THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS

Native Hawaiian Decolonization and the Politics of Gender
Author(s): J. K?haulani Kauanui
Source: *American Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Jun., 2008), pp. 281-287
Published by: Johns Hopkins University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40068536
Accessed: 08-02-2016 18:45 UTC

REFERENCES
Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:
http://www.jstor.org/stable/40068536?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Johns Hopkins University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Quarterly*.

http://www.jstor.org

This content downloaded from 130.216.158.78 on Mon, 08 Feb 2016 18:45:50 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Native Hawaiian Decolonization and the Politics of Gender

J. Kēhaulani Kauanui

Unbeknownst to most Americans—and even those within American studies—there is a thriving independence movement taking place in the Hawaiian Islands today. It was borne out of an unlawful U.S.-backed overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893, and is currently in opposition to a proposal for U.S. federal recognition of a Native Hawaiian Governing Entity, which would transform Hawaiians' political status in damaging ways. U.S. senator Daniel Akaka (D-HI) first proposed the legislation in 2000 to recognize Hawaiians as "Native Americans" with a political trust relationship to the United States—similar to that of American Indians.[1] Akaka's initiative followed the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Rice v. Cayetano* that found Native Hawaiian–only voting in trustee elections for the state's Office of Hawaiian Affairs to be unconstitutional.[2] Even though the ruling was made only on the basis of the Fifteenth Amendment, state programs and federal funding targeting Native Hawaiians are under threat by lawsuits challenging their legitimacy on the basis of the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection. But none of those suits has met with success in the courts; what they have managed to do is terrify Native Hawaiians, especially the poorest—some of whom live on Hawaiian Home Lands (congressionally allotted homesteads), while others survive on the beaches. Senator Akaka and proponents of the federal proposal argue that this status change would offer protection against these constitutional challenges and afford Native Hawaiians the rights currently accorded other indigenous peoples in the United States, albeit precariously. However, the legislative proposal paves the way for the global settlement of outstanding Hawaiian land claims and further undercuts the right to self-determination under international law protocols for decolonization.

When one looks at the history of U.S. federal recognition for indigenous domestic dependent nations, it is clear that there are some guarantees that would come along with the passage of the bill. These include extinguishing the Hawaiian people's title to the Hawaiian Kingdom Crown and Government Lands—a title that heretofore has not been relinquished, as acknowledged

©2008 The American Studies Association

This content downloaded from 130.216.158.78 on Mon, 08 Feb 2016 18:45:50 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

in the U.S. Apology Resolution (Public Law 103-150), in which the U.S. government apologized to the Native Hawaiian people for its complicity in the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani.[3] The Apology Resolution includes a finding of fact that states that "the indigenous Hawaiian people never directly relinquished their claims to their inherent sovereignty as a people or over their national lands to the United States, either through their monarchy or through a plebiscite or referendum." At stake are 1.8 million acres of former crown and government lands of the Kingdom of Hawai'i—lands that Hawaiians can currently claim title over since these lands were stolen by those who orchestrated the 1893 overthrow and who then ceded them to the U.S. government.

Not only have state-financed supporters and representatives, along with all of the media in Hawai'i, silenced pro-independence voices, but they have misrepresented opposition to the bill as hostility to Native Hawaiian rights rather than protection of them. Given that the Hawaiian Kingdom's sovereignty was not lost via conquest, cession, or adjudication, those rights to self-determination are still in place under international law. Native Hawaiian people lost the ability to be self-determining through unilateral political processes—the 1898 U.S. annexation and imposed 1959 statehood—but at no time did that amount to a legal termination.

