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THE KĀHEA TO RETURN HOME: DIASPORIC KĀNAKA 'ŌIWI AND HIGHER EDUCATION

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The Kāhea to Return Home: Diasporic Kānaka 'Ōiwi and Higher Education

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This paper explores the perspectives of two Kānaka 'Ōiwi wāhine (Native Hawaiian women) born and raised in the diaspora and their journeys in navigating their way back home to Hawai'i. The modern usage of the term diaspora, in the context of Kānaka 'Ōiwi, is used to describe Native Hawaiians who were born or who have spent significant time outside of Hawai'i. However, from a Hawaiian worldview, our kūpuna (ancestors) made us Kānaka 'Ōiwi. We share our stories of being born and raised in the diaspora and what that meant for us as Kānaka 'Ōiwi. In telling our story, we center our shared experience of utilizing the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UH Mānoa) as a means to make our way home. We share the development of our shared kuleana (responsibility and privileges) to address a need to create a space and form a hui for haumāna with shared experiences of diaspora. With the help of Native Hawaiian Student Services (NHSS), we had the privilege to connect with our fellow diasporic Kānaka 'Ōiwi haumāna (students) to establish the Native Hawaiian Diaspora Association. We hope to bring more awareness to the increasing amount of diasporic Kānaka 'Ōiwi at UH Mānoa and the importance of a space like the Native Hawaiian Diaspora Association in serving the unique needs of our students. For UH Mānoa to become a Native Hawaiian Place of Learning, it must recognize, honor, and support the many diasporic Kānaka 'Ōiwi haumāna who receive the kāhea to return home.

For Kānaka 'Ōiwi (Native Hawaiians), Hawai'i is more than a place of paradise. We are continuously resisting the exploitation and appropriation of our culture and homelands (Hall, 2005). Hawai'i is the one hānau (birthing sands) of our peoples, where we have established pilina 'ohana (familial relationship) with 'āina (land). Our mo'okū'auhau (genealogy) affirms our pilina 'ohana to 'āina with the tracing of our kūpuna (ancestors) for many generations (Chang, 2019). The Hawaiian Kingdom led our peoples into the future rooted in values of aloha 'āina (love of land) and kuleana lāhui (nation-building responsibilities); however, since the illegal annexation of our nation by the United States and ongoing occupation in Hawai'i, the livelihood of our people is continually threatened (Sai, 2018). In the ongoing threats of settler-colonialism, more and more of our lāhui (nation) are becoming part of the diaspora (Trask, 1999).

Being physically separated from our one hānau creates barriers to engaging in Native Hawaiian cultural practices and community. The separation challenges what it means to be Kānaka ʻŌiwi and determining our kuleana to the lāhui. Although many of our ʻohana (families) remain in the diaspora, some receive a kāhea (calling) to return home. This article shares the stories of Kahilo and Alicia, two wāhine (women) ʻŌiwi from the diaspora. We share our stories of being born and raised in the diaspora, what that meant for us as Kānaka ʻŌiwi, and our independent journeys in navigating our way back to Hawaiʻi. In telling our story, we center our shared experiences using higher education as a means to make our way home. The University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa (UH Mānoa) served as an access point for us in our journey, but it was truly our kūpuna that brought us back home and to meet one another.

In building pilina (interdependent relationship) with one another, we share the development of our shared kuleana (responsibility and privileges) to address a need in our community. With the help of Native Hawaiian Student Services (NHSS), we had the privilege to connect with our fellow diasporic Kānaka ʻŌiwi haumāna (students) to establish the Native Hawaiian Diaspora Association. It is this work that created an opportunity for us to continue our pilina and build a network of support as we navigated reconnection with our ʻāina, moʻokūʻauhau, and lāhui. We hope to bring more awareness to the increasing number of diasporic Kānaka ʻŌiwi at UH Mānoa and the importance of a space like the Native Hawaiian Diaspora Association in serving the unique needs of diasporic Kānaka ʻŌiwi students. For UH Mānoa to become a Native Hawaiian Place of Learning¹, it must recognize, honor, and support Kānaka ʻŌiwi, including the many diasporic Kānaka ʻŌiwi who receive the kāhea to return home (University of Hawaii at Mānoa, 2020).

