

# Living in Kalihi

## Remembering Stories of Struggle and Resistance

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Political Science 304 (Indigenous Politics)

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*This paper exposes the various ways American settlers remove traces of Kanaka Maoli history while exemplifying colonial narratives of immigrants who struggle to survive in the present colonial space of Kalihi. I will describe the historical and political transformation of Kalihi through an analysis of devices that settlers use in the early twentieth century, such as maps and newspaper advertisements, to dispossess land from Kanaka Maoli. The evidence I have chosen illustrates how the transformation of land has shaped the experiences of residents of Kalihi. While settlers attempt to erase native history in the community, Kanaka Maoli continue to share their stories through their biographies and oral histories to oppose the dominant narrative of blankness forwarded by settler colonialism. Settler colonialism comes in different forms, and this paper reveals the importance of critiquing settler ideologies in order to return ancestral lands to Kanaka Maoli. Since many people are unaware of their participation and existence in colonialism, retrieving native histories will promote a better understanding of the current predicaments indigenous peoples face and will help create alliances among residents to make decisions that will respect the right of Kanaka Maoli to self-determination.*

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As the population in Hawai'i continues to grow, more people demand space and begin to have desires for land ownership. Private entities build luxurious condominiums, shopping malls and other sites that appeal to settlers. Settlers who support these projects live at the expense of Kanaka Maoli, for they continue to perpetuate the legacy of colonialism. They have no intention of returning ancestral lands to indigenous peoples since their primary purpose is to stay and replace them (Wolfe 2006,

388). The debate over the development of Hawai'i is an important issue to discuss because of its harmful effects on the resurgence of Kanaka Maoli. Settlers dominate the conversation on land development today, and their decisions cause the destruction of native land and people. Land development projects are hegemonic because they perpetuate settler colonialism, and they deny the space for indigenous peoples to regain their sovereignty (Kosasa 2009, 197). Settlers promote a concept of "blankness"



This essay was written for my Indigenous Politics course with the help of my mentor, Noenoe Silva. As a Filipina immigrant settler, I was inspired to write about the history of Kalihi, my new home. This essay serves as a reminder of my responsibility to remember stories of resistance that will empower my fellow community members to create change without harming the resurgence of Kanaka Maoli. I hope to inspire others to take action that will contribute to the decolonization of Hawai'i.

in which the land they stake a claim on is uninhabited by indigenous peoples (Kosasa 2009, 197). This form of action erases native culture and history in order to justify the presence of settlers and their claim to land. Kalihi, one of the many communities in Hawai'i, continues to face settler colonialism in different forms.

In this paper, I will describe the historical and political transformation of Kalihi from the nineteenth century through an analysis of maps, biographies, and oral histories. While Kalihi is known to have a high number of low-income immigrants, it also has a rich Hawaiian history. The presence of Kanaka Maoli in Kalihi is central to opposing the dominant narrative of blankness forwarded by settler colonialism. This essay exposes the various ways American settlers remove traces of Kanaka Maoli history while exemplifying colonial narratives of immigrants and Kanaka Maoli who struggle to survive in the present colonial space. The evidence I have chosen illustrates how the transformation of land has shaped the experiences of residents of Kalihi. I argue that it is imperative to show the relationship of the manner in which immigrants and native people struggle to survive in order to remove settlers' claim to innocence, and to critique and to confront their actions that affect their everyday lives. Since many people are unaware of their participation in settler colonialism, retrieving native histories will allow current residents to form alliances with indigenous peoples and to make decisions that will respect the right of native people to self-determination.

The colonization of Hawai'i has produced an uneven social space for Hawaiians, for it further reinforces hierarchies of power in regards to their social, political and economic statuses. During my research, I came across a recent article published in *Civil Beat* about the need for the state government to establish stops for the rail transit in Kalihi. It claims Kalihi as the "last working class neighborhood in central Honolulu" (Friedheim, 2016). Most of its residents work in businesses and tourism industries. This article observes that Kalihi is currently home to immigrants from the Philippines, Korea, Samoa and other Pacific Islands (Friedheim, 2016). Friedheim, however, fails to mention the historical presence of Kanaka 'Ōiwi in the community. The absence of the recognition of Kanaka Maoli in the article reveals the author's historical and cultural amnesia, for the author has no interest in stating why there are not many Kanaka Maoli in Kalihi.

