



# NĀ KUA'ĀINA

— LIVING HAWAIIAN CULTURE —

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paring of taro was a family effort. 'Ohana with taro would gather about every three weeks to harvest taro, replant, and make poi. Individual families would thus go home with a generous supply of fresh poi to last until the next gathering. When ulu was abundant it was also cooked in the imu and pounded into poi. Sweet potatoes were also cooked in the imu and sometimes mashed and mixed with coconut milk for a dessert. Most families in Puna grew ti leaves in their yards. Traditionally, ti leaves were used as a charm to ward off evil spirits at the site where the leaves grew or to protect the person who would wear the charm. Ti leaves are also used to wrap fish and other food for steaming or cooking over an open fire or in an imu. Kukui nuts are also easily and customarily grown in yards. The nut is baked and used as a relish with Hawaiian salt to prepare raw fish. If the land around their house was not suitable for cultivation, then plots were cultivated in family land with better soil. Some families in Kalapana, for example, cultivated dry-land taro in Kamaili. Plots were even cleared in the forest for planting taro, sweet potatoes, and bananas.

### Regeneration

At the end of the twentieth century, the Native Hawaiian community of Puna, particularly the lower part, remained distinct, geographically, culturally, and socially. A significant part of the population is descended from the first families who migrated there and settled in the district. They had a strong tradition of perseverance in a district that has been constantly changing and evolving.

In addition, young Native Hawaiian families were moving in increasing numbers into Puna from Hilo, Honolulu, and other neighboring islands. Beginning in 1958, most moved into the nonstandard subdivisions, which offered affordable homes for low- and moderate-income families. Yet despite the increase in the population, the opening of new subdivisions, and continuous eruptions by Pelehonuamea, Puna families still engaged in subsistence activities.

Pelehonuamea continued to manifest her presence in the Puna district through an active eruption that began on January 3, 1983, and continued into the twenty-first century with earthquakes, natural subsidence, and the steady flow of steam and natural gases out of the earth into the atmosphere.

When geothermal energy development for the generation of electricity threatened to destroy the Puna Forest Reserve, the kua'āina and Pele practitioners rallied together to protect the natural and cultural resources of the for-

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est they and their ancestors had always utilized and protected. This challenge  
most clearly demonstrated the regenerative role of Puna as a cultural kīpuka.  
Testimony provided by kua'āina of Puna about their customary use of the for-  
est convinced the circuit court judge and the judges of the Hawai'i State  
Supreme Court that Hawaiian cultural and subsistence beliefs, customs, and  
practices continued to be actively practiced in the Puna Forest Reserve. This  
resulted in a ruling of the Hawai'i State Supreme Court that more broadly  
defined the recognition of Native Hawaiian rights to access undeveloped pri-  
vate and public lands for cultural, religious, and subsistence purposes.

The ahupua'a of Kahauale'a, owned by the Campbell Estate, was originally  
targeted for geothermal energy development. When Pele began, on January  
3, 1983, to continuously erupt at Kahauale'a from mauka to makai the State of  
Hawai'i offered the Puna Forest Reserve for the development project. In 1983  
the Pele practitioners formed an organization they called the Pele Defense  
Fund. In 1985 they adopted a statement of the inherited beliefs that led them  
to oppose geothermal energy.

#### Pele Perspectives

- 1 Pele is the heart, the life of the Hawaiian religious beliefs and practices today.
- 2 Pele has always been and is today central and indispensable to Hawaiian traditional religious beliefs and practices.
- 3 Nowhere in the geographical Pacific except Hawai'i is there a recognized volcano-nature God but Pele.
- 4 Pele is the akua, and 'aumakua of Hawaiians today. Her blood relationships continue as shared traditions, genealogy and aloha for particular 'āina and places in Hawai'i. Pele is kūpuna and "tutu" to many Native Hawaiians.
- 5 Pele is the inspiration, strength and focus for those who are established in practices and performances of ancestral tradition and religion.
- 6 Pele influences daily spiritual and physical life activities, making it essential that Pele exist in pure form and environment.
- 7 Pele's person, her body-spirit, her power-mana, her very existence are the lands of Hawai'i. This 'āina is her, which she replenishes, nourishes, and protects. She is seen in special-alternate body forms, along with those of her sisters and brothers, their kino lau: the native fern, the native shrub, the blossoms of the native trees.

- 8 Pele is a living God. She is tangible. She has a home on Hawai'i. She has been seen by many living in Hawai'i. She causes earth quakes, tidal waves and lands to sink or surface from the ocean.
- 9 Pele is the magma, the heat, the vapor, the steam, and the cosmic creation which occur in volcanic eruptions. She is seen in the lava, images of her standing erect, dancing, and extending her arms with her hair flowing into the steam and clouds.
- 10 We know geothermal development will adversely affect and personally injure the sacred body of the God Pele, and that she would retaliate. We fear for the loss of our God, for the loss of the spirits of our ancestors, for the loss of the lives of our children, and for the loss of our places in Hawai'i.
- 11 We believe that geothermal development will unduly burden those who are the family of Pele, her guardians, her worshippers.
- 12 Geothermal development will severely impair those who depend on salient images of Pele, her viability, and her forests which are connections to the deity.
- 13 Geothermal development would impinge upon the continuation of all essential ritual practices and therefore also impacts the ability of training young persons in traditional religious beliefs and practices, and the ability to convey these to future generations.
- 14 Geothermal development will take Pele and diminish and finally delete her creative force, causing spiritual-religious, cultural, psychological and sociological injury and damage to the people who worship and live with Pele.

The Pele Defense Fund filed a suit to stop the exchange of the Puna Forest Reserve for Kahauale'a between the state of Hawai'i and the Campbell Estate (Pele Defense Fund v. Paty 79 Haw. at 442, 1992). Through the course of the court case, the kua'āina of Puna testified about their ongoing access to the Puna Forest Reserve for the hunting and gathering of resources. They explained the spiritual protocol followed out of respect for Pele and the multitude of ancestral deities dwelling in the forest.

Though unable to reverse the land exchange, the Pele Defense Fund won recognition of the rights of Native Hawaiians of Puna to access the Puna Forest Reserve for traditional and customary practices even under the private ownership of the Campbell Estate. The court case set a precedent for all Native Hawaiian rights of access by ruling that "Native Hawaiian rights pro-

tected by Article XII, Section 7, may extend beyond the ahupua'a in which a Native Hawaiian resides where such rights have been customarily and traditionally exercised in this manner." Prior to this ruling, the rights of Native Hawaiians to access had been limited to the ahupua'a in which they lived.

The Pele case expanded the recognition of all Native Hawaiian rights and contributed to the regeneration of Native Hawaiian culture and religion throughout the Hawaiian Islands into the twenty-first century.<sup>72</sup> It also reaffirmed the continuing existence and belief in Pelehonuamea as the inspiration for new generations of Native Hawaiians from the rising of the sun at Kumukahi, Puna to its setting at Lehua, beyond Kaua'i.