

28/07/2020

During the Zoom call, we recommend keeping this live document open on your second screen or using half of your main screen.

Leadership Week Live Notetaking

Solidarity in the Struggle: Embodied Activism in the Pacific (Public Lecture)

Dr Elamani Case

Wow guys, I was on mute this entire time. I will go backwards. Thanks for your patience. Thank you for joining me tonight for this session. This is part of leadership week 2020. A little bit of housekeeping; this is a Zoom webinar. I'll be talking for 45 minutes then save 15 at the end for questions. If you have one, please feel free to drop it in Q/A. If you want to ask it yourself, use the "raise your hand" function. Be aware that we are recording this session, and it'll be posted on the leadership week site afterwards. We also have an electronic live transcriber; if you want a paraphrased transcription, it's in the link posted in the chat. If you have technical issues, let us know.

As I mentioned, tonight's session is *Solidarity in the Struggle: Embodied Activism in the Pacific*. I'll start with this photo. I like to start all of my talks with some sort of art. This photo comes from where I'm from, Hawaii. This was taken at the end of last year at the base of my mountain; Mauna Kea. We are in a longstanding stand to protect our mountain from desecration. It's a stand that's been ongoing for years. When I went home last year I went to this place, a sanctuary that we've created for people to come and find strength and solidarity in one another and show their support. What I love about this photo is that when I went there I found this row of freedom flags; flags representing different tribal nations having achieved or trying to achieve sovereignty. The one at the front is the one for West Papua, and the one at the back to raise in Hawaii to symbolize our sovereignty, independence, and what we stand for as indigenous Hawaiian people. It's a beautiful representation of our commitment to the betterment of our collective futures. My independence in Hawaii is tied up in the independence and freedom of my Pasifika relatives. These flags are flown because they represent the struggles and beauty of solidarity.

To give you background about where this talk came from: it was inspired by a woman named Leanne Simpson, a writer, scholar. In her book "As We Have Always Done", she talks about struggle. Struggle is hard, but beautiful, and righteous. She talks about the beauty of being an indigenous person and to act upon and experience yourself as indigenous means you will experience struggle. We continue to struggle because we are occupied, erased, displaced, disconnected. Our bodies are the targets for settler-colonial violence, the rim of the Pacific war exercises occurring every 2 years is one example of that, how our bodies and our place in Hawaii is continuously disregarded for the pursuits of colonial nations. We continue to struggle as well because it's our heritage. Our inheritance engaged in struggle, our grandparents engaged in struggle for the worlds they wanted to create. They've shown us how to do so. In that sense, struggle is hard and painful and heartbreaking, but it's also something we know how to do and will continue to engage in. As Leanne Sipson says, that's

Please note that this is not a verbatim record.

28/07/2020

During the Zoom call, we recommend keeping this live document open on your second screen or using half of your main screen.

our collective gift to the world. We can create the future within which we want to live, grow and thrive.

I'm going to tell a few stories. That's the way I teach. I'll tell you some personal ones, and from the Pacific. They will touch upon themes of struggle of indigeneity. We'll talk about solidarity, embodied activism, and indigenous worlds and futures. But this session is *really* about - I was hired to do certain things, and the course I teach has course learning objectives. But my agenda is also about empowering Pacific people and creating a better region for all of us, Pacific descent or not. I want to empower you to know your place in the region to help you fight for us and fix it. It's an opportunity and invitation to help you think beyond the walls of your house or classroom. To consider and be critical of your position and liberty. And by that I mean - where are you? Whose land are you on? Your own, someone else's? What does your being mean there? It's also an invitation to accept the work of solidarity. And I mean *work*. Solidarity is not sympathy. Not just an expression. It's an action. A heavy one. It involves struggle. It's also an invitation to engage in embodied activism; being changed so much by the movement that you live your life differently. And to engage in struggle by embracing who you are in the moment you're engaged with. Be self-aware, be self-actualized, and be empowered to bring who you are to the struggles you care most about. This session is less of a lecture and more of a sharing. I'm providing some promptings, not a how-to, so that we all can be motivated and inspired to continue on in the work of creating better futures and worlds for our region and the wider world.

