

Ethnic Nationalism in Hawai‘i

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A nationalist identity has the power to unite and mobilize populations against an oppressor. It also has the power to justify war, violence, and discrimination. Embodying a nationalist identity is both a tool of liberation and can be a cloak worn to inflict maltreatment. Indigenous groups that have survived the colonial machine must cultivate a nationalist identity to advance their social, political, and economic status and to gain the resources and rights that were unjustly stripped away. Indigenous nationalist identities have been created amongst the maze of systematic injustice and in the wake of cultural genocide. Those that identify as Native Hawaiians or Kanaka Maoli are using a contemporary nationalist identity to revive their culture and resist American occupation in Hawai‘i, but that is not without opposition. Residents of Hawai‘i who do not claim Native Hawaiian ancestry push back against nationalist rhetoric within the Hawai‘i justice system. This paper will convey the influence that nationalist rhetoric and nationalist identities have on social and legal triumphs and troubles of Hawai‘i. Also explored are the motives to bolster the Kanaka Maoli nationalist identity and the impacts it has on such a modern, globally-connected, and ethnically diverse state. Ethnic nationalism as a form of resistance through the Kanaka Maoli identity is the most effective means to force the governing regimes of Hawai‘i to reflect Kanaka Maoli culture and address historical and contemporary issues (Takagi, 2004).

While there are many working definitions of nationalism and diverse categories of nationalism, the concept boils down to promoting one group’s interest over another. A nationalist identity is a way of affirming whom a group is by distinguishing who they are not. Nationalism and a nationalist identity are methods of creating exclusion and social hierarchy to meet goals. Therefore, the ethnic nationalist identity is always changing to meet the challenges brought by an oppressor (Okamura, 2008). Ethnic nationalism in Hawai‘i strives to ensure that those who identify as Kanaka Maoli be granted rights, respect, privilege, and the natural resources needed to live and govern as the original

people of Hawai‘i (Okamura, 2008). This ethnic identity is granted to those that can trace their genealogy to Hawai‘i before European contact. Ethnic identity also implies the observance of Native Hawaiian culture and allegiance to the health of the Hawaiian Islands and those of the Kanaka Maoli ethnic class. Colonized states often grapple with finding a collective identity while being occupied as they are disconnected from ancestors and traditional ways of life. Imperialist colonialism/capitalism, settler colonialism, missionary discourse, and the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom has fragmented social ties and has destroyed the health land and people (Silva, 2004). These forces of history have created a “soul wound” to the Kanaka Maoli (Jacob, 2014). Access and connection to the land is the most pivotal aspect of an indigenous person’s identity and well-being (Silva, 2017). The foundation of the Kanaka Maoli identity is the value and practice of *aloha ‘aina*. An ethnic nationalist identity is a vehicle that one can jump into to fight for cultural resurgence (Silva, 2017) and is the most crucial method of resistance. Openly embracing a Kanaka Maoli identity is the most potent form of contemporary resistance to American occupation, “Our presence is our weapon” (Simpson, 2017).

What I mean by resurgence is our creation of a world in which we speak, write, and compose in our native language, take care of our ‘aina and waters; reinvoked and appreciate our native deities; and live (at least mentally) free from the destructive settler colonialism in which we now find ourselves. (Silva, 2017)

Where there is power, there will always be resistance (Foucault, 2001), which is valid for both the response to American power in Hawai‘i and the resistance against Kanaka Maoli nationalism, as evident in the case of *Rice vs. Cayetano*. This case was taken to the U.S. Supreme Court on February 23, 2000, and a verdict was reached that non-Hawaiians had the same right to vote in the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) elections as Native Hawaiians. Previously, only those who identify, and can prove genealogical ancestry to Hawai‘i (also shown through blood quantum), were allowed to vote in OHA elections. The Supreme Court

found that this standard was “radically discriminatory,” which set a legal standard that has crippled Kanaka Maoli nationalism movements ever since. The creation of OHA in 1978 was to advocate and address the needs of Kanaka Maoli people. OHA began with an ethnic nationalist entity, set to mobilize, resist, and undo the effects of colonialism/American occupation in Hawai‘i. The ramifications of the *Rice vs. Cayetano* verdict has dramatically altered Kanaka Maoli nationalism. This steep blow shifted the mission from “advance and obtain” to that of “protect and maintain” (Okamura, 2008). The verdict also ushered in a new wave of racial tension between Kanaka Maoli and Hawai‘i residents. Kanaka Maoli were disgusted that the plaintiff in the *Rice vs. Cayetano* case was a ‘haole’ man of missionary descent claiming to be a victim of racial discrimination when the purpose of OHA was to fight back against the discrimination instituted from haole to Kanaka Maoli (Silva, 2017).

