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HE MAMO ALOHA NA HĀLOA; THINGS I WOULD HAVE LEARNED IN A KULA KAIAPUNI

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He mamo aloha na Hāloa; Things I would have learned in a Kula Kaiapuni

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Moʻolelo are narrative reminders of the stories our ancestors hold in trust for future generations of kānaka. They remind us of our humanity as kānaka in life, love, and difficulty. Using moʻolelo, the author, a former Hawaiian language immersion teacher (kumu kula kaiapuni) will reflect on the moʻolelo of Hāloa and examine the many lessons learned through reconnection to diverse and non-heteronormative family structures, initiating and building language relationships after intergenerational loss, and engaging law, policy, and systemic structures to advance Indigenous education and ways of being and intergenerational persistence through the Hawaiian educational movement.

He mamo aloha na Hāloa; Things I would have learned in a Kula Kaiapuni;
Small reminders in everyday life that as a kanaka, we are living embodiments of our
kūpuna

I. 'Akahi - Welo 'Ohana¹

"You are a bastard. Your parents weren't married, so you are a bastard!"

In the seventh grade at a Hawaiian school, a classmate found out that my parents weren't married - in fact, they were never married - and he inscribed my place in this world as illegitimate. While I know he didn't mean this as a compliment, his assertion wasn't pejorative either; simply an alignment with his (capital T) truth. His assertion was ironic, however: his parents weren't married either. Perhaps in his mind, a hale pule marriage and subsequent divorce conferred legitimacy as compared to my family status. Up to this point, I had never been embarrassed about my parents not being together (while they dated for several years, I did not have a single memory of their union). Rather, I remember a sense of loneliness that there were no other siblings who shared my exact lineage, only "half" siblings. I longed for the simplicity of a heteronormative family. As a seventh grader, my classmate's assessment cut deep.

It wasn't until college that I learned the moʻolelo of Hāloanakalaukapalili, the first kalo, as well as his younger sibling, Hāloa, the first Hawaiian kanaka who share a complicated parentage (Kame'eleihiwa, 1992; Wilson, 1999) and how this genealogical connection continues to inspire us as "mamo," a progeny of this first human family. I learned to expand my conceptions of 'ohana, questioning the idea of "legitimate" relationships. I also learned of generations of Hawaiian lineages (such as wohi and pi'o

¹ Editor's Note: The author chose not to translate most Hawaiian words in her reflection. We encourage you to access the many online Hawaiian language resources like wehewehe.org to assist in deepening your understanding here.

alliances) causing me to further question what is considered sacred. Viewed through my classmate's Eurocentric lens of family, 'Ōiwi knowledge, origin stories, the sacred agency of our deities, and their relationships – all would be dismissed and relegated to illegitimacy. As I got (much) older, healing became possible by understanding the deep and lasting legacy of my Hawaiian ancestors. In the same disciplined way, I connected through 'Ōlelo Hawai'i and came to realize that truth-seeking can take place by striving to reconnect with our ancestors through our mo'olelo (stories).

One curricular movement to include mo'olelo in classrooms across the pae'āina has been Nā Hopena A'o (Hawai'i State Department of Education, n.d.) This curriculum "includes everyone in the broader community to develop the competencies that strengthen a sense of belonging, responsibility, excellence, aloha, total well-being and Hawai'i ("BREATH") in ourselves, students and others." Initially, I had a tepid reaction to these standards. I felt that students and teachers wouldn't have to work as hard to access this knowledge, in the same disciplined way that they would have to with the Hawaiian Immersion education program. However, I recognize now that creating space in public education (both K-12 and higher education) to cultivate curricular experiences rooted in Hawai'i is paramount. Implementation of the Nā Hopena A'o competencies will vary based on the knowledge base of the teacher, support of the administration, student and 'ohana receptiveness, resources provided to implement this co-curricular initiative, and many other factors.

Mo'olelo, both mythological and historical, is not just critical for Hawaiian students, but all students who call Hawai'i their home, providing sanctuary from harmful hegemonic curriculum. Baker and Baker (2023) write, "weaving mo'okū'auhau through mo'olelo is essential for understanding the connectivity of one's successive genealogical or narrative line to the next" (p. 3). After many years of strategic erasure from public schools, Hawaiian stories, and stories about Hawaiians, return to curricular focus through these kinds of targeted endeavors. Indigenous scholar Margaret Kovach (2010) states, "Oral stories are born of connections within the world and are thus recounted relationally. They tie us with our past and provide a basis for continuity with future generations" (p. 94). These assertions are supported by Smith (1999), who continues,

Story telling, oral histories, the perspectives of elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research. Each individual story is powerful... These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every Indigenous person has a place. (p. 144)

The relationship building of kanaka through our mo'olelo places us within a broader lineage of native peoples of this place, our beloved Hawai'i.

