Critiquing Settler-colonial Conceptions of 'Vulnerability' through Kaona in Mary Kawena Pūku'i's Mo'olelo, "The Pounded Water of Kekela"

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As Nicole George notes in *Climate Hazards, Disasters, and Gender Ramifications,* Pacific Islanders are "the first communities to be negatively impacted as we enter an era known as the Anthropocene" (113). For Indigenous peoples of the Pacific, environmental change is not part of an "impending climate crisis" (Whyte, "Indigenous Science" 225) or "doomed" future (McNamara and Farbotko 18) but is a lived reality. Having endured and survived changing environmental conditions for centuries, Pacific Islanders possess a host of traditional, ancestral knowledges that enable not only survival, but the ability to thrive amidst extreme weather events, one of which is drought. Due to the colonial conditions that have created climate change and inform its mitigation strategies, however, global powers frequently dismiss Pacific Islanders as 'vulnerable', and, I argue, use this logic of 'vulnerability' to exclude Indigenous peoples and Indigenous knowledges from climate change responses.

This article aligns itself with scholarship that asserts that climate change and the conditions that produce climate change vulnerability are a direct result of colonialism (Whyte "Indigenous Climate Change Studies" 153; Robinson 312). Kyle Whyte encapsulates this relationship in his statement, "climate change is an intensification of environmental change imposed on Indigenous peoples by colonialism" ("Indigenous Climate Change Studies" 153), and similarly, Angela Robinson makes the case that "climate change functions in many ways as an affective regime of colonialism" (312). This is particularly pertinent when considering the relationship between colonial

powers and Indigenous nations in the Pacific, as Robinson explains: "Insofar as the United States has been the primary contributor to climate change and its effects, it is therefore largely implicated in and responsible for the environmental devastation occurring in Oceania" (320). This article builds upon this scholarship by foregrounding the gendered components of this "affective regime" (Robinson 312) and the ways in which it disproportionately impacts Indigenous women. As a structure, settler colonialism does not exist in isolation, but intersects with heteropatriarchy and capitalism. It is the triangulation of these structures that has produced our current climate crisis and continues to monopolise mitigation strategies. As Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill explain, "settler colonialism has been and continues to be a gendered process" (9), and it is the gendered elements of settler colonialism and its use of "vulnerability" that this article seeks to explore in relation to climate change responses. I argue that the colonial and "masculinised nature of contemporary climate change governance" (George 115) now weaponises gendered vulnerability to climate change to perpetuate the colonial myth that Indigenous women need to be "instructed, led and managed" (Fordham et al 8) and prevents Pacific Island women from leading adaptation strategies to drought and disaster management. As Robinson suggests, "Attempts to delay solutions that effectively address climate change can thus be framed within the larger regime of US colonialism and imperialism" (320), and it is for this reason that the concept of climate change "vulnerability" needs to be analysed within the context of the Pacific's settler-colonial history.

Building upon recent efforts to foreground the political utility of Pacific literature (Oh; Robinson), this article turns to a Hawaiian story, or mo'olelo, "The Pounded Water of Kekela", to challenge the colonial and patriarchal conceptions of Indigenous vulnerability. As Jenny Bryant-Tokalau states, "islanders and their countries are not always as vulnerable as they may appear, and had, in the past, the ability to survive in

the face of environmental changes without a large amount of assistance from donors" (3). Hawaiian mo'olelo, or stories, make visible this long-standing ability to respond and adapt, and thus offer counter-narratives to contemporary discourses of climate change vulnerability. Through this first analysis of Mary Kawena Pūkui's fiction, I make the case that this vulnerability does not prevent Indigenous women from being central to the recovery and reparation of the environment. I examine Pūku'i's depiction of mana wahine, or "feminine spiritual power" (McDougall, "Wondering and Laughing" 27), to emphasise how Hawaiian women or wahine 'ōiwi are agents of change in forming responses to environmental change globally. I demonstrate how the navigation and combatting of environmental disaster is conceptualised through kaona, or metaphor, relating to the female body. It demonstrates how this mo'olelo at once provides a narrative of Indigenous, female adaptability, and also demonstrates how the lessons of the past (ka wā mamua - that which is in front of us) can guide Native Hawaiians in the wake of an unknowable future (ka wā mahope).

Critiquing the Deployment of 'Vulnerability' in Climate Change Discourse

In its original usage within climate change discourse, vulnerability encapsulates two circumstantial contexts: the initial propensity to anticipate or be harmed by environmental disaster, and the ability to recover from, or adapt to, the consequences of an environmental disaster (Wisner et al. 11; Kelman et al. 130; Kelman 8). In terms of exposure to risk, the Hawaiian Islands, along with other Pacific Islands and territories (PICTs),[1] are indeed vulnerable to effects of climate change including rising sea levels, coastal erosion and drought due to their geographical location and extensive littoral zones. It is the latter that this article, and Pūku'i's mo'olelo, are primarily concerned with, as Hawai'i's climate variability and reduced rainfall results in wide-spread droughts of various forms: meteorological, hydrological, ecological and agricultural

(Frazier et al. 96). The impacts of drought extend well beyond limited access to drinking water, as water scarcity then impacts diverse ecosystems across the archipelago as well as agricultural productivity (100). Reduced moisture in the soil can cause "plant stress" (96) as well as an increase in wildfires.

