Making a nation and faking a state: illegal annexation and sovereignty miseducation in Hawai’i

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DOI: 10.23791/461116

Abstract: As a result of the re-emergence of the 1897 Kū‘ē protest petitions and more recent scholarship among academics, which counter the U.S. history of annexation and occupation, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa scholars have been addressing the discourse on De-occupation instead of pursuing a nation-within-a-nation arrangement of U.S. federal recognition.

This article describes the February 2016 ‘Aha Na‘i Aupuni, a self-governance and constitution-writing meeting for and by Native Hawaiians, and includes the first-hand observations of one of the participating delegates. This Na‘i Aupuni process is tied in with the recent protests against the Thirty Meter Telescope project on Mauna Kea on Hawai‘i Island in early 2015. The momentum of the Mauna Kea protests has led to a renewed sense of responsibility to educate on the history of illegal annexation, and on the significance of land for Hawaiians and Hawaiian sovereignty in particular.

Keywords: indigenous, sovereignty, education, resistance, federal recognition, Hawai‘i

[Submitted as Research Note: 13 June 2016, Acceptance of the revised manuscript: 22 August 2016]
Hawai‘i’s citizens, both Kānaka Maoli and others, opposed annexation and denied any formal bilateral Treaty of Annexation. Nowadays, aware of the illegitimacy of annexation, sovereignty activists have come to term the “State of Hawai‘i” the “Fake State of Hawai‘i” in an act of protest. The Kū‘ē Petitions now showed that accepting federal recognition under U.S. occupation would be a lesser status than calling for the De-occupation of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

What pressed many to nevertheless participate in the process of Na‘i Aupuni, rather than to forfeit the chance to voice their opinions on the sovereignty debate, was the preface taken from the previous name roll and recognition process, the Kana‘iolowalu Roll: “Native Hawaiians who choose not to be included on the official roll risk waiving their right, and the right of their children and descendants to be legally and politically acknowledged as Native Hawaiians and to participate in a future convention to reorganize the Hawaiian nation … and as a result may also be excluded from being granted rights of inclusion (citizenship), rights of participation (voting) and rights to potential benefits that may come with citizenship (e.g., land use rights, monetary payments, scholarship, etc.).” (Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 2013). Correspondingly, the Hawai‘i statehood vote in 1959 had run along the same principle of a closed vote, between the choice of remaining a U.S. territory or becoming a U.S. state, no question on regaining sovereign status as the Kingdom of Hawai‘i (Fig. 1).

The fabricated self-determination being promised by Na‘i Aupuni, under the auspices of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), was only open to those willing to work within the U.S. domestic system of law. OHA is a government agency tasked with Kānaka Maoli matters, such as specific programs for the betterment of Native Hawaiian health and education. However, the premeditated and funded nation-building process by OHA is an extension of the failed attempts of “native rolls” collecting names, such as Kana‘iolowalu mentioned above (Act 195). Act 195 is clear in stating a move towards federal recognition, generally seen to be a lesser status of nation-within-a-nation than a sovereign nation-state in itself: “The purpose of this Act is to recognize Native Hawaiians as the only indigenous, aboriginal, maoli population of Hawai‘i. It is also the State’s desire to support the continuing development of a reorganized Native Hawaiian governing entity, and, ultimately, the federal recognition of Native Hawaiians.” (State of Hawai‘i, 2011). In a seeming rebellion of the OHA and thus U.S. executive involvement, the OHA CEO Kamana‘opono Crabbe had in May 2014 raised the following questions in a letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry: “First, does
The Hawaiian Kingdom, as a sovereign independent State, continue to exist as a subject of international law? (…) if the Hawaiian Kingdom continues to exist and the sole-executive agreements are binding on the United States, have the members of the Native Hawaiian Roll Commission, Trustees and staff of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs incurred criminal liability under international law?”. Crabbe’s questions were meant to expose the process and those promoting it as simultaneously counter to both independence goals and U.S. domestic laws. The letter was shortly thereafter rescinded by a follow-up letter sent by the other OHA Trustees, although another individual trustee confirmed his support (Hussey, 2014). The letter and questions were left unanswered by Kerry.

