ʻAnakē Lynette Kahekili Kaopuiki Paglinawan: Following in the Steps of Her Ancestors

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Abstract: ʻAnakē Lynette Kahekili Kaopuiki Paglinawan is a social worker, woman of faith, and Native Hawaiian cultural practitioner. She has a long history of working with Native Hawaiian families and was one of the first social workers to integrate culturally-based interventions into her social work practice in the mid-sixties. ʻAnakē Lynette remains active in the community working with individuals, families, and various organizations. She is currently a faculty member at the Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa where she directs the Hawaiian Learning Program and serves as cultural consultant for numerous school initiatives. In 2012 ʻAnakē Lynette was recognized as a *Living Treasure* by the Hongpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaiʻi. Taken together, the stories in this article paint a picture of an Indigenous healer firmly anchored in her identity and comfortable in the multiple worlds that Indigenous Peoples must traverse on a daily basis.

Keywords: social work, Indigenous social work, Native Hawaiian healing, culturally relevant practice, faith and practice

"Mai kāpae i ke aʻo a ka makua, aia he ola malaila." Do not set aside the teachings of one's parents for there is life there. - Mary Kawena Pukui

Know Thyself

I sit patiently in the reception area not knowing where the meeting with colleague and Native Hawaiian cultural practitioner, ʻAnakē (Aunty) Lynette Paglinawan will occur. Mid-afternoon light streams in from the sliding doors that lead out to a garden at the rear of the room. The room itself glows yellow and brown as sunlight bounces off rich koa wood paneling and furniture. The seating area and my chair are comfortable, but I find it hard to lean back and relax. Despite my best efforts and knowing Aunty for a number of years, I still get nervous each time we meet. It is not her; it is me. The moments leading up to our meetings are always… complicated. I think it is the secure hold she has on her identity; a hold that I do not have. Despite years in the field and a relatively long and respected career as a social work instructor, I still question myself. I wonder whether I am good enough and if I know enough of anything to possibly teach others. How arrogant, to believe I have something to offer when in fact I have so much to learn. In my darker hours I question my career choice and know it is just a matter of time before I am discovered as a fraud or "outed" as an imposter. But in the sunlight of an enriching conversation, one in which the world and something beyond it opens before us I appreciate my vulnerability and revel in what Keen (1991) refers to as "potent doubt." The irony is that despite my discomfort before the meeting, Aunty has never done anything to make me feel *less than*. Quite the opposite: leaving a conversation with Aunty I feel confident in my ability and in my sense of self. This was especially true when designing the Native Hawaiian Interdisciplinary Health program. Appreciating the long history of Western expropriation and cultural appropriation here in Hawaiʻi, I was careful to follow protocol and checked my every move with Aunty. She would say to me, "Mike, you know what you are doing, trust yourself." But checking in with Aunty was less about distrusting myself and more about making sure I didn't inadvertently repeat the past. I shared this with her and she sat down with me and we talked about what I envisioned for the program. In the end, she said, "i mua" (move forward). This is Aunty's way: you leave her side as your best self.

The receptionist patiently dials around the building trying to locate both my host and our eventual meeting space. No luck; she hangs up and gets back to her other duties when the phone rings a little while later. She says mahalo (thank you) to the person on the other end of the line and instructs me to make my way to the social worker's meeting room. I am currently in the administration building and despite the garden beyond the glass doors and the sun peeking through, it feels very much like a place where lofty decisions are made. The back building is where social workers meet with Native Hawaiian orphaned youth, their extended family, and the community. Decisions made back there might not change the world, but those decisions do

change the world of the child needing services. I slowly walk back to the meeting room and wait a few minutes before Aunty arrives. She has just come from the hospital where her husband and fellow *Living Treasure* has been battling the ravages of diabetes. We hug and kiss in the tradition of Hawaiian culture and I ask about Uncle.