Under these conditions, the vulnerability of Pacific Island women to drought is well documented (Showalter, López-Carr and Ervin 60; Alston 41; Aipira et al. 227). Prior to colonialism, however, Pacific Islander women possessed the ability to recover from and adapt to drought and its ongoing effects. Writing about Native women from Fiji and the Marshall Islands specifically, George explains that: "women have played key leadership roles in their communities and on the international stage to build awareness of and respond to the damaging impacts of climate change phenomena" (125). Elizabeth McLeod et al. also state that Pacific Islander women "hold valuable traditional knowledge gained from their individual experiences adapting to environmental changes over generations" (179) and are "implementing climate-smart agriculture [and] revitalizing traditional practices that utilize drought-tolerant species and the benefits of nature" (2). Like Pūku'i, George and McLeod et al. ("Lessons"; "Raising") demonstrate that Pacific Islander women are not vulnerable to drought due to an inability to respond, as it is clear that Indigenous women have been responding for centuries. Rather, their research reveals that the vulnerability of wahine 'ōiwi is a result of the poverty, violence, and limited access to resources, the conditions of which are result of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy.

Recent scholarship outlines how female vulnerability to drought and the inability to adapt and respond to drought is the result of systemic oppression, and as Kirsten Vinyeta, Kyle Whyte and Kathy Lyn note: "Native Hawaiians have endured intersecting layers of oppression" at the level of colonial, racial and gendered oppression (2). Hawai'i, alongside other Pacific Islands, has for centuries existed under the

triangulation of settler colonialism, capitalism and heteropatriarchy. As J. Kēhaulani Kauanui explains: "the U.S. occupation in Hawai'i was founded on gendered oppression" (285), evident in the ways that "processes of colonialism eroded Hawaiian women's status" (282). As well as divesting Hawaiian women of political power and voting rights, the logics of settler colonialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy have sought to either restrict or invisiblise women's cultural, social and spiritual responsibilities to the land. Lisa Kahaleole Hall explains that "colonialism takes place through gendered and sexualized forms that reconstitute both individual and communal indigenous identities in stigmatized and disempowering ways" (15). Hall goes onto explain that "the legacy of colonial conquest and hyper-commodification has made Hawaiian women's experiences invisible or unintelligible within both dominant and counter-hegemonic discourses" (16). This disempowerment and invisiblisation of Hawaiian women is evident in relation to the role of wahine 'ōiwi in responses to drought, as patriarchal and colonial structures have prevented Native Hawaiian women from possessing leadership roles within their communities. It is the triangulation of settler colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy that has created the conditions of female vulnerability to drought, and perpetuated the notion that Indigenous women are in need of assistance.

The colonial and patriarchal conditions that have produced this gendered vulnerability are the same conditions that continue to prevent Pacific Island women from being given platforms to implement Indigenous knowledge and respond to climate disaster in ways that are culturally appropriate. As Haunani-Kay Trask explains: "The relationship between ourselves [Indigenous peoples] and those who want control of us and our resources is not a *formerly* colonial relationship, but an *ongoing* colonial relationship" (*From a Native Daughter* 103). The ongoing nature of this relationship is visible within the exclusionary nature of contemporary climate change governance.

Whyte explains that although "[c]limate change impacts affect Indigenous women more acutely [...] colonial policies for addressing climate change devalue the leadership of Indigenous women" ("Indigenous Climate Change Studies" 155). The continued invisiblisation of Pacific Island women from climate change strategies is particularly pertinent, as McLeod et al. note that "the perspectives of Pacific Island women are not included in the extensive literature on climate change" ("Raising the Voices" 179). McLeod et al. explain that "the lack of attention to the voices of Pacific Island women in climate research reflects a broader pattern of underrepresenting the importance of indigenous people, gender, and traditional knowledge" ("Raising the Voices" 179). It is these circumstances that lead me to argue that settler-colonial rhetoric deploys the notion of Indigenous, female "vulnerability" to limit Indigenous women's involvement in climate change responses. The colonial and "masculinised nature of contemporary climate change governance" (George 115) is using the notion of "vulnerability" as another "gendered barrier" (116) that prevents Pacific Island women from being included within disaster management and responses to climate change.

Mo'olelo and Mana Wahine

To begin to remedy this exclusion of Pacific Island women and Indigenous knowledge within climate change responses and foreground the resilient and adaptive capabilities, this article turns to a traditional form of Hawaiian storytelling, the mo'olelo. Mo'olelo are a form of Hawaiian intellectual production that "directly linked the kānaka to their land and spirituality" (de Silva and Hunter 1932), and thus preserve traditional, ancestral knowledges (ike kupuna). As well as encapsulating Hawaiian epistemologies and ontologies, mo'olelo demonstrate the significant social, cultural and spiritual roles and resilient capacities of Hawaiian women. As de Silva and Hunter explain, such stories "are crucial to understanding the power behind the voices of the women,

whose resiliency has survived millennia against many colonizing and assimilationist forces" (1935). The most famous mo'olelo, "Moolelo no Hiiakaikapoliopele" (1861-1863), tells of the akua wahine, or female deities, Pele and Hi'iaka, and encapsulates the power of these Hawaiian goddesses that has been passed down through genealogies. In 'ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language), this feminine power is referred to as mana wahine, which is a "strength" that is inherent, inherited from genealogies and ancestors such as earth mother Papahānaumoku and the volcano goddess Pele (ho'omanawanui 209). Turning to mo'olelo to access mana wahine in climate change contexts is necessary because as ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui explains, "mana wahine is exemplified through our mo'olelo because it is valued in our culture" (209). In their encapsulation of land-based epistemologies and ontologies, and female power, mo'olelo can destabilise rhetoric that presents Pacific Islanders, particularly women, as "vulnerable", and therefore unable to respond to climate change. Building on the work of Brandy Nālani McDougall, who makes the case that mo'olelo and mana wahine "enable strong social, political, economic, and cultural critiques that subvert colonialism, support ancestrally informed decolonial movements, and inspire people to act" ("Wondering and Laughing" 27), this paper demonstrates how mo'olelo and mana wahine continue to subvert the settler-colonial view that vulnerability to drought is synonymous with inability to respond to drought, and instead present Hawaiian women as integral to environmental recovery.