What is Native Hawaiian Diaspora?

Currently, the term *diaspora*, in the context of Kānaka ʻŌiwi, is used to describe Native Hawaiians who were born or who have spent significant time outside of Hawaiʻi. From a Hawaiian worldview, our kūpuna (ancestors) made us Kānaka ʻŌiwi. Therefore, no matter where our people are in the world, they are and will always be Hawaiian and part of the lāhui Hawaiʻi.

Our genealogy chant, Kumulipo, shares concepts of diaspora in telling our creation history (Ahia & Johnson, 2022). Throughout the lifecycle of the limu (coral, seaweed, moss, lichen) and ʻoʻopu² (general for fishes included in Eleotridae, Gobiidae, and Blennidae families), these life forms will journey between the wai (freshwater), kai (sea), and ʻāina (land). With each new generation, they find a home that may be away from its original birthplace. The limu begins its life cycle in the kai, then transforms as a lāʻau (plant) on the ʻāina. ʻOʻopu can adapt between the wai and kai and later on will become either an ʻoʻopu kai (salt-water fish) or ʻoʻopu wai (fresh-water fish). Many teachings from the Kumulipo allow us to reimagine diasporic Kānaka ʻŌiwi as not bound by ʻāina or kai, but everything in-between, just as limu, lāʻau, and ʻoʻopu make the journey throughout each generation (Ahia & Johnson, 2022). With the Kumulipo being part of our shared moʻokūʻauhau (genealogy), we can reclaim diaspora as an ancestral practice.

¹ See the genealogy and institutionalization of this term at <https://manoa.hawaii.edu/nhpol/>

² Editors' note: ʻoʻopu is the general name for fish in the families: Eleotridae, Gobiidae, and Blennidae.

Voyaging is another concept we can use to understand the diasporic experience of Kānaka ʻŌiwi. Over a millennium of voyaging has woven a foundation of relationships between nā kai ʻewalu (the eight seas, as Kānaka often term the water surrounding their islands) and the Hawaiian archipelago (Chang, 2016). We understood that ʻike (knowledge) can be learned in many different ways and one of those ways was to leave your one hānau, journey to another ʻāina, and potentially return to share the waiwai or resource that you learned. Many Kānaka men have set sail across the seas as laborers when foreign ships landed here for trade (Rosenthal, 2018). One moʻolelo (story) tells of Humehume, the son of Kaumualiʻi, ruler of the islands of Kauaʻi and Niʻihau, who was sent away as a child to receive a Western education (Balutski, 2023). Humehume served in the American Navy in the War of 1812 and lived a burdensome life in America, and as a young man, sought a way to return home.

Not long after, Humehume was invited to join Hawaiian missionaries setting sail under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) to Hawaiʻi. This huakaʻi happened to be the first boat of ABCFM missionaries to land in the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1820. During this time, Humehume's father still remained the sovereign of Kauaʻi and Niʻihau and resisted being forcibly included in the Hawaiian Kingdom. Upon Humehume's return home, he knew his kuleana was to fight for Kauaʻi and Niʻihau to remain its own sovereign nation. The moʻolelo of Humehume affirms the traveling journeys of many Kānaka ʻŌiwi into the diaspora.

Thus, from the Kumulipo to Humehume, we see that to be in the diaspora is to simply be Hawaiian. There is ʻōlelo noʻeau (wise saying, proverb) that says, "I ulu nō ka lālā I ke kumu," which translates as "The branches grow because of the trunk" (Teves, 2018, p. xv). This metaphor can signify the ʻāina being the tree while Kānaka ʻŌiwi are the branches. No matter the length of the branch, it is still rooted to the base of the tree. In this same light, we, as Kānaka ʻŌiwi, are the branches forever bound to our ancestral lands and not lost while living in the diaspora (Teves, 2018). From a Hawaiian worldview, we are and will always be a part of the lāhui. It is within our rights of self-determination to have the choice of living within our one hānau or not. On the other hand, our history regarding the illegal occupation of Hawaiʻi by the United States has replaced our ancestral ways of voyaging with forced migration due to threats of settler colonialism. It was not by choice that many of our Kānaka ʻŌiwi communities have had to move away and live outside the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi (Trask, 1999).

