘i, the princess is recognized and pardoned from death, said to be the punishment for daring to gaze on the ali‘i marchers. This encounter is the climax of the story’s development. Knowledge of her ancestors and her genealogy not only saves the princess from the marchers, it also seems to save her from her own melancholy and anger. Being recognized as an ali‘i by her kūpuna and witnessing firsthand how Hawai‘i’s ali‘i persist as part of the ‘āina, as its caretakers, allows Ka‘iulani to see herself as belonging to the Hawai‘i she once feared was lost to her and her people. Her encounter reassures her that foreign control could never erase the Hawaiian from Hawai‘i.

Following this encounter, Princess Ka‘iulani heals through reconnecting with the Kumulipo. She whispers, “How far I’ve gone from all of my birthright. How far—I ka puolo waimaka o ka onihi ke kulu iho nei, e.’ My eyes a bundle of tears full to overflowing” (58). She then reaffirms her descent from Papa, the Hawaiian Earth Mother, and Wākea, the Hawaiian Sky Father, who are both listed in the Kumulipo: “Papa and Wakea my progenitors I am here—I am yours,” after which Ka‘iulani feels “a glorious surge of freedom—of being at peace with everything” (59). That she says this while in Nu‘uanu, where Papa and Wākea once lived according to various hi/stories, underscores the power of this ancestral reconnection. On her way home she recalls a few of the beginning lines from the Kumulipo and chants in English first and then Hawaiian: “Darkness of the sun, darkness of the night. Nothing but night. O ka lipo o ka la, ka lipo o ka po—po wali [*sic*] ho-i” (59). Affirmation of Ka‘iulani’s and Hawai‘i’s claims to sovereignty and nationhood, Ka‘iulani’s knowledge of her genealogy, the Kumulipo, is what ultimately guides and saves her. In emphasizing this healing through genealogy, Holt, in turn, asks us, as contemporary Hawaiians, to follow the princess’s example, to take pride in the great knowledge of our people and to know our continued belonging to this land for generations.

Princess Ka‘iulani was greatly loved. During a time when ali‘i children were rare due to the ravages of foreign diseases, she was the bright hope for continued Hawaiian governance within our homeland. Lovingly calling her Kamalii Kaiulani, or Royal Child, the Hawaiian newspapers of the time reported consistently on Ka‘iulani, even while she was abroad in Europe. Upon her return to Hawai‘i, *Ka Lei Rose o Hawaii* noted the crowd of four hundred people, including “na Luna Aupuni o na aupuni nui, na luna aupuni, na poe koikoi a me na hoaloha a lehulehu wale” (the leaders of the great nations, the national leaders,

other influential peoples, and numerous friends), who were there to welcome Kaʻiulani despite “ka nui o ka ua a me ka nui o ka pilikia no ka pikalekale o na alanui i ka lepo” (the heavy rain and the trouble caused by the muddiness of the dirt roads; “E Huli” 1). As mentioned earlier, Kaʻiulani fell ill and died a little over a year after returning to Hawaiʻi. Though she died in her home at ʻĀinahau, Kaʻiulani had fallen ill weeks earlier while visiting the Parker family in Waimea on Hawaiʻi. Her “omaimai” (chronic illness) was reported as “ka maʻi rumatika ehaeha loa” (inflammatory rheumatism) in *Ka Makaainana* on February 13, 1899 (“Ke Omaimai” 1). Later, after Kaʻiulani’s death, on March 18, 1899, *Ka Lahui Hawaii* reported on her funeral under the headline “Me Ka Hanohano Nui, Ka Hoolewa o ke Kamaʻlii Vitoria Kaiulani, Kumakena ka Lahui Hawaii—Olo ka Pihe mai o a o” (With Great Honor, The Ascent of the Royal Child Victoria Kaʻiulani to Heaven, The Hawaiian Nation Mourns—The Lamentation Resounds Everywhere) in great detail, including noted family members and officials in attendance; the order of the procession carrying Kaʻiulani to rest at Mauna Ala, the Royal Mausoleum, and the procession members’ traditional mourning attire; her burial in the Kalākaua crypt; and the gifts of kāhili given by Kamaʻlii Kawananakoa.<sup>11</sup> *Ka Lahui Hawaii* described the tremendous grief of those in attendance:

Ua puka mai na paa kahili a pau iwaho a mahope mai ka pahu kupapau e hali-haliia ana e na hapai pahu. Me ke akahela ka hapaiia ana a hiki i ke kau ana i luna o ke kaa, a o ia no hoi ka wa i olo ai ka pihe o na leo kumakena. Auwe! He ku i ka walohia a me ka makena maoli.

All of the kahili bearers came outside and afterward there was the coffin, which was carried by the pall bearers. They carried the coffin carefully until they placed the coffin atop the carriage, and indeed, during this time, the lamentations of the mournful voices resounded. Auē! It was truly moving and mournful. (my translation)

Arnold Hōkūlani Requilman notes that more than twenty thousand “weeping Hawaiians, young and old, lined the sidewalks to watch the procession’s movement” (200) and that “Hawaiʻi Ponoʻī,” the Hawaiian national anthem, was played after her vault had been sealed. These accounts demonstrate the people’s love for Kaʻiulani, as well as how she was upheld as the future of the

Hawaiian nation. Because her death came so soon after annexation, by mourning Ka‘iulani, our people were also mourning the loss of our country.

