

Nānā I Ke Kumu (Look to the Source)

M. Melia Lane-Kamahele

Change is survival: Resources and a biocultural continuum

AS CURIOUS, ENGAGED, AND OFTEN OPINIONATED PEOPLE, we spend an inordinate amount of time and energy handwringing, hair pulling, teeth gnashing, and struggling with how to capture the essence of something, someplace, somebody's story and share it—a never-ending drama that never finds a curtain call. The struggle to validate and make relevant the ways in which we capture and interpret a culture or community's place-based reference is challenging. It is an ongoing evolution to explore, acknowledge, respect, and validate multiple phases and periods of time, facets, and perspectives while remaining timely and honest. The evolutionary process is regularly and incessantly protested, prodded and questioned by parties wishing to hijack the messaging and the perspective. It is the continuing challenge to find balances between decolonization, cultural misappropriation, and the other extreme of "burning up on cultural re-entry"¹ that continues to evolve and test our collective thinking about how to explain, explore, and encapsulate components of increasingly complicated histories and stories.

When Congress and the president add to the collection of special places comprising the 400+ units of the National Park Service, places that were created and set aside in perpetuity for the enjoyment of all, what are we really aiding and abetting? Is it a process that captures a moment in time, or a period of significance, or should it be an evolving shared message about who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going, linked within a critical biocultural continuum that grounds us? It is about who we were, who we are, and who we want to become.

A biocultural continuum refers to the physical, biological, and human elements that strengthen a people's evolving relationship with a defined place and enables them to maintain their unique set of customs, beliefs, language, traditional knowledge, objects, and built environment, or biocultural resources.² It is critical to understand that many people perceive resources as being simply "natural" or "cultural." Resources are rarely viewed as integrated elements in a larger process, and the compartmentalization becomes an artificial and limited framework tied to resources, projects, budgets, and funding streams that bifurcate what

The George Wright Forum, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 308–314 (2017).

© 2017 George Wright Society. All rights reserved.

(No copyright is claimed for previously published material reprinted herein.)

ISSN 0732-4715. Please direct all permissions requests to info@georgewright.org.

should be a seamless perspective. In many ways, these simplistic definitions create the basic conundrum that challenges the process of interpretation and messaging about communities, cultures, and places.

The National Park Service (NPS), moving into its second century, still struggles to find a balance between interpreting events that have been captured static in time with being relevant and culturally competent and sensitive. Relevancy to a diverse, evolving population requires a major paradigm shift to share the perspectives of those communities and individuals about whose lands, culture, and generations institutions struggle to portray.

Agencies such as NPS have begun to reconsider their education and interpretive planning and programs from the perspective of shared authority. They are beginning to incorporate and share community-developed perspectives, and are beginning to include local voices in their materials across a variety of platforms (paper, web, film, social media). For instance, planning documents such as the foundation statement for Nez Perce National Historical Park incorporate native language and indigenous perspectives. To take another example, the foundation of Kaloko-Honokōhau National Historical Park on the island of Hawai'i began with a report to Congress by a group of primarily Native Hawaiians, who asked the legislators to establish a national park unit to perpetuate Native Hawaiian culture and resources.³ Haleakalā National Park, on the island of Maui, now offers a park informational brochure that orients visitors and others to the park and its resources through the eyes of the community. Through their perspectives and through the integrated use of Hawaiian language and cultural concepts, the community is presenting what *they* want visitors to learn, understand, and know about their very special place, which is not necessarily the message that NPS shares. Different perspectives, but both valid and important.

When an organization acknowledges and incorporates intangible cultural heritage through traditional language and perspectives, the fundamental ways in which the biocultural continuum and traditional history are engaged and shared are completely different than a mere recounting of events. However, that process has been, and continues to be, a long, diverse series of critical conversations by and through management, indigenous employees, researchers, partners and stakeholders—and we are by no means done.