Whether our diasporaneity is a product of forced migration or otherwise, we reclaim the narrative of diasporaneity as an ancestral practice. In this light, our identity as Native Hawaiians is affirmed, and no matter our journeys, we are still part of the lāhui. With our stories, we share how we have come to understand our identity as Kānaka ʻŌiwi in the diaspora. Throughout our lives, we always knew we were Hawaiian but wished to explore a greater meaning and connection to being Hawaiian. The kāhea to return home is truly a calling from our kupuna, and we hope that our stories will inspire others to return home as well.

Alicia's Story

I am the firstborn of Malia Kamaliʻi and an only child of Jorge Reyes, granddaughter of Rudolph Kamaliʻi and Barbara Griley, great-granddaughter of Peter Kamaliʻi, Jr. and Mary Soares, and great-great-granddaughter of Peter Kamaliʻi and Abigail Camacho. My maternal lineage is Kānaka ʻŌiwi from the islands of Oʻahu and

Maui, while my paternal lineage is Mēxihcatl (Aztec) from Nezahualcoyotl (Neza), México. My 'ohana currently resides in the ancestral homelands of the Nuwu, known as Las Vegas, Nevada, which is the place I call home. Being raised outside both of my ancestral homelands complicates my understanding of being Hawaiian and Aztec.

My earliest memories of Hawaiian culture come from my childhood being raised by my haole grandma Barbara and hānai Filipino and Portuguese grandpa, Rudy Pacrem. I remember riding in the car with my grandma while she played her *Facing Future* album by Bruddah Israel Kamakawiwo'ole and *Nā Pua o Hawai'i* by Mākaha Sons & Friends. These albums were constantly on rotation as we drove around the hot valley of Las Vegas. I grew up eating Hawaiian food and listening to the stories of my hānai grandpa growing up on O'ahu, catching fish, and growing food for our 'ohana. My mom showed her pride in being Hawaiian from her name, which was passed down to her from my grandpa Rudolph Kamali'i, who passed away early on in her life. My understanding of what it meant to be Hawaiian came from the memories and stories of my 'ohana. Unfortunately, it was not until I graduated college that I had the opportunity to connect with my ancestral homelands of Hawai'i. A large majority of my 'ohana (aunties, uncles, cousins, etc.) became part of the diaspora, and the very few left in Hawai'i visited us on the continent rather than us visiting them.

Growing up in the diaspora, in the inner city of Las Vegas, Nevada, and being of two Indigenous cultures, I was raised understanding more of my Mēxihcatl identity. Where I lived, where I went to school, and who I became friends with were predominantly Black and Latiné. I never felt that I did not belong, but I always knew I was different. When hanging out with my Mexican friends, they would always ask, "What are you? You look different than the typical Mexican." I could not figure out what made me look so different but I would respond with "I am Mexican and Hawaiian." My dad would consistently express to me that we are the "real Mexicans," which to him meant being Indigenous Mexican. He shared our culture with me in his teachings and the way he designed his home, but most importantly, we would make trips back home to our family in Neza. These trips allowed me to connect with my family and the lands our people come from. Throughout my childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, I sought to learn more and connect with Mēxihcatl identity, which left me feeling very limited in my understanding of what it means to be Hawaiian.

Higher education became an opportunity for me to explore my identity. After high school, I moved away from Nuwu lands and traveled up north to Wašiw land to attend the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). It was a complete culture shock for me growing up and being raised in communities of color to adjust to a predominantly white institution. I pursued my bachelor's degree in Molecular Microbiology and Immunology and was the only Indigenous student in many of my classes. I struggled to find a sense of belonging on campus, and eventually found my people and community through the Multicultural Center at UNR.

