

Ho'okulāiwi and the Lived Experiences of Indigenous Research

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Hookulaiwi¹

A high-ranking alii of Kauai, Kaweloleimakua (Kawelo) fell into disfavor with his family, particularly his cousins who were of senior genealogical lines. Kawelo's oldest brother, who was named Kahueloku and who was stillborn in the form of a rat, provided Kawelo with advice and admonitions throughout his life. One day, Kahueloku overheard Kawelo's cousins and their council planning to banish Kawelo, his older brother Kamalama, and his two uncles to Oahu. In order to avoid confrontation, Kahueloku advised Kawelo to leave Kauai before dawn of the next day. So the small group, accompanied by Kahueloku, boarded their canoe and headed for Oahu.

Within a few hours, the voyagers reached Po-kai on the Waianae coast of Oahu where they came upon a group of fishermen. The fishermen, recognizing that the group was from Kauai asked Kawelo and his companions when they had set out on their journey. Kawelo informed them that his party had left Kauai at the crowing of the second cock. Being that it was still mid-morning, the fishermen were incredulous to hear that anyone could have paddled across the channel in such a short period of time. Infuriated by their disbelief, Kawelo prepared to strike them with his paddle. However, Kahueloku advised him not to waste time. He reminded Kawelo to push on toward shore where he had more important business to attend to. The fishermen agreed, telling Kawelo that he should save his strength for the champions of Waianae who were waiting on the beach. So with a couple of strokes of his paddle, Kawelo's canoe flew past the fishermen and quickly arrived on the shore.

Upon reaching the Waianae Coast, Kawelo and his party saw two large men standing on the beach. After a few initial words were exchanged, the two men suddenly and without provocation became confrontational. They told Kawelo and his party that they could not land at Waianae unless they were able to uproot the two

coconut trees of Po-kai. Kawelo responded by asking them where he might find these two trees. The two men replied that the trees were standing right in front of him. When Kawelo heard this, he realized that they were baiting him, so he retaliated by telling them that coconut trees are recognizable by their nuts, something he failed to see on the two of them. He then asked how they preferred to be uprooted, one by one or both at once. The two men from Waianae were incensed by this response and one of them retaliated calling Kawelo a big head with no beard—not even peach fuzz. Enraged by this insult, Kawelo leapt from his canoe and struck one of the men in the head sending him sprawling on the beach with his feet shuddering and his body quivering. Upon witnessing this, the second man accused Kawelo of false cracking his brother. After an exchange of some fighting words, the second man tried to strike Kawelo, but Kawelo was too quick and beat his opponent to the punch. With a single blow to the head, the man was dispatched rather unceremoniously rolling onto the sand and into the water. At this point, a large mob had gathered at the scene and, as mobs tend to do, it moved in to attack Kawelo, the outsider. Just at that moment, the kahuna² of Kaihikapu-a-Kakuhihewa (Kaihikapu, the ruling chief of Oahu) arrived carrying a black piglet. When they saw the black pig, those crowded around realized that the kahuna was there to find out whether Kawelo was of royal stature. Recognizing this, the mob quickly parted creating a clear path between the kahuna and Kawelo. After chanting a name chant for Kawelo's family, the kahuna released the pig. Without hesitation, it ran directly to Kawelo's feet and lay down. Everyone who witnessed this recognized it as a sign of Kawelo's status as a high-ranking chief. The kahuna then approached Kawelo and knelt before him in recognition of his stature. As he rose, he issued an invitation for Kawelo to visit Kaihikapu in Lualualei.

After a relatively short stay on Oahu, Kawelo made a name for himself as an accomplished fighter. He also

helped the farmers of the area become more productive. His helpfulness made him a valuable person in the mind of Kaihikapu. Because of this, Kaihikapu offered him land at Kolekole³ to “hookulaiwi” or to create a new homeland for himself and his family. So Kawelo set about building his kauhale⁴ there. He chose to thatch the roofs with yellow mamo feathers and red oo feathers. When it was completed, his kauhale was truly a magnificent sight to behold.