Critical participants of the ‘Aha Na’i Aupuni, who pulled out of the proceedings before elections/meetings or in the end voted against the “constitution” and the “Gated 88” – a reference to the gated golf course – noted particular pre-assembled ideas for the “constitution” that explicitly excluded national independence. During the meetings there were vocal protests with arrests at the golf course. Among the protestors were known cultural leaders like Walter Ritte, who had eliminated himself from nomination and was physically removed from the golf course, when attempting to be a non-participant observer of the proceedings in the first week. The leader of the Nation of Hawai‘i with its sovereign land tract in nearby Waimanalo, Bumpy Kanahele, had participated and withdrawn from the ‘Aha Na’i Aupuni earlier than midway through it. One of the professors, who continued working within the ‘Aha towards independence, was Williamson Chang from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Richardson School of Law, drafting working papers for a provisional Government.

Throughout the ‘Aha Na’i Aupuni meetings, emails were being leaked from the participant list serve and smartphone videos uploaded into Facebook discussion forums for the benefit of those being denied observation. One of the participants of the ‘Aha’s “independence caucus” and subsequent “international committee”, journalist Ka‘ūlani Milham, later exposed the opaque and rushed drafting of the “constitution” in a series for the “Hawaii Independent”: “If developing the best product possible was really the goal of the convention and, at the planned ending of the process, that product had clearly not been agreed upon, wouldn’t the logical move be to extend the process and continue working? Originally, the ‘Aha was meant to last for eight weeks, not four. And that was with only 40 different viewpoints to incorporate.” (Milham, 2016).

In the meantime, a declaration was written denouncing the ‘Aha and signed by independence advocates on the outside of the gated convention, among others, professors Jon Osorio, Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, and Kaleikoa Ka‘eo from the University of Hawai‘i: “The ‘Aha 2016 stems from a top down approach in which all of the terms: the use of Hawaiian trust monies; participation; timeline; representation; the convention, and outcomes have been determined by a small number of people, including former Governor Abercrombie; the State legislature; the Governor-appointed Kana‘iolowalu commissioners; the OHA Board of Trustees; the OHA-selected Na‘i Aupuni Board; and approximately 150 self-appointed ‘aha participants. Each of these parties is complicit in driving an agenda that has divided our people more than ever.” (Hawaii Independent, 2016).

**Mauna Kea and contemporary indigenous resistance**

The reason so many Hawaiians were watching and protesting the Na‘i Aupuni proceedings was tied to the dynamic and on-going “We Are Mauna Kea” movement that sprung up in early April 2015 (Caron, 2015). Among those arrested protesting at the Aha Na‘i Aupuni were also main actors of the Mauna Kea movement. Mauna Kea on Hawai‘i Island is the tallest mountain on earth measured from the seabed to the highest point of its summit. The Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT), the project which initiated this renewed consciousness to guard the ancestral land, is to be 18 stories high, to have a construction footprint of 8 acres, and to sit on 5 acres of land (KAHEA, 2015). Building laws on the island do not even allow for any structure of this height. Construction for the first of currently 13 telescopes began in the late 1960s and this was the only one actually agreed upon, but over the decades a dozen were to follow with inadequate permits. Environmental impacts of the project are seen in the destruction of the habitat of endangered flora and fauna, only to be found on Mauna Kea, and in the potential contamination of the main aquifer of Hawai‘i Island beneath the summit of Mauna Kea. The protests against the telescopes on Mauna Kea go back several decades, however, the involvement of the younger generation and of students, as well as the use of social media, helped gain a different level of awareness on the conflict.