Despite common knowledge of Ka‘iulani’s illness after Waimea, Holt gives Ka‘iulani a new death, showing her sickness beginning after her encounter with the Huaka‘i Pō in Nu‘uanu, and her death following just two weeks later:

It was almost dawn. . . . She was drenched and tired—so was the mare—from the long ride, the exposure to the rains. A chill and fever had already begun to exact a toll on her strong young body. She had fallen on the verandah near the heavy front doors. . . . In two weeks’ time, she would be dead. (59)

While somewhat abrupt of an ending, Holt chooses to give Ka‘iulani a sense of returning and belonging to the ‘āina and the kūpuna before her death. Tonally this provides mournful reassurance that Ka‘iulani lives on alongside our ancestors, that like the Huaka‘i Pō, her spirit continues to inhabit and protect the ‘āina. Her journey, as Holt has written it, stands as a model for all Hawaiians to be reassured that we belong in life and death to our homeland, that the mana of our deep history lives on here, and that our ancestors supersede our relatively recent colonial occupation by the United States—all important lessons of the Kumulipo.

### MAKING WRONG RIGHT NOW: IMAIKALANI KALAHELE’S POETRY AND ART

Born in 1946 and still creating, Imaikalani Kalahela is a poet, playwright, performance and visual artist, musician, and activist who, like Holt, has dedicated much of his life to organizing exhibitions and readings for the Hawaiian arts and literary community. His day job as caretaker of the grounds of the Queen Lili‘uokalani Children’s Center of Kapālama additionally shows his commitment to the will and trust of Queen Lili‘uokalani and Hawaiian communities. Also like Holt, much of Kalahela’s work demonstrates kaona connections with the Kumulipo. In 2005, Kalahela created an eighteen-foot mural, *Kumulipo and Pō‘ele‘ele*, using felt markers as a medium.<sup>12</sup> He describes the mural as depicting the first lines of the first wā, where Kumulipo, a male darkness, and Pō‘ele‘ele, a female darkness, are born: “For me, that’s what this [mural] is. It’s that time

when you just come out of Pō when things are out of the darkness, the primal” (Cardwell).

In a recent interview, Kalahela shared that he uses his work to “look for solutions,” which he has found in turning back toward cultural traditions and philosophy. He says, “I look more and more towards my ancestry. . . . For me, the answer really is to look toward the gifts of Papa. Papa has the answer. . . . The answer is in the ceremonies of old. We need to go back to the understanding that we are all a part of everything and we need to function and behave that way” (Cardwell). Emphasizing not only ancestral return, but a distinctly *female* ancestral return as part of his own creative process, Kalahela’s art and writing are predominantly dedicated to issues of cultural and social justice for Hawaiians by emphasizing a return to the ‘āina and Indigenous culture and traditions. His poetry collection, *Kalabele*, published in 2002 by Kalamaku Press, asserts that a necessary part of the return to ‘āina and culture is a focus on the ancestral, honoring the special role of women within creation, with several visual poems, or calligrams, employing kaona to the Kumulipo.

Among the first poems in the collection is “The Source,” a poem of eight one-line stanzas centered and arranged on the page to use the negative space to suggest a woman’s kohe, or vagina:

from the source  
 revolve to the source  
 the secret must for the source  
 for capable hands the secret revolves  
 from capable hands to capable hands  
 revolve  
 revolve  
 revolve (12)

The shape of the poem is most certainly not accidental. His work, as well as the work of his peers, Joe Puna Balaz and Wayne Kaumualii Westlake, represent a movement to consciously Hawaiianize concrete poetry and have the aesthetic form represent Kanaka values and concepts.<sup>13</sup> The Kumulipo emphasizes the duality and pono between male and female as a necessary part of creation, which is emphasized in all genealogies; the poem’s shape underscores the role of human sexuality as a part of the creation that occurs within all elements of

the natural world and suggests that procreation mirrors godly creation. In other words, as Kalahela emphasizes, the kohe is the gateway to Ao, the time of light and humankind.

The poem makes more specific kaona connections to the Kumulipo through its title and the repetition of the words “source” and “revolve,” or “kumu” and “huli.” The “source” is emphasized within the poem as the beginning, the origin of creation; the political “revolution” should come “from the source,” be guided by it and driven by our ancestral connection. The poem illustrates that “secret” knowledge, perhaps an example of meta-kaona, is part of the journey of revolution, knowledge that must pass “for capable hands” “from capable hands” “to capable hands.” The “capable hands” point to the many generations that both inspire and work to preserve this knowledge. The repetition of “revolve” references the “huli” that occurs in the very first lines of the Kumulipo: “O ke au i kahuli wela ka honua / O ke au i kahuli lole ka lani” (Kalākaua 187), or “At the time that turned the heat of the earth, / At the time when the heavens turned and changed” (Lili‘uokalani, *Kumulipo* 2). The Kumulipo teaches that “huli,” turning or revolving, is a part of the creative process, that change and upheaval are necessary for creation to occur.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the repetition of “revolve” also connotes colonial resistance, and the “secret” that we, as Kānaka Maoli, are in a continual state of huli, or revolution, as a part our creation.

In the poem “Manifesto,” Kalahela further uses kaona to emphasize our connection to the beginnings of pō in the Kumulipo. Using short centered lines, Kalahela recognizes the ‘āina as “the source / of / my origins” as it “lie[s] / beneath [my] feet,” while the very “breath / in [my] chest / originated / in Pō” (63), which underscores one of the primary lessons of the Kumulipo—that of our intimate connection to the universe. As descendants of the beginnings of the universe, we contain the beginnings of the universe living on within us. In a recent interview, Rubellite Kawena Johnson affirms, “As man is born into the universe, so is the universe reborn in him; he is the intelligent survivor of cosmic creation in the highest form of organic life on earth . . . he is the culmination of all forms” (qtd. in Wiannecki). In this way, the Kumulipo stresses that time should be thought of not as linear, but perhaps as spiral, with the future and the past as a part of the present, an idea echoed by Kalahela.<sup>15</sup> He writes, “the destiny / of my race / is / plunged into / my gut,” with his “gut,” or na‘au, as the seat of both his emotions and his knowledge from a Kanaka perspective.