The Lived Experiences of Indigenous Research

The story of Kawelo illustrates the idea of indigenous research as akin to the building of a homeland. For Kawelo, his journey involved dislocation, obstacles, perseverance, strength of character, acuity, revelations, industriousness, and, finally, location. Indigenous researchers have similar experiences as we strive to improve the world and make it a better place for our peoples. And, over time, the line between activist and researcher has become blurred. In her second edition of *Decolonizing Research Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Smith (2012, p. 218) discusses the relationship between activist and researcher;

In the last two decades the issues for indigenous activists and indigenous researchers have changed dramatically; the world has been and is in the process of being reconfigured in ways that simultaneously impact on indigenous peoples. These changes require further conversations about how research assists or hinders indigenous activism, how indigenous activism can undertake and employ more research in activist arguments, how the two activities of research and activism connect with the visions, aspirations and needs of indigenous communities, and how these two activities assist communities to live as indigenous communities that experience cultural sustainability as well as social, economic and political well-being.

Each article in this journal describes not only a unique journey, it also describes an effort to build a homeland of some form or another. We refer to these journeys as the “lived experiences” of indigenous peoples. The idea, then, that research is a lived experience that reflects the macrocosms and microcosms of indigenous well-being is encapsulated in each article. Eruera Stirling, a noted elder of Te Whānau-ā-Apanui

and Ngāti Porou in Aotearoa, best describes lived experience as follows;

The old men told us, study your descent lines, as numerous as the hairs upon your head. When you have gathered them together as a treasure for your mind, you may wear the three plumes, “te iho makawerau,” “te pareraukura,” and “te raukura” on your head. The men of learning said, understand the learning of your ancestors, so you can talk in the gatherings of the people. Hold fast to the knowledge of your kinship, and unite in the knot of mankind. (Eruera Stirling as cited in A. Salmond, 1997, p. 513)

The lived experiences of Māori and Native Hawaiians in our own lands are similarly etched⁵—Māori displacement through a breached treaty by the British government and Hawaiian displacement through an illegal overthrow of its constitutional monarchy by a group of treasonous citizens supported by the United States government. Indigenous stories, then, document our experiences of dislocation in many contexts, particularly in the area of research. Yet, amidst this dislocation, comes our perception of the reality of oppression, not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but rather as a challenging situation that can be transformed (Freire, 1970). We believe in the possibilities that research holds for everyone—but we also believe that we need to understand the teachings of our ancestors so that we can talk in the gatherings, not only of our peoples, but also of all peoples. Our lived experiences lie at the heart of our unabashed and unapologetic single-minded commitment to the elevation of our indigenous peoples through research, especially research that is both rigorous and responsive to the needs of our communities. Research, that is, for and by our peoples! But why are lived experiences important?

Lived experiences exist on the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels of humanity. The belief that the universe and the individual human being are inextricably linked anatomically and psychically is foundational to both the Māori and Hawaiian cultures. Boas (1973, p. 126) explains that “the macrocosm is the universe as a whole, whose parts are thought of as parts of a human body and mind” and that the microcosm is “an individual human being whose parts are thought of as analogous to the parts of the larger universe.” We

believe that, on a much less grandiose scale, the conceptualization, conduct, and dissemination of research operate in a similar manner. Moral (or immoral) causality as an additive—simplistically defined as cause, effect, and result—relates to the power differentials that arise as a result of the decisions that are made at any given time.

On the macrocosmic or universal level, Māori and Hawaiian views of creation converge in an understanding that all nature is a great kinship tracing its origins back to a single pair, the Sky Father and the Earth Mother.⁶ In this world, man and nature are inextricably linked. Such linking means that our peoples depend on an acute understanding of how our worlds work. This understanding has come from thousands of years of keen and sensitive observations of all living things in their environments and of similarly acute observations of the land, of the sea, and of the sky. Māori and Hawaiian ways of knowing and doing have evolved in such a way that our present and our future are firmly rooted in the past. In essence, we look back to our future. It stands to reason, then, that research that dislocates us from our past and, therefore, our future, is tantamount to cultural annihilation. We have the capacity, through our research, to make decisions that reverse this process, relocating us in our own ways of knowing and doing.