Native Hawaiian Mary Kawena Pūku'i played a central role in the collection of Hawaiian mo'olelo and traditions by interviewing Kanaka Maoli across various localities and transcribing mo'olelo and cultural knowledge (Maly and Maly 40). "The Pounded Water of Kekela" is one mo'olelo that Pūku'i recorded that conveys two simultaneous realities: that wahine 'ōiwi (Hawaiian women) are disproportionately impacted by the effects of drought, but that wahine 'ōiwi are central to the recovery and reparation of

the environment. This mo'olelo was initially told to Pūku'i "by an old man of Kona" (Pūku'i 66), however, it is important to note that "authors of the many mo'olelo wrote their own versions, using both mnemonic devices from the oral tradition and literary devices that developed over time" (Silva 160). Pūku'i first published her retelling of "The Pounded Water of Kekela" in English in the magazine *Paradise of the Pacific* in 1933, a monthly magazine "replete with stories by writers who live in the Islands" (1922 April issue 35 32).[2] It was then compiled in *Pīkoi and Other Legends of the Island of Hawai'i* by Pūku'i and Caroline Curtis in 1949 and republished as *Hawai'i Island Legends: Pīkoi, Pele and Others* in 1996. It is this later version that this article examines.

Kaona, Kupuna, and Menopause

I argue that in "The Pounded Water of Kekela", Pūku'i deploys kaona, an intellectual, rhetorical and literary practice, to represent the response to drought as a female practice informed by female, ancestral knowledges. In its simplest form, kaona is a "hidden meaning" expressed through allusion, symbolism, pun, and metaphor (McDougall, "Putting Feathers on our Words" 3). More than a literary aesthetic, however, kaona "draws on the collective knowledges and experiences of Hawaiians" (3) and it therefore also an expression of Hawaiian epistemologies. Pūkui herself describes kaona as the "spirit" of the text, and in "The Pounded Water of Kekela", I argue that this "spirit" is distinctly feminine. Throughout the narrative, three women - a kupuna, or "old woman", Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of volcanoes and creator of land, and Chiefess Kekela, after whom the mo'olelo is named - play a central role in recovering water for the village of Kona. This discovery of water is a communal effort between the women, as Pele leads the kupuna to the water source, and then the kupuna informs Chiefess Kekela of this hidden body of water. It is then through the

Chiefess's leadership that the village gain access to this water, and the impact of the drought is ameliorated. These wahine ʻōiwi synecdochally represent women of all ages, positions of power and social statuses, and thus convey how wahine ʻōiwi more broadly are central to forming strategies that help communities recover from the effects of drought.

The moʻolelo centres upon a Native woman existing within a colonial space, as it takes place when "the people of Hawai'i had learned from the missionaries about the God of the Christians" (Pūkuʻi, "The Pounded" 61). The subsequent sentence links this colonial presence with environmental decline, as Pūkuʻi writes that "this was a time of drought in South Kona. Had it not been for a few deep wells everyone would have had to leave or die" (61). From the opening of the story, Pūkuʻi deploys kaona in the form of a pun or playfulness with ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian language) to convey the role of Hawaiian women in this colonial and environmentally-compromised space. As McDougall explains: "kaona may also be made using the Hawaiian language, which is accessible only to some and emphasizes both the untranslatability of certain Hawaiian concepts and the multiple meanings that are inherent to the flexibility of ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi" ("Putting Feathers on our Words" 4). In English, the protagonist is repeatedly referred to as "an old woman", however, a Hawaiian audience would understand the woman to be a "kupuna", a word used in one context to refer to grandparents or elders (Craighill Handy and Pūkuʻi 18). Within traditional Hawaiian culture, elders or kupuna play an essential role in the continuance of knowledges relating to the environment. As Leilani Holmes explains: "stories of the *kupuna* contain historic discourses about knowledge, memory, land and social change" (49). Pūkuʻi deploys kaona in this narrative by drawing upon the multiplicity of meanings associated with the word "kupuna". As well as referring to a grandparent or elder, kupuna also refers to "a starting point" or "source" (Kagawa-Viviani et al. 2). Pūkuʻi uses kaona in the form of a pun to convey that the

kupuna is the source of knowledge relating to reciprocal relationships with the environment, knowledge that is "intended to incite humans to act in such ways as to ensure the protection and reproduction of *all* creatures in the universe" (Holmes 37). Pūku'i also implies to Kanaka Maoli readers that this woman will also locate a new "source" of water during the drought, and thus uses kaona to depict the kupuna as enabling the people in her village to adapt to the lack of rainfall. Through her playfulness with the Hawaiian language, Pūku'i foreshadows how Indigenous women will be pivotal to tackling the issues of water scarcity despite their status as a vulnerable group under colonial conditions.

