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**In the Footsteps of Ancestors :**

Holistic Healing at Ka'ala Farm Cultural Learning Center,  
O'ahu, Hawai 'i

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# In the Footsteps of Ancestors: Holistic Healing at Ka‘ala Farm Cultural Learning Center, O‘ahu, Hawai‘i

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*Abstract: Based on ethnographic work at the Ka‘ala Farm Cultural Learning Center on the island of O‘ahu, this paper explores the role land-based cultural revitalization plays in the healing of the aboriginal people of Hawai‘i or Kanaka Maoli (“true human being”) under prolonged colonization and occupation. Since its inception in the late 1970s when the teachers and students of a Hawaiian alternative school began the restoration of the ancient kalo (taro) terrace as part of its educational activities, Ka‘ala Farm has served the larger community in facilitating land based cultural learning through participation in traditional kalo farming. The research focuses on the process of healing at Ka‘ala Farm observed by the Ka‘ala Farm directors and staff and the coordinators of the programs for elementary school students, at risk high school students, early college students, college students, and survivors of substance abuse and incarceration. Based on the data collected through interview and participant observation methods in their interface with previous research in other aboriginal communities, the paper identifies the significant factors in the healing process as follows: cultural protocol, practices and values, place and ecosystem-based knowledge, reconnection with ancestors in various forms, and spirituality. Through Ka‘ala Farm’s pedagogical and communal farming activities, the participants experience a spontaneous self-directed discovery of aboriginal cultural values and cosmology as a process of holistic healing. The research finds that such an organic process of self-discovery allows the participants to reconnect with the wholeness of life, overcoming the social and existential fragmentation wrought by colonization and belligerent occupation.*

*Keywords: Aboriginal Healing Practices, Land-Based Healing, Hawaiian Cosmology, Colonization and Occupation*

## Introduction

**K**a‘ala Farm Cultural Learning Center (Ka‘ala Farm, hereafter) is located in the Wai‘anae Valley in the district of Wai‘anae on the island of O‘ahu, Hawai‘i. The farm utilizes the ancient taro (or *kalo*) terraces or the *lo‘i kalo* in Hawaiian language, fed by the spring and stream water from Mount Ka‘ala, the highest peak on the island of O‘ahu. In the late 1970s, the foundation of Ka‘ala Farm was laid by the students and teachers of an alternative school and community members as part of their land-based or ‘*āina* (land, literally “that which feeds” in Hawaiian) based educational program. Over the forty years of its existence, Ka‘ala Farm has been spearheading the integration of cultural revitalization with its ‘*āina*-based education, healing, networking, and research.

My first encounter with Ka‘ala Farm took place in 2009 when one of my students at Leeward Community College, Wai‘anae, facilitated our class visit. Since then, my students and I have been fortunate to return to Ka‘ala Farm mainly through service learning activities. My relationship with Ka‘ala Farm took on a new level when I joined a team research project at the University of Hawai‘i, West O‘ahu (UHWO, hereafter) entitled ‘*Imi Na‘auao: Hawaiian Knowing and Well-being* between May, 2017 and January 2019. This not only allowed an opportunity to work closely with Ka‘ala directors and staff, it has also allowed me to assume certain responsibilities, or *kuleana* in Hawaiian language, as part of Ka‘ala Farm’s extended family or ‘*ohana*. My close involvement with Ka‘ala Farm gave me a chance to reflect on my positionality in my evolving relationship with the Hawaiian nation (Lāhui) and people as a

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whole. It all began in my early teens as a participant in a student exchange program for peace between Honolulu and Hiroshima, Japan. With peace education and activism under my belt, my later return to Hawai‘i as an adult exchange scholar/student naturally has led me to my engagement with the Hawaiian sovereignty movement since the early 1990s. Thus, while I was a non-aboriginal researcher, I also received a healing effect from Ka‘ala Farm, which helped me make sense of my personal journey and my positionality in the ongoing process of the reconstitution of the people and nation in a holistic manner.

## Methodology

The scope and methods of this paper are based on two research projects at UHWO. The first one, as I mentioned, is the UHWO team research project entitled *‘Imi Na‘auao: Hawaiian Knowing and Well-being*. Along with my co-investigator Tatiana Kalaniopua Young (who focused on the activities of a Hawaiian activist organization at Ka‘ala Farm), I was assigned to Ka‘ala Farm proper to assess the impact of the ‘āina-based learning and healing on the Lāhui (nation, race, people) consciousness. The data collection involved participant observation of their monthly community events called *Lā ‘Ohana* between October 2017 and January, 2019 and interview schedules with the coordinators of the ‘āina-based learning and healing programs at Ka‘ala Farm from various organizations and institutions (Hawaiian charter school, placed based learning program for elementary school children, high school, culture-based recovery program, community college, universities and alternative school alumni) between May and August, 2018. The interview schedule questions with the coordinators were designed to reconstruct the experience of the students and clients at Ka‘ala Farm. The majority of the interviews were conducted at their work sites and included such questions as “What are the changes you observed in your students/clients as they participated in the activities at Ka‘ala Farm?” and “What aspects of Ka‘ala activities do you think had the most impact on your students/clients?” The participant observation included “talk story” with the Ka‘ala personnel and event participants on a wide range of subject matters as a culturally distinct form of “non-directive interviewing techniques” (Tengan 2007, 19). Ku Kahakalau and Manulani Aluli Meyer oversaw our research activities based on the aboriginal research ethics called *Ma‘awe Pono*, or the “path of harmony.”

The second project was a joint student research project called the *Kikaha* project, in collaboration with a UHWO colleague, Olivia George, and two students that took place between summer and fall of 2018. It consisted of microbiological study of the microbial population at Ka‘ala Farm, juxtaposed with social science analysis of the healing aspects of the lo‘i kalo (wet land taro terrace) through interviews with the directors and staff members of Ka‘ala Farm and Ho‘omau Ke Ola, a culture-based recovery program located in Wai‘anae. The interviews were conducted at their work sites with the questions such as “Do you see any changes in the students/clients/participants who come to Ka‘ala Farm?” and “Do you see any difference in their reactions to the activities in the wetland (lo‘i kalo) and the dryland (*māla kalo*)?” The findings from these two research projects form the basis of this paper.

