

# SETTLER RESPONSIBILITY

## Respatialising Dissent in “America” Beyond Continental Borders

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**ABSTRACT:** Settler responsibility is a worldview grounded in profound relationships, exchanges, and solidarities between Indigenous and non-native communities. When put into practice, settler responsibility requires constant collaboration, articulation, and radical care to support a rich re-envisioning of peace and justice. Through a critique of white settler colonial discourse, I demonstrate that shared histories of US imperialism link Caribbean and Pacific Islands. Building upon ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui’s notion of *kuleana* consciousness, I argue that decolonial awareness in local spaces is a necessary step towards creating better worlds. Applying the Hawaiian concept of *kuleana*, my qualitative and archival findings from Bieke (Vieques), Guåhan (Guam), and Hawai‘i calls settlers to deepen our approaches and ethical responsibilities to the Indigenous peoples whose lands we occupy. Bringing to the fore that Indigenous movements for demilitarisation respatialise dissent in “America” beyond continental borders, I seek to raise white settler consciousness about our own ignorance of these islands, histories, and peoples.

**KEYWORDS:** Settler colonialism, militarisation, Bieke/Vieques, Guåhan/Guam, Hawai‘i

### Introduction:

The colonising forces of white settlers and the US military did not stop at the edges of what would eventually be named California and other coastal constraints of US Empire. In addition to staking territorial claim to these Indigenous lands and then renaming them United “states” of America, settlers stretched their colonial reach through acts of archipelagic imperialism over multiple islands and oceanic spaces. Indeed, “By the time of the war with Spain in 1898, the United States and its citizens had already claimed scores of guano islands, located in the Caribbean, Pacific, Atlantic, and even Indian Oceans” (Duffy Burnett, 2005: 781). As Duffy Burnett makes explicit, by the closing of the 19th Century white settlers were not just marking US jurisdiction over lands in North America but claiming their authority over the whole of the continent’s surrounding waters.<sup>1</sup> The simultaneity of US Empire is thus a history that does not follow a teleological trajectory of temporality and spatiality, advancing from east to west and over the continent, as many assume by the way US history is mediated through a white settler lens.

Rather, even before Oregon became a state in 1859, settlers enacted the Monroe Doctrine (1823), Tyler Doctrine (1842), and Guano Islands Act (1856) as a way to heave themselves onto a plethora of islands around the world. Reimagining US Empire through the lens of island

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<sup>1</sup> To view a list of the US’ claims to islands, read Skaggs (1994: 230-236).

spatiality thus disrupts national frameworks that triumphantly claim a conquest of Indigenous space as linear and temporally contained (see for example the work of Fredrick Jackson Turner).<sup>2</sup> To be sure, the violence of white settlers upon the Americas' continental lands, waters, and skies continues to spill over onto multiple islands, respatialising processes of Indigenous dispossession and resistance to include islands and peoples around the world. The history of guano islands is an "important and underappreciated early chapter in the story of American imperialism" (Duffy Burnett, 2005: 781). Yet, seldom do scholars theorise island experience beyond the containment of "area" studies.

Area studies form part of a "structuring grammar of colonial modernity" (Roberts and Stephens, 2017: 8). Colonial modernity, as I argue delineates the world into hemispheres, quadrants, and knowable "regions" easily dissected and investigated by curious white settlers to advance our national interests, continental frameworks, and racialised dominance while supplanting Indigenous knowledge—a critical aspect of colonial modernity that area studies often obscures. As a result, white settlers devalue the cultural memories of Indigenous peoples, evidenced by their non-existence in "official" US narratives. And because "memory and forgetting are co-constitutive processes; each is essential to the other's existence" (Sturken, 1997: 2). 21st Century white settlers are tactically "guarded" from recollecting the horrors of our violent heritage.

Settler consciousness is bound by an accumulation of "official" memories that screen genocide with progress and institutionalise white settler cultural memory as the sole proprietor of US History. This works to eliminate the painful realities, past and present, of Indigenous communities from settler consciousness. Which is why "thinking about, with, and from archipelagos" is so important—there is an attempt "to shift the geography of reason, to decolonise theory and knowledge, and to overcome the forgetfulness of coloniality" (Thompson, 2017: 70). Contributing to a broader discussion of the need for settler remembering, Thompson alludes to how through historical repetition, settler narratives not only reveal an enthusiastic redaction of settler memory in connection to the violence of our forebears and their lived experiences, but also actively reproduce such violence. Cast as development's praiseworthy progression, US expansion and settler colonialism into island space is hegemony's "ideal blueprint" for continental superpowers seeking to protect their core (Stratford, 2017: 76). Pushing against disciplinary expectations while seeking to redefine Indigenous-settler socialities, as a new direction in thinking comparatively about relationalities between Caribbean and Pacific Islands and peoples, in this essay I ask: how do archipelagos reveal the global reach of US Empire across oceanic space? How does an archipelagic rendering of US Empire respatialise dissent in "America" while also providing new approaches to settler responsibility?

Through erasures often constructed as "imperial amnesia," island voices and dissent are screened from the consciousness of most "Americans." By imperial amnesia, I build upon memory literature on the nation to refer to the official forms of nation-state power that disappear the experience of empire and colonialism from the US nation state (Sturken, 1997; Gómez-Barris, 2008; and Hirsch, 2008). Indeed, histories meticulously constructed not through Indigenous cultural memory but through the stories that settlers tell about the past, are foundational to this US historical erasure and the proliferation of settler ignorance about US History. Obfuscating the colonial violence in which settlers still participate, imperial amnesia denies the existence of Indigenous counter narratives. Weaponising settler

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<sup>2</sup> For more information concerning his theory of the closing of the western frontier see Turner (1920).

ignorance by screening Indigenous knowledge, white nationalism continues to rise as emboldened white settlers move conversations glorifying whiteness from private arenas into public spaces throughout the country.