It is critical in Native education that we not only learn the stories of our ancestors and carry these lessons forward as we navigate an ever-changing world as Indigenous people. Mo'olelo visits us as we grow and learn, and lessons from a single mo'olelo can evolve as we need them later in life. In my case, I began to distance myself from the shame of malu kukui² and chose to locate myself in the succession of mo'okū'auhau and learn from our collective mo'olelo.

² This term is primarily used to describe an ali'i of uncertain genealogy, but could also be extended to shame families that did not have 'ohana structures in alignment with Christian values.

II. ‘Alua: Aloha ‘Ōlelo: Loving Language Relationships

Mai ka pi‘ina a ka lā i Ha‘eha‘e
 A i ka mole ‘olu ‘o Lehua
 Eia au ko kama ē
 He mamo aloha na Hāloa
 ‘O Hawai‘i ku‘u kulāiwi
 Mai nā kūpuna mai
 ‘A‘ohe mea nāna e kū‘ai
 I ke ēwe o ku‘u mau iwi
 E ola au i ku‘u lāhui
 Ke kuleana o ka ‘ōiwi
 ‘O ka ‘ī ma kāna ‘ōlelo
 He Hawai‘i au, mau a mau

-Dr. Larry Kauanoe Kimura, *Kulāiwi* (1983)

I remember learning this mele written by foundational Hawaiian language scholar Dr. Larry Kauanoe Kimura. After a brief welina, this mele declares, “Eia au ko kama ē, he mamo aloha na Hāloa” (Here I am your child, a descendant of Hāloa). It reminds us that Hawai‘i is the land where our ancestors are buried and that I am strengthened by my people. And while this mele is important for all Hawaiians, it has become an anthem for Hawaiian language speakers, a reminder of the importance of our work to revitalize the Hawaiian language.

Unlike many of my teacher friends who were initially reluctant to go into teaching, I have always wanted to be a kumu: more specifically, a kumu kaiapuni (immersion teacher). It is something I naively decided when I was in high school. I say “naively” because I had no idea of what immersion education entailed. The video, *‘Auhea ‘Oe e Ke Kumu?* (Where are the teachers?) (‘Aha Pūnana Leo, 1990) was transformational. This mo‘olelo documented various immersion school sites and included interviews with the vanguard of this movement. When it came to education through the medium of Hawaiian, these highly educated academics led with their na‘au; they began within their own families, with their children, their most cherished loved ones. They shared the conviction that it was possible to create a new generation of Hawaiian language learners, even after several decades of cultural trauma and disconnection. I witnessed this for the first time when I visited the Pūnana Leo³ o Honolulu; I saw young children speaking, playing, praying, singing, and even arguing, thriving in our Hawaiian language.

At the time, I was a second language (L2) speaker and an average student of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. The Pūnana Leo and Kula Kaiapuni movement was in its nascent stages, and I knew in my na‘au that I wanted to be a part of the aloha ‘Ōlelo movement. The first year I took a formal Hawaiian language course in high school was 1993. “Onipa‘a” (i ka ho‘ona‘auao) became a rallying cry for many Hawaiians across Hawai‘i: 1993 was the 100th commemoration of the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom. In my

³ The Pūnana Leo preschools were established in 1985 in both Honolulu, O‘ahu and Hilo, Hawai‘i. These schools were inextricably linked to the Māori Kōhanga Reo movement to create early learning “nests” where children would learn through Hawaiian language and cultural practices.

history class (taught by a haole teacher), I was told that this was a “dark day in history,” but in my Hawaiian class I learned that ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i was not just for mele (song) on KCCN⁴, but a living, breathing vessel that has the ability to empower individuals and communities: I ka ‘ōlelo nō ke ola. Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2014) reminds us that, “The efforts to revitalize the Hawaiian language have been an indispensable part of the Hawaiian movement of ea” (p. 13). Like other parallel and liberatory Hawaiian movements, the Hawaiian language and Hawaiian-ness are beautiful.

After graduating high school, I continued my Hawaiian language studies and often spoke with my tūtū about what I was learning. Although my tūtū, “Grams,” was a learned woman, the gift of ‘Ōlelo was not passed down to her from her parents in an intergenerational transfer of knowledge. So, although my grandmother could speak phrases with her youngest sister, she didn't have the same kind of language conversancy as a mānaleo (first-language speaker). I say this to acknowledge that the ease of learning from her parents and grandparents was stolen from her, possibly through punishments at school or internalized indoctrination that learning her mother tongue would limit her success in life. As a young, orphaned woman and pragmatist, the Hawaiian language may not have been paramount to my tūtū's survival. I would like to say that my conversations with her were smooth and loving, but she would sometimes remind me that the way I spoke ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i was not the way that she grew up learning and speaking Hawaiian, and was incongruous with the voices of her kūpuna. Wong (1999) describes this type of language learning experience “book” or “college” Hawaiian. At that time, I felt hurt, but now I recognize that she was probably right about a lot of things and that she, too, was processing her loss. In that healing, we created our aloha and pilina through language learning.

