

# CREATING HOPE TOGETHER

VIRTUAL SERIES

## CONFLICT KALEIDOSCOPE

An Introduction to Systems Thinking for  
Arts and Culture-Based Peacebuilders  
April-June 2025

IMP  
ACT

TRANSFORMING  
CONFLICT WITH ARTS  
AND CULTURE

Session 2  
May 15, 2025  
with Scot Nakagawa  
& Julia Roig

# PRE PORT

Armine Avetisyan

May 2025

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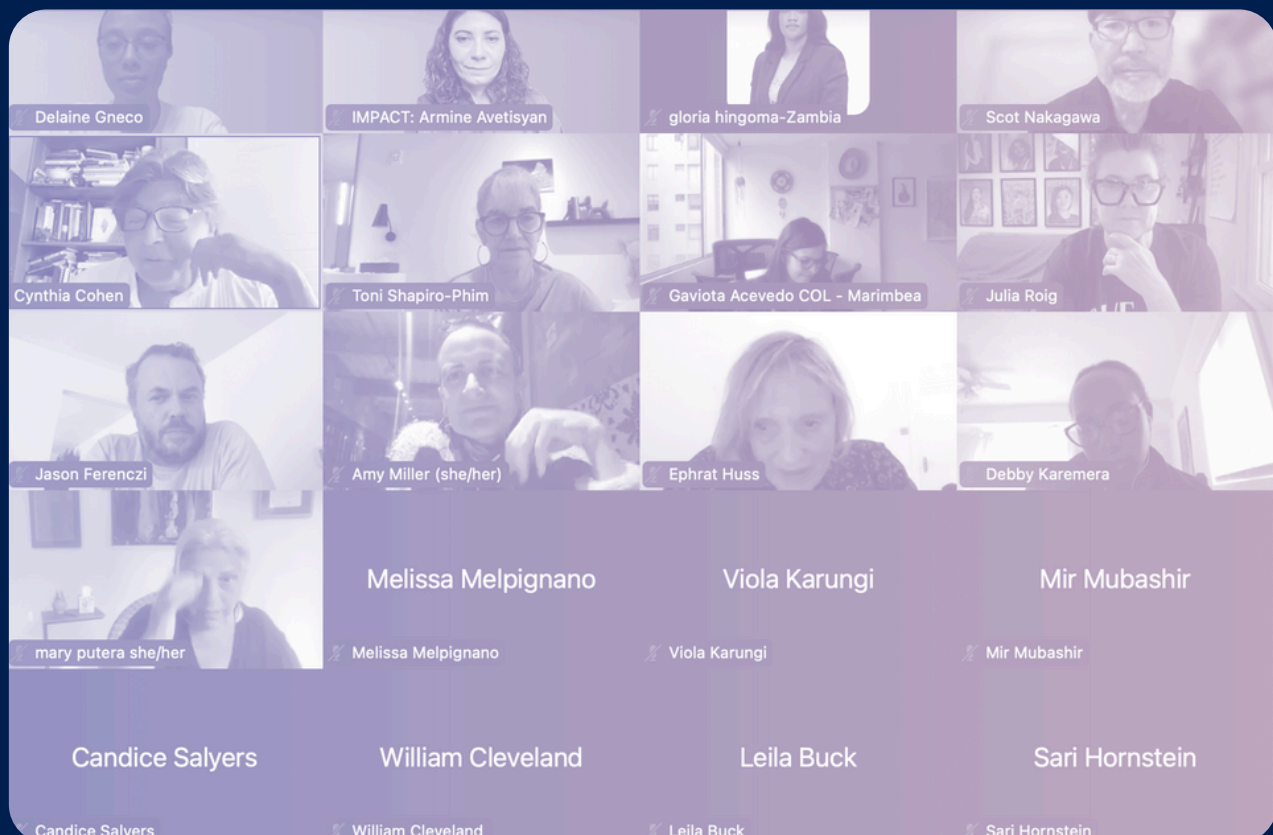


# INTRODUCTION

The second session of the *Conflict Kaleidoscope* workshop series—part of the *IMPACT: Creating Hope Together Virtual Series*—continued to explore the intersection of systems thinking, cultural strategy, and movement-building in contexts of deep social conflict. The session featured a powerful storytelling presentation by longtime activist and strategist **Scot Nakagawa**, who revisited the landmark 1992 No on Ballot Measure 9 campaign in Oregon. Drawing from lived experience, Scot recounted how arts, community organizing, and coalition work came together to defeat a discriminatory constitutional amendment targeting LGBTQ+ people.

The session also included an interpretive commentary by **Julia Roig**, who offered systems thinking insights into the dynamics Scot described—highlighting feedback loops, narrative strategies, and adaptive leadership.