As the basis of US History and the militarisation of Indigenous lands, white nationalism is nothing new. Unperturbed and unrestricted, the US military continues to benefit from settler ignorance. Exceeding the nation's continental borders by funding militarised expansion around the world, settler ignorance amalgamates with settler apathy to create globalised privilege. Budding from research on militarisation in three archipelagos, the Hawaiian, Mariana, and Puerto Rican Islands, I argue that as strategic military sites, islands continue as a crux for imperial expansion. Yet growing up on the continent there is never much discussed about islands colonised by the US (Hall, 2009). Thus, this essay is also a critique of white settler imaginaries about US island colonies and argues that an ethics of settler responsibility is a necessary part of larger, now globalised, decolonial projects.

Forming part of a way to think about a burgeoning lexicon and collective consciousness for decolonisation, it is crucial to remember that the US' sphere of influence is not solely defined by land, but also by the accumulation of waters and skies.<sup>3</sup> White settlers were not satiated by their genocidal acts of continental colonial conquest. As Kanaka Maoli scholar Haunani-Kay Trask writes,

*The United States, in collusion with white settlers in Hawai'i, moved inexorably to fulfill the prophecy of Manifest Destiny. Extending the American imperium into the Pacific seemed entirely natural to a people and a government seasoned by centuries of genocide against American Indians (1993: 12).*

Contextualised so that one may begin to conceptualise the role whiteness has played in colonising Indigenous lands on the continent and in oceanic space, Trask makes explicit that US Empire was built from stolen native lands.

Seeking to quench what seems to be an unquenchable desire, amassing control and power over space and history molds white settler positionalities in the contemporary moment. Saturated through this *longue durée* of self-aggrandisement, the white settler's sense of entitlement is an incessant and always incomplete effort to impose white exceptionalism, threading white settlers' inventions of manifest destiny into the present. Such a maniacal thirst for more continues today as a weapon of the US military and extension of what has become a globalised US settler-state. We settlers, those individuals, families, and communities, who cannot claim an ancestral connection to the lands we inhabit, must recognise that there is an opaque violence in colonisation within, over, and around Indigenous communities in the 21st Century. Even if our high school history books demarcate settlers to a past that is long over, we all have a responsibility to elucidate the fluidity of settler colonialism, as it absorbs the current era. Indeed, the need for a more concerted effort towards settler responsibility is global in scope because US Empire and militarisation is also global in scope.

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<sup>3</sup> Such expansive accumulations of waters, specifically, was later defined as the US' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the 1980s. And so, in addition to marine "preserves" US jurisdiction over Atlantic, Caribbean, and Pacific Island colonies extends 200 miles over, under, and throughout surrounding island waters.

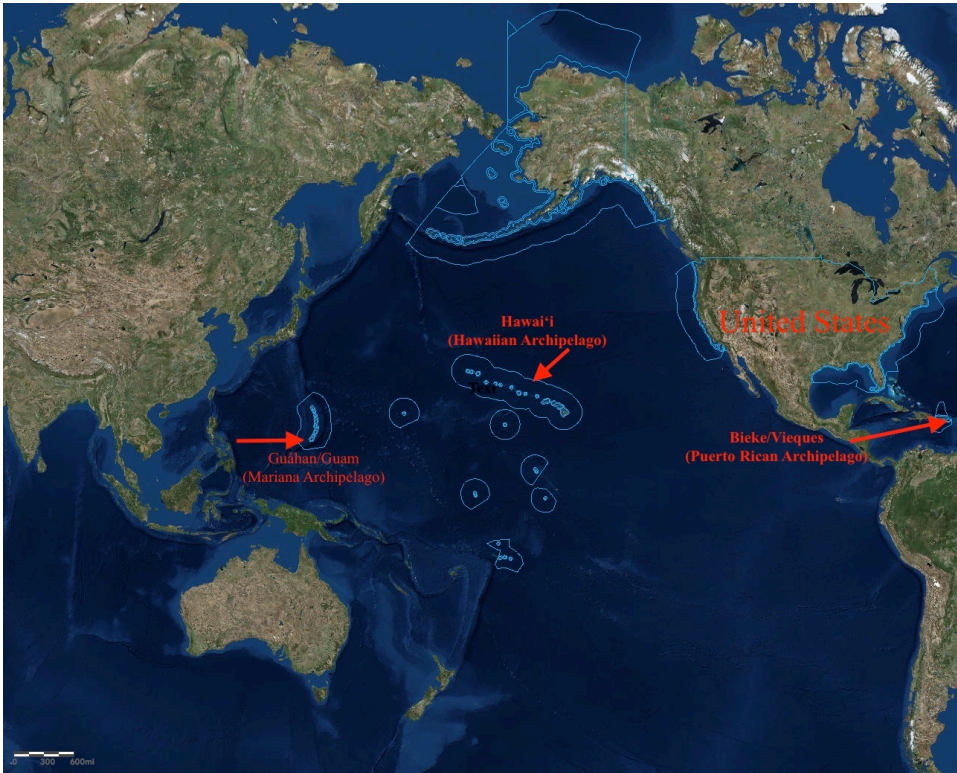


Figure 1 – US Maritime Limits and Boundaries Webmap (Mapping Oppressive Political Structures: US Empire And Island Colonies) – using Earthstar Geographics, NOAA/NOS/Office of Coast Survey<sup>4</sup>

Towards the goal of a decolonised settler perspective and consciousness, this essay offers settler and Indigenous readers a “decolonial gesture” (Gómez-Barris et al, 2014). A decolonial gesture refers to “de-linking from a hegemonic system” while demanding a “continuous process of social change” that “interrupts the course of colonial historiography as usual and wedges another in its place” (ibid: 1). Which means that settlers would join Indigenous peoples and movements in identifying oppressive power regimes and then actively work towards dissolving our colonised understandings of and interactions with each other and institutions of power. Through friendships and an unwavering commitment to humanity we can learn from one another how to construct the world anew. Opening a pedagogical space for decolonising human interaction between Indigenous and settler communities, “settler responsibility” advocates for critical reflexivity by those living atop Indigenous lands to which we have no genealogical connection (Fong et al, 2016). In imagining a greater solidarity towards Indigenous communities, settler responsibility is its own decolonial gesture.

