

Future Imaginary Dialogues: Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada

info@obxlabs.net

00:12 Jason Edward Lewis: Okay, thank you Bryan for sitting down with me...

00:17 Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada: Yeah, of course.

00:17 Jason: And doing this interview to talk about the Indigenous future imaginary, indigenous futurisms and all those sorts of things. How I'd like to start is have you introduce yourself however you wanna contextualize yourself.

00:34 Bryan: My name is Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada. I'm a translator, student, editor, poet, sometimes author, person, surfer. I don't know, a bunch of random things. Yeah, that's...

00:49 Jason: Where are you from?

00:51 Bryan: I was actually born in Germany, my dad was in the military. So, I was born in Germany, came here when I was three, and then stayed a couple of years and then went back to Germany, and then back here for seventh grade. Now I've been here for a little while, but for a long time Germany was actually the place I had been the longest.

01:16 Jason: And when did you start learning olelo?

01:20 Bryan: [chuckle] My mom hates when I tell this story so I'm gonna, I guess, start off with that story. [laughter] I went to school at Kamehameha which is a school for Hawaiians. And everyone thinks it's this super Hawaiian school, and at least when I was going there, it was not a very Hawaiian school. But one of the things I wanted to take was Hawaiian language, but my mom was like, "When are you ever gonna use Hawaiian language? You should take something that you're gonna use." So I took Spanish, which I never used. I know a couple of Spanish words, and then I use Hawaiian every day and it's part of my job, it's part of the reason why I get to do any of this work and think about the things that I think about and that kinda thing. It's been a pretty strong foundation for a lot of this work.

02:03 Jason: Did you start picking it up and then?

02:06 Bryan: Yeah, I mean, in our family, my grandma was a native speaker, and my mom talks about ignoring her kupuna whenever they would speak to her in Hawaiian. Then there was me, and I started in college because I was told not to learn it in high school. Now that my mom sees that it's important, she also thinks it's important but it took a while, and I think that's a common thing for a lot of us, at least in my generation, that people didn't know what the purpose of learning Hawaiian was or what the purpose of learning any kind of cultural practice was in this modern world, you know?

02:45 Jason: It reminds me, there's a line in an essay you wrote or a blog post, whatever you wanna call it, "We're not warriors, we're a grove of trees." And you talk about the need to create spaces where you can imagine something else, and I wondered if you can sort of expand on that. What you mean by that and why it's important.

03:05 Bryan: Sure. There's a couple of things that I meant by it. One of the things that we're having here is this kind a struggle for independence from the United States and also just from imposed understandings of the world. In terms of political independence, what I think is really neat about this push to be separate is that we have a nation that was not founded on slavery and indigenous genocide. Hawaii was not that when it became a recognized nation. I think we have the opportunity to form this nation that's outside of those things 'cause we're only used to these structures that were built on exploitation and that kind of thing. But this push for independence allows us to imagine what it could be like without relying on that to run our country or to exist in the world.

04:02 Bryan: I think that's one thing that I think, that kind of space, imagination in a political sense we need to create space for. But I also just think we need to be able to imagine just what we wanna be when we grow up, kind of thing. I feel like we don't get to do that. People are always telling us the reality of the situation is this or the reality of that is this. You need to understand the reality of things. And really they're telling you to stop imagining. Stop dreaming of things that can be different and stop being who you are in a way that's not the norm, and so I think we need to get away from that and this understanding of reality as the only way it can ever be, the way it's always been.

04:47 Bryan: People have this weird idea that just because Hawaii is a part of the United States now, that's always been a part of the United States and that it always will be a part of the United States. We need to create space where we can

see past that and part of that is making connections with other places because I think one of the reasons people don't buy into the idea of independence or imagination is that they don't understand what's been happening in other places, that people have done this kind of thing before, that it's happened a bunch of times and in a bunch of different places and in a bunch of different ways. That's kind of what I see in terms of making space for imagination; just being able to look at things differently and to think, yeah this is not the reality that I want. Yeah, I think that's kind of...

05:39 Jason: How do you... 'Cause you do, in your introduction you said you're an emerging academic, right. You have a PhD, you write poetry, you do blog posts and stuff like that. To me, that was part of it, that too was the idea that we can imagine ourselves in these different... In these different ways.

06:01 Bryan: Yeah. Yeah. That's another thing that I think is neat about this workshop, but also a little dangerous like that, here are Hawaiians, or indigenous folks doing these very future-facing things that other people recognize as future-facing; it's technology, it's scientific kind of stuff. And I feel like for a lot of people, if they hear about that, they're like, "Oh, wow, this is the first time they're doing that. This is the first they're coming into the modern world; and look at this melding of ancient and new." When that's actually how we've been existing in this world the whole time. And so, yeah, I think that also making that space for imagination is making space for a world where everything can be Hawaiian. We had that post the other day on our Facebook about, with 'Ioane's quote, kind of funnelling 'Ike Kupuna into all of these different genres and that's what we need. 'Cause we've lost a lot of cultural stuff, as have a lot of indigenous folks, and it makes us afraid that there's not enough abundance out there for us to mess with our culture, to grow in different ways.