The method of analyzing data primarily involved an interpretative approach where the interviews and the field notes from the participant observation were coded, sorted and interpreted to reconstruct a holistic self-understanding of healing at Ka‘ala Farm from the perspective of those who are in the position of liminality (i.e., neither “insider” nor “outsider”) (Rabinow [1977] 2007). The consistent themes relevant to healing emerged not only through the organic interdependence between the parts and the whole (Geertz 1983) but also through their resonance with Hawaiian cosmology and cultural values and those of other aboriginal communities.

## Background

Ka‘ala Farm is embedded in the larger Wai‘anae community, located in the west end of the island of O‘ahu. The population of Native Hawaiians or Kanaka Maoli (“true human being” in Hawaiian) in this community (the Wai‘anae and Nānākuli districts combined) comprises 59 percent of the total population (74.8% in Nānākuli and 54.5% in Waianae), the highest concentration of Kanaka Maoli in Hawai‘i (Azuna et al. 2018). According to Azuna et al. (2018), for the indicators for economic well-being, education, health, and crimes, both Nānākuli and Wai‘anae occupied the bottom echelon of 7th to 12th ranks out of the twelve districts on the island of O‘ahu in 2018. The unemployment rate is 2.6 times higher than the state and county median. The percentage of K–12 students in special education is about 1.5 times higher than the median. Those with obesity make up 73 percent of the population, and those with diabetes make up 14 percent (in contrast to the state and county median of 9.0%) of the population in Nānākuli and Wai‘anae districts. Citing the first modern reports in the mid-1980s on the “health...social, economic and cultural plights of our Kanaka Maoli,” Kekuni Blaisdell, a Kanaka Maoli physician and independence advocate, identifies the interrelated historical, cultural and social factors as “depopulation, displacement from the ‘āina, colonialism, cultural conflict, adoption of self-destructive foreign ways and despair, and racism” (Blaisdell 2003,14).

The historic and ongoing process of colonization and occupation in Hawai‘i goes back to the arrival of the British Navy Captain James Cook’s expeditionary fleets. The encounter created an enduring pattern of externally dependent trade, resource exploitation, and depopulation due to the disease brought in by the foreign entities (Kamakau [1961] 1992; Kent [1983] 1993). By the end of King Kamehameha’s reign that unified the warring chiefdoms, the population of the Kanaka Maoli was drastically reduced. The death of Kamehameha coincided with the arrival of American Calvinist missionaries. Whereas some of the early missionaries, like William Richards, made significant contribution to the Hawaiian Kingdom as a Constitutional Monarchy that gained recognition as an independent state among the European nations (Kamakau [1961] 1992), others, like Amos Starr Cook and Samuel Castle, were quick to become the sugar plantation oligarchs (Osorio 2002). The small but hegemonic section of the missionary and sugar planter descendants eventually waged a *coup d’etat* against the kingdom in 1893 aided by the US minister to Hawai‘i and the US Navy. Having failed to secure the passage of annexation treaty in the Senate, due significantly to the mass petition movement in Hawai‘i that dissuaded the Senate, the US annexed Hawai‘i through joint resolution in 1898 (Silva 2004; Sai 2004). The illegality of annexation has been perpetuated by the US incorporation through Territory (1900–1959) and Statehood (1959–present) (Sai 2004).

The marginalization of the aboriginal culture began with the ban on the use and instruction of the Hawaiian language school and instructions in Hawaiian language both at public and private schools in 1896 (Silva 2004). Despite Prince Kuhio’s effort as a Territorial delegate to pass the Hawaiian Rehabilitation Act designed to restore the land base for Kanaka Maoli in 1921 (Kent [1983] 1993), the displacement of Kanaka Maoli has continued to this day. The market-driven expropriation of the land by the settlers and foreign entities, as well as the belligerent occupation by the US military, has been the driver of the displacement of Kanaka Maoli from their homeland and the desecration of their sacred sites. As a result of this historic and ongoing colonization and occupation, the health and well-being of Kanaka Maoli have been critically undermined, as Kekuni Blaisdell (2003, 14) reminds us:

[W]e Kanaka Maoli had the highest rates of for the leading causes of death (heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and chronic lung disease) and the shortest life expectancy, compared with other people in our homeland. We also ran highest for

behavioral risk factors such as tobacco and alcohol abuse, obesity, and high blood pressure.

As Fermantes (2008) argues, the displacement of Kanaka Maoli from their homeland shows the most visible effect of the historic and ongoing process of colonization and occupation. Kanaka Maoli are over-represented in the “homeless” and incarcerated population, making up 28.3 percent of the total “homeless” population (Office of Hawaiian Affairs 2016) and 37 percent of the inmates (Office of Hawaiian Affairs 2018), while Kanaka Maoli constitute 21 percent of the total population of Hawai‘i. Furthermore, the high cost of living and housing due to the external dependency on tourism and land development has forced the working class and some middle-class Kanaka Maoli to seek affordable life situations outside Hawai‘i on the US continent and abroad.

However, as Blaisdell (2003) suggests, the identification of these factors also implies possible remedies as the decolonizing restorations and transformations that have been taking place in the Hawaiian nation since the Hawaiian Renaissance of the 1970s. Indeed, despite or perhaps because of the adverse socio-economic conditions of the community, the Wai‘anae community has been a vanguard in the grass roots organizing effort for food sovereignty, sustainability, revitalization of traditional knowledge and alternative education, providing the models for the rest of Hawai‘i to follow. Ka‘ala Farm is one among many such aboriginal culture-based progressive initiatives.