In October of 2013, a mural for Mauna Kea was painted at the Campus Center of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, calling out the university’s claim to be a “Hawaiian place of learning” while they bulldoze the most sacred sites (Fig. 2). The university newspaper “Ka Leo”, who hosted the mural event, painted over this protest. After pressure from the Native Hawaiian student group “HauMĀNA”, Ka Leo apologized for the censorship. On October 7, 2014 the ground-breaking ceremony for the TMT was disrup-
ted and ultimately stopped by Mauna Kea activists. “We are Protectors, not Protesters” is a common slogan for this movement, as the emphasis lies on protecting the sacred land rather than protesting the construction project as is in this location. On April 2, 2015, the so-called protectors, now more numerous, blocked the access road to the construction site. 31 were arrested in the peaceful protests, and thousands began showing their support for Mauna Kea. Social media and the speed in which it spread around the world showed a great solidarity movement with the hashtags #WeAreMaunaKea, #protectMaunaKea, #AlohaTMT, and #TMTshutdown. Another standoff on June 24, 2015, with approximately 700 protectors including children, resulted in more targeted arrests and the Hawai’i Governor David Ige proclaimed “emergency rules” for trespassing on the summit road. The emergency rules were only directed towards protectors, and cultural practitioners were restricted from their customary visits, while astronomers and stargazing tour participants were officially permitted to travel on the road. The emergency rules were deemed unconstitutional and thrown out after protectors had been arrested nonetheless, as once in the case of a group of seven women and one man arrested during prayer (Kelleher, 2015). Currently, thanks to a Hawai’i 2015, the so-called protectors, now from the complex sociopolitical factors to keep in mind when discussing Kanaka Maoli sovereignty in Hawai’i. Social media and the speed in which it spread around the world showed a great solidarity movement with the hashtags #WeAreMaunaKea, #protectMaunaKea, #AlohaTMT, and #TMTshutdown. Another standoff on June 24, 2015, with approximately 700 protectors including children, resulted in more targeted arrests and the Hawai’i Governor David Ige proclaimed “emergency rules” for trespassing on the summit road. The emergency rules were only directed towards protectors, and cultural practitioners were restricted from their customary visits, while astronomers and stargazing tour participants were officially permitted to travel on the road. The emergency rules were deemed unconstitutional and thrown out after protectors had been arrested nonetheless, as once in the case of a group of seven women and one man arrested during prayer (Kelleher, 2015). Currently, thanks to a Hawai’i Supreme Court ruling in favour of the protectors, a lawsuit has won against the TMT for the time-being. The Supreme Court ruled that the TMT did not follow the appropriate building permit, the Conservation District Use Permit (CDUP), and was to renew its permit application process, which has stalled the project indefinitely. The arguments against the TMT project and the Na‘i Aupuni process stem from the complex sociopolitical factors to keep in mind when discussing Kanaka Maoli sovereignty in Hawai’i. In the historical context of U.S. American imperialism, Hawai’i was an independent nation-state overthrown and occupied by the USA. The demographics of the State of Hawai’i that depict the population as multiethnic with a non-white majority gloss over the marginalization and assimilation of the indigenous people of the land. However, the demographics of the citizens of the independent Kingdom of Hawai’i until 1893 were multiethnic as well. In 1993, the Apology Resolution was signed by U.S. President Bill Clinton admitting to the overthrow on its 100th anniversary. Revealingly, its phrasing delegitimizes the argument of a multiethnic nation-state and only “apologizes” to the indigenous population: “Whereas, the indigenous Hawai’ian 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” (U.S. Congress, 1993). Due to the long held misconception of the legality of annexation, there are now two main discourses of the factions in the Hawaiian sovereignty movements, with the one side – the Hawaiian Kingdom “monarchists” – disputing the use of the term “indigenous” for Kanaka Maoli. The De-occupation proponents argue on an international law basis that the Hawaiian Kingdom remains an internationally-recognized nation-state under prolonged occupation, whereas the Decolonization advocates argue within the frame of domestic U.S. laws and are in part for the status of federal recognition. Noelani Goodyear-Kā‘ōpua contends that these concepts and movements need not be exclusive to another, as she asserts that Kānaka Maoli are in fact “indigenous”, but to Hawai‘i, not to the USA (Goodyear-Kā‘ōpua, 2011). She argues for conceptualizing decolonial responses for sovereignty from outside the occupier’s framework instead of from within, and advocates for collective action and decision-making for land rights and nationhood from an indigenous perspective, effectively bridging the two main discourses.