07:22 Bryan: And so sometimes when we do new things, people are like, "Oh, that's not Hawaiian," or, "You're going the wrong way with this, don't add these western things to it," or whatever. But we can very easily take these genres that are considered western and make them ours. That's what we did with literacy in the 19th century. There's arguments about how Hawaiians had a particular kind of writing before and I'm not sure if I always buy some of those things. But they took this technology that was introduced and used it for Hawaiian purposes. We used it to print over 100 newspapers in the span of, what is that, about 110 years. So now, because of that, we have this humongous archive of indigenous thought and Olelo and stuff like that. Yeah, it was a western thing. And there were some things that came with it, like with literacy there was a large push for Christianity and stuff like that, and sometimes they were really wrapped up very tightly together. But Hawaiians, a lot of the times, especially in the beginning, they were like, "Well, hey, cool, I want the literacy, but I don't really want your religion that comes with it." And so, we can take these things and make them into what we want. Yeah, I won't go in this direction I was actually thinking of going into.

[laughter]

08:40 Bryan: But, yeah, that's why I want Hawaiians to be writing genre fiction, I want there to be Hawaiian mysteries, Hawaiian romance novels, Hawaiian YouTube channels of weird sketch comedy, and kind of anything that people enjoy, I want there to be a Hawaiian version of that. Because that's how we have a Hawaiian world. And as long as we found it in our culture and make our culture a foundational part of it; and our language and our Olelo and we realize that's an important part of it, then I think we can go into anything we want. Because as long as we're rooted, then, like I said in the post, we can grow any direction as long as we have that connection still.

09:22 Bryan: And I think for some folks that's a scary thing, because we have lost a lot. Just looking at the number of people who are raised first language speakers of Hawaiian by first language speakers of Hawaiian, that number has gotten pretty small. And so there's worries about language loss and cultural loss and stuff like that, but if we just do this and hold on to everything and not let it grow, then we're stifling everything. Yeah, I don't wanna live in that world actually where we can only do what we've done before. So, yeah, I want us to do new stuff. Walk in the footsteps of our ancestors, but take it down a different path.

10:03 Jason: Well, then in another essay, the "We Live In The Future, Come Join Us," one of the things you talk about... You talk about how Hawaiians have been living in the future for a thousand years. And I find that really powerful to think about, as one way kind of erasing these dichotomies that get set up between indigenous and modern and between the past and the future. And I'm curious, yeah, what kind of conversations you've had with people about those ideas within this community, in the sense of, are people generally supportive of that or is it really mixed at this point? Is there a generational thing going on? We had a conversation with somebody, I don't think it was you, where they were talking about how they actually feel that the current generation is in some ways actually more conservative, in some ways.

10:56 Bryan: That was not me.

10:58 Jason: That was not you. Okay.

11:00 Bryan: I don't think so, I don't remember that.

[laughter]

11:00 Bryan: Yeah, I actually don't know much of the response to that blog posts besides the positive ones, because people use it in their classes and stuff like that, but they're usually my friends, I feel like [chuckle] are reading it. So I actually haven't heard too much criticism, 'cause I also feel like, maybe, older folks or even folks who have that idea of, "We need to not let things grow," or, "We have to hold on to it in very tight, frozen carbon form," kind of thing, probably wouldn't read a blog. I mean, that's on Facebook.

11:39 Jason: Self selection.

11:42 Bryan: Yeah, so there's that, but I think that the conversations that we've had, that that post definitely grew out of conversations that I think all of us have been having just in random places, never in a real, kind of formal setting like, "Let's sit around and talk about the future." There was just grumbling about like, "Why do they always say we're stuck in the past" or... And one of the specific kind of things that planted a seed for that article was, there's a New York Times article that... I forget the guys name, he had written about them initially blocking the opening of the construction of the telescope and he kept talking about these stone age beliefs and all of these backwards natives in tea leaf skirts and stuff like that. And so my initial reaction to that kind of thing is like, "Oh you live in the past" I'm like "I don't live in the past, you live in the past". You know, so that's just kind of me being contrary which I think some of my friends say that's what I do. But then I was like you know there actually is something to that though, that we don't actually, we've never lived in the past, and I think what's different is that... Is the time scale thing. We are nowadays often on a very different time scale. We're on the time scale of election cycles, and billing cycles, product release cycles, funding cycles, yearly budgets kind of things and for Hawaiians that's not the normal cycle that we're on.