Make Conscious What Is Unconscious

"I was just visiting with him this morning and he is doing much better," she says. Uncle has been ill now for some time and this most recent episode has been particularly difficult. Aunty Lynette explains that a blood infection has pushed him in and out of consciousness and that she has had to help the physicians in his healing process. This comes as no surprise to me, both that she would help the doctors with the healing of her husband and that she would frame it as such. I would be fighting with and for my loved one and battling it out with the medical team. In fact, I have. When my father was diagnosed with lymphoma and given just six months to live, I assumed the mantle of champion. My task was to make sure he received the best treatment possible and I think I did a good job, but my relationship with the Western medical establishment was often adversarial. Aunty Lynette is different, she *guides* the process so that her family's needs are met and Uncle receives the best care possible. She navigates and negotiates the world around her with the type of grace that gently drapes around those near her, including the medical team. I am sure they leave Uncle's hospital room feeling the same way I do after one of our meetings.

After explaining some of Uncle's most recent interventions – including decreasing some of his medications – she shares a story with me. "Uncle has been in and out of consciousness recently and just the other day, after waking from what seemed like a long sleep I asked him if his ʻuhane (spirit) went on a huakaʻi (journey)." She goes on to tell me that Uncle said he joined her deceased brother Pila on an archeological dig on Kauaʻi. According to Aunty, the two were very close in life and loved researching in the field. While working the coastline with Pila, Uncle saw some kahelelani (small seashells also known as Niʻihau shells) and decided to come back. "Uncle knows that I love kahelelani. In his mind those shells represent me. He was on a dig with my brother Pila, but he came back to me." She sat up straight, her eyes glistening as she went on, "I asked him if he wanted to stay with Pila, perhaps, he would like to keep digging. He said that would be fun, so I told Uncle that he could go and that he shouldn't worry about me – I will join him later." In this way Aunty gave Uncle permission to go to Pō, the ancestral home to Native Hawaiians. "I know that he will be doing what he loves with family and friends," she tells me.

I am humbled because I know the nature of Uncle and Auntie's relationship. The two are incredibly close. In fact, their careers as social workers and as cultural practitioners are not parallel, but rather intertwined – so much so that it is rare to see one without the other. Asking Aunty Lynette to speak to your group is essentially asking for both Aunty and Uncle. Yet, she remains her own person, as does he. The two are differentiated, capable of being completely present and connected to each other while also remaining discrete and separate. In my years of practice as a family therapist, this seems a rare feat.

Our conversations are rarely casual and this day is no exception. Even our small-talk before the official meeting is rich and contains a life-lesson. Today it is about holding on and letting go. All of us will have to let go of our loved ones some day (unless we pass first); to consciously encourage our loved ones to make the journey without us is nothing short of courageous. Most of us hold on to others for our own needs, which is understandable, but we often fail to recognize the needs of those we love. More importantly, we don't realize the paradoxical nature of life: that in letting go we lovingly hold on, and in stubbornly holding on we unwittingly tear apart. This is Aunty's way – she lives the life she espouses. The difference between her and me is not the issues we face – life spares no one – it is the way she handles herself in times of hardship that distinguishes her. This is why she is so respected in the community and why her mana (spiritual power) is so strong. She is our model for the authentic life.

In the quiet space between our words she leans back, then breaks the silence and asks, "Did I ever tell you about the time my hānai (Hawaiian adoption) son went into a coma?" She had not and so she proceeds to do so. "None of us really know how it started, but I remember being called and told my son was in the

hospital and that he was in a coma. I rushed to the hospital, but they wouldn't let me in. Hānai is not recognized by the State. Well, I looked at the nurse and said 'This is my son, he spends his days with me and my family and I *will* go and see him." Aunty Lynette can be quite persuasive and in my mind's eye I see a young nurse slowly backing up both literally and metaphorically at the force of nature before her.