This spiritual realization of interconnectedness via the Kumulipo is later shown to inform Kalahela’s “manifesto,” which “infest[s] / [his] veins”

with a new  
nationalism,  
old spiritualism,  
and a need  
to make wrong  
right  
now. (63)

Kalahele asserts that while a sense of nationalism is “new,” because Hawaiian nationalism was born out of a space of colonial contention largely in the nineteenth century, the spiritualism that also informs his political consciousness is “old,” again highlighting ancestral connection. Together, his nationalism and spiritualism urge him in the final lines “to make wrong / right / now.” These last three lines can be read in two ways: (1) that there is a need for “mak[ing] wrong,” or resisting, immediately, or “right / now”; and (2) that there is a need to “make” the “wrong” of colonial injustice “right” in the present. Either meaning explains what is being declared through Kalahele’s “Manifesto,” that the political and the spiritual are necessarily intertwined and together urge us as contemporary Hawaiians toward a resistance against colonialism through an ancestral connection and return.

Kalahele’s *Inaspace* series concludes the collection and features a succession of black and white drawings depicting many of the same dualisms present in the Kumulipo—light and dark, male and female. All the drawings depict stylized celestial orbs rendered with traditional kapa and kākau, or tattoo, designs, many of which are tied to genealogies. In *Inaspace 1*, there is a piko, a center, from which traditional designs connoting genealogies radiate forth. Movement and turning are depicted here, again harkening to the “huli” in the first few lines of the Kumulipo.

In *Inaspace 3* and *Inaspace 4*, the orbs resemble the heads of comets and are placed to indicate movement between darkness and light, emphasizing the movement between the time of the gods (pō) and the time of humankind (ao) and perhaps signifying Kalahele’s call for an ancestral return/connection in the present. At the same time, both drawings are also reminiscent of human reproduction through the central image of an orb within an orb (like a fertilized egg) presented as moving between darkness and light.

That the series is called *Inaspace* highlights the Kumulipo’s influence on Kalahele and the spiritual and political lesson of our interconnection with our

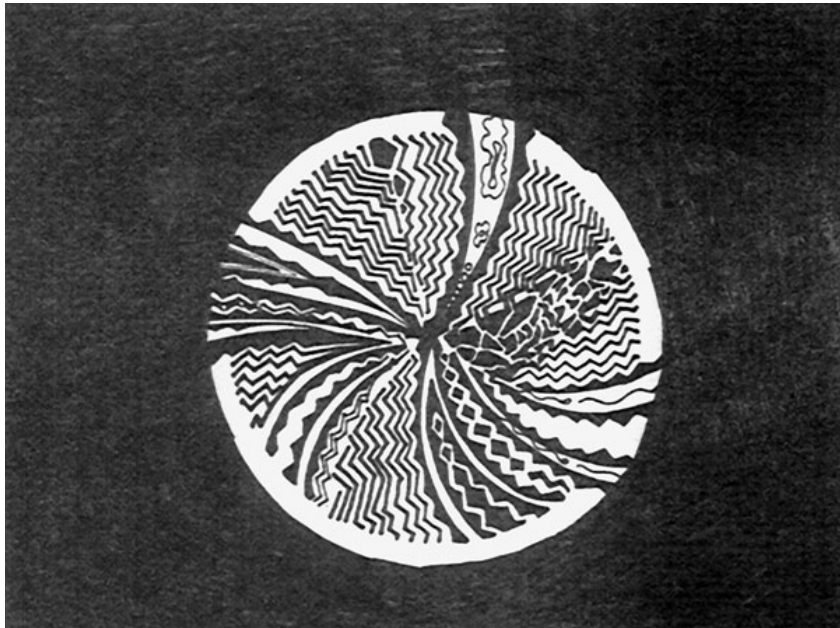


FIGURE 3. Imaikalani Kalahela's *Inaspace 1* (2002).



FIGURE 4. Imaikalani Kalahela's *Inaspace 3* (2002).

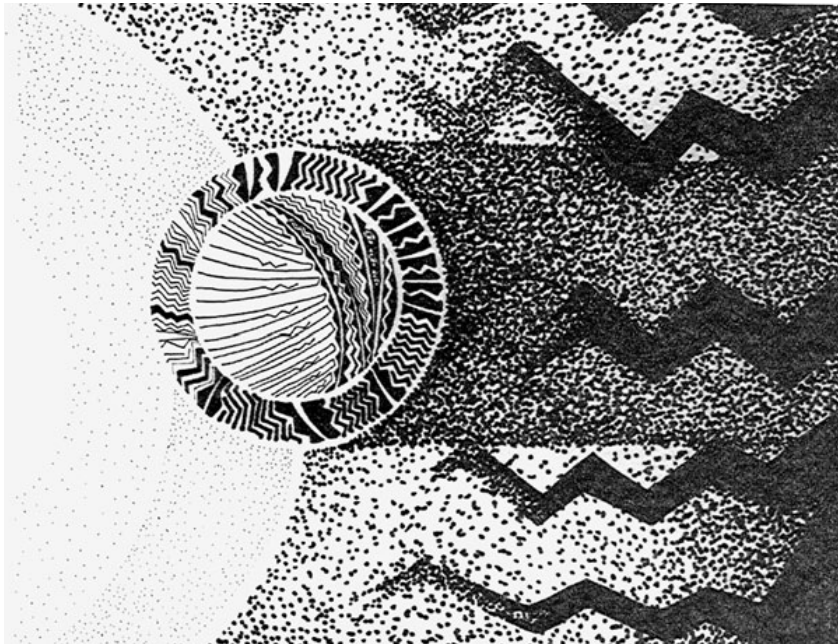


FIGURE 5. Imaikalani Kalahela's *Inaspace 4* (2002).

land, our ancestors, and the universe, as the Kumulipo also emphasizes how within each of us is a universe, the same beginnings of creation, as well as the ability to procreate.

