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Counternarratives of Maunakea. Crossing Digital Spaces, Claiming Ancestral Knowledge in Hawai'i

Abstract: This article focuses on the resistance to the proposed construction of the TMT telescope on Maunakea, exploring the legal and cultural clashes behind the protests and the strong social media presence of the Maunakea protectors. Digital activism allowed the Kū Kia'i Mauna movement to enhance the grassroot organizing and to take back the narrative of the protest, countering an overwhelming settler colonial media discourse, establishing connections across "webs, rhizomes, and rivers" with Indigenous movements worldwide. Building on the scholarly work about Hawaiian spatial practices and colonial cartography and on the intersection of storytelling and the reconstruction of the 'ike kupuna (ancestral knowledge), this article explores how Indigenous scholars and activists productively negotiated digital mediascapes to disseminate counternarratives. Finally, digitalization has enabled the creation of a Maunakea social media archive, to collect and organize multimedia materials, for the sake of research for activists and educators across the globe.

Keywords: *Indigenous, Hawai'i, Maunakea, digital activism, TMT, Hawaiian sovereignty*

1. A Premise

On July 15, 2019, the construction of the TMT, Thirty Meters Telescope, was scheduled to begin. Again. The largest telescope in the Northern hemisphere was planned to be built on the peak of Maunakea, the sacred mountain on the island of Hawai'i and the tallest mountain on earth if measured from the peak to the ocean floor. In Hawaiian traditions of creation, the mountain is an ancestor and shares genealogical ties with Native Hawaiians, or Kānaka Maoli.[1] It is one of the most sacred sites, if not the most sacred, in Hawaiian culture. For Kia'i, the guardians/protectors, there is a deep cultural responsibility to protect the mountain from desecration; it is, in fact, a genealogical duty to those who came before them and the generations who will succeed them.[2] From March 25, 2015, to Oct 19, 2021, in two waves of protest, tens of thousands of Kia'i camped at the base of the access road to the mountain to prevent trucks to carry materials to begin the construction.

The history of Native Hawaiians' resistance against settler colonialism dates back to the very first contact with Euro-American explorers, missionaries, and capitalists, from the end of the Eighteenth century, and it developed especially in conjunction with the overthrow of the monarchy in 1893 and then again when it became officially the 50th state of the United States in 1959. A founding moment in contemporary Native Hawaiian culture is the 1970s reawakening in resistance and activism known as

[1] See Leon No'eau Peralto, "Portrait. Mauna a Wākea", in Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua et al., eds., *A Nation Rising* (Durham, NC: Duke U.P., 2014), 233-243. In the following pages, I will use three terms interchangeably to refer to the indigenous population of Hawai'i: Hawaiians, Native Hawaiians, and Kanaka Maoli (or Kānaka in its plural form). For issues related to the multiple spellings of Maunakea/ Mauna Kea/ Mauna a Wākea, see Puakea Nogelmeier, "Maunakea And Maunaloa Deserve Our Respect", *Civil Beat* (2017), https://www.civilbeat.org/2017/11/maunakea-and-maunaloa-deserve-our-respect/, accessed 9 November 2022.

[2] See Candace Fujikane, *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future* (Durham, NC: Duke U.P., 2021), 86-88, and Frances Nguyen, "The Pandemic Hasn't Stopped Native Hawaiians' Fight to Protect Maunakea", *Vox* (2020) https://www.vox.com/2020/8/7/21354619/mauna-kea-tmt-telescope-native-hawaiians, accessed 9 November 2022.

the Hawaiian Renaissance.[3] The new millennium has seen several instances of conflict, clashes, and negotiations between the State and Kānaka Maoli, but the events surrounding the construction of the TMT on Maunakea are arguably the most significant, and inspiring, cultural battles of the last decades. Kānaka Maoli have been protesting the desecration of Maunakea for decades: sometimes news barely made it across the sea to the other islands, more seldomly they reached the continent and were published or broadcast on some news outlet in California. With the movement to protect Maunakea in 2019, however, the issue acquired national relevance, and it was broadcast globally, especially thanks to social media, which as the scholars Carlson and Berglund underline, "can be harnessed to disrupt public spheres, center indigenous voices, challenge political processes, and create communities of change".[4] The protest on Maunakea became an opportunity to dramatize a contest between different narratives: more specifically the proliferation and dissemination of counternarratives called into question the bias and interest of dominant voices and media platforms that had defended an aura of reliability and objectivity up to that point. The exceptional convergence of online activism with on-the-ground strategies and actions, adds another level of investigation into the potentialities of digital cultures, but also on the political significance of *actual bodies occupying actual space*, which was at the very core of a few pivotal moments of the protests, and in a very concrete sense contributed to its overall transformative impact.

