

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a large, vibrant green leaf. In the background, a bouquet of palm fronds and purple flowers is visible. The person is wearing a dark blue jacket. The overall scene is set against a dark, blurred background.

LEARNING MATERIALS

PILI KA MO'O

By Justyn Ah Chong and Malia Akutagawa (Kanaka Maoli)

MEANING



Reciprocity

The way of life that centers mutual exchange and sharing amongst all beings — past, present, and future, seen and unseen — and the Earth

ARTISTS

It isn't simply old bones in the ground

ARTISTS' STATEMENT

"It seems that now more than ever, Native Hawaiian burials are being dug up and ancestral remains disturbed for the sake of continued "development," "progress," and economic gain here in the occupied Hawaiian Kingdom. By highlighting the Fukumitsu family and their ongoing struggle to protect their 'iwi kūpuna (family burials), we hope this film sheds light on the reciprocal relationship Native Hawaiians maintain with their family beyond the veil, and allows others to see why for us, it isn't simply old bones in the ground, but rather treasures worth protecting at all costs." - Justyn and Malia



Justyn Ah Chong
Kanaka Maoli

Justyn Ah Chong is an award-winning Native Hawaiian filmmaker from O'ahu, Hawai'i. After graduating from USC's School of Cinematic Arts, Justyn worked as a director, cinematographer and editor at 'Ōiwi Television Network, Hawaii's premiere Indigenous broadcast station. In 2019, his acclaimed film "Down on the Sidewalk In Waikiki" premiered at the Maoriland Film Festival in New Zealand and won the People's Choice Award for Best Short Drama. The film has screened at festivals around the world, including the imagineNATIVE Film Festival in Toronto, the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, and the 307 Film Festival in Wyoming where it was awarded Best of Fest. Justyn was a 2020 Nia Tero 4th World Media Lab fellow, and continues to share culturally-inspired, place-based stories through his production company, Olonā Media.



Malia Akutagawa
Kanaka Maoli

Malia Akutagawa is an Associate Professor of Law and Hawaiian Studies with both the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Hawai'i inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge – Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies and the William S. Richardson School of Law. Malia's scholarship includes State and federal laws protecting iwi kūpuna (Native ancestral burials), preserving cultural and historic sites, and engaging Native communities and stakeholders in consultation on these matters. She is particularly interested in the integration of Native, Indigenous Hawaiian methodologies, customary law, and governance principles founded by the ancient 'Aha Kiole (People's Councils) and incorporated into law under the Statewide'Aha Moku Advisory Committee (AMAC).

FILM SYNOPSIS

Hakipu‘u Remains a Kīpuka (oasis) of Traditional Knowledge

The Fukumitsu ‘Ohana (family) of Hakipu‘u are Native Hawaiian (Kānaka ‘Ōiwi) taro farmers and keepers of this generational practice. While much of O‘ahu has become urbanized, Hakipu‘u remains a kīpuka (oasis) of traditional knowledge, where great chiefs once resided and their bones still remain. The Fukumitsus are tossed into a world of complex real estate and administrative proceedings when nearby Kualoa Ranch, a large settler-owned corporation, threatens their ancestral burials to make way for continued development plans.



THEMES

Caring for the Land, Nurturing Ancestral Relationships

IWI KŪPUNA

While Indigenous cultures worldwide are highly diverse and not monolithic, reciprocity is a common core value that typically constructs relationships of respect between the living and their ancestors. In Kānaka ʻŌiwi culture, the ancestors whose bones infuse the land are known as iwi kūpuna, and as is common in virtually all cultures around the world, their burials are regarded with deep reverence.

Due to the ongoing relentless development in the islands by powerful foreign interests, the land and its original people are under increasing pressure in a variety of ways. In *Pili Ka Moʻo*, we see how protecting ancient Kānaka burials is connected to the integrity of ecosystems, in this case through the farming of taro. In Hawaiian *moʻolelo* (stories), taro originates as the stillborn child of Wākea and Hoʻohōkūkalanī, making the fight for Hakipuʻu — a traditional land district that long predates colonization — even more deeply connected to iwi kūpuna. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the Fukumitsu family’s homeland, Hakipuʻu, is owned by foreigners, primarily the Kualoa Ranch, which has recently acquired more land that contains precious family burials down the road from where the family resides.

