

琉球大学学術リポジトリ

【《UH・UR合同シンポジウム》報告】 Non-natives
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メタデータ	言語: 出版者: 琉球大学国際沖縄研究所 公開日: 2014-12-24 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Aikau, Hokulani K. メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12000/30116

《UH・UR 合同シンポジウム》報告

Non-natives Need to Strive to be Non-invasive: Restoring Kalo and Community in He‘eia, Hawai‘i

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Abstract

Since 2009, Kāko‘o ‘Ōiwi, a non-profit organization, has been actively restoring kalo (taro) cultivation in the He‘eia ahupua‘a, on the windward coast of O‘ahu, on a parcel of land designated as wetland. There are various obstacles to the restoration process which include but are not limited to property rights, conservation policy at the state and federal levels, as well as the challenges and logistics of removing invasive species so that kalo can be replanted and regenerate. The removal of invasive plants are a key component of the restoration project and provides a metaphor for the need to remove the various settler state structures, such as private property, conservation strategies, and Federal policy related to First Nations and Native Americans and Native Hawaiians, that have inundated Indigenous ecosystems and in many cases pushing out the Native structures that once thrived in these environments. In this paper, I draw upon interviews, participant observation, surveys with community volunteers to explore (1) the challenges the community faces as they work to restore Indigenous land based practices associated with kalo; (2) the role stories play in the restoration process; (3) how gender matters in the restoration process.

1. Introduction

My first visit to Māhuahua ‘Ai o Hoi, the site where Kāko‘o ‘Ōiwi a Native Hawaiia non-profit organization is working to restore lo‘i kalo cultivation (terraced fields for growing taro), was in 2009 a few short months after the Kāko‘o ‘Ōiwi staff had cleared the land and planted the first kalo (taro). I met Kanekoa Shultz, executive director of Kāko‘o ‘Ōiwi, at a Starbucks coffee shop across the street from the Windward Mall in Kāne‘ohe, a suburban town located approximately thirty minutes from Honolulu. We

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ordered coffee then sat down to talk story about the work they were doing at the lo'i, the organization's vision for the future, and the role they wanted me to play in the project. When we were finished drinking our coffee we got into Shultz's truck because, he said, we would need four wheel drive in order to get to the lo'i; my car would not make it. My mind was racing trying to imagine where, in Kāne'ohe, we could be going that would require four wheel drive—everywhere I looked were the signs of sub-urbanization; strip malls with supermarket chains, fast food restrarunts and gas stations, single-family homes with manicured yards and two cars in the driveway, and condomimum complexes fenced to give the illusion of seclusion. We piled into the truck and headed north on Kamehameha Highway through more suburban neighborhoods and past King Intermediate School. Just before we reached the bridge that would take us over He'eia stream the markers of urbanization and modernity abruptly end as houses and condominiums are replaced by thick green underbrush amidst tall mangrove trees. Shultz pulled off to the side of the road, got out of his truck, opened a gate, and returned to his truck. When we drove through the gate, I was unprepared to see the acres and acres of green fields framed by the Ko'olau Mountains in the background. From my inexperienced eye, it appeared we had been transported to another place and time when the land was not burdened by the weight of development and urbanization.

But my eyes deceived me. I would learn that although the land appeared to be pristine, it was in fact inundated by non-native species of plants and animals that, over time have depleted the soil and water of valuable nutrients and oxygen making it nearly impossible for native plants and animals to live. We drove down a bumpy, pot-hole-filled dirt road, muddy and slippery from the consistently heavy rains we had had that winter and spring. It was a good thing we were in Shultz's truck because the heavy rains had turned the road into a muddy, slippery mess and at one point even his 4X4 almost got stuck. But the spine jarring, white knuckled drive was worth it when we arrived at the lo'i. It was a small humble lo'i with young kalo whose green and silvery faces quivered in the light breeze. Bradly Wong, who was born and raised in Ko'olaupoko, brought his friends to the lo'i and they just started digging. Once they had a small area cleared, they planted kalo. Three years later, he recalls how naive he and his friends were. They didn't know what they were doing but they saw the vision of what He'eia could be again if the grasses were cleared and kalo replanted. So each week he came back to the lo'i and one shovel at a time started digging up the California grass and restoring lo'i and kalo. At the time, I could not fathom what that work entailed but today, after working in the lo'i for nearly two years, I can say that digging out this one lo'i was back breaking work that took a lot of time and effort; it was, indeed, a labor of love. That day I also learned that more than two-hundred acres of invasive grasses would need to be removed before the area could return to lo'i kalo which were a vast grid spanning the basin floor only 50 years ago.