Within this nationalist context there exist two opposing self-determination projects that provide the backdrop to my focus on decolonization in relation to Hawaiian gender and sexuality. These are the pursuit of indigenous self-determination within U.S. federal policy on internal self-determination, and the right to full self-determination under international law. Each of these entails different political goals and strategies. Within this fraught political context, I focus in particular on the construction and deployment of cultural discourses of reclamation in the area of gender and sexuality within Hawaiian nationalist projects. These are politicized cultural projects of reconstruction that are concerned with assessing and accessing sources of knowledge about identities, roles, and relationships that are considered part of an indigenous tradition. Although processes of colonialism eroded Hawaiian women's status, it is still unclear whether Hawaiian nationalist projects can help to restore that status through forms of decolonization that include the eradication of sexism.[4]

My research examines why feminist assertions within the Hawaiian nationalist movement are silenced, by male and female activists alike, but not because Native Hawaiian feminism is seen as irreconcilable with Hawaiian cultural norms; instead, feminism is typically viewed as unnecessary and superfluous. I suggest that this view is based on the fact that there are so many Native Hawaiian women in leadership positions within the movement.[5] This

This content downloaded from 130.216.158.78 on Mon, 08 Feb 2016 18:45:50 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

perception also seems to rest on the widespread understanding that prior to British and Euro-American colonialism, Native Hawaiian culture was egalitarian, not patriarchal. This popular understanding is critical to the current nationalist context, wherein the movement as a whole encourages a rethinking of the Hawaiian past as a basis for cultural reclamation projects in the service of political mobilization. My argument is twofold: (1) gender oppression has been a mode of imperialism in the history of Hawai'i; and (2) the nationalist struggles over the meaning of precolonial history with regard to both gender and sexuality constitute a significant political terrain within the context of Native Hawaiian decolonization. From this perspective, the recovery of precolonial history for the nationalist struggles, along with a research agenda that focuses on the history of U.S. imperialism and gender oppression in Hawai'i, is crucial to an engaged politics of decolonization.

Due to the pathbreaking work of formative Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) scholars Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa and Noenoe K. Silva, one can now identify strong female figures within Hawaiian cosmological traditions and among deities and chiefs in Hawaiian society.[6] Many contemporary Native Hawaiian women rely on a collective understanding of an egalitarian precolonial history because it offers many rich examples of powerful women who were self-determined and who asserted incredible agency vis-à-vis men. In her book *Na Wahine Kapu: Divine Hawaiian Women* (1992), Kame'eleihiwa argues that the female gods are ancestors to modern Hawaiian women and have inspired them in their role as the strong female leaders of today. Using her knowledge of Hawaiian language, chants, songs, and prayers, she has restored a lost genealogy of female gods to their place in the Hawaiian cosmos and history. Kame'eleihiwa also delineates the histories of female chiefs and other famous high-ranking Hawaiian women throughout the nineteenth century.

Historically, gender was not a stand-alone category, since all gender roles were mediated by genealogical rank, whereby one's ancestral lineage was most important for determining social positions. Hawaiian kinship was (and still is) bilaterally reckoned through both the maternal and paternal lines. Furthermore, both Hawaiian women and men held governing positions as paramount chiefs and lesser chiefs prior to the formation of the monarchy in the late eighteenth century. In her book *Sacred Queens and Women of Consequence: Rank, Gender, and Colonialism in the Hawaiian Islands* (1990), Jocelyn Linnekin argues that women were also symbolically associated with land, valued as producers of high cultural goods, and participants in a separate domain of female ritual and social power.[7] Hence Hawaiian women were seen as powerful autonomous beings and were points of access to rank, land, and political power.

This content downloaded from 130.216.158.78 on Mon, 08 Feb 2016 18:45:50 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Colonialism transformed the Hawaiian system of balance between women and men. Anglo-American Calvinists introduced Western ideas to Hawaiian society that dictated the domestic subjugation of women in social, political, and economic realms. As Sally Merry's book *Colonizing Hawai'i: The Cultural Power of Law* (2004) shows, the impact of Western laws and culture in Hawai'i entailed a radical restructuring of the status of women starting in 1820, when New England missionaries introduced Christianity.[8] Calvinism and the common law of coverture were two primary determinants of Hawaiian women's changed status. However, issues of genealogical rank also determined Hawaiian women's status in ways whereby gender subordination was not clear cut. In any case, Europeans, Euro-Americans, and Asians introduced their own cultural and institutional forms of patriarchy to the Hawaiian Islands via occupation, colonialism, imperialism, and settler societies. These newcomers also influenced Hawaiians through community ties, labor practices, and intermarriage.