Some of my most meaningful relationships were due to the Multicultural Center. The Center offers student service coordinators of each major racial/ethnic group (including Indigenous students). Saundra Mitrovich, the Indigenous Student Services Coordinator during my time as a student, was instrumental in connecting me to the community and providing me the opportunity to come into my own identity. I connected with Native students all over Turtle Island and developed close relationships with Native

community members of the Northern Nevada Area. When in the community, I learned how important education is for Indigenous peoples. Our existence at UNR was resistance: resistance to erasure and assimilation. We all came to UNR with the intent of bringing education back to our communities (Salis Reyes, 2019). Sandra affirmed our belonging by acknowledging the gifts we brought to the institution and holding the institution responsible for recognizing, honoring, and supporting us. It is through my education that I came to understand that the knowledge from our communities predates the institution and must be recentered. With UNR being a white settler-colonial institution, we sought for leaders to acknowledge its history and provide reparations to local Tribal Nations. As a Kānaka ʻŌiwi and being a guest on Wašiw lands, I understood my kuleana to serve the local Tribal Nations and communities by supporting their efforts for the reclamation of higher education (Vaughn, 2019). I committed myself to pursuing my master's in education administration to learn more about indigenizing the academy to serve Indigenous students and communities.

As I continued my studies, centered on how to reclaim higher education for Native and Indigenous people, I explored what Indigenous-centered education looked like in the academy. In my research, I began to discover Kānaka ʻŌiwi scholars and their efforts to transform the University of Hawaiʻi to serve Native Hawaiians. I felt this kuleana to learn more about my Native Hawaiian community. Growing up in the diaspora, I developed a strong sense of identity as an *Indigenous* person being immersed in broader Native and Indigenous communities. I am blessed to have many close relations throughout my life that have helped me embrace my identities as a ʻŌiwi and Mēxihcatl woman. It is their love and support that encouraged me to listen to the kāhea to journey back home. My intentions in returning home were to explore my passions in education and be immersed in my Kānaka ʻŌiwi communities. I saw education as an opportunity to embark on this journey, which led me to apply to the UH Mānoa for my doctoral degree.

On returning home to the Hawaiian Kingdom, I began my doctoral journey as a graduate research assistant in the Department of Educational Administration, working alongside Dr. Ethan Chang. Ethan became a valuable supporter in reconnecting to my homeland while also connecting with communities outside of UH Mānoa. Being a diasporic Kānaka ʻŌiwi, returning home, and embarking on this chapter of my life as a doctoral student, I was eager for any opportunity to reconnect with ʻāina. Ethan invited me to ʻāina workdays at Huilua Loko Iʻa in Kahana Bay with Kumu Kimeona Kane, which allowed us to engage in community-based research and reimagine educational spaces, beyond formal classrooms. Before entering Huilua and meeting Kumu Kimeona, my understanding of a “workday” was limited to taking care of ʻāina with physical labor. However, it was so much more than I could have imagined.

Kumu Kimeona is a cultural practitioner of Uhau Humu Pōhaku (rock weaving) and an Aloha ʻĀina Steward from Waimānalo, Hawaiʻi. He provides the opportunity and space for both Kānaka and non-Kānaka to return to and learn from ʻāina. For our Tuesday gatherings, we do not show up to work on the ʻāina: rather, we learn how to recenter our ancestral practices and lifeways as Kānaka. Kumu leads through the perpetuation of ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian language) and cultural protocol, such as oli and mālama ʻāina. The work is done to enter space with oli, learn the moʻolelo of a place, and receive the teachings presented by ʻāina when we show up. I explored what it

meant to be Kānaka by learning the cultural practice of uhau humu pōhaku and becoming a haumāna of Kumu Kimeona.

Since my return to the Hawaiian Kingdom, I realize that my story is one of many diasporic Kānaka 'Ōiwi students who, like me, use higher education as a means for reconnecting with ancestral homelands, 'ohana, and community. In the short time of my return home, I recognized the privilege and honor of being connected and in pilina with 'āina, which is not available to many diasporic 'Ōiwi haumāna. The space Kumu Kimeona holds is one I hope to share with my fellow diasporic Native Hawaiian haumāna.

Kahilo's Story

I am the daughter of Nadine Ida (Napua O Nalani) Wallwork of Mountain View, Hawai'i and Jon Patrick Keller of South Pasadena, California; granddaughter of Robert Ramin Wallwork of Kaimukī, O'ahu and Anna Kahilo Campbell of Keaukaha, Hawai'i. My name is Sarah Victoria Kahilo Hanakahi Kahalewai Ke Keller, raised on the ancestral lands of the Luiseño and Gabrieleño peoples, in a town otherwise known as Norco, California. My name represents my grandparents' mo'okū'auhau (ancestry). Growing up with an inoa 'ohana (family name) reminded me of my Hawaiianness. Although I carried this inoa 'ohana, I was disconnected from my 'ohana Hawai'i (Hawaiian family), leaving me often confused and insecure about my Hawaiian ancestry. As difficult as that was, the disconnect fueled my hunger to return home, reconnect with my kūpuna, and ultimately reconnect with myself.