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<sup>4</sup> Online at:

<https://noaa.maps.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=c36ab47fb8764a99970d76b9474f38cf>.

## Settlers Immigrate, Immigrants Settle: Colonisers Arrive

Conscious colonisers know that if a people's imagination can be controlled then their future can be controlled. And while resistance bubbles up in waves to settler authoritarian structures, "hegemonic blocks" (Gramsci, 1913-1922 [1985]) persist as unfettered foundations that maintain colonial imposition.<sup>5</sup> To articulate a paradigmatic shift of consciousness that makes rubble of such totalising blocks, one's settler responsibility must also do the work of reconstructing settler colonial narratives—lest our efforts be stunted by the very entity we look to critique. When settlers decolonise our commitments to settler-invented nationalisms, for example, and instead align with the Indigenous peoples of these same lands, a shift in collective consciousness has the potential to transform society's understanding of humanity, sacred space, and history. In its efforts to erase Indigenous memory, an "American" colonial presence on the continent parallels an "American" colonial presence on islands as simultaneous and duplicitous.

When history books and parental figures only allow space for their children to imagine history through the lens of whiteness, the entire settler colonial structure is reproduced. Praising British-cum-American settler "pioneers" and their "self-sacrificing" roles in bringing "civilisation" then "freedom" and "democracy" and now globalised "security" to "savages" deemed unworthy for self-governance seems to be the duty of white settlers, who, without critically thinking often dissolve our settler responsibilities to Indigenous communities through mirages of goodwill. Equipped with state-sanctioned historical ignorance, there is very little basic understanding of our violent settler roles still associated with US Empire building. As such, we settlers are not just colonial agents but also colonial subjects who perpetuate ignorance, apathy, and privilege to the benefit of US imperialism without critically reflecting on the ways in which this colonial structure is detrimental to humanity. Whether cast as fur-trappers, miners, missionaries, plantation owners and managers, expats, researchers, snowbirds, and tourists who stay but never attempt to integrate into the Indigenous community, whalers, military strategists, soldiers and the like, it is as if all white people are cut from the same white cloth. These (anti)heros and writers of history kaleidoscope settler colonialism, then and now, into an illusion of reality—twisting, bending, and altering a very stark, grey, and violent past for one that is decorative, illustrious, and false. Rather than inculcate settler imaginaries solely through the narrow perspective of white nationalism, settlers should be taught US History on the continent and islands from Indigenous perspectives as a way to break from our inherited ignorance.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For Gramsci, "hegemonic blocks" create institutionalised frameworks of power that are passed down and maintained intergenerationally. For instance, when a settler child inherits vast sums of money from a settler parent who, say, made their wealth from extractive economies on Indigenous lands without Indigenous consent, this transferring of unearned privilege and affluence is arguably a hegemonic block that preserves settler colonial power.

<sup>6</sup> To read histories of US Empire in Biekie from a Boricua perspective, see Cordero Ventura (2001), Ayala and Bernabe (2009), and Ayala and Bolívar (2011); to read histories of US Empire in Guåhan from a Chamoru perspective, see Natividad and Leon-Guerrero (2010), Camacho (2011), Na'puti and Bevacqua (2015), and Hattori (2018); to read histories of US Empire in Hawai'i from a Kanaka Maoli perspective, see Silva (2004, 2018), Kauanui (2008, 2018), and Goodyear-Ka'ōpua (2014); to read histories of US Empire building on the continent from a Hupa, Karuk, and Yurok perspective, see Risling Baldy (2018); to read histories of US Empire and expressions of solidarity in these three islands from settler accomplices, see McCaffrey (2002), DeLoughrey (2007), Fujikane and Okamura (2008), Garrison (2013, 2016, 2017), Davis (2015), and Saranillio (2014, 2018).

Because settler structures of social control and historical imaginaries persist into the contemporary moment, settlers continue to benefit from a long tradition of settler colonialism in what is now considered the US and its island colonies. Such ghastly historical repetitions become common practice among settlers because “What national readers will and will not find plausible in the histories they choose depends largely upon how they perceive themselves and how they wish to see their past—and... how they prefer to view their relationship to aboriginal peoples” (Seed, 2001: x). Screening the past in this way severely stunts our ability to imagine a system of social relations beyond what has been imposed on us all since the late 15th Century. This is because white settlers have always controlled the telling of history in a way that continues to justify the violence of colonial conquest as “benevolent” forms of immigration and as fulfilling our manifest destiny.<sup>7</sup> And, because we live in a global society that values whiteness as the pinnacle of ultimate racial attainment, in part because of these same educational standards, many white people conceive of ourselves as superior to all others. Whether obvious to white people or not, however, this seed of white arrogance is sown through the many ways in which educational standards erase Indigenous histories and geographies. Indeed, manifested through unbridled white settler control, the extraction of Indigenous worldviews within our shared histories has been normalised for the past five centuries. As a result, other modes of thought and spheres of influence that critique whiteness’ self-appointed grandeur are not considered, not included, and are easily dismissed within US historical narratives (Risling Baldy, 2018). This essay is thus premised on the productive tensions between settler colonial studies and Indigenous critique.