As Linnekin argues, under U.S. colonization, the position of Hawaiian women on the whole seemed to shift, such that by the mid-1840s non-Hawaiian men become points of economic access and status for Hawaiian women. Male prominence manifested itself in the Western political structure of the kingdom, which eventually degraded women's status. Also, there was a discrepancy between women's legal status and their active role and valuation within the rural communities of the *maka'ainana* (the common class). Although there was a contradiction between women's legal standing and the actual political power of high-ranking female chiefs during the nineteenth century, the consolidation of government threatened Hawaiian women's status within various ranks, but did not succeed in entirely changing traditional practices through which women were able to assert their agency.

The changing status of Hawaiian women after the 1893 overthrow, the 1898 annexation, and the 1900 Organic Act (which organized the islands into a colonial territory) deserves more scholarly attention. Noenoe Silva's pathbreaking work documents Hawaiian women's formative role in confronting U.S. imperialism at the turn of the century. Her book *Aloha Betrayed: Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (2004), documents Hawaiians' mass opposition to the U.S. annexation and the gendered dimensions of indigenous political organizing during that period. When one examines the political cartoons published in U.S. newspapers during the period of the overthrow, one finds grotesque representations of Queen Lili'uokalani that reveal how intolerant white male settlers in Hawai'i were when it came to reckoning with a Hawaiian woman as the reigning monarch.

This content downloaded from 130.216.158.78 on Mon, 08 Feb 2016 18:45:50 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

In 1898, the U.S. unilaterally conferred citizenship on Hawaiians. By 1900, Hawaiian men were enfranchised, but Hawaiian women did not gain the franchise until 1920. While in the context of contemporary nationalist struggles U.S. citizenship is contested among many Hawaiians today, it is clear that Hawaiian men took advantage of these forms of empowerment that excluded women. During the early 1900s, for example, they dominated the territorial legislature, outnumbering even non-Hawaiian men.

As Kathy E. Ferguson and Phyllis Turnbull demonstrate in *Oh, Say, Can You See? The Semiotics of the Military in Hawai'i* (1999), the U.S. occupation in Hawai'i was founded on gendered oppression, with the islands being viewed as feminine and therefore ready for masculine dominance. Hawaiian men's role in the U.S. military has also played a role in neocolonialism, and their socialization within that institution has arguably contributed to sexism and violence in home communities by setting new standards about what is considered culturally appropriate. U.S. militarism also perpetuates gendered violence against both the Hawaiian people and lands and waters of our archipelago.

As Andrea Smith argues, "the analysis of and strategies for addressing gender violence is not simply a tool of patriarchal control, but also serves as a tool of racism and colonialism."[9] Even if patriarchy is understood as a colonial "import" to Hawai'i, male dominance and feminist critique are far from irrelevant to the oppression of Hawaiian women. If one asserts that women were not oppressed by men in traditional Hawai'i before the coming of foreign influences, the peril is that some may argue that simply getting rid of those influences (as if we could) would solve the problem of women's oppression in Hawai'i today. In other words, we risk treating the problem of contemporary forms of gendered oppression as secondary to the restoration of political sovereignty, as though the recognition of Hawai'i's sovereignty claims would be enough to deal with the structural manifestations of sexism and misogyny. Along with activism, critical analysis, and a decolonizing sensibility attuned to gender oppression are necessary emancipatory strategies for reckoning with the legacies of colonial male domination. Lisa Lowe's definition of decolonization as "the social formation that encompasses a multilevel and multicentered assault on those specific forms of colonial rule" is most appropriate here.[10] Extending her definition, I also suggest that M. Jacqui Alexander's work—centering erotic autonomy as a politics of decolonization—is revealing in this context since she takes up Caribbean state nationalism and its sexualization of particular bodies, technologies of control, and the criminalization of particular sexualities as important sites for producing and reproducing state power.[11] As

