

Audrey Lipps
Dec, 2017
Preliminary Research Paper

Indigenous Food Sovereignty in Post-Colonial Hawai'i

I began research on the Big Island of Hawaii in May of 2016 and completed this ethnography in December of 2016 by examining the overarching aspects of food sovereignty, including the accessibility of organic agriculture to Native Hawaiians on the Big Island of Hawai'i. I studied the relationships between natives and non-natives to food sovereignty, and paid attention to both the broader context of a postcolonial society and the more local context of community-based agriculture and developmental organizations. My research question is as follows: *What influences the decisions of native-Hawai'ians and non-native Hawai'ians to participate or not in the production and consumption of organic agriculture?* From an academic and research standpoint, my paper would typically be organized in research format, but due to the length restraint and the purpose of this class, I am writing my analysis based on my literature review and interpretation of the first-hand accounts that I discovered through my research.

Currently, contemporary food politics is a discussion of great interest among social scientists and researchers. It is a topic of great debate and intrigue that inhibits many sociological components. For my research on accessibility to organic agriculture in North Kohala, I chose the snowball approach while interviewing, which is a research method that is based on referral. Once the interviewing process begins, you rely on your participants to help give the names of others who may be interested in the same topic, as well as relying on friends and acquaintances gained through the research. The research that exists is primarily contributing to the actions surrounding land sovereignty and education in Hawaii. Many studies are contributing to the health and well

being of Hawaiians and their well being based on those food habits, including the relationship between food and homesickness and nostalgia contrasting to nutrition and protein. (Lassetter, 2011). Additionally, there are studies that focus on disparities due to systematic and racial oppression in Hawaii and what social workers can do to be more responsive and culturally appropriate. This particular study examines the Critical Indigenous Pedagogy of Place (CIPP) as an approach method that helps to process the indigenization and the impact of that ecosystem in Hawaii, led on a youth-based farm on Maui (Alma, M.O et al. 2014, Trinidad, 2014). Studies show that food security issues for low-income residents of Hawaii can impact them based on poverty levels and their access to healthy food, along with alternative ways of eating, including churches and soup kitchens, (Henrich, 2015). Finally, there are books that focus intently on race and class issues in Hawaii and explore the multiple and complex relationships with colonizers and the history of Hawaii (Rohrer, 2010, Vowell 2011). That being said, there was not a current primary source or collection of sources that document an ethnographic research from an undergraduate living in a specific region on the Big Island of Hawaii studying the specific content that I did. I believe that this ethnography will make a valuable contribution to the accessibility to food and organic agriculture on the big island. My goal of the project, after spending eight months studying and interviewing, was to gain clarity on the specific food accessibility of Native Hawaiians and the production and consumption of their participation of organic agriculture. I interviewed to gain insight on a community that I cherish deeply, to understand and inquire about organizations and youth based initiatives on the island, as well as to gain insight on the invisibility of Native Hawaiian organic farmers and to contribute to the

understanding of this as a contemporary political and socio economic issue that I am passionate about.

I discovered the complexities of native Hawai'ian identity politics that surround the revolutionary food movement sweeping the islands, including questions of agriculture, race, diet and place. I interviewed 15 people in a variety of ages, class systems, ethnicities and occupations. From farmers to teachers to apothecary owners, my research spanned a diversity of participants in North Kohala, the northernmost tip of the Big Island of Hawaii. There are many themes that were persistent throughout the research and that highlighted the political issues on the island. Particularly, I found that local organizations have been shaping the organic movement since the 1990's and that organic farming is both a choice or a non-choice, and it is rarely in between. Native Hawaiians and their access to farming and to land issues is historically tied to the colonial takeover beginning with Captain James Cook in 1778 and leading to the post-colonial era of Hawaii where it currently stands¹. Hawaii is the most isolated land mass in the world, and for it to have been colonized and adapted to not only Western, but American values, has contributed to the way that it is dedicated and differentiated in terms of food and food justice. When farms started to develop and the words "organic" and "no spray" were introduced into the vocabularies of farmers, it was seen as something foreign, something white. The very idea that something can be classified by something Hawaiians have been doing for thousands of years was a new concept; there was no such things as GMOs or non-GMOs, there were only the ability to grow, share and plant for survival. Permaculture, a popular buzzword, represents what Hawaiians know culturally and historically as "permanent agriculture," as something that

¹ Vowell, S. *Unfamiliar Fishes*. 2011.

sustains. The complexities of organic and not-organic food, as mentioned in interviews, is a white man's classification. After its colonization by the British captains, and the birth of statehood that was forced upon Hawaiians by militia, the islands were developed into sugarcane plantations. Hawaiian medicinal healer and community member, Ki'i Cravallo spoke on the complexities and the history of the soil as it is now. "No one needs 60 acres, 20 acres to live on. That's a load of crap. Give it up. Or lose it. It needs to be taken back into the hands who know what to do with it. There's people living in all the good farm lands and all the valleys. There's people trying to grow on former sugar land, and trying to tell us it's organic. You can't compete with that because that's pure corruption." And later, "There is a lack of education on what organic is. Organic has become, the word organic has become within its meaning after Round-Up and all those things that were created. When you talk to an old school farmer, I'm talking old school, everything was organic. The old Filipinos who have been farming forever, everything was organic. So I think it was very confusing for them and then Round-Up and all of these pesticides were made and we had to create this term organic to separate ourselves so that we knew what were eating, you know?"²

Local community organizations have persevered in the ways of organizing and the fight for food justice, sustainability and sovereignty. North Kohala was chosen as the first pilot farm to school program on any of the islands, meaning that there are full initiatives developing from the Department of Education and allowing for North Kohala to step out of the box for two years and to reinvent what farming education looks like. Kohala Elementary School principal David Garcia says, "I think it's very difficult for people who want to farm to farm. There's no land, and

² Cravallo, Ki'i. Personal Interview. 25 September, 2016.

if there is land, it's very expensive. There's no way that young individuals with not a buttload of money, can start a farm or a business. And I would say, I've heard a lot of talk of people buying this farm and breaking it down and leasing it out and I think that could work, that would be an opportunity. So I would like to see more opportunities for young farmers to get involved.³” Local organizations have been the pioneers in changing the way that elementary students are thinking about the futures in an agriculturally-based community, including programs like this and others, designed to motivate students from kindergarten and on to pursue farming practices that are culturally ancient and still relevant to the community of farmers today.

Finally, speaking to the way that Hawaii's economy has been built, it is necessary to understand that the majority of the state revenue comes from the tourism industry, which Hawaiians are calling “culture genocide.” Local store owner Jeannie Phillips speaks to agriculture and its significance to the diversity of cultures in Hawaii, “The native Hawaiians, that's what they used to do. Really, that's how they lived their life, that was their lifestyle. They would grow their taro and homestead and hunt and all those things. And here we are, 2016, and the honest fact is that most of the native Hawaiians are working at the hotel.⁴”

The issue of organic farming in Hawaii is a complex and multidimensional issue, one that has been passed down through hundreds of years of colonization and white-washing and one of the most important topics of our food history, organic versus non-organic, is shaping the way that we look at food and the relationship it has to our environment. It's tied to where we are from and what color our skin is and where our ancestors were planting seeds. Organic farming in Hawaii appears to only be successful and accessible to those who can afford it, and in more

³Garcia, David. Personal Interview. 24 October 2016.

⁴Jeannie Phillips. Personal Interview. 5 October 2016.

cases than not, those who believe in organic food and the right to plant it, by displacing native Hawaiians from their island's ecosystems and straight into the doors of Costco.

Works Cited

Alma, M.O. (2014). Critical Indigenous Pedagogy of Place: How Centering Hawaiian Epistemology and Values in Practice Affects People on Ecosystemic Levels. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*.

Cravallo, Ki'i. Personal Interview. 25 September, 2016.

Garcia, David. Personal Interview. 24 October 2016.

Henrich, KM. (2015). Food security issues for low-income Hawaii residents. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Public Health*.

Jeannie Phillips. Personal Interview. 5 October 2016.

Lassetter, J. (2011). The integral role of food in native Hawaiian migrants' perceptions of health and well-being. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*. .

Rohrer, J. Haloes in Hawaii. Spickard. 2010).

Vowell, S. Unfamiliar Fishes. (2011).