As mentioned earlier, Ka‘ala Farm emerged from the field education program of the alternative school in Wai‘anae called the Rap Center in the late 1970s. The Rap Center was established in 1970 by the City and County of Honolulu aimed at the “prevention, reduction, or elimination of drug abuse” among the youths in Wai‘anae-Nanakuli “between the ages of 12–25” (Behavior Science Corporation 1971, 6–8). One of its initial objectives, “To modify positively the academic, vocational, recreational, and interpersonal...behavior of the young people,” had developed into an alternative school for at-risk youths (Behavior Science Corporation 1971, 7). According to a couple of alumni (Reno Yaw and Schauntell Schmidt-Taylor) who attended the Rap Center between 1979 and 1982, the land-based education at the current location of Ka‘ala Farm was well integrated into the school’s program (Reno Yaw, pers. comm., July 31, 2018; Schauntell Schmidt-Taylor, pers. comm., July 12, 2018). The program was contextualized in traditional Hawaiian knowledge by a Hawaiian language teacher who not only taught the language but also Hawaiian cultural values (Yaw, pers. communication; Schmidt-Taylor, pers. communication). The Rap Center’s educational program has laid the foundation for Ka‘ala Farm’s mission that has been sustained to this day: “Our mission is to reclaim and preserve the living culture of the *Po‘e Kahiko* (People of Old) in order to strengthen the kinship relationships between the ‘āina (land that feeds) and all forms of life necessary to sustain in the balance of life in these vulnerable lands” (Ka‘ala Farm, Inc., n.d.).

It was the incorporation into a non-profit organization in 1983 that propelled an alternative school program to the ‘āina-based cultural center, but what was more significant was the action that students, teachers and community members took around the time of incorporation with the aim of bringing back the flow of water from the mountain to the site via PVC pipes to reactivate the ancient irrigation system for the lo‘i kalo (wet land taro terrace). The interruption of the water flow created by the sugar industry has been maintained by the state, city, and county governments. At the initial stage, Ka‘ala Farm was confronted by the State Department of Land and Natural Resources and the City and County Board of Water Supply for their water access through direction action. But over the years, an understanding was established between Ka‘ala Farm and the authority whereby the latter has been taking a hands-off approach to their water access (Butch Detroye, pers. comm., July 17, 2018).

## Aboriginal Healing Practice Themes

In order to fully capture Ka‘ala Farm’s multidimensional contribution to the larger community, the data needs to be re-contextualized in the common themes articulated in other aboriginal communities. Here I am referring to the common themes of healing and well-being from the pre-existing research projects conducted in Native American and Maori communities. Previous research finds the most unique aspect of aboriginal healing practices that sets them apart from those of the normative (or the “western”) medicine is their effectiveness in addressing the trauma caused by the historic and ongoing process of colonization. Among the Native American and Maori communities, colonization has entailed displacement from the land, the assault on cultural identity, the assault on the spirit, the alienation from the nature, and the resultant fracture in their holistic approach to health (Dobson and Bazzoni 2016; Hond, Ratima, and Edwards 2019; Lavellee and Poole 2009; Mark, Chamberlain, and Boulton 2017; Tinirau, Gillies, and Tinirau 2011; Waldram 2013). The impact of colonization has been perpetuated by the application of the normative medical paradigm to aboriginal health. In the field of mental health, for instance, the individual focus predominant in psychological thought and practice tends to exclude the relationship to the family, community, social system, as well as the spiritual realm (Yeh et al. 2004). In Maori communities, the colonial suppression of traditional healers (the Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907) has left an enduring legacy whereby traditional healers—who used to play a central role in society—are marginalized as part of “‘alternative’ or complementary forms of health treatment” (Mark and Lyons 2010, 80). Similarly among the First Nations in Canada, the historic and ongoing colonialism has distorted their “restorative healing traditions” (Dobson and Brazzoni 2016, 202).

Faced with the historical and ongoing impact of colonization, the healing paradigm in aboriginal communities involves a holistic framework of health and well-being based on the interconnecting system of land, ecosystem, family, community, body, mind, spirit, and ancestors (Baskin 2016; Dobson and Brazzoni 2016; Lavellee and Poole, 2009; Mark, Chamberlain, and Bouton 2017; Mark and Lyons 2010; Tinirau, Gillies, and Tinirau 2011; Waldram 2013). Traditional cultural protocols, other cultural and spiritual practices, aboriginal epistemology, and cultural value systems serve as an important instrument of restorative and transformative healing in aboriginal communities (Dobson and Brazzoni 2016; Green 2010; Lavellee and Poole 2009; Mark, Chamberlain, and Boulton 2017; Mark and Lyons 2010). Aboriginal healing practices incorporate the restoration of the balanced ecosystem, the reconnection with the native plants and food not just as medicine but as ancestors, and the reclamation of the ancestral land for cultivation, shared identity, and the assertion of original sovereignty (Lavellee and Poole 2009; Waldram 2013). Thus, the idea of aboriginal healing situated in the context of alternative ways of responding to the historic and ongoing colonization is based on the interdependence in which “all life is interrelated with one another, the environment, and the cosmos” (Mark and Lyons 2010, 1757).

Reflecting the articulation of common themes of indigenous healings presented by the previous research, this paper focuses on the following areas in order to illuminate the contribution of the ‘āina-based programs at Ka‘ala Farm to the revitalization and perpetuation of aboriginal ways of healing: 1) the centrality of Hawaiian cultural protocols, values, and practices, 2) reconnection with the land, ecosystem and plants; 3) reconnection with ancestors; and 4) spirituality.

