

Kū mākou e hele me ku'u mau pōki'i aloha, ka 'āina a mākou i 'ike 'ole ai ma lalo aku nei

I returned to hula in search of something to make my participation in this world meaningful. I had long divorced myself from my natural inclinations as a culturalist by opting the route of the academic and the professional. Despite evidence that our kūpuna were highly functioning generalists, I had succumbed to the western notion that focus and specialization was note for distinction. The rules of that game were easy, but internally, there was a tugging in my nā'au that told me to deepen my perspective.

Kau maila 'o Kamohoali'i ka lā'au, he pāoa

In 2008, I entered UNU as a member of the Kuku'ena cohort, which is comprised of faculty, staff, and students from both Hawai'i Community College and the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. At the end of the hula track courses, Tangarō invited me to take my learning to another level so standing at the crossroad, I opted to put my doctoral studies on hold and enthusiastically entered Unuolehua in June 2010.

The decision was easy, but the transition was difficult. It had been awhile since I engaged in hula in a way that taxes the mind and body the way our tradition demands. Additionally, I am fairly established in my career as a mid-level director at the university and the demands of the position, in addition to Unuolehua, required me to adjust my life. My career and hula are both equally important to me, so I've made sacrifices and compromises to allow me to fully participate and live in the secular and spiritual realms. The beautiful result has been seeing how the hard lines between both have blurred and how each now informs the other.

E huli ana mākou i ka 'āina ma mua aku, kahi a mākou e noho ai

A natural introvert, immersing myself in the process of Unuolehua has uncovered more of who I really am, both as an individual and in relation to others. The reveal has been swift and constant. I've had to push myself to learn at an accelerated pace, which includes everything my classmates have known for years prior to my entry into the cohort. It's humbling, but it's an experience that I relish because I never knew how thirsty I was for a cultural paradigm. Hula challenges me physically, spiritually, intellectually, and artistically, and this holistic engagement had been missing in my overly sensible life.

In the final months of this huaka'i, I am preparing for my ritual death. It is a necessary step in my transition and transformation to kumu through the rites of 'ūniki. It is the same spiritual death that Hī'iaka experienced in her arduous journey through human and supernatural obstacles in realizing her potentiality and in her eventual deification. I know transition is inevitable, but every now and again, I feel like my head is barely above water, my arms and legs are frantically kicking below the surface, and my heart is pounding in my ears. It is the survival instinct manifested physiologically in response to the current and impending spiritual reordering. I am battling the need to stay alive in my current state as an 'ōlapa, to tighten my grasp on what's comfortable, and not transform.

'O Hawai'i kā ka 'āina a mākou e noho ai a mau loa aku

This winter solstice, I will stop kicking and let the water envelope me, mai ke po'o a i ka hi'u, from head to tail, and when I emerge from 'ūniki, I will be changed and the new self will be in residence. Transformed, I will return to the communities that have nurtured me and that I'm committed to in facilitating their own transformations in profound ways that I've been generously afforded.

Kainoa Ariola

Hula as a transformative process: Glimpses into Unuolehua

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