

### **Decolonial Potluck Project**

For my decolonial potluck project, I have decided to study Kalua pig and its historical significance in Hawaii. Being born and raised here in Hawaii, Kalua pig has been a dish that I have enjoyed my entire life. Before this project, I understood that pigs have a large cultural significance in the Native Hawaiian culture and its history, although I wanted to research this further. By looking into typical meals and combinations involving Kalua pig, I will research individual ingredients, cooking methods, and compare the Kalua pig of today with that of the pre-contact Hawaiian society. To examine a decolonial view of this meal, I want to find a way to prepare the dish in a way that is as authentic as possible to Native Hawaiian culture and avoid any modern 'colonial' adaptations. The traditional methods are celebrated frequently by Native Hawaiians today, but I would like to attempt in my own way to make this dish as traditional as possible. The primary questions I want to explore to better understand Kalua pig are: What significance does this dish have in the Native Hawaiian culture? How has this meal been adapted over time from outside influences, and how can Kalua Pig be made in an appropriate way today without erasing the history behind the dish?

Pigs have been a cornerstone of the Indigenous Hawaiians diet and culture for a long time. Although it is a common misconception that Captain Cook introduced pigs to Hawaii for the first time, this is entirely false. Pigs were brought over to Hawaii by the Polynesians who first inhabited the islands sometime between 700 and 2800 years ago (Horsburgh 5). They were extremely valuable to the voyagers who would travel great distances to find new land for two reasons; firstly, pigs are a great source of meat and protein, and secondly, when you arrived at a previously undiscovered island in the Pacific, you could breed the pigs and have a valuable and self-sustainable source of food. In pre-contact Hawaiian society, 'pre-contact' meaning the time before western contact in 1778, pig carried heavy cultural significance in the society. Pig was considered one of the sacred foods, with each representing a distinct god. The *ai kapu*, which was the set of taboos regarding food in the Hawaiian belief system, allowed only men to consume the sacred foods. Although any man was allowed to consume pig, typically the only people who

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had the opportunity were the high-ranking chiefs (O'Connor 158). Thankfully, Kamehameha II overthrew the ai kapu system of taboos, and granted all Hawaiians the right to consume the sacred foods of the gods and let everyone enjoy this cultural staple.

### Land and resources / Production

In the pre-contact era of Hawaii, any pig that was consumed in Hawaii obviously had to have been raised in Hawaii. Raising livestock anywhere leads to ecological changes to the natural environment. Pig farming in Hawaii led to a lot of forested land being cleared and used to raise pigs. This deforestation can contribute to negative impacts on the environment, including damage to the natural water cycles and soil fertility. When large areas of land are cleared, rivers and streams can be disrupted as well as natural underground water systems. Over time this can permanently affect the soil fertility and water access. Another consequence of deforestation is the potential for loss of biodiversity. When you displace all living creatures in a large area of land, many of the animals in the immediate proximity will die or they overcrowd other areas and can strain the resources available to that species. Pollution is also a major repercussion of raising pigs. Methane gas and other greenhouse gasses are a natural result of raising livestock, but pig waste can have immediate and local adverse effects on the environment. Raising pigs brings about the potential of polluting water irrigation systems used for growing produce, or even the natural streams that run through each Ahupua'a and provide drinking and bathing water for the population. Finally, anytime a foreign species, such as pigs, is introduced to an ecosystem, they can become an invasive species. Invasive species can introduce new diseases that can decimate local species, and they can also lead to a loss of biodiversity if they consume too much of the native plants or animals. So while eating meat such as pig will have negative effects on the environment, this is a simple truth of producing food for a society and is acceptable. An example of negative effects on the environment that are unacceptable is the fact large agricultural companies in Hawaii such as Dupont, Syngenta, Dow AgroSciences, Bayer, BASF, and Monsanto are buying huge portions of land and causing lots of pollution to the natural environment while producing more than 75% of global pesticides (Redden 72). This is far

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worse than any adverse effects of the Native Hawaiians raising pig that seem miniscule in comparison, and it shows that globalization and capitalism in Hawaii has led to terrible consequences for the Aina.

