

J. Kēhaulani Kauanui

Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism
Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2018 (ISBN 978-0-822-37075-8)

Reviewed by Halena Kapuni-Reynolds, 2019

Halena Kapuni-Reynolds (Kanaka Maoli) is a doctoral student in the Department of American Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where he currently serves as the graduate assistant for the Museum Studies Graduate Certificate Program. His research interests coalesce around pedagogy, public history, memory, museums, curation, Indigenous theory, and social history. His most recent research has focused on the (re)interpretation of Hawaiian history through a gendered lens, with particular emphasis on the biography of Hawaiian chiefly (ali'i) women.

Quote:

For individuals interested in Indigenous politics, and for activists with long-enduring commitments to Indigenous liberation from the reigns of empire, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism* offers a timely and critical addition to the literature(s) on indigeneity, nationalism, sovereignty, sexuality, and gender. In ways that are reminiscent of her first book, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Kauanui 2004), Kauanui fearlessly reminds readers to look critically at the past as a means to understand the present and to imagine Indigenous decolonial futures. This reflective practice is evident in each chapter of *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty* via Kauanui's work to situate the multiple contemporary sovereignty claims in Hawai'i today with respect to the history of the Hawaiian Kingdom and its formal recognition as a state by other (predominantly European and American) world powers. In addition to evaluating each of these claims, Kauanui theorizes how Hawaiian sovereignty might be (re)conceived in ways that are grounded in precolonial Kanaka Maoli practices.

Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty is rooted in the growing field of Indigenous feminist theory. Lisa Kahaleole Hall states that "Indigenous feminism grapples with the ways patriarchal colonialism has been internalized with indigenous communities, as well as analyzing the sexual and gendered nature of the process of colonization" (Hall 2009, 16). Indigenous feminism differs from other forms of feminist theory because it grapples directly with the issues of heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism, which have systematically worked not only to disenfranchise Indigenous women, but to eliminate all Indigenous peoples through various forms of violence (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013). Questions regarding the rights of Indigenous peoples to land and sovereignty are further discussed intersectionally by Indigenous feminists as part of their decolonial theorizing and world-building. Throughout Kauanui's new work, we can see how Indigenous feminism provides a crucial framework for interrogating colonial logics that have disciplined Indigenous understandings of gender, land, and sexuality.

As the book's title suggests, Kauanui is concerned with the paradoxes that surround the history of sovereignty in Hawai'i (20). These paradoxes speak "to the conflicts and contradictions that arise concerning contemporary Hawaiian political claims in light of a complicated history of modernity for Hawaiians, which developed in the context of keeping imperial nations at bay" (20). The paradoxes that Kauanui explores in the book are many and include the anti-indigenous rhetoric of some Hawaiian Kingdom nationalists, the transformations in Hawaiian governance that allowed for international state recognition within the global hegemonic reach of "Western sovereignty" in the nineteenth century, and the transformation of Hawaiian sexuality through various forms of biopolitics.

Kauanui threads the theoretical concepts of settler colonialism and colonial biopolitics throughout each chapter. Scholars working in the fields of Indigenous studies, American studies, and settler colonial studies utilize settler colonialism, as theorized by Patrick Wolfe, as a way to describe the structures by which agents of colonizing powers come to settle on native lands and eliminate native peoples. Beyond the physical dispossession of Indigenous communities from their ancestral lands, studies on settler colonialism have also discussed the internalization of colonial logics within Indigenous and settler communities. One of the colonial logics that Kauanui describes is the normalization of heteropatriarchal Christian marriage in the islands during Hawai'i's bid for international recognition in the nineteenth century.

Michel Foucault's work on biopolitics further informs Kauanui's critique of Hawaiian governmentality. The "colonial" descriptor that she uses to describe biopolitics draws from Ann Laura Stoler's critique regarding the absence of the colonial context within Foucault's original texts (22). For Kauanui, colonial politics refers to "the governing of Indigenous life, death, reproduction, gender, sexuality, relation to land and property, and other sites of state power over both the physical and political bodies of the Hawaiian population" (23). Additionally, colonial biopolitics provides "a means to demonstrate that settler colonialism is a historical and ongoing form of governmentality in which Indigenous life is simultaneously eliminated and assimilated, affirmed, and negated" (23). Kauanui effectively argues that colonial biopolitics is symptomatic of settler colonialism, and in cases like Hawai'i, where colonization did not formally occur, can illustrate how settler colonial logics can (and continue to) penetrate Indigenous politics in destructive ways.

Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty comprises a thoroughly written introduction, four chapters, and a brief conclusion. The first chapter, "Contested Indigeneity: Between Kingdom and 'Tribe'," provides a robust overview of the discourse surrounding Hawaiian indigeneity within two prominent Hawaiian sovereignty movements. The first is the effort to federally recognize Kanaka Maoli through legislative and state efforts, such as the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act (commonly known as the Akaka Bill), the First Nation Government Bill, Kana'iolowalu, and Na'i Aupuni. The second consists of Kanaka Maoli who assert the continued existence of the Hawaiian Kingdom under international law, specifically, the Hague Regulations' laws of occupation (1899 and 1907). When retroactively applied to Hawai'i, these laws provide a legal framework that demonstrates the illegality of Hawai'i's annexation to the United States. Furthermore, through international law, Hawai'i has been recognized as an independent state currently occupied by a foreign power (62). Showing the problems that arise from each of these claims, Kauanui suggests that "the emphasis should be on protecting the existing claims by

opposing all U.S. governmental attempts to change Hawaiian legal status to further domesticate the question of sovereignty” (74).

The second chapter, “Properties of Land: That Which Feeds,” provides a structural critique of land privatization in Hawai‘i rooted in the Māhele of 1848—the event that effectively allowed for Kanaka Maoli, non-Kanaka Maoli citizens of the Kingdom, and, later, foreigners to hold land in fee simple title. Drawing from Foucault’s thesis that “politics is war,” she argues that the propertization of land in Hawai‘i by Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian elites “remains central for the ‘achievement’ of statehood” under a notion of international sovereign recognition that was first codified in the European Peace Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 (81). These “Wesphalian notion[s] of sovereignty,” as Kauanui describes them, “are still regarded as the legitimate basis for international political domination of independent states over peoples” (49). Furthermore, the Māhele is an example of how Kingdom elites enacted “their own form of colonial biopolitical governmentality in the face of foreign advancement at the local level and Western imperialism more broadly” (93). Making the case for understanding the legacy of settler colonialism in Hawai‘i, Kauanui describes the acquisition of large tracts of land by Haole (whites), an example of how the Māhele normalized private property regimes in Hawai‘i that permeated into lived social realities. The chapter ends with short descriptions of the AVA Konohiki project and the group Hui Mālama i ke Ala ‘Ūlili, two “renewal projects” that privilege “Indigenous knowledge as the basis for revitalizing Hawaiian ontologies and epistemes in nonproprietary relation to the ‘āina (land)” (110).

The third chapter, “Gender, Marriage, and Coverture: A New Proprietary Relationship,” focuses on the transformation of women’s legal rights during the Hawaiian Kingdom, primarily through the introduction of Christian marriage and legal coverture, and the legacy of those transformations in contemporary sovereignty politics. The chapter includes an ethnographic review of Kanaka Maoli gender and sexual practices, illustrating how “relationships between women and men were egalitarian within their respective genealogical ranking” (117). She then turns her attention to the arrival of Christian missionaries in Hawai‘i in 1820 and their influence among “Christianized chiefs” in disciplining Hawaiian sexuality (122). A significant part of the chapter describes Ka‘ahumanu, the Kuhina Nui (co-ruler) and *de facto* ruler of Hawai‘i at this time, and how she reformed her sexual practices to mirror the hetero-monogamous relationships of the missionaries. Ka‘ahumanu’s self-transformation then led to edicts that effectively codified Christian teachings as kingdom law. Rather than frame these choices through the structure of Indigenous agency, Kauanui instead contextualizes Ka‘ahumanu’s actions by discussing how, in the 1820s, foreign men violently attacked missionaries and criticized Ka‘ahumanu for attempting to impede their sexual access to Hawaiian women. Kauanui describes these events as “European assertions of white male entitlement to Hawaiian women’s bodies for sexual pillage” (131). Because of these instances of sexual violence, in addition to resistance from other ali‘i, prostitution was not outlawed in Hawai‘i.