Blending tradition, culture, and knowledge

National Park of American Samoa was established on October 31, 1988, and, in 1993, the U.S. government, through the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, entered into a 50-year lease with the government of American Samoa and a number of the village councils. The park preserves and protects coral reefs, a paleotropical rain forest, fruit bats, and the Samoan culture, *fa'asamoa*. The concept of *fa'asamoa*⁴ is integrated throughout all areas, including interpretation, education, visitor programs, science and research, and partnerships. In the past 25 years, the evolution of the park—the staff and the level of integration with community, projects, and programs—has been a study in patience, expectations, and politics, and amazing success stories.

At National Park of American Samoa, lands from multiple traditional village areas across the islands are included in the lease between the governments of the U.S. government and

American Samoa. Interpretive materials and programs at the visitor center are provided in both Samoan and English. Bilingual school curricula have been developed and are taught throughout local schools. They are part of a robust education and outreach effort that incorporates social media and engages hundreds of students from K–12 to learn traditional Samoan culture alongside programs that integrate frameworks for science and research and encourage holistic thinking. The next generation of scholars and scientists are blending *fa'asamoa* and scientific protocols in their learning, understanding, and research. As well as sharing knowledge about their environment and culture, they are also sharing and learning about biocultural resources, and incorporating presentations of historic events and interpretive programs reflecting both traditional and modern challenges.

The management of invasive species across park units has led to the development of specialized crews composed of village and community members, working in partnership with NPS staff to successfully implement a project to control invasive and alien tree species such as tamaligi, pulumamoe, and lopa⁵ that threaten the native paleotropical forest and ecosystems. These Samoan crews deploy current technologies and safety programs to manage their forests, archaeological sites, and cultural landscapes. They preserve the cultural connections not only through their physical presence, the practice of cultural protocol, and acknowledgement of the resources daily, but also through the creation of an enduring link to the place, the resources, the villages, and the future of the island communities.

Ta'ū Island hosts the largest unit of the park, approximately 5,000 acres extending from ocean reefs to the cloud forest of Mount Lata. The island is believed to be the birthplace of the Samoan deity *Tagaloa* and of all Polynesian cultures. It was the island residence for the *TuiManu'a*, or King of the Manu'a Islands, until an American government was established in 1904. According to the records maintained by National Park of American Samoa, there are 139 archaeological features spread throughout the *Saua* site on the island of Ta'ū, which includes an ancient village site with scattered house foundations, cooking areas, stone-tool grinding features, traditional wells, habitation features, artifact scatters, and graves. Lopa and pulumamoe tree populations invaded these significant historic cultural sites, diminishing their value and destroying physical features. Preserving the sacredness of these cultural sites is one of the objectives of this project. The crew removed all known non-native pulumamoe trees from the island, because native fruit doves and bats consume fruits of the pulumamoe. These animals are capable of dispersing invasive seeds throughout Ta'ū. The field crew also treated the last known lopa tree populations on the remote south side of Ta'ū, adjacent to the historic *Taisamasama* water (Ancient Yellow Water). Taisamasama is where the last king of the Manu'a Islands, King Tuimanu'a, and King Malietoa from Western Samoa met in approximately 1840 and decided to align their communities within the Christian faith. The Ta'ū village council allowed the ecological restoration of the Taisamasama rainforest area after a consultation process with village *pulenuu* (mayors).⁶

Over many years, the invasive tree species project has provided not only a biocultural continuum within which history, site interpretation, and management activities are entwined. It also has supported and nurtured the concept of *fa'asamoa* that has been expressed by the program, the community, and their resources management. The patience and expectation

of using a culturally competent process and range of activities has created a win-win for the villages and for next generations of resource stewards living *fa'asamoa*, and deployed a tradition of utilizing knowledge from the past and the present to influence the future.

Reclaiming *Kuleana*: Community, culture and place

The challenge to define and support relevant interpretation, and capture the nuances and importance of all the contributing components of a shared story and heritage, rests with the ability to remain flexible, communicate, question, and be open and receptive to inclusive explanations. An example is the long history of Hansen's Disease (leprosy) and the isolated community established in 1865 at Kalaupapa Peninsula on the Hawaiian island of Molokai, where 8,000 patients lived until 1969. The interpretive focus, as mandated by the park's enabling legislation, is the Kalaupapa Settlement and the tragic history of the patients. Only recently has there been an effort to identify and include the interpretive stories and place-based family connections for the lineal descendants of the Hawaiian community that was forcibly removed from the peninsula to make way for the Hansen's Disease patients. Multiple generations of Hawaiians were forcibly disconnected from their community and place.