Her son is completely unresponsive as she enters the room. Visited previously by both Buddhist and Christian priests, the young man remains in his sleeplike state. Aunty talks to the young man, asking where he has gone. "Where is your 'uhane?" she asks. As she talks and he lies in his bed she realizes that there is something he wants or needs, but she is not sure what it is. It is a mystery she must figure out. She also realizes that his condition is worse than expected and that his healing will require family and friends to pool their resources. Before kūkulu kumuhana (gathering spiritual energy) can occur family and friends must first go through hoʻoponopono (a type of family/group therapy to set things right and forgive), to make sure all of the negative energy is cleared. Aunty explains that you have to cleanse it all, even the little things – hurt feelings, petty jealousies, unresolved anger – in order for the kūkulu kumuhana to be effective. Together, family and friends prayed to Ke Akua (God), nā akua (the many gods), and ʻaumākua (spirit ancestors) for guidance. It was then that Aunty remembered the moʻolelo (story) of Hiʻiakaikapoliopele (the sister of the Goddess Pele) who was sent to retrieve Pele's lover, Lohiʻauipo. "You know, the moʻolelo is not instructive; I knew I had to retrieve his soul but I didn't know how!" Aunty giggles to herself at the self-disclosure. She then explains that the moʻolelo offers clues about the process, but never provides a *how* to because each situation is different. "The healer must always be aware of context and the kaona (hidden meaning)," she says.

During the prayers Aunty had a realization, "I start thinking about the boy lying in bed; he is loyal and always keeps his promises. He's the type of boy that if he says something is going to happen, well then it is going to happen." That was the answer. We had to let him know that he was still wanted, still needed and that there was so much left to do. He had to follow through on his commitments."

Aunty gathered family and friends and over the course of several days they sat with him, shared their aloha (*reciprocal* love) and held him accountable for all that was unfinished in life. They shared stories of both the good and tough times and how much he meant to those around him. His 'uhane got stuck in the spirit world and together they drew him back. "This was healing at a high level, but it required us to heal the little things first, the base thoughts and feelings that most take for granted. And when we gave thanks, after he came out of the coma, we acknowledged all of the healers who participated in the process, including the Buddhist and Christian priests. It required all of our energy to bring him back," she says.

Form And Essence Must Be One

Aunty Lynette Kahekili Kaopuiki Paglinawan grew up in a tight-knit Hawaiian family from a healing lineage. While neither her father nor her mother functioned as healers, both her grandparents on her mother's side were healers. Aunty Lynette's grandmother was an empath and was particularly sensitive to the spirit world. She was one of those rare individuals with particularly strong mana, who was gifted by her ʻaumākua to see spirits. Her grandfather was an actual practitioner who conducted the rituals needed to make things pono (right and proper). As for Aunty Lynette, she knew from a very young age that she wanted to be a social worker, but did not come into her own as a cultural practitioner until after she earned her MSW.

"Social work prepared me for the work I would do in the Hawaiian community. I learned to be present and to treat those I served with dignity. Most importantly, I learned about myself." Aunty tells me that self-reflection grounded her and enabled her to do the cultural work she's become known for. The conversation slows and I see her staring over my right shoulder. I am not sure whether she is gathering her thoughts, gently consulting the spirits, or remembering a past event. I soon realize it is *all of the above*. "I remember telling my parents that I wanted to be a healer – using Hawaiian methods. My mother was very supportive, but my father needed convincing. Being a Hawaiian practitioner has certain risks and my father knew that; he was concerned for my safety." She explains that one does not simply declare oneself a healer; this is especially true in Hawaiian culture

where sacred knowledge is handed down across generations along hereditary lines and mentorship is a requirement. Aunty conducted extensive research on her genealogy and learned that healing was part of her family history. She also consulted her 'aumākua who eventually gave her permission to train in ho'oponopono. Aunty's father, knowing that she had done her due diligence, eventually gave his blessing.

