

# Stereotyping Kanaka Maoli—A Stewing Deterrent

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*For centuries indigenous peoples all across the world have been subject to cultural, spiritual, and corporeal genocide. Many dismiss this as a thing of the past, but the war against Colonialism persists today in the perpetuation of this genocide in the forms of stereotypes and other means of erasure. In this essay I explore how indigenous people around the globe, and more specifically Kanaka Maoli, are battling these forces. I look to our kūpuna, interview modern Kanaka scholars, and draw from the interpretations of imperial historians to construct a strong argument that will inspire Kanaka to strive for more than what the Colonialist would lead us to believe. This essay is a call to arms in a sense, meant to be heard by the masses of Kanaka Maoli, so that we may restore our maui.*

*E ola mau kānaka!*

*Ola!*

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Indigenous peoples have been victims of cultural, spiritual, and corporeal genocide since the beginning of the 15th century. Whole tribes, villages, and peoples have been slaughtered, enslaved, and forcefully assimilated into the more “civilized” Western race that is predominantly Caucasian and Christian. All of the aforementioned are byproducts of a process referred to today as Colonialism. Although enacted through different courses of action depending on location, colonialism historically follows a familiar methodology—first, is to assert power over a people with displays of superior technology and other means of intimidation. Second, is to demand land and, if necessary, take it by force. Last, is to impose ideologies on the indigenous people, discrediting their

entire culture and making them forget who they are, thus making them assimilate to one’s own “superior” culture. Colonialism has proven sustainable through the past because within a generation or two of oppression, the affected people soon adapt to make the best life for themselves, which often results in submitting to the oppression.

Beginning in the 20th century, with movements led by leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States, people have begun to take political action against overtly racist and unjust oppression. Unfortunately, once colonized, a people’s dealings with oppression, and in many cases outright racism in the forms of stereotypes and various appropri-



As a young aspiring Kanaka in the 21st century, Kaipulaumakaniolono looks to apply the teachings of his kūpuna in modern context to best serve his lāhui. He keiki nō kēia o nā Pali Hāuliuli e Halehale mai ana i ka Poli Ko’olau e pūlama mau ana i ka pono o ka maui kanaka.

ations, become just as systemic as it is social. Even today, where knowledge has become currency, the media plays an intrinsic societal role in maintaining the colonial process by limiting indigenous peoples access to the currency that is knowledge. A substantial knowledge of history and culture is essential for a people to truly determine who they are and who they want to be, thus concluding to finding their own identity. Mainstream media in conjunction with affluent bourgeois and government officials perpetuate the colonial process of erasure through its underrepresentation and ignominious treatment of indigenous peoples across the world, leading to conflicting identities that originate in the perpetuation of stereotypes.

Stereotypes are the most prevalent and easily perpetuated facet of the imperial mechanism. Beginning in the plantation era, affluent plantation owners brought in Chinese laborers to inspire the “insufficient” and “lazy” Hawaiians to work harder. However, this tactic was unsuccessful due to the fact that Hawaiians could farm their own ‘ai<sup>1</sup> and gather their own i‘a<sup>2</sup>. The unwillingness of Kanaka Maoli<sup>3</sup> to work at the plantations, simply because they had no reason to be doing such grueling work, became the catalyst for the birth of the “lazy Hawaiian” stereotype (Takaki). Kanaka Maoli were recalcitrant at best in their attitude toward fattening the pockets of greedy foreign businessmen. The bourgeoisie then permeated the idea that Hawaiians were lazy, and, much like the highly pretentious gospel they spread, the stereotype was quickly imbibed by all settlers. Soon enough, much like a rancid broth, the stereotypes eventually stewed into the minds of Kanaka Maoli themselves over the course of the next generation. Here stands the ultimate indicator of imperial success: when it makes a people, in this case Kanaka Maoli, doubt themselves. This is exactly what Ngugi Wa Thiong’o references in his book *Decolonizing the Mind* as the “cultural bomb” (Ngugi 3). As an indigenous scholar, he has found that colonization of the mind is much harder to unshackle than the physical occupational chains that enslave the physical body. In her Master of Fine Arts thesis, Lena Lei Ching comments on her experience with this, sharing that “some Hawaiians have become so affected by colonization that they have become skeptical about the importance of our Native legacy” (Ching 6), the

reason being that Kanaka have had it steeped into their minds that laziness is their legacy. A legacy of laziness is easy to be skeptical of, neither I nor anyone I know would care to leave such a legacy. The stewing stereotype of the “Lazy-Hawaiian” erased Kanaka Maoli memory of their history and replaced it with the common insufficient caricature we have come to know today.