Reclaiming those connections between community, culture, and place is critical to interpretation and understanding. Along the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail on the west coast of the island of Hawai'i, families who are cultural and lineal descendants of people connected to historic places along the 175-mile corridor are finding new ways to confirm their place-based *kuleana* (personal responsibility and obligation) to stewardship by maintaining segments of the trail (including repair work, proper cultural protocol and ceremony, and connecting the stories and legends) in their *ahupua'a*.⁷ By reconnecting with their past, and through self-determination and engagement, they are empowering their families and future generations. Projects like these in which the federal agencies and partners support the communities to plan, lead, and execute, serve to rebuild families, provide direct biocultural connections, and perpetuate responsible interpretation and sharing of important lessons.

History and interpretation across the first century of the National Park Service challenges us to make it better, make it more inclusive, make it multi-dimensional, and, in the process, create opportunities to share, learn, and support. We need to balance political realities with optics and individually find the courage to "step over the edge of 2000 years of Hawaiian and Pacific tradition."⁸ It requires that we engage fully and with intent in our own communities of practice, encourage dialogue and create expectations of patience, accept and initiate collaboration, and develop interpretive materials that reflect the richness of the variety of perceptions of events, people, places, and communities.

The challenge of history and interpretation in the National Park Service is to revise the frameworks in which the work takes place. Agencies that work with communities need to find more respectful ways to share and collaborate. When preservation fund grants are provided to communities, it is critical to not only follow the guidelines and reporting requirements, but more importantly, to ensure that communication takes place to incorporate the outcomes and outputs that are of value and use to the community. That means the bean counting occurs *and* the products are in a format that is meaningful to the community—

traditional language documents and reports, materials and information collected in ways which are culturally competent, and done within a timeline that is respectful to the community.

The presence of specific cultural practices and knowledge in a community that may be valuable to both them and external partners represents a tremendous responsibility on both sides. The responsibility for the knowledge and for how it is collected, shared, used (or not used), evolves out of the commitment of time, trust, and sharing on all sides. Creating an expectation of patience is part of that process.

There are many models that can be used to define how these conversations and engagements occur. These entwined processes can be called organizations, partnerships, consortia, alliances, co-management structures, stakeholders, or agencies. When working together, they all face the additional challenges of sharing information and interpreting both biocultural processes with traditional science, data, and events, and making the information understandable, relevant, culturally competent, and sensitive.

The challenge is to recognize and balance the processes by which observation, theory, and deduction combine to provide more robust, grounded information that can be evaluated and used to inform decisions, outcomes, or possibilities. This process of deduction and application is intimately tied to sharing history as it is linked to a biocultural continuum. Interpreting history is not strictly telling the story of an event, a person, or a place. It is about the relationship between the components through a timeline that creates the connection and the *kuleana* to execute and continue. The concept of cultural ecosystem services in conjunction with place-based knowledge and communities of practice help define the careful relationships that have evolved over time and place. How those relationships are observed and explained internally and externally is part of the communication and interpretation challenge.

From a Pacific and indigenous perspective, whether *fa'asamoa* or through the presentation of an '*oli*,⁹ we are linking historic events, how those events are interpreted or shared, and how we each relate to them, in them, and through them. Other examples might include the genealogical chants such as the *Kumulipo*, which binds perspective, evolution, biocultural resources, and environments to explain and describe a state of being. The *Kumulipo* is an 18th-century chant in the Hawaiian language, composed of 2,000 lines that tells a creation story and includes the genealogies of members of Hawaiian royalty.¹⁰