Aunty Lynette pursued Hawaiian healing because she noticed that many of her Native Hawaiian clients did not respond well to Western treatment. Aunty contends that Western interventions do not always work for Hawaiians because most models fail to acknowledge the connection between Nā Kānaka (mankind), 'aumākua/Akua (spirit ancestors/God) and the 'āina/lani/moana (environment). This tripartite model is central to a healthy Hawaiian worldview and any deviation represents a serious threat to lōkahi (harmony) (Duponte, Martin, Mokuau, Paglinawan, 2010; Paglinawan & Paglinawan, 2012). Then there is the legacy of cultural historical trauma. Native Hawaiians are over-represented in nearly every negative health statistic in the state as well as other social and economic indicators; a direct consequence of (what some would argue is) an ongoing colonial process (Duponte, et al, 2010). Many Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) are distrustful of Western ways, unconvinced that the system that attempted to systematically and systemically dispossess them of their culture, their gods and their land (Kame'eleihiwa, 1992; Osorio, 2002; Silva, 2004; Trask, 2005) can possibly help them navigate and negotiate broader colonial issues like poverty, poor health, hunger, homelessness, and drug addiction (Duponte, et al, 2010). Even more inconceivable is the notion that a system devoid of spiritual grounding will aid Native Hawaiians traversing the difficult terrain of legitimate healing. More and more social workers are learning that to avoid the conversation of spirituality is to miss avenues of healing for those in greatest need. Aunty realized long ago that it is critical to attend to the spiritual lives of Native Hawaiians; it is one of the features that distinguish her work. Finally, social work practice from a Native Hawaiian perspective looks different than social work anchored in the West. Story is at the core of social work for the Native Hawaiian practitioner. It is through story that maladaptive coping is challenged, new life lessons are passed on, and cultural heritage is reaffirmed. In both her community practice and her work at the University of Hawai'i School of Social Work, Aunty Lynette begins and ends sessions with a story, either her own or from those she serves.

Strive To Be Pono: Cultural Competence And Decolonization

I've known Aunty Lynette for several years now. We occasionally see each other passing through the halls at the School of Social Work, but most of our interactions have been wonderfully intense one-on-one discussions about culture, Native Hawaiian values, trauma, and most often – healing. In 2012 the Schools of Medicine and Social Work at the University of Hawai'i partnered to create the Native Hawaiian Interdisciplinary Health (NHIH) Program. This joint venture hopes to recruit and retain Native Hawaiian haumāna (students) to the healing professions and erase the chasm between Kānaka Maoli cultural identity and their burgeoning professional identity. Unlike their Haole (Caucasian/foreign) counterparts Native Hawaiians, like other Indigenous Peoples, have had to "check" their cultural identities at the door of the academy (Meyer, 2001; Smith, 2005) as Western methods enjoy privileged status over Indigenous ways of knowing (Mokuau, 1990; Paglinawan & Paglinawan, 2012). Our hope is to indigenize the curriculum by creating a space for Kānaka Maoli haumāna to explore the myriad ways their cultural identities can inform their professional practice, all while helping those in greatest need – Native Hawaiian and Non-Native Hawaiian alike. Paradoxically, decolonization efforts help all people, not just the Indigenous. As one of two non-Native Hawaiian program coordinators, it is critical that I make sure the program is pono and run in accord with Native Hawaiian values. This is a program for Native Hawaiians that not only explores Native Hawaiian culture but actually engages in cultural protocol. Aunty Lynette is both the kumu (teacher) and spiritual guide for the program.

This was not the first time that Aunty Lynette helped launch a program. Years ago she served as cultural consultant and helped reinitiate the Hawaiian Learning Program (HLP) in the School of Social Work's graduate program. The Hawaiian Learning Program had been defunct for a number of years and there was

a concerted push to bring it back. Aunty Lynette, a widely revered social worker and acknowledged Living Treasure who practiced Native Hawaiian values and healing methods, was the logical choice and became the first Director in 2008. The NHIH Program at the Baccalaureate level is modeled after the Hawaiian Learning Program. When Aunty and I first met, she told me that she had been thinking about our program. She was concerned for our Kānaka Maoli haumāna. "Not every BSW student will go on to the MSW Program; many will choose to enter the field right away. They need training in Native Hawaiian healing too," she said. Of course, she was right. So she helped us design the program: four 1-day sessions over a four-month period. The program opens with an exploration of the Hawaiian world view and emphasizes the many differences and similarities to Western ways of knowing. The second session explores cultural historical trauma and its ongoing consequences, while the third session focuses on Native Hawaiian healing methods like hoʻoponopono, laʻau lapaʻau (medicinal healing), and lomilomi (Hawaiian body work). In the last session, social work and medicine students meet with Native Hawaiian practitioners who have already traveled the path the students are on now.

