

Anthropology Book Forum

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"Statehood or Sovereignty? Unearthing Hawaiian History and Politics through the Lens of the Contemporary Sovereignty Movement"

Review by Naomi Alisa Calnitsky

J. Kehaulani Kauanui, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018.

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In *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty*, author J. Kehaulani Kauanui unearths one historical period, the early- to mid-nineteenth century, to explore transformations wrought by Christianity and the introduction of the Anglo-American legal system upon three spheres in the Hawaiian Islands: land, gender and sexuality. In doing, so she examines the consequences of such changes for the ways in which "contemporary sovereignty politics" in the islands have evolved (2-3). The author approaches this task with the theoretical tool of paradoxes as means to present new ideas linked to the problematic history of colonialism and sovereignty in the islands, and simultaneously to represent the concerns of the indigenous sovereignty movement in the twenty-first century. She begins by exploring tensions inherent to external (i.e. US government) efforts to represent indigenous Hawaiians as equivalent in status to American Indians in terms of prospects for political representation and engagement vis-a-vis the United States, a notion rejected by activist Mililani Trask in 2014, owing primarily to the sovereignty movement's continued engagement with the discourse of kingdom-based nationalism. The imagery and history associated with the Hawaiian monarchy's presence as an agent of international relations

and of Hawaiians' relations with outsiders through the nineteenth century is revisited as it feeds into contemporary indigenous formations of nationalism and sovereignty politics.

The book is composed of four chapters, the first concerning questions of indigeneity and identity, the second matters of land and sustenance, the third questions of marriage, gender and propriety, and the fourth addresses discourses revolving around sexuality and "savagery." The book delves into the question of colonial biopolitics to discuss the arrival of liberal governance in the nineteenth century as a process wherein deviant sexualities were increasingly managed and regulated by the state as indigenous chiefs and elites worked in "tandem" with missionaries to achieve increasing sense of "racial respectability" (23). As a result of colonial processes, indigenous women experienced a "degraded gender status" as Western social norms were increasingly imposed on and internalized by Kanaka Maoli or indigenous Hawaiians.

The idea that indigenous sovereignty stems from the land itself is foregrounded in the author's discussion of indigenous sovereignty discourses, which often refer not only to historical facts and events (i.e. the fact of the monarchy) but also to indigenous constructions of sovereignty through language and ideas. Since "sovereignty" is an adopted, Western concept, indigenous political, legal and cultural terms are introduced in Kauanui's text, including the term *ea* (life, breath, to rise, rule, independence) (28). As a diasporic Hawaiian scholar with a specialization in anthropology and American studies, yet without an intimate knowledge of the indigenous Hawaiian language, the author's involvement in sovereignty politics since 1990 informs her methodological approach. Her 2008 study, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity*, predates this study, prompting the immediate question of how *Paradoxes of Sovereignty*, effectively published ten years later, departs from the previous book. *Hawaiian Blood's* emphasis on genealogy rather than land and sexuality makes it unique, while *Paradoxes* addresses many issues, like Christianity and colonization, that have been amply explored in other scholarly works.¹ In this regard, in some places the book draws from the previous and pathbreaking work carried out by historian Patricia Grimshaw. What does make *Paradoxes* unique, however, is its self-professed emphasis upon "critical discourse analysis and archival research with a close examination of contemporary historical documents of Hawaiian

nationalist statements and position papers" (31). Historical and contemporary articulations of Hawaiian sovereignty are, as a result, explored here side-by-side with fruitful results.

While the book examines a number of competing theoretical threads, they are tied together under the umbrella of colonialism's past and the evolution of Hawaiian statehood, with an eye to the impact of constitutionalism, political production and monarchical evolution in the decades of the mid-nineteenth century. The arrival of a more institutionalized patriarchy, through the application of Western legal norms upon indigenous ones, was one critical result of changes implemented from "above" during this era. This study is fundamentally interdisciplinary, drawing in part from a range of schools and approaches, including native studies, cultural studies and American studies, as well as anthropology and history. The examination of governance and self-determination alongside the question of gender makes this study unique. In her theoretical formulations of how indigeneity has operated in the Hawaiian context, the author points to Robert Nichol's concept of the "settler contract" as an extension of the social contract, whereby domination and hegemony of Western colonial governments over indigenous peoples was and continue to be enacted through the social contract model (53).