My presentation uses the lo'i kalo restoration project at Hoi as a way to think through the various challenges Kāko'o 'Ōiwi faces as they move this project forward. I am currently working with Kāko'o to determine how the restoration process impacts the community. On the surface, the focus on community appears pretty straight forward and indeed, historically up until about the 1950s, the community who cared for the lo'i was recognizable. It consisted of Native Hawaiian families who had genealogical ties to the land as well as other local families who immigrated to Hawai'i as sugar plantation laborers but put down new roots and raised families. During interviews, Kūpuna describe a multi-ethnic community where Hawaiian values and principles governed land and resource use practices. Today there are multiple communities that comprise this restoration project including Kāko'o staff, community workday volunteers, the Kūpuna who inspired the project, and the residents in the surrounding neighborhoods. Although some members of this community are geographically and genealogically grounded to this 'āina (land), many of us live in other parts of O'ahu and are Hawaiian and are not. At the crux of my presentation today is the question, what role can non-natives play in everyday acts of resurgence? I ask this question rather than the question asked by Jeff Corntassel in a lecture he gave recently at UH Mānoa, "how do we conduct everyday acts of resurgence" because for Kāko'o 'Ōiwi, they are already participating in daily acts of resurgence that put us on the ala loa, the long path of Indigenous Regeneration. I am interested in this question because far too often Indigenous-Settler alliances fall apart, in part, because non-natives do not know how to be non-invasive.

The title of my presentation is a quote from Hi'ilei Kawelo, the Executive Director of Paepae o He'eia, (which is a fish pond that was restored about 11 years ago that is fed by the He'eia stream which winds through the wetland) who made this statement on Facebook after describing the difference between the Australian mullet and the native stripe mullet, she writes "Eat da invasives ... non-natives should strive to be non-invasives!!!" What I like about this quote is that it assumes that non-natives do not need to be invasive and should strive to stay in check in order to actively contribute to the regeneration of native species. In the context of Hawai'i's fisheries, she suggests we eat the Australian mullet allowing the native stripe mullet population the space it needs to rebound.

The quote also lends itself to being a useful metaphor. At the macro-level settler-state structures such as the private property land system, capital driven land use practices and development, as well as federal and state environmental laws are all non-native institutions that were introduced into Hawai'i's geo-political ecosystem and have become invasive taking over and squeezing out our indigenous socio-political and spiritual systems. These non-native, and now invasive, institutions have cut off Kanaka Maoli access to the knowledge, resources, and spiritual forces essential for the lāhui to thrive. I argue that in and of themselves these settler-state structures are not bad. But the problem is that some of these institutions have become so normalized and naturalized that we do

not recognize them as introduced or as being key causes of the very problem we seek to correct; in some instances we have given them Hawaiian names and assume they are a natural part of the environment. The Australian mullet is once again instructive as it is sometimes mistaken for the Uouoa or the ‘Ama‘ama (the native striped mullet). But as Hi‘ilei reminds us, we have to re-educate ourselves about the characteristics of our native species/institutions so that we can tell the difference between the two. But her “edumacation” does not stop there; rather she then says to eat the Australian mullet making the non-native fish useful rather than invasive.

The point I want to emphasize about this example is that it is up to individuals to learn and educate themselves in order to facilitate change. But in my work with Kāko‘o to restore the ‘āina and the community that will take care of it, it is important to think through the role non-natives will and should play in this process. So one objective of this project is to understand how positionality matters in the restoration process. I use the Hawaiian value and principle of Kuleana as an analytical tool to explain the relationship between positionality and the role individuals should and could play in perpetuating Indigenous acts of resurgence. But before I unpack the concept I want to describe the Māhuahua ‘Ai o Hoi project a bit for fully.