Pūku'i intertwines the kupuna and the declining state of the environment, and in doing so mobilises the needs of the environment through her female protagonist. As Holmes explains: "the *kupuna* speak of the earth/human relationship", so much so that they "articulate the voice of the land" (38-46). Pūku'i does this through a Hawaiian concept that McDougall refers to as "island-human relationality" ("What the Island Provides" 203). Island-human relationality is "approaching every part of the island as sacred and as ancestor. Doing so entails seeing humans as part of and not separate from the island" (203). In particular, Pūku'i conveys a gendered notion of island-human relationality, as the vulnerability of the archipelago and the vulnerability of wahine 'ōiwi to drought are intertwined through imagery that connects the infertile environment with the aging female body. Repeatedly referring to her as "the old woman", Pūku'i presents a woman who is likely to be post-menopausal. Pūku'i expresses island-human relationality by reflecting this sense of aging and infertility in the barren landscape around the woman: "Dry grass, dry ferns and withering lehua trees—that was all she saw" (61). Stating that these dying plants are "all she saw", Pūku'i conveys the reflexive nature in which the woman views the scorched earth. Here, her perception of self is reflected in the way she perceives the environment. Within the context of Hawaiian

epistemologies, referring to the lehua trees as "withering" also conveys a "hidden meaning" or allusion to the aging female body (McDougall, "Putting Feathers on our Words" 3). In the Hawaiian language there exists a euphemism, "ke kulu waimaka lehua", which translates to "the flowing of the red lehua blossom tears" and refers to menstrual flow (Kame'eleihiwa 75).[3] By referring to the lehua trees as "withering", Pūku'i invokes this Hawaiian phrase to allude to the end of a fertile period, both in terms of the female body and the landscape that is deteriorating due to the lack of rainfall.

As McDougall suggests, however, the perception of the land as ancestor is also visible here, as "lehua trees" are an allusion (kaona), to the ancestor and goddess Pele.[4] In some representations, Pele "adorned herself extravagantly with wreaths of lehua blossoms" (Ho'oulumāhiehie 5). Kaona in the form of an allusion foreshadows how the female ancestors will be central to guiding the protagonist in her responses to the drought. After observing the kupuna has observed the lehua trees, Pele appears to her and her dog. Despite not taking her usual form of an old woman herself, Pele is immediately recognisable to the kupuna, as she exclaims: "'Pele!' She whispered under her breath. 'I have seen Pele!'" (Pūku'i, "The Pounded"63). When considering the first interaction between the goddess Pele and the old woman or kupuna, I argue that their relationship evocative of the relationship between a haka and an akua (god). A haka, which "means literally 'a bird's perch, or a rack to hang things on'" functions as "the medium for a chosen spirit" and a mouth through which the spirit speaks (Craighill Handy and Pūku'i 123). What is significant about a haka is the notion that, as Craighill Handy and Pūku'i state, "[a] woman could become a haka only after menopause" and that "[n]o menstruating person might come there" (124). Whilst Pele does not physically take control of the woman's body, the idea that Pūku'i's protagonist is Pele's chosen haka stems from the fact that the old woman becomes the mouthpiece through

which the water is discovered, and thus is a metaphorical haka. At the end of the narrative, Pūku'i also writes that "[t]o the old people and their dog the people gave great honour, saying 'they are the chosen of Pele and she always chooses the best'" ("The Pounded" 66), highlighting that their encounter was not coincidence, but that the woman was chosen by Pele. In her depiction of the meeting between the kupuna and Pele, Pūku'i emphasises the central role of ancestral guidance and Hawaiian genealogies in the empowerment of women and their ability to adapt to changing environments. As Kame'eleihiwa explains, goddesses such as Pele "are our ancestors, they are our inspiration, they live in us" (72). Indicative of how the Akua metaphorically "live" inside the wahine 'ōiwi, Pūku'i uses the metaphorical *haka* to convey how Pele "lives" inside the woman and empowers her in saving her village from the ongoing drought (Kame'eleihiwa 72). As Pele is "the most important *kupuna*", who guides another *kupuna*, who then guides the Chiefess, this trajectory is a form of *kaona* that demonstrates how women's actions in relation to the environment are indicative of the collective action in which Indigenous women partake (Craighill Handy and Pūku'i 38).

Menstruation and Regeneration

In the same way that the deterioration of the environment is depicted through kaona and the aging female body, the replenishment of the landscape is also signified through kaona relating to youthfulness, menstruation and regeneration. This is first represented through the inclusion of Pele.[5] Whilst her role in creating land contributes to the construction of land as feminine, her femininity is not a means of imagining the landscape as passive and conquerable as is typical of imperialist rhetoric wherein the Hawaiian Islands are constructed as female (Trask, "Lovely Hula Lands" 23; Kauanui 285). As McDougall suggests, Pele's "passionate nature and her emotions drive her to both violence and love, which are demonstrated through the flow and eruptions of

Kīlauea", the volcano ("Wondering and Laughing" 28). Through her ability to take the form of human woman as well as lehua and lava, the figure of Pele presents the feminine nature of the land as dynamic, powerful and dangerous with the potential for disruption and eruption. Similarly, ho'omanawanui explains that Pele "garners respect from the male gods and conquers men" (209). Pele thus poses a challenge to the Western, patriarchal, and imperialist modes of thought that construct Indigenous women as vulnerable to the changing conditions of the environment as Pele is one of the central agents of change upon the archipelago and is therefore representative of mana wahine.