If I'm going to ask people to think about their own positionality I have to be upfront about my own. I believe that as a Hawai'i woman that who we are is ultimately where we come from. I am a Hawaiian. My experience growing up there has shaped everything I do, stand for, and know. These three photos feature a place at the center of my childhood memories, those from adulthood and my inherited ancestral memories. They are memories I may not have experienced myself but was given and gifted. These are from Anaeho'omalū; you can see the connection between mountain and ocean. In a Hawaiian view, we stand for and protect all of it. The second photo is a makaha; a loose gate going into a fish pond. It represents abundance and sustainability. The last photo is my grandmother. I was told she was a small, staunch Hawaiian woman. Here she is standing on that beach, where she raised her children. She's drying meat in the sun, hung on a line, chasing flies away with a coconut branch. I didn't meet her in the physical sense but I visit her in my dreams. She's a huge motivation for everything I do; she fought for a better world when she was alive.

To give you a glaringly obvious example of why I stand to protect places, this is what that beach looks like today. Here you see the same mountain in the background - a different one on the island I come from - and this is what the beach looks like. It's manicured, cleaned, made to look more white. It's the backdrop to somebody else's fantasy. Our brown history has been erased. It's not the beach that my mother went to go to dry meat for her children. This represents struggle. I have very early experiences of displacement. Of going to a place one day and feeling at home, and the next day seeing a lock on a gate and being labelled a trespasser. I'd be punished if I passed that gate, even though on the other side my memories and my grandmother reside. I don't bring this up because this is a unique

Please note that this is not a verbatim record.

28/07/2020

During the Zoom call, we recommend keeping this live document open on your second screen or using half of your main screen.

experience; it's so common. That's my positionality. It's that experience of struggle that motivates everything I do.

Why does positionality matter? It encourages us to think about what our being in place means. How are we positioned in relation to place, people history, power? If we're not the indigenous power in the place we're in, how was our place there motivated or enabled by certain power structures? We can then engage in solidarity with the people whose lands we're on. I'm from Hawaii but I live here in Aotearoa. I, as an indigenous person, have to be critical of my own positionality, on someone else's land. I bring these two photos in because when I first moved to Wellington, I had to ask myself the question - what had to happen for me to be here? This city was built over extensive waterways, streams I can't see or hear, but that run underneath the concrete. The first photo is a series of waves painted over a petrol station where a stream runs underwater. The second photo is of a street I live on; Boulcott. According to my research, there is a stream that used to run down the curve of that street. At the end there was a big pool of water – Waikoko - named for the koko, the birds, that were said to gather at that pool. What I find disturbing is that the building is now called waikoko. This taking of history, this total erasure of an indigenous history, and this replacement with this new building and story. That's the headquarters of Trust Power. A huge electronic power house sitting on a stream, stealing its name. I have to be critical of these powers. I have to use my own positionality and privilege to tell those stories that are literally running underneath the concrete.

What does it mean to be indigenous? I've used that term a lot. The term has functionality in the Pacific. People have all kinds of interpretations; we could do a whole webinar series on that term alone. But it's helpful to think about this particular working definition. This was done by survey research from Jose Martinez Cobo. "...those which having a historical continuity with preinvasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems." They find themselves in a position where they are the non-dominant part of society, often the minority in their own homeland. With that pushing-out comes struggle.

When we talk about solidarity, coming together, we've been able to witness across the world that indigenous people come together because of shared experience and a recognition of struggle. Those struggles that come with displacement and erasure. A recognition of struggle doesn't have to flatten diversity of specificity. Last week in Christchurch I did a talk on West Papua. A fellow panelist was from there. I remember him saying "Hawaii and West Papua, they're the same". We're the same in that we're both under prolonged military occupation. We see, and understand, each other. That doesn't erase the specificity of our experiences. I can raise my flag and he can't. He lives here and is local about the ongoing slow motion genocide and may not ever be able to go home. That's not to flatten the diversity, it's to honour it, by recognizing the ways we connect and the ways we are different.