Chapter two examines the divergence between Western conceptions of property and the Kanaka Maoli/indigenous Hawaiian reverence for the land, as refracted through indigenous Hawaiian deities that have manifested components of the land and natural environment, inflecting it with meaning and a sense of shared spiritual literacy for centuries. Hawaiian deities effectively are "living entities with names" and are understood to literally embody the physical world (77). As this spiritual canon might be linked to the sovereignty movement, it can indicate a rejection of Western ontological modes of organization, and restore power to the notion of original occupancy as a mode of existence that is explicitly linked to a "distinct" relationship to Hawaiian lands, which resultantly continues to exist either beyond or outside of Western legal frameworks (80). Despite these ideals, the author remains sufficiently objective so as to highlight the dissonance between contemporary trends in land expropriations in the islands (81) and the specificity of desires of the sovereignty movement.

The Great Mahele, which in 1848 re-divided lands according to an imported Western model, and which was taken up pragmatically by Kamehameha III in an effort to protect his Kingdom from further foreign encroachments, alongside the 1850 Kuleana Act, are revisited to discuss the evolution of land owning patterns and property rights across the kingdom from the mid-19th century onwards. Indeed, the story of early land privatisation in the Hawaiian islands has been amply documented in other works, most prominently Stuart Banner's *Possessing the Pacific*.² Here, as Banner notes, accommodation to foreigners would rework the "internal politics of land tenure in the islands."³ Missionaries, as well as their offspring, were amongst those who would benefit economically from these changes (83; see also Schultz 2017).

What sets this study apart is its effective emphasis on the story of colonialism and governmentality in the islands and the body politic's transformation with time (93; 97). The indigenous population would be cut in half by epidemics over the course of 1803 through 1831; in turn, these changes would dramatically impact patterns of sustainable agriculture which predominated prior to the Great Mahele and help signal the onset and ascent of commercial monoculture throughout the islands. Oral and written deeds to the land predominated prior to the Mahele. Under this system lands were primarily awarded or bestowed from above, in a top-down fashion, following the process of *kalai'aina* or carving of the lands (87). Alongside this, the paradigm of *kuleana* (responsibility or interest) predominated. Modern capitalism's ultimate dismemberment of these prior systems, (100) is charted here in some detail, with a focus on those capitalists whose scale of ownership has implicated them more directly in contemporary indigenous sovereignty demands and legal conflicts (97-105). Moreover, the "very concept of sovereignty" is revisited through a nod to recent trends in the indigenous agricultural and ecological restoration movement (112).

The historical prosecution of adultery amongst indigenous Hawaiians is a key theme explored in the third chapter, as Western missionary norms were increasingly enforced. The institution of Christian marriage accompanied the social pressures permeating the indigenous world, and as the author successfully shows, "the missionary pursuit had an emotional element to it" (138). Owing to the advance of coverture, indigenous women were effectively displaced from politics and disenfranchised as legal actors once married. (151) The final chapter creatively considers how

reforms enacted by Hawaiian chiefs reworked the "savage" sexualities that were normative amongst indigenous Kanaka Maoli to secure recognition from outsiders, adopting Western heteromonogamy as a model (159). This history of biopolitics is also impressively brought up to the present day, where discourses of "erotic autonomy" have taken precedence (192). In all, Kauanui's study constitutes a significant addition to the existing anthropological and historical scholarship that engages with events taking place in the nineteenth century in the islands, and scholarship linked to the contemporary sovereignty movement, complementing the existing scholarship in a nuanced and commanding way. There is no doubt that this study will be of interest to scholars in the field, and its varied insights will constitute an enduring gift to the decolonization movement and its undertaking, both in the islands and more broadly amongst Indigenous communities worldwide.

Notes

1. See for example, Jennifer Thigpen, *Island Queens and Mission Wives: How Gender and Empire Remade Hawaii's Pacific World*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), Joy Schultz, *Hawaiian by Birth: Missionary Children, Bicultural Identity and U.S. Colonialism in the Pacific* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017) and Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth Century Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989).
2. See Stuart Banner, *Possessing the Pacific: Land, Settlers and Indigenous People from Australia to Alaska* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), in particular the chapter on the Great Mahele.
3. Naomi Alisa Calnitsky, "On the Margins of Empire? Toward a History of Hawaiian Labour and Settlement in the Pacific Northwest." *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 126.4 (2017):420.

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