

12-18-2020

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Recommended Citation

Detwiler, Kalilinoe (2020) "Contemporary Mo‘olelo: Filling the Literature Stream with Pacific Water," *Horizons*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://kahualike.manoa.hawaii.edu/horizons/vol5/iss1/21>

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Contemporary Mo'olelo

Filling the Literature Stream with Pacific Water

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English

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This paper discusses the essentialness of drawing from mo'olelo and traditional knowledge in creative works and conducting the production of those works through an Indigenous lens. I first identify the discourse community through which the research and conclusions are oriented, which is the Native Hawaiian community interested in telling stories through new mediums. I identify a concern of this community which is the number of storytellers who use Hawai'i as a backdrop for stories that misrepresent the community and culture in the entertainment industry as a commodity. Through the research, I identify the harm of allowing non-Indigenous voices to tell Indigenous stories. The research links mo'olelo to movements of rhetorical sovereignty and cultural perseverance. I propose a push toward ethical storytelling for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous creatives by orienting their work in traditional values including kuleana and aloha 'aina. Through a meta commentary of my animated capstone film Pua ka uahi, I demonstrate kuleana as an essential value during Hawai'i-based film production. Kuleana is the focal point through which production of creative works should be focused. On top of carefully considered visual and story choices, creators must be aware of and act on their kuleana during the pre-production, production, and post-production stages.

Introduction

Storytelling in the modern world has furthered horizons and opened infinite potentials as new technologies are used to create and disseminate. For Hawaiians, whose culture is rapidly evolving and adapting, the desire to bridge traditional culture to contemporary mediums is unavoidable and

exciting. The scholarship and meta commentary of my own creative work will expose how a foundation in traditional knowledge, mo'olelo, and kuleana prepares both Indigenous and non-Indigenous storytellers to ethically tell a story rooted in Hawai'i, uplifting Hawaiian culture through the adaptation of new media.

I have described my past and current films as wai, water, that flows as part of a greater stream. In the 'auwai, Hawai'i's



Kalilinoe Detwiler is currently pursuing an MA in English at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She is working on multiple animated short films that seek to further the discussion of ethical storytelling and Pacific representation in new media and literature. Through this project, she learned a great deal about her kuleana as a film director, artist, and Kanaka 'Ōiwi scholar. She is excited to keep the momentum going by producing more creative works and studying how storytelling changes across cultures.

irrigation ditch system, water is recycled so that all the lo'i are able to get fresh water and the kalo can grow. Contemporary literature is like the kalo that draws from the stream of mo'olelo and traditional knowledge, and the people will consume it and feed it to the next generation. For these reasons, scholars and creatives have a kuleana, responsibility, to put forth work and water that will feed the community. My interest lies in making visible the necessity of including traditional knowledge in representative and rhetorical pieces that will be consumed by local and national audiences. As a Native Hawaiian filmmaker, artist, and English scholar, I seek to tell stories that represent my identity and my culture in ways that have not been represented or have been represented falsely. I have been told by people in this community that they often see creatives outside of Hawai'i who want to tell Hawai'i-based stories, and within my own classes, I was designated as the Hawaiian who was expected to speak up, especially when not spoken to, when something was not "accurately" Hawaiian. Though the responsibility ultimately falls on the writer to be culturally responsible for their representation of Hawaiians and 'olelo Hawai'i, I was able to aid concerns that arose in the script and in the recording studio. By understanding current scholarship and the need to incorporate traditional knowledge in contemporary texts, I hope to be involved in how non-Indigenous voices may also ethically conduct their production so as to uplift Hawaiian culture. At the same time, I will be able to make decisions for my own art based on common discursive strategies and rhetorical perspectives.

The discourse community through which I ground my research consists of upcoming Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars with the intent to create literature including but not limited to film and music as a means of refilling the space in popular culture currently unoccupied or occupied by misrepresenting narratives of Hawaiian culture. I am interested in this community because the current group of artists and filmmakers will be the next generation to produce content in the new media and entertainment industry.