The events surrounding the Maunakea conflict directly invoke crucial questions about the status of Hawai'i, the limits of democracy, the dark side of scientific discourse, and of course about Indigenous rights, issues that are at once exquisitely place-specific, and yet global. In particular, in the mind of a white European like myself, this conflict seems to activate a series of binary oppositions that invite further scrutiny. On the one hand, a progressive tradition in Euro-American thought has taught me to treasure scientific modernity, secularity, and progress and to be skeptical of religious beliefs taken as a guide in civic and political life, and to question cultural essentialism. On the other hand, that very tradition is extremely responsive to issues of social justice, of indigenous rights, rights of self-determination, and it fiercely defends minorities and environmental rights against corporate greed and the "rule of the majority". On a separate but related level, astronomy seems to be a wonderfully "noble" endeavor, aimed at scrutinizing the unknown wonders of the universe, in an attempt to understand its laws and our meaning in it. However, framing astronomy, or scientific research tout court, as a purely intellectual effort may prove profoundly misguiding. It means to dismiss its capitalist dimension, constituted of massive capital investments, speculations and revenues, and the acknowledgment that in this case it is mostly linked to a Department at the University of Hawai'i, which despite being a public State University, like many other research universities across the globe, often acts nowadays as a greedy corporation.[5]

The protectors of Maunakea stress the significance Maunakea has for Hawaiian people across history, and its status as a sacred place. In fact, at a foundational level, most Kanaka arguments are rooted in an understanding of Hawai'i as a colonized country: its history of colonization is unerasable from any honest attempt to understand its current situation. Who gets to set the rules in your own home? Who gets to say what is sacred, or how to care for the land? Who gets to control the resources

[3] See the ground-breaking, now classic work by Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter. Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999 [1993])

[4] Bronwyn Carlson and Jeff Berglund, eds., *Indigenous People Rise Up. The Global Ascendency of Social Media Activism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers U.P.), 8.

[5] See Dina Gilio-Whitaker, "At Rest for the Moment: Update on Mauna Kea Anti-TMT Movement" (2016), www.indiancountrytoday.com, accessed 9 November 2022. "From the start of the TMT project, private and public funds have been paying the exorbitant salaries and benefits of several individuals associated with TMT in the range of $200,000 to $275,000 annually. Also, millions of dollars in contracts have been awarded to an exclusive group of private businesses. Only a select few companies specialize in this type of observatory design, construction, and technology".

of the land? And finally, in a mainstream media environment dominated by big players and powerful corporations, how do you get your voice across, how do you transform the narrative, how do you claim it back?

This article aims at looking back to the more than 300 days of continuous resistance at the high elevation protest site (6,632ft) on the access road to Maunakea, briefly exploring the legal and cultural clashes behind the protests – e.g. the alleged binary opposition between technology and nature, modernity and tradition, private and public interests – and highlighting the strong social media presence of the Maunakea protectors. Digital activism allowed the Kū Kia'i Mauna movement, the "guardians of the mountain," not only to enhance the grassroot organizing, but to take back the narrative of the protest, countering a simplifying and overwhelming settler colonial media discourse, while also establishing powerful connections across "webs, rhizomes, and rivers"[6] with Indigenous movements worldwide (e.g. #IdleNoMore, #NoDAPL) and borrowing digital strategies from other marginalized communities (e.g. #BLM). This article will build on the scholarly work about Hawaiian spatial practices and colonial cartography and on the intersection of storytelling, language revitalization, and the reconstruction of the 'ike kupuna (ancestral knowledge).[7] It will follow Hearne's insights exploring how Indigenous scholars and activist productively negotiated digital mediascapes "reimagining the digital as a site of possibility".[8] Finally, while this specific conflict is still not quite over, digitalization has enabled the creation of a shifting Maunakea social media archive, to collect and organize multimedia and multilingual materials, for the sake of historiography and research, for Kānaka Maoli across the Pacific and the US mainland, and for activists and educators across the globe.

2. Interconnectedness

Currently the 50th state of the USA, the archipelago is the locus of a history as a sovereign nation, the Hawaiian Kingdom, from the unification of the Islands under King Kamehameha I in 1810 when the island of Kaua'i passed under his rule. Then a colonial history, after the coup in 1893 by businessmen and American landowners backed by the US Navy, when the beloved Queen Lili'uokalani was overthrown. The archipelago became a US businessmen-backed Republic (1894-98), then an incorporated territory (1900), despite great resistance, petitions, and legal actions by Native Hawaiians and by a segment of American citizens and politicians.[9] As scholar and activist Haunani-Kay Trask highlighted, "we suffered a unilateral redefinition of our homeland and our people, a displacement and dispossession in our own country. In familial terms, our mother (and thus our heritage and our inheritance) was taken from us. We were orphaned in our land".[10] In 1959 Hawai'i became officially the 50th state of the United States.

Circulation and contact are central to many aspects of the archipelago's cultural history: circulation around and across the Pacific Ocean by the indigenous people, then from Europe and from the U.S., as the first colonization of the island took place throughout the nineteenth century, and then primarily from Asia, when many laborers came to Hawai'i mostly to work the land. But circulation rarely happens in a neutral environment: more often, there are undeniable structures of inequality, those who hold power, and those who challenge it. Despite the fact that Hawai'i is often depicted as a multicultural paradise, it is also, remarkably, the arena for critical battles around indigenous rights,

[6] Joanna Hearne, "Native to the Device. Thoughts on Digital Indigenous Studies", *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 29.1 (2017), 3-26.
[7] See Marie Alohalani Brown, *Ka Po'e Mo'o Akua. Hawaiian Reptilian Water Deities* (Manoa, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2022).
[8] Hearne, "Native to the Device", 9.
[9] See Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed. Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke U.P., 2004)
[10] Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 16.

state rights, and de-colonization. Whereas commonly we understand the conflict in Hawai'i as framed by the opposition between Kānaka Maoli and white colonizers, many critics complicate this dichotomy by including a third community, which is also the most conspicuous: settlers of color. [11]

