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## Noho Hewa: The Wrongful Occupation of Hawai'i

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## Media Review

*Noho Hewa: The Wrongful Occupation of Hawai'i*. Dir. Anne Keala Kelly. Honolulu, Kuleana Works/Pacific Native News Production, 2009. 80 min. DVD US\$50.00.

At a time of growing tensions around the Pacific, the world nervously eyes both the United States and North Korea, and every move being made by either side draws a sharp, collective breath. With military strikes threatened against the US military base established on Guåhan, it seems that the Pacific basin is indeed poised to be the playground within which these global tensions play themselves out. For those of us living within or coming from the Pacific, this situation is as terrifying as it is infuriating, for it is precisely this targeting of our islands that underpins many of our calls to demilitarize the Pacific. With this backdrop in mind, it has never been more important or timelier to consider the potent messages within Anne Keala Kelly's documentary *Noho Hewa*.

*Noho Hewa* provides a vital Indigenous lens on militarization in the Pacific. Although the film's initial focus is on Hawai'i, that lens pulls out to consider the broader questions around United States military activity around the world, and the role Hawai'i is forced to play in global warfare. In order to fully comprehend the grievous nature of this portrait, one must first appreciate that Hawai'i is a sovereign state, under illegal occupation by the United States. Illegally annexed without a treaty in 1898, the US claim to Hawai'i has never been validated and is still, to this day, decried by Indigenous Hawaiians and their supporters. Indeed, the title *Noho Hewa* alludes to an occupation that is unwelcome, unjust and immoral.

Just as the geographic scope of militarization pulls back to include US meddling around the world, so too Kelly expands her analysis of occupation to include the systemic context which supports the military occupation of Hawai'i. Promoting strong native voices of dignified resistance and critical analysis throughout the film, Kelly deconstructs the institutions of rabid tourism, corporatized academia, the food industry and manipulative politics. In doing so, she exposes a deeply complex system of enforced servitude, state and corporate collusion, and internalized racism.

These themes of government, military, tourism and the food industry are deftly analysed as the posts which hold up the house of neo-colonialism in Hawai'i. Military testing upon sacred sites is layered upon tourism expansion over ancient burial grounds, which extends to economic supplanting of native families and the simulation of native realities, reflecting the replacement of traditional economies and ecological pillaging by the food industry. All of which serves ultimately to erase native presence upon the land, to be replaced with a military settler population. As Haunani-Kay Trask so poignantly states within the film: 'This is not a natural environment anymore – This is a tourist environment, this is a military environment'.

As an Indigenous woman of the Pacific, I watched this documentary with a tight chest. Seeing the various engagements with state and industry, I realized I knew these manoeuvres. I have encountered them in public meetings here in Aotearoa, with extractive industries and our own facilitative government. The pervasive sense of colonial entitlement is the same. The steadfast self-righteousness. The complete lack of respect. The duplicitous language. This is no coincidence – the colonial playbook has been handed around the world, and certainly around the Pacific. And this is why, when we consider the current geopolitical climate of the Pacific, *Noho Hewa* holds a vitally important insight to the realities of those upon whose territory this brutal scenario will play out. At one point, Keanu Sai issues a

chillingly prophetic statement: ‘December 7 1941, Hawai‘i was attacked because of Pearl Harbour, it wasn’t attacked because of Hawaiian sovereignty. That’s the problem ... Hawai‘i is targeted for nuclear strikes by Russia and China. The question now is: Could Korea reach us?’

Anne Keala Kelly pulls no punches in her portrayal of the longstanding, immoral and unjust occupation of her homelands. Not even fellow Hawaiians escape the accounting as confronting internalized racism is an important dimension of her evaluation. From the opening scene, the Indigenous audience is challenged to consider how we respond to the calamity of colonial occupation around us. Further on, Steve Biko’s words are invoked: ‘The most potent tool of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed’. This documentary will take its wider audience on an important yet confronting journey. At the same time, it is unapologetically Indigenous, and messages of resilience, perseverance, dignity and strength also shine through. Kelly urges Indigenous peoples to remember our sovereignty, our inherent right to self-determination, and our obligations to our ancestry and future generations. This is our true north. As the world threatens to spin out of control, and the mainstream media landscape consumes itself in self-preservation, *Noho Hewa* is a crucial touchstone for Indigenous perspectives on militarism in the Pacific.

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