My higher education journey starts with my mom. She was a graduate of California State University, Los Angeles, and higher education was a means to grow outside of her parent's authority and make a life for herself in a less expensive location. My mom's siblings also chose to leave Hawai'i and pursue growth and success, and when they started their own families, my grandparents followed suit. Ironically, while higher education served my mom as an avenue for independence (at the cost of leaving her homeland), I found myself retracing her steps and returning to our one hānau.

My dad also valued higher education as a community college basketball coach. I admired how he supported his student-athletes to continue their basketball careers and academics. Through my dad, I first met my Auntie Auli'i-Ann Silva at a Super Bowl party when I was 10 years old. Auntie Auli'i brought kālua pig to the party, and I remember feeling amazed by having Hawaiian food. At that time, she was a counselor at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and she informed me about the "Non-Resident Tuition Exemption that provides in-state tuition for Native Hawaiian students" (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Office of Admissions, 2016). When I began exploring options to complete a Bachelor's degree, I knew exactly who to contact for more information. Rather than sending me links or telling me to figure it out myself, Auntie Auli'i took the time to listen to my story and what was calling me to return home. She empowered me to recognize that my passions and ambitions were of value and that our lāhui needs more Kānaka to return home. Our story conveys the importance of Native Hawaiian advocacy for students in Hawai'i and the diaspora. Kānaka 'Ōiwi on the continental U.S. are part of our lāhui, and should receive a waiver from out-of-state tuition meant to offset the cost of tuition for our local and Native Hawaiian communities.

One of the most important resources in my voyage home was Native Hawaiian Student Services (NHSS) at UH Mānoa. Kyle Help, the Director of Kua'ana Native

Hawaiian Development Services, helped me to understand exactly what I needed to complete before I moved out to Hawai'i and started classes. Kyle's kuleana provided need-based tuition waivers to Native Hawaiian students and helped students with financial aid, scholarships, and academic advising. While providing these important resources, Kyle shared his story growing up in the diaspora and his journey moving back home. These one-on-one Zoom meetings with Kyle prior to my move built my confidence and alleviated the stress of moving thousands of miles away from my family.

These experiences carried me through higher education. I learned the importance of building pilina and both giving and receiving mentorship. It is important for students to know who they can reach out to for help and to have someone they trust to help them reach their goals. This has played a massive role in my success as a Native Hawaiian diasporic student using higher education to return to my homeland.

As I prepared to move into my dorm, NHSS offered me a paid internship. The Kekaulike Internship Program was created for Native Hawaiian undergraduate students to "support individual student academic and professional success while also supporting the strengthening of partnerships between the University of Hawaii and the greater Hawai'i Community" (Native Hawaiian Student Services, n.d.). Through this internship, Emma Malia Bell and myself were assigned to work with 'Ilima Long on a research project centering Native Hawaiian political resistance and organizing in response to the 1887 Bayonet Constitution and the formation of Hui Kālai'āina and Hui Aloha 'Āina. I gained much from this experience: building pilina with a new friend and mentor, learning about research methods, presenting at a conference, growing my Hawaiian National consciousness, and building a community of support among Hui Aloha 'Āina members. Talking story with this community, I began to recognize the importance of forming a community to support Kānaka 'Ōiwi returning home.

In the summer of 2022, I participated in the NHSS Peer Mentorship training program, which includes credits and a stipend upon completion. As a part of our kuleana for this program, I trained new student research and program assistants. I received a NHSS staff mentor to gain experience working in a student-facing role. Due to my experience as a diasporic student, I was assigned to support Kyle and reach out to incoming out-of-state Native Hawaiian students through phone calls and emails. We shared information about NHSS programs, such as the Native Hawaiian Diaspora Bridge Program, which supports first-time Native Hawaiian students beginning their academic transition to Hawai'i learn about Hawaiian culture and the programs, resources, and opportunities offered on campus and the greater community. Activities include a field trip focusing on Hawaiian history, Hawaiian New Student Orientation, and a three-day mālama 'āina work day just before the Fall semester.