13:16 Bryan: We have this kind of... I think in the blog post I call it kind of this geological time and this genealogical time, where things take a lot longer and you understand that you have to set the foundation now but you might not see the fruits of that labour for generations, and so I think that idea of getting back to that understanding that things don't always have to happen right now, I think because people are like, we need to have this telescope now because this has to happen right now; there's some kind of reasoning for, there're gonna lose there funding for it, their investors are gonna pull out, but then we end up with this thing on The Mauna that we'll have ramifications for a long time. And they don't think about that, it's always like well, science is this cutting edge thing and it's pushing but we need to have... We need to step back and be able to see that sometimes science shouldn't trump these things you know, like these concerns that we have about The Mauna, about our culture, about its effects on the environment and stuff like that because people are like, oh science has made all of these advances but they've also done some messed up stuff.

14:38 Bryan: I mean like all kinds of experiments and sterilizations, all of these things that we read about that don't really get put up when they talk about that aspect of science, so like they even will take our cultural practices and say, "Look your ancestors were astronomers so you should be in support of this", and I was like, yeah but 20 years ago you didn't even respect that as astronomy, that's just weird belief. Hawaiians had to sail across the Pacific to prove that we didn't just accidentally drift into the islands, we're like "Ooh how did we get here ? We just got lost while we were fishing and now we're in a new place" That we happened to have brought all of these new plants and supplies and people. So that kind of thing... That understanding, that very short sighted understanding people have of history and of the future, where...

15:34 Bryan: But if you think of something happening, I think of how, and I feel like this sounds new age-y and stuff like that, but I think of like what our actions look like to trees or to mountains and stuff like that, where a blink of an eye for a mountain is hundreds of years for us and they're like, "That was dumb." [laughter] Or "Why did they do that, now this all happened." If they even regard us.

16:01 Bryan: I feel like sometimes we're like these yappy dogs to the planet, but we're pissing all over the floor, doing all of that kind of stuff. So yeah, I think we need to get back to understanding how the world works and how we work with the world, and that needs a longer view than just, "Let's get this done this year." And that's not to say we don't have to act on things, cause there are very urgent things that we need to do, but also I think you understand the urgency more if you're looking ahead to when these... To see how these things fit in now, like the ramifications of this happening now,

played out into the future, how the ripples work and stuff like that.

16:43 Jason: Can you talk a bit more about genealogical time? Because I find it's something, that it's kind of a denser conversation around genealogy here than in most, if maybe not all the other indigenous communities that I've spent time in.

17:03 Bryan: Yeah. So we have a big thing for genealogy, it's essentially our anchor. And what's interesting is the word for historian also is the word for genealogy or one of the words anyway, so the word "mo'okū'auhau"

17:23 Bryan: If you look on Samuel Kamakau, he was one of our most well known historians, they call him a "mo'okū'auhau"

17:30 Bryan: Which if you just translated it kind of simply it'd be like, oh he's a genealogist but like that also means that he's a keeper of our history and one of the things I think that we pay attention to a lot is mo'o, and mo'o is the idea of succession and mo'o is in a lot of our important words like mo'okū'auhau: Which is genealogy and history and Mo'o 'olelo which is story and history all of that kind thing and even kuamo'o which is the spine or our backbone.

18:01 Bryan: And because there's all of these things that are coming together to hold us up. And so, I think, because of that foundational aspect of Mo'o, that makes us pay attention to the succession of things, the way things are passed down through the generations and stuff like that. And so for me, genealogical time, again, is not just looking into the future, but now looking far back into the past, because you're understanding that your ancestors set the foundation for a lot of the things that are happening now. Like, just for a short example, the way Liliuokalani responded to the American government in 1893 set the stage for us being able to push for sovereignty in a certain kind of way now. And they were thinking of us back then.

18:48 Bryan: There's a pretty often quoted thing from the newspaper... Shoot, I can't think of the author's name right now. Noenoe Silva just wrote a book about him and Joseph Poepoe. Anyways, the quote, it's actually a fight over telling stories in the newspaper, but he says, "Stop cutting the mele short." 'Cause they cut the mele short, the chants and stuff short, because of printing space. Everything, they need to pay for stuff. But he was like, "Stop cutting the mele short," because the generations of 1870, 1880, 1890, and 1990 are gonna want these things. And so that's a very clear indication of, look, our kupuna knew that we needed these things, and so they're trying to hold on to them for us or to save them in a certain way or present them to us in a certain way, that would allow us to stand on them as a foundation now.

19:51 Bryan: And so that's part of the genealogical time thing for me, is that looking back into our stories and seeing the succession of things passed down, the succession of values, and then knowing that that continues through you into the future generations. Your children and grandchildren and great grandchildren and great, great, great, great, great, keep going down through that. That you, as some people have been saying, is you are a future ancestor. And so the things that you do now are setting the stage for these ripples to take place in the future.