## Cultural Protocols, Values, and Practices at Ka‘ala Farm

The entire milieu of Ka‘ala Farm itself constitutes traditional cultural protocols. Located in the middle zone of the Wai‘anae valley where the ancient kalo terrace is reactivated and the fresh

water from the heart of Mount Ka‘ala flows through the farm, Ka‘ala Farm materializes the partial return of the *ahupua‘a* system. Ahupua‘a is part of the traditional land division, typically corresponding to the natural watershed from the mountain to the ocean. Besides the unit of traditional land division, the ahupua‘a system constitutes an ecosystem that holds the natural flow of water at its center: “Ahupua‘a was a self-sustaining environment extending from the mountain to the sea with productive interdependence of all life forms” (Blaisdell, Chang, and Lake 2005, 373). The “productive interdependence of all life forms” was the basis upon which the quality of water was said to have maintained throughout the system due to the nutrient cycle in which one being’s waste become food for other beings. Through the ahupua‘a ecosystem services, Kanaka Maoli were able to obtain all the basic necessities of life from food, medicine, clothing materials, housing materials, and tools, to canoe building materials (Blaisdell, Chang, and Lake 2005). The ahupua‘a system not only serves as the physical reminder of the ecosystem that Ka‘ala Farm is a part but also embodies the matrix of traditional ecological knowledge and the way of life of the Kanaka Maoli.

The understanding and the lived experience of ahupua‘a thus serve as a holistic model of living. This is in common to the holistic model used in other aboriginal healing practices such as the “medicine wheel” or “sacred circle” of Native Americans and the “four-sided house” (*Whare Tapa Wha*) and the “octopus” (*Te Wheki*) of the Maori (Dobson and Brazzoni 2016; Green 2010, 32; Lavellee and Poole 2009; Mark, Chamberlain, and Boulton 2017; Mark and Lyons 2010, 1757). Referring to the use of the sacred circle in the aboriginal communities in Canada, Green (2010, 32) explains its functionality for healing practices: “Within this wheel, health means to live a meaningful vision of one’s wholeness, connectedness, and balance in the world.” Similarly, the ahupua‘a ecosystem is an embodiment of the wholeness of existence for Kanaka Maoli. As will be discussed in greater detail later, the wholeness embodied by ahupua‘a is encoded in the cosmogonical chant called *Kumulipo* that poetically expresses the emergent processes of time, space, life and cosmos. In particular, it expresses the interdependence of life forms between the land and the ocean (Bailey 2012). Accordingly, the lived experience of the ahupua‘a ecosystem at Ka‘ala Farm gives the participants an opportunity to reset their temporal and spatial orientation to the original or ancestral vision and practice of life. The sharing of such vision, as Green (2010) reminds us, is celebrated and renewed by the cultural protocol (i.e., ceremonies and rituals).

The particularity of ahupua‘a at Ka‘ala Farm including its singular geological and ecological features, is introduced to the participants during the initial cultural protocol of permission and welcome. The protocol takes place in front of the *hale* (traditional house or hall) that is located at the beginning of the lo‘i kalo. The Ka‘ala Farm personnel stand in front of the hale while the participants and guests stand across from the hale divided into male and female, facing the Ka‘ala Farm personnel. Typically the representative figures lead the participants to offer *oli* (chant) to seek their permission for entry. Butch Detroye, Ka‘ala Farm cultural director, responds to the oli with their oli of welcome and introduction to Ka‘ala Farm. The oli was composed by Kumu Mililani Allen, the *kumu hula* (hula teacher) of the community. It honors the names of the goddess, spring, streams, mountains, wind, and sacred site or *heiau* of the land (Detroye, pers. comm.). Speaking about her students in the summer early college program, Cathy Ikeda, professor of education at UHWO, sees the critical role of the cultural protocol: “I think it sets foundations for [the understanding] that this is a place, this is like a sacred place...there is spirituality to it” (Cathy Ikeada, pers. comm., July 12, 2018). Both Lexter Chou, an advisor to the Leeward Community College student government, and Jewelynn Kirkland, a Nānākuli high school science teacher and coordinator of the ‘A‘ali‘i project for at-risk students, concur with Ikeda on the importance of cultural protocol in their students’ understanding of the place on a deep level (Lexter Chou, pers. comm., August 1, 2018; Jewelynn Kirkland, pers. comm., May 15, 2018). Kirkland further explicates the foundational aspect of oli: “It is about the foundation. Without this place, where we [are] standing, where are

we gonna be standing? Stand physically, stand and live in, you now, the whole thing. We need this place to stand. ...and who, what mountains are part of who we are” (Kirkland, pers. comm.).

### “Hale”

As described above, the location of hale is where the initial cultural protocol typically takes place. Once the protocol is performed the participants enter the hale for an orientation usually conducted by Detroye. Before getting into the introduction, he asks everybody to sit comfortably on the bench seat and do a breathing exercise by inhaling, or *hanu*, keeping it in the lungs for a few seconds, and exhaling or *hā*. This breathing exercise is contextualized in the traditional Polynesian custom of *honi* where the two people greet by lightly pressing each other’s nose and exchange their breath (*hā*). Thus, the breathing exercise serves as a way for the participants to symbolically greet the presence of Ka‘ala Farm while practically giving them a chance to attune themselves to the environment. Following the introduction, Detroye introduces himself and asks everybody to introduce themselves. Following the tradition, the inclusion of the participants’ genealogy and place of birth is critical to their introduction.

Both symbolically and functionally, the hale is a central space of cultural protocol. Reno Yaw, Rap Center Alumnus and Ho‘omau Ke Ola staff, talks about the importance of hale in his awakening as a Kanaka Maoli:

I think as a client [of Ho‘omau Ke Ola], we was up there one time and we was in the hale. And I think my entire life I have never been in one hale and it was my first time ever and it impacted me. Not that I wanted to go out to be one Hawaiian but I was standing one hale and I never did before, ever. And I was in there like ‘Wow!’ That was my first time for that. Right. My “aha” moment. (Yaw, pers. comm.)

The “aha” moment also came to the early college students in a more practical manner giving them the understanding of the functionality of hale during the hard work in summer, as Ikeda relates to their discovery: “I think for me and students it’s like when you work hard and then they would eat brunch in the hale. When you go in the hale, it’s like Hawaiian AC no matter how hot it is outside. They really enjoy the hale. They always like, go to hale, you know?” (Ikeda, pers. comm.). As can be seen in both Yaw and early college students’ experience, the learning of culture both in its symbolic and functional aspects takes place as a self-discovery through the participants’ interaction with the traditional architecture as they decode the meaning for themselves.