The normalization of the practice of hetero-monogamous marriage in Hawai‘i is also reviewed in chapter 3. Not only did the missionary endeavor lead to the outlawing of polygamy, polyandry, and incestuous relationships among ali‘i siblings, it also “redefined Hawaiian masculinity to encompass ownership and control over property, including land and eventually women and children” (136). Tied to marriage was the adoption of common-law coverture in Hawai‘i as early

as 1841, which resulted in the subsumption of a woman's legal rights and obligations under her husband upon marriage (139). This new "proprietary regime" diminished women's rights in the Kingdom, resembling the enclosure of land that was accomplished through the Māhele (142). The implications of these regimes are discussed in the last section of the chapter, which critically analyzes a memo by David Keanu Sai, self-proclaimed chairman of the Council of Regency and acting minister of the interior of the Hawaiian Kingdom, regarding the "suffrage of female subjects" in the Hawaiian Kingdom.

Whereas chapter 3 focuses on transformations in women's gender and sexuality, chapter 4, "'Savage' Sexualities," highlights other Hawaiian sexual practices of the late eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth centuries. For Kauanui, "any rigorous examination of sexuality in relation to colonial domination necessarily entails a focus on sovereignty and its sexual implications" (156). In each of the five sections that comprise this chapter, she illustrates different elements of Hawaiian gender and sexuality. They include a review of the literature on aikāne (that is, same-sex relations and sexuality), a (re)telling of Kauikeaouli's (Kamehameha III) same-sex relationship with the Tahitian Kaomi in the early years of his reign, an account of Kauikeouli's incestuous relationship with his sister, Nahi'ena'ena, a contemporary review of literature regarding the fluid third gender known as mähū, and lastly, a critique of how same-sex marriage law in Hawai'i today constitutes a form of "settler colonial continuity in Hawai'i that extends the introduction of male–female marriage and legal coverture for women in the early nineteenth century" (186). The chapter ends with an open invitation to imagine a "decolonial Kanaka erotic autonomy: a politics of sexuality that is grounded in rich Hawaiian lineages of possibility—consensual and sensual" (193).

The close attention that Kauanui pays to Hawaiian women, gender, and sexuality in relation to the formation of the Hawaiian Kingdom and settler colonialism signals a shift in Hawaiian scholarship. Whereas past scholars have focused primarily on Hawai'i's independent status as a means to distinguish the Hawai'i case from other Indigenous struggles, Kauanui challenges this statist model by posing questions about prestatist forms of sovereignty. She also critiques the changes to Hawaiian gender and sexual practices that necessitated Hawai'i's recognition by foreign (predominantly Western) powers as a sovereign state. Rather than disavow claims to sovereignty, these critiques are meant to reassess our understandings of Hawaiian indigeneity—much like the work of other Indigenous feminists whose work is committed to addressing gender inequality in their communities. Through *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty*, Kauanui paves the way for a new generation of Indigenous feminists, especially within Hawai'i, to think critically about our past in ways that can change the present. As the fight for Indigenous land and sovereignty continues, such critiques are necessary for ensuring that our struggles lead to "an ethical future and substantiation of sovereignty through remaking indigeneity without the reliance on juridical regimes of power" (201).

References

Arvin, Maile, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill. 2013. Decolonizing feminism: Challenging connections between settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy. *Feminism Formations* 25 (1): 8–34.

Hall, Lisa Kahaleole. 2009. Navigating our own “sea of island”: Remapping a theoretical space for Hawaiian women and indigenous feminism. *Wicazo Sa Review* 24 (2): 15–38.

Kauanui, Kēhaulani. 2008. *Hawaiian blood: Colonialism and the politics of sovereignty and indigeneity*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.