Recognising that I speak from the positionality of a white woman who benefits from the structural impositions of her European ancestors onto the Indigenous Americas, I intend for this work to be used to critique the entire settler structure of control. Seeking the colonial undoing of white nationalism, settler responsibility builds upon Kanaka Maoli scholar ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui’s articulations of “kuleana consciousness”. According to ho‘omanawanui, “kuleana consciousness extends to all. Settler colonialism benefits settlers and is bent on eliminating the Native. Settlers and others with new insights, having heard this story, can adopt a form of kuleana consciousness” (2012: 260-261). As a form of kuleana consciousness, settler responsibility creates a space in which settlers too may participate in processes of decolonisation and, by extension, demilitarisation as well. A call for settler responsibility continues to reverberate within the research of many decolonial scholars such as Haunani-Kay Trask (1993, 2008), Noenoe Silva (2004), Patrick Wolfe (2006), Candace Fujikane (2008), Jodi Byrd (2011), Keith Camacho (2011, 2012), J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Patrick Wolfe (2012), Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2013), Dean Saranillio (2014, 2018), Judy Rohrer (2016), and Macarena Gómez-Barris (2017). Highlighting this call, I now turn to the work of Haunani-Kay Trask (2008). Explaining the role of settlers within Hawai‘i’s

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<sup>7</sup> When considering how colonial conquest is naturalised as innocent acts of immigration and white settler manifest destiny, I am reminded of the many times in preschool and elementary school when I latched hands with my white classmates as we sang “This Land Is Your Land” and pranced around in a giant circle. While Woodie Guthrie’s song was intended as satirical rather than patriotic, “This Land Is Your Land” is one example of how young children in the US, settler or not, are indoctrinated to believe in the benevolence of colonial conquest. And so, while white settlers continue to create a country with national borders reflecting our own interests and norms, as noted in the lyrics of “This Land Is Your Land”, white settlers encourage others to join in the fun while avoiding naming ourselves as colonisers. Rationalising the taking of Indigenous lands from coast to coast as kind acts of sharing, I drifted back to my own childhood while listening to my nephew’s 2nd grade class sing “This Land is Your Land” at his elementary school Christmas celebration in 2018.

sovereignty movement, Trask states that non-Kanaka Maoli or those not Indigenous to Hawai'i:

*Are beneficial only when non-Natives play the roles assigned to them by Natives. Put another way, nationalists always need support, but they must be the determining voice in the substance of that support and how, and under what circumstances, it applies (1993: 62).*

As Trask indicates, settlers do have a place in decolonial movements, but it is situated within a framework that does not dictate or take up large amounts of space. So, even if you are a settler you must recognise your responsibilities and participation in processes of decolonisation as valuable, but also, in need of non-settler guidance.

As I argue here, this guidance is crucial for settlers, especially white settlers, because our very bodies map oppressive political structures, not just through colonial cartographies, but also, our pervading whiteness into Indigenous space, like islands controlled by the US. Settler map-making and settler colonialism thus work in tandem as oppressive political structures. This is because while “power is exerted *on* cartography” it “is also exercised *with* cartography” (Harley, 1989: 12). Guided by the reconfiguration of power, the simultaneity of decolonial solidarity and settler responsibility cannot be overemphasised. Even as US Empire obscures its archipelagic imperialism within the psyche of its own continental citizenry, we settlers, *with new insights and having heard these stories*, have a moral obligation to remap and redefine our decolonial solidarity to Indigenous spaces, peoples, and each other.

In so doing, the simultaneity of space is reimagined through acts of settler responsibility. Giving way to the proliferation of decolonial solidarity, expanding the multiplicity of settler and Indigenous spatial signifiers demonstrates that decolonising settler interpretations of space amplify desires to transform the US settler-state. For this reason, critical engagement when conceptualising such spatial pluralities is paramount for decolonial solidarity among Indigenous and settler communities. And, because simultaneity is much more complex than a “temporal coincidence” (Anderson, 1983) US Empire must be reimagined. Rather than participate in the false imagery of the US as a “nation of immigrants” we should push forth a more accurate portrayal: the US is a violent settler nation that continues to dispossess first nations’ peoples of their lands, waters, skies, and histories on the continent and throughout islands.

To honour these lands as Indigenous, quashing settler colonial nationalisms furthers processes of decolonisation. In this colonial undoing, a shift of consciousness moves away from reifying settler inventions of the state and embellishments of immigrant innocence to respecting the peoples whose land we occupy and militarise through non-consensual domination. Hidden in plain sight, white settlers often mask our historical positionalities of violent conquest behind facades of innocent immigration. Yet, “settlers, not immigrants” (Trask, 2008) have never been innocent. To be sure, there was, is, and never will be anything innocent or respectable in settlers believing ourselves and our invention of private “property” and state-based “rights” superior to native claims that demand a return of their sovereignty. Such “rights” and claims to land are rooted in racialised and gendered processes of othering because “both racialization and gendering are processes that are historically constituted through a racist and heterosexist system that reproduces itself through its iteration in bodies, institutions, and law” (Day, 2016: 83). In illuminating these spaces as settler colonial, one uncovers how processes of settler socialisation, racialisation, gendering, and law have never ended, but rather persist into the 21st Century. Whether knowingly or not, white settlers

around the world thus sustain processes of racialisation and gendering according to our own will, force, domination, institutions, and legal constraints.

As a dynamic force, however, settler colonialism is not confined within rigid constraints but is a malleable compulsion that transforms and rearticulates itself according to the desires of those in positions of power - a settler privilege to be sure. For instance, in "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native" Patrick Wolfe's theory of settler colonialism marks the social formation as one where "invasion is a structure not an event" (2006: 388). Settler colonialism cannot be relegated to a past long over. Instead, Wolfe makes explicit that settler colonialism is ongoing in cases where mechanisms preserving settler control over Indigenous lands have never been abolished. In the US and its island colonies the legal imposition of congressional plenary power serves to keep Indigenous and other colonised peoples subject to colonial domination in terms of their relative political status. Building from Wolfe, I argue that settler colonialism constantly rearticulates itself not just through whiteness but also by waves of "outsiders" arriving to Indigenous lands that perpetuate these same structural impositions in the contemporary moment. We are not simply "descendants" of settlers; we are settlers.

Affirming Lorenzo Veracini's concept of settler processes of indigenisation (2010), many settlers do not see themselves as settlers. Preferring instead the more innocent framework of immigrant ancestry, settlers often do not consider acts of immigration as perpetuating settler colonial structures. Believing themselves superior to the Indigenous peoples they often called savage, white European settlers, for instance, were the first "immigrants" to what is now considered the northeastern US. To be sure, the term "settler" does not falter, capaciously including all individuals who move to Indigenous lands not of their own genealogy. Even if immigrants, children of immigrants, and those with histories of forced migration identify as "arrivants" and are perhaps Indigenous to other places, all who occupy lands not of their own genealogy perpetuate structures of settler colonialism (Byrd, 2011).