### THE WORMHOLE WOMB OF PŌ: SAGE U'ILANI TAKEHIRO'S "KUMULIPO REMIX"

Representing the next generation of Kanaka artists after Kalahela, Sage U'ilani Takehiro is a poet, performance artist, and political activist from Hilo, Hawai'i, the 'āina locating most of her poems. In 2007, she published *Honua*, her first poetry collection, with Kahuaomānoa Press. Throughout *Honua*, Takehiro's poems use 'ōlelo Hawai'i, HCE (Pidgin), and English to embody themes of colonial resistance, drug and alcohol abuse as "self-medication," dispossession and other forms of colonial loss, (re)connection to 'āina and kūpuna, and the connection between creation and procreation. These last two themes, in

particular, are reflected in the poem “Kumulipo Remix,” which in its entirety embodies kaona connections to the Kumulipo.

As the title “Kumulipo Remix” asserts, the poem “remixes” the Kumulipo and its themes, perhaps for younger Hawaiian audiences influenced by hip-hop and hula cultures as Takehiro is. The term “remix” refers to an alternative version of an original song. As such, the original is a recognizable part of the remix, rather than just the inspiration for it.

The poem summarizes and retells parts of the Kumulipo, beginning with Pō:

Born is everything from the dark  
and the slime, where another world

swirls words to life with a tongue  
lungs suck the breath of an ocean (38)

True to the original, Takehiro uses the word “Born” to begin several of her stanzas, just as much of the Kumulipo emphasizes the birth of all things by beginning many of its lines with “Hānau,” or “Birth.” The poet also recalls Pō as the site of the universe’s beginnings, out of which “the slime” emerges alongside “words” that are brought into being at this time, “swirl[ed] to life with a tongue”; the ocean is a living being with “lungs” and “breath.” Pōkā Laenui asserts that the Kumulipo “illustrates the deep and enduring differences between Western and traditional Hawaiian ways of relating to and respecting the environment, more specifically, the ocean. More than just an ‘environment’ or a ‘resource,’ to us, the ocean is a living being—a home for other living beings and of living gods” (10). Also, though “words” are not mentioned as part of the Kumulipo, Takehiro’s inclusion of them within her remix underscores her recognition of the Kumulipo’s preservation in orality as well as the power of words to actualize.

Takehiro’s first two stanzas then diverge from the Kumulipo, bringing the reader into a modern, colonized space. The “words” and the “ocean” in the time of Pō are shown to be beyond the reaches of “pa‘a concrete civilization” where “realization and rediscovery reveals [*sic*] captivity.” Takehiro stresses the word “captivity” by having it break her alliteration of the latter line. Her emphasis on “captivity” demonstrates a kaona connection with Queen Lili‘uokalani’s translation of the Kumulipo during her imprisonment in ‘Iolani Palace in 1895. At the same time, Takehiro uses kaona to connect her experience (and other

Kānaka's experiences) with Trask's use of "captivity" in "Writing in Captivity" (1999).<sup>16</sup> Despite this depiction of Hawaiians in colonial captivity, Takehiro maintains that we as contemporary Hawaiians carry the mana of our ancestors within us and offers a vision of cultural renewal and continued sovereignty:

mana carved in the na'au  
 now, born from a petroglyph  
 poem is her kino

she hears the song of the 'I'iwi  
 singing to the 'Ō'ō, who are off  
 somewhere breeding (38)

Thus, though captive, the "mana" is indelibly "carved" within the "na'au," or gut, which, from a Hawaiian perspective, informs us intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. This image is then mirrored through the "petroglyph poem," further explained below, which births "her kino," "her" body.

Takehiro's use of "her" and "she" in the poem most likely references the queen, with the "petroglyph / poem" a kaona reference to the Kumulipo, which was composed in a time when the preliterate writing of our ancestors, combining orality and *ki'i pōhaku*, or petroglyphs, was used to record births, generations, and significant events in stone. As Lili'uokalani's genealogy chant, the Kumulipo depicts the long lineage of ancestors from whom Lili'u was born. Takehiro portrays the "poem," however, as active; it gives birth to "her kino," a subtle poetic choice that suggests the Hawaiian belief in the mana of the spoken word to actualize. But, because kaona is often multilayered, the "she" may also be read as a referent for all Hawaiians, with the queen's experience of captivity as a metaphor for all Hawaiians within American colonialism.<sup>17</sup>

The next stanza depicts the feminine presence as "hear[ing] the song of the 'I'iwi" and "singing to the 'Ō'ō," with each bird's name capitalized for emphasis. Both birds are used here to symbolize ali'i government and sovereignty in that both birds' feathers (red feathers from the 'i'iwi and yellow feathers from the 'ō'ō) were traditionally used to make 'ahu'ula, or feather cloaks, and mahi-ole, or feathered helmets, for ali'i. Takehiro makes an important distinction between the two birds, as the 'i'iwi is the only bird still able to sing because it is not extinct like the 'ō'ō, a consequence of the colonial processes of deforestation

and land development (“Extinct Bird”). In Takehiro’s vision, however, though the ‘ō‘ō does not sing, it is also not extinct; on the contrary, it is “off / somewhere breeding” (38), proliferating.

“Kumulipo Remix” then moves back into retelling the fifth wā of the Kumulipo, that of Pōkanokano, translated by Lili‘uokalani as “Night of Strength” (*Kumulipo* 19) and associated with Kamapua‘a, the pig god:

In a forest where the pig digs into the earth  
Birth is the uprooted tracks of Kamapua‘a

Pimpin’ nā pua and making mo‘o women  
Wet in the night

While Pōkanokano is translated by Lili‘uokalani as “Night of Strength,” it may also be translated as “Night of Male Erection,” because “kanokano” can be used to describe the erect penis, which is appropriate within mo‘okū‘auhau like the Kumulipo to celebrate fertility and progeny. Consequently, Kamapua‘a is well known in mo‘olelo for his sexual exploits and prowess as a warrior. Oli and mo‘olelo featuring Kamapua‘a often employ sexual kaona to express his association with farming and the forested uplands, linking him to procreation and creation. John Charlot notes how the word “‘eku,” which means “to root, as a pig,” is repeatedly used as a metaphor in Kamapua‘a literature to emphasize the god’s primary function “to make soil fertile with his power of fecundity. . . . The rutting and wallowing of the male pig in the female earth is manifestly sexual for a Hawaiian audience” (*Kamapua‘a* 20). Takehiro’s portrayal of Kamapua‘a plays up his sexual prowess, expressing his role in creation and “birth,” as well as in procreation as he “mak[es] mo‘o women / wet in the night.”