### “Kuleana”

One of the critical components of self-discovery is the notion of *kuleana*, translated as responsibility and right. In the specific context of the program at Ka‘ala Farm, kuleana entails a designation and undertaking of the individual or groups’ roles in relation to the totality of the task. Based on my observations of my service learning students and the Lā ‘Ohana events, the designation of kuleana invariably takes place spontaneously and organically.

Even among the 4th- and 6th-grade participants, according to Liveon Simmon, a Ka‘ala Farm intern, a rudimentary sense of kuleana can be observed in their shift of attitude from total disengagement where “they are not even paying attention” to where they are so engaged to the point they don’t want to leave (Liveon Simmon, pers. comm., July 17, 2018). Both Michael Hayes, a UHWO Education Professor, and Ikeda observed a dramatic increase in engagement among their early college students where they become “really involved in what is going on” (Michael Hayes, pers. comm., July 16, 2018). Ikeda highlights how the engagement has

significant to do with the organic process in which they discover their kuleana: “They don’t even ask you ‘Oh, what should I be doing?’ They just go and do it” (Ikeda, pers. comm.). Yaw explains how the self-discovery of kuleana at Ka’ala Farm can lead to an exponential development process of self-discovery among the substance recovery patients: “I see them get more interested in oli (chant) and the *pule* (prayer) and everything else because they know it’s all tied in” (Yaw, pers. comm.). He further elaborates on this process as the recovery of the whole through making connections: “I think it is humongous for [them to] finally make one connection about something. ... I [am] not the smartest in Hawaiian culture, but I know there’s things that I do today, I know what’s important, I know who is affected, and I know I can be a part of something else outside of me and it’s through this” (Yaw, pers. comm.).

The self-discovery of kuleana connects individuals with the whole both in their collective task and their community. Accordingly, the individual undertaking of kuleana simultaneously entails the group engagement in the tasks at Ka’ala Farm such as weeding, harvesting of kalo, planting of *huli* (seedlings of kalo), and cleaning all in a spontaneous manner. This collective undertaking of kuleana is known as *laulima*, which literally means “many hands.” Hyimeen Akiona, cultural director at Ho’omau Ke Ola, translates it as “working together” (Akiona, pers. comm., June 12 and July 19, 2018). The cultural values of kuleana and *laulima* are something that manifests in the process of the activities at Ka’ala Farm where the participants work together spontaneously and harmoniously without any prior or on-site instruction or guidance.

## Reconnecting with the Land, Ecosystem, and Plants

The spontaneous aspect of the on-site learning and experience of cultural values is significantly related to the ‘āina-based activities at Ka’ala Farm. As mentioned earlier, the work environment at Ka’ala Farm is literally the ancestral land for the Kanaka Maoli in which the activities are designed to restore and perpetuate the original ahupua‘a ecosystem.

Some of the Native American (Carrier Nations) and Maori healing practices also place the land and nature-based activities at its center (Dobson and Brazzoni 2016; Hond, Ratima, and Edwards 2019; Mark, Chamberlain, and Boulton 2017; Mark and Lyons 2010; Tinirau, Gillies, and Tinirau 2011). The example of Maori community gardens for health promotion in the Taranaki Region in Aotearoa has a strong affinity for the healing practices at Ka’ala Farm. The community gardens (*māra*) are based on the reclamation of their ancestral lands, the location of “past tribal authority and activity” as part of non-violent resistance to the historical and ongoing colonization; the *māra* activities entail the “restorative effect on people and groups” in terms of their reconnection with the indigenous food system, shared identity, “ability to work as a collective” or social cohesion, sense of “responsibility and commitment” their cultural heritage, and intergenerational connections (Hond, Ratima, and Edwards 2019, 49–51). Although Ka’ala Farm shares these aspects of restorative effect, there is one unique aspect of the ‘āina-based healing practices at Ka’ala Farm. It is the coexistence of the dry land gardens (*māla*) and the wet-land kalo terrace.

### “Lo‘i Kalo”

Most of the official activities take place in the lo‘i kalo (located in the west side of the farm) supervised by the cultural director Detroye and the executive director Eric Enos. The *māla* area (located in the east side of the farm) that houses kalo and other plants is managed by Ka’ala Farm’s long time associates Mahina and Cheryle Pukahi who organize the Lā ‘Ohana, a monthly open community event. While both lo‘i kalo and *māla* are part of the integral experience at Ka’ala Farm, it is the activities at the lo‘i kalo that are most popular among the participants.

The activities in the lo'i kalo facilitates an "immersive" experience (Hayes, pers. comm.) where the participants feel direct connections with the ahupua'a ecosystem, plants, cultural values and practices, and ancestors' footsteps. Yaw explains a profound sense of awe that the participants from the substance recovery program experience at the lo'i kalo:

I think a lot of them...like me, never experienced stuff like that...stepping into one active lo'i, feeling that mud go between your toes, feeling that ice cold water, knowing that it is the freshest water coming down from the valley, ...hearing stories and knowing that 700 years [ago] that somebody up in there working probably in the same lo'i because of the stories they share up there about the carbon dating and everything they've done to prove that there was people up there, right? (Yaw, pers. comm.)

The activities at the lo'i kalo, including weeding, harvesting, and planting, seem to be at the core of Ka'ala Farm experience as Akiona observes its immediate effect among her clients/students: "It's the spiritual stuff that you begin to heal" (Akiona, pers. comm.). In comparison with working on the dry land, Akiona sees immediate changes in their behavior that indicate "spiritual changes": "My most memorable experience is watching *haumana* (students) getting into the lo'i and see spiritual changes. The minute they get into there. The feet get *lepo* (mud) on. First they were 'oohh uhh!' And you finally see" (Akiona, pers. comm.). A particular change she has witnessed is their show of respect: "[T]his population we work with, they swear a lot. It becomes part of their language. I noticed over the years swearing no more. So it's the total respect. Also, you see around here they hack and spit. You cannot do that up there. They don't" (Akiona, pers. comm.). Robert Nunes, a caretaker of the Ho'omau Ke Ola's 'āina-based learning facility, also sees the remarkable changes in his clients where they get into a "peaceful, kinda like laughing mode" and feeling "comfortable [and] content," as an indication of "spiritual growth" (Robert Nunes, pers. comm., June 12, 2018).