What distinguishes both the NHIH and HLP from other cultural programs is not just the content. Sadly, academia has a long history of *studying* Indigenous peoples and *explaining away* significant cultural practices. In fact, many argue that the academy is one of the most powerful colonial forces available to the dominant culture; that through its study it first objectifies and then historicizes whole groups of people, especially Indigenous groups (Meyer, 2001; Smith, 2005; Trask, 1999). What separates the NHIH and the HLP is the way the material is taught – congruent and in accord with Native Hawaiian values. A prime example is location. Aunty Lynette insisted that the NHIH be conducted beyond the halls of the academy. "Native Hawaiian haumāna must be on the land and the sea, in the wahi pana (sacred spaces) and puʻuhonua (sanctuaries) of our ancestors. Learning is not limited to the classroom. "The ʻāina is our classroom" she told me. For the Native Hawaiian, land is more than its ability to create a surplus yield. ʻĀina is precious not just as *resource*, but as a *source* that not only provides food and water, but also the ground for genealogical connection to family, the ancestral gods and the life force that shapes the very identity of the individual and community (Kameʻeleihiwa, 1992; Kanahele, 1986; McGregor, 2007; Tengan, 2008). And so our first NHIH session was held in Ahupuaʻa ʻO Kahana State Park, a historical and modern site of colonial/Indigenous contestation on the Island of Oʻahu.

The day starts with us learning an oli kāhea (chant asking permission to enter the grounds). After some practice we oli and our host offers an oli komo (welcome) in return. Our host then explains the long history of Kahana Valley and its many iterations, from loʻi kalo (staple food grown in irrigated terraces) that fed the people of the ahupuaʻa (land region), to sugar cane fields, to practice arena for jungle warfare during WWII, and now back to loʻi kalo again. Kahana is a living park with 31 families residing within the boundary of the park itself. After a brief presentation we tour the grounds. I can feel the ocean breeze across my face and the slosh of mud under foot. Kahana is one of the wettest places on Oʻahu and it shows; everything is green and lush and moist. The primordial valley has mana that you can feel. After the tour we re-gather at the welcome center and Aunty Lynette leads us in pule (prayer) and we mahalo the ʻāina, our ʻaumākua, our kūpuna and Ke Akua. Then she and Uncle explain the nature of a Hawaiian world view. The haumāna and kumu sit in rapt silence, heads nodding in acknowledgment every few minutes.

Together Aunty and Uncle take us to a place where values still guide behavior and respect is given to all living things. They take turns sharing both their personal and professional lineage and the many ways they are connected to the ʻāina and to us. As the day unfolds the fictitious separation between person and nature and God slips away and connections are formed. This is the collective consciousness that Aunty so frequently talks about. No longer alone in a world determined to separate us from our mooring, haumāna and kumu walk to the field adjacent to the welcome center and share our personal and professional genealogies as Aunty and Uncle did just hours ago. Some haumāna can go back generations, while others have hollow spaces where culture and identity lie hidden; others have open wounds left from past colonial violence. Some haumāna-nā kuaʻaina (those from the country) – complain about being too Hawaiian; of being stereotypically labeled as lazy, meek, or worse. Others are concerned they are not

Hawaiian enough and feel like race frauds – especially haumāna who attended elite private elementary, intermediate, and high schools. Tears flow and again heads nod in acknowledgment. In the end we oli mahalo (appreciation chant) and thank each other for our bravery and our hosts for their generosity. As a final act we give paʻakai (a gift of salt) to our hosts. This is where the real program resides, in the act of *living the learning*. We learn by doing: Nānā ka maka, hoʻolohe ka pepeiao, paʻa ka waha (look, listen, and be quiet). Yes, we are what we believe, but even more so, we are what we do. Cultural protocol, Aunty tells the haumāna, is the way one practices being Hawaiian. She also helps students recognize that despite what others say, they are exactly Hawaiian enough. Believing you are too much or too little Hawaiian is a consequence of cultural historical trauma; the internalized colonial voice that judges and disciplines (Kauanui, 2008).