Another legal battle incorporating ethnic nationalist identity is the case of *John Doe vs. Kamehameha Schools* of 2005. Created in 1884, Kamehameha Schools is a non-profit giant on the Hawaiian Islands (Okamura, 2008), and their mission is to promote Kanaka Maoli students through extensive educational opportunities. Kamehameha Schools incorporates Kanaka Maoli values and language into their curriculum and are shaping generational leaders to have a nationalist imperative. The school’s policy is to give “preference” to Kanaka Maoli students, thus implementing policy based on ethnic nationalism in order to progress Kanaka Maoli social, political, and economic standing. Kamehameha Schools was sued over this policy when they denied entrance to a student whose family claimed the Hawaiian culture yet did not fit the ethnic criteria of dissent (Okamura, 2008). While *John Doe vs. Kamehameha Schools* was settled out of court, the case opened debate. A U.S. District Court judge decreed that preference to Kanaka Maoli students, “serves a legitimate remedial purpose by addressing the socioeconomic and educational disadvantages facing native Hawaiians...and revitalizing native Hawaiian culture” (Apgar, 2006), which legitimized the school’s policy. However, the District Court judge’s ruling was repealed; on the platform that

the policy “constitutes unlawful race discrimination” and “operates as an absolute bar to admission for non-Hawaiians” (Okamura, 2008) thus violating the 14th Amendment of the Constitution (Apgar, 2006). Many relate Kamehameha School’s policy like Affirmative Action in that, it is race-based but is intended to level the playing field amongst external pervasive racial preference (white privilege) that exists in the United States. Kanaka Maoli nationalist identity continues to play a role in this saga, as individuals protest these rulings and fight for exclusive access to the fruits of Kamehameha School’s educational resources. *John Doe vs. Kamehameha Schools* is an example of how nationalist identity ignites positive change for a struggling demographic, only to be crippled by accusations that their nationalist identity is unlawful. However, Kanaka Maoli have been successful in other court cases nationally.

The Akaka Bill, signed by U.S. President Bill Clinton, congressionally recognizes Native Hawaiians as the indigenous people of Hawai‘i. The bill authorizes procedures to grant an ethnically based governing entity and protects Kanaka Maoli entities from further legal troubles like *Rice vs. Cayetano* and *John Doe vs. Kamehameha Schools*. The Akaka Bill catapults the original people of Hawai‘i into a political standing similar to Native Americans. Many residents of Hawai‘i feel that this bill is a first step towards the Kanaka Maoli, gaining access to resources, respect, and will embolden cultural resurgence. Indeed, the Akaka Bill grants Kanaka Maoli interests “a seat at the table” and allows proven Kanaka Maoli to hold positions of power (Okamura, 2008). The Akaka Bill illustrates the pervasive power of ethnic nationalism. Despite setbacks to the movement and debate over the bill, there is upward mobility.

Ethnic nationalism does not only play out in the courtroom or among government entities. Ethnic nationalism takes to the streets to find authentic expression and activates civilians to protect land and rights. In March of 2015, the state of Hawai‘i permitted the installment of the Thirty Meter Telescope on the sacred mountain, Mauna Kea. When construction was set to begin, many got involved in saving Mauna Kea from further becoming a scarred scientific platform. Protectors of the Mauna are in the midst of a six-month-long

standoff with government officials and construction workers (Anon., 2019). Protectors have come from all corners of the world, and the most pervasive theme shared is that of Kanaka Maoli. The ethnic nationalist identity has enlivened many to non-violently and systematically protest the Thirty Meter Telescope. Protectors on Mauna Kea embody the identity and sense of nationalism but practicing Kanaka Maoli culture through dance, language, and values. This movement is a clear example of how nationalism can be internalized and mobilized on the individual level to promote the Kanaka Maoli group interests over the global-scientific community's interests. The continued success of the movement proves that nationalist identity is the most powerful tool of resistance.

Hawai'i has been an occupied and colonized nation for over 130 years. The Kanaka Maoli have faced dramatic reductions in population, institutionalized oppression, extreme loss of culture, land, and resources at the hand of the American government (Silva, 2007). The scars of Hawai'i's history intertwine with the hardships faced today create a struggling group. The most natural and most powerful reaction to this reality is the formation of ethnic nationalist identity. The Kanaka Maoli identity is steeped in revived cultural traditions, ethnically shared solidarity, and zeal to resist

American occupation and disenfranchisement. Many great minds openly debated and critiqued as being a force of division, unsuited for modern, globally connected societies. Noam Chomsky said, "Nationalism has a way of oppressing another," and William Ralph Inge has said, "A nation is a society united by a delusion about its ancestry and by common hatred of its neighbors." George Orwell even believed that "Nationalism is power-hunger tempered by self-deception." However, the holistic power cultivated through nationalism cannot possibly be oversimplified as bad (Schachter & Funk, 2012). Gandhi used a nationalist identity to solidify the incredibly diverse nation of India to drive out the British. Haiti used nationalism to lead the first successful colony revolt and gain independence. So too, Kanaka Maoli uses ethnic nationalist identities to resist American occupation and revive their culture.

A warrior confronts colonialism with the truth in order to regenerate authenticity and recreate a life worth living and principles worth dying for. The struggle is to restore connections severed by the colonial machine. The victory is an integrated personality, a cohesive community, and the restoration of respectful and harmonious relationships. (Alfred, 2015)

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