From there, the poem briefly references Kamapua‘a’s “domestics with Pele” and in turn Pele’s battle with Hi‘iaka—both mo‘olelo that are not featured in the Kumulipo but perhaps are still retold as a part of Takehiro’s hula background, in which Pele and Hi‘iaka play primary roles. Here, however, Hi‘iaka and Lohi‘au are said to have “made out in the staircase / spread legs . . . doggy style,” a more modern setting and term for perhaps a not so modern sexual position (and emphatically not missionary style!). Meanwhile, the “‘Ō‘ō [nests] on the roof” in witness as “the sways of Kanaloa’s ma‘i / [pound] against the pali of Papahānaumoku,” with the ocean gendered as male (Kanaloa) and the pali gendered as female (Papahānaumoku) in sexual union.<sup>18</sup> Though this is also

not a part of the original Kumulipo, Takehiro clearly privileges a sexualized view of creation that incorporates the traditional perspective of using sexual metaphor to also express the political. Trask asserts in “Decolonizing Hawaiian Literature” that “[b]ecause Hawaiian is a profoundly metaphorical language, and Hawaiians an openly erotic people, descriptions are always rendered with fertile imagery: the land is a fecundity of beauty; our traditional deities are gods of abundance, of plenitude. . . . It is commonplace in the Hawaiian worldview to see relationships as both political and erotic” (174).

Overall, Takehiro’s remix focuses on the sexual, emphasizing a connection between creation and procreation, which is also a part of what is emphasized and celebrated within the practice of mo‘okū‘auhau. The sexual themes within the work of Kalahale and Takehiro underscore that rather than viewing sex as “vulgar,” the Kanaka Maoli view is grounded in a healthy celebration of sex as natural, providing joy and progeny. Their emphasis on the sexual, then, highlights biological and cultural continuity. As the “songs of sex” are “born,” they are “sucking mana through / slime that breathes life,” opening the way for the time of Ao, when humankind is born from the gods, followed by “the dances” and the “stories”:

Born are the kamali‘i o kēia mau mo‘olelo

*Here we are, the children of Hawai‘i*

*Eia mākou, nā mele ho‘okani*

*Here we are, the leaders of tomorrow*

*Oli ē, oli ē no mākou*

Born are the passions from the kūpuna

Born are the dances to the people

Born are the stories from the keiki (39)

Takehiro’s remix describes the birth of the “kamali‘i o kēia mau mo‘olelo,” or the “children of these stories,” and thus suggests the coming of Ao in the Kumulipo. This line is followed by a few lines from a common children’s song in Hawai‘i used in May Day celebrations, “Eia Mākou” (Here We Are), by Kamuela Ka‘ahanui, which demonstrates a sense of continuity of the kamali‘i within a colonial space. In particular, the lines of “Eia Mākou” that Takehiro weaves in to her remix reinforce how the “children of Hawai‘i” continue to make music and song despite their colonial captivity. In this way, the contemporary world merges with the ancient original in Takehiro’s revisioning of the Kumulipo:

Born is the blood of Kānaka  
and the spirit of Kumulipo through  
the wormhole womb of Pō (39)

Similar to depictions by Holt and Kalahēle, Takehiro asserts our intimate (and proximate) genealogical tie to Pō and the beginnings of the universe through the Kumulipo, and in doing so, also challenges the notion of linear time. “Kumulipo Remix” moves between the time of Pō and the time of Ao to affirm our continued Kanaka Maoli sovereignty and our genealogical connection to land and ocean, even as it recognizes our present colonial situation and our efforts to decolonize by continuing to “sing”:

Born are the prisons of our world  
and the oli we conceive in them  
they cage a voice singing poems  
to the ‘Ō‘ō birds, who are off somewhere  
breeding (39)

In this final stanza, the queen’s imprisonment is referenced once again to underscore her resistance in translating the Kumulipo and to parallel the overincarceration of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi since the onset of American colonialism.<sup>19</sup> Rather than casting us as tragic, passive victims, however, Takehiro emphasizes our cultural continuity by positing Hawaiians as actively singing and creating, an anticolonial project given earlier missionary bans of hula and other forms of colonial silencing of Kanaka voice. Thus, her final image, which illustrates that the songs and poems reach the “‘Ō‘ō birds,” also stresses the mana of the singing to revitalize, reaffirm, and sustain our sovereignty, as the “‘Ō‘ō . . . are off somewhere / breeding” themselves out of extinction, offering the hope of a revitalized Native governance.

### WHAT HAPPENS TO THE ONES FORGOTTEN?: JAMAICA HEOLIMELEIKALANI OSORIO’S “KUMULIPO”

The final contemporary Hawaiian writer I will examine for her kaona connections to the Kumulipo is also the youngest writer featured in this book—Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, a performance poet from Pālolo, O‘ahu. The 2009 slam champion of *Brave New Voices*, an American national television show featuring



FIGURE 6. Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio performs “Kumulipo” at the White House in 2009.

young slam poets, she has performed for audiences throughout Hawai‘i, North America, and the Pacific and has been active in fostering slam poetry within Hawai‘i’s high schools. Much of her work explores issues of historical injustice for Hawaiians, colonialism, language revitalization, and queer identity.