The self-discovery of kuleana and laulima, we discussed earlier, takes place organically and spontaneously in the lo'i kalo all across the different groups of participants. Observing the 4th- and 6th-grader participants, Simmon witnesses the shift to total engagement as they immerse themselves into the lo'i kalo: "[O]nce they get into the mud they [get] excited. Probably...three out of the bunch [are hesitant] but when everybody is in they are going to try it too" (Simmon, pers. comm.). Detroye calls this process a "social adjustment" that the lo'i kalo experience brings to the participants:

Even with a college groups because a lot of them don't know each other; they are just getting to know each other. They [are] real quiet when they come in ... . But once you get in the mud, once they are in the *lo'i*...you hear a laugh, you hear talking, you hear joking and by the time they come out they're all known each other. We call that 'taro talk' (Detroye, pers. comm.).

The process of "social adjustment" in the lo'i kalo is indeed the process of the self-discovery of kuleana and laulima. Chou recalls the spontaneous formation of a collective work with individual kuleana in the lo'i kalo among her students: "Everybody was working as a team. So that was great, just to see how organic all flowed together. They all started to make their own lines of you know, pulling [weed] from this side...passing it down to this side" (Chou, pers. comm.). Through working together, Akiona sees the strengthening of the connection between her clients/students: "It brought a lot of love to one another. Even if it meant playing after the work, eh? Playing in the lo'i in the mud where they were in full body wrestling. But it brought love. It brought bonding" (Akiona, pers. comm.). Furthermore, Chou points out how the result of their individual-collective work becomes visible during their students' work time in the lo'i kalo: "[T]here at Ka'ala Farm that day...there was no water movement, right? And once

they started pulling [weed] and after we looked at it, the water was super flowing” (Chou, pers. comm.). Clearing up the lo‘i kalo to restore the flow of water has much deeper and personal meaning for Akiona’s clients/students. The self-discovery of their kuleana of the lo‘i kalo cleaning leads to the metaphorical comprehension of their own life process. Akiona relates to the debriefing she has with her clients/students where they are afforded to reflect on the connection between their activities and recovery:

I [would] like to see what they are thinking in the head. And how they can relate it to the recovery, eh? “Why are you doing [the weeding]?” “I have to take out the rubbish.” “How come?” “Water no can go smooth.” “And if the water no can go through then what?” “Then it it’s not gonna have the smooth [flow].” “So how can we relate this?” “So if I don’t clean and take [the rubbish] out, it cannot go smooth in life for me.” (Akiona, pers. comm.)

The self-discovery of deeper personal meaning is one of the reasons why Akiona regards her clients/students’ work at Ka‘ala Farm as “very spiritual” because they can gain the “spiritual eye” to see their life struggles and recovery reflected in their work at the lo‘i kalo (Akiona, pers. comm.).

### “Kalo”

While the removal of the weeds from the lo‘i kalo generates multiplicity of meaning for the participants, the fundamental purpose of their work at the lo‘i kalo is to take care of, or *mālama* the kalo plant, the staple food and sacred plant for Kanaka Maoli. The Lā ‘Ohana events feature the story of the birth of kalo led by Mahina and the traditional *poi* pounding practice of the pre-cooked kalo led by Cheryl. Prior to the work at the dry-land kalo patch, Mahina shares the cosmogony of kalo derived from the Kumulipo. Mahina explains how the islands were created by the mating of *Papa* (earth mother) and *Wākea* (sky father); As *Wākea* was “intimate” with their daughter *Ho‘ohokukalani*, their union brought the first human named *Haloanaka* who was still born at the birth. In grief, *Ho‘ohokukalani* buried *Haloanaka* with her breath into the ground. At this very place the first kalo emerged. When the second child was born, he was named *Haloa*, the first human being. At the end of his story, Mahina asks the participants a question, “So what is kalo to you?” The participants usually get the right answer, “He is our older brother!”

The kinship relationships with plants and animals are widely shared by other aboriginal and Polynesian societies. Alluding to the Ojibwa people’s transcendental notion of personhood and the concept of Totem derived from the Anishinabe word, *ototeman* as illustrating examples, Raymond Pierotti uses the term “kincentric ecology” to describe the relationship in which “humans and nonhumans are viewed as part of an ecological assemblage that is treated as an extended family who share ancestry and origin” (2011, 31). In light of “kincentric ecology,” therefore, the Hawaiian cultural value of *mālama ‘āina*, taking care of the land that feeds, has more than its literal meaning. According to Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa, *mālama ‘āina*, constitutes the backbone of reciprocal cosmic and societal relationships between *akua* (gods) and *ali‘i* (chiefs), *ali‘i* (chiefs) and *maka‘āinana* (commoners), and humans and ‘āina. Honoring these multidimensional kinship relations with kalo through the ‘āina activities allows the participants to retain their deep connections with the ‘āina, community, family, nation, ancestors, and themselves.

