

My Ontology Emerges

The lessons from the story of Hāloa are many. Throughout my lifetime I have both learned and taught this story. More so, I have lived essential concepts of this story. I have experienced sustenance from the land. I have also engaged my role as a caretaker of the land and other natural elements. Through these various learning and teaching opportunities, five main concepts have emerged that guide my ontological worldview. These concepts include ‘ohana, mo‘okū‘auhau, the interdependent relationship between kaikua‘ana and kaikaina, kuleana, and the balance between hānai and mālama.

‘Ohana. One of the most important lessons I learn from the story of Hāloa is that the entire lāhui Hawai‘i is connected genealogically; we are all related as ‘ohana, the Native Hawaiian concept of interdependent and extended family relationships (Handy & Pukui, 1998). In describing ‘ohana specific to the area of Ka‘ū on Hawai‘i Island, Handy and Pukui (1998) state:

The fundamental unit in the social organization of the Hawaiians of Ka‘ū was the dispersed community of ‘ohana, or relatives by blood, marriage and adoption, living some inland and some near the sea but concentrated geographically in and tied by ancestry, birth and sentiment to a particular locality which was termed the ‘āina. (p. 2)

Described in this way, the term ‘ohana is a reminder not only of connections that Hawaiians have to each other as humans, but also to the ‘āina, or land, from which we draw nourishment. Further, Handy and Pukui (1998) describe the term ‘ohana in connection to the kalo plant:

The term *‘ohana* was likewise a figure essentially belonging to a people who were taro planters. *‘Oha* means “to sprout,” or “a sprout”; the “buds” or off-shoots of the taro plant which furnished the staple of life for the Hawaiian are called *‘oha*. With the substantive suffix *na* added, *‘oha-na* literally means “off-shoots,” or “that which is composed of off-shoots.” This term, then, as employed to signify the family, has, precisely, the meaning “the off-shoots of a family stock.” (p. 3)

In this way, Handy and Pukui remind us that not only is the term and thus the concept of *‘ohana* connected to the land and *kalo*, but we also receive a visual representation of the *‘ohana* in which each off shoot is connected to the next. These are important points of interconnectedness that distinguish *‘ohana* from the English concept of family.

Mo‘okū‘auhau. *‘Ohana* can be further described through the Hawaiian concept of *mo‘okū‘auhau*. In the Hawaiian world, we see the connections between all elements in the universe through *mo‘okū‘auhau*. Pukui and Elbert (1986) translate *mo‘okū‘auhau* to “genealogical succession, pedigree” (p. 254). Kanahele (2011) further describes *mo‘okū‘auhau*:

Mo‘okū‘auhau is a literary introduction to a family lineage. The family line may include humans, elements of nature, sharks, or other forms of life. If important enough in the mythological framework of the social structure, the name is recorded. (p. 1)

Therefore, *mo‘okū‘auhau* is the genealogical story. It is the thread that connects all the elements of the world through space and time. The *Kumulipo*, a Hawaiian cosmogonic genealogy, and birth chant for the high chief Kalaninui‘iamamao is explained in English by Lili‘uokalani (1897). As a cosmogonic genealogy, the *Kumulipo* defines each

generation of life. Born from the primal darkness is every element of the Hawaiian world, including humans. It is important to note that in the Kumulipo, a mo'okū'auhau of the Hawaiian world, Hawaiians are the direct descendants of the elements of the world, including Papahānaumoku, the earth mother. Therefore, two core elements of 'ohana include genealogical ties and familial relationships between every animate and inanimate element as well as the understanding that Hawaiian people are deeply and genealogically rooted in their land and place. Consequently, 'ohana is an Indigenous, place-based ontology.

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