This content downloaded from 130.216.158.78 on Mon, 08 Feb 2016 18:45:50 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Cynthia Enloe suggests, using women's experiences under colonialism as a starting point for articulating nationalist goals reaps different possibilities for liberation.[12] Hence, women's experiences of oppression must inform Hawaiian nationalist decolonization or risk the use of nationalism to trump feminism as divisive and distracting to the nationalist cause. Similarly, queer Hawaiian experiences must also be taken into account when tending to the direction of Hawaiian nationalist agendas.

As Hawaiian cultural and political decolonization and self-determination reckons with gender and sexual politics, the legacies of U.S. colonialism, white supremacy, and Asian American political ascendancy in our homeland come into sharper focus. Indeed, all of these issues are pertinent to the field of American studies, not simply Hawaiian nationalism or Hawaiian studies.

Notes

1. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Precarious Positions: Native Hawaiians and U.S. Federal Recognition," *The Contemporary Pacific* 17.1 (2005): 1–27, and "The Multiplicity of Hawaiian Sovereignty Claims and the Struggle for Meaningful Autonomy," *Comparative American Studies* 3.3 (2005): 283–99.
2. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "The Politics of Blood and Sovereignty in *Rice v. Cayetano*," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, special issue on "Putting Law in its Place in Native North America," guest ed. Susan Gooding and Eve Darian-Smith, 25.1 (2002): 110–28.
3. For an account of the overthrow from the perspective of the ruling monarch at the time, see Liliu'okalani, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* (1898; Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1964).
4. For gendered challenges within Hawaiian sovereignty politics, see J. Kēhalani Kauanui, "Blood and Reproduction of (the) Race in the Name of *Ho'oulu Lahui*—A Hawaiian Feminist Critique," special issue on "Women Writing Oceania: Weaving the Sails of the Waka," guest ed. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Carolien Sinavaiana, *Pacific Studies* 30 (2008): 1–2; "A Fraction of National Belonging: 'Hybrid Hawaiians,' Nationalism, and the Search for the 'Pure Blood,'" in *Beyond the Frame: Visual Representations of Women of Color*, ed. Angela Davis and Neferti Tadiar (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 153–68; and "Off-Island Hawaiians 'Making' Ourselves at 'Home': A (Gendered) Contradiction in Terms?" special issue on "Migrating Feminisms: Asian and Pacific Women as Migrants," guest ed. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Kalpana Ram, *Women's Studies International Forum* 21.6 (1998): 681–93.
5. For a series of discussions about the Hawaiian movement and the role of Native Hawaiian women, as well as a critical engagement of feminism in relation to Hawaiian nationalism, see Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1992).
6. See, for example, Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa's *Na Wahine Kapu: Divine Hawaiian Women* (Honolulu: 'Ai Pohaku Press, 1992); and Noenoe K. Silva's *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).
7. Jocelyn Linnekin, *Sacred Queens and Women of Consequence: Rank, Gender, and Colonialism in the Hawaiian Islands* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990).
8. Sally Merry, *Colonizing Hawai'i: The Cultural Power of Law* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton, University Press, 2000).
9. Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Boston: South End Press, 2005), 1.

This content downloaded from 130.216.158.78 on Mon, 08 Feb 2016 18:45:50 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

10. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 108.
11. See M. Jacqui Alexander, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: An Anatomy of Feminist and State Practice in the Bahamas Tourist Economy," in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, ed. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1996).
12. Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

This content downloaded from 130.216.158.78 on Mon, 08 Feb 2016 18:45:50 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions