

The Mana Wahine of Hawai'i

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In Western societies, women have faced unfair societal expectations, some of which included having to act in a quiet and reserved way. However, there are those who rose up and did great things; these women can now be classified as feminists. In Hawai'i, there was no difference. There were quite a few strong, outspoken women. Pre-European contact Hawai'i was extremely different than what Hawai'i grew to be after missionaries first introduced Christianity in the early 1800s. Unfortunately, throughout both time periods, women were still treated as inferior. Although they had the lower hand throughout the history of Hawai'i, in both folklore and reality, many Hawaiian women were strong and intellectual even while facing instances of oppression. Women were treated as having a lower status for reasons influenced by folklore and European contact, yet some specific female Hawaiians and deities really stood out in the patriarchy. The list is long, but the goddesses Papahānaumoku, Pele, and Laka, and ke ali'i¹ Ka'ahumanu, Pauahi, Ke'elikōlani, Queen Emma, Lili'uokalani, and Ka'iulani were exemplary mana wahine.²

Every culture has a set of stories and legends that are didactic in ways that shape the future by teaching people how to conduct themselves in society. Aspects of the Hawaiian culture, such as oral traditions and laws, confirm the pressure put on women. Papahānaumoku, or Papa, is known as the earth goddess and makuahine³ of all Hawaiian people. Her story involves how the kapu⁴ system was implemented in ancient Hawai'i. This mo'olelo⁵ depicting the birth of the Hawaiian islands is a story in which Papahānaumoku and Wākea's union first birthed a human daughter named Ho'ohōkūkālani. After her birth came the islands of Hawai'i and Maui. However, Wākea longed for Ho'ohōkūkālani because she was very beautiful. He asked the kahuna⁶ for help and he implemented a new law. It was a religious law called 'aikapu⁷ that then separated male and females from eating with one another. Males became la'a⁸ and females were haumia⁹ because of menstruation. The

Kahuna also decided that there should be four nights of worship dedicated to the four major gods, Kāne, Lono, Kū, and Kanaloa, all of whom were male. On these nights, men could not sleep with women. Wākea sneakily used this time to seduce Ho'ohōkūkālani, and she became hāpai¹⁰ with Hāloanaka, who was stillborn. His body was buried and grew to become the first kalo.¹¹ Later, another child was born from Ho'ohōkūkālani, named after his older brother Hāloa, the first kanaka.¹²

After Wākea's unfaithfulness, Papa left him for another lover and gave birth to the island of O'ahu. Wākea had relations with others as well and created Moloka'i and Lāna'i. After a period of time, Papa and Wākea reconvened and birthed the rest of their children, the remaining islands: Kaua'i, Ni'ihau, Lehua (atoll), and Kaho'olawe, who became the afterbirth. The 'aikapu is said to have sprung from this version of the island creation stories, and although Papahānaumoku is respected and revered as the earth mother, she endured a lot. The story of Wākea's overwhelming urge to be unfaithful to Papa had established the reasoning for a law: one that separated the men from the women, creating the illusion that women are inferior.

Furthermore, ancient Hawai'i had many other rules that separated men and women. Not only were they eating separately, but their food was even cooked in a different imu.¹³ Additionally, women could only eat certain foods. It was kapu to consume pork, banana, coconut, and certain types of fish. If a woman was found in her husband's sanctuary or at another man's eating house, she suffered the death penalty. However, a husband could enter his wife's eating house with no penalty. This shows the status that men held over women. Although there were eating taboos, the family did have a house in which, if not eating or worshipping, they could interact freely with each other. Women did stay in different housing while menstruating, called the hale pe'a¹⁴ (Malo 52). Men thought women were dirty because of menstruation, so it became kapu to sleep in the same hale¹⁵ during her monthly cycle. Additionally, it was recognized that their society was dominated by males, in both the 'akua¹⁶ and the kanaka realm. Men were considered very sacred and, as mentioned previously, even the four primary gods are male. Although there was much segregation overall and the gods were all male, women were allowed to participate in religion and worship, giving them a bit of autonomy.

¹ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the words royalty or monarch.

² In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word strong women.

³ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word mother.

⁴ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word taboo or forbidden.

⁵ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word story.

⁶ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the words Hawaiian priest.

⁷ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the words sacred eating.

⁸ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word sacred.

⁹ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word defiling.

¹⁰ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word pregnant.

¹¹ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word taro.

¹² In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word person.

¹³ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the words underground oven.

¹⁴ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the words menstrual house.

¹⁵ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word house.

¹⁶ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word god.

However, many rules applied to women and breaking any of the kapu was punishable by death.

One of the most worshipped female deities in Hawaiian culture is Pele. She is different because, usually, female deities are gentle and motherly, while Pele is the fierce goddess of fire and the creator of ever-growing land. Before her arrival to Hawai'i island, there already lived a god of fire in Kilauea. His name was Aila'au, literally translated as forest eater. He was feared and revered for his ability to destroy and create land. However, when Pele made her way from Puna up to the mountains, he heard of her coming and fled (Westervelt 36). Another famous legend of her strength and ferocity is the mo'olelo of Pele and Kamapua'a. They had a romantic relationship for some time but became agitated with each other's flaws. Pele was becoming discontented with Kamapua'a and his hog-like tendencies, while he was annoyed with her raging short temper. Eventually, they faced off in a battle of scorned lovers; Pele triumphed over Kamapua'a, though the odds were not in her favor (Westervelt 47). Pele was powerful enough to send a god of fire fleeing in fear and win a battle against the handsome pig god, Kamapua'a. Not fitting within any traditional Western ideals of women, such as being submissive, quiet, and weak. Pele is loud, outspoken, strong, and powerful.

Another deity who has contributed to the recognition of powerful women of Hawai'i is Laka, a goddess who is sometimes associated with Pele's younger sister, Hi'iaka. Laka is also linked to birth and fertility, but, most importantly, she is considered the goddess of hula¹⁷ and the forest, which is where she resides. Not only is it important that a female deity is known to have taught the traditional dance of extreme cultural importance of Hawaiians, but it is astounding that a female taught it, as it was initially meant for men. In ancient times, only men performed this art. When hālau hula¹⁸ go to pick materials in the forests for their performances, they honor Laka. She also represents a way of taming the spirit, body, and mind as one must be disciplined to dance hula. In this context, hula seems to have originated from a female and is empowering because it is a sacred part of Hawai'i and has been passed down for generations by a goddess.

This power within the supernatural female entities can also be recognized in the power of the ali'i as well. Queen Elizabeth Ka'ahumanu was King Kamehameha the Great's favorite wife. She was powerful in the way that she became Queen Regent. When her husband died and his son, Liholiho, was named successor, she declared that the King wished that she rule alongside his heir (Williams and Tune 16). Liholiho, or Kamehameha II, with Ka'ahumanu, made major changes to the Kingdom of Hawai'i. In 1819, she had "abolished the

religious rules and elevated the importance of the ali'i in civil governance" (Proto 35). The Queen also brought in the Calvinist religion and declared that the'aikapu be no more. In 1824, she laid down new rules heavily influenced by the Calvinist religion. She fought for the rights of Native Hawaiian women and called for 'ainoa.¹⁹ Kamehameha II should have sentenced her to death for this, but instead refused to and further changed the dynamics of Hawaiian society. Queen Ka'ahumanu was not the reigning ali'i, but with King Kamehameha II's support of her choices, made a monumental shift from ancient Hawaiian laws into a growing modern society.

Princess Ruth Keanolani Kanāhoahoa Ke'elikōlani was a great woman. She fought hard for the rights of the Hawaiian people but is not as well known as some of other ali'i. She also amassed lands from her relatives, which helped her gain political power and gave her an advantage, after the Great Māhele (Osorio 102). All of her land was left to Princess Bernice Pauahi Pākī Bishop, who in turn left it for the generations to come (Van Dyke 53). She empowered 'Ōlelo Hawai'i²⁰ by demanding to do business transactions in only Hawaiian rather than English, even though she could speak and understand English well. By using her native tongue, she became an advocate for both Hawaiian culture and language. Because of her advocacy, the University of Hawai'i at Hilo has given her recognition by naming the new Ka Haka 'Ula o Ke'elikōlani (College of Hawaiian Language) building after her.

The recipient of Princess Ruth's land, Bernice Pauahi Pākī Bishop was the last royal descendant of the Kamehameha lineage and the great-granddaughter of Kamehameha I. She was known as an incredibly intelligent, kind, and generous woman. She and her husband, Charles Reed Bishop, set aside her lands for the children of Hawai'i and founded Kamehameha Schools and the Bishop Museum. Princess Pauahi was a historic woman who encouraged putting education over everything else. She is arguably still the most influential Hawaiian woman, because her legacy continues today with her scholarships, schools, and land set aside for the revitalization of Hawaiian culture and teaching purposes. Princess Pauahi fully represents the strength and agility of a woman who, against the odds of a male-dominated and Western culture, was able to give more than enough back to her community and her beloved people.