Following iconic Hawaiian activist Haunani-Kay Trask, Candace Fujikane is among the leading scholars of this issue. Fujikane, born in Hawai'i of Japanese ancestry, acknowledges the central role of settlers of color in the perpetuation of colonialism, and their very presence on the islands as a product of the colonial enterprise. She argues therefore for the necessity that settlers actively engage in the process of defending Hawaiian rights against the settler state as allies. For the scholar, "the conditions of settler colonialism require an expansiveness in articulating the *simultaneity of overlapping positionalities*".[12] Fujikane highlights that settlers of color in Hawai'i are always already simultaneously positioned, as both subjugated by settler state power, but on the other hand as settlers who often unwittingly support the state in its colonial practices: "[w]hen 65 percent of the 'i State Legislature is constituted by Asian settlers who are making harmful decisions that undermine Kanaka Maoli traditional and customary practices and environmental protections, we have to recognize the millennia of mālama'āina (caring for the land) that enabled Kānaka to identify the laws of the elements".[13]

In her latest work, *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future*, Fujikane moves from two related issues in Hawai'i today: the first, a political struggle between Indigenous rights and the power of the State, that was mostly visible recently around the proposal to build the TMT on Maunakea. The second has to do with environmental protection, real estate speculation, and climate change in Hawaii. Clearly the two issues are interrelated, and they sometimes can be understood as a conflict between capitalism and indigenous way of life. Fujikane's intervention in the scholarship about Hawaiian cartographies may provide some crucial information to better contextualize the protest on and about Maunakea, and especially the role that maps played in the legal case surrounding the TMT. The scholar and activist asks us "How are lands mapped as having an ontology – a life, a will, a desire, and an agency – of their own? How can such cartographies help us to grow a decolonial love for lands, seas, and skies that will help to renew abundance on this earth?"[14]As she argues, cartography as a methodology is critical to growing intimate relationships with 'āina (lands and waters) in ways necessary to our planetary future.

She uses the term "critical settler cartographies" to refer to a methodology of critiquing settler colonial maps and articulating economies of abundance, as a necessary strategy to challenge dominant Western epistemological formations and rethink society and our relationship with the environment. Critical settler cartography is for Fujikane an embodied land-based practice that "exposes the grandiose claims, contradictions, erasures, and ideological interests that drive settler colonial cartography".[15] In late capitalist economies, the state and the developers fracture and isolate the land into smaller and smaller lots until they can claim that the land has no longer any cultural significance or ecological continuities. As in the case of Maunakea, the settler state cartographically makes abundant indigenous lands *appear* to be wastelands and then carries out the actual *wastelanding* through industrial development. Such strategies of mapping and conceptualizing the land aim at delimiting and domesticating Indigenous places and their significance precisely because the seizure of land is constitutive of occupying and settler states. "In Hawai'i, settler colonial depictions of the land

[11] On the flawed understanding that Kānaka Maoli constitute a "race issue" in Hawai'i see Haunani-Kay Trask, "Settlers of Color and 'Immigrant' Hegemony", *Amerasia Journal*, 26.2 (2000), 1-24.
[12] Candace Fujikane, *Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future*, 14.
[13] Ibid., 15.
[14] Ibid., 4. For a thorough study of how Hawaiian leaders selectively appropriated Western ideas and technology – also with regards to mapping the land – to both transform and give continuity to traditional concepts of Hawaiian statecraft in the kingdom, focusing on agency and on "'Ōiwi optics" rather than imitations of foreign models, see also Kamanamaikalani Beamer, *No Mākou Ka Mana: Liberating the Nation* (Kamehameha Publishing, 2014).
[15] Fujikane, *Mapping*, 17.

as 'lying in waste' were aimed at seizing political control over both people and land and erasing a vast Kanaka Maoli knowledge base".[16] When settlers' cartographies of Maunakea indicate the peak as a "waste land", or when they identify it as the perfect location for the largest telescope on earth, they ignore for example its rich historical, cultural, and spiritual significance, but also its crucial role as the location of five aquifer systems on the island of Hawai'i.[17]

In her research on the scholarship about 19th century legal documents, Fujikane came across the term "mo'o'āina", and it is via this concept that I would like to move towards considerations regarding digital activism. "Mo'o'āina are the small land divisions, part of a larger land base, genealogically connected to one another", and "what is deeply telling and beautiful about maps of mo'o'āina is that they are defined by their relationality with that which lies on their edges, borders that are not boundaries of separation but seams of relationality".[18] Mo'o'āina is a principle that structures 'Ōiwi cartographies of resurgence through the restoration of interconnected waterways: "Kanaka practitioners based their own maps on centuries of kilo practices evident in 'ike kupuna (ancestral knowledge) of Mauna a Wākea".[19] Unlike the maps produced by the settler state, also in the legal battles around the construction of the TMT, these relational cartographies highlight varied ecosystems spread along the land and crossed by vast arteries of surface and subterranean waterways. Following this understanding of land as an *interconnected* network, we can realize how a harmful event in one place ripples out to all others, and by the same principle, a restorative change catalyzes far-reaching and often unexpected forms of revitalization elsewhere.