Like many Hawaiian mo'olelo that use kaona through symbols and imagery associated with the female body, this narrative uses kaona or metaphors associated with Pele and menstrual flow to represent the beginning of a new cycle. Analysing Pūku'i's depiction of Pele as a metaphor for menstruation, and the beginning of a new environmental cycle, stems from how Pele is understood within Kanaka legends and the concept of kino lau, or "many forms" (Bray 13). John Dvorak explains that "native Hawaiians traditionally regarded an eruption as the menstruation of the goddess Pele" (8), and Carolyn Bray similarly states that: "[h]er sacred life-giving form, from the menstrual blood that courses through the body/earth, flows from the mouth of the volcano as hot lava" (13). This association between Pele, lava and menstruation is visible as when Pele appears, the kupuna observes that: "[h]er bare feet trod the rough lava road as lightly as if it had been a smooth floor" (Pūku'i, "The Pounded" 61). As well as the lava being associated with a menstrual cycle, in this mo'olelo it is representative of the beginning of a new, environmental cycle that is gendered and therefore functions as an expression of mana wahine. As Bray suggests, "[o]ver time, when the lava-drenched soil is soaked with rain, flora and fauna thrive. When Pele's sacred liquid reaches the sea, new land is formed" (13). It must be noted that as well as

lava being associated with growth through kaona, its association with growth also is representative of pedological findings wherein soils formed by volcanic ash are known to be particularly fertile grounds. Evaristo Haulle and Delphine Njewele explain that in Hawai'i "it is believed that the eruption of volcanic ash greatly enriches the soil, giving better crops" (22). Within these epistemological and pedological contexts then, Pūku'i uses kaona associated with the female body to represent women as central to restoring environmental balance and promoting growth, a notion which contrasts the association of vulnerability with passivity. This life-giving force associated with Pele is another way mana wahine can be understood, as the female body is central to the renewal and growth of the environment.

Pūku'i also draws upon Pele's other bodily forms to symbolise menstruation and regeneration: the end of an infertile period, in terms of drought, and the beginning of a period of growth for the environment. I argue that the first sign of rejuvenation, or the beginning of a new cycle, is seen through this link between the "withering lehua trees" and Pele's appearance as a "young woman" (Pūku'i , "The Pounded" 61). This is due to the fact that, as McDougall explains, one of Pele's bodily forms is lehua groves ("Wondering and Laughing" 38). This means that the opening "withering lehua trees - that was all [the old woman] saw" depicts one form of Pele in decline, before she re-appears in youthful, human form. After seeing these "withering lehua trees", the protagonist looks up to see "a young woman approaching, tall and beautiful, dressed in a red holoku'" (Pūku'i 61). This description is atypical of Pele's kino-lau as her "dominant form" is volcanic activity or an "old hag" (Bray 13). Whilst not implying that Pele transformed from those particular lehua trees into "a young woman", I read the inclusion of the "withering lehua" before Pele's arrival as a form of kaona that signals the end of life, before Pele appears in human form, a metaphor for her new beginning. This unusual and youthful appearance of Pele and her meeting with the "old woman"

are the first ways in which Pūku'i signals a form of re-birth or rejuvenation, and a foreshadowing of how wahine 'ōiwi will provide a solution to the drought.

Within the context of Pele legends and this drought narrative, the lehua and Pele's red dress take on a new significance regarding the menstrual cycle. H. Arlo Nimmo summarises Pūku'i's writings on Pele, stating that "[a]ccording to Pūku'i, when Pele appears, the colour of her clothes are significant" (50). Pūku'i herself writes that: "Pele in white has traditionally been interpreted as a warning of sickness; Pele in red as a coming volcanic eruption" (Pūku'i, Haertig and Lee 13). Despite Pūku'i's statement, within this narrative, Pele's arrival in the "red *holokū*'" heeds no volcanic eruption, but the opposite: the discovery of water and the ending of a drought. I argue that this inconsistency and anomaly in terms of Pele's appearance and significance is due to the overarching use of kaona relating to the environment and the female body. In evoking Pele firstly through the "withering lehua", and then through a "red *holokū*'", Pūku'i demonstrates how, in a metaphorical sense, the lehua have once again become red, and thus invokes once again the euphemism relating to menstruation: "the flowing of the red lehua blossom tears" (Kame'eleihiwa 75). Due to the fact that within this narrative, Pele's "red *holokū*'" does not foreshadow a volcanic eruption, the colour gains a new significance. As Kame'eleihiwa explains, in Hawaiian epistemologies red is "the colour of sanctity, as well as the colour of menstrual blood" (75), again supporting the notion that Pele's youthful and vibrant appearance within this barren space can be read a form of rejuvenation and the beginning of a new cycle. The "red *holokū*'" emphasises Pele's sacredness and embodiment of ongoing fertility in contrast to 'the old woman' and the ongoing drought in Kona, and foreshadows how the restoration of the environment is a specifically gendered act.