Another phenomenal mana wahine was Queen Emma Kalanikaumaka'amano Kaleleonālani Na'ea Rooke. She was married to King Alexander 'Iolani Liholiho, otherwise known as Kamehameha IV, in 1855. After the untimely death of her husband and son, she was left a widow at a young age. Her fight for the Hawaiian culture and Hawai'i continued when she ran against

¹⁷ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the words ancient Hawaiian dance.

¹⁸ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the words Hula group.

¹⁹ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the words free eating.

²⁰ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the words Hawaiian language.

David Kalākaua to be reigning monarch. Unfortunately, she lost. Rioting occurred due to this, and the uproar was exhilarating because she, a female, was considered to be a better candidate by the native population (Kamehiro 28). Queen Emma was dedicated to helping the native population by any means necessary. Her most prominent address of an issue was the rampant diseases and illnesses affecting the native population. Queen Emma helped to establish Honolulu's first hospital, which they named in honor of her, now known as Queen's Medical Center.

When King Kalākaua passed away, his sister Lili'uokalani, born as Lydia Lili'u Loloku Walania Wewehi Kamaka'eha, became successor to the throne. She was Hawai'i's last reigning monarch and a testament to the strength of Hawaiian women during harsh trials and tribulations. Imprisoned in her own home and forced to sign over the Kingdom of Hawai'i to the United States of America, Queen Lili'uokalani remained kūpa'a.²¹ American business and plantation owners "tried to weaken the monarchy and gain political power ... and although beloved by the native Hawaiians, the new queen had several factors working against her" (Koepe 3). Kalākaua's cabinet had been forced into allowing non-Hawaiian people to vote, resulting in the weakened voice of the kanaka. The Queen also "tried to introduce a new constitution that would have returned power to the Hawaiian monarchy and people, [she] ignited the spark that started the Hawaiian revolution" (Bobo 3). Her never-ending persistence is a defining characteristic of a strong woman, even after having to abdicate her throne in fear of the bloodshed of her people. In her biography, "Liliuokalani thought that her removal as Hawaii's ruler would be temporary and she felt justice would return the islands to the people and the monarchy" (Bobo 7). As a result of losing her throne, the Kingdom of Hawai'i began to collapse, leading to the annexation of Hawai'i to the United States and eventually, in 1959, statehood. Until the day she died, she continued to fight for Hawai'i and show that it was a priority to her. Her knowledge in politics was a key component in her continued struggle with the United States while her love of music encouraged and uplifted the Hawaiian people.

After the overthrow in 1893, young Princess Victoria Kawēkiu Ka'iulani Lunalilo Kalaninuiāhiālapalapa Cleghorn tried to restore the Hawaiian Kingdom. She was very intelligent and went to school in England because she was Crown Princess of her aunt, Queen Lili'uokalani. She also became a famous spokesperson for Hawai'i, having traveled to the continental United States to speak on behalf of her people. Many others around the world thought Hawaiians were "heathens", but through Ka'iulani's example, learned that Hawaiians were just as intelligent as they were. She was modern, "civilized", and knowledgeable in politics. She was also fluent in the English, Hawaiian, French, and German languages. At such a young age, she worked hard to represent the

Hawaiian people and, possibly, the adaptability of a modern, yet still heavily cultured nation.

Considering that Hawai'i recognizes these phenomenal females, enough to name buildings after and continue to tell mo'olelo of them, it shows that society is moving in the right direction. The problem that needs to be addressed is the lack of worldwide recognition of women in all countries because the cultures and governments have not progressed towards a more equally represented society. Everyone should hear more about the women from various cultures that have stood apart from others. Collectively, all of the aforementioned mana wahine transcend the expectations of women in intelligence, strength, and courage. Not only have Polynesian Cultures been considered barbaric, but they also contain women who have almost always been subjugated as a gender and sex. In conclusion, not all women are quiet, insecure, and unaware. From the 'aikapu to the overthrow, it becomes clear that women will strive to elevate their position within society. They have contributed immensely to cultures and communities through education, the growth of language, land, and spirituality. The fluidity of a culture is important because the behavior towards women rest on it. The mana wahine of today can reflect on those who came before them and continue to perpetuate the spirit of what it means to uphold equity and virtues, to be pono.²²

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²¹ In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word steadfast.

²² In the Hawaiian Language, or 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, this translates to the word goodness or uprightness.