The Moʻolelo of Kohelepelepe:[1]

To tell the story of Ualani Davis's *Kuʻu Pua i Kohelepelepe,* we must first ground it in Place. Kohelepelepe is located in Maunalua in the ahupuaʻa of Waimānalo. Maunalua is a wahi pana that once held pristine fishponds guarded by the moʻo (freshwater guardian) named Laukupu. Nestled within this landscape and rising prominently above the town of Maunalua is Kohelepelepe or Kohelele (the vaginal labia or the flying vagina). At the base of this crater is a quaint botanical garden, which houses plants from around the world. Ualani's pieces are situated here in the embrace of native and non-native flora and fauna.

The moʻolelo of Kohelele or Kohelepelepe is a story of consent and resistance, one that teaches us traditional modes of understanding regarding the complexities of domestic violence and the intricacies of familial bonds. Martha Beckwith, informed by Mary Kawena Pukui, writes that Kapōʻulakīnaʻu, also known as Kapōmaʻilele, the sister of Pelehonuamea, saves Pele from a violent attack on her person by Kamapuaʻa. Kamapuaʻa and Pele are known to have a tumultuous relationship, both as lovers and enemies.

According to this moʻolelo, the pig deity Kamapuaʻa forces himself onto Pele near Kalapana on the island of Hawaiʻi. This violent attack catches the attention of Kapōʻulakīnaʻu, a powerful matron god of hula and sorcery. Thus, her senses would have been attuned to the cries of help from her sister, who, in her own right, commands the fires of Kīlauea.

Kapōʻulakīnaʻu detaches her vagina from her body and throws it with all her might toward Oʻahu. This leaping vagina captures the attention of Kamapuaʻa, and a chase ensues. He leaves Pele and follows Kapōʻulakīnaʻu's vagina toward the crater—popularly known today as Koko Head. Her vagina lands on the summit of this crater, Puʻumaʻi (genitalia hill), making a shapely indent on its slopes nearest the jagged sea cliffs of Makapuʻu. Once the indent is made, Kapōʻulakīnaʻu withdraws her genitalia and hides it in Kalihi Valley.[2]

Because of her sacrifice and mana (spiritual and physical power), Kapōʻulakīnaʻu saves her dear sister Pele from Kamapuaʻa's apathetic lust. This moʻolelo teaches us that consent is a loina Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian principle)—that relations must carry with it all forms of consent. In an ultimate act of resistance, Kapōʻulakīnaʻu unmoors her sexual organ from her body, revealing the extent to which kinship relations are upheld.

Therefore, Kohelepelepe is a symbol of the feminine, carrying immense power. In Hawaiian thinking, genitalia were prized for their reproductive power. Many mele maʻi (genitalia chants) were composed for high-ranking aliʻi (chiefs), as the maʻi (genitals) are the foundation of all genealogical connections. These chants were composed using kaona

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[1]Research was conducted by Kaiminaauao Kahikina in partnership with Ualani Davis.

[2] Martha Warren Beckwith, *Hawaiian Mythology.* Mumbai: Delhi Open Books, 2021, 187, https://www-degruyterbrill-com.eres.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/document/doi/10.1515/9780824840716-004/html.

(symbolic and layered language), which honors the maʻi and its genealogical potential. For example, Queen Liliʻuokalani's maʻi was named ʻAnapau (frisky), and a chant was composed to describe its actions, movements, and erotic power in relation to the continuation of a chiefly lineage.

Gardens As a Form of Resistance:

Queen Liliʻuokalani was a prolific writer and composer. Her many mele (songs) haunt and entice with poetic prose of pleasure, sorrow, love, and affection. Her composition "Aloha ʻOe" has inspired the imagination of many who dream of visiting Hawaiʻi's shores.

While imprisoned for eight months at ʻIolani Palace in 1895, the Queen wrote the mele "Kuʻu Pua i Paoakalani," which speaks of her two gardens: (1) Paoakalani in Waikīkī and (2) Uluhaimalama in Pauoa Valley. This mele is a fond recollection of Paoakalani, her estate, where the Queen spent considerable time composing and writing. As an expert in Hawaiian composition, the Queen employs kaona (layered meaning) in this particular mele by alluding to a rare blossom in her garden. This likely refers to a faithful companion or trusted confidant during her imprisonment. Uluhaimalama, also referenced in the song, was a kūʻokoʻa (independence) garden, planted as a gift to the community and a form of resistance. Within the context of a U.S.-occupied Ko Hawaiʻi Pae ʻĀina (Kingdom of Hawaiʻi), Paoakalani and Uluhaimalama were gardens that the Queen found refuge amidst the non-consensual military occupation of Hawaiʻi and looming American imperialist interest in her national lands, waters, and people.

While imprisoned at the ʻIolani Palace, the Queen received flowers from Uluhaimalama wrapped in newspaper. Johnny Wilson—the son of her lady-in-waiting, Kitty Townsend-Wilson—faithfully delivered these flowers to his Queen, wrapped in the news of the time. The Queen was under a strict news embargo; all of her correspondence was surveilled under the watchful eye of the Republic of Hawaiʻi. The Queen was careful to unwrap these bouquets herself to relish the news snippets that came into her possession.[3] Some believe that Johnny Wilson is the rare flower mentioned in the mele, as the Queen, delighted to receive flowers from her beloved estate, Paoakalani and garden, Uluhaimalama, was likely inspired to compose the mele "Kuʻu Pua i Paoakalani."[4]

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[3] Liliʻuokalani. *Hawai'i's Story by Hawai'i's Queen.* (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers), 289, https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/liliuokalani/hawaii/hawaii.html.

[4] Nona Beamer, "Wilson School/ ʻKuʻu Pua i Paoakalani,'" *Hula Preservation Society,* 1980, https://www.papakilodatabase.com/main/imageserver.php?path=H/A/S/H/1/2/8/2/7/2/9&file=NonaBeamer-Mele-015.pdf.

Though Paoakalani and Uluhaimalama no longer flower, their lasting legacy of resistance conveys an essential message of resilience in times of political turmoil and unrest. Ualani captures the essence of this resistance through cyanotypes. Davis's pieces work with the sickle shape of the koa leaf, the delicate ʻihiʻihilauākea, and the illuminating kukui. Each plant carries a symbolic meaning meant to be in conversation with its surroundings in the garden, which is composed chiefly of non-native plants. The koa symbolizes bravery, strength, and resilience; the ʻihiʻihilauākea, native to the area, symbolizes reverence; and the kukui symbolizes illumination and knowledge. These three pieces are aligned with the position of the sun at three important days of resistance celebrated by Kānaka Maoli: Lā Kūʻokoʻa (Independence Day), Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea (Sovereignty Restoration Day), and the ʻOnipaʻa Peace March.

The botanical garden at Kohelepelepe was strategically chosen for its vital and feminine energy. It is a garden that tells many stories through its plants from around the world. With a growing Hawaiian section, the garden is shifting its narrative toward a place-based orientation. Ualani's pieces are part of that shift. Her work pays homage to a resistance garden with layers of meaning and complexity. Each plant chosen by Davis holds a moʻolelo waiting to be shared with kamaʻāina and malihini alike. Like the famed feminine power of Kapōʻulakīnaʻu and Queen Liliʻuokalani, Davis's work honors the principles of pilina (relationality) and consent found in our rich cultural teachings.

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"Na Anoai o Oahu Nei." *Ka Hoku o Hawaii,* Pepeluali 11, 1930.