This embodiment of Pele, beautiful and youthful, represents the hope of recreating a fertile world, as it is Pele's appearance that leads the old woman to have

hope of finding water: "Pele loves Kona and has brought us water,"; "Pele has shown kindness to her thirsty people"'; '"Pele has brought water for her people" (Pūku'i, "The Pounded" 63-65). Here, Pele embodies mana wahine as the discovery of water is owed to Pele. Understanding Pele as central to the regeneration of the environment contributes to existing discussions surrounding Pele's role within Hawaiian mo'olelo by placing her regenerative qualities within the context of drought. Whilst Pele is, as aforementioned, the creator of land, her association with volcanic eruption and fire in other mo'olelo places Pele in a cycle of growth and destruction within Hawaiian mythologies. Pūku'i herself rejected the view that Pele was a goddess only of destruction and a deity to be feared. Together with Craighill Handy, she writes:

> It is profoundly significant that the Hawaiians of Ka-'u did not fear or cringe before, or hate, the power and destructive violence of Mauna Loa [the volcano] [...] They loved Pele, whose home was their land: they endured her furies, and celebrated the drama of creation with which they lived. (22)

Celebrating Pele's power to destroy, as well as her power to create, demonstrates a respect for the diversity of mana wahine, and for the cycles of which the environment is part. Pualani Kanaka'ole Kanahele supports this idea of regeneration, and explains how Pele and her sister Hi'iakaikapoliopele are "necessary in the cycle of destruction and regeneration that gives life to the Hawaiian Islands. Both are necessary for the growth of the land" (xii). Kanahele addresses the regenerative role that Pele plays within this narrative, transforming Kona from a place of drought and destruction to a rejuvenated land: "It is the gift of Pele [...] She loves Kona and remembers her people when no rain falls" (Pūku'i, "The Pounded" 66). McDougall and Nordstrom continue this notion, stating that "[b]ecause the mo'olelo and the undeniable forces associated with Pele and Hi'iaka are so well known by Kanaka Maoli, all *mo'olelo* relating to the sisters work as

powerful metaphors for the potential of life after destruction" (98). Through this use of kaona, which engenders associations of women with growth after destruction, Pūku'i emphasises how wahine 'ōiwi are essential in the regrowth and rebuilding of the environment after environmental disasters.

(Re-)Birth

The final expression of mana wahine in this mo'olelo is the metaphorical re-birth of Kona, as the discovery of water signals the end of the drought and a new beginning. In a continuation of kaona, imagery of the female body is continued through the repeated images of womb-like spaces from which new beginnings can be metaphorically 'birthed'.[6] Rather than depicted as one single event, images of birthing and rebirth appear throughout the short narrative through recurring motifs of womb-like spaces, specifically that of caves and wells. When Pūku'i first introduces the "old woman" she is "sat in her cave", partaking in the tradition of kapa making. She also "gazes out of her cave" and her dog Huelani lies "beside her on the cool floor of the cave" (Pūku'i, "The Pounded" 61), until Pele appears and beckons the dog away to find water, before he returns and "[capers] proudly about the cave" (63).[7] As well as caves, wells are represented as a source of hope and sustainability: "Had it not been for a few deep wells everyone would have had to leave or die" (61). The central image of birth and the giving of life is the final moment in the story, as water is discovered within a cave. "'The cave!' she thought. 'There is a cave near here'. She found it and stooped down to peer in. Water! A great pool of water disappearing in the darkness of the cave!" (64). Associating these images of birthing with mana wahine is significant as Kame'eleihiwa states that "[w]omen are powerful because they give birth" and explains that the existence of land is due to the birthing capacities of women (73). Kame'eleihiwa explains that it is Papahanaumoku who "gives birth to islands" and Haumea, the

goddess of fertility and childbirth who is the guardian goddess of the island of Hawai'i (76).[8] It is women's fertility and ability to reproduce that that Nicole Alice Salis Reyes et al. explains "reminds us of the mana (power) Hawaiian women possess [...] and the mana to nurture potential" (242). Through considering pregnancy and motherhood as forms of power, Hawaiian ontologies associate wāhine ʻōiwi with the protection and nurturing of the future. This becomes particularly significant within this mo'olelo as it is this womb-like imagery that conveys the power of wāhine ʻōiwi in creating solutions to the drought and nurturing new relationships with the environment.

In representing mana wahine through kaona relating to women's reproductive abilities, Pūku'i expresses the Hawaiian belief relating to genealogies and the continuance of power and knowledge through the generative capacities of women. The idea that the solution to the drought is "birthed" by women is expressed through the fact that the water is discovered in this cave, as Pūku'i describes the water as being "of Kekela" the "of" often being used to denote when someone is a child "of" a person ("The Pounded" 66). In this sense, the water has metaphorically been birthed by Kekela through her leadership and creativity that allows the water to be accessed. This association between water and pregnancy is outlined by Kim Anderson who explains "women carry water during pregnancy, and the first part of giving birth involves the release of that water" (9). Anderson's interviewees also express this relationship between birth, water, and the environment, as Anderson explains that "[a] number of grandmothers drew the equation between life-giving waters carried by women and what occurs with Mother Earth in her life-giving cycles and abilities" (11). Through using these repeated motifs of caves and wells, Pūku'i draws upon Native Hawaiian knowledge to reveal the centrality of wahine ʻōiwi to the birthing of generations who can continue to care for the environment, and to the birthing of ʻāina—love of the land.