Pierotti delves further into the reciprocal relationships between human and nonhuman persons that are achieved through humans taking nonhuman beings into them as food: “Humans live in mutual aid relationships with nonhumans. If humans eat or otherwise use nonhumans, they are empowered by that relationship. This empowerment leads to mutual respect” (2011, 33). In some of the programs at Ka‘ala Farm that entail a prolonged period of activities such as

Ho‘omau Ke Ola and Nānākuli Highschool’s ‘A‘ali‘i Project, the participants can experience all aspects of the care of kalo, from weeding to planting, harvesting and eating. Akiona explains how eating the kalo they cultivated completes the cycle and also begins a new cycle: “You can see the impact of the food, the source they worked for and eat and come back and work even harder. Not that you tell them to work harder; it just comes” (Akiona, pers. comm.). For at-risk high-schoolers, Kirkland takes the advantages of their healthy appetite for food to retain their reciprocal relationship with the ‘āina:

You know, they’re hungry, they’re kids. If we can connect place, land, to how it nourishes you... When they’re eating it, they have to think back that the food came from... Where? Came from the ‘āina. And without us to mālama ‘āina, in multiple ways, the food not going to grow. ... If you have a good care and have, you know, aloha to the ‘āina, it grows, so they see what is happening to them. (Kirkland, pers. comm.)

The Ka‘ala Farm participants’ experience of the reciprocal relationships or mālama ‘āina that plays out in the activities at the lo‘i kalo and in the cycle of planting, harvesting, and partaking of kalo constitutes an act of retracing their ancestors path as Akiona puts: “It’s walking the path of the footsteps of our ancestors and carried on throughout the years” (Akiona, pers. comm.). Contextualized in the “kincentric ecology,” the meaning of “ancestors” assumes multidimensionality not just limited to the human ancestors that worked at the lo‘i kalo hundreds of years ago but nonhuman ancestors.

## Re-connecting with Ancestors

As mentioned earlier, the participants in general experience much more immediate, direct, and deep connections with the ‘āina, community, themselves, and ancestors in the lo‘i kalo compared to the māla. As Yaw pointed out earlier, there are many factors that account for the difference, for instance, the contacts with the fresh water from the mountains and the ancient terrace structure. In order to find out the difference from a natural science perspective, I teamed up with my colleague in microbiology and two students during the summer of 2018 to explore the world of microbes at Ka‘ala Farm. The soil samples taken from both dry and wet land patches were submitted to metagenomics to determine the microbial populations. The microbes form a community that helps process carbon and nitrogen into the soil to foster the plants’ growth and are more active in the water than the dry land (Bach et al. 2018; Staley and Sadowsky 2016). The preliminary findings of the samplings indicated that the lo‘i kalo has much more diverse microbial populations than the māla and that each lo‘i kalo patch contains one unique microbe that was not present in other patches. The understanding of the microbial world at Ka‘ala Farm sheds light on the organic and spontaneous nature of the communal work in the lo‘i kalo.

In this context, the importance of Kumulipo resurfaces as it tells the story of the emergence of life in the manner of today’s evolutionary biology. As with other Polynesian cosmologies (Aotearoa, Tuamotus, Society Islands, Marquesas, and Samoa), according to Katharine Luomala, the Kumulipo explains “the early phase of world origin by evolutionary development and the later phases by the creative acts of gods” (n.d., 26). Accordingly, Papa and Wākea’s procreative story mentioned earlier comes in the chant as the thirteenth era. The first two eras of the Kumulipo describe the primordial process of creation: The turning heat of the earth, the turning of the heavens, and the slime (walewale) that established the earth leads to the birth of the night; From the night, Kumulipo (“source of profundity”) and *Poele* (“darkness”), respectively male and female beings were born; from them coral polyps (*‘Ukuko ‘ako ‘a*) in the ocean and the worms (*Ko ‘e ‘enuhe*) in the land were born (*The Kumulipo* 1978, 1–2; Beckwith,

[1951] 1972, 42–49, 187). The Kumulipo, therefore, narrates the evolutionary process of life forms from the primordial to complex unfolding on the land and in the ocean. The first two eras thus capture the development of the simple life forms in the sequence from the slime that established the earth, the first sexed beings, to the emergence of coral polyps and earth worms. In other words, the emergence of micro-organism, though not specifically named, is acknowledged in the Hawaiian cosmogony. Preceding the birth of *kalo*, therefore, microbes emerged as the earliest form of ancestors in the Hawaiian worldview. Akiona, Detroye, and Schmidt-Taylor mention the “cellular memory” or the interaction through the cellular structure to account for the healing effect of the *lo‘i kalo* (Akiona, pers. comm.; Detroye, pers. comm.; Schmidt-Taylor, pers. comm.). Akiona explains how such memory exists “because everything in the *lepo* (mud) is what we have in our body” (Akiona, pers. comm.). In comparison to the ancient rock structure and *kalo*, the microbes in the *lo‘i kalo* facilitate the connection with an “invisible ancestor” at the molecular level.

## Spirituality

Akiona, Chou, Ikeda, Nunes, and Yaw (pers. comm.) all identify spirituality as one of the significant components of Ka‘ala Farm and its activities. Yaw approaches spirituality as a deep emotional connection he has experienced at Ka‘ala Farm in detail:

I’ve gone up there at times by myself just [to] get quiet when things going on and I sit down by the *ahu* (cairn). If you can find the time or you can make that connection the place is spiritual. Not all the time but a lot of times, I went there and it just felt deep where at time I like cry and I don’t know why. ... When I go up there, I feel safe or I feel like I [am] allowed to cry up here. I found my place like I just can’t let go. (Yaw, pers. comm.)

As Yaw relates to the relevance of making connections in the experience of spirituality at Ka‘ala, Baskin (2016, 52) illuminates aboriginal spirituality in a slightly broader manner:

[S]pirituality embodies an interconnectedness and interrelationship with all life. Everyone and everything (both “animate” and “inanimate”) are seen as being equal and interdependent, part of the great whole and having a spirit. This view permeates the entire Indigenous vision of life, land, and the universe.

This experience of retaining the connection with the whole, one of the consistent themes in this research, thus constitutes the core of spirituality, which plays a vital role in the healing. Dobson and Brazzoni (2016, 12) find that the Carrier Nations’ participants become aware of the ubiquity of spirituality in their ancestors’ lives through cultural activities: “Participants are shown that spirituality existed in all parts of traditional life.” The *lo‘i kalo* activities at Ka‘ala Farm, in particular, are critical for the reawakening of spirituality as it enables the participants to reconnect not only to the tangible forms of the ancestral life such as the *ahupua‘a* system, cultural protocol, and *kalo* but also to the “invisible” existence of ancestors the participants sense in the *lo‘i kalo* where the community of microbes as their ancestors are working together harmoniously. A Kanaka Maoli master navigator, Bruce Blenkenfeld (2019), connects this invisible existence with the notion of spirituality in the context of navigation: “You know it’s a big part of it that we always acknowledge is the spiritual, the unseen.”