In this discussion, I will define terms used in Pacific literary scholarship using Cristina Bacchilega's "Legendary Hawai'i and the Politics of Place" and build off of the introduction with Jeffrey Carroll, Brandy Nālani McDougall, and Georganne Nordstrom's "Ho'ohuihui: Navigating the Pacific through Words" to establish the importance of mo'olelo in any Pacific creative work. Next, I will bring Scott Richard Lyons "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" and Malea Powell's "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing" into the conversation to describe how those creative works become necessary rhetorical texts through the inclusion of mo'olelo. Then I will talk between two contemporary pieces and ku'uialoha ho'omanawanui's "The Art and Politics of the Modern Hawaiian Wonder Tale" to question the strategies used in Indigenous works to maintain their rhetorical agenda while attracting different audiences and creat-

ing space for themselves within the entertainment industry. By identifying the harm of non-Indigenous voices successfully using these strategies without careful consideration of their rhetorical implications, I may begin to discuss how all storytellers may begin to tell works grounded in mo'olelo while pushing forward the Native Hawaiian lāhui. Lastly, I will provide a meta commentary on my own animated short film that draws directly from mo'olelo and the scholarship discussed in this paper with a focus on the values highlighted in Noenoe Goodyear-Ka'ōpua's "Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance: Hawaiian Studies Methodologies."

Use and Consumption of Mo'olelo

To reorient the value of folklore, history, and traditional knowledge as an essential part of contemporary Hawai'i creative works, 'Mo'olelo' is grounded in scholarship written by Cristina Bacchilega and in "Ho'ohuihui," providing a distinction between Indigenous understandings of mo'olelo with the present day consumption of "Legendary Hawai'i." Mo'olelo is a Hawaiian term that can be interpreted as a fragment of a story situated in one's history, a people's larger history, and a genealogy (Bacchilega 7). Additionally, "place" holds great value as it "situates events, heroes, tellers and listeners, memories and emotions in ways that connect the creation and transformation of landmarks with familial or genealogical relations" (Bacchilega 8). Mo'olelo interconnects stories with history and land, as opposed to having no foundation in reality. The interconnectedness that mo'olelo creates between place, history, and people is seconded in "Ho'ohuihui" which names the Pleiades cluster as Kūpuku, a community that symbolizes the Hawaiian community that has been "woven together with stories—stories that give life to a people by conveying their history, culture, struggles, and resilience" (Carroll, et al. 10). To contrast the Indigenous value and power that mo'olelo holds, Bacchilega continues that in the capitalist American society, mo'olelo became the commodity known as "Legendary Hawai'i" which were "legends" that were served "like raw materials" to "non-Hawaiians (and especially Americans) to experience, via Hawaiian legends, a Hawai'i that is exotic and primitive while beautiful and welcoming" (Bacchilega 5). Mo'olelo in this case became a marketable commodity that was stripped of confusing cultural implications that an audience not situated in Hawai'i or familiar with other mo'olelo would understand. The market and consumption of what Bacchilega coins "Legendary Hawai'i" is a potential reason why the issue of non-Indigenous voices telling Indigenous stories came to exist. Mo'olelo carries cultural weight and implications as well as esoteric qualities that change the value of a creative work when used intentionally, and the next paragraph will connect the presence of rhetorical agendas with representative texts.

Mo'olelo as Rhetorical Sovereignty, Survivance, and Cultural Perseverance

Scott Richard Lyons “Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?” and Malea Powell’s “Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing,” demonstrate how mo’olelo used in moments of rhetorical sovereignty and survivance can change misrepresenting narratives of culture and place, restricting the telling of these stories to Indigenous voices. Rhetorical sovereignty is “the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires . . . to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (Lyons 449). Bacchilega, similarly, illustrates how within mo’olelo there is a “process of cultural construction” that is “situated in the pre-occupation and negotiation of the present, a process where every teller engages with the past and interprets it so as to affect listeners or readers” (Bacchilega 1). The traditional aspect of mo’olelo makes it a form of rhetorical sovereignty as the “teller” is bringing traditional knowledge to the present in a form to serve a goal in which the discourse is essential in moving the audience. Hawaiians have an inherent right to tell contemporary stories that draw from mo’olelo.