Alongside mo'o'āina, another fundamental concept to understand Pacific Indigenous epistemologies of spatiality and interconnectedness is the notion of wā (or vā), a relational space/time, that indicates the social and spiritual relations between people. Much scholarship has been produced on this concept, especially with regard to the Pasifika cultures of Samoa and Tonga.[20] Samoan author Albert Wendt, in a discussion about traditional tatauing, wrote that:

> Important to the Samoan view of reality is the concept of Va or Wa in Maori and Japanese. Va is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the contexts change. […] A well-known Samoan expression is 'ia teu le va.' Cherish/nurse/care for the va, the relationships. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group, unity, more than individualism: who perceive the individual person/creature/thing in terms of group, in terms of va, relationships.[21]

Here the relational space of vā organically links the individual to a context, a community, and connects people to a relationship with place. Most importantly, this concept stresses the ancestral responsibility to actively care, the agency to nurture a relationship with place. Notions of relationality and interconnectedness are clearly reminiscent of the way cyberspace and social media work, and both

[16] Ibid., 94.
[17] Ibid., 103.
[18] Ibid., 19.
[19] Ibid., 91.
[20] Among the most often cited authors who discussed vā is Albert Wendt, in *Out of the Vaipe, the Deadwater. A Writer's Early Life* (Wellington, NZ: Bridget Williams Books, 2015). See also Tevita O. Ka'ili, *Marking Indigeneity. The Tongan Art of Sociospatial Relations* (Tucson, AZ: U. of Arizona P., 2017); I'Uogafa Tuagalu "Heuristics of the Vā", *AlterNative An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 4.1 (2008),108-126, Melani Anae, "Teu Le Va. Samoan Relational Ethics", *Knowledge Cultures*, 4.3 (2016), 117-130; and Stephen Garner and Terry Pouono, "The Digital Vā. Teu Le Vā in Online Spaces", *Cursor* (2021), https://cursor.pubpub.org/pub/33f0jhi2/release/2, accessed 9 November 2022.
[21] Albert Wendt, "Tatauing the Post-colonial Body", originally in *Span*, 42-43 (1996), 15-29, now online https://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/wendt/tatauing.asp, accessed 9 November 2022.

these ideas invite an epistemological shift, both in cartography and in the way discursive formations relate to power structures. In fact, Indigenous scholars have applied the notion of vā to the development of digital space, as an opportunity to indigenize the digital environment, enriching it with Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, and centering it around communal learning, a practice so crucial to Pasifika cultures, in the acknowledgment that "the digital space must not impoverish, distil and strip the rich cultural significance of Pasifika ways of knowing and being".[22]

This idea of interconnectedness questions Euro-American epistemologies of *individuation* and *separation*, not unlike the mo'o'āina highlighted by Fujikane's work. Just like the reconceptualization of cartography in an indigenous perspective, social media may function in fact as a "tool to articulate counter narrative and to contest selective or dismissive framing by mainstream media".[23] A foundational moment in the new configuration of activism and digital media may be located in the Arab Spring movement of 2010-11 across much of the Arab world, when, in the face of governmental crackdown, youth and activists:

> advertised protests through Facebook events, giving live updates to each other on law enforcement via Twitter, and shared the videos of their battles on YouTube for the world to see. These tactics changed how resistance was done. They showed how effective social media and the internet could be in energizing an entire movement, and how quickly massive numbers of people could be mobilized. This new realm of organizing opened a new battleground between activists and the governments they organized against.[24]

A similarly dramatic change took place in indigenous communities in North America in the winter of 2012 thanks to the *Idle No More* movement through Canada and across the world.[25]

In "Native to the Device" the scholar Hearne follows a set of three metaphors, that deeply resonate with Fujikane's insight, to describe social media practices by Indigenous activists and youth, "the web, the rhizome, the river".[26] She borrows the notions from critic Susan Bernardin, who expands the vocabulary for describing the Indigenous digital to include waterways, arguing that "images of rivers and their deltas express the flow, trade connectivity, and networked structure of the digital and the Internet".[27] For Bernardin, rivers, spiderwebs and rhizomes are ways that Indigenous women activists have explicitly connected spiritual and tribal frameworks to the fundamental forms and structures of digital media.[28]

3. Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu: Education on Maunakea

Understanding the conflict on Maunakea requires in itself an exercise in interconnectedness and intersectional inquiry, because, like many instances we discussed earlier, even in this case it may appear, on the surface, that there are two sides, two main actors: the Kanaka protectors on one side,

[22] Dion Enari and Jacoba Matapo, "The Digital Vā. Pasifika Education Innovation During the COVID-19 Pandemic", *MAI. A New Zealand Journal of Indigenous Scholarship*, 9.4 (2020), 8.
[23] Candis Callison and Alfred Hermida, "Dissent and Resonance. #IdleNoMore as an Emergent Middle Ground", *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 10.4 (2015), p. 696.
[24] Kawena Kapahua, "Stories from the Mauna, Ku'u One Hānau", *Biography*, 43.3 (2020), 575-581, here 578.
[25] Carlson and Berglund, "Introduction", *Indigenous People Rise Up*, 7.
[26] Hearne, "Native", 17.
[27] Ibid., 16.
[28] On gender perspectives about Hawaiian sovereignty movement, see also Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, *Native Men Remade. Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawaii* (Durham, NC: Duke U.P., 2008) and Noelani Goodyear-Ka'opua, ed., *Nā Wāhine Koa. Hawaiian Women for sovereignty and Demilitarization*, (Honolulu, HI: Hawai'i U.P., 2018).

and the corporation behind the TMT on the other. In reality, beside the need to question any coherence and homogeneity within each one of these groups, we should also consider the larger society in Hawai'i, and the various economic and political groups that had an interest in the TMT construction, embodied for the sake of simplicity in the governor of Hawai'i David Ige, and the University of Hawai'i, which itself embraces radically different positioning on the issue, and that at the time held the lease for much of the land on Maunakea and on which the telescope was supposed to be built.

