

Multi-generational Resilience in the Anthropocene: Routes to Indigenous Futures. Presentation Notes.

Dr Lewis Williams, AIR and Whakauae Research Services and Nicole Paul, AIR, Melbourne University. Indigenous Futures Conference, Tāmaki Makaurau, 13th November 2018.

Contacts: Lewis@whakauae.co.nz; nicole@nicolepaul.ca

Objectives:

1. Situating ourselves
2. Indigenous Futures for the Anthropocene
3. AIR and the work of multi-generational resilience;
4. Practice tensions.

Two key streams of inquiry framing our paper are:

- Key contextual issues as globally experienced and unique to local practice contexts, and;
- Key pedagogical practices that enable the resurgence of Indigenous societies and knowledges, and facilitate epistemological, relational and creative solidarities between Indigenous Peoples and those no longer to indigenous to place¹.

Indigenous Futures – what kind of Indigenous futures are we talking about?

Indigenous Futures (IF) literature is primarily orientated to the resurgence of Indigenous Peoples; emphasizing firstly social, and secondarily, ecological justice goals. The Alliance for Intergenerational Resilience (AIR) is concerned with IF from both an Indigenous resurgence and planetary sustainability perspective as this applies to all of Earth's inhabitants.

Planetary sustainability through an Indigenous Futures lens requires deep cultural shifts in human thinking and behavior. To this effect, AIR's key goal is Social Ecological Resilience – harmonious co-evolution of our human and other than human relatives, and the relevance of Indigenous knowledges and ways of being towards this goal. A significant strategy towards this goal is developing promising practices of multi-generational resilience.

For Nicole, one of AIR's Indigenous youth representatives, this work enables re-engaging in ways that facilitate self-discovery and self-autonomy. It is an opportunity to create a different narrative to colonization, creating authorship over our history and future. Contemporary Indigeneity is possible even through displacement.

Nicole: We are focused on new conversations around a global indigenous identity, finding alternate ways of establishing our indigeneity in a contemporary society through youth experience and engagement. Youth, like myself, are eager to learn culture and language and develop our own ideas on what it means to be indigenous in a contemporary setting. Or, in my case, finding and maintaining my identity as an Indigenous woman from Canada, but living and conducting my research from Australia with regards to the values of the Kulin Nation in South-Eastern Australia.

Resonance of our work with the Indigenous Futures literature:

Here are some examples where AIR's work resonates with Indigenous Futures Literature:

- **Re-imagining:** the decolonizing project seeks to re-imagine and re-articulate power, change and knowledge through the multiplicity of epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies. (Sium et al, 2012:111).
- **Deep Cultural Shifts:** Dismantling settler-colonialism as an eco-social structure: "We native people have that connection that non-native people are searching for. They say recycling and all of these terms, where as we say 'we're living in harmony and we recognize our relatives and stuff like that. But they are not to the point of recognizing any relatives. They're at the point of knowing you have to recycle to help the environment and to stop the global

¹ Indigenous and no-longer Indigenous to place, encapsulates a range of subject positions that include Indigenous peoples living on traditional territories, those who are Indigenous to their country or place of origin and identify with and are grounded to varying extents in their cosmologies, languages and cultures; and those who are not in the place of origin of their ancestors, being one or more generations removed. In this sense, being Indigenous to place is an ontological continuance and not being in 'place' is an act of colonial continuance (Williams et al, 2017).

warming. They're not at the point of talking about helping the earth heal. They're not talking about helping our relatives to survive". (Bang et al, 2014, 46).

Societal Relevance: Indigenous Futures are not only vital for aboriginal people; they also provide valuable insights into global challenges (Lempert, 2018), Stewart-Harawira, 2005).

- **Beyond the Binary:** Viable futures of survivance means working to move our practice beyond historicized us/them dichotomies and willfully contracting common narratives of assimilated and landless urban Indians towards longer views of our communities and our homelands not enclosed by colonial timeframes (Bang et al, 2014).
- **Land-based education** is critical to working with the nexus between epistemologies and ontologies of land and Indigenous Futurity. Realizing this transformative potential will require engaging with land-based perspectives and de-settling dynamics of settler colonialism that remain quietly buried in educational environments. (Bang et al, 39).
- **Decolonization is not a metaphor** (Psychological and material facets). Incommensurability of Decolonization work "the collective work of decolonization is often an uneasy, reserved and unsettled matter (2012, p.3).

