

Ho‘oilina Conference Notes

Panels and Keynote, Small and Large Group Discussion Summaries—May 29, 2019

Keynote Speakers

Alaska

Ben Young

Hawai‘i

Billy Richards

Reflection Speakers

Ka‘iulani Murphy (HI)

Lehua Kamalu (HI)

Panelists

Alaska

X’unei Lance Twitchell

Yarrow Vaara, S’ákjayéi

Lyle James

Cordelia Qigñaaq Kellie

Hawai‘i

Pōmaikalani Bertelmann

Mahina Paishon-Duarte

Kaleomanuiwa Wong

Haunani Kane

Small Group and Audience Members

The following are summaries of notes taken during our discussions during the Ho‘oilina Conference, organized according to the broad themes that emerged.

THERE ARE INEXTRICABLE LINKS BETWEEN ENVIRONMENT, LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND HEALING

- Our identity as indigenous peoples is linked to our languages and our environments. Our languages reflect our environments. There is healing in our languages, in connection with our environments, and in connection with each other and our genealogies (inclusive of our ancestors and future descendants).

BALANCE IS A PARAMOUNT CULTURAL VALUE

- Balance is an important value; it may be the central value of our cultures. It may be the entirety of culture.
- We need to move forward while defining what balance meant to our ancestors, through the reclamation of ancestral knowledge.
- Balance extended to the speakers of the conference: Alaska and Hawai‘i; clan representation; male and female; elder, parent, and youth.
- Balance was also spoken about as encompassing traditional relationships of reciprocity and sharing (such as trade and connection between groups up and down river).
- The canoe (yaakw, wa‘a) is the simplest way to illustrate balance; when it is out of balance, it doesn’t move forward, and when it is out of balance it corrects quickly.

WE CARRY OUR ANCESTORS, MENTORS, AND LEADERS WITH US ALWAYS

- Bringing our ancestors, leaders, mentors, clans, communities, and families into the physical and spiritual space of the conference was important for all.
- Such a practice was both an acknowledgement and summoning of strength among our peoples.
- At one point individuals were asked to bring their languages to be heard, creating language spaces in the conference with a call to “Let us hear their ancestors.”
- The sharing of languages touched many participants; one expressed amazement at hearing so many native languages spoken in one place.
- There are stories and songs of our ancestors that we use for reclaiming ourselves, our languages, and our cultures.
- Our genealogies (mo’okū’auhau) inform our lives today.

OUR PEOPLES HAVE STRONG CANOE HERITAGES

- The act of reclaiming ancestral knowledges voyaging, canoes, and the ocean was characterized as reclaiming, reawakening, relearning, and responsibility.
- One participant described the importance of having water in your heart
- Acknowledgement of the existence of canoe roads and maritime routes; examples include trade with the Tsimshian and evidence in material culture and historical record.
- Yaakwdáat/Yakutat means where the canoes come up and rest.
- Rivers represent how we navigate to each other and to ourselves
- The canoe itself is a focal point/catalyst of cultural revival.

OUR ENVIRONMENTS ARE “OCEAN FORESTS”

- The term “ocean forest” illustrates the interconnectedness of ocean and land, ‘āina and kai that was acknowledged by conference participants.
- Our cultures recognize the importance of balance in our environment.
- Acute awareness of the environment, our surroundings, and its fluctuations is integral to understanding ourselves and our culture.
- We also acknowledge that there are different perspectives from land to sea, and place to place that require us to code switch. The differences in our environments have shaped our identities (for example, islands with finite resources).
- We want to heal the waters, and in doing so heal the earth and heal ourselves.
- The ocean is threatened (by pollution for example), but it is also imparts so much healing from physical, spiritual, and historic trauma. The ocean is strong, and we are nourished by that strength as people with water in our hearts
- How do we make sure we can live in our own homelands?
- When witnessing changes in our environment, fluctuations in the health of our oceans, and decreases in our resources, we are moved to answer the question “Whose responsibility is it?” The responsibility is ours.

WE HAVE EXPERIENCED COLONIZATION AND ARE AFFECTED BY HISTORICAL TRAUMA.

- We are still collectively and individually dealing with the lasting impacts of colonization; historical trauma has made it difficult to reclaim ourselves.
- Colonizers should know that their racism hurts us.
- Colonization has shaped both the mindsets of many of our people and those who are not our people; from the lack of support for cultural programs, the lack of interest in traditional knowledge or practice, the pain of not looking or acting like others and feeling “less than,” to people being openly non supportive with the thought of why even try if a practice is going to die anyway?
- One participant shared the experiences of German occupation in Sāmoa, noting that it only takes one generation to lose culture.
- How do we reach a place where our culture is strong? The feeling of not being able to answer questions about your culture and language is one of hurt that diminishes our understandings of ourselves, but should be understood in the framework of colonization and trauma, and not a reflection of personal failing.

WE HAVE THE STRENGTH AND TOOLS TO HEAL OUR PEOPLE.