In 2014, the Board of Land and Natural Resources approved the $2.4 billion TMT project, but after Construction attempts were blocked beginning the same year, and 31 protectors were arrested on April 2, 2015, the Supreme Court of Hawai'i invalidated the building permits in December 2015, ruling that the board had not followed due process. Then, in October 2018, the high court approved construction to resume, but continued protests thwarted construction progress. Like Fujikane reminds her readers, mountain lands are protected by state laws as conservation districts (because they are the source of water). However, "the 11,288 acres of the Mauna Kea Science Reserve leased by the University of Hawai'i from the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) is located over five delineated aquifer systems": what the State has branded as the "Astronomy Precint" sits entirely above the Waimea Aquifer.[29]

On July 13, 2019 a group of Kia'i (protectors) gathered at the base of the Maunakea access road to stop the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope, including about thirty Kia'i who were camping non-stop overnight.[30]A few days later, on July 17, the governor of Hawaii David Ige issued a state of emergency, clearing a path for law enforcement to begin making arrests. According to several witnesses' report, multiple agencies arrived on the scene; there were officers brought in from other islands, Dept. of Land and National Resources, Police, Sheriff, and the National Guard. Hundreds of Kia'i gathered around their kūpuna (elders), who were sitting in front of a massive, militarized police presence dressed in riot gear and armed with chemical dispersants and a long-range acoustic device (LRAD). As journalist Frances Nguyen reports, this was for many the largest law enforcement operation to come down on Hawai'i they have ever witnessed in their lifetime. Kia'i sat in purposeful silence as 38 kūpuna, many in their 70s were arrested, zip-tied and escorted (in some cases carried) by vans away from the camp. As we will see soon, this was perceived as a watershed moment, a generational wake-up call especially for the way in which social media disseminated the images of that repression and those zip-tied kūpuna. As a response to the violence, and with clear and painful echoes for all Hawaiians residents of images from the Dakota Access Pipeline violent repression, and from the Black Lives Matter movement, thousands of Kānaka and allies across the islands reached the camp and started to organize a permanent base. The protectors on site kept watch for construction crews through windstorms, hail, and overnight temperatures that dipped well below 30 degrees Fahrenheit.[31]

Marie Alohalani Brown, a renowned scholar and activist who was among the kūpuna (elders) arrested, writes about the camp organization:

> it is important to know that it wasn't the leaders who sorted out who ran what (with the exception perhaps of the logistics tent and kapu aloha kia'i). It was an organic process—kia'i attracted to certain kuleana just kept at it, and pretty soon, others recognized them as po'o (head, as in director)…The Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu remains an incredible example of lāhui, in both the sense of nation and

[29] Fujikane, *Mapping*, 103.
[30] Marie Alohalani Brown, "Aloha Wale Mauna Kea, Aloha Wale Ku'u Po'e Hoapili Kia'i ma ke Anuanu", *Biography*, 43.3 (2020), 582-587.
[31] Frances Nguyen, "The pandemic hasn't stopped Native Hawaiians' fight to protect Maunakea", *Vox* (2020), https://www.vox.com/2020/8/7/21354619/mauna-kea-tmt-telescope-native-hawaiians, accessed 9 November 2022.

> people, as a sovereign space/place run organically by intelligent, hardworking, dedicated, selfless aloha ʾāina who embody the best of our culture and what it means to be Kānaka ʾŌiwi.[32]

Presley Ke'alaanuhea Ah Mook Sang, one of the founders of the camp university on Maunakea writes that following the arrests of thirty-eight kūpuna on July 17, "the lāhui (nation) arrived at the Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu en masse". The people on the camp went from barely forty individuals to upwards of 7,000 in a matter of days. The images of the arrested elders circulated on independent social media throughout several groups and individuals' accounts, effectively transformed the narrative of the event, and resulted in an influx of Hawaiians and local allies, global celebrities like Jason Momoa, Dwayne Johnson, and Damian Marley, that decided to take a public stand and support the Protect Maunakea Movement, together with countless allied celebrities across the US, who contributed through their own social media to disseminate counternarratives about the protest. It was at that point that the idea of the Pu'uhuluhulu University was born:

> My intent was to educate the masses who showed up to practice aloha ʻāina, and secondly, to prove that education is not confined within the walls of Western academia. We decided to claim this new institution as an actual place of Hawaiian learning, as opposed to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, which has publicly portrayed itself as an Indigenous space. … Unlike the current actions of the University of Hawai'i administration, Pu'uhuluhulu University therefore intentionally allowed and encouraged individuals of our kaiāulu (community) to take ownership of the ʻike (knowledge) they possess, and transfer those knowledge systems to the lāhui.[33]