The Principled Life

Aunty Lynette knows who she is; even more important she knows where she is: she sits comfortably at the intersection of her Christian faith, cultural practice and social work training. She lives by a set of principles that can easily be found in her faith, practice, and training: know thyself; make conscious what is unconscious; form and essence are one; and, strive to be pono. For Aunty Lynette the boundaries between her faith, practice and training are unnecessary if not altogether illusory.

There is likely no better example of this than one of her famed cases in which a young mother was brought to her, apparently suffering from noho ʻia (spiritual possession). Aunty had never met the wahine (woman) before and did not know what to expect, but when the family brought her over to the house the wahine began jerking about in seizure-like fashion. Responding to the situation in the moment, Aunty quickly conducted a pīkai (sprinkling with salt water for cleansing and purification) and then began praying for a clear path to healing. She asked some questions and soon learned that this was not in fact a case of noho ʻia but rather a situation of unresolved grief. The young wahine had lost a keiki (child) just after birth and then subsequently suffered a miscarriage. Now pregnant for the third time she recently dreamed that an ʻuhane was coming for her unborn keiki. Aunty recognized her fear but also her need to first grieve the many losses. The wahine cried, heaving and choking and letting go years of pain and hurt while her family looked on in shock at what they were witnessing. Then Aunty approached the dream. They talked for several hours and Aunty learned that the wahine kept the umbilical cord of the keiki that passed just after being born. Aunty explained that the spirit of the keiki is trapped and unable to go to Pō because she did not let the keiki go. A part of the keiki was literally still here with her. The young mother knew that she had to let go and that she must now care for her unborn keiki. After all this, Aunty Lynette guided her to prenatal care to improve the chances that this third keiki would survive.

Conclusion

Aunty Lynette Paglinawan is a *Living Treasure*, cultural icon, keeper of the flame of Native Hawaiian healing, and a woman of faith. She is part of a long line of healers and was trained by the likes of Tutu Mary Kawena Pukui. But she is also a social worker and so all of the trappings that come with such titles and accompanying reverence ultimately fail to grab hold of her. Aunty walks with her head high, confident in her identity and sense of self. But she is not full of herself. She has seen too much to succumb to such narcissistic indulgences. Aunty traverses the physical and spiritual worlds, attends to Ke Akua and ʻaumākua and listens for the kaona imbedded in their words and images. She knows that the spirit world and ours are thinly veiled and just a moment away. This is the way of true power, the kind *earned* over time and through practice; it is exercised with great care.

Today's conversation, like most of our others is laser-focused, but we also giggle quite a bit too. Her smile invites me to share my ōlelo and manaʻo (wisdom) and she seems to listen twice as much as she talks. Still, she says things have changed for her over the years. "At my age there is very little I am unwilling to say. That can be good and bad," she says with a chuckle. But it would not be her *words* that concern me; I can't imagine her saying something hurtful. It would be the *quiet* that would worry me. The only thing more potent than her words is her silence. Most often it is an invitation to share, but I imagine it also could be deafening.

As the day closes we bid each other aloha with a warm hug and a gentle kiss on the cheek and I feel privileged

for the opportunity to spend this time with her. I will mark this moment – like I do all the others spent with her – as part of my own spiritual journey, right next to time spent in meditation and contemplation. Being with Aunty is being in sacred space and sacred time. Some believe that each of us have a certain number of days allotted for our life here on earth. I imagine that my time with Aunty does not count against my allotment here in the physical world. As usual I leave her presence as my best self, not some ideal reserved for the future, but me as I truly am, unencumbered and in the moment. This is her gift to me: myself connected to nā akua, ʻaumākua, and the ʻāina. And this moʻolelo is my gift to her.

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