A rich group discussion followed, inviting reflection on meaning-making, polarization, the role of arts in activism, and lessons for today's anti-authoritarian and peacebuilding work.



# “Conflict Kaleidoscope”

## Session 2 in numbers

### PRESENTERS FACILITATORS



### REGIONS



### BREAKOUT ROOMS



### REGISTERED



### COUNTRIES



### NEW TO IMPACT



### PARTICIPATED



### FEEDBACK RESPONSES





# CASE STUDY FROM OREGON

## BY SCOT NAKAGAWA

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### 1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF OREGON'S RACIAL AND POLITICAL DYNAMICS

- Oregon was founded as a whites-only homeland, with laws excluding Black people and terminating Indigenous tribes.
- Early settlers feared alliances between Black and Native communities and resisted Southern slaveholding elites.
- Oregon's racial homogeneity was sustained through exclusionary immigration laws and sundown policies.
- The Northwest Imperative in the 1970s-80s aimed to colonize Oregon with white supremacists and neo-Nazis.
- Hate groups like East Side White Pride emerged and were responsible for racially motivated violence (e.g., murder of Mulugeta Seraw).
- Rather than diminish, hate crimes increased following that murder—highlighting the organized strength of far-right movements.



### 2. INTRODUCTION AND DETAILS OF BALLOT MEASURE 9

- In 1992, the Oregon Citizens Alliance (OCA) introduced Measure 9 to amend the constitution.
- The measure aimed to label LGBTQ+ individuals as “abnormal, wrong, unnatural,” equating them with criminals.
- The OCA had succeeded in Measure 8 (1988), repealing protections for LGBTQ+ public employees.
- Their campaign used fear-mongering: e.g., claims that LGBTQ+ people “recruit” children.
- The measure threatened more than LGBTQ+ rights: it legalized discrimination based on perceived identity, endangering others.

# CASE STUDY FROM OREGON

## BY SCOT NAKAGAWA

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### 3. STRATEGY AND FORMATION OF THE NO ON 9 CAMPAIGN

- The LGBTQ+ community was still fractured from the failed No on 8 campaign, where they had been sidelined.
- Donors were hesitant to support another campaign after being disappointed in 1988.
- A grassroots steering committee was elected—Scot was nominated and joined.
- Many members were unfamiliar to funders, leading to further donor reluctance.
- The campaign was caught between two needs:
  - Run a traditional campaign to win votes and satisfy donors.
  - Address internal wounds and restore community trust and visibility.

### 4. COALITION-BUILDING CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIONS

- Scot and others insisted on a movement-building strategy, not just an electoral one.
- Aimed to counter Christian nationalist and white supremacist threats by building deep, lasting alliances.
- Campaign leadership adjusted roles and hierarchies to satisfy skeptical funders.
- Scot's role included statewide development and GOTV coordination in all Oregon counties.
- LGBTQ+ organizers had limited experience in canvassing due to threats of violence.
- Built coalitions with a wide range of identity-based and sectoral groups:
  - African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, Republicans, people of faith, farmworkers
- The Rural Organizing Project helped mobilize small towns.
- Personal bravery stood out—e.g., one gay man in a rural county came out to every neighbor.



# CASE STUDY FROM OREGON

## BY SCOT NAKAGAWA

### 5. THE ROLE OF THE ARTS AND CULTURE IN MOBILIZATION

- A grassroots cultural campaign filled visibility gaps left by the formal campaign.
- Created posters, buttons, and stickers with messages like: “If you have ever known love, vote no on nine.”
- The campaign materials became widespread and beloved: “People remember the No on 9 fad.”
- Hollywood support—led by Gus Van Sant—generated visibility and major fundraising boosts.
- Celebrity involvement helped Oregonians feel supported: “People outside the state actually care about us.”
- National visibility through New York Times editorials and media appearances followed.

### 6. REFLECTIONS ON MOVEMENT-BUILDING, DIGNITY, AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

- Scot emphasized that campaigns ≠ movements.
- Campaigns are zero-sum; movements are about recognition, meaning, and collective dignity.
- The campaign could never fully meet people's need for affirmation, but it had to create space for it.
- When the No on Hate campaign emerged, Scot argued for cooperation, not competition: “They’ll reach people we won’t.”
- This openness led to parallel expressions of activism and broader participation.
- Volunteers didn’t just want to win a vote—they wanted to be seen and respected.

### 7. LESSONS LEARNED: CAMPAIGN VS. MOVEMENT

- **Victory:** Measure 9 was defeated with 56% of the vote.
- **Backlash:** The OCA responded with 30+ local measures, winning nearly all, though later struck down.
- The campaign **unintentionally polarized** rural counties—deepening urban–rural divides.
- **Lesson:** Campaign victories can sow future challenges if consequences aren’t anticipated.
- Despite tensions, **long-term infrastructure emerged:**
  - **Basic Rights Oregon** evolved from campaign structures.
  - Ongoing ties with **immigrant and rural organizing groups** remain strong.