Closely tied to the term rhetorical sovereignty is survivance, which is another goal that contemporary pieces can serve. Survivance seeks to resist and survive under a colonial power, and the individual uses survivance to “reimagine, and literally, refigure” false titles assigned to them by the colonizer (Powell 400). An author practicing survivance can be seen on the surface level as a submissive entity that has given in to imitation of the dominant in order to simply survive. Survivance is similar to cultural perseverance, which Ellen Cushman in “We’re Taking the Genius of Sequoyah into This Century” describes as an adaptation of culture and traditions in the contemporary and the continued evolution across generations using new tools as they are invented or introduced (Cushman 71). Mo’olelo in contemporary literature can be a form of survivance if it appears to imitate popular tropes while making political or emotional points of resistance that are noticed by people within the teller’s community. Mo’olelo can also be a part of the push for cultural perseverance because of the contemporary medium, chosen not in response to an oppressive force but as a means of reinvention and to bring traditional knowledge to the present. Creative Indigenous works often seek to combine “the political and the poetic, the rhetorical and the aesthetic” so that creators can “appeal to audience members simultaneously on a multitude of levels” (Caroll, et al. 5), which is the main goal in incorporating mo’olelo in creative works of cultural perseverance, survivance, and rhetorical sovereignty. Contemporary mo’olelo should not imitate just to imitate in order to be successful across outside audiences. It should possess kaona, a hidden meaning or deeper

message, that pushes the lāhui and their identity to the contemporary stage.

The problem occurs when non-Indigenous voices, or creatives who are not oriented in a Hawaiian perspective, bring mo’olelo forward and imitate Western storytelling tropes in order to satisfy Eurocentric audiences, instead of using it to uplift the Hawaiian community. A non-Indigenous voice practicing Indigenous storytelling risks perpetuating false narratives because of their inclination toward a “Legendary Hawai’i.” In order to create a path for non-Indigenous creatives to ethically tell stories that uplift rather than offend, the conversation should begin on whether certain strategies of creating space in the entertainment industry is necessary in order for creative works to survive among Eurocentric counterparts.

The Discursive Strategy Bridging Mo’olelo and Popular Culture

Incorporating Western elements is an essential discursive strategy to make space for Pacific stories in the entertainment industry. Two modern representative texts will be analyzed by ku’ualoha ho’omanawanui’s “The Art and Politics of the Hawaiian Wonder Tale” to show how the strategy can be successful but also hurt Hawaiian representation. ho’omanawanui suggests that Del Beazley’s “Hawaiian Sup’pa Man” has aligned the traditional hero, Maui, with the American Superman through his deeds. By connecting the two, Beazley seems to have opened his song to both Hawai’i locals and Americanized youths (ho’omanawanui 48), effectively inserting Hawaiian values seen in Maui’s deeds like aloha and kuleana, as well as Hawai’i Creole English which is historically rhetorical, in popular culture. In this example, an Indigenous voice relies on both Hawaiian and Western symbols to create a successful work. A contrasting example is Disney, a non-Indigenous voice that uses the same strategy. Maui in Disney’s *Moana* demonstrates the “colonial trope of the emasculated buffoon” (ho’omanawanui 70) which allowed him to take up space in the film industry through comedy, entertaining Western audiences while lacking intentional metaphor and symbolism that would make Pacific audiences feel represented. “Ho’ohuihui” emphasizes the importance of understanding “the old metaphors” and creating new ones “for the sake of understanding and further work” (Caroll, et al. 1). Without symbolism to reference its Pacific origins and values, Disney’s Maui falls short as a representative figure of traditional values in contemporary art. Maui entered popular culture as both a superhero and “misogynistic clown” (ho’omanawanui 70), showing some necessity to acknowledge and use Western devices and archetypes if a creator wants to be consumed on a larger scale. The conversation, then, must discuss how non-Indigenous voices can navigate this discursive strategy. The answer, I propose, begins in the pre-production process.