Hundreds of volunteers and educators contributed to Pu'uhuluhulu University and offered free education to the community for eight months, until the demobilization due to COVID-19. According to one of the founders, roughly one thousand different classes were offered, including History of the Hawaiian Language, Native Hawaiian Legal Rights, Mele Aloha ʻĀina, Sea Level Rise, and Natural History. Following in their footsteps, "other grassroots educational systems were created, including Hūnānāniho University, classes at Kahuku, and free online education and workshops provided by programs such as Kanaeokana".[34]

This fundamental emphasis on education is a legacy of anti-colonial struggle and the "decolonizing of the mind", to quote Kenyan intellectual Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and it is also reflected in the social media practice of the movement. It reminds us that education may be a powerful tool in the hands of the dominant class to impart conformity and acceptance of the status quo, or on the other hand "it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world".[35]

4. A Digital Emergence

The movement had a robust social media presence that acted as a direct line of communication between the front line and its supporters locally and abroad, but it also aimed at educating the public about the intricate cultural and legal issues behind the conflict, while countering the oversimplifying mainstream media coverage, which had initially characterized the protectors as anti-scientific nostalgics. The young Hawaiian activist Kapulei Flores, who has been documenting the Protect

[32] Marie Alohalani Brown, "Aloha", 584.
[33] Presley Ke'alaanuhea Ah Mook Sang, "Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu University", in Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua et al., eds., *The Value of Hawaii* 3 (Honolulu: Hawai'i U.P., 2020), 266.
[34] Ibid., 267.
[35] Richard Shaull, "Foreword", *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire, trans. by Myra Bergman Ramos, [1970], (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

Maunakea through photography, on her Instagram accounts, and on her website *400years project*, rejects this framing "it's one too big, one too many … We don't have a problem with science; our ancestors used astronomy and the stars to navigate. But we don't support desecrating the land in order to do that".[36]

One of the youngest members of the Nā Leo Kāko'o, the Kia'i media team, Kawena Kapahua, was only twenty-one at the time when he started documenting independently via his Twitter account, "posting to a quickly growing audience of attentive and concerned community members" and recording details, police numbers, movements, and he "showed the Kia'i at the cattle guard, as they chained their fates to the fate of our Mauna"; "soon, reporters from national news outlets were coming to me to check they had their facts right on what had occurred".[37] This eloquent reversal between independent and dominant media outlets may signal the ascendency of the reputation of the Kanaka counternarrative, not just for the Hawaiian community but globally. Kapahua writes about an exceptional example to measure the constant backlash from mainstream outlets and voices, and how social media activist had to coordinate a strategic pushback:

> Days after the police had retreated, Hawai'i Governor David Ige claimed that Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu was falling apart. He said it was a corrupt den of drugs and alcohol, and a scene of constant lawbreaking. He painted a picture of a pu'uhonua on fire, playing upon the stereotypes about Hawaiians that the government he led had cultivated for decades to continue our oppression. But almost immediately, videos in response came from Nā Leo Kāko'o, displaying beautiful scenes of a well-organized pu'uhonua—people playing music, talking story, kūpuna passing down knowledge, and culture thriving in the face of armed repression. The governor's falsehoods were laid bare, and he had to eat his words when he later visited the pu'uhonua, and faced the stares of the thousands of Kia'i he had lied about. Without the media team's quick and strategic moves to reclaim the narrative, an unchallenged story of the Mauna would have perpetuated the same tired trope of Hawaiians doing drugs and making trouble. [38]

Much more intensely than four years before, in 2015, the confrontation that took place on Maunakea in 2019 had created a widespread interest in the divisive Maunakea telescope. Back in 2015, the TMT Observatory Corporation itself had created an informational microsite, *Maunakea and TMT*, revolving around the core belief that "spirituality and science can harmoniously coexist on Mauna Kea" (http://maunakeaandtmt.org/). As Ravazzini and Maier point out, the microsite was created right after the arrest of 31 people and the global protest that followed, on Apr 13 2015, and its declared goal was to provide more background information about the project and to answer some common questions, "their website emphasizes future, harmony, environment, and the necessity of science advancement as embodied in the TMT".[39] During that first wave of Maunakea protest, one of the main pages for the movement was the Protect Mauna Kea website, created by Ho'opae Pono Peace Project, an affiliate of Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples, in order to promote Maunakea as a sacred place and sustain the campaign against the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (http://www.protectmaunakea.org/).

Four years later, the number of website and social media accounts managed independently or in a coordinated way by Kānaka Maoli had grown exponentially. The official website of the camp (https://puuhuluhulu.com/) with its own YouTube channel, kept being updated until the Covid

[36] Katherine Plumhoff, "Mauna Kea Protests. Native Hawaiian Activists Are Fighting for Their Sacred Land. Kapulei Flores is Documenting the Protect Mauna Kea Movement", *Teen Vogue* (2020) https://www.teenvogue.com/story/mauna-kea-protest-kapulei-flores, accessed 9 November 2022.
[37] See Kapahua, "Stories from the Mauna, Ku'u One Hānau", 579.
[38] Ibid., 580.
[39] Silvia Ravazzani and Carmen Daniela Maier, "Framing of Issues Across Actors. Exploring Competing Discourses in Digital Arenas", *Journal of Communication Management*, 21.2 (2017), 186-200.

explosion on March 14, 2020, and it included a "Code of Conducts" to follow on the base, hyperlinks to petitions and donations and other grassroots initiatives, and videos of important moments and speeches on Maunakea. One of the most significant original video contributions is the short documentary film, *Like A Mighty Wave*, created by Mikey Inouye, local filmmaker who is a part of the Mauna media team.