On May 12, 2009, Osorio performed her poetry at the White House at the invitation of First Lady Michelle Obama. Osorio chose to perform “Kumulipo,” based on a written free verse poem of eleven stanzas and fifty-four lines of the same title. The performance poem “Kumulipo” differs from the written version largely because of the two-minute time limit imposed on all the performers as well as the surveillance of Osorio’s poem (her poem needed to be submitted and approved before the performance). Despite these imposed limitations, Osorio’s performance of “Kumulipo” for the White House event is powerful, moving, and political, as she emphasizes ancestral memory, *mo‘okū‘auhau*, and naming, and illustrates the anxiety of colonized forgetting.

Osorio’s “Kumulipo” is a personal *mo‘okū‘auhau*, one that traces her genealogy from her paternal grandparents to herself; however, the poem also represents a personal epiphany for the poet, showing the ways in which genealogies provide knowledge and guidance, insight into history, and a basis for personal identity as well as illustrating the danger in forgetting them. Her performance begins with the devastating question, “What happens to the ones forgotten?” and continues:

the ones who shaped my heart from their rib cages  
 i want to taste the tears in their names  
 want to trace their souls into my vocal chords so that i can feel related again  
 because i have forgotten my father's own grandparents' middle names  
 forgotten what color thread god used to sew me together with<sup>20</sup>

Using a lowercase “i” to humble herself in relation to her kūpuna in the poem, Osorio illustrates how in a colonized space where genealogies are not valued and preserved, there is always the threat of forgetting. Lisa Kahaleole Hall describes this threat: “Because colonization relies on forced forgetting and erasure, the need to bring the past forward into our consciousnesses is ongoing. Reconstructing tradition and memory is a vital element of indigenous survival, and there is nothing simple or one-dimensional about the process of reconstruction” (279). This anxiety of forgetting echoes an editorial in *Ka Makaainana* in 1896 following the republic’s English-only law: “E hooliloia ana anei ka hanauna hou o Hawaii nei ma ka papa o na poe kuaaina a me hupo? Ina aole pela, alaila e imi koke a hoomaopopo i ka moolelo oiaio a me ke kuauhau o Hawaii nei” (qtd. in Office of Hawaiian Affairs, *Mo’okū’auhau* 3), or “Will the new generation of Hawaii nei become a class of backwards and ignorant people? In order for this not to happen, we should quickly seek to understand the true history and genealogy of Hawai‘i.” Tellingly, the equation of mo’okū’auhau with “ka moolelo oiaio,” or “the true history” and the comparison of those without knowledge of mo’okū’auhau to “na poe kuaaina a me hupo,” or “backwards and ignorant people,” illustrates the cultural and pedagogical importance of mo’okū’auhau for Kānaka.

Well over a century later, Osorio’s anxiety of forgetting her own mo’okū’auhau mirrors *Ka Makaainana* and is expressed through her words and the mournful tone of her voice and gestures, as she realizes her great-grandparents and their middle names may have been forgotten. Following Kamehameha IV’s passage of a law in 1860 (urged by missionaries) that all Hawaiians must take on the surname of their fathers and adopt Christian names along with their Hawaiian names, Hawaiian middle names became a way to carry the names of one’s maternal lineage. Thus, in forgetting the middle names of her great-grandparents, there is the possibility of forgetting entire lines of ancestors. Osorio underscores the forgetting of middle names as ancestral loss in her next lines: “But there is a culture, a people somewhere beneath my skin that I have been searching for.” Osorio then urges us as Hawaiians to recognize the importance of remembering our roots, our ancestors:

But our roots cannot remember themselves  
Cannot remember how to dance if we don't chant for them  
And will not sing unless we are listening.  
but our tongues feel too foreign in our own mouths  
we don't dare speak out loud  
and we, cant even remember our own parents names

In these lines, Osorio highlights how most contemporary Kānaka do not 'ōlelo Hawai'i, and so “our tongues feel too foreign in our own mouths and we don't dare speak out loud,” which has led to a deep sense of shame and the inability to remember how to properly pronounce or speak the names of our parents and kūpuna the way that they did—a devastating example of cultural loss and colonial domination. Thus, she urges fellow Kānaka:

do not forget what's left  
cuz this is all we have  
and you won't find our roots online

We have no dances or chants if we have no history  
just rants  
no roots  
just tears

Much of the rest of Osorio's “Kumulipo” performance articulates the desire for continued Hawaiian cultural and language revitalization and for the continued practice of mo'okū'auhau:

i want to teach my future children  
how to spell family with my middle name—Heolimeleikalani  
how to hold love with Kamakawiwo'ole  
how to taste culture in the Kumulipo

While Osorio uses her own middle name, Heolimeleikalani, and her father's middle name, Kamakawiwo'ole, to stress the continuity of family and personal mo'okū'auhau, she upholds the Kumulipo as a carrier of Kanaka culture and history, thereby asserting that both the personal practice of mo'okū'auhau and the study of the Kumulipo as a kind of national mo'okū'auhau

are necessarily a part of the decolonizing process of cultural and ancestral reconnection.

In Osorio's performance, her great-grandparents' middle names are not recovered, or at least, they are not included as part of the mo'okū'auhau (given in Hawaiian) that she shares in her White House performance, wherein she declares, "This is all I have of my family history / And now it's yours":

‘O Elroy Thomas Leialoha Osorio he kāne, ‘o Clara Ku‘ulei Kay he wahine  
 Noho pū lāua a hānau ‘ia o Jonathan Kamakawiwoole Kay Osorio he kāne  
 ‘O Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwoole Osorio he kane, ‘o Mary Carol Dunn  
 he wahine  
 Noho pū lāua a hānau ‘ia o Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio he wahine

Mo'okū'auhau begin with the eldest ancestors, distinguishing between male and female, and culminate with the performer. Osorio follows this model, recognizing her paternal grandparents, her parents, and then herself. That she performs her mo'okū'auhau in Hawaiian exercises her language sovereignty, but also her rhetorical and aesthetic sovereignty. Osorio's performance of her mo'okū'auhau within her poem "Kumulipo" demonstrates the presence of a distinctly Kanaka Maoli culture and language, a political act in and of itself that highlights the colonized status of Hawaiians but also articulates the urgency of resisting colonial co-optation through cultural and historical recovery and self-identification in terms of ancestry. Certainly, these elements are clear for Osorio's general audience, who may also be able to surmise that Osorio observes a Hawaiian cultural tradition of mo'okū'auhau in her performance.

