Kuleana and the Crises of our Ecological Moment

Proposing a Living-Together Praxis of

Treaty Ecologies & Relational Sovereignties

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Kānaka people – as with most land-connected Indigenous peoples of the world – are beset by entwined, recalcitrant actions of settler colonialism and capitalist exploitation - the refusal or entailment of Indigenous peoples land-relation sovereignties, and the inherent incapacity of settler colonialism to halt the earth-destructive forces on which settler colonialism is constituted.

This paper offers a proposition of a modest set of practices, for both affirming Kānaka relational sovereignty – even in the context of settler state refusals of that sovereignty – and for assuring mutual benefits in pursuit of the shared urgent demand to imagine and enact livable futures together as Indigenous and Settler peoples in the face of the spiraling crises of global climate and biodiversity system collapse. Those praxes as captured by the term Treaty Ecologies – practices committed to mutuality, humility, and sharing of knowledge practices – enacted by starting from Indigenous approaches to alliance, reciprocity and relationality, answered in-kind, humbly respectfully and genuinely by settler scholars and citizens as treaty partners.

The planned Fulbright-supported research exchange with Dr. Ty Kāwika Tengan and other Kānaka maoli scholars and activists aims to pursue parallel commitments, grounding research relations in Kuleana: responsibility and reciprocal care of each other and for the earth, 'āina, and to adopt these praxes as a means of addressing more immediate crises where Kanaka land, community, and sovereignty are under serious threat. Within this, Treaty Ecologies can help to contour pragmatics of undertaking research via "living-with" relations, between persons, and via "living together" relations between mutually-respecting, inter-political collectives.

In the course of my presentation, I will trace a set of decolonial collaborative research practices from more than two decades of action research with, and in support of, Indigenous land rights and land-sourced, Indigenous knowledge activists. Drawing on reciprocal collaborative engagements with Piikani Blackfoot, Secwepemc, and Mi'kmaq knowledge holders, the paper elaborates a growing diversity in emergent praxes of Treaty Ecologies.

Dr. Brian Noble is an Associate Professor in Dalhousie’s Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology. His current research considers the processes both animating and empowering Indigenous land, resource, and knowledge relations, and the place of Indigenous Peoples’ treaty and alliance-making in response to local and global environmental crises.

For more information, please contact <anthprog@hawaii.edu>