This continuance of ʻāina through women and genealogies is fully encapsulated at the end of the moʻolelo when the water is 'birthed' or released from the cave. In the same way that Pele is associated with the destructive power of fire and the generative life cycles, the ending of "The Pounded Water of Kekela" continues these associations through mortal women. Pele is the generative life force through which the women are able to mitigate the effects of the drought. Upon locating the water inside the caves, the "old woman" informs the chiefess Kekela of the discovery. The old woman and her husband "started at once to Kekela's home on the shore" to tell her that "Pele has brought water for her people" (Pūkuʻi, "The Pounded" 65). Upon hearing the news, Kekela "called the servants, directed them to the cave, and bade them take water gourds to fill" and "commanded that people gather *kuikui* nuts for torches to light the cave while others gathered vines with which to measure the pool's size and the cave's roof" (66). When arriving at the cave, however, they realise that the water is difficult to access as "the roof is very low and the cave dark" (65). Faced with this obstacle, chiefess Kekela turns to the element associated with Pele and powerful femininity: fire. The chiefess first suggests that the people "gather *kukui* nuts for torches to light" before commanding that people "bring wood" with which to "[make] a fire" (65). This turn to fire is symbolic of mana wahine, as Kameʻeleihiwa explains: "it is woman who has the secret of fire. It is mana wahine" (3). Pūkuʻi depicts how, in order to ensure her people access the water, Kekela turns to the element of her powerful ancestor, Pele, and thus uses ancestral knowledge to resolve the environmental disaster. In relation to Pele and her role in cycles of destruction and regeneration, the fire is used to destroy the cave so that water can be accessed:

> [W]hen the fire died men chipped away at the hot rock [...] another fire was built and more rock chipped away. After days of work a

> section of the cave roof had been removed and the pool was easy
> for thirsty folks to reach. (66)

Through depicting the use of fire, which is symbolic of Pele, and the evocation of the cycle of destruction and regeneration, Pūku'i demonstrates the necessity of ancestral knowledge in the resolution of environmental disasters. As Kame'eleihiwa explains, "[i]t is the female *Akua* [gods] that empower Hawaiian women" (72). That the solution to the drought begins with Pele, then passes to the kupuna, and then to Kekela demonstrates a genealogical empowerment; a metaphorical passing on of knowledge from ancestors that is emblematic of mana wahine. As McDougall explains, mana wahine is "the power of women to bring forth new generations" ("Wondering and Laughing" 30). Mana wahine is expressed through the way that Pele, the kupuna, and the chiefess Kekela work to discover the water and end the drought, as it is through the actions of all these women that "[t]here was water enough to last throughout the drought!" (Pūku'i, "The Pounded" 66). Whilst Pele leads Huelani to the water, it is the two mortal women that facilitate accessing the water and sharing it with the community.[9]

In this mo'olelo, Pūku'i presents the possibility of powerful women bringing forth new generations of environmental healers who have the ability to restore aloha 'āina: "love for land and all who dwell upon it; the kind of love that affirms the importance of independence and interdependence; the kind of love that demands action, ingenuity, creativity, and memory" (Yamashiro and Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 5). Reyes et al.'s statement "Wāhine 'Ōiwi hold the potential of our lāhui (nation) in our bodies and birth them; we create hei (nets, webs) of potential to raise our future leaders, and we also serve as fierce protectors of these hei" (242) also bolsters the notion that Hawaiian women have a generative capability to foster environmentally conscious generations. In using kaona to portray the generative power and invocation of ancestral knowledge, this mo'olelo

conveys how the empowerment of Indigenous women is not reliant upon introducing settler-colonial strategies that marginalise Indigenous voices. The empowerment of Indigenous women to lead and engender change that can restore human and more-than-human relationships is already existent in knowledges gained and shared through ancestors, and a cultural responsibility towards the environment.

Conclusion

As Robinson asserts: "In order to begin effectively and affectively addressing climate change, Indigenous peoples and our knowledges must be front and center" (334). In analysing mo'olelo, this article decentres Western knowledges relating to the recovery of the environment, and instead centres 'ike kupuna, or ancestral, land-based knowledges. Given that mo'olelo at once preserve 'ike kupuna, and encapsulate mana wahine, mo'olelo emphasise the integral role of Hawaiian women in sustaining productive relationships with the environment, and thus in the continuance of aloha 'āina. Similar to how J. Uluwehi Hopkins asserts that mo'olelo were "used as a form of resistance to the influences of Westernization" during the nineteenth century (231), this article highlights the ongoing capacity of mo'olelo to resist contemporary hegemonic discourses that privilege Western global powers over the experience of Indigenous communities. As a literary and rhetorical practice, mo'olelo function as counter-narratives against the colonial and patriarchal narratives that reconstitute Indigenous women as needing to be "instructed, led and managed" (Fordham et al. 8).

Examining kaona as both a representational strategy and as a way of knowing highlights the political and decolonial utility of this literary and rhetorical practice. Through weaving into the narrative pun, allusion and metaphor, Pūku'i uses kaona to represent how cycles relating to the female body—birth, menstruation and menopause—are symbiotic with the environment, and thus reveals how restorative

environmental relationships are intricately intertwined with women. Using these bodily functions to convey the mutually constitutive nature of wahine ʻōiwi and the environment reveals how Indigenous women are a necessary part of the environment's survival, particularly within the context of its exploitation, degradation and destruction under capitalist, imperialist and patriarchal systems. As McDougall explains:

> Because of the colonial context of Hawaiʻi, contemporary practices of kaona, however, must also be viewed as decolonial assertions—they are both actions (doing something with a particular aim) and enactments (acting something out) reinforcing ancestral knowledge. This reinforcement of ancestral knowledge, in turn, provides a foundation to guide us within contemporary colonial contexts to overturn colonial narratives and to actualize claims to ʻāina (literally 'that which feeds,' our word for land), sovereignty, and governance. (3)

In our contemporary moment, kaona can thus serve to "overturn" colonial and patriarchal narratives that perpetuate Indigenous, female incapability to effectively respond to climate change disasters under the guise of 'vulnerability'. To counter these narratives that use discourses of vulnerability to justify the ongoing intervention and governance of imperial powers in the Pacific Islands, kaona reinforces not only competence and knowledgeability, but claims to sovereignty that are based upon genealogies and land-based knowledges.