Please note that this is not a verbatim record.

28/07/2020

During the Zoom call, we recommend keeping this live document open on your second screen or using half of your main screen.

A few examples. The first photo is from Mauna Kea, the mountain we will continue to protect. When this sanctuary was established last year, a few days later, eviction notes were delivered to those who were stationed there. We saw this beautiful expression of solidarity between people at both places. I won't play this video for the sake of time but please go and watch it. It features a group up at Ihumaatao who learned one of the songs, made it their own, and recorded it, and participated in the Mauna Kea worldwide Jam for the Mauna. In that expression of solidarity, that sung enchanted expression, the people on Mauna Kea were strengthened. There were all of these exchanges. I can cite people here who created t-shirts, sold merchandise, donated the proceeds. It continues.

Last year, after I went home, I was able to go to Ihumaatao, and I delivered a statement of solidarity. We timed it so that our deliveries would be synched and we could deliver statements of solidarity of our homelands at the same time. In this beautiful expression of solidarity we see the worlds we're fighting for. We see what our indigenous futures can look like when we control our lands, our resources, our futures.

The question still has to be asked - after I looked at the working definition... What about those in the Pacific who don't identify as Pasifik? Not just those who are not of Pasifik heritage, but those who don't experience themselves as indigenous. There are those for example who don't have much use for that term. Because they are the majority in their homelands. They don't want to be associated because of the negative connotations it carries. If we apply that term to everyone as this umbrella term, are we then not allowing for the range of ways there is to be known as Pasifik? If our most powerful and salient solidarities are between those who have struggled in similar ways, then our connections and disconnections are facilitated by colonialism. Are Māori and Hawaiians so close because they struggle the same? What about those who haven't? I think about these things a lot.

For me, I think if we don't consider ourselves to be indigenous but we live in a place where there are people who do, we have to consider why indigeneity functions and why it matters - and why it has to matter. It matters in Aotearoa, for instance. We have a responsibility to recognize how and why indigeneity matters. It matters in Hawaii, and Guahan, and West Papua, where West Papuans are becoming a minority in their own homeland because of transmigration policies from Indonesia. This means going beyond the distinctions of indigenous or not, and just building on whakapapa, on genealogy, which obligates me to the region. Your struggle might be different than my own, but it is to know that if I want to be free and independent as an indigenous person that means I have to help every other person in the Pacific to be free and independent.

With Mauna Kea and Ihumaatao we saw expressions of solidarity from people who don't call themselves indigenous, but as first people, as people who are geologically connected to the places they come from. We saw Pasifika solidarity. This is from Mauna Kea; we saw contingents from different populations. We had a huge contingent representing Taonga.

Some other examples here in Aotearoa; I look to and see inspiration from the work of Oceania Interrupted, a Pasifik and Māori women's collective that is designated to performing different artistic actions to interrupt spaces, which is essential for bringing awareness to the

Please note that this is not a verbatim record.

28/07/2020

During the Zoom call, we recommend keeping this live document open on your second screen or using half of your main screen.

struggles in West Papua. This is how to use your body and agency to break into spaces, to make people stop, wonder and learn. This goes beyond Western terms like indigenous to build upon whakapapa.

We have many examples of people building upon our shared inheritance. Some of the most powerful expressions of radical sovereignty, of solidarity, also came when people fought for our shared inheritance; our ocean, our environment. From nuclear free decades ago to the last year in our major strike for climate change. We saw representatives from Pasifik nations at the forefront; we think of the people most impacted as being distant, and yet here they stood in front, asking what they can do, and to witness change that would help them.