- Colonization is four-pronged; the dismantling of language, culture, identity, and people. Decolonizing is putting it all back together. Though it may not be visible, language is something that is always there and within us, just like the roots of the trees.
- Revitalization is to be in places where our understanding of our own strength is strong.
- One participant said that it is important to change the conversation and to change the paradigm. We have suffered generations of trauma, but we have also experienced generations of healing and strength.
- The paths you are on is created for you by your ancestors, and that moment of awareness is amazing and inspirational.
- We are never alone; we are here with each other and our ancestors; we are working together and remembering our connections.
- We are strong.
- Perpetuation is Prevention.
- If everyone who lived in our places spoke our languages (native and nonnative) then it would be impossible to be cruel to each other and to ourselves.
- Sometimes we hold on to our pain like a relative, but language can allow us to heal.
- The contexts of our languages are important, and we should never try feel the need to apologize for using our languages.
- We are all in different places on the journey to preserve and perpetuate our languages and cultures; recognizing these differences while working to lift and support each other is part of our shared indigenous identity and our responsibility to one another.
- We have so much indigenous knowledge; we can harness it and put it on a platform to create our own cultures of change.

OUR LANGUAGES ARE PART OF OUR IDENTITY AND HELP US HEAL.

- If you lose the language and you lose the culture, what is left?
- The difficulty of trying to teach people a second language is an American construct. But some people don't even believe that they can learn their own languages. There's a lot of the mind framing and ground work that has to be done with language revitalization.
- We need to get to the point where we feel we can make mistakes, and that our mistakes made while trying to learn won't hurt our language. We don't want a handshake language; we want vernacular, the language spoken in society.
- We need to begin observing the subtle songs of our languages.
- We've come so far with language revitalization in a very short time; 30-40 years.
- Today, language helps young people to find themselves. We are taught language to help us succeed in this world.
- One participant shared that she hopes to grow into her name.

WE MUST THINK OF CHANGE AT THE SYSTEMS LEVEL

- We must recognize that there are different ways of being and knowing, and make an effort to get out of our silos.
- Cultivating/Reclaiming/Sharing indigenous knowledge is an act of rebellion against colonial systems.
- One solution is to make cultural programs that last for a day, a week, or a month become part of the system of education, make it the norm and the foundation of learning. We will be going back to our "reality" which is informed by our cultures, our environments.
- The systems put in place that oppress our knowledges and practices continue to chug along without their original creators; we need to create our own systems, and we don't need permission.
- We need to work with practitioners so that all involved grow; in teaching the youth we will teach the parents and the larger family unit, eventually impacting the community.
- How do we scaffold change? We need to think about the reforestation of a people, of generations.
- What does it mean to live as indigenous people? One participant talked about growing up as a kalo farmer. There is a difference between doing a practice and living a practice. How shall we teach? Inherent in our practices are systemic and mindset changes. For example, the importance of feeding people versus profit, food sovereignty, etc.

WITH KNOWLEDGE COMES THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTION

- Do we just reawaken when we access our ancestral knowledges and languages? Or do we face what is happening and do we have responsibilities for action?
- Reclaiming knowledge from our ancestors isn't enough to create change. We must ask ourselves what knowledge will be used to activate.

THERE IS POWER IN SINGLE MOMENTS AND OF INDIVIDUALS AND INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS THAT BECOME PART OF THE WHOLE MOVEMENT

- One participant reflected that a single day of planting seedlings led to the creation of a great forest, and that that single day has meaning twenty years later and throughout his life.
- All learning is done in retrospect; one moment can have great impact decades from now.
- As individuals, we have the strength to rise up.
- As individuals committed to our languages, we can inspire others to rise up. We must be inclusive, we must let them dance with us.

FUTURE GENERATIONS ARE OUR HOPE

- As leaders, we need to leverage kupuna knowledge and work in the capacity of serving others and our communities.
- Learning our languages protects our children.
- One participant had a vision of the future in which indigenous people with advanced degrees are the norm instead of a rarity.
- Surviving and thriving are evidence of successes among our people, and continue the legacy of healing of our ancestors.
- In one community in Canada, there is no longer a single canoe-builder. But there will be in the future. Our generation may not be the one to revive a practice or reclaim knowledge, but we have to lay the path so that future generations will be able to.
- We need language stewards, people who are in specific places to grow the next generations of strong speakers.
- How does modern technology impacts traditional practices? We can be deliberate about its use and incorporate intentional understanding to teach traditional protocols, mindsets, processes, etc around affected practices.
- Planting seeds can be viewed as planting forests, but also planting canoes, which are mediums for cultural revitalization and forward movement as a people. When we teach a student, we are likewise planting canoes.
- There is great potential in our futures, and it lies with our youth.
- Participants spoke of their children being able to (and wanting to for themselves) learn their languages and cultures; many older generations didn't have these opportunities to reclaim their identity. There is great power in that shift; of wanting to learn and being able to learn.
- We are making miracles, one child at a time.