A central figure in the activism and legal fight around Maunakea is Kealoha Pisciotta, the President of Mauna Kea Anaina Hou and Founder of the marine protection group Kai Palaoa in Hawai'i. She is also the spokesperson for the Mauna Kea Hui. The Mauna Kea Anaina Hou is an "organization comprised of cultural and lineal descendants, and traditional, spiritual and religious practitioners of the sacred traditions of Mauna Kea" "which has litigated many cases protecting Mauna Kea in the past 25 years", as their rich and highly informative website states (https://maunakeaanainahou.org/).

On Instagram, the account of Protect Maunakea, one of two accounts that had been operating from the camp, has about 140 thousand followers, while ainamomona has about 43k followers. Other Instagram accounts that are worth mentioning are kanaeokana, with 31k followers and its own YouTube, facebook, tiktok and twitter accounts, with the goal of "amplifying Hawaiian language, culture, and 'aina-based action, and Kanaka autonomy" (14k followers). In terms of Instagram tags, #protectmaunakea and #kukiamaunakea both have about 74k posts shared using that tag, #wearemaunakea counts almost 70k posts, while the more general #tmtshutdown has 27k posts shared with that tag. Most of these accounts coordinate collaborative efforts on specific initiatives and action, like the one in July 2020 to commemorate a year since this latest standoff and the kupuna arrests, when a slew of online events and actions was organized under the tag #tmtshutdownweek which included topic-focused talks via Zoom, film screenings, and a petition signing campaign.

With the capacity of saving and organizing Instagram stories, these accounts have effectively utilized the social media archive to create informative and educational multimedia materials under thematic clusters and labels/tags. If we look at their most recent posts and stories we have a sense of the users traffic still present on these pages, and can assess their crucial role as source information and counternarrative on Hawaiian issues, besides and beyond the TMT issue. One of the latest video-posts on the Instagram account of Protect Maunakea (from June 8, 2022) is about the TMT Project filing a cessation for the NPDES permit and has almost 20k views. The post claims that its reason is to avoid further scrutiny and potential legal challenges, that "would have exposed that this permit was actually invalid at the time they attempted to proceed with construction in 2019".

A post on the Instagram account of ainamomona from Aug 6, 2021, in a trademark style of multiple-slides post, with large capitalized text on colored background, addresses the pivotal issue of the negative impact of mass tourism on Hawai'i, and it is clearly, yet somewhat unusually, addressed to non-Kānaka followers. On one slide of their post, we read "Stop romanticizing Hawai'i and respect the land. Stop going around our islands making TikToks and Instagram posts about your exotic getaway that continues the touristy narrative of Hawai'i" and then on the following slide, they emphasize "start educating yourself on Hawai'i". A more recent post on the same ainamomona account, from May 13 2022 addresses the conflict with UH over the most recently passed House Bill HB2024 that in fact will strip the university of its land authorization on Maunakea. It offers another instance of counternarrative, whereby DLNR (Department of Land and Natural Resources) claims that without UH Maunakea would be lost to commercialization, and that it wouldn't be able to maintain the roads for vehicle access to the summit. In one of its slides, the post cites Ngugi wa Thiong'o on the power of cultural colonization, that undermines the capacity of a people to believe and trust in its own ancestral knowledge. In the comment section below the post, after a series of anaphoric "they [University of Hawai'i] want you to believe …" aimed at revealing an arguable paternalistic attitude of the UH about what is best for Maunakea, the author writes "do not fall for this false narrative. We must believe in our lāhui and the capacity we have to stand for our 'āina". In both these instances, on mass

tourism and the role of the University, there is an extreme awareness of the power that social media have in countering dominant narratives, and a focus on education and dissemination.

5. The Mauna Kea Syllabus Project

What remains in the aftermath of the explosive development of social media in times of emergency? Most of the accounts and platforms mentioned above are now fully dedicated to a wide range of issues related to Kanaka sovereignty, and mālama ʻāina. There have been numerous lawsuits and contested cases hearings challenging the permitting and construction of TMT and other further development atop Maunakea,[40] but as this article approaches completion, the TMT crisis seems to be reaching a new time of stability with the suspension of the building permits, and a new Stewardship for Maunakea.[41] In addition, these online platforms, from Instagram to Youtube to other mentioned outlets, are serving as a social media archive to educate a new generation of Hawaiians and allies globally.

A particularly fascinating project is the Mauna Kea Syllabus Project, an educational resource that seeks to bring diverse voices of the lāhui together in order to enhance education. The creators acknowledge their inspiration to similar initiative like Standing Rock, Black Lives Matter, and Immigration syllabi, when they created thematic categories, guiding questions, readings, and resources, that include interviews with elders and community leaders, and propose a set of syllabi and unit useful for the teaching of the event.