2. Background

Māhuahua ‘Ai o Hoi translates loosely to mean restoring food production to Hoi. Hoi is a ili or small land parcel within the ahupua‘a of He‘eia. He‘eia is located on the windward coast of O‘ahu island in the moku or district of Ko‘olaupoko, and it is an ahupua‘a. The He‘eia ahupua‘a is a pie-shaped land division that extends from the uplands of the Ko‘olau mountain range through alluvial and coastal plains through a restored fishpond to the fringing reefs. In addition to its geographical dimensions, an ahupua‘a also represents a historical system for administering land and “clarifying resource use and designating responsibilities” for the management of those resources among the different ‘ohana (extended families) living within the region [Andrade 2008, pp.29–30]. Although people continue to recognize the geographic boundaries of ahupua‘a, the land management system that governed the use and distribution of resources has transformed with changes to the Indigenous land tenure system and economic realities of contemporary Hawai‘i [Kaneshiro et al. 2005].

I think Walter Ritte, a long time activist and warrior for our lāhui (people, nation), describes the current state of our environment best in a recent press release

Our economy is at war with our natural resources. Unsustainable economics are killing the goose that lays our golden eggs, depleting the corpus of the trust, destroying our mother, neglecting our kuleana to Hāloa.

The disappearance of our wildlife and traditional plants from our forests has caused us to be the endangered species capital of the world.

We can no longer drink the waters in our rivers. The `ōpae, hīhīwai, and `o`opu in our rivers are gone. Corporations are diverting rivers away from our traditional food production uses in our taro lands and fishponds.

Corporate industrialized development and farming are turning our lands into chemical laden dust bowls, which run into the ocean and cover our reefs.

Our major source of food along the shoreline such as `opihi, ahukihuki, limus, crabs, shrimp, lobster, and fish are all but gone [May 29, 2012].

Ritte could have been describing the He`eia wetland in his speech. During the 1840s and 50s when the Indigenous land tenure system was replaced by the private property model, the majority of the He`eia ahupua`a was awarded to ali`i. Over the course of the last half of the 19th century, the land was consolidated under the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Estate who held title of the land until the 1960s when they initiated a land swap with the newly formed State of Hawai`i, which had acquired control of all Crown and Government lands seized during the illegal overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai`i and unlawfully “ceded” to the Territorial government. The land deal consisted of the Bishop Estate swapping approximately 400 acres in He`eia for a parcel of land in Honolulu along the Kaka`ako waterfront. This land swap was devastating to the community as it provided the necessary conditions, which legitimated the eviction of families from the land and authorized that lo`i be filled with topsoil making way for more profitable economic development projects. Despite the best efforts of the state to remove all traces of the native from the `āina, people did not go peacefully but launch massive protests against the luxury housing development, lagoon, and boat harbor slated to replace their beloved lo`i. Because of their dogged determination, these projects were not carried out and the land remained fallow until Kāko`o `Ōiwi returned kalo to the land.

The impact of changes in land ownership and uses has been devastating; when I went to the lo`i in 2009 there were no native animals (vertebrate or invertebrate) in the wetland and only two native plants the `aka`akai and neke. `Aka`akai is a bulrush that grows in brackish water and the neke is a common native fern that can be invasive. This was a place that was momona (fertile, rich, productive). Kupuna describe the `āina they were raised with as a place filled with lo`i, with streams teaming with `opae and `o`opu which would be their lunch if they caught enough, the ocean was their refrigerator where they could gather at least four different variety of limu, two variety of crab, two types of shrimp, eel, oyster, turtle, and the lands a place where you could eat all the fruit you

wanted. As my story of my first visit to Hoi illustrate, the difference between then and now is stark and quite sad, really.

The difference is starkly illustrated when we compare a photograph of the area from the 1920s and one taken in 2005. In the 1920s photograph, we see how the lo'i system dominates the landscape and how it is connected to the fishpond at the mouth of He'eia stream. The aerial photograph from 2005 shows how much the landscape has been transformed, all of the light green in the center of the image is California grass (*Brachiaria mutica*) the biggest obstacle to restoration because it literally sucks oxygen out of the water (40% saturation) and because the rhizomatic root system produces a thick mat that traps the water from flowing through the wetland. It is water that moves nutrients through the system. Whereas the California Grass traps some sediment from going into the fishpond and out onto the reef, it also traps valuable nutrients in the black mud that surrounds the root system.