As the rail project continues, there will be more designated stops in Kalihi because of its proximity to the urban core. The presence of the rail will increase property

values and rents, and politicians plan to expand and create more public housing units in the community to accommodate more families. With the expansion of the rail and public housing, more outsiders will desire to live in Hawai'i. Settlers are attempting to appeal to others with the promise of space that they can easily obtain and occupy. This promise of space is a move to innocence that does not restore the livelihoods of Kanaka Maoli, for it secures the power and wealth of settlers (Tuck and Yang 2012, 7). The denial of the inclusion of Kanaka Maoli in development projects does not lead to the restoration of the islands of Hawai'i as a sovereign nation. These land development projects further secure a settler future.

Current residents of Kalihi are in financial struggles and are racialized within American society. Friedheim hints that immigrants have trouble meeting the social and political expectations of society. This is not unique in the case of immigrants because immigrants often challenge societal pressures of assimilation. Most immigrant assimilation narratives in America do not question their subjectivity that is deeply rooted in settler colonialism. Denying the existence of settler colonialism in Hawai'i contributes to the forgetfulness of settlers who have a particular "obligation to indigenous peoples" (Hall 2008, 275). The current hegemonic political system truly supports white supremacy, in which white settlers have historically benefited from the racialization of people (Hall 2008, 275). Friedheim's article fails to unveil the problem that is caused by the American hegemonic culture, which in turn reinforces racial hierarchies. It normalizes the presence of settlers in government institutions unless more people begin to question their legitimacy.

The media coverage on Kalihi addresses only the surface of the problem without critiquing the unequal power relations of indigenous people to settlers within these discussions on land development projects. While some people may disagree with my analysis of the article in *Civil Beat*, it is important to address and critique settler colonialism in Hawai'i. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith observes, history is about power and indigenous peoples' perspective is often neglected (1999, 32). Settlers wish to develop land without seeking knowledge or consent from indigenous peoples. They have accepted the common fact that they live on American soil; therefore, their decisions support American values. Settlers have a vision for progress in Hawai'i in which they invoke American ideas of private property to claim native lands as their home and they solely rely on historical amnesia to accumulate wealth (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). They believe that the

land they lived on was not taken from indigenous peoples who were forcefully removed and eradicated. The federal government ignored the Hawaiian population until Hawaiian leaders helped create an initiative for the restoration of their health and livelihood (Kauanui 2008, 80). Americans feel entitled to land because of their social and political power, thus, the inclusion of Kanaka Maoli in land development projects will challenge settler's claim to innocence and will lead to the return of ancestral lands to Kanaka Maoli.

The invisibility of indigenous peoples is harmful in current discussions on the problems of the American political system and subject formation. Self-determination is fundamentally linked to the "political and legal process of decolonization" (Sai 2011, 116). American settlers cannot dictate the discussion and legal proceedings over the transformation of Kalihi because they attempt to legitimize their actions through U.S. laws, and they extinguish memories of Hawai'i as a sovereign nation. The U.S. federal government, for example, imposed the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act to use blood quantum, which allowed settlers to dispossess land from Kanaka Maoli (Kauanui 2008, 74). Recognizing their tactics will allow current residents to evaluate the government's actions and to remind government officials that they do not have the right to make any decisions without the legal consent of Kanaka Maoli.

The newspapers that are managed by settlers also appeal to their own fantasies and desire for property. The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* in 1904 featured the vast empty spaces of land in Kalihi that was available to anyone who could afford it. It states about a building lot on King Street: "this piece of land is for sale." In fact, the "land will divide into building lots easily and is a fine piece of property" (*Pacific Commercial Advertiser* 1904, 6). The use of the word "property" tells its readers about settlers' belief that land can easily be disposed of, so it disregards the spiritual relationship of Kanaka Maoli to land. Hawaiians have a genealogical relationship with the land that sustains their resistance to settler colonialism.