20:23 Bryan: And so I think the genealogical time is like geological time in a way, but at a human scale. Because in a way, we are the aina as well, but we also experience things in these shorter moments and so I think we need to realize that it's a very long succession of these shorter moments. It's this Mo'o of things going and going and going, and that we're a part of it. And that's why we have that sense of Kuleana, that sense of responsibility, because it's been passed on through the generations. Our ancestors had it, and then they're like, "You know what, you need to carry this now, too. And then you need to carry this, and you need to carry this..." And so when we understand that responsibility, then we know that we have to keep pushing these things forward.

21:17 Jason: And so how do you balance, or maybe it's not a balance, maybe balance isn't even the right word, but I'll use it for the moment, how do you balance the keeping of the traditions and respecting and acknowledging that kuleana being passed down to you, and the fact that those people back then were looking forward, looking out for you, looking forward, with the making of new traditions? Making of new lessons to be learned about life as we live it today. Some of the aspects of which were probably not apparent seven generations back.

21:55 Bryan: Yeah, for sure. Right, right, right. Yeah, [chuckle] one of my friends used to call Hawaiians the MacGyvers of the Pacific, 'cause they would take whatever little thing they could find and use it for their own purposes. We had an octopus lure that they would use to catch octopus, and so it would be a shaft and then cowry shells and then a hook. And then when the western folks came, they were like, "Oh, metal actually works better than these bone hooks."

So they would switch just the bone part, so there would be shaft, cowry shells, metal hook. And so there's that kind of... It's still keeping up the practice and the use, but switch out something if it works better with something else. And so that idea of the balance, I think to me, comes from knowing genealogy and knowing the genealogy not just of you as a person, but also of ideas and of knowledge.

22:49 Bryan: So where did it come from, where did this practice come from, who passed it down, what is the main points of this thing that they're passing down? 'Cause if you were always taught, "Don't do this practice a particular way," then okay. And putting it in a video game would mean that you've betrayed that teaching, then don't do that. But if you were taught, "Use this technique because you need to catch fish and feed your family," and then you can shift out parts to make sure that you can catch fish and feed your family, then change that stuff out, because that's what we did.

23:28 Bryan: So again, with literacy, that was... Yeah, they used it because they wanted to translate the Bible, to spread the word about Christianity, but Hawaiians started using it. They took over the press in 1862 and they didn't look back. Then people were reading three, four newspapers at a time, and they would be talking in one newspaper like, "Oh, did you hear what they wrote in *Ke Aloha Aina*?" Or, "Did you see what they said in this one?" "Oh, I don't agree with that." And so they would just kind of have these things. And so the technology was enfolded into the genealogy of knowledge. It became a way of transmitting some of the knowledge and stuff like that, and so... And it's not a complete shipwreck 'cause I think people lots of times think, "Oh, it went from an oral culture to a written culture."

24:12 Bryan: And that's not true cause actually even if you look at some of the written forms, they mimic oral forms, and people would often read mo'olelo out of the newspaper to their families and stuff like that. So I think these things moved together in a certain way. And that's I think a good model for these kinds of innovations that we'd like to do. Like, if we have mo'olelo in video games, I'm not saying stop having spoken versions of mo'olelo. I'm saying have both of them. Right? Because there's nothing saying that we can't do both of these things. Cause lots of times I see arguments in our community about like, "Oh stop, don't translate that because that's... You should be teaching people to speak Hawaiian instead of translating," or something like that. Or, "Don't do this because you should do that." But like, "We got time to do both." You know? And like...

25:07 Jason: Option D.

25:07 Bryan: Yeah. Or maybe, "You do that thing and I'll do this thing." Because that sounds more interesting to you, because I don't wanna do that. And so I feel like as long as we pay attention to our lineages of knowledge and of practice, that will inform us on what we can do with our knowledge, what places are okay to have knowledge. Like, I'm not a hula person, so I wouldn't choreograph some kind of modern dance thing using traditional mele. But if a hula practitioner who has been trained for a long time has the okay of their Kumu and they wanna do that kind of thing, then I think that's what they should do. Because they have the okay, they know where it came from, they know what's okay to change. They're not just changing it for the spectacle of it. Because we know where it came from, we know where it can go and still be the thing, still be mo'olelo. Even if it's in graphic forum or in digital form, that kind of thing.

26:09 Jason: Right. What do you imagine it's gonna be like to be Kanaka Maoli some generations from now? 150 years, 200 years. What would you like it to be?

26:22 Bryan: What would I like it to be?

26:23 Jason: Either way, what you think it's gonna be, what would you like it to be?