Navigating the Creative and Production Process Through a Hawaiian Lens

Non-Indigenous voices may begin to tell Indigenous stories by turning to traditional knowledge and values like aloha 'aina and kuleana for all stages of production. Prior to the incorporation of traditional stories to adapt a culture to modern storytelling modes, non-Indigenous producers must first root their stories in the land and people because of mo'olelo's interconnectedness to land as explained above in "Ho'ohuihui." By understanding the greater story and kaona, one will naturally begin to see the connection between the people and place. Once achieving an understanding of aloha 'aina, one must then mālama 'aina and take care of that land, history, and genealogy. In the pre-productions stage this mālama 'aina may look like visiting the storied place and talking to people who have cultural knowledge while also working directly on the land. Secondly, producers have a kuleana to move the lāhui forward with their creative work by appointing those rooted in the Native Hawaiian community as key personnel who control the direction of the work. Kuleana in the pre-production stage may look like involving cultural advisors and mentors, learning 'ōlelo Hawai'i, and listening to kupuna and kumu. Kuleana during the production and post-production stage may include mentoring young Indigenous creatives in the craft in order to give them access to an otherwise gated industry. For film specifically, I have observed that by including Native Hawaiian voices in the script writing and storyboarding phase, the story itself evolves through multiple revisions to more soundly represent Hawai'i. The Pacific Islanders in Communication is one organization that funds projects that have a "Training Plan" for "emerging Pacific Islander filmmakers, talent, and technical crew" ("Digital Shorts Fund") in order to ensure a dedication to the Pacific community and an uplifting of Pacific talents. This organization is one example of a push for all storytellers, regardless if they are Indigenous or not, to bring forward Pacific representation in digital media. Only when the story and the production process is grounded in an Indigenous lens will a non-Indigenous voice begin to ethically tell a story that pulls away from "Legendary Hawai'i."

With an aesthetic that attracts national audiences, Hawaiian mo'olelo is able to push forward culture perseverance among other rhetorical agendas because of the weight it carries for Hawaiians. This body of scholarship directs readers to see the potential for mo'olelo in contemporary creative works and the danger of having those stories be told by creatives positioned outside of the Pacific, who are uninterested in exercising their kuleana. This work also proposes a collaboration between non-Indigenous creatives and Indigenous voices, as well as Indigenous creators and non-Indigenous techniques in order to tell new stories that adapt culture to contemporary forms. In my own future films and projects, I will take care

to ground traditional knowledge in modern settings to expose and develop contemporary concerns that are normally glossed over when the Pacific is used as a backdrop in non-Indigenous media. Finally, I intend to carefully mitigate between mo'olelo and artistic liberties necessary in telling a story that is accessible to youths in and outside of Hawai'i.

Animated Capstone Film *Pua Ka Uahi*

The animated capstone film titled *Pua Ka Uahi* is a culmination of my film and animation courses, studies in rhetoric, and research of Pacific folklore. The film is an animated short informed by the mo'olelo of Pele and Kamapua'a while existing separately in order to tell a story that showcases the land of Hawai'i while exploring the artistic liberties of animation in practicing cultural perseverance. Noenoe Ka'ōpua Goodyear in her introduction to *'Ōiwi Methodologies* reminds research practitioners, and by extension creators of Hawai'i-representative literatures, to "be conscious of the political stakes of our research" (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 9). As the writer, director, and animator, I am aware of this film's ability to represent a grand network of mo'olelo, people, and culture to audiences with uncontrollable interpretations. As a Hawaiian scholar, my kuleana begins with recognizing that my audience is the Native Hawaiian community, and the goal of the film is to contribute to the discussion of Indigenous representation in animation. It is also my kuleana to draw from traditional knowledge and navigate through the storytelling and production phases with a focus on adapting those elements to the new technologies of animation. Through this carefully crafted short film, Indigenous storytellers will see that they can also tell wonder-filled stories that are accessible to greater audiences while doing it in their native tongue.

Audience

The intended audience of my film is young Indigenous creatives interested in storytelling using non-traditional mediums. The film will also be accessible to audiences outside of Hawai'i, showing a need for eko'a, duality, and the negotiation between counterparts. Bacchilega suggests that when negotiating between mo'olelo and the present, the teller is engaging and interpreting so as to influence their listeners (Bacchilega 1). Goodyear-Ka'ōpua pushes this notion further by suggesting that "When sharing knowledge, the entire process enriches the community that participates in the inquiry" (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 16). Kuleana is mobilized by bringing in the community to ensure cultural sensitivity and a forward progression of art and representation. My audience will be involved and mentored during the production stages in order to "enrich" the community while aiding the culture in its adaptation to new tech-

nologies. Within the production stage, I will work with ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i speakers, and all of the sound engineering will be conducted at MELE Studio at Honolulu Community College by another kanaka maoli scholar studying sound design and production. The fostering of Pacific talents is also a direct benefit of the film format of this project.

Film Medium

Film was chosen as the medium of this product in order to combine Western cinematics and technologies with Indigenous storytelling. Cushman draws from Sequoyah, the creator of the Cherokee writing system, to demonstrate how the creation of the writing system impressed upon Western ideologies that the Cherokee were noble and civilized (Cushman 68). The rewriting of Western understandings of the Cherokee people is in part due to Sequoyah’s “appeal” to his Western counterparts “on a multitude of levels” (Carroll, et al. 5) which aided in the survival of the Cherokee language. Film is an example of Cushman’s notion of adapting and evolving culture as new tools become available, and one of those tools is animation.

