

Why We Must Protect Mākua Valley

by Dr. Trisha Kehaulani Watson

June 14, 2009

“E mālama i ka makua, he mea laha ‘ole.”

Mary Kawena Pukui explained this ‘ōlelo no‘eau to mean “parents should be cared for, for when they are gone, there are none to replace them.” To Hawaiians, Mākua Valley in Wai‘anae represents our parents; Mākua is a kinolau or physical body form of the parents of all Hawaiians. A particularly sacred place, or wahi pana, the protection of Mākua remains as of vital import to Native Hawaiians as the protection and caring for our human parents. The occupation and desecration of Mākua is both a physical and spiritual offensive against the residing indigenous people of this land.

Mākua’s rich history extends back as many as thirty-five generations, as early as the 8th century. Mākua houses a rich spiritual history that reflects its deep significance to the Hawaiian people. Even today, as one stands in the valley, hō‘ailona appear regularly to those who help mālama Mākua.

Whether in the form of clouds, timely and pointed winds (called makani, a Hawaiian word also meaning ghost or spirit), or images that appear in the mountains or valley floor, signs or hō‘ailona serve as telling reminders of the powerful spirituality of Mākua.

In 1977, renowned anthropologist Marion Kelly would lead a study on Mākua for the Bishop Museum that collected extensive interviews and documents on Mākua that served as one of the first studies to respectfully include the spiritual history of a place. Kelly’s study now serves as a vital repository for the cultural and social history of Mākua. In her study, she places strong emphasis upon folklore and spiritual knowledges.

References of this second and spiritual form of knowledge or being can be commonly found in certain parts of our language. Specifically, in concepts like ‘ike pāpālua, or second sight or knowledge. Mary Kawena Pukui defines this term as “To see double; to have the gift of second sight and commune with the spirits; supernatural knowledge.” This references the idea that

knowledge or understanding for Hawaiians came in part from a spiritual realm or from akua, the gods. Another similar concept is 'ike pāpālua, or second form. Pukui explains this term: "to have a dual form, as the demigod Kamapua'a, who could change from man to hog." Mākua served as home to a similar figure, the mo'ō of Mākua.

In heavy rains, the mo'ō come down the stream from Ko'iahi to meet her boyfriend, the shark from Kāneana Cave. When the stream flows strong, it breaks through the sand beach and flows into the sea. The mo'ō goes into the sea and goes on the big rock next to the blow hole at the Wai'anae end of the beach. The rock is called Pōhaku-kū-la'ila'i. On this rock, she would turn herself into a beautiful princess and call to him. The shark would come out of Kāneana Cave through the undersea channel and swim out to the blow-hole. He would then turn into a man, and he and the princess would make love. When they were ready they would go to live in the stream. And when the water is green the mo'ō is in the stream. When it is clear she is not. No swimming is allowed when the mo'ō is in the stream.

Another important part of Mākua was the cave, known to local residents as "Kāneana Cave." One woman recollects: "And my father was there to oversee when they opened the cave. And my father said, 'His human form of [Kaneana] is still up on that hill, and he watches for you when you go to the beach to go swimming, or to try and catch fish. He can change himself to a shark and come and get you and bring you in that cave and eat you.'" Mākua remains particularly alive with traditions that speak to the natural resource management of the area. Yet, mo'olelo were also used to teach proper behavior.

A resident recollects about the lessons she learned at the cave in Mākua.

The entrance of that cave is out by the long reef they call Papalooa. And she has an opening underneath. If you go way out to the end, and you just stand like that, you will see a big opening. And he enters through there, and he can have anyone that treats him mean. That is where he takes them, down below. If you ever entered that cave, you will see the water. Down below, there's a pool. We were made to crawl into that cave, and we didn't want to go. Just to teach us a lesson we went. And when we went, and the time he took his captives all in there, and then he killed them, the blood. And it [the cave] is a beautiful thing. And the only thing that got me scared was the sharks (sic) head. It was a big sharks (sic) head right on the stone. I don't know if _____. [Dad said,] "Pretty soon you'll be one of them, lady, because of your big mouth." I have

a bad temper, and in that cave I kept my mouth shut. Now you crawl out. That is how he gets out and changes into a man. Lot of the old folks and the children named him if we disobeyed. We were not as fussy then. No, no, we do it, we do it.

The lessons present in traditional folklore also contained social values and community norms. Mākua teaches us about our culture and our history, as a parent does its child.

Story-telling and cultural narratives speak to history, contemporary norms, resource management, essentially every aspect of life. When those narratives are silenced, entire histories can be effectively wiped away.

The military can no longer deny Mākua's critical cultural and ecological importance. An alternative site for military activities and live-free training, which the Army is currently attempting to resume in the valley, must be found.

Source: <http://hehawaiiiau.honadvblogs.com/2009/06/14/why-we-must-protect-makua-valley/>

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