Even though solidarity can be beautiful, it doesn't mean there isn't also struggle in solidarity. How do we move beyond hashtag solidarity? Clickivism, Instagram, into what is embodied? Some of the hardest work is not Instagrammable. It's when you sit down and think about your own assumptions, and sometimes inherent racism. When you look at solidarity it's getting past the movement that's popular for the movement and engaging yourself in the long haul. Whether someone's taking a photo or not.

To return to Leanne Simpson, she encourages us to be engaged, body, mind, spirit, in the movement. If you want to be changed by it you have to engage, and you have to create a different future by living differently in the present. If you just go on with the status quo and you like and post a few things here and there, we won't achieve anything.

I also want to point out that solidarity in the struggle means that we must see people as more than their struggles. If we only see people in the Pasifik as the struggles they go through then we are too reductive. West Papua is so much more than genocide, but we also need to know of West Papuans as more than that. They have hopes, dreams, talents, and they deserve to live just because they do. Hawai is more than an occupied nation that's a tourist paradise. We need to see people as diverse, worthy, loveable, etc. I can say the same thing for the Black Lives Matter movement. We need to know the causes of police brutality, but we also need to celebrate black lives for being intelligent, intellectuals, scholars, inventors, poets, that have added to our lives.

That gets me to the topic of embodied activism. For me this means that you are so changed by the experience of being active, you can't help but live better. If you're concerned about climate change, how can we live differently to live in alignment with the future we want? We want to be changed by the movement. Seeing connections. Knowing that you don't have to travel to a place to help it. Sometimes you can do more in the place you're in. Last year I couldn't go to Mauna Kea so I wrote "30 Ways to Stand for Mauna Kea". I did it because I had to deal with the sadness of not being able to go home, but I had to say - suck it up, and ask myself what I could do because I wasn't at home. We shouldn't go to West Papua. We should think about what our privileges do that allows us to help them. Distance doesn't mean we don't have obligations. Distance obligates us to act and stand stronger.

Students often say they don't want to stand in front of a march, hold a microphone, do a speech. That's fine. There are so many ways to show solidarity. But bring you, your gifts,

Please note that this is not a verbatim record.

28/07/2020

During the Zoom call, we recommend keeping this live document open on your second screen or using half of your main screen.

your insights, to the movement. Understand your positionality in relationship to that movement, but bring who you are. We need the people on the frontlines and the people in the speeches and the people rubbing the shoulders of those in the front, and those cooking the food, and making the infographics, and filming, documenting, everyone. Be self-aware, be self-actualized.

Continue to engage in the practice of dreaming and creating better futures. We can get so caught up in the movement of the struggles that we forget what we're standing for. I mean down to the tiniest detail; I'm standing for justice, freedom, sovereignty. But what world do I want to wake up in the morning? What do I want to be fed and nourished by? I bring in a few poems here of indigenous futures. I was honoured to hold a poetry workshop by a group of wahine. These are dreams for a free, independent, decolonized futures. These dreams sustain us and motivate us.

I wanted to end with another example of beautiful solidarity and dreaming. This is a poem put together a few weeks ago, shout-out to the amazing Mikee Ihunoi (sp?). This video features indigenous poets from across the region, not just calling for the cancellation of wargames, but for a better future.

To sum up, before I answer questions, I hope this session provided you with opportunities to reflect on your positionality, to consider embodied activism, and to embrace your potential. This is not a how-to. I'm not any kind of authority. This is me speaking as an indigenous woman who has experienced struggle and is engaged in it. So yeah - I think I'll end there and try to answer some questions. I'll go to the Q&A. If you want to raise your hand, do so and I'll figure out how to answer it.

Question: As Pasifik in New Zealand how can we address those who feel they need to put a stake in the ground to assert their place in the land without addressing the oppression of our Māori cousins?

Answer: As a Pasifika person in New Zealand, I feel I have to use my positionality as someone who is not Māori to speak to those who are not Māori to remind them of the importance of indigeneity, and remind them of the consequences of colonization. I don't like it when someone claims indigeneity for a place when they have indignity of a region. Least of all in a place where people are still trying to find their place. If as a Pasifika person I do want to claim a space, what does that mean for the indigenous people? If we don't consider that, we are part of the problem. It calls on us to use our positionality to help tangata whenua here in Aotereoea.