Furthermore, the advertisements declare authority, ownership, and legitimacy of the sale of the land with the mention of its approval from the court. Readers can see that the court is an extension of American ideals protecting the freedom of settlers to own native land. Truly, indigenous peoples are outside of the American legal system, and Hawaiians had to change their nationality in their own homeland to survive (Trask 1999, 30). This illustrates how settlers will do everything in their power

to maintain and justify their control over land. The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* reveals the eagerness of settlers to earn money from land sales. They believed that land should be privately owned and that it is wasteful for it to be left untouched (Dunbar-Ortiz, 55). Rather than returning land to Kanaka Maoli, they appeal to other settlers with the promise of space and argue that they can make "good use" of the land. Kanaka Maoli are genealogically related to the islands of Hawai'i; thus, they are entitled to take care of Hawai'i and current residents must recognize their right to a sovereign nation.

Western urbanization often refers to buildings, bridges and canals. Indigenous peoples have their own way of living off the land, which is often seen as uncivilized to an outsider. Historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz describes America as the land that was transformed by indigenous peoples, land which white settlers imagined that indigenous people were unaware of how to use properly (2014, 27). Missionaries saw how Kanaka cultivated taro through the ahupua'a system. However, they did not agree with the way the Kanaka Maoli were managing the land. Settlers then declared indigenous people as uncivilized peoples and unfit to rule because they did not know how to properly manage their land (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014, 35). The advertisements in the early twentieth century tell us that the land is "planted with taro at the present time" (*Pacific Commercial Advertiser* 1904, 6). Since the land is for sale, it is implied that the buyer will have to remove the taro and it is not the ideal landscape to build a house. The Hawaiian Islands, the sacred kalo (taro) plant, and the Hawaiian people are descendants of the ancient ancestors, Papahānaumoku and Wākea (Kame'eleihiwa 2001, 71). Kanaka 'Ōiwi view kalo as their elder sibling and is also their primary staple food (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2013, 133). On the contrary, settlers have no interest in taro cultivation because they do not have genealogical ties to the kalo plant and the land. The advertisements show a negative connotation in planting and cultivating taro, and the underlying assumption is that taro is not essential to the American way of life.

Early twentieth century advertisements reveal to us how settlers were trying to promote a sense of American nationalism. They persist in encouraging other Americans to own land, and their participation removes traces of Kanaka Maoli. The occupation of Hawai'i has made it difficult for Kanaka to regain their sovereignty and land. According to Keanu Sai, the migration and settlement of U.S. citizens are direct violations of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva convention (2011, 106). White settlers vi-

olated the international law to protect their interests. Sai also asserts “one of the fundamental duties of an occupier is to maintain the status quo ante for the national population of the state” (2011, 103). It is necessary for settlers to retain their hold and control of land by continuously recruiting U.S. citizens to occupy the islands of Hawai‘i. The continued migration of Americans to Hawai‘i is actively erasing native histories and native people. However, indigenous peoples and their allies need to challenge U.S. settlers by questioning their right to sell land and to allow indigenous people to lead the conversation in land use and management in order to return land to Kanaka Maoli.

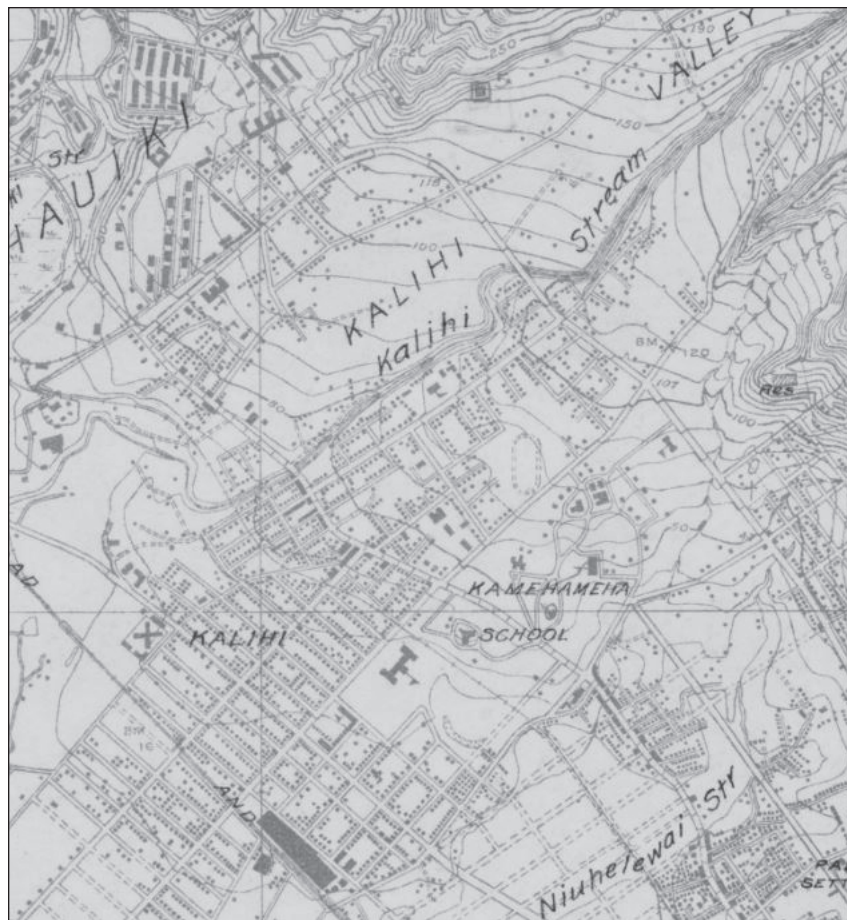
Settlers reinforced the widespread belief that Hawai‘i is an unoccupied state, which motivated outsiders to claim property in order to secure their power. Western maps also advertise this idea of emptiness with the way they illustrated communities in Hawai‘i. By focusing on Western maps in the twentieth century, land in Hawai‘i appears to be mostly unoccupied. The United States