The notion of Kanaka Maoli insufficiency perpetuated through imperialism’s stewing stereotypes has been detrimental to the general outlook of Kanaka Maoli. I struggle every day to comprehend why Kanaka Maoli have such low expectations for themselves. So many of my peers see work in carpentry, as a bartender, or being the cashier at Safeway as their only options. They cannot see themselves in any way achieving more than the minimum wage. I have tried, on multiple occasions, to reason with them: “Do you not know who your ancestors are? Do you not realize that Maui snared the sun? That ‘Umi rallied commoners to become the first Ali‘i ‘Ai Moku<sup>4</sup> of Hawai‘i island? Did it not occur to you that our literacy rate exceeded 90% when most of the world had yet to put pen to pad?” The answer to each of these questions is a flat, straight, and sad “No.” That answer, in varying degrees, is the basis for every problem Kanaka Maoli face today. In a forthcoming chapter of the *Routledge Handbook for Indigenous Language Revitalization*, Kaliko Baker speaks to this issue, confirming that, “as a result of (the) erasure of the aboriginal epistemological views of the world of the Kanaka Maoli, our *kūpuna*, elders, were realizing that they were being voided of their *mauli*” (Baker 3). He defines *mauli* as “the life force of Kanaka Maoli,” and illustrates further how our *kūpuna* fought to sustain this *mauli* in the establishment of true Kanaka Maoli newspapers<sup>5</sup> in 1862, the first being *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika*. These were run completely by Kanaka Maoli to produce content for Kanaka Maoli audiences, “these newspapers were becoming repositories of knowledge that our *kūpuna* were compelled to save and perpetuate” (Baker 3). The newspapers often featured *mo‘olelo*<sup>6</sup>, *mele*<sup>7</sup>, and glimpses into the social, political, and spiritual lives of our *kupuna* pre-contact.

4 Literally “Chief that eats the land,” said of a chief who rules an entire island

5 An overwhelming majority were completely missionary owned and run strictly with the intention of spreading the gospel, hardly every printing anything relevant to Kanaka Maoli. See Baker’s chapter for more detail.

6 Traditional stories

7 Traditional songs

1 Any type of vegetable or produce

2 Any type of meat or poultry

3 Literally “Indigenous/Real People,” from here on used to reference Native Hawaiians

Erasure is the only plausible reason for this evidence of Kanaka Maoli perseverance and ingenuity being irrelevant and unknown to us today. After the overthrow of 1893, history was completely rewritten by the new colonial empire. Act 57, Section 30 of the 1896 Laws of the Republic of Hawai'i banned the use of the Hawaiian Language in all schools and violation of this new law was punished corporeally (Baker 3). Kanaka Maoli literally had the mauli beaten right out of them. In the rewriting of our history, done solely by haole<sup>8</sup> "scholars" highly incentivized by the Provisional Government to present their side of the story (Sai), Kanaka Maoli traditional history was completely excluded. Lena Lei Ching takes note of this, citing Ralph S. Kuykendall's book *The Hawaiian Kingdom* as having only 3.6% on "Before the haole came," the rest being entirely based on how missionaries and imperialist saw the course of history. Kuykendall, like many scholars, proclaim Captain Cook as the "discoverer" of the Hawaiian Islands among other things (Ching 4). All too common is this narrative of "scholars" proclaiming that racist and evil sea-wanderers are great heroes of "discovery," the most famous case being Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of what he thought to be India. The phrase "In 1492 Columbus sailed the Ocean-Blue" has been ingrained into the minds of most children in the public school system both in song and book. Maliakamo'opunawahineopanila DeSoto Ka'aihue calls these acts of erasure forms of colonial "violence" and illustrates that "books are the vehicles that can potentially mobilize erasures" (Ka'aihue 75) as she deconstructs the story 'O Hāloa ka Hawai'i Mua Loa in her doctoral dissertation. These issues of erasure are rife in all sources of public education.

Kanaka Maoli have been rewritten out of history, thus giving us no place historically and putting us in a bind as to who we are culturally, socially and spiritually. Indigenous people struggling with issues of identity is not uncommon today, as Moses E. Ochonou, an Associate Professor at the University of Vanderbilt, writes in his book *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria*:

In Northern Nigeria the erasure of the cultural singularities of Middle Belt communities through the civilizational agency of Hausa-Fulani colonials engendered and foreshadowed tensions that were not rooted in colonial ethnicity per se but in the dueling struggles of Anglo-caliphate administrators and middle belt people. (216)

In simpler put terms, Ochonou basically describes the bourgeoisie as pinning the local tribes against each other by leading the two tribes to believe that they had conflicting interests. While this is not found common in Hawai'i, as the islands were united under Kamehameha Paiea's rule in the late 18th century, my uncle from *Aotearoa*, otherwise known as New Zealand, tells many accounts of the British imperialist pegging *iwi*, or tribes, against each other simply by giving false accounts of words said that could be taken as insult, thus allowing the *iwi* to kill each other while the colonials took the land. This is recognized by Ka'aihue as a form of erasure that Sankaran Krishna terms as "abstraction," Krishna is cited as saying "Abstraction... is a screen that simultaneously rationalizes and elides the details of [the] encounters [between foreigners and the indigenous peoples]" (Ka'aihue 77). This severe distortion of truth and accounts often leaves a people without a clue as to what transpired to put them in very precarious situations. In not knowing how one have arrived in a situation, one cannot possibly know how to get out. This is the issue of identity which plagues Kanaka Maoli today.