....study your descent lines, as numerous as the hairs upon your head.

The cover of this journal, designed by Kaleinani Tim Sing, captures the idea of a sense of guidance (or even protection) obtained from our ancestors through the ways of knowing and doing that they have passed on to us. As such, our ability to enhance the well-being of our peoples through our research rests, in part, on our ability to carefully utilize our precious legacies. Tim Sing's stylized and vibrantly colored graphic of tightly thatched mamo and 'ō'ō feathers in a sweeping representation of both protective roof and soaring bird wing extends our view from the past to the future and back again.

On the microcosmic level, mana (or spiritual energy) permeates Māori and Hawaiian worlds—everything is imbued with mana acquired either

through birth or through pono actions. Pono actions, in particular, reflect the need to ensure that a harmonious or balanced world is maintained through transparency, honesty, integrity, honor, and commitment to both self and others. Therefore, to have mana is to have authority, influence, and the power to perform efficaciously in multiple contexts.

....understand the learning of your ancestors, so you can talk in the gatherings of the people.

Efficacy, or the right to influence, comes with the powerful knowledge that every morally-related (or immorally-related) action bears a consequence, which bears another, which bears another—a chain reaction of cause, effect, and result. For every “problem” there is a multitude of choices, each with its own unique chain reaction.

Hold fast to the knowledge of your kinship, and unite in the knot of mankind.

Indigenous research, then, must be a process of moral causality. The solution to each “problem” should be one that will offer up the best outcome—helping indigenous researchers to develop the expertise to make the best choices is the nature of the indigenous movement. In order to accomplish this, we believe that there exists an imperative for our indigenous researchers to understand the ways in which systems, especially education systems, function in harmony and in conflict with our efforts to build strong and healthy indigenous peoples and nations. By grounding our beliefs about the phenomena we refer to as indigenous ways of knowing and doing in political activism, we are most likely to acquire the knowledge, skills, and strategies necessary to develop a pedagogy of hope (Freire, 1970) that emerges from and affirms the cultural experiences of our indigenous peoples. This pedagogy of hope exists not only on a broader plane of profound conscientization, which we might call knowledge discovery or recovery, it also exists on a focused plane of transformative action (Smith, 2007).

The authors in this peer-reviewed journal—Kekailoa Perry; Kalani Akana; C. Mamo Kim; ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui; Kimo Cashman; Huia

Tomlins-Jahnke; Rawiri Tinirau and Annemarie Gillies; and Antoinette Freitas, Erin Kahunawai Wright, Brandi Jean Nalani Balutski, and Pearl Wu—could each assume the mantle of indigenous activist researcher. Each article, while documenting a unique focus, has at its core the critical responsibility to work with our communities to prepare our peoples with the knowledge, skills, strategies, and values necessary to facilitate the optimal functioning of all our endeavors.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ This story is retold from Wong's reading of *Ka Moolelo Hiwahiwa O Kawelo* published in Kuokoa Home Rula: Ka Hiwahiwa o ka Lahui, 1909–1910. In keeping with the original publication, Wong adopts the same printer's marks.
- ² A high priest.
- ³ The mountains above Wai'anae.
- ⁴ A set of houses.
- ⁵ The lived experiences of many other indigenous peoples also include subjugation in their own lands through colonization, breached treaties, illegal overthrow of constitutional governments and other such hostile actions.
- ⁶ The Māori worldview refers to Ranginui (Sky Father) and Papatūānuku (Earth Mother); the Hawaiian worldview refers to Wākea (Sky Father) and Papahānaumoku (Earth Mother).