Geological Topographical Quadrangle Map in 1927 portrays Kalihi simply as a piece of land (Figure 1). The United States conducted this survey to broadly illustrate areas that are occupied by people. Those who see this map will probably notice some of the empty spaces in Kalihi where settlers may want to move into. Maps often tell viewers whether or not it is the ideal place to build a house or a building. The person who conducted this survey emphasized blank spaces because there are not a lot of shaded areas. It also indi-

cates how Kalihi has a set of roads that allow people to roam freely. The map does not indicate the type of buildings in the streets of Kalihi, so it does not give viewers an idea about the lifestyles and the social relationships developed among residents. Given the growing number of low-income immigrants in the community during the twentieth century, they had to interact with Kanaka Maoli to find ways to survive.

The map also does not have vibrant colors and drawings that show the trees growing in the land nor does it depict how water flows in the valley. There is a lot of evidence of life in Kalihi, and this Western map fails to show the life of the land. It does not examine the physical space from the perspective of Kanaka Maoli. It simply portrays Kalihi as a space to occupy, and the grouping of homes in boxes tells us that there is room for more people to come and claim property. This settler map denies power from Kanaka Maoli because it appeals to the eyes of the settlers and their understanding of land, when Hawaiians “should understand their world from their

own Hawaiian perspective, not those of their colonizers” (Chang, 2015, 8). It takes a colonial stance that land can easily be owned and transformed. The language of the map is English as well, which illustrates that the map is targeting a haole audience. In 1927, many Hawaiians maintained their native language, as witnessed by the publication of at least four Hawaiian-language newspapers in the islands (Chapin 2003, 149). Newspapers in Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino language were also being published at this time. Clearly,



**Figure 1** Kalihi Valley portion of U.S. Geological Survey map of Honolulu Quadrangle, Island of Oahu, City and County of Honolulu, Hawaii, 1927. Photo provided by Hamilton Library map collection.

this map is meant for a particular audience, most likely white settlers from the United States.

Kanaka Maoli continue to contest claims of blankness in the dominant settler narrative of Hawai'i. Through their recorded oral and written histories, their presence and contribution to Kalihi that settler maps and advertisement fail to emphasize is remembered. John Dominis Holt, in the early twentieth century notes, "living in Kalihi made me more Hawaiian in every way. I was given the freedom to be myself and to be myself was to be more Hawaiian" (1993, 112). He makes a clear assertion of his identity as a Hawaiian living in Kalihi. Settlers do not pay much attention to the oral stories of indigenous peoples. Kanaka Maoli take action in proving that they exist and resist settler colonialism through their oral stories. Outsiders should not ignore the presence of Kanaka Maoli, and they need to be included in conversations that affect their lifestyles.