ORIGINS OF SETTLERS

The origins of this settler colonial conflict has its roots in the 1800s, when descendants of missionary families came to own and control all of the sugar cane production in Hawaiʻi. The cultivation of sugar displaced Native Hawaiians from their land, diverted water from naturally flowing streams used for taro cultivation, and brought hundreds of thousands of poorly-paid agricultural laborers from Japan, China, the Philippines, Korea, Portugal, and elsewhere.

Many of these people eventually came to call Hawaiʻi home and joined their lives with Native Hawaiians. A unique local culture was birthed out of all of these relationships during the plantation era. Thus, many people in Hawaiʻi today are a mixture of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

KĀNAKA CLAIMS TO LAND

The imposition of western private property regimes onto Hawaiian lands means that property rights take precedence over Kānaka claims to land and their ability to maintain their culture. The colonial structure of the state of Hawaiʻi means that traditional Kānaka burials are not accorded the same respect as those of foreign settlers.

THEMES (Continued)

Caring for the Land, Nurturing Ancestral Relationships

A WIDESPREAD PROBLEM

The desecration of Kānaka burials at Hakipu‘u is representative of how widespread the problem is in Hawai‘i. This film shows viewers that in the worldview of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi, the violation of iwi kūpuna that goes hand-in-hand with environmental degradation reflects the state of being out of balance with the land, the ancestors, and the *akua* (gods) as Kānaka understand it.

The concept of balance and being in a state of righteousness is known in the Hawaiian language as *pono*. At the same time, the loss of Kānaka control over land due to the illegal annexation of Hawai‘i by the United States in 1893 is the loss of *ea* (political sovereignty) over the land. The physical loss of lands and continual threats to ancestral graves affect the state of being *pono* between Kānaka ‘Ōiwi and their kūpuna (ancestors) when they are unable to care properly for their iwi kūpuna.

PILI KA MO‘O

Pili Ka Mo‘o is a stark reminder that for Indigenous peoples, the practice of culture is menaced by the systems of colonialism that are not consigned to the past, but rather are forces that still interrupt their lives in the present. The practice of reciprocity can thus be undermined by processes of state power. But it is nonetheless through the resilience of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi that reciprocity is sustained and passed down to younger generations.



QUESTIONS

Discussion Questions

CONCEPT OF TIME

In *Pili Ka Mo'ō*, we are introduced to Hakipu'u on the Windward side of O'ahu by Kōlea and Summer Fukumitsu, who know exactly where their family comes from and where their ancestors are buried.

The film's title, *Pili Ka Mo'ō*, evokes the past and future, which exist simultaneously in a place where ancestors are future-looking and descendants are backward-looking. This perspective is in sharp contrast to linear time, which is a western construct. When you strip away the notion of linear time, what you have is the primacy of relationship. Ancestors reach into the future to remove obstacles and support the well-being of their descendants. And ancestors speak on behalf of descendants in the *pō* (eternity, dark infinite realm of potentiality) and rely on their descendants in the *ao* (light, the physical, earthly realm). How does that concept of time compare to or differ from your belief system?

BURIALS

Why do you think Hawaiian burial grounds are treated differently by some people than burials in settler cemeteries?

CHANTING

Kōlea and Summer's child was asked to recite the names of his ancestors in the tradition of chanting (called *oli*) in the Hawaiian language. How did you feel when the child began to recite the names?

WALKING THE LAND

What is the significance of Kōlea walking the *'āina* (land) and moving the soil and mud away to free up the spring? Is there a larger meaning here for you and for all of us?

QUESTIONS (Continued)

Discussion Questions

SOLIDARITY

When Kōlea and Ian are arrested for sitting on a road to prevent construction by Kualoa Ranch on sacred land where the bones of their ancestors (iwi kūpuna) are buried, Kōlea says:

Police tried to mediate between us and the Ranch. We were arrested for protecting the historic sites. The Ranch was business as usual because there were just two of us. It's harder to move a hundred people than two. With all of that support, the Ranch decided they couldn't fight us and decided to hold off for two weeks.

After a hundred people turned out in solidarity to protect the iwi kūpuna, the dynamic shifted with the police. How would you explain this change to someone who has never witnessed or participated in an act of solidarity?