AIR and the work of Multi-Generational Resilience

- The Alliance for Intergenerational Resilience (AIR) is a not-for-profit organisation consisting of Indigenous and non-indigenous scholars, artists, social and environmental activists, spanning at present, from Canada (Turtle Island), New Zealand (Aotearoa), Australia, and Scotland (Alba).
- **GOAL:** Increasing social-ecological resilience through connecting and supporting locally based innovations through emphasizing the resurgence of Indigenous lands and societies, and the renewal of Indigenous Knowledge and ways of being in all cultures. This work enables Indigenous Peoples and those no longer Indigenous to Place, a deep and reciprocal connection to the Earth and its inhabitants, made up of places we can all call home. Key conceptual axes are: Indigenous, Intergenerational and Intercultural. Areas of practice are: research, education, and social action. Emerging Intergenerational Resilience hubs are concerned with linguistic and cultural renewal as this connects to food sovereignty.

Key Concepts

- Crisis of Epistemology and Relationship – How people, and institutions conceive of reality and enact it. This is perhaps the most fundamental issue regarding planetary continuance.
- Digging underneath identity politics to underlying issues of ontology and epistemology
- Learning to live within the requirements of place & becoming of place (Armstrong, 2015).
- Centering the ontologies, epistemologies and realities of Indigenous Peoples whilst becoming of place in ways that are culturally situated and grounded.
- AIR is NOT advocating for neoliberalist forms of naturalization – i.e., the erasure of Indigenous lands and peoples - where settler peoples take on the political status of Indigenous Peoples.
- Fostering Elder and Youth Voices is key to the work of multi-generational resilience.
- **Multi/Intergenerational resilience:** Processes whereby people ensure to the best extent possible that the next generations of human and other than human relatives have what they need to flourish – emphasizes practices of connectivity and knowledge transmission between humans and species. In Te Ao Māori this resonates with **Whakapapa:** Genealogical connection between all entities, that links all animate and inanimate, known and unknown phenomena in the terrestrial and spiritual worlds (Te Ara, Hutchings et al, 2018). Mauri as the life force energy that connects all entities animates this interconnected genealogy. This conceptualization resonates with Indigenous perspectives of wellbeing as a 'simultaneously collective and individual intergenerational continuum that exists in the past, present and future" (Walker et al in Wirihihana and Smith, 2014).

Examples of the work of AIR to date

Example: Elders Voices Summit: Held on the territory of the Tsawout Nation, British Columbia, AIR's inaugural gathering 'The Resilient People's – Resilient Places: Elders' Voices Summit' was a 4-day Indigenous-led sustainability education forum attended by over 100 people

aged between 17 and 80 years from Canada, Aotearoa, Australia, and Scotland. Common to the Indigenous peoples whose territories lie within each modern nation state is a history of British colonial domination authorised through powerful racialised discourses of Anglo–Saxon exceptionalism (Williams et al, 2017). In part as a counter to these histories, the Summit's key theme was multi/inter-generational resilience. A community development approach was adopted towards pedagogical development where AIR worked with Tsawout First Nation Elders and community members to develop the 4-day program. Another key aspect of the methodology was Cultural Remapping - the recovery of Indigenous cultural ecologies, knowledge systems and ways of being in ways that significantly remap dominant understanding of the cultural ecology of place. Drawing on previous scholarship in critical Indigenous studies and social geography we applied this concept in two key ways: (1) the remapping of sociohistorical narratives that involves the disruption of dominant white-settler colonial narratives of the ecology of culture and place through resurfacing and repositioning Indigenous narratives of country, culture, and kin; and (2) the remapping of ontology and epistemology in an embodied sense upon the human psyche through ceremony, stories, arts-based approaches, and simply being one with country (Williams et al, 2017:5).

For Nicole, the Summit provided a safe space for youth to voice thoughts and reengage cultural narratives from a contemporary youth perspective. It provided opportunity for Youth, and community members who may be disconnected from their culture, to redevelop cultural ties. It also created a forum for Indigenous scholars, artists, knowledge keepers etc to collaborate together and develop research with an Indigenous paradigm - acknowledging the unique and versatile methods of creating and disseminating knowledge from person to person. The summit highlighted how land-based learning and art making is integral to Indigenous cultures, proving space for learning and cultural sharing with the use of Indigenous methodologies. Witnessing research being done through an Indigenous paradigm inspired me (Nicole) to research with the same methodologies, focusing on cultural continuation in areas such as; transnational and multigenerational dialog, youth perspective and experiences and arts-based practices in relation to myself and my experiences with reclaiming my Indigeneity through art- for example, drum making.

The work of multi-generational resilience: What's on top now?

- Supporting the UNESCO sponsored 2019 Year of Indigenous Languages through: a position paper; an international summit in Scotland focused on Indigenous languages and social-ecological resilience; and, development of an internship to work with the resilience hubs to craft their stories of unfolding decolonization work
- Frameworks of Multi-generational Resilience with RIWC and Indigenous Partners, Toronto
- Elders' Council, formalizing protocol
- Art-based Projects (Nicole). Leading the development of multiple projects aimed at: creating positive and safe space for cultural engagement, cultural continuation, language engagement and challenging the stigmas around Indigenous art.