In today's modern world, Kanaka Maoli are taking steps to reinvigorate our mauli in the reintroduction of traditional mo'olelo, thus returning the integrity to our identity. In an interview, Kalehua Krug, as the spearhead of Hawaiian Immersion reform, recognizes that "[erasure] is perpetuated through our own self-colonization." This is why, in his work with the Department of Education *Papahana Loiloi Kaiapuni*, he is working hard to ensure that the new curriculum certifies that all of our students have a strong sense of place and identity. This is essential as it will make the Hawaiian language much more than just the medium of education, something that students are generally not fond of, but also a vehicle to enjoy stories and engage in fun extra-curricular activities, which students enjoy.

Integration and normalization of Kanaka Maoli ideologies, values, and language is paramount to the reinvigoration of mauli and undoing of erasure. In an interview with Kaliko Baker, he spoke to building an institution steeped in Kanaka Maoli ideologies saying, "Christians are strong because every Sunday they are instructed on their history, their mo'olelo. If we had an institution similar to the church, we would feel more secure in who we are." While Kanaka still battle to establish a more formal context of cultural normalization, over the past 20 years a few Kanaka-friendly hubs have developed on the University campus. Ka Papa Lo'i o Kanewai down near

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the Hawaiian Studies building has naturally reeled in Kanaka Maoli students, many of whom are in the Hawaiian Studies or Language departments and are working to strengthen their understanding of who their kupuna were and how they can best implement that ancestral knowledge. This being my first semester at the University, I applied for and got a job at Native Hawaiian Student Services and have at least four *hoa kama'ilio*<sup>9</sup>. I intend to keep our relationships purely in 'olelo so that we normalize its presence in this "Hawaiian place of learning" that we call the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. To those who I know can 'olelo, I remain vigilant in my strict use of 'olelo with them because I know that our use of 'olelo will inspire others to make 'o lelo a regular part of their lives as well. It is quite often that when someone notices a group speaking exclusively in Hawaiian that they will come and comment; most often these comments are of thanks and appreciation for our remaining steadfast in our language and inspiring them to do so themselves.

In order for Kanaka Maoli to truly progress we cannot tolerate complacency in anything we do. Malia Ka'aihue is absolutely correct when she asserts that these acts of imperial erasure are malicious acts of violence because our people have been subject to utter social genocide. We have had the caricature of a "lazy" and "insufficient" Hawaiian completely ingrained into our minds whether we like it or not. All of the brilliant Kanaka Maoli scholars I interviewed unanimously agree that we are all victims of the colonial mechanism's volatile erasure, this makes it certain that we have no room for error. Our maui must be restored immediately; we are already nearly out of time.

While we have begun, the light at the end of the tunnel is still yet dim. Kanaka have somewhat cleared out the abstraction of our history, providing a clear timetable of our history for any who choose to research, but not every Kanaka is willing to research. Our communities hold prominent members who clearly defy the plantation-day stereotypes, but our youth still do not idolize them because they would rather identify with the American pop-culture. We are working hard, but erasure is ever present. The media refuses to recognize Hawaiian community rallies where hundreds flock to the 'Iolani Palace, instead choosing to air another five-minute special on how the rail has gone over-budget yet again. The representatives for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs are up for re-election this year, but unless one sees the campaign signs on your drive into work one would never know.

Kanaka Maoli remain irrelevant and erased from the media today.

The only way to alleviate this erasure is to have a stronger sense of urgency in our daily battle of imperialism. Kanaka Maoli need to wake up with purpose. Every morning I wake up and I am thankful for the opportunity to be educated and to write these sorts of papers that speak to the issues of our community, because I know that my research can have a profound impact on my community. There is an old saying that goes, "Na ka 'eleu mikimiki, nana e ka lawe lilo," "*It is by the swift and fast, they will take it all.*" The imperial forces who surround us have had a half a century head start; we must advance rapidly. Anyone who knows anything about Kanaka Maoli history and our struggles should have already had a concept of the information encapsulated in this brief essay, but the battle begins now within you. It is now up to you to internalize this struggle and find where you stand in the conundrum of erasure and resistance. Kanaka Maoli especially, I speak to you. Who are your ancestors? What is your language? I beg you to find out, because education is not just about earning a degree and being recognized as "smart" and "educated." As Jamaica Osorio put it to me in a recent conversation, "Education for me (is about) getting my country back." Now I urge you to go and reclaim the history that is rightfully yours.

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