26:25 Bryan: I don't know. One thing that I would like it to be is, we don't have to keep saying this is a Hawaiian thing, or this is an indigenous thing, because it will just be out already. I feel like I would love it if, and this I feel is gonna happen much earlier than 150 years from now, but I work as a translator. And I always think that I would love it if I didn't have a job no more. Nobody needed somebody to translate stuff out of Hawaiian because they already speak Hawaiian, you know? So that's what I want, I want our stuff to be so widespread that it's almost not noticeable anymore. Because all of this stuff that has these kind of Western messages in it and things that have been generally oppressive to us. I'm not saying Western culture in general is oppressive to us, but there's a lot of things that teach us to think badly of ourselves, indigenous representation, you guys kind of talk about, that stuff isn't marked as dangerous Western things, that's marked as television show. That's marked as book, comic. So that's what I want us to have, is these kind of really beautifully done, culturally grounded Hawaiian things just everywhere.

27:41 Bryan: And yeah, I kinda, I don't know what that'll look like, I think it'll be neat. I can't imagine what a building

would look like if it were built from a Hawaiian point of view, instead of highest and best use, and the tricks that they use to make like they have affordable housing in there but it's somehow still a million dollars for an apartment.

28:04 Jason: Yeah.

28:05 Bryan: I feel like those things would be different. And I'm not saying we would have some magical utopian world where Aava comes out of the water fountain and fried fish falls out of the sky kind of thing, but I really think it would be a different world. I think the landscape would look different. I don't think we'd have buildings like this anymore, you know? Yeah. I think the tricky thing about it is, and if we blow up the planet before we get to see that kind of thing. [chuckle]

28:38 Jason: So we were talking about... Yes what it'd be like in seven generations and this idea that it'd be so deeply different in a sense, like if all this thing is normalized.

28:51 Bryan: Yeah. That's kind of the... So we even have, one of the committees that we're a part of for Kanaeokana which is the network of Native Hawaiian schools is called re-normalizing Olelo Hawaii. And yeah, cause what's... In the Kingdom era everybody spoke Hawaiian, you know? There's stories of people's ancestors, people who are not Hawaiian, their ancestors speaking just Chinese, because they're Chinese and then Hawaiian. And the language of business was Hawaiian, the way you got around was just Hawaiian. And so even my grandpa who was Japanese, he... We played some kinds of traditional game up at campus and they showed us how to make it and it's this very very complicated game that has multiplications to get the points and all of this. But you kinda bounce this little wooden thing on a wooden stick. And so I took it home and my grandpa was like, "Oh." And he started doing it. And I was like, "Oh how do you know this?" And he's like, "We played it growing up." It was called arrapio. And the Hawaiian name is kama pio. But there was still like a lot of Hawaiian language just around and that's what I want. I want cultural values informing everything. I want Hawaiian language to be one of the languages that you just hear on the street all the time, and it's actually... I feel like that's gonna happen much sooner than seven generations.

30:13 Jason: Yeah?

30:14 Bryan: At least for language. I don't know about the transforming of the rest of the cityscape and landscape looking different, and Hawaiian buildings and that kind of thing. But that move for Hawaiian is really moving along well. And, shoot. I forgot... There was a point I was going to make in connection with that. But it's okay.

30:36 Jason: Maybe it'll come up.

30:37 Bryan: Yeah.

30:37 Jason: I'll ask a question going the other way. Which is what do you think our seventh generation ancestors are gonna say... Sorry, descendants. Are gonna say about this time?

30:50 Bryan: About this time? I hope they're gonna say, "I'm glad they worked so hard to keep this thing going." It's like the train. I'm glad they kept shovelling the coal into the thing to keep it moving along. 'Cause what's been neat is... I've not been, I'm not an old timer like Lilikala. But I've been doing Hawaiian language work, and translation work and stuff for the last couple of decades. The last two decades or so. And just in that time, which is to me a very short time, I've seen the number of speakers grow. You can go to the grocery store, or the restaurant, and you hear people speaking Hawaiian.

31:27 Bryan: And the knowledge that we have kind of had to do, and kind of fight pretty hard to get... Like at the graduate level, people are getting... Like in elementary... Well, maybe not elementary school, but they're getting this kind of level of cultural knowledge that we had to work hard for. They're getting that very easily and very early on. And I feel like we're kind of a pivotal generation. Not to put too much like, "Oh, we're so good." Kind of thing, but the generations before me... My mom's generation, and even a little bit her mother's generation, that was when they were taught not to speak Hawaiian.

32:05 Bryan: And that was when... They have so many stories about not being proud to be Hawaiian. And being ashamed of speaking, or being ashamed of being Hawaiian because it was a bad thing. They were taught that. And we are still working through that. I think when we talk to friends my age, there's still issues of identity. Are we authentically Hawaiian? Is our language good enough? The language level that we've achieved. Is that good enough to

be Hawaiian? And when you look at the young folks coming out of the immersion schools, and the charter schools, they don't have that worry. They're like, "Yeah. We're Hawaiian. Of course. Why are you asking me about it?" And so I feel like in a way... Like I said, this kind of pivotal time, we need to keep this going. We have to keep that work going. My friend likes to quote, shoot. I think it's Momaday who said, "The oral tradition is always one generation from being lost." And I'd want them to say that, "That's not the generation that lost it. They worked to keep it going, and to reinstate things, and to make new things. And now, because we have this thriving Hawaiian world with weird new buildings, and we speak Hawaiian everywhere, that was part of the... They were part of the folks who helped lay the groundwork for that."