### Distribution / Retail

In modern times, pork remains a staple in the U.S. Hawaiian society. It can be found in any grocery store, many restaurants, street vendors, farmers markets, etc. There is such a great demand for pork in Hawaii, so much so that there simply isn't enough land to produce the pork consumed here. This means that lots of the pork in Hawaii must be imported from other parts of the world. The importation of pork and the distribution through all the retailers fuels the economy and further cements Hawaii's role as a global trading port. The local economy is also boosted in terms of produce and livestock distribution services, supermarket retailers, resorts and tourism, and many other facets of Hawaiian society.

### Consumption

As discussed earlier, in pre-contact Hawaiian society, pig was a sacred food that was enjoyed primarily by high-ranking members of society and the Auli'i. Next, I will examine the modern consumption habits and the representation of pork in Hawaiian society today. Hawaii today is a melting pot of many distinct cultures primarily because of mass immigration due to demands in the plantation industries immediately following the capitalization and the introduction of global markets. With all these unique cultural influences on the foods we consume, the number of ways pork is prepared today has exploded compared to that of pre-contact Hawaii. Influences of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Portugal, and other cultures brought about new ways of cooking with pork which are readily available in grocery stores, restaurants, etc. With all these new dishes available, the prevalence of Kalua Pork has decreased, but the traditional methods of cooking pork true to Hawaiian culture are still utilized. While not everyone has the capacity to cook Kalua pig in an underground oven (imu) for hours or even days on end, there have been modern adaptations to the dish, not only limited to the method of cooking. Today, Kalua pig is often prepared as a plate lunch, which would typically include a side of white rice and mac

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salad. There are many different sides that people use with a Kalua pig plate lunch, but white rice and mac salad are probably the most common. This creates a bit of a dichotomy where the Kalua pig is a representation of traditional Hawaiian food, but it is placed right next to white rice and mac salad, neither of which are traditional to the Hawaiian cuisine.

### Representations

In pre-contact Hawaiian society, pig was viewed as a delicacy and people utilized very methodical cooking techniques through cultural practices. Kalua pig was made using an imu, an underground oven. Creating an imu is not an easy job, although an imu would typically cook an entire pig as well as perhaps other foods, this was almost always a communal effort. Firstly, a pit is dug into the earth and a large fire is created by burning hardwood such as Kiawe. After some time and when the flames have died out, large stones are placed on top of the hot coals. The stones insulate the heat from the coals to make it last for days on end, while also evening distributing the heat across the entire imu. Next, the pig is seasoned with salt and sometimes other seasonings and then wrapped in a large leaf, mostly taro or banana leaves. This adds an earthy flavor to the pig and helps trap moisture during the cooking process. After the pig is wrapped, it is placed into the imu and the imu is covered, to provide further insulation, using a web of large leaves, woven mats, and finally a small layer of soil / sand. The signature tenderness of Kalua pig is primarily due to the long cooking time. Using a relatively low heat and cooking the pig for several hours, sometimes days results in delicious tender meat (Stice).

In modern Hawaii imus are not a practical way of cooking for most people. For that reason, a few common methods of producing Kalua Pig are in a traditional oven or a slow cooker. Although these methods are not authentic to the traditional cooking practices, for better or for worse, they work as a practical means for this food to persist and keep its popularity in Hawaii. Some reasons why I call these methods practical is with the inordinate land value and housing issues Hawaii faces, many people don't have the land capacity, let alone the time, to dedicate that many resources to one dish. In post-contact capitalist Hawaii, people in neighborhoods don't share the same communal food values compared to the

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people who lived in the ahupua'a in pre-contact Hawaii. This is easy to see, Hawaii's societies just don't function as they did before the western contact. With that said, many Native Hawaiians still practice and celebrate the construction of an imu for a large social gathering such as a luau, wedding, graduation, family gathering, etc. Being able to practice the cooking methods of your ancestors and taking the time and effort to produce such a delicacy highlights the cultural significance of this dish to indigenous Hawaiians.