In an interview of Patrick Wolfe by J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (2012), the two discuss how the violent foundation of settler colonialism is predicated on eliminating native peoples physically and/or politically in ways that dismember them as polities. According to Wolfe, settler colonialism is undergirded by the "logic of elimination of the native," meaning that within settler colonial schemes, Indigenous peoples are targeted for elimination. This can happen through genocide, spatial removal, and compulsory forms of assimilation. Emulating European settlers, Euro-Americans cognitively and structurally attempt to eliminate Indigenous genealogical connections to land through an "organizing grammar of race" that obscures genealogy with race to "encode and reproduce the unequal relationships into which Europeans coerced the populations concerned" (Wolfe, 2012: 1). In turn, Wolfe suggests that in this context, from an Indigenous perspective, all non-Indigenous people, including those who were enslaved or otherwise coerced "are still part of the invasive society" taking Indigenous lands (Wolfe in Kauanui and Wolfe, 2012: 239).

As noted in the work of Hupa, Karuk, and Yurok scholar Cutcha Risling Baldy (2018), white settler discourse and narrations of history continue to eliminate the pain, trauma, and horror of native dispossession from a settler collective consciousness. As a result, I argue that more recent arrivants participate in these same erasures and excavations simply by attending schools and receiving history lessons approved by the settler-state in which they live. And, as Kauanui, Wolfe, and Byrd highlight, while hierarchical degrees of racialisation and modes of self-identity proliferate, "settlers," "immigrants," and arrivants all perpetuate continued forms of Indigenous dispossession. In these histories and realities not only do white settlers



eliminate indigeneity from the historical narrative, but we also coerce others to do the same. Through grading structures that pass or fail students depending on how well they incorporate settler histories, youth in the US and its island colonies continue to disappear indigeneity and colonial resistance through settler impositions.

Indeed, US Empire is not simply a succession of “successful” conquests and wars as white settlers move our imagined manifest destiny westward and beyond the continent. While settlers are taught to conceptualise and argue US history as static and one dimensional without the need of multiple voices, we also cannot deny that US Empire exists as a synchronous usurpation of island space that silences Indigenous dissent. And so, I take seriously when Byrd asks that “settler, native, and arrivant each acknowledge their own positions within empire and then reconceptualise space and history to make visible what imperialism and its resultant settler colonialisms and diasporas have sought to obscure” (2011: xxx). I posit that settler responsibility forms part of such emerging praxis, transforming how relationality is theorised beyond currents of continental constraints and settlers who produce difference through power rather than likeness through resistance.

To be explicit, US Empire gains global power not because white settlers are God’s chosen people, but because our continental power regime violently extends itself in multiple directions throughout the planet, and over islands. But, of course, us settlers are never taught to imagine history in such a way. To begin mending such errors, shifting one’s spatial understanding of US Empire to the marginal, the periphery, and the archipelagic can open up other histories of imperial and militarised obfuscation (Gómez-Barris, 2017). In this reimagining of space, counter-narratives complicate linear histories of the US nation-state and the US’s ongoing process of colonisation.

### Respatialising Dissent in “America”

Despite dynamics of historical negligence and omission, resistance to US militarisation in Bieke, Guåhan, and Hawai‘i took off in the last three decades of the 20th Century. Activists have created new and fluid connections forged between Caribbean and Pacific women while also highlighting that resistance towards the US military is not confined as an isolated event, but relationally links islands around the world. For example, in 1980, nearly a century after the US assumed colonial control of Bieke, Guåhan, Hawai‘i, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and arguably Cuba, Kanaka Maoli community organiser Moanike‘ala Akaka (RIP) travelled from Hawai‘i to Puerto Rico and Vieques. In an oral history Akaka shared with me she recounts her time in Vieques:

*It was kindred spirits. Very gratifying to rub shoulders with these fellow natives in the trenches struggling against this power that oppressed both of our peoples, and desecrating both of our islands, thinking nothing of the fact that this is what they’re doing to us. Of course, it’s just heart rendering to myself continuing to think about the fact that these poor people are living on this island while America is bombing the hell out of it, and obviously America has no qualms about what they’re doing. And they would have continued. If not for the resistance of the people of Vieques, and those of us who started the Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana, if not for the resistance, they would be bombing our islands to this day. It’s sacrilegious. Tourists, people are lured here to these [Hawaiian] islands just like the beauty of Vieques. Vieques is beautiful, and yet*

*America thinks nothing of using us as bombing targets, and would have continued to this day, if we had allowed them to get away with it. I have so much aloha for the people of Vieques because they've been through so much suffering, but it's those rare moments of victory. The bombing stopped on our islands. It's important that people, you know, if you're going to be living here, it's important that people get to know and understand a bit of the history of what's transpired here, and also understand that we're not anywhere U.S.A. We're Polynesia. We've been here for 2,000 years. America is what, a couple hundred years old? It's important for them [settlers] to respect the native culture and to respect the people. (2010)*

When Akaka talked to me about her time spent in Vieques, she expressed solidarity for Viequenses as she related similar experiences of social injustice that both communities share as Indigenous peoples from islands. This expressed solidarity is rooted in the militarised and colonial histories of both islands by the US, a cultural connection to the islands' lands, waters, and skies, and empathy for the plight of one island community to the other. Flourishing into a more globalised notion of demilitarisation solidarity, it was then that Akaka helped unite the campaigns to stop the military training and land expropriations of Kaho'olawe and Vieques, which had commenced on both islands in 1941.

Participating with Viequense fishermen in peaceful protests on land and in the water, Akaka raised a more unified consciousness concerning the ways in which Kanaka Maoli and Viequense demilitarisation struggles are interwoven. Indeed, heightened solidarity among the Kanaka Maoli and Boricua demilitarisation communities crystallised when Akaka travelled to Vieques to extend her support for the Viequense struggle on behalf of the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana/family (P.K.O.). Seen as one of Hawai'i's original proponents to stop the bombing of Vieques, Akaka is also highly regarded for her founding membership in the PKO. The PKO—a grassroots organisation that formed in the early 1970s—proved to be instrumental in halting the bombing of Kaho'olawe in 1990. Additionally, Akaka is also one of the original members of the Hawai'i chapter of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP), an Indigenous Pacific movement that began in the 1970s aimed at denuclearising and liberating the Pacific from western imperialism. As Akaka notes:

*When we started the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific I had just gotten back from Vieques and Puerto Rico, and so my daughter came to join me. We spent time together at the anti-nuclear conference, which became instead of being the Nuclear Free Pacific Movement, the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement because we native peoples were there, and we were there from all over. There were Māoris from New Zealand, Tahitians, and CHamorus from Guam. It was just wonderful us being together as kindred spirits. (2010)*

Weaving Bieke into the Pacific's decolonial and demilitarised imaginary, Akaka physically and cognitively disrupted fixed notions of US colonial cartographies. Inspired by her participation in the NFIP, Akaka aided in linking the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. Akaka will always be remembered as a respected Kanaka Maoli kupuna/elder who tirelessly advocated for Indigenous rights.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Considering Akaka's remapping of Oceania into the Caribbean as a founding member of the PKO, honour her memories by viewing part of her oral history at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkUWFFxoyXs>

Akaka's time spent in Vieques and Puerto Rico helped her conceptualise a more globalised vision concerning the destructive presence of the US military on islands around the world. Vieques specifically and the Caribbean generally, thus have arguably been cognitively mapped within Oceania since the region's earliest demilitarisation mobilisations. A heightened decolonial solidarity among Kanaka Maoli and Viequenses steadily took form in the late 20th Century. No longer imagined as disconnected by oceans and languages, Akaka constructed a historical link between Hawai'i and Vieques through demilitarisation solidarity. In her recognition of the simultaneity of both Kanaka Maoli and Viequense urgencies to stop the military training on Kaho'olawe and Vieques, Akaka interlinked these islands' demilitarisation movements. Physically and conceptually unified through the congruencies of decolonial struggle, Kanaka Maoli and Viequenses have been connected in their quests to end the militarisation of their islands for nearly half a century.

Through multiple acts of civil disobedience, a common strategy used by activists in Hawai'i and Vieques include "invading" or "rescuing" lands occupied by the US Navy. To be sure, one of the most salient commonalities in several Kanaka Maoli and Viequense oral histories that have been shared with me is the expression of pride that activists in both communities defeated the world's largest military *sin ningún tiro*/without a single shot. As opposition to the bombing of Kaho'olawe and Vieques gained traction in these separate "regions" throughout the 1970s, the merging of peaceful protest strategies formed an integral part of nonviolent collaborations between Kanaka Maoli and Viequenses in 1980. In addition to oral histories, Puerto Rican newspapers recorded the congealing of these communities' demilitarisation struggle.

While informing the broader Boricua population of the simultaneity of Kanaka Maoli and Viequense decolonial struggle, a handful of news articles from 1980 highlight relational links to one another. According to one article reprinted by the Associated Press:

*Fisherman from the island of Vieques united with members from a Hawaiian group to try and put an end to the U.S. Navy's use of islands for their firing practices. Like the inhabited island municipality of Vieques near Puerto Rico, the uninhabited Hawaiian island of Kaho'olawe has been utilised by the U.S. Navy for the practice of heavy artillery. The groups – one of them the Cruzada Pro Rescate de Vieques (the Crusade in favor of rescuing Vieques) – offered a press conference Friday where they announced they will oppose the Navy together and said that they will concentrate above all on the problem in Vieques. (1980: nd - author's translation)*

Strategising the rescue of islands desecrated by the US Navy, Kanaka Maoli and Viequense activists helped garner a more global awareness of the islands' transoceanic movement for demilitarisation. Proving victorious, in the sense that the US Navy and its allied forces were ousted from Kaho'olawe in 1990 and Vieques in 2003, these so-called "tiny" spaces reverberated throughout the world with deafening tones. Demonstrating that the US military can, in fact, crumble—its weakness is found in the inability to defeat peaceful, yet forceful, protest. Effective demilitarisation, so it seems, comes through nonviolent measures. As resistance grew, so did a budding consciousness grow—highlighting that the islands had been historically and politically connected through US hegemony since the 19th Century.

As noted in the Puerto Rican newspaper *El Mundo*, journalist Víctor González Orta emphasises such confluences:

*Since 1941, the Navy has not allowed the natives (Hawaiians) to step foot on their island of Kaho'olawe. In 1976, members of the 'Ohana started to invade the island and the Navy reacted by sending Naval personnel to remove them from there and has since... (filed) charges against the invaders. (1980: nd - author's translation)*

As noted by González Orta, the Hawaiian island of Kaho'olawe, like 75% of Vieques, had largely been under the control of the US Navy since 1941. Also, important to note is that in the mid-1970s and early 1980s the navy responded to Kanaka Maoli and Viequense pushes to end the militarisation of the islands in a similar fashion. On both islands, navy officials reacted to the rescuing of lands by Kanaka Maoli and Viequense "invaders," by arresting them—charging the activist-protectors with trespassing on federal lands (Aluli, 2010).

As attention to these resistance movements began to proliferate, the depiction of their shared struggle coalesced into a modern-day analogue of the biblical story David and Goliath. In multiple Kanaka Maoli and Viequense oral histories, many referred to themselves as David positioned against Goliath. To be sure, as the Viequense fishing community banded together in their small boats and faced the navy's gargantuan Atlantic Fleet in the mid-1970s, so too did PKO members in Hawai'i stand against the navy's monstrous Pacific Fleet. Rather than experience these occupations of lands and waters as "trespassing," however, Kanaka Maoli and Viequenses expressed that they were rescuing or reclaiming what had been stolen from them. Together, Kanaka Maoli and Viequenses alike stood in *kū'ē*/resistance and opposition to the desecration of their ancestral lands.

González Orta illuminates other relational experiences shared between Kaho'olawe and Vieques. For instance, just as Vieques is a distinct island from Puerto Rico, so is Kaho'olawe located in close proximity to other islands (1980). Indeed, both Kaho'olawe and Vieques are smaller islands located off the coasts of larger islands. While Vieques is about eight miles east of Puerto Rico, Kaho'olawe is located less than seven miles west of Maui. Kaho'olawe and Vieques have comparable landmasses and so lands taken by the US Navy are similar in size. While the US Navy expropriated 26,000 of 33,000 acres in Vieques, the entirety of Kaho'olawe's landmass, 28,000 acres, was taken by the US military. Like many of the parallels that these islands share, both were seized by the US Navy in 1941 and to this day are littered with unexploded ordnances on their land surfaces and surrounding waters.

Another relational link illuminated by González Orta is how the histories of these two islands are narrated exterior to the English language, demonstrating a refusal to centre their shared coloniser's tongue when illuminating histories of resistance to US Empire. While González Orta's article is in Spanish, another colonial language imposed in the Caribbean, his translations from Spanish to Hawaiian break from the language of their shared colonial violence. In so doing, González Orta highlights how both the Boricua and Kanaka Maoli communities reject that their interlocking solidarity be exclusively remembered in English. For example, González Orta translates the group "Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana," (Protect Kaho'olawe Family) as "Protejan Kaho'olawe 'Ohana (familia de islas adyacentes)." In English this translates to "They protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana (family of adjacent islands)." Further, González Orta translates the words "aloha 'āina," love for the land, that which feeds, as "la tierra es sagrada y no debe destruirse." Meaning, "the land is sacred and should not be destroyed." These translations from Hawaiian to Spanish are significant for many reasons. But for this essay, the translations highlight the ways in which Caribbean and Pacific Island relational links of de/militarisation are also mediated outside the language of US Empire. Thus counter-narratives to US imperialism are expressed in tongues other than

those practiced by the colonisers, resisting Americanising efforts to eradicate the use of these languages.

In the next few pages, I shift to Guåhan and briefly articulate one way the Chamoru community continues to push back on the militarisation of the sacred space of Litekyan/Ritidian. From public testimony at I Mina ‘Trentai Kuåttro Na Liheslaturan Guåhan/The 34th Guam Legislature, I highlight segments of three testimonies given in English.<sup>9</sup> As I bring forward these particular testimonies I do not mean to diminish the plethora of voices that continue to refute US Empire in the Chamoru language. Rather, I do not deny that my Chamoru language skills are still developing and that there exists a rich archive of colonial critique that is inaccessible to me.

As part of the US government's plans for a "Pacific Pivot" during the Obama administration, the US military sought to increase their already heavily militarised presence on Guåhan and throughout the Mariana Islands (Natividad and Leon-Guerrero, 2010; Na'puti and Bevacqua, 2015; and Santos-Perez, 2015). Because of perceived national security threats by China and, increasingly North Korea, the US military had planned to move thousands of US troops stationed in the Middle East to islands in the Pacific. While this Obama-era policy has been terminated, Pacific Pivot manoeuvres continue to occur, including re-stationing thousands of military personnel and their dependents from Okinawa to Guam, drastically expanding the island's population and further stressing already strained natural resources like water. To accommodate the swell of soldiers, particularly Marines that will be deployed into the Mariana Islands, the infrastructure of the islands, specifically Guam, will be vastly altered. Additional weapons testing and training will require further base construction and continued desecration of sacred culturally and historically important Chamoru sites, like Litekyan.

Responding to such potential destruction, Chamoru demilitarisation activism includes testimonies given at multiple public hearings and informational briefings throughout 2017. Catalysed by then Vice Speaker and Chairperson for the Committee on Culture and Justice, Therese Terlaje, one such informational briefing convened on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Concerned that much of the oceanic area of Litekyan's northern most tip would be vastly inaccessible to the fishing community because of the military's plans to construct a live-fire training range as part of the build-up, Manny Duenas, President of the Guam Fishermen's Co-Op stated,

*They are going to take 15 square miles of our ocean at Ritidian Point, some of our most pristine waters, and they are going to fire 40 pounds of lead into the water. That's water quality? Who is going to go out three miles and check... I promise the military we are going to have 50 to 100 boats parked at Ritidian when these guys start shooting their weapons... (2017: online)*

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<sup>9</sup> To view these legislative hearings, refer to Aguon (2017), Nelson (2017), San Nicolas (2017) and Terlaje (2017). Contributing to the demilitarisation of "public cybersheres" (Nogues, 2018), these legislative hearings offer Indigenously centered decolonial narratives easily accessible to the public through information technology, specifically in this case, Youtube. In so doing, I Mina ‘Trentai Kuåttro Na Liheslaturan Guåhan—which is, at the time of this writing, led by a supermajority of Chamoru women—is able "to bring Guåhan as an island, and as the rooted location of a particular decolonisation movement, into wider visibility" (ibid: 31).