33:38 Bryan: Yeah. And I also want them to say, "I think they did some funny stuff. I think they did some fun things. They did weird things with our culture, but look at what we have now 'cause of it." Yeah. That's what I'm hoping they'll say. I don't know if that's really what they'll say. They might be like, "Look at what they used to wear."

33:55 Jason: What did they do? Look at their hair. [laughter]

33:57 Bryan: "Yeah, why is Bryan's hair so long? Oh, it's so embarrassing that they looked like that." That's also...

34:02 Jason: Now we just have optic cables!

[laughter]

34:04 Bryan: Yeah. Yeah.

34:05 Jason: Yeah, so speaking of them looking back on this time, can you talk a little bit about your PhD work?

34:11 Bryan: Oh, sure. My currently stalled PhD work is about [laughter]... I'm a translator, as I said. And I'm kind of an ambivalent translator, in that I actually love translation, and I love the challenge of trying to bring something from Hawaiian into English in a way that still carries some of the Hawaiian story with it. But I also know that that process can really make a lot of problems. It can really be damaging to the story, especially because people don't know what's involved in translation. Because we have stuff like Google Translate, and the universal translators on sci-fi shows, people think that a machine can translate something. And I can't speak for other languages, but you can't translate with a machine for Hawaiian, because there's so many shades of meaning to these words, there's all kinds of kaona, which is our kind of directed meaning that we kind of cherish in language use. When we're talking about one thing, we're actually really saying something about something else.

35:17 Bryan: And sometimes, it's often... Well, the easiest ones to understand are of sex. 'Cause Hawaiians always make jokes about sex, but it's like they're saying something else. But there's also ways of critiquing the li'I by saying a certain thing in a certain way. So that, trying to translate that into English is kind of a fool's errand. There's no way you can actually do it. One of my, kind of the pieces of advice that I've always held on to for translation is that anything is translatable, and nothing is translatable. You can always have something that comes across, but here you can actually, this is something completely different now that you've translated it. And we had a... I've seen the reaction to our translations when I was one of the people who translated *Ka Mo'olelo o Hi'ikaikapoliopole*. And it's this very long story about Hi'iaka who's also in our video game.

36:15 Bryan: And people would take it and they'd be very happy about the translation and sometimes they would say things like, "Oh, I'm so glad I can read this kind of traditional story without any Western trappings around it". And they're speaking about the English. And I'm like, "But you know, this is from a completely different language, right?" And it was written in 1906 when there was a lot of different things going on. So part of my dissertation is looking at the way translation was carried out throughout the Kingdom era. Well, actually, throughout the Kingdom era and up until the present day, which is a huge chunk of time. But I felt like it wouldn't be a useful project without kind of tracking things throughout that whole time period. And then ending with a new model of translation that serves our community better because the Hi'iaka project was awesome. We got to work with Solomon for the artwork.

37:11 Bryan: When he was talking about working on people drawing little stick figures and stuff, that was us. We were drawing little stick-men and he made it into the beautiful artwork in the book. So it's a wonderful book and we had a \$1,500 version of the book and a \$300 version of the book, and then the normal price of that book was \$40 of the regular version. And it was an elevation of one of our mo'olelo to show people, "Look, this is the treatment Hawaiian literature deserves." But if we're really trying to get our mo'olelo out there, to me that's maybe not the best way to do it.

I love that we took that approach. Because I think it is a beautiful book. As Puakea said, he was the project lead... As he said, he was like, "I want the most beautiful book people have ever seen to be a Hawaiian book." And that's awesome to me. But I also want people to know that mo'olelo. So I want a \$5 version of that book to be available for people to read. You take it to the beach, drop it on the ground. It's an accident, you pick it up but you keep reading. It's okay if the book gets a little bit bust up, but we don't have that book wasn't that. And that's maybe an argument for other translation projects. One translation project can't be everything.

38:30 Bryan: But also, we have issues with literacy in our community. We always talk about how we had new universal literacy in the Kingdom. And that's the thing that we are proud of and I think rightly so. But we don't always talk about that we have not awesome rates of literacy now. And so, if we translate these mo'olelo and you put it in a 400 page book that cost \$40, I don't know if that's the best thing for our community. So what I want is mo'olelo in all of these different genres. I want it in video games, I want it in comics, I want it to be around all of the time so that one, that we can be surrounded in our mo'olelo so this can be a Hawaiian world. But also, so that people who don't support our movement and don't think that Hawaiian values are the thing that will really teach you how to live in Hawaii so that they're surrounding them, too. So that our stories are infiltrating their understandings as well. They think, "Oh, this is such a nice movie that we're watching or this is a nice book that I'm reading my children". But all the while, the values that we've put into those stories are getting into their minds and changing how they think about land because right now, the highest and best use of land is a building on it.