### Personal relationship

Having been born and raised in Hawaii, Kalua pig was a common food for me. Ever since I was young, my dad and I would go to our local plate lunch spot and my favorite was always the Kalua pig. Growing up I never really understood the cultural significance of the food I was eating partly because it was so accessible and commonplace in my diet. After spending almost all my life in Hawaii, when I graduated high school, I decided to attend the University of Washington in Seattle. As is common with any recent high school graduate who leaves their hometown, I was very anxious and felt very homesick for a while after first moving. I think these feelings were probably intensified by not only the great distance from my home, but also because I missed my small and very friendly community. Finding myself in a giant city in the United States made me feel like I had left a small familiar pond and jumped into a vast ocean. All of this to say, I was feeling very homesick, and it was tough to shake that feeling. Naturally, I wanted to find something familiar and something that would remind me of home. Luckily, I was able to find a fantastic restaurant that marketed itself as serving "Hawaiian food". The restaurant served lots of different dishes you might find in Hawaii, even if they weren't authentically Hawaiian. The Kalua pig plate lunch was so good my roommate and I would routinely go there after our classes. We must have been going there at least once per week at one point in our years in Seattle. My roommate, who was a transfer student from Tokyo, shared my love for Kalua pig even if he did not share the same nostalgia I felt. For this research project, I interviewed and asked him about any personal connections he

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had to the food to see if there were more similarities between our connection to Kalua pig than I had previously thought. When I asked him about his exposure to Kalua pig he replied:

*"I spent my early youth living in Japan where in my family, Kalua pig was not common. You might be able to find it prepared in a Hawaiian restaurant but those were also not very common at all. Pork itself was common in my family growing up, but it was not often prepared like Kalua pig is, it would not typically be slow-cooked or shredded. The first time I had eaten Kalua pig was when my family immigrated to Los Angeles. Growing up near Long Beach, my friends and I would go to L&L after school pretty often. That was the first time I had tried the Kalua pig plate lunch, and I loved it. Later when I was at UW, and you introduced me to the plate lunch place I would order it almost every other day. The only change I would make is to replace the mac salad with fried kimchi, but other than that it was the perfect warm meal to have after a long day of classes."*

I found it interesting that my friend did in fact share a personal connection with Kalua pig, even though he has never been to, and has no connection with Hawaii. This goes to show what was once a culturally unique cuisine is being enjoyed thousands of miles away from its origin.

### My Cooking Process

This research project prompted me to take a deep dive into a specific dish that has personal significance to myself, and I am glad to have done it because I learned so much about a food that I love. For our decolonial potluck, I prepared some Kalua pig. I used some Pork Tenderloin from the grocery store, some Hawaiian Sea Salt, and Kiawe liquid smoke as seasoning. I was happy I was able to source locally produced salt and seasoning, although I was unable to determine where the pork tenderloin came from. If I was to cook it again, I would probably try to source a specifically Hawaiian raised pig. The Kalua pig itself was not a complex recipe, with only 3 total ingredients including the pork, although the

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cooking process was more precise. First, I seared the pork and seasoned it with a healthy rub of salt and liquid smoke. Then, I wrapped the pork in large banana leaves I got from my backyard. I was not able to construct an imu, so I opted to slow cook the wrapped pork in a crockpot slow cooker where I cooked the meat on a low heat for about 8 hours. At this point, the meat was extremely tender and was quite easy to shred, and then the cooking process was finished (Kathy).

I was happy with how my dish came out, and I really enjoyed the whole cooking process. I learned a lot about the history and cultural significance of a food that I have enjoyed my entire life. It has inspired me to think a bit more about the food that I eat and learn more. I have always treasured Kalua Pig, but I enjoyed eating it my whole life without understanding much of the cultural significance or history surrounding it. I am thankful to have gone through this process, as I was able to research the dish, produce it in a de-colonial fashion while attempting to be as authentic to the Native Hawaiian methods as possible, and gain some cultural awareness.

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