Holt establishes a form of agency challenging the ways the government has restricted and limited Kanaka Maoli. He points out that Hawaiian families such as the Palau and Gailing families in Kalihi speak Hawaiian in their households (Holt 1993, 117). Even though they were speaking Hawaiian mostly inside their homes, he was able to notice them because they lived within six blocks from his house. In fact, he shows that it was "unavoidable for us to see and hear our close neighbors everyday" (Holt 1993, 115). He had constant conversations and encounters with Hawaiians and their presence made him feel comfortable. The "air itself was Hawaiian" because he was surrounded with people who spoke his native tongue (Holt 1993, 117). This statement highlights the existence of Kanaka Maoli in a colonial space, still able to stay true to their identities with the practice of their language and culture in the area. His observations of Hawaiian families show us the ways that physical spaces generate social spaces that resist settler colonialism.

Through the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Center for Oral History, the daily experiences of Hawaiians in Kalihi are commemorated. Peter Martin and Albert Nawahi Like were interviewed in 1984, and they told their stories of growing up in Kalihi and why they had decided to continue to live there. In Martin's statements, he portrays Kalihi as an ideal place for Hawaiians because his family had owned an acre of land that consisted mostly of taro (1984, 305). He practiced his culture with his family when he pulled taro from their patch and pounded it to make poi (Martin 1984, 304). The Martin family relied on their traditions and knowledge to feed members of

their communities. They shared food with their neighbors, and they exposed other people to the indigenous ways of living sustainably and becoming food self-sufficient, which settler maps fail to portray. Since Kalihi did not have public transportation for its residents, residents had to grow their own food to survive. Martin heavily emphasizes how he grew up seeing his parents and neighbors invite one another into their homes to share food.

It is essential that Hawaiians have the power to grow their own food in their communities because it is part of who they are. The cultural activities Martin performed with his family prove to us that they are part of history because they practice their culture outside of their homes and have produced food that most people in the neighborhood ate. They maintained their identities as Kanaka Maoli, which is essential in reclaiming their own history. Martin's story shows the resiliency of Native Hawaiians to live in a colonial space, and settlers must recognize their responsibility to restore their sovereignty without interference.

In Albert Nawahi Like's narrative, he discusses his father's background as the editor of the *Ke Aloha 'Aina* newspaper (1984, 687). He was aware of his history at a young age, for he understood the problems Hawaiians were facing. He paid attention to the way people were living off the land. For example, he mentions that Ewa Mauka had a taro patch and how the Kamehameha shopping center was once an open kiawe field (Like 1984, 689). His observations reveal to us that people in Kalihi practiced Hawaiian values of maintaining the health of the land. Like creates a map through the use of his words that allow people to envision Kalihi in a way that Western maps fail to do. He makes us think about the politics of location through his personal experiences growing up in Kalihi and how his identity as Kanaka Maoli shapes these spaces. He was socially conscious about the ways other people were trying to survive, and he understood that people who live in Kalihi were mostly low-income.

People were growing their own food and many Hawaiians learned ways to live together and practice their culture along with immigrants from other countries. Kalihi allowed them to understand each other's culture, and more importantly, give agency to Hawaiians to be in a space where they can be themselves. The conditions that immigrants and Hawaiians had to endure were similar in some aspects because they were all being forced to assimilate to the American society.

The two interviews conducted in the late twentieth century reveal the presence of Kanaka Maoli in Kalihi,

and how they grew up to love Kalihi because it gave them a chance to express and practice their culture. These interviews portray their pride for their culture and identity as Hawaiians. Their stories tell others about their resiliency living in Kalihi. Remembering Kalihi in the past is important because it contests the narrative of blankness and the resurgence of Kanaka Maoli.

Settler colonialism fosters an ideology of man's lust for land. Settlers who acquire land from other settlers tend to forget the harm it causes to indigenous peoples. They follow their belief that Hawai'i is "American" land, free for the taking by those who can afford it. The disappearance of Kanaka Maoli in land management and development projects is problematic because it further reinforces the historical erasure of indigenous peoples and the American settler ideology that land may only belong to those who support their colonial actions. Including Kanaka Maoli in conversations about land means that residents are acknowledging the history of colonization in Hawai'i. It challenges settlers' claim to land because it is not for them to take. Indigenous peoples and their allies need to rely on their history to disrupt settler colonialism and to stand with Kanaka Maoli who are actively seeking ways to dismantle this hegemonic political system. Actively learning and keeping in mind the history of indigenous peoples will allow people to approach current native predicaments and to become allies to indigenous peoples' fight for a decolonial future.

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