Aligning with Kanaka Maoli and Viequense island and ocean protectors, many members of the Chamoru fishing community have pledged to take to the ocean as a way to resist the bombardment of Litekyan. Indeed, another relational experience shared by Chamoru, Kanaka Maoli, and Viequense resistance to US militarisation is the unrelenting leadership of the Indigenous fishing communities of these islands. Responding to the Chamoru community's outcry against the military's build-up of Guam, Senator Telenia Nelson introduced resolution 228-34 on September 22nd 2017, proposing a pause to the construction of a live-fire training range at Litekyan,

Numerous testimonies were given in support of Resolution 228-34. As the US military attempts to alienate Chamorus from their sacred and ancestral lands, waters, and skies, tãotao Litekyan/people of Litekyan continuously voice their opposition to such a culturally and environmentally destructive proposition. At the hearing tãotao Litekyan Catherine "Auntie Cat" Flores McCollum began her testimony (2017) by asking, "How much more are they [the military] going to take?" Later referring to the US military as "a giant who left many of our returned lands with contamination and unexploded ordnance" she continued by stating, "No, the military is not a great steward to our lands, and neither is the Fish and Wildlife." Before handing over the rest of her time to her niece Maria Hernandez, McCollum finished her testimony by stating, "Our family has been waiting patiently for the return (of Litekyan). Correct the injustices that have and will take place. Let us take care of Ritidian. Let our families take care of Ritidian. Let us be the people who will protect our lands from destruction". Echoing sentiment expressed by Kanaka Maoli and Viequense activists in earlier decades, Hernandez went on to describe the efforts to save Litekyan as a "David-and-Goliath battle," (2017) a relational experience connecting Guåhan to the decolonial imaginary of Bieke and Kaho'olawe. As women protectors of Guåhan, McCollum and Hernandez are at the forefront of Litekyan's intergenerational demilitarisation leadership. It is also important to note that McCollum has spent time in Bieke as a demilitarisation activist, further strengthening Caribbean-Pacific reconfigurations of decolonial and oceanic solidarity.

Boricua, Chamoru, and Kanaka Maoli resistance to the militarising forces of the US settler-state provide an opportunity to re-conceptualise the US military and government as settler institutions that violently perpetuate colonial continuities into the contemporary moment. Highlighting the political relationship of Bieke, Guåhan, and Hawai'i as island colonies of the US, many activists of these communities seek to "break down the walls of colonial slavery" that the US continues to impose over their islands (Santos, 1991). As US colonial violence persists on and around islands across the globe, so too does the goal of forcibly eradicating Indigenous memory from the places and peoples it desires to control. Revered by many as one of the greatest democracies in the history of the world, the respatialisation of dissent in "America" reveals that settlers wielding power over "official" historical narratives are masterful yet deceitful storytellers.

## Conclusion

Whether watching the sunset over the Mariana Trench turn into a blanket of shining stars while listening to winds flow through the trees, or smelling the delicious swaths of night blooming jasmine while reading *From A Native Daughter* in Hawai'i, or walking the long white sandy beaches of Punta Arenas/Sand Point in Bieke just to catch a glimpse of where the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea converge into one, the militarised landscapes on these

islands are inescapable. As non-Chamorus, non-Hawaiians, and non-Viequenses living on the continent or islands, none of us are situated outside the purview of settler responsibility. None of us, no matter the painful realities of how our ancestors “arrived” to the continent and/or islands, are excused from taking responsibility for our continued dispossession of Indigenous lands. As the Chamoru, Kanaka Maoli, and Viequense communities throughout this essay articulate, we settlers must recognise that “America” is not a nation committed to equality for all.

Entangled in US imperial power while also reshaping the imaginary of oceanic mapping, Caribbean and Pacific social realities of resistance reimagine the contours of dissent in “America’s” contemporary and colonial moment. As a white settler, I support the demilitarising efforts of these islands because I recognise that the colonising forces of the US incessantly use its military as a weapon for political gain on islands around the world, without Indigenous consent. In listening to the Chamoru, Kanaka Maoli, and Viequense communities, I learn a history of the US that remaps how I desire to engage my own whiteness and unearned settler privileges. I hope that in sharing these histories other white settlers begin to desire the same.

The need for settler responsibility is critical precisely because most white settlers do not see that the quest for political freedom from us, 21st Century colonisers, is the utterly exhausting life experience of many Indigenous peoples around the world, including those on islands. My kuleana, my settler responsibility is to transpose the knowledge I have gained from archipelagos to the continent and into settler spaces, as I am doing right now. This work is important because it respatialises dissent in “America” while also calling for accountability by those who continue to finance the military’s destruction of Indigenous sacred sites: US citizens. Without a doubt, counter-narratives to “American benevolence” continue to multiply on islands around the world.

Noting that islands exist as the crux, and not periphery, of “America’s” ballooning imperial expanse, I advocate for critical approaches to how settler colonialism is imagined on the continent while also making clear that as an inheritor of whiteness I want nothing to do with the intergenerational “gift” of hegemony that state-derived histories sustain. Instead, I also want to find my place in Indigenous movements for decolonisation and demilitarisation. Just as I concur with Trask about the role of settlers in Hawai‘i’s sovereignty movement, I concur with Dean Saranillio when he states:

*By taking seriously Indigenous knowledges and economies, we can create another future, and in the creation of an alternative future, more space for mutual respect can occur. Settler states have no interests in non-Natives identifying with native movements, as such identification opens our world to alternatives that the settler state denies are possible (2014: 204).*

I want to be part of a world where settlers/immigrants/arrivants, white or not, wealthy or poor, recognise that we all uphold settler structures of control that disempower Indigenous communities. In this world of critical self-reflection, we can help transform how collectivities and consciousness are imagined and sustained. Decolonising settler consciousness is not an insurmountable feat that necessitates a cataclysmic reordering of time, space, and human interaction. Being respectful of other humans, their ancestral lands, histories, and sacred space should not be cast as a radical suggestion or imaginary, it is simply the right thing to do as a decent person who shares this world with peoples of many cultures.

Multifaceted, settler responsibilities are vast and varied and always particular to place. Furthermore, settler responsibility can never solely be defined by settlers but is always a collaborative effort with Indigenous communities. To be sure, settlers are an important part of decolonial projects and we, too, have talents that can help construct the world anew. White settlers invented the very laws still used to govern society—still used to erase Indigenous claims to land—and settlers still control the production of historical and geographical narratives used to stifle the ways in which history and future is imagined. We settlers must do better. We must acknowledge our settler privilege. We must hold each other accountable for the continued dispossession of Indigenous lands that are not ours to claim, not now—not ever.

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