At the conclusion of our Peer Mentorship program, we were assigned to create a project proposal. Working with Kyle and NHSS over the summer, I felt empowered to continue the Diaspora Bridge Program by launching the Native Hawaiian Diaspora Association to offer year-round support for students. The first program I led for the Native Hawaiian Diaspora Association was intentional: we took the Hui Aloha 'Āina Walking Tour. The tour focuses on the quick and effective actions by Hawaiian nationals between 1887 and 1893, organizing widespread resistance to the Bayonet Constitution. A majority of this tour pulls from the research I worked on with 'Ilima Long, focused on Native Hawaiian political resistance and organizing.

Taken together, these experiences reveal the importance of mentors and community (both on and off campus) to guide my journey. In sharing my passion, I hope our association members can see how their passions can contribute to our lāhui, and encourage them to find mentors who can support them on their journey through higher education.

Heeding the Kāhea to Return Home: Finding Each Other and Forming a Hui

The Native Hawaiian Diaspora Association supports fellow diasporic Kānaka in our respective journeys home to Hawai'i. The formation of our hui (group) began with a kāhea from Kahilo. Alicia was one of the first people to respond. Upon meeting, we bonded over our shared upbringing and experience growing up in the diaspora. In addition, we shared a mutual passion for contributing to our lāhui and exploring our Hawaiianness. Our backgrounds, values, and organizing experiences made us the perfect duo as we took on leadership roles within the Native Hawaiian Diaspora Association. In the first few meetings, we discussed the structure of our hui, goals, and audience, and created the following mission statement:

The Native Hawaiian Diaspora Association is an independent, haumāna-organized space established at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. We welcome Kānaka 'Ōiwi from all walks of life, who have grown up or spent significant time away from Ko Hawai'i Pae 'Āina. The organization is an inclusive and safe space for Native Hawaiian Diaspora who are seeking cultural reconnection, healing, and community. Our goal is to center our experiences and empower one another in exploring Kānaka 'Ōiwi identities, build pilina, and understand our kuleana to our lāhui and kulāiwi. (Native Hawaiian Student Services, 2023)

Everyone comes with a different story, whether it be upbringing, construction of a Hawaiian identity, relationships with 'ohana, or community. We recognize that the separation from our motherland is what brings us together now. Kuleana is both a privilege and a burden. Our primary intention with the Native Hawaiian Diaspora Association is to provide a safe space for haumāna to find community and learn their kuleana.

Our shared love for community and organizing brought us together as we met and engaged in many of the same spaces. We intimately share a desire to be in community and bring our lāhui together. Building a hui has allowed our relationship to blossom into a sisterhood, where we support one another as we grow into leaders who will better serve ourselves and our communities. It is part of our kuleana to bring our diasporic Kānaka 'Ōiwi together and support one another as we continue our journeys returning home.

Conclusion

Higher education provides opportunities to explore ourselves and our lāhui, and apply the change we want to see in both. Through scholarship and organizing, we collaborate, practice, and grow together as we contribute to our communities. We share stories of being born and raised in the diaspora, what that means for us as Kānaka 'Ōiwi, and our independent journeys in navigating our way back to Hawai'i. By telling our stories of how we used higher education to return to our one hānau, we hope to raise awareness for other Kānaka considering the return home.

For UH Mānoa to be a Native Hawaiian Place of Learning, the institution must understand its kuleana to serve all Kānaka ʻŌiwi students (University of Hawaii at Mānoa, 2020). A fundamental step in these efforts is challenging and transforming our understanding of those who make up the lāhui. Being part of the Kānaka ʻŌiwi diaspora does not reduce our connectedness to our culture. The journey home is a way for us to further our kuleana and reconnect with our ancestral homelands. With these concepts and moʻolelo, UH Mānoa can better embrace the diversity of the lāhui and reimagine diasporaneity, ultimately providing the essential support for diasporic Kānaka ʻŌiwi who receive the same kāhea as we did, to return home.

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