The Mauna Kea Syllabus Project traces its genealogy to Pu'uhuluhulu University, the brainchild of Presley Keala'anuhea Ah Mook Sang and others. From the conversations and transformations at Pu'uhuluhulu University, the Mauna Kea Syllabus was born. The Syllabus as a formal project began in late 2019 in partnership with Hawai'i Review, a literary print journal published by the Student Media Board at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. In June 2020, organizers of the Mauna Kea Syllabus hosted an online panel "From Standing Rock to Mauna Kea: Digital Learning Exchanges" featuring Anne Spice and Jaskiran Dhillon, scholar-activists who participated in the creation and facilitation of the Standing Rock Syllabus Project, in conversation with Mauna Kea Kiaʻi Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua and Uahikea Maile and moderated by Brandy Nālani McDougall. The panelists discussed the significance of digital media in their respective movements and reflected on the possibilities of creating online pedagogy to educate a broader (local and international) audience on the issues impacting the Indigenous communities. That panel served as a starting point of the syllabus we see today.

The Mauna Kea Syllabus is intensely bilingual, since it is also the result of decades of an extraordinary cultural and language revival, but it also inherently multimedial, including texts, videos, music, oral stories, images. In the *Units* menu it incorporates sections on US Settler Colonialism, on Cultivating Solidarities, on Gender Sexuality Pilina (relations), on Environmental Justice etc. One of the units in the Mauna Kea Syllabus is written by Jamaica Osorio, and it is about Ea, a quite recurring

[40] "Archiving a Movement. The Mauna Kea Social Media Archive", *King Kamehameha V Judiciary History Center*, https://www.jhchawaii.net/archiving-a-movement-the-mauna-kea-social-media-archives/, accessed 9 November 2022.

[41] See the statement by Sen. Donna Mercado Kim, chair of the senate committee on Higher Education: "In this new version of the bill [HB2024], the responsibilities to manage the mountain will be bifurcated or split between two entities – the new Mauna Kea Stewardship Authority and the University of Hawai'i. The Mauna Kea Stewardship Authority will be charged with managing, protecting, and conserving the public uses of the approximately 9,450 acres of Mauna Kea Conservation Lands, while the University will be tasked with managing the 550 acres of Astronomy Research Lands comprised of the Astronomy Precinct, the Hale Pohaku Complex, and the Mauna Kea Access Road", https://bigislandnow.com/2022/04/08/maunakea-management-authority-bill-passes-committee-heads-to-senate-floor-for-final-vote/, accessed 9 November 2022.

word from the Hawaiian Language (‘olelo hawai’i), which is also present in the state motto, and it is officially translated as “life” as in “The *Life* of the land is perpetuated in Righteousness”. More commonly the concept of Ea has been translated as “sovereignty”, but even this translated term has been under scrutiny by Hawaiian activists, in so far as it inherits and reproduces an alien, Eurocentric notion of land ownership and independence.

Another keyword that the syllabus uses as a starting point for the reader/student is Kuleana, that indicates “a Kanaka ‘Ōiwi ethic of responsibility, authority, and rights that are tied to one’s relationship to place, genealogy, and commitment and effort put forth toward a community and land-base”. Kuleana points to the connection between a people and its ancestry based on place and genealogical belonging, “Mountains, winds, rocks and other non-human beings are recognized as family members and ancestors, and people are obligated to care for their ‘ohana”. The author of this introductory text warns the readers “In drawing upon these curated sources, some of which are meant for particular places, people, and times, we ask that you acknowledge your relationship, your *positionality* in relation to Hawai‘i before engaging with, teaching, or doing work on our islands”.[42]

In conclusion, and to go back to Jamaica Osorio’s reflection on the concept of Ea, he writes:

> throughout the course of this syllabus you will not only learn specifically about the violence of the Thirty Meter Telescope and the brilliance of ‘Ōiwi resistance and resurgence. You will encounter the creative and courageous Kanaka scholarship and mo’olelo that describe some of the many ways the fight to protect Mauna a Wākea was at is center also a fight to reclaim our ea through decolonial pilina, genders, and sexualities, Environmental Justice, Kanaka Science, and Hawaiian Religion.

6. Conclusion

The events surrounding the proposed construction of the TMT and the brave and visionary resistance of Kānaka Maoli through social media is a testament to the potential inherent in digital activism in the process of decolonizing education and produce and disseminate transformative counternarratives at the service of justice, truth, and indigenous sovereign rights. As the young media activist Kawena Kapahua writes:

> I could see the importance of representation in media, and in storytelling in general. If we are not present in these spaces, our voices could be lost, our perspective never told. And perhaps one day down the road, young Kānaka like me trying to find their way in the world would remain uninspired because they did not learn the mo’olelo of the battle for the Mauna – only hearing the versions of those who opposed us, vilified us, and targeted us. If we do not tell our stories, others will tell them for us, and as our history has too often shown us, they will be told wrong.[43]

In the past few pages, I have attempted to concisely illustrate the major players and issues at stake in the TMT proposed construction, and more importantly how Kānaka Maoli have responded to this crisis and transformed it into a generational opportunity for resistance, decolonization, and solidarity. Along with the complex battles in the court and at the state level, through a diffused leadership in social media, the movement was able to appropriate and reverse the dominant narrative of the conflict, educating in a powerful community-learning experience, both on site and online, the thousands who went to Maunakea, and those who are interested in learning and sharing those lessons in the classroom and across the world.

[42] https://www.maunakeasyllabus.com/, accessed 9 November 2022.
[43] Kapahua, “Stories from the Mauna, Ku’u One Hānau”, 580.