Beyond its representation of knowledge transmission across generations, "The Pounded Water of Kekela" itself is an embodiment of transgenerational knowledge. From its oral origins, to its publication in *Paradise of the Pacific*, and finally to its resurgence in mo'olelo collections, this mo'olelo evidences the communication of Native stories and knowledges across generations. This, in itself, is representative of

the Hawaiian worldview "ka wā mamua", or "the time in front", which "acknowledges all that has come before ourselves" (Wilson Hokowhitu and Alului Meyer 17). By turning to ka wā mamua, Native Hawaiians can "[seek] historical answers for present-day dilemmas" (Kame'eleihiwa 28). The contemporary, colonial and patriarchal rhetoric of Indigenous, female vulnerability is a present-day dilemma for which mo'olelo can hope to provide answers, and guide wahine 'ōiwi in the move towards ka wa mahope—or an environmentally sound and decolonial future.

Notes

[1] I use this term in lieu of U.S-Affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI), which continues the colonised status of Hawai'i and denies the existence of any Hawaiian sovereignty.

[2] *Paradise of the Pacific* was launched in 1888 and changed its name to *Honolulu Press* in 1966.

[3] The inclusion of lehua could also function as an allusion to Pele's fury, as in the mo'olelo "Moolelo no Hiiakaikapoliopele", Pele "overreacts with volcanic fury, destroying the lehua grove and the person that her sister loves best" (Silva 165).

[4] This connection between fertility and water, or infertility and lack of water, is expressed throughout Pacific Islander epistemologies. The intertwining of women, fertility and the environment can also be seen within other Pacific Islander epistemologies more broadly, for example, among Maori tribes of Aotearoa (New Zealand). Jade Sophia Le Grice and Virginia Braun explain that: "[w]ithin traditional mätauranga Mäori, the process of human reproduction is interwoven with biological, social, spiritual and ecological elements […] For Mäori, within traditional mätauranga, reproduction and human growth activities are likened to the process of growth in other natural phenomena, incorporating biological and spiritual development" (153). What Le Grice and Braun outline here is that ecological growth, and thus the fertility of the ground - does not exist in isolation but is also connected to human reproduction and the continuance of genealogical lines that are central to Hawaiian lifeways. This interconnection between humans and land in terms of fertility is epitomised in the Maori language, as the word for land, whenua, also means placenta (Le Grice and Braun 154).

[5] Pūku'i's representations of Pele gain further significance when considering Pūku'i's full name, Mary Abigail Kawena'ulaokalani (The-Rosy-Glow of the Heavens) ahi'iakaikapoliopele (of Hi'iaka [youngest sister of Pele] in-the-bosom-of-Pele)

Naleilehuaapele (wearing the crimson *lehua* wreaths of the Volcano Goddess) (Craighill Handy and Pūku'I 13). Her name reveals that she shares her genealogies with Pele.

[6] Whilst not unique to Hawaiian literature, these motifs relating to the female body are often deployed through kaona. Beyond literature, however, imagery relating to the female reproductive system is used to explain the topographical features of Hawai'i: "Lualualei is the birth center of Oahu, hence the female, Hina's womb or cave" (Enos qtd. in Fujikane 45). Using kaona to represent the power of the female body is consistent with the idea that kaona was used as a tool of colonial resistance as it provided as way to obscure sexual images from missionaries. McDougall and Nordstrom explain that "it was through the printing of mele, or songs, and mo'olelo during this time period that it was realized that sexual kaona was especially difficult for missionary/haole audiences to read and understand" (98).

[7] Naming the dog Huelani also creates an intertextual significance, particularly regarding narratives concerning water and drought. Pūku'i's contemporary, Samuel H. Elbert, with whom she published *Place Names of Hawaii* (1974), *Hawaiian Grammar* and several dictionaries, published a poem "The Waters of Huelani", that also depicts drought on the Hawaiian Islands (see Cabacungan 1). It is likely a reference to Huelani Drive on which Elbert lived. This narrative, like "The Pounded Water of Kekela", ends with the discovery of water. Pūku'i's decision to name the protagonist's dog 'Huelani' therefore allows her to speak across texts wherein droughts have been overcome.

[8] Haumea is often referred to as "Haumea of the wondrous births" (Kame'eleihiwa 7) due to her ability to "give birth from multiple parts of her body" (Reyes et al. 242)

[9] Reading the use of fire as a gendered way of sourcing water becomes even more significant when considering the way water is located in another mo'olelo about the god Kane. Kane acquired water in ways associated with penetrative and phallic imagery, as Kane "thrust his staff into the pali near at hand, and out flowed a stream of pure water that has continued to the present day" (Maly and Maly 19).

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