Example of Practice tensions:

Developing an inclusive group of people consisting of both Indigenous and non-indigenous people from diverse regions, who are valued and recognized in their community for their wealth of knowledge and leadership.

One way that Tuck and Yang's concept of 'incommensurability' manifests is through "onto-epistemological rupture" - the divergence or incongruence between shared understandings of the nature of being, and subsequent actions by different cultural and generational collectives which are at odds with seemingly shared perspectives (Williams et al, 2017). (e.g., see slide 15)

A counter to this is the capability of onto-epistemological differentiation – the ability to differentiate the tension points between conflicting ontologies (experiences of reality), epistemologies (actions as these are anchored in local political ecologies) and agency imperatives – reasons for acting. This capability is critical for dealing with the more-subtle differences in subject positions that exist throughout a range of identity categories within Indigenous and non-indigenous groups. (See Decolonial Reflections for scaling DEEP, Williams, 2018).

Conclusion

Based on a philosophy of extractionism, the prevailing development paradigm has relied heavily on supressing Indigenous ways of knowing and being, both through deliberate acts of

racial, cultural and epistemic genocide and through deeply ingrained and less consciousness patterns carried in the collective psyche. Developing practices of multi-generational resilience in urban and rural settings in ways that are culturally situated and grounded, yet centre the realities, leadership and epistemologies of those Indigenous to place is critical to the continuance of humanity.

Yet, this work of multi-generational resilience requires holding considerable paradox — holding the collective space that simultaneously honours the innate capacity of all humans for an empathic and indigenous connection to the earth as a living being, while recognising divergent contextual social locations and in particular the different daily realities and ecological leadership of First Peoples who have historical continuity with place.

Enabling the resurgence of Indigenous societies and knowledges, whilst facilitating epistemological, relational and creative solidarities to occur requires that we are able to be conscious of and bring reflexivity to the diverse cultural, political and geographical terrains and related agency imperatives (everyday priorities) in which we are anchored on a daily basis (onto-epistemological differentiation). In this way, we may be able to move beyond often unconscious and outmoded (recolonising) ways of being, ensuring the collective continuance of human and other than human life in ways which emphasise the significance of our actual 'lived epistemologies' alongside our respective colonial histories and contemporary positionings within cultural and social structures.

References

- Armstrong, J. (2015). Some thoughts on indigeneity. *Unpacking the Challenges, Stirring the Potential Panel*. Presentation at the Resilient Places – Resilient Peoples: Elders' Voices Summit Sept 20th 2015. Retrieved from <http://eldersvoicessummit.com/videos.html>
- Bang, M., Curley, L., Kessel, A., Marin, A., Suzukovich, E., & Strack, G. (2014). Muskrat theories, tobacco in the streets and living Chicago as Indigenous land. *Environmental Education Research*, 20(1), 37-55.
- Hutchings, J., Smith, J., and Harmsworth, G. (2018). Evaluating the mana of the soil through the Hua Parakore Framework. *MAI Journal*, 7(1), 92-101.
- Lempert, W. (2018). Generative Hope in the Postapocalyptic Present. *Cultural Anthropology*, 33(2): 202-212.
- MacKinnon, I., Williams, L. and Waller, A. (2018). The re-indigenization of humanity to Mother Earth: a learning platform for cultivating social-ecological resilience to challenge the Anthropocene. *Journal of Sustainability Education*, <http://www.susted.com/wordpress/content/the-re-indigenization-of-humanity-to-mother-earth-a-learning-platform-to-cultivate-social-ecological-resilience-and-challenge-the-anthropocene> 2018_01 Published on line Jan 13th 2018.
- Sium, A., Desai, C., and Ritskes, E. (2012). Towards the 'tangible unknown': Decolonization and the Indigenous future. *Decolonization, Indigeneity and Society*. Vol 1, No.1. pp. 1-XIII
- Stewart-Harawira, M. (2005). *The new imperial order. Indigenous response to globalization*. Wellington: Huia Publishers.
- Tuck, E., and Wang, K. (2012). De-colonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education and Society*, 1, 1-40.
- Williams, L., Bunda, T., Claxton, N. MacKinnon, I. (2017). A Global De-colonial Praxis of Sustainability – Undoing Epistemic Violences between Indigenous Peoples and those no longer Indigenous to Place. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, Special Issue on South-South Dialogues: Global Approaches to De-colonial Pedagogies*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2017.25> Published online: 03 October 2017.
- Williams, L. (2018). Transformative sustainability education and empowerment practice on Indigenous Lands: Part One. *Journal of Transformative Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344618789363> Online First 24th July 2018.
- Wirihana, R., Smith, C. (2014). Historical trauma, healing and well-being in Māori communities. *MAI JOURNAL*, 3(3): 197-210.