

KU‘U HOME ‘O KEAUKAHA: HE LEI MO‘OLELO NO KA ‘ĀINA
ALOHA (MY HOME, KEAUKAHA: A LEI OF STORIES FOR BELOVED
LANDS)

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

AMERICAN STUDIES

May 2024

By

Halenakekanakalawai‘aoMiloli‘i K. Kapuni-Reynolds

Dissertation Committee:

Brandy Nālani McDougall, Chairperson

Elizabeth Colwill

Noelle M. K. Y. Kahanu

Kathleen Kawelu

Karen Kosasa

Ty P. Kāwika Tengan

Keywords: Keaukaha, Hawai‘i Island, Hawaiian History, Decoloniality, ‘Āina

‘Ālana a ho‘ola‘a ‘ia i ku‘u makuahine
‘o Johnette Keonaona Toy Len Kapuni-Reynolds (1952 –
2011) a me ko‘u kupunawahine
‘o Noelani Audene Kaleoaloha Ioane-Kapuni (1926 – 2022)

ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ku‘u Home ‘O Keaukaha: He Lei Mo‘olelo No Ka ‘Āina Aloha would not have been possible without the support, words of encouragement, and aloha from numerous individuals who believed in me and this project since I started my PhD in 2016. First, thanks goes to my ‘ohana, especially my life partner, Ikaika Jenks Pua‘a, and elder sisters, Noe Kirby and Eke Leo, for always being there whenever I needed them over these last few difficult years. I also give thanks to my aunt, Mapuana Waipā, and cousin, Lehuanani Ah Nee, for their unwavering support and numerous conversations about our beloved kin and community over the years. I am

also forever indebted to my parents, Johnette Keonaona Toy Len Kapuni-Reynolds and Gary Lester Reynolds, and my grandparents, Noelani Kaleoaloha Audene Ioane-Kapuni, John Kaleiali‘i Kapuni, Esther Jane Reynolds, and Herman Lester Reynolds, for teaching me the value of hardwork, family, and community. May you all rest in eternal peace.

No dissertation project could be completed without a group of friends and colleagues who are there for you to exchange ideas and to support you during those tough moments in life. Mahalo to my fellow UH-Hilo alumni Lokelani Brandt for our many conversations, lunches, and holoholo sessions; to Pūlama Lima, mahalo for the many dissertation writing sessions that pushed me towards completion; and to Kamalani Johnson, mahalo for our numerous conversations on Hawaiian academic work. Thanks also goes to Katherine Achacoso, Māhealani Ahia, Pōmaika‘i Gushiken, Kahala Johnson, Leiana Nāholowa‘a, Aree Worawongwasu, and many other UH-Mānoa colleagues for introducing me to an array of literatures and ways of thinking. Judith Schachter has also been tremendously helpful throughout this process, and I am grateful to her for our many email exchanges over the years regarding Keaukaha and Hawaiian Home Lands. Many thanks to my dissertation committee as well for their support throughout this process.

iii

This dissertation represents my lifelong commitment to learning more about Keaukaha’s history and ensuring its transmission to future generations. There are no words that can adequately convey my sense of appreciation and aloha for people like Rhea Akoi, Lehua Veincent, Patrick Kahawaiola‘a, Edith Kanaka‘ole, Luana Kawelu, Don Pakele, and many others for their efforts to preseve the stories of our elders and to teach our children and grandchildren the importance of knowing who you are and where you come from. May we continue to build on the foundation that was laid for us by those who have passed.

Lastly, to the many who are unnamed but have played a role—big or small—in the completion of this project, mahalo to you all for your friendship and aloha. In the words of the late Albert Nahale-a in his infamous song *Ku‘u Home ‘O Keaukaha*:

E hana like kākou me ke aloha
I mau ke ea o ka ‘āina i ka pono

Let us work together with aloha
So that the sovereignty of the land is restored

iv

ABSTRACT

Keaukaha is a land and sea area located in Hilo, Hawai‘i in the ahupua‘a of Waiākea. Famed for its brackish waters, rocky coastline, and abundance of natural resources, it is home to numerous wahi pana (legendary, storied places) whose stories shed light on the Kanaka ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian) ancestors who once made their livelihoods there. In 1924, Keaukaha became the home of the first Hawaiian Home Land community established on the Island of

Hawai‘i under the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920 (HHCA). The HHCA is a U.S. federal law passed in 1921 that established the Hawaiian Homes Commission and set aside over 200,000 acres of land for the purpose of rehabilitating “native Hawaiians” with 50% or more Hawaiian blood by returning them to a leasehold land base. The first Keaukaha homesteaders, comprised of long-time residents of the area and newcomers, founded an “improvement club” that organized and advocated for the community’s needs—a legacy that is carried on today by numerous community organizers a century later.

This dissertation offers the first book-length archival study of Keaukaha with emphasis on the 19th and early 20th centuries. It builds on the works of other Indigenous and Hawaiian studies scholars by relying on Hawaiian language and English language primary source materials to create a decolonial story of place before and soon after the establishment of the Keaukaha Hawaiian Home Land community. By retheorizing huli kanaka (the Hawaiian term for anthropology) as a critical ‘Ōiwi social and aesthetic theory, and by utilizing a “lei kui” (a type of lei where flowers are pierced and strung together) methodology, I thread together ‘Ōiwi and non-‘Ōiwi historiographical methods to reveal stories of Keaukaha’s past. This work intervenes in the academic literature on Hawaiian Home Lands by centering a single community’s efforts to create and maintain ‘Ōiwi community in the face of displacement and dispossession during Hawai‘i’s Territorial Era (1900-1959). Although the stories traced in this dissertation are marked by loss and struggle, it also recounts practices of ‘Ōiwi joy and a refusal to be replaced by settler-colonial processes. A key example illustrated throughout this dissertation is the practice of huaka‘i hele (sightseeing tours) to visit relatives, friends, and wahi pana. Through this project, I practice and theorize decoloniality, as theorized by Global South scholars, by actively working to remember and theorize from the ‘āina aloha and ‘Ōiwi community that raised and educated me.