IF YOU CANNOT PROTECT THE LAND

In the film, Malia Akutagawa says:

If you cannot protect the land, forget it. And if you cannot protect the ancestors, to help us return to ourselves, then we lose everything. To unearth our kūpuna in the ground, we cannot have our own ancestors rest peacefully.

What is your interpretation of Malia's words?

HOMELESSNESS

Viewers learn that many Hawaiians are homeless because they have been evicted from their ancestral homelands. Indigenous people in the mainland U.S. also experience alarmingly high rates of homelessness, which entails being cut off from one's ancestral homelands. What is the relationship between Indigenous peoples who have been rendered homeless (unhoused and removed from their ancestral lands) and settlers who have colonized Hawaiian lands?

LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY

The filmmakers are guided by love and responsibility for their 'ohana (family) and this extends to their ancestors and the future generations in a reciprocal relationship that crosses generations in the physical and non-physical realms. What comes up for you when you consider this?

KEEP LEARNING

Additional Learning Resources

READ

Education Incubator:
Invitation with Aloha

<https://eduincubator.org/our-stories/>

Noho Hewa:
The Wrongful
Occupation of Hawai'i

<https://nohohewa.com/>

David Aiona Chang,
The World and All the
Things Upon It: Native
Hawaiian Geographies
of Exploration

https://www.alibris.com/search/books/isbn/9780816699421?invid=15354709724&utm_campaign=NMPi_Smart_Shopping&utm_term=NMPi_Smart_Shopping&ds_rl=1264488&ds_rl=1264488&gclid=CjwKCAjw7rWKBhAtEiwAJ3CWLBIWhbZYgEZ0buRski4qELfvDDSWGTVZGHKQ2-bxaQAZLrUN20vJyBoCIfgQAvD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds

Protect Hakipu'u

<https://www.protecthakupuu.org/>

<https://www.protecthakupuu.org/post/why-we-resist>

<https://www.protecthakupuu.org/post/naholowa%CA%BBa-timeline>

WATCH

For more background
about Kōlea, Summer, and
their family, see EPS 1:
Naholowa'a Mo'olelo

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_vp4DyQQAc

“Over many decades, iwi kūpuna would literally and spiritually become part of their burial lands. In this way, kānaka 'ōiwi remain forever connected to kulāiwi (“bone plains” or ancestral lands). Kulāiwi feed our souls and comfort our na'au. These lands speak to us, they sustain us, they resonate with us because the same mana that flows through them courses through our iwi (bones) and koko (blood).” Kamakako'i: Cutting Edge - Mahalo: Justyn Ah Chong

Aloha Rising - Hakipu'u
'Āina Aloha

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=3285002934949370

Listen to Kōlea and Summer at 11:08

Listen to Malia Akutagawa at 19:04

Why we resist

Kū'ē: to oppose, resist, protest



From <https://www.protecthakupuu.org/post/why-we-resist> By Kōlea Fukumitsu

Above all, we resist to protect our way of life as mahi'ai (farmers) and kua'āina (people of the land); and to protect our wahi kapu (sacred places) and iwi kūpuna (ancestral bones) who root us in our culture and for which we can always access ancestral wisdom.

Preserving our traditions and subsistence way of life:

We are mahi'ai, so 'āina is vital to our well-being. 'Āina is 'ohana, it is living and has purpose. When we plant kalo, it is an exercise in resistance. Protesting isn't always about holding signs or blocking a road. Protesting and resisting, for us, is planting huli (taro shoot). We have planted huli here for hundreds of years. Each huli in Hakipu'u represents a continuous and long-standing genealogy of our lives sustained by Hāloa. It demonstrates to all those who seek to usurp our ea (sovereignty) that we are still here, we exist, we are not going anywhere. Our existence is our resistance.

Mahi'ai are kia'i too:

Mahi'ai have always been kia'i to the 'āina, as they protect & preserve some of our most sacred resources. In challenging times, it seems insufficient to be a simple kalo farmer. We have had to step out of the lo'i to fight the powers that seek to dispossess us and wrestle our lo'i kalo out of our hands. The more we access our native rights, practice what we are professing, and access what we can, the more we validate and protect that which we are fighting for.