In 2010, Kāko'o 'Ōiwi acquired a 38 year lease from Hawai'i Community Development Authority (a subsidiary of the State of Hawai'i) allowing them to open up additional lo'i. At this time, they have 6 lo'i planted and actively under cultivation. However, their long range goal is to restore 200 acres of lo'i with another 200 acres used for aquaculture, cultivation of native food plants and medicinal plants, and the construction of cultural and educational centers on site. The process of opening lo'i has been very labor intensive as Kāko'o 'Ōiwi was not able to use any machinery in the areas officially designated "wetland". In April, I learned [April 14, 2012] that they now have permits to use machinery to remove the California grass and open new lo'i. Whereas it took staff and hundreds of volunteers 2 years to open the first six lo'i, in two months this past summer, Kāko'o used a back hoe to open up four new ones. The focus can now shift to planting kalo rather than the arduous task of removing California grass and keeping it from constantly taking over.

The community that is helping to restore lo'i kalo is not the same community whose kuleana (responsibility) it had been for generations before. I should qualify that there are several people involved whose mo'okū'auhau (genealogy) ties them to this place, but for most of us we do not live in vicinity or even in the Ko'olaupoko district. This is a challenge and a theoretically interesting one because it really has forced me to think critically about who the "non-native" is, how they/we should strive to be non-invasive and to think about what the non-native can or should contribute to this process. I want to wrap up my presentation by turning to the relationship between kuleana and positionality as a way to think through the nuances of non-natives striving to be non-invasive.

3. Negotiating Kuleana and Privilege within Settler State Structures

As Indigenous peoples, part of our kuleana, responsibility, is to engage in everyday acts to reclaim and regenerate our relational, place-based existence. How do we do this

when so much has changed? Historically (as recently as the 1950s), it would have been absurd to ask whose kuleana it was to farm in He'eia--the community was geographically and genealogically evident. It was known which families farmed which lo'i, when it was okay to take water and resources from the streams, the fishpond, the reef and the mountains, and when it was not. The norms were in place and agreed upon by the community and there were clear consequences for not playing by the rules. But today, the "community" is not so easily discernible.

Historically, kuleana was a key part of the social and economic system that managed the community's access to and use of the natural resources in the ahupua'a. But since the 1970s when the last family was forcibly evicted from their land, the principles of development, capitalism, and conservation have governed land use practices in the area. Given these overarching principles, how do we restore kuleana and community? For me this question leads to a much longer list of questions: What does kuleana mean today? How did it work historically? What contributes to the loss of kuleana? How do we restore kuleana in an era of neoliberalism and privatization? What does kuleana mean in the context of notions of the "public good" and "public rights" and "public lands"? How does restoring kuleana connect to restoring community when historically community was geographical and genealogically determined? What constitutes the community today and what is their kuleana?

Kuleana as an ethical principle and practice allows us to acknowledge differences within the community while also establishing possibilities for solidarity. What kuleana offers is an understanding of individual responsibility that is fluid and relative while also holding the individual accountable to the 'āina, communities, lāhui, and ancestors. Kuleana goes beyond neoliberal discourses that inform environmental conservation that lock nature and humans in an oppositional war. Rather kuleana is attentive to the particularity of place and to the ways in which individuals who are differentially positioned vis-à-vis land and ancestors are accountable based on that relationship [Cote, Day and de Peuter 2007]. I want to share an example based on my personal experience as a volunteer and researcher in order illustrate the layered way I am thinking about kuleana and because I want to disrupt the automatic association of the non-native with the settler. I do this not to let settlers off the hook or to divert attention away from the need to remove the invasive settler-state institutions so that we can replant our native ones, but rather because I want to offer a nuanced understanding of the "native" as well as kuleana.

Although I am Kanaka 'Ōiwi Hawai'i, I am not from this ahupua'a and my genealogy does not connect me to this ahupua'a. Within a Hawaiian worldview, as described by nineteenth century Kanaka 'Ōiwi scholar Samuel Kamakau, one's relationship to a place is through one's ancestors, your genealogy [p. 66]. We recite our mo'okū'auhau so our ancestors will know us.⁽¹⁾ Kuleana cannot be acquired but comes through mo'okū'auhau. The particular gods a family honors, the land they mālama (care for) and the places where they can gather resources are all determined, in part, by

genealogy and kuleana. As a malihini (stranger) to this place, what gives me the right or authority to work these particular lands and with this particular group of people?