Though 'ōlelo Hawai'i may be the obvious choice for sharing one's mo'okū'auhau, her language choice excludes all nonspeakers, which in this performance includes the president of the United States. This exclusion makes a powerful statement, expressing Osorio's nationalist loyalties to Hawai'i. In using 'ōlelo Hawai'i to share her mo'okū'auhau, her very identity, she exercises the rhetorical sovereignty to choose a Hawaiian-speaking, largely Kanaka audience. Moreover, in sharing her mo'okū'auhau within a poem called "Kumulipo," she aligns herself and her ancestors with the cultural, political, and spiritual teachings of the Kumulipo and follows Lili'uokalani's model of a return to mo'okū'auhau as colonial resistance.

Osorio's performed "Kumulipo" concludes with the lines "do not forget us / mai poina," exhibiting bilingual repetition, as "mai poina" translates as "don't

forget.” These brief lines, which follow her mo‘okū‘auhau, draw a kaona connection to the queen’s imprisonment. Before her trial by U.S. military tribunal, Lili‘uokalani was actively working with the Hui Aloha ‘Āina and the Hui Kālai ‘Āina to petition against U.S. annexation. The queen’s imprisonment by the republic conveniently delayed her from petitioning the United States to reinstate her throne, so before she began serving her sentence, she handed out ribbons to her supporters that read “Mai Poina ‘Oe Ia‘u,” or “Don’t forget me,” to ensure that resistance and the petitioning process continued. Osorio’s closing lines, therefore, forge a kaona connection with the queen and the antiannexation movement.

The concluding lines demonstrate how Osorio is speaking to two audiences through kaona—one, an English-speaking general American audience, which includes the president; and the other, an English- and Hawaiian-speaking Kanaka audience. As such, the meaning somewhat differs. Aside from language, the lines differ in that the English line includes the word “us,” indicating here an exclusive Hawaiian collective, a “mākou” as opposed to a “kākou.” Together, her demonstration of the anxiety of colonized forgetting, her articulation of a desire to reconnect with ancestry and language, and her powerful (and exclusive) performance of her mo‘okū‘auhau in Hawaiian underscore “Don’t forget us” as “Don’t forget (what you have done/continue to do to) us.” On the other hand, “Mai poina” urges her Hawaiian audience to not forget our ancestors, who and where we came from, our history, and our culture. Of course, this urging has a nationalist underpinning as well, as Osorio demonstrates in the poem that Americanization has meant a near cultural genocide.

The written version of Osorio’s “Kumulipo” differs from her performance in that she traces her mo‘okū‘auhau back five generations and includes her siblings’ names alongside her own. This change suggests she is in the process of reconstructing memory, while also actively resisting forgetting:

‘O Waiwai‘ole ka Wahine, ‘O Kahinuonālani ke Kāne  
Noho pū lāua a hānau ‘ia ‘o Charles Moses Kamakawiwo‘ole he kāne

‘O Daisy Ka‘ai‘awa‘awa ka wahine, ‘o Charles Moses Kamakawiwo‘ole ke kāne  
Noho pū lāua a hānau ‘ia ‘o Eliza Leialoha Kamakawiwo‘ole he wahine

‘O Eliza Leialoha Kamakawiwo‘ole ka wahine, ‘o Emil Montero ke kāne  
Noho pū lāua, a hānau ‘ia ‘o Elroy Thomas Leialoha Osorio he Kāne.

‘O Elroy Thomas Leialoha Osorio ke kāne ‘o Clara Ku‘ulei Kay ka wahine  
Noho pū lāua a hānau ‘ia ‘o Jonathan Kamakawiwo‘ole Kay Osorio he kāne

‘O Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio ke kāne ‘o Mary Carol Dunn ka wahine  
Noho pū lāua a  
hānau ‘ia ‘o Duncan Andrew Kamakanaonākuahiwi Osorio he kāne  
hānau ‘ia ‘o Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio he wahine  
hānau ‘ia ‘o Hali‘aku‘uleialoha Kikahaikalāhiki Lehuau‘ionālani Osorio he wahine  
hānau ‘ia ‘o Lehuanani Alana Pilipa‘a Kim Osorio he wahine

Within the context of her written “Kumulipo,” Osorio’s same final two lines, “do not forget us / mai poina” following her mo‘okū‘auhau in Hawaiian may also address future descendants while showing what’s at stake of being lost without remembering one’s language and genealogy, as well as the ability to genealogize.

Osorio’s choice of poem for the White House performance is key. In choosing to perform “Kumulipo,” she uses kaona as a means of connection with the original Kumulipo while at the seat of American colonial power, at the White House in the presence of President Obama and the First Lady. In doing so, her performance is reminiscent of Queen Lili‘uokalani’s own travels to Washington, DC, to represent her people and to argue first against annexation and then against the dispossession of Hawaiian land. That these trips were preceded by the queen’s efforts to translate the Kumulipo, her own mo‘okū‘auhau, while imprisoned illustrates Lili‘uokalani’s own return to ancestry and culture within colonial confines, and the mana therein. In following Lili‘uokalani as a model, Osorio’s performance thus also subtly asserts her loyalty to Lili‘uokalani as an ali‘i and thus her allegiance to the Hawaiian Kingdom. In bringing “Kumulipo” to the seat of American power over a century later, Osorio assures her audiences that she has indeed not forgotten whom she comes from, the queen, or the memory of an independent Hawaiian Kingdom.