With the aid of pedagogical aspects of Ka‘ala through cultural protocol, the understanding of the history and meaning of the place and the *ahupua‘a* ecosystem, the story of the birth of *Kalo*, and *in situ* practices of cultural values, the participants are given a precious opportunity to gain an insight into the working of the unseen to attain their holistic reconnection.

## Discussion: Implications for Holistic Healing

From the disengaged 4th grader and the at-risk high-school students to the adult survivors of substance abuse, domestic violence, and incarceration, Ka‘ala Farm provides a milieu of holistic healing for the participants to overcome the state of disconnection. The notion of healing is normally applied only to those with the recovery program. However, the healing at Ka‘ala Farm is applicable to all participants who are in need of reconnection regardless of the degrees of impact from the disconnection. Such needs fundamentally stem from the crude reality Kanaka Maoli are burdened with the intergenerational trauma through historic and ongoing colonization and occupation. Akiona identifies the trauma starting “from ancestry, what was taken and continued to be taken... So my voice was taken too” (Akiona, pers. comm.). The estrangement from ancestral roots is wrought by the physical displacement of Kanaka Maoli from their homeland through settler colonialism, military occupation, and land development. It is also caused by the ontological displacement through cultural erasure ubiquitously present in varying degrees in the educational system, media, governmental bureaucracy, consumerism, tourism, and real estate development. Paglinawan et al. (2020, 34) address such forces as “cultural wounding” inflicted on Kanaka Maoli through “distortions of the historical record, suppression of traditions and destruction of cultural artifacts, denigration of the significance of genealogies for both lineage and place and censorship or distortion of religious practices.” The state of disconnection can create the worst-case scenario for some Kanaka Maoli driven to the spiral of criminalization and incarceration as Detroye points out: “All they know is the streets and jails” (Detroye, pers. comm.).

Peter Menzies (2008) analyzes the impact of colonial policies on intergenerational trauma among the aboriginal population in urban Toronto. He sees the disruption in the balance of the medicine wheel as a consequence of colonial policies has created the state in which “[i]ndividual, family, community, and nation now exist in isolation of one another” (Menzies 2008, 46). The healing, accordingly, is aimed at the reintegration of individual, family, community, and nation based on the principle of the medicine wheel. Comparably, Ka‘ala Farm provides a critical opportunity for the participants to be re-integrated into the whole based on the principle of *mālama ‘āina* (taking care of the land that feeds).

In resonance with the land-based healing program in the Taranaki community in Aotearoa that gives meaning to their activities as “a site of peaceful resistance to cultural subjugation,” including land loss (Hond, Ratima, and Edwards 2019), Ka‘ala Farm embodies resilience to the forces of colonization and occupation through the reactivation of the continuity that has never been lost. It is eloquently expressed in Ka‘ala Farm’s founding act of removing the overgrown vegetation to uncover the ancient terrace structure and the retention of water flow from the source.

The healing begins as the participants’ spontaneous self-discovery of their kuleana situated in the concrete tasks that gets organically woven into the collective kuleana at Ka‘ala Farm. The serene and peaceful surroundings of Ka‘ala Farm encourage some of the participants to reflect on the deeper meaning of their experience and kuleana for their individual life path, family, community, and nation. Thus, the momentum for healing is this self-directed discovery process that activates the will to regain the wholesomeness of existence both individually and collectively within the participants.

## Conclusion

For four decades from its inception, Ka‘ala Farm has been a great source of inspiration for Kanaka Maoli and others through its commitment to the revitalization of Hawaiian culture, the ahupua‘a ecosystem, and aboriginal food system. Created as a land-based education program for at-risk youth in the Wai‘anae community, it has served a wide ranging educational

institutions, business organizations, non-profit organizations, and research institutions in Hawai‘i and beyond. While the land-based education continues to be at the core of its activities, this research focused on the healing aspect of Ka‘ala Farm in a broader and holistic sense.

Much like the healing programs in other aboriginal communities, the healing at Ka‘ala Farm exemplifies the recovery from and resilience to the historic trauma inflicted by colonization and belligerent occupation. Ka‘ala Farm’s founding act of reclaiming the ancestral land and the natural flow of water by the Rap Center teachers and students with the support of community members has restored the continuity of the ancestral footsteps overcoming the historic and ongoing disruptions. The Ka‘ala Farm pedagogy through cultural protocol, orientations on the history and cosmology of the place, the ahupua‘a ecosystem, and the birth of kalo, and the general cultural milieu with the hale, and ancient stone terrace structure contextualize the participants experience at Ka‘ala Farm and provides them with a meaningful vision of their wholeness. It is through the participants’ spontaneous self-discovery of kuleana and laulima (“working together), which typically takes place in the lo‘i kalo, that they experience their reconnection with the wholeness of existence as the legacy of their ancestors. Spirituality as a synergistic component of reconstructed wholeness heals the impact of disconnection forced upon them by the historic and ongoing process of physical and ontological displacement. The healing process allows the participants to reaffirm the continuity of the living culture of the ancestors in today’s context and reality. Tatiana Kalaniopua Young (2018), who conducted her research on the Hawaiian activist group Hui Kū Like Kākou that holds its semi-autonomous activities on Sundays at Ka‘ala Farm, eloquently expresses a similar conclusion about the healing effect at Ka‘ala Farm: “HKLK (Hui Kū Like Kākou) organized space for cultural reintegration, adapting the ‘old’ to k(new) way of life, weaving our feelings, thoughts, and prayers into a pathway of healing” (Young 2018, 56).

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