39:58 Bryan: Yeah, we're sitting next to the highest and best use of land. And that's not the way we should living and if you look at 'Alawi, you can tell that. So that's kind of my dissertation is about. And the reason I like to look at the history of translation in Hawaii is that it's a little different from some other kind of colonial situations. Translation, I think as I was talking to you folks about it, translation here didn't happen just out of the language 'cause I think that was a lot of stuff that happened with colonial kind of folklores and stuff like that. Because they would extract all of these things from the indigenous culture and take it back to Britain or United States and do whatever they wanted with it. Make their theories of evolution of man and somehow, "Oh, hey, indigenous people ended up at the bottom," or something like that. But in Hawaii, we translated a bunch of stuff into Hawaiian. We wrote a bunch of stuff in Hawaiian and then we translated stuff, there's like 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea in Hawaiian, Shakespeare, Bill Wolfe, random pulp romance novels are in Hawaiian. 'Cause I feel like we always think, "Oh yes, look at all of this high cultural stuff," but there was trashy novels in Hawaiian, too because Hawaiians loved all kinds of stories.

41:21 Bryan: So that is kind of one of the things that I wanna bring light, too. And also, just the legal translations. I mean, a lot of people when they look back at the Kingdom era, they're like, "Oh, that's just based on Western law and then the Hawaiian kind of came out of that." But actually, if you look at the way, translation work back and forth between the English and Hawaiian versions of the law, things were quite a bit different. There were Hawaiian thought infiltrated that more than people understand. So that's the kind of stuff that I'm looking at in my dissertation. But like I said, it's been stalled and part of it is because of writing blogs like "We Live in the Future, Come Join Us".

42:02 Bryan: And writing short stories 'cause I write speculative fiction and stuff like that and you know that kind of thing helps me imagine the future and sometimes that is more satisfying and inspiring than writing the dissertation. My committee members, well [chuckle] actually they understand that. They know that I haven't been working on it, so it's not a secret. I was gonna start kinda whispering on the camera.

[chuckle]

42:26 Bryan: Don't tell my committee members." But they know.

42:28 Jason: You just published a short story in a collection...

42:30 Bryan: Yeah, from Aotearoa.

42:31 Jason: Yeah. Can you just give us a quick...

42:35 Bryan: Yeah, so recently, I had a short story published in an anthology out of Aotearoa and it's called Black Marks on the White Page, and it was edited by Witi Ihimaera and Tina Makereti who are to me like... Well, I'm new to Tina's work but Witi's work is like... We've all... Well, not we've all, but most of us have done like... That's who we kinda look up to, you know? He wrote Whale Rider, if you've seen that movie. He wrote the book of it. Bulibasha, all of these other books. And so it was just like this amazing thing to see my name on the back of the book with all of those

people. But what I liked about it was, it's a steam punk story. It's this weird, dorky steam punk story set in the Hawaiian kingdom. 'Cause steam punk is generally set in Victorian England, and there's all these gears, and clockwork, and lords, and ladies, and everybody wears goggles and top hats and stuff like that. And I was like, "What? That actually looks like the kingdom kind of." Not that everybody wore goggles but I mean like that... The kingdom, there was a lot of kind of Victorian things about it. And so to have this steam punk story set in the kingdom made a lot of sense to me, and so I really liked it and it has stuff from the newspapers in it. The kind of... The whole story didn't get in there because of space constraints and Witi had a pretty strong hand as an editor, which I thought was kind of cool, actually.

44:04 Bryan: But the whole story is about this woman who summons Hi'iaka from the newspaper to fight these monsters that come every time, these tutua, who come to feast on the mana of these kind of sacred places that we no longer care for as the kind of Christian religion has been coming in. And they're doing it to preserve the mana but... So she summons Hi'iaka, she thinks, from the newspaper to fight these monsters, but it turns out that, that one from the newspaper is a simulacrum. She's a paper god. 'Cause that was the original name of the story, was Paper Gods. And so the real Hi'iaka comes to set things straight and it teaches that person a lesson about why you're throwing things out of balance because the monsters were actually keeping things in balance. And so that's... Yeah, I don't know. It's a dorky story, but I like writing it. And you can sneak in history and critiques of colonialism through that kind of thing, and you can make people imagine this Hawaiian world. 'Cause imagining... Yeah, imagining the future or imagining a different world, doesn't mean just imagining the future. It means imagining a different kind of past and one where we figure a little bit more prominently in it than we often do. So yeah, it's that kind of thing.