I share this story because my experiences as a learner and now teacher of Hawaiian language have been both restorative and at times emotionally challenging. I have been deeply impacted by both new students just beginning their language journey, and those in the ‘ōlelo leadership community who have cultivated three or four new generations of language speakers in their families. In my own ways, I continue advocating for multiple access points to (re)learn our ‘Ōlelo Makuahine.

III. ‘Akolu - Ola i ka Wai

I was 24 when my mother remarried. She met her new ipo through her professional work, the majority of which was spent advocating for Hawaiians in the Hawai‘i legal system, mostly regarding ‘āina struggles. In one particular case, a hihia was fought in court to return the wai that was (and is) being skillfully diverted (stolen) from its traditional waterways in East Maui to supply other ‘āina on the lee side of the island, an engineering feat that left the kalo farmers without sufficient water to properly cultivate their lo‘i, and also negatively impacted stream life. At the time of this court case, her new beau and many other ‘ohana could count themselves as five and six generations strong from this area and enjoyed a lifestyle where they could continue their customary practices of farming and fishing.

The “isolation” of this place served as a pu‘uhonua, a sanctuary for Hawaiian cultural practices. However, the labor-intensive nature of kalo farming, in combination with the lack of water, forced many families to leave this place. Other families sought employment with the very company that divested them of their customary right to this

⁴ KCCN is an FM radio station that features Hawaiian music.

natural resource, to make ends meet. Only after many years of labor would these communities receive any kind of relief from the extractive dewatering of these streams. The humble kānaka navigated Hawai'i constitutional protections⁵ to claim their access rights to water. Hāloa does not only live and thrive in our mo'okū'auhau but also through his kinolau, kalo. Having opportunities to cultivate and partake of his body form is just one part of the necessary skills. Navigating policy, water commission hearings, and court cases became other vital mechanisms for Hawaiian families living their traditional lifestyles.

After many setbacks, the community began to see a return of life through the water - not just limited to the 'o'opu, hīhīwai, moi and other stream fish, but also the people. Many 'ohana returned to their place and way of life, where their families could sustain themselves in alignment with 'āina and wai. This is a place where I now bring my children to reestablish their connection with these akua and kūpuna elements. Ola i ka wai.

I would be remiss if I didn't point out the parallel nature of this victory to the Hawaiian language movement and the re-establishment of the Hawaiian language as a medium of instruction in 1986 with the public school system. A return of the mother tongue as a language of instruction is much like the return of wai to its traditional waterways. Through the language, immersion schools provide access and opportunities for Hawaiians to thrive, facilitating a return to the knowledge and practices of kūpuna while continuing to reimagine native modernity.

IV. 'Ahā: Ku'u Wahi Mo'olelo 'Ōlelo

From the time I was fifteen years old, I had a very clear picture that the Hawaiian language would be my constant companion. I do not claim to be a language scholar, but unlike my mother and her mother before her, I have the gift of access to the Hawaiian language and the ability to learn from some of the best kumu and kūpuna. However, the normalization of the Hawaiian language has a long way to go. While some schools have been in existence as immersion sites for over thirty years, new sites are opening yearly and may only have a single teacher tasked with creating this language kīpuka. As a former teacher in kaiapuni and a current teacher educator, I have witnessed a range of success for those who join this movement.

I recently taught a class where several students shared what inspired them to pursue Hawaiian Immersion teaching. One student shared that as a pukana, she thought she would go into the medical field; however, after working with keiki at a community center, the pull of language brought her back to teaching. Another shared that Hawaiian language church services gave her and her 'ohana access to Hawaiian language education. One haumāna's story especially touched my heart. Growing up in a homestead community on Kaua'i, she had always felt grounded in her 'ohana and her Hawaiian knowledge. When she transferred to UH Mānoa, however, she started to feel the loss and perhaps shame of not being further along in her language learning. She cried when she told her story of perceived inadequacy, comparing her language learning to that of her classmates. While all of these students are bright spots in their

⁵ Article XI, Section 7 of the Hawai'i State Constitution: "The State has an obligation to protect, control and regulate the use of Hawai'i's water resources for the benefit of its people."
<https://lrh.hawaii.gov/constitution/>

respective classrooms, this last student continues to be one of the most enthusiastic and passionate kumu that I have ever had the pleasure of teaching.

Hāloa's story is many-faceted. It is a story of regenerative power over many millennia; understanding that our survival as a people depends on taking our kuleana seriously, caring for and nurturing one another, being steadfast, disciplined, hardworking and unwavering as caretakers of Hāloa. There are many pathways to the Hawaiian language, as the stories shared above illustrate. To the extent we can be true to who we are as a people, reach deep within for answers that are already there, and allow ourselves to be receptive to the lessons of our kupuna Hāloa, we will connect with our language as a people, and our language will live. I pono nā mamo a Hāloa.

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