# MAKING SENSE OF COMPLEXITY - SYSTEMS THINKING LENS

## BY JULIA ROIG

Picking up from Scot's story, Julia offered a systems-oriented interpretation. She drew from Rumi:

"If you think because you understand one, you must also understand two... But remember, you also need to understand 'and.'"

This "and-thinking," she explained, captures the essence of systems practice—an alternative to binary or linear logic. Scot's narrative illustrated a "cloud problem," not a "clock problem." You can't reassemble a campaign like a watch. Instead, you learn to observe, adapt, and respond to ever-shifting dynamics.



### SYSTEMIC PRACTICES EMBEDDED IN THE CAMPAIGN

- Helping the system "see itself" through identity-based No on 9 groups (e.g., African-Americans, immigrants, Republicans voting No).
- Engaging across levels—from rural counties to Hollywood, local to national.
- Identifying feedback loops and unintended consequences: "Victory consolidated an anti-LGBTQ+ base in rural areas."
- Allowing conflict as generative: the campaign tolerated dissent and supported parallel initiatives like the "No on Hate" campaign.

**"We are not  
separate from the  
system we are  
trying to change.  
We are the  
system."**

Julia Roig

Julia critiqued how systemic change is often constrained by short-term funding cycles and linear logic. "We are funded through a sick system," she noted, "where impact is often fabricated to fit boxes." Yet, despite this, the campaign showed that adaptive, relational organizing could reshape reality.

## REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

### QUESTION

What lessons from the No on 9 campaign inform your current work in the anti-authoritarian movement?

### SCOT'S RESPONSE

- Movements are messy and require recognizing that people have their own agency — “more like herding cats than sheep.”
- People join movements for recognition, respect, and meaning, not just material needs.
- Campaigns are poor vehicles for deeper narrative and meaning-making work; movements are where collective story weaving happens.
- Quoted Liz Mann: “Stories are like stars, but narratives are like constellations.”
- Highlighted the critical role of arts and culture (e.g., buttons, posters, T-shirts) in energizing and sustaining engagement.
- Cultural actions gave people confidence to act and reshaped public perception:

### COMMENT

- Reflected on the tension between systemic change and the pursuit of meaning.
- Shared experience of ongoing street protests in Israel against war: despite limited systemic success, people are motivated by a profound sense of purpose and solidarity.
- Emphasized how people often act not out of strategic calculation, but for deep emotional meaning.

**“Even out of a broken vessel, good things can be had.”**

Scot Nakagawa

## REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE



### QUESTION

Could the arts move beyond symbolic buttons and posters toward deeper narrative transformation, like in The Laramie Project?  
How to set the conditions for such narrative-shifting art to emerge in movements?

### SCOT'S RESPONSE

- Acknowledged they weren't thinking in terms of cultural strategy at the time—more about visibility and youth mobilization.
- Recalled organizing a Nirvana concert to energize youth and counter white supremacist recruitment.
- Referenced the Anne Frank House in Boise as an example of a memorial-education site that supports deeper community transformation.
- Admitted that the campaign didn't have the mindset for systemic narrative change but now sees its importance.

### JULIA'S RESPONSE

- Affirmed Cleveland's point, noting a growing consciousness among organizers of the need for long-term cultural shifts.
- Emphasized the importance of working closely with artists and cultural workers to co-create new practices and shared space for collective meaning-making.

***“That’s part of why I think people like Scot and I are spending as much time as we are with arts and cultural workers right now... so that we can, hopefully, breathe life into the kinds of ways of doing this work.”***

Julia Roig

## REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

### QUESTION

How do you address the stress responses and embodiment of fear that come with shifting into complex systems thinking?

### JULIA'S RESPONSE

- Emphasized the need for intentional containers—spaces for grief, rage, rest, self-care, and community grounding.
- Not everyone needs to do all roles; part of systems practice is knowing your place in the movement.
- Encouraged self-reflection

### SCOT'S RESPONSE

- Drew on Hawaiian cultural wisdom, especially the concept of pono (balance).
- Justice and sustainability require physical and emotional balance between self, others, and nature.
- Noted his own embodied stress (e.g., dizzy spells, stiff necks), which he attributes to overwhelm and systemic pressure.
- Pointed out how bodily stress can generate interpersonal conflict if not addressed.

***“You cannot be in good relationship... if you have not worked out and constantly implemented forms of justice.”***

Polly Walker

***“Where am I right now? What do I need? What does the movement need of me?”***

Julia Roig

### COMMENT

- Shared that in Cherokee culture, there is no direct word for “peace,” but rather tohi, which means balance and good relationship with all things.
- Extended the concept of relationship to include not just humans but the “more-than-human world” (e.g., buffalo, seas, lands, star nations).
- Echoed Scot and Julia’s emphasis on balance and justice and framed this as a lived tradition, not a romantic ideal.