## THE KUMULIPO AND NATIVE GOVERNANCE AND SOVEREIGNTY

Because of the Kumulipo’s importance in Hawaiian history and culture, and because of the tremendous cultural significance placed on mo‘okū‘auhau in general, contemporary Hawaiians hold the Kumulipo within cultural memory.

The Kumulipo also represents a classical work of Kanaka Maoli literature and further helps, along with other classical works, to define the overall body of Kanaka Maoli literature. Thus, kaona is used within contemporary Hawaiian literature to situate the modern as part of a continuum of Hawaiian literature, an assertion of both literary nationalism and intertextuality. Contemporary kaona references to classical texts privilege Hawaiian cultural perspectives and epistemologies, and they celebrate the literary mo‘okū‘auhau within which the contemporary text must be read.

More than defining a literary tradition and asserting literary nationalism, however, kaona may also provide connections to cultural and experiential knowledge, as well as to the history associated with the text’s creation. Thus, when kaona connections are made to the Kumulipo within contemporary Kanaka Maoli texts, the kaona connections also encompass the deep sense of history related—the Hawaiian cosmogonic perspective and the epistemology it represents, as well as how the Kumulipo is the mo‘okū‘auhau of Kalākaua and Lili‘uokalani. Because of the Kumulipo’s association with Hawai‘i’s last two monarchs during its final years as an independent nation, the Kumulipo has also come to symbolize the legitimacy of Hawaiian sovereignty, standing as a theoretical framework supporting deep Hawaiian connections to ‘āina, which, in turn, reinforce Hawaiian assertions of sovereignty and calls for self-governance.

As Holt, Kalahale, and Takehiro’s works illustrate, the Kumulipo details our intimate and distinctly Kanaka genealogical connection to our islands and its plants and animals. In the “Foreword” (a play on the terms “foreword” and “forward”) to Pueo Press’s republication of Lili‘uokalani’s translation, Pualani Kanaka‘ole Kanahale notes that the “lesson” of the Kumulipo is “interconnection”: The Kumulipo “is a remembrance from the lipo of our deep past to the lipo of our unknown future. It heralds existence from dawn to dawn or the numerous beginnings and endings. . . . The Kumulipo recognized that the interrelationship of all things is an everlasting continuum, it is Ponahakeola, the chaotic whirlwind of life” (n.p.).

The lessons of interconnection and continuity in the Kumulipo further emphasize Hawaiian identity through kuleana (responsibility). By tracing our beginnings to the beginning of the universe, the Kumulipo shows how we are inseparably a part of the universe and intimately a part of the land and ocean surrounding us. This familial relationship accords the kuleana we have as descendants and family members to Hawai‘i, as we must care for Hawai‘i as we would our family. Of course, the fulfillment of this kuleana is dependent

on our self-determination and sovereignty as a people; we are not able to fully honor and care for our ‘āina, nor our culture and our people, so long as our lāhui is occupied by the United States, which controls and abuses our lands, ocean, and resources.

While the Kumulipo demonstrates the deep sense of history preceding humankind valued by our kūpuna, the oli also effectively establishes a long history of Native governance, title, and sovereignty. By recounting eight hundred generations of ali‘i in the final nine wā, the Kumulipo also firmly validates our people’s long history of sovereignty and Native governance. As colonialism is a system that must justify its means by emphasizing the colonized country’s ineptitude to govern and support itself, a text showing eight hundred generations of Native governance exposes the lie behind these claims. Furthermore, the Kumulipo also undermines American colonial rule in Hawai‘i, as the United States is relatively young, with only about nine generations within its national history, and just a mere four or five generations in Hawai‘i. The Kumulipo exposes both the foreignness of the United States in Hawai‘i as well as the youth of the United States in comparison to Hawai‘i, which is a lāhui with a much deeper history.

I close this chapter with a poem I wrote while in Aotearoa on a Fulbright grant in 2002. I had brought a copy of Lili‘uokalani’s translation of the Kumulipo with me, as well as Beckwith’s translation, so I could also have access to Kalākaua’s version of the Kumulipo in Hawaiian. Feeling homesick for Hawai‘i during one particularly cold and rainy day (and after enduring a couple of months of cold and rainy days prior), I passed a huge bush of blood-red hibiscus in full bloom. They took me back to warmer days and nights in my grandparents’ garden at home, and I felt so grateful for this sense of connection, however small, through ‘āina. I went back to my flat and read through the second wā, which recounts the births of plants and repeats these very important lines: “He nuku, he wai ka ‘ai a ka lā‘au / ‘O ke akua ke komo, ‘a‘oe komo kanaka,” or “An entrance, a flow of water, this is the realm of plants / Where the gods may enter, humans may not” (my translation and interpretation). I was inspired by these strong words to consider our place as humans as beneath those of plants, which are beings from whom we are supposed to learn rather than control, as well as aspects of creation that are not supposed to be for humankind. I wanted the kaona of this poem, “Red Hibiscus in the Rain,” to reflect this profound knowledge. If we follow and integrate the teachings of mo‘okū‘auhau like the Kumulipo, we must approach our earth with reverence, humility, and an openness to learn from our ‘āina, recognizing that we are the most recent and nascent of its life-forms.

*Red Hibiscus in the Rain*

Though the red fire-flower shivers with each tickle  
of water, her stigma hangs above her like a flare to catch  
a pill of pollen in her mouth, by chance. You ask her why  
and listen closely, as she begins the story of her birth—  
from calyx to pistil, filament to corolla—opening the folds  
of her thin-veined petals to reveal the light deep in her throat.

*He nuku, he wai ka 'ai a ka lā'au.*

*'O ke akua ke komo, 'a'oe komo kanaka.*

A chant of night falls from the clouds overhead and she closes,  
drawing the fire inside her petals, out of reverence for the stars.