I'll go to the chat now. That was the only question in the Q&A. Oh, so sorry about the mute earlier. It looks like that's the only question. Oh wait, here we go. Yeah! I'll wait a couple of minutes for a question. To be honest, that question about positionality and your role as Pasifika in New Zealand - I would never have thought about that if I never moved here. In Hawaii, I am the indigenous person. Coming here, though it sounds simple, has forced me to ask that question. What does it mean to be indigenous in a land you're not indigenous to?

Please note that this is not a verbatim record.

28/07/2020

During the Zoom call, we recommend keeping this live document open on your second screen or using half of your main screen.

Question: Hopes and vision for the future?

Answer: I don't often allow myself to go there. The future I envision for my children and grandchildren, if I ever have them, is to raise our generations on land that is clean, with water that is clean, on land we can plant and farm as we want to, that we don't have to ask permission for those things. I dream of a future where West Papua is free, where the military buildup is no longer happening in places like Guahan, where indigenous people have control of the air they breathe, where islanders aren't scared of the ocean rising and taking their homes but embrace it as part of their inheritance. Healthy, sovereign futures full of breath.

Question: Do you believe mental illness has had an effect on those that are indigenous?

Answer: Those that are indigenous do suffer from mental illness. It's not easy being indigenous. For those that act upon that daily, we know that. We know how taxing it can be to engage in struggle, especially if you choose to be active. WE know it can put a strain on relationships, and can impact you personally. Indigeneity, as beautiful as it can be, because it's painful, can impact your mental health. I speak from personal experience on that one.

Question: I'd love to hear you speak more about Oceania Interrupted and physical/embody activism.

Answer: It was in 2016, an entirely new experience for me. I'm a very wordy person. But in that, my mouth was covered, I had to tie my hands behind my back, and walking through public spaces. It was very different and challenging in a beautiful way. It made me realize what it is to move through a space and not be able to talk or be heard. I got outside of my comfort zone, walking through the Pasifika festival to interrupt a space not for myself but for somebody else. It's not above us; it's that when we get in the way, and fill ourselves with doubt, that we keep ourselves from being what we need to be for the movement. Get out of your own way, Elamni, because the world needs more of you.

Question: As a Pasifika Wahine coming to Aoteroa what are some challenges you faced in terms of your indigeneity in another land?

Answer: I didn't have a big Hawaiian community to live with and find my own solidarity with. I found myself part of a larger Pasifika whanau which I love. They took me in because I didn't have that Hawaiian base. To get back to the challenges; living here requires of me that I align myself with the indigenous people. If I'm not indigenous, I can be part of the problem. If somebody asks me to carry the burden of a movement, I will do so, in ways that I can. If somebody asks me to speak on a topic, I will. Sometimes because my position as not-Māori means someone might listen to me. I've found comfort in being a bit uncomfortable. I don't want to feel too settled here. I always keep myself on edge and acknowledge my positionality.

Question: In response to the question about mental health; what is healing?

Answer: Healing is returning to place in memory, whakapapa, where we come from, and why we are in the world. When I take time to breathe, chant (I say this because I can't sing), I love dancing. When I engage in hula, dance the stories of my ancestors. I find healing when I draw on the strengths of my genealogy, in other people, and I hope I can be healing for other people as well.

Please note that this is not a verbatim record.

28/07/2020

During the Zoom call, we recommend keeping this live document open on your second screen or using half of your main screen.

I started with a photo at the sanctuary. I remember thinking: we can be sanctuaries for each other, of safety, of reprieve, for each other. I find healing in that. When we recognize that in each other, we will be strengthened by it and for it.

Thank you so much everyone for joining me tonight and for being patient with me not knowing to unmute my mic, and going on this little journey for me. Let's all go home and dream of bright, beautiful, sovereign futures, and do what they can to make them happen.

[End transcription]