Animation is unique in its ability to control technical visual elements like colors and motion. Artists have the ability to emphasize specific details like wind, fire, and water, that are not easily manipulated in a little to no budget live-action film. A peer in my capstone production course, who is directing a short film about two young girls on Kaua‘i, notes that a benefit of animation is the ability to tell stories through children, a warned-against endeavor for student filmmakers. Animators are able to incorporate esoteric visuals like kinolau and hula and make those properties visually exciting using advanced animation software to appeal directly to Indigenous audiences. Beyond the level of rhetorical content, by telling stories with animation, I am also spreading an awareness that this mode of storytelling is accessible and audiences can use these tools to further adapt their culture.

Rhetorical Strategies

While the inclusion of Native Hawaiian and Hawai‘i-based scholars and creatives lend my film a certain amount of ethos, my kuleana goes beyond careful crewmember considerations. The content of the story, including characters, color, and motion, are oriented through an Indigenous perspective to aid the rhetorical process. Lilikalā Dorton notes in her thesis “A Legendary Tradition of Kamapua‘a, the Hawaiian Pig-God” that “it might be argued that Kamapua‘a was the Hawaiian male prototype, as Pele was the female counterpart” (Dorton 3). The subjects of the film, Pele and Kamapua‘a, were chosen for the purpose of relating with young Native Hawaiians since Kamapua‘a is not the antagonized pig that non-Indigenous

voices often represent him as. The entire film is spoken in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i which contributes to the film’s pathos by evoking a sense of connectedness to Native Hawaiians. Visually, the vast representation of land and place not only adds to the film’s credibility as a carefully researched project of Hawai‘i island and its mo‘olelo, but it also evokes feelings of nostalgia for “home” as viewers recognize places like Kīlauea, Mauna Kea, and Waialele ‘O Waiānūenuē. Instead of the storybook-vibrant colors often used in Hawai‘i animations, this film relies on pastel color palettes to explore a style that is less fantasy like and unlike Hawai‘i-based animations that have come before. The less vibrant the colors are, the more everything begins to blend together in a more painterly style and the audience will focus on the movement.

Traditional knowledge, mo‘olelo, and metaphors are sprinkled throughout the film and were chosen intentionally, but there were also some details that I had to forego because of the medium and intended audience. Some visuals include hula to signify the characters Hi‘iaka and Poli‘ahu. A spiral which is an important symbol in Pacific culture can symbolize life, growth, and time. An ‘ohelo berry is seen in the beginning to foreshadow Pele’s character before she appears on screen. There is light imagery, including Kamapua‘a lifting a large rock under the water, that alludes to *kūkini* runners to not only signify the origin of the film’s title but also the race across the land. Finally, Kamapua‘a’s character design practices how to use *kinolau* in animation, which would be a confusing concept in linear storytelling because when a character’s appearance changes, the audience must now work to understand that one character’s three faces.

Similar to how “Hawaiians have passed down the story of Kamapua‘a from one generation to another, changing minor details to suit their purposes and adding new anecdotes of their own to the list of . . . adventures” (Dorton 3), I had to change small details in order to suit this particular story. Kamapua‘a often used his little pig form rather than his large pig form when committing his mischievous deeds (Dorton 144), and lent himself his fish form when outrunning and escaping Pele’s fires (Dorton 148). While brainstorming how to keep the audience engaged through the transformations between kinolau, I had to choose when to prioritize storytelling techniques and when to draw directly from traditional mo‘olelo. Kamapua‘a’s malo would have in other texts been colored black or red, but I chose blue in order to have a visual character consistency with the dark blue stripe on his humuhunukunukuapua‘a form. Additionally, his pig form is brown instead of black so that the transition from his pig to human skin can be followed visually even if the audience doesn’t speak ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. Pele is commonly represented in Hawai‘i visual rhetoric as a full-bodied, powerful, *mana wahine*. In the film, Pele’s character was designed to make her 3D model easier to manipulate during action sequences, which is where I showcase her strength. Her vocal ban-

ter with Kamapua'a reminds audiences of her fiery attitude and confidence. Color-wise, I leave the red hues to the environment and give her kihei a white and yellow kapa color so that she stands out in the constantly changing landscape. All of the characters are designed to look young in order to appeal to young creative audiences. By designing them to look like everyday people, Pele and Kamapua'a are seen through a slice-of-life lens and audiences may even be able to imagine them traversing the island today.