**Aloha ‘Āina**

The concept of aloha ‘āina, the Hawaiian “love of the land”, which also translates to “patience”, is fundamental to this indigenous perspective. To understand aloha ‘āina, a rough “translation” of both ‘āina and aloha into the English language and concepts is needed here, despite the shortcomings in the connotations conveyed. For the context of the term “aloha ‘āina”, aloha would be translated as “love”. The everyday use of the term “Aloha” is not merely “hello” and “goodbye”, as it holds a more vital life-giving essence for Hawaiians. The understanding of ‘āina as simply “land” requires a more in-depth description to highlight the profound meaning of the land to Kānaka Maoli epistemology. The etymology of ‘āina indicates the root as the word ‘ai and shows the value of the land in nurturing and sustaining life: “‘Āina also conveys the sense of arable land. It is essentially a term coined by an agricultural people, deriving as it does from the noun or verb ‘ai, meaning food or to eat, with the substantive na added, so that it may be rendered either “that which feeds” or “the feeder”. ‘Āina thus has connotations in relation to people as conveying the sense of “feeder”, birthplace, and homeland” (Ho’omanawanui, 2008: 124).

Mauna Kea protector Ku‘uipo Freitas, among those arrested at least twice on the mountain, explains her understanding of the term: “Aloha ‘āina is not only a phrase I say, but also a way of living: conducting oneself. It doesn’t only mean love for the land. It has kaona [meaning] to it that most people don’t realize. When we say ‘āina, we don’t just mean land. It means all things in relation to the land that we live on and survive on. It is the love we have for our language, culture, resources, ali‘i [chiefs], chants, stories, legends, people and more. It is the encompassment of everything to do with our culture and history as a people of Hawai‘i. You must show aloha ‘āina through your actions, not just your words.” (Hermes, 2016). In a quote by James Kaulia, President of the Hawaiian Patriotic League “Hui Aloha ‘Āina”, which collected 21,000 of the Kū‘ē Petitions’ signatures, the term aloha ‘āina is translated as “patriotism” from the meaning of “love of the land”: “Do not be afraid, be steadfast in aloha for your land and be united in thought. Protest forever the annexation of Hawai‘i until the very last aloha ‘āina [lives].” (Silva, 2004: 146-147).

**Miseducation and E(A)ducation**

As a result Noenoe Silva’s rediscovery of the Kū‘ē Petitions in 1996, the sovereignty advocates are now promoting the De-occupation discourse over the Decolonization one. Fully-aware that the greater public is still misinformed on the illegitimacy of U.S. annexation, due to the Department of Education upholding much of the standard U.S. curriculum in the “Fake State of Hawai‘i”, many of the advocates are taking it upon themselves to re-educate or “E(A)ducate” on Hawaiian history and sovereignty. Mauna Kea
activists came up with the slogan “EAducate” and Ku‘uipo Freitas explains the wordplay on “EA” and “education”:

“There are many meanings to the word ea. These include sovereignty, life, air, breath, to rise and to swell up. All of these meanings are goals for Hawai‘i Aloha ‘Āina, to raise awareness and knowledge that the history we thought we knew was in fact all lies. We are in a time of great change, and so I believe the meaning of this slogan “EAducate” is to educate in the Hawaiian way; to see things the same way our kūpuna [elders, ancestors] saw things. It’s an amazing time to be witnessing this.” (Hermes, 2016).

Hawai‘i Aloha ‘Āina is “a free Hawaiian educational series that aims to overcome the indoctrination, de-nationalization and Americanization of our people that has been occurring ever since the illegal overthrow of our queen Lili‘uokalani on January 17, 1893,” she explains (ibid.). Even Honolulu’s McKinley High School – renamed after William McKinley, the U.S. President that had unilaterally declared the territory’s annexation treaty. A travelling art project illustrates the value of and interrelation to the land: “The actions and words of activists (…) remind us that Hawaiian social movement is at its best when, rather than demanding that the land be given back to Hawaiians, it is getting Hawaiians back on the land.” (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2011: 155-156).

Acknowledgements

The author would like to mahalo Lele-mia Irvine for his guidance and Ka‘ulani Milham for her help in clarifying any further inquiries on the 4-week Na‘i Aupuni proceedings. Her 5-part series “What Really Happened at the ‘Aha” can be read on Hawaiiindependent.net. Thanks also to the reviewers for comments and advice.
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All translations from Pukui & Elbert’s Hawaiian Dictionary, also online at: http://wehewehe.org/

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Figure 4: “No Treaty of Annexation” installation at ‘Iolani Palace, Honolulu