The recent completion of the Polynesian Voyaging Society's *Mālama Honua* (Care for the Earth) Worldwide Voyage by the traditional Hawaiian sailing canoe *Hōkule'a* represented the challenges not only of the ocean, but larger ones of connectivity, relevant messaging, interpretation, and education. The canoe utilized non-instrument navigation to circle the globe, a journey of four years and more than 40,000 nautical miles, encompassing 23 countries and territories, and calling at more than 150 ports. At each stop, the crew shared the importance of community, culture, the Promise to the *Pae'āina o Hawai'i*,¹¹ and a promise to future generations to inspire, learn about, and care for Mother Earth. In turn, they engaged and shared experiences with the local community. They also were able to provide real-time voyage tracking and coverage during cultural exchange events through the development of social media and web materials provided by the various crews during the different legs of

the voyage. The journey crossed lands, waters, time, space, and cultures, and continues to resonate and inspire locally and globally.

Following a brief maintenance overhaul, on August 16, 2017, the canoe and her support vessel, *Hikianalia*, departed Honolulu on the island of O‘ahu on the next leg of her voyage to inspire young people by traveling throughout the Hawaiian Islands to 40 ports and more than 80 communities to thank the people of Hawai‘i for their support. They will engage with schools and organizations through outreach events, service projects, crew presentations, and canoe tours.¹²

The integration of our stories across generations, landscapes, and seascapes; the recognition and inclusion of cultural and political nuances; and our collective capacity to listen, share, and learn, will serve to create a community of practice that far exceeds our individual contributions. It is through grappling, curiosity, and critical conversations, along with a willingness to be flexible, open minded, and accepting of different perspectives, that we will truly tell our stories and celebrate our connections to culture, time, and place across the past, present, and future.

*‘A‘ohe pāu ka ‘ike i ka hālau ho‘okahi.*¹³

All knowledge is not learned in just one school (One can learn from many sources)

The views and conclusions in this essay are those of the author and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions or policies of the National Park Service or the United States government.

Endnotes

1. Daniel Kawaiāea, personal communication, 1990.
2. Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative, Culture and Communities Working Group, 2011.
3. Honoko‘ahu Study Advisory Commission, *The Spirit of Ka-loko-Hono-ko‘-hau, a Proposal for the Establishment of a Ka-loko Hono‘-ko-hau National Cultural Park, Island of Hawai‘i, State of Hawai‘i* (Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i: National Park Service, 1974).
4. *Fa‘asamoa* is the concept that captures the essence of Samoan culture: its places, communities, resources, and traditions. It can be viewed as a manifestation of a biocultural continuum.
5. Tamaligi (*Falcataria* spp.); pulumamoe (*Castilla elastica*); lopa (*Adenantha pavonina*).
6. National Park of American Samoa, “American Samoa Partnership Grant Update, Annual Grant report: Invasive Species Removal,” July 2017.
7. *Ahupua‘a* is a land division that represents a biocultural continuum from the mountains down to the ocean and into the nearshore, encompassing a variety of integrated ecosystems and resources that were utilized, shared, and traded.
8. “Two thousand years of tradition have brought us to the edge—the next two thousand require that we step over” (Imaikalani Kalahēle, 1998). Kalahēle is a poet, playwright, artist, musician, and activist whose works are widely known throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

9. The oral tradition of recording information through chant for the purpose of passing it from one generation to the next.
10. The original printed text of the *Kumulipo* was published in 1889 from a manuscript copy in the possession of King David Kalakaua. The first English language translation was made and published in 1951.
11. The Promise to the *Pae'aina o Hawai'i* was a unique environmental initiative that brought together individuals and organizations across all sectors in a collective effort to achieve real improvements in protecting and caring for Hawai'i's unique environment. This effort was inspired by the Worldwide Voyage, and included actions towards effecting change on how oceans are valued, implementing policy measure for healthy oceans, and catalyzing long-term collaborative ocean management.
12. For more information about the Polynesian Voyaging Society and the *Mālama Honua Worldwide Voyage*, see <http://www.hokulea.com>.
13. Mary Kawena Pukui, *'Olelo No'eau: Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: Bishop Museum Press, 1983).

M. Melia Lane-Kamahele, P.O. Box 53, Honolulu, HI 96810