Conclusion

As the film wraps and becomes whole, the kuleana of disseminating the film and research again falls on me as the director. Goodyear-Ka'ōpua emphasizes that like the water that flows in and out of the lo'i, mana and knowledge must also flow "properly" so that "growth can occur" for the ea, or sovereignty and leadership (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 12). Ultimately, the research and how it has informed my project is a step toward making culturally responsible artistic works. Through this experience, I and those involved are better equipped to move the discussion toward a better flowing 'auwai. Even as conversations begin on proper or improper use of visual rhetoric and cultural symbols within my own creative work, what matters most is that the discussion has begun for kanaka maoli scholars and creatives to decide for themselves how best to tell their stories. As the film reaches festivals around the Pacific and the world, I will continue to speak to audiences about the role film serves and how the next animation will further uplift the lāhui. Indigenous youths will know that it is possible to tell old and new stories using the ever evolving set of tools and technologies, and that there is a space for them in the film industry without sacrificing traditional culture. The momentum of this project will continue until the next creative work, which will only move the community toward a more culturally responsible representation of Pacific identity in new media. As a Native Hawaiian scholar and creative, this project is my kuleana to Hawai'i.

Glossary

Ea—While ea has multiple meanings including "life," in this paper I am referring to ea as a sovereignty, an independent, self-governing nation.

Kanaka Maoli—A Native Hawaiian person.

Kihei—A traditional garment made of cloth or kapa. Kihei are commonly tied above the shoulder and are worn in ceremonies and other traditional activities or practices.

Kinolau—Physical forms, bodies, or manifestations of akua (gods) and kupua (demigods). Kamapua'a is a kupua that may take on various forms including the humuhumu-

nukunukuapua'a fish, the 'ama'u fern, the hog, and the small pig. Kinolau may share similar characteristics or provide insight to specific mo'olelo.

Kūkini—Kūkini runners were athletic messengers of ali'i (leaders, chiefs) and were able to cross great distances very quickly. They undergo special training at a young age. Kūkini races occur between two of these athletic individuals as they start at one point together and race toward a final location.

Kuleana—Hawaiian traditional value with many meanings. Kuleana may refer to one's responsibility, one's right, or one's possession. In this paper I discuss one's kuleana, responsibility and duty, to their community through their craft.

Lāhui—In this paper lāhui refers to the Native Hawaiian community. It also refers to the Native Hawaiian people and nation as a whole. To be a part of the lāhui is to understand the history, ideology, values, and needs of the group while also understanding one's role and responsibility.

Lo'i—In this paper I refer to lo'i kalo or the kalo patch which thrives with a fresh water irrigation system. Water is filtered through the crops and the kalo grows. Kalo is an important staple, symbol, and ancestor for Native Hawaiians.

Mana wahine—A warrior woman, a powerful woman who is full of mana and strength. Mana wahine are respected individuals and possess authority. Patriarchal hierarchy and clear-cut gender structures didn't exist in Pacific culture, and women generally held as much power and wisdom as men.

Mo'olelo—History, genealogy, story. Mo'olelo has multiple meanings. One of these meanings is "folklore," but mo'olelo is not meant to render a story fictional. While the stories often recount folkloric creatures or people, they are connected to the land and many times provide information on the origin and the creation of mountains, rivers, entire islands, plants, animals, and people. Mo'olelo were originally passed down orally and are interconnected to tell a greater story. There are many levels to mo'olelo that makes it difficult to understand without knowledge of Hawai'i, Hawaiian culture, 'ōlelo Hawai'i, and relevant histories.

Wai—Water. Wai is an important symbol in Hawaiian culture as it holds power and is deeply rooted in history and traditional values. Water, as it flows in the 'auwai, connects the land to the people and feeds the people. Life began from pō (darkness), like the deep depths of the ocean. There are many 'ōlelo no'eau that emphasize the importance of wai.

'Auwai—Fresh water irrigation system commonly used for the lo'i. Small streams lead water from a river or origin stream, through the crops, then back to the origin, which is released into the ocean.

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