Why we resist Kū'ē: to oppose, resist, protest



Maintaining the life of our ‘āina and preserving our wahi kapu and iwi kupuna ensures that we can access our ancestral wisdom and continue to sustain our children and mo‘opuna to come:

We have had to defend our ancestral lands from adverse possession to ensure that our wahi pana and ancestral burials do not fall to harm. A few months ago, when I was on Moloka‘i with the film crew for the Hawaiian Soul film, my wife had to face alone the destruction of iwi kupuna on the kuleana lot that had belonged to the Naholowa‘a ‘ohana.

She begged John Morgan to stop the desecration of the iwi kupuna, but he continued with grading and grubbing. The trees, soil, and stones where the burials lay were hauled out and deposited on the grounds of Kualoa Ranch. My wife requested to sift through the soil to see if any bones were taken, but John Morgan refused to let her inspect the soil. This was especially painful for my wife and our whole family. My grandmother planted with intention to honor those iwi kupuna and was very vigilant in protecting them. Now the land is an open, gaping wound.

My tutu and the other kupuna in Hakipu‘u also ensured that access along our ancient Kanohoanahopu trail would remain open. Today, Mr. Morgan has blocked access with a gate at the end of Johnson Road on the ‘Ino‘ino property where my kūpuna are buried. He has done grading and grubbing and taken out lo‘i terraces and, potentially, iwi kupuna in the subsurface layer. He has broken an old cesspool and raw sewage has been spilling into the nearshore waters, polluting our ocean and natural resources, and may also be contaminating my ‘ohana's ancestral graves.

For us, we had to take our stand and block the road from trenching that would destroy our iwi kupuna. In doing so, I was arrested. This act of resistance was necessary because without the spirit of our kupuna in the land, we would no longer have their wisdom and guidance.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.protecthakupuu.org/>
<https://www.protecthakupuu.org/resources>

BEHIND THE SCENES

Production Crew



Malia Akutagawa and Justyn Ah Chong (Kanaka Maoli)



Justyn Ah Chong (Kanaka Maoli) setting up to film Malia Akutagawa's interview Photo By: Ivy Lagod



Justyn Ah Chong (Kanaka Maoli) films Kōlea Fukumitsu harvesting kalo (taro) Photo By: Ivy Lagod



Justyn Ah Chong (Kanaka Maoli) filming Kōlea Fukumitsu in the lo'i kalo (wetland taro patch) at the foot of Kānehoalani. Photo By Ivy Lagod



Kōlea Fukumitsu prepares awa (ceremonial root) for the ho okupu (offering) during the filming.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Resources

REQUEST	Request an educational screening or someone to speak online to your class.
LISTEN	Listen to a pre-recorded introduction to the film and post-screening conversation.
NEXT EPISODE	Pili Ka Mo'o is the final episode in the Reciprocity Project, Season One. For more info on the seven episode series, please visit our website at reciprocity.org .
DISCUSSION GUIDE	This discussion guide was written by Dina Gilio-Whitaker and Mishy Lesser, Ed. D. in consultation with the filmmakers and Reciprocity Project producers.

CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS



The Reciprocity Project embraces Indigenous value systems that have bolstered communities since the beginning of time. To heal from the climate crisis, we must recognize that we are in relationship with Earth, a place that was in balance until the Industrial Age. This short film series and multimedia platform, made in partnership with Indigenous storytellers and their communities worldwide, invites learning from time-honored and current Indigenous ways of being.
<https://www.reciprocity.org/>



Nia Tero is a US-based non-profit working in solidarity with Indigenous peoples and movements worldwide with a mission of securing Indigenous guardianship of vital ecosystems. Nia Tero is committed to an antiracist and inclusive culture centering Indigenous rights, wisdom, practices, worldviews, and protocols.
<https://www.niatero.org/>



Upstander Project encourages decolonization and upstander behavior through compelling documentary films and learning resources. Upstander Project's goals are to overcome indifference to social injustice, develop the skills of upstanders, and contribute to action-oriented campaigns in response to vital social issues.
<https://upstanderproject.org/>



Recreational Equipment, Inc. also known as REI, is an American retail and outdoor recreation services corporation. It is organized as a consumers' co-operative and dedicated to outdoor education. Across films, podcasts, and editorial programs, REI Co-op Studios develops and produces stories that entertain, enrich, and explore the power of time spent outside, while complementing the co-op's broader climate and racial equity, diversity, and inclusion commitments.
<https://www.rei.com/newsroom/article/rei-co-op-studios>



reciprocity.org