45:23 Jason: I look forward to reading it. I have it on order.

45:25 Bryan: [laughter] Yeah. It's the short version. I have to change the name because he cut it before Hi'iaka even showed up in the story so I was like, "Oh! That's a bold move."

[laughter]

45:35 Bryan: But I really liked it. I loved his edits and it was amazing. And I was just like, "Witi, he might have edited my piece."

45:41 Jason: Right, right. I'll go with that.

45:43 Bryan: Yeah.

[laughter]

45:44 Bryan: 'Cause I think all of us have that, "Oh, I'm an imposter."

45:49 Jason: Yeah, absolutely.

45:50 Bryan: Yeah.

45:51 Jason: So then, kind of the follow-up question then, is there anything that we didn't get to, or anything else you want to say? Particularly about the future stuff. I really think the... I do... I really think the, "We Live in the future, Come Join Us", is kind of a brilliant piece of writing.

[chuckle]

46:11 Jason: I'm gonna be using it at my seminar...

[chuckle]

46:11 Jason: In the winter. And I think, both in terms of style, stylistically, I think you did a really strong job, but also that whole kind of line of, "We've been living in the future." In order to survive in this place, you had to live in the future, right? And then coupled with what you were talking about today, you have to think about yourself as the ancestor of the future. And so what is your responsibility as that ancestor? So when they look back...

46:42 Bryan: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

46:43 Jason: They like... They did okay.

46:47 Bryan: Yeah. I don't know, I mean... I think one of the things that I do, 'cause I feel like... So we run the social media for Khanal Kana and... I wonder if I'm gonna get in trouble for talking about this.

[laughter]

46:57 Bryan: So we have a lot of followers, I mean I feel like... We've only been up for three months.

47:01 Jason: Totally! You guys get like 5,000 likes...

47:03 Bryan: [laughter] Yeah so we get a pretty good amount of stuff. But the comments are so interesting, because I feel like the comment zone of any place on the internet is always the den of iniquity. This is where all the people hang out that...

47:20 Jason: It's where the monsters are.

47:21 Bryan: Yeah. But I also think that certain times it's a good barometer of what general people think, you know? Who maybe are not academic, or they haven't really been really critical of the narratives that they've been taught. And what I notice on our social media is a lot of the comments are like, "I know Hawaiian culture and it's this." And it's these really reductive understandings of culture and they're like, "Oh, I lived in Hawaii for 20 years and I know this." And it's like, no that's really not what it's about and that's not us. And so that, I think, is one of things that I wanted from that blog piece is like, "Yeah, you guys say all of this stuff and you think you really understand us, but you never really look. You don't really pay attention, you don't question your assumptions, you don't look at what's actually happening." 'Cause there's always stuff when we push for sovereignty or that kind of thing, they're like, "Well, you know, I would support that, but I still wanna drive my car." Or, "I still wanna have an iPhone." Or, "You're so hypocritical, you talk about wanting sovereignty but you still use a computer." That is a very clear indication to me that they're not really paying attention to, one, what we're saying, but, two, how we interact with the world, how we move through the world because it is different than them.

48:47 Bryan: They're just kinda trying to fit us in these little boxes and stuff like that. And I think that's something that I feel will make us all have a better future is if people would just look a little closer at stuff. Look a little closer at indigenous folks, but also a look little closer at themselves. What are these assumptions that they're making about Hawaiians. What are these assumptions that they're making about the Mauna? 'Cause some of the arguments for the telescope are like, "You know, we need to be able to look for another planet so that we can live on another planet." And it's like, "Well, how about let's look at this planet first and stop... "

[chuckle]

49:27 Bryan: There's this funny shirt that I saw a while back, you know, "There is no planet B."

[laughter]

49:34 Bryan: Let's just, kinda, look a little closer to what we're doing because telescopes are there to look farther. But I think we need to look closer sometimes. I think we need to pay attention to these things and we need to do it ourselves too. Hawaiians just need to do it ourselves. And that's what the koa one is about a little bit. We like to call ourselves warriors and I think that's a strong thing, I think that there's stuff... Let's maybe look at our own word for it and see, maybe that fits us a little better. We're wearing the different jacket when we call ourselves warriors. That's something that I think that I really want to have happen for us to have a better future is to just... Let's pay attention a little bit more.

50:17 Jason: That's awesome. Thank you so much for your time and your thoughts, Bryan.

50:19 Bryan: Oh, thank you. Yeah.

50:20 Jason: For sharing your good mind.

50:21 Bryan: Hope it wasn't too out there.

[laughter]

50:23 Bryan: Or boring.

50:24

Jason: Mahalo.

50:24 Bryan: Yeah, mahalo iā 'oe.

[laughter]

[pause]