### 1. WHAT RESONATED FROM SCOT'S STORY?

#### GROUP 1:

- Participants appreciated Scot's shift from event-based thinking to relational systems thinking.
- A participant from Colombian reflected on how composing a peace-themed song in response to the Palestinian conflict helped her cope with despair and channel energy into action.
- Another participant, a theater artist, shared how his work in devised theater mirrors Scot's grassroots engagement. He questioned: "Does art have limits? What more can we do to create systemic change through art?"

#### GROUP 2:

- Reflected on the emotional impact of Scot's story. They were struck by how messy and uncertain the campaign felt at the time—and yet it still led to meaningful change.
- Noted strong parallels between Scot's context and today's rising authoritarianism, expressing that his story renewed her hope in the power of creative, collective resistance.
- Highlighted how the story mirrored current activist fatigue—particularly in places like Israel—and affirmed the need to turn to the arts during times of despair.
- Identified with Scot's efforts to connect people across divisions, saying it inspired her approach to facilitating shared purpose among cultural workers in rural Colombia.



### 2. STRENGTHS OF SYSTEMS ANALYSIS IN ARTS-BASED CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION



#### GROUP 1:

- Emphasized that “we are the system”—change must start within our own structures and behaviors.
- Critiqued how even peacebuilding systems replicate hierarchies and trauma (e.g., in post-conflict Colombia).
- Art was seen as a way to break friend/enemy binaries and foster complexity, empathy, and infinite game thinking.
- Participants highlighted the importance of thinking backwards from long-term goals, while staying adaptive.

#### GROUP 2:

- Emphasized that Indigenous worldviews—such as those of Cherokee and Aboriginal peoples—already embody systems thinking through their understanding of dynamic, cosmic balance.
- Described the creative process itself as a system—organic, relational, and inherently in sync with systems theory.
- Reflected on the challenge of helping people recognize they are part of a system in an age of hyper-individualism and digital disconnection.
- Stressed the value of retrospective clarity—how looking back at campaigns like Scot’s can help us reframe present struggles with more trust in the process.
- Arts offer a rare space where uncertainty, contradiction, and transformation can coexist—providing fertile ground for both individual and collective change.



### 3. DESIGNING ARTS-BASED INTERVENTIONS WITH A SYSTEMS LENS

#### GROUP 1:

- Arts-based interventions should be imaginative, experiential, and grounded in human connection.
- Suggested strategies included:
  - Interactive/devised theater with impacted communities.
  - Music composition based on lived experience to process trauma and spark dialogue.
  - Symbolic transformation of violent objects, like the Escopetarra (guitar made from a gun by Colombian artist César López).
- Participants emphasized that creative response is both emotional survival and strategic action.

#### GROUP 2:

- Interventions can bring together diverse community members to recognize their interdependence and co-create solutions that serve a collective vision. E.g. traditional music as a participatory tool for systems mapping in communities.
- Rather than treating art as a specialized domain, systems-based approaches invite people to engage with creativity as a shared, everyday process that fosters agency and connection.
- Art-based practices can help participants engage with uncertainty and complexity, offering symbolic, embodied, or metaphorical ways to explore change and resilience.
- Symbolic exercises that explore personal evolution—such as drawing or storytelling across life stages—can help individuals reflect on continuity and growth within systems.
- Systems-based art interventions should blur the boundaries between art and everyday action, making creative practice a tool for relational work, reflection, and change.

# ABOUT IMPACT

IMPACT is a diverse global organization, advocating for arts and culture to transform conflict and build more creative and just societies. IMPACT is governed by a diverse and dynamic board comprised of artists, scholars and practitioners in the field of arts, culture and conflict transformation from around the globe, including Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Israel, Kenya, Japan, Serbia, Turkey, and the Philippines.



## JOIN THE IMPACT COMMUNITY

- Partner with Us: we are looking for like-minded individuals, networks and organizations to work collaboratively with in the space of arts, culture and conflict transformation
- Take part in our upcoming events: sign up to our newsletter to receive news about our in-depth event series on the key themes from IMPACT: Creating Hope Together
- Join the IMPACT community: sign up to our newsletter, follow us on social media: @impactartorg
- Find out more about our Virtual Series “IMPACT: Creating Hope Together”: read our reports and check out the videos on our YouTube channel
- Find out more about the AHA Project: read the inspiring stories of the IMPACT community
- Donate to IMPACT, so that we can support our growing IMPACT community by advocating to policymakers, funders and leaders for arts, culture and conflict transformation
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