Within the native-settler binary, my positionality as a Hawaiian committed to the project of ho‘oulu lāhui (rebuilding our nation and people) and participating in everyday acts of resurgence affords me a level of authority in comparison to my non-Hawaiian research partners and volunteers. This authority is grounded in the familial relationship all Kanaka ‘Ōiwi Hawai‘i have with Hāloa, ke kalo. Kalo is the kinolau of Hāloanākalaukapalili the first human child born of our ancestors Wākea and Ho‘ohōkūkalani whose death must have brought his mother much sorrow. They buried his lifeless body beside their hale (house) where she must have wept for her loss. From the place where her tears soaked the earth, the first kalo emerged. Wākea and Ho‘ohōkūkalani would have a second child who they named Hāloa, the first ali‘i. When I work in the lo‘i with my children I teach them that they are caring for our ancestor, our elder brother who in turn will nourish us physically and spiritually. In perpetuating this practice, I also acknowledge that we are continuing a tradition that was taught to my tūtū wahine by her tūtū wahine, and in this way I am continuing my family’s kuleana.

Kamakau is quite adamant that a person without kuleana (he kanaka kuleana ‘ole) cannot enter a ‘aumakua realm that is not appropriate to that person’s mo‘okū‘auhau. But, he goes on to explain that under special circumstances – and through the ritual performance of ceremony – a kanaka kuleana ‘ole can enter a ‘aumakua realm of another’s mo‘okū‘auhau. He cautions by saying that even if the kanaka kuleana ‘ole does the ceremony correctly, it is up to the ‘aumakua to let the spirit enter. As a person who is not kupa‘āina to this specific place I recognized that I would be required to prove myself before my request to work in this place would be recognized; I knew full well that although I was asked to be part of this project, it was not up to me or Shultz to determine whether or not I would be asked to stay, that would be decided by the kupuna and ‘aumakua. So before I conducted any research I spent a little over a year as a volunteer (not as a researcher) and showed up whenever Shultz or the staff called and needed help. I learned the mo‘olelo that breath life back into the land and now know the names of most of the akua/‘aumakua who live there. I am learning the names and characteristics of the native plants who have survived the non-native invasion and the native animals who have made their return. I recognize the smells, tastes, and sounds of this place. But kuleana is not something that can be taken for granted; although I have become familiar to this place I am not a kupa‘āina and so my kuleana is always bounded. It is my additional responsibility to ensure that my actions, however well intentioned, do not become invasive.

Today I only had time to focus on my native/non-native-ness as one dimension of difference that informs my positionality and kuleana. I am still in the process of mapping the multiple dimensions of difference and solidarity that are being formed at Hoi. What we have learned so far from our survey of community volunteers is that although

individuals' reasons for coming to Hoi may differ, they leave with an increased level of respect in and belief that Hawaiian ecological knowledge is essential to restoring the ecosystem and indigenous food system in He'eia. I am also realizing that not everyone who volunteers will have kuleana to this place, even though they have become a part of the community. As we continue with our research I hope to learn more about how the staff and regular volunteers understand the work they do. I am particularly interested in learning if they frame their work in the language of kuleana. What I know is that it will take many hands to remove the non-native plants, structures, and institutions that have inundated our lands, minds, and spirits and become invasive. I also know that each of us will have a different kuleana to take up as we move forward. Unsettling settler colonialism is back breaking work that requires clearing acres and acres of invading plants over and over again. When the task seems too daunting, I think of the Ae'o, native stilts, who returned to the lo'i last November. In May they assembled a nest and laid four eggs. Kupuna told us that this was the first time they had seen Ae'o nest in the lo'i in over 50 years. The Ae'o could not return until the California grass was removed and the lo'i rebuilt. The lāhui needs invasive systems removed so our native ones can be replanted, then our people and our nation will thrive once again.

Notes

(1) Although he wrote this in the context of death rituals and sending the soul of a loved one to nalei, the place where the soul leaps into the spiritual realm, I think it can be expanded to include the physical realm as well.