Indigenous Studies Research Network Seminar Series
Associate Professor J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Wesleyan University

Hawaiian Kingdom Nationalism and the Feminization of Indigeneity

Tuesday 6th July, 2010
12:30-2:30 at A Block, Room 105, Kelvin Grove Campus

The Speaker

J. Kēhaulani Kauanui is an associate professor of anthropology and American studies at Wesleyan University, in Connecticut, USA, where she teaches courses on Native sovereignty politics, U.S. colonialism in the Pacific, nationalism, and critical race studies. She earned her Ph.D. in the program of History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is the author of Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity (Duke University Press, 2008). Currently, she is working on her second book titled, Thy Kingdom Come? Gender & Sexuality in Hawaiian Nationalist Politics—a critical study on gender and sexual politics vis-à-vis state-centered Hawaiian nationalism and the disavowal of Hawaiian indigeneity. Kēhaulani was part of the founding steering committee for the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, established in 2008, and is currently a council member serving a three year term. She is the producer and host of a public affairs radio program, “Indigenous Politics: From Native New England and Beyond,” on WESU in Middletown, CT, which is syndicated on five others stations across seven US-states through the Pacifica-radio network, and is also archived online: www.indigenouspolitics.com.

Abstract

The history of the Hawaiian Kingdom—recognized as a state by all major global powers throughout the 19th century—provides Kanaka Maoli (Aboriginal Hawaiians) with a rare legal claim for an indigenous people, since all treaties negotiated between the Kingdom and other nations were signed after the Kingdom has already been recognized as an independent State. This talk presents a critical analysis of contemporary Hawaiian nationalism, with a focus on those wanting to restore the Kingdom who are politically invested citing Hawaiians’ adaptation to Westernization as evidence of our capability for self-governance. The presentation interrogates this history and its contemporary political manifestations in relation to gender differences. The formation of the Hawaiian Kingdom entailed an adaptation to the European masculinist conventions of statehood, where the representation of the nation as part of “civilized manhood” was crucial. Today, most contemporary Kingdom restorationists view anything less than the quest for independent statehood as “backward” because of the domestic dependent status that states imposed on indigenous peoples worldwide allowing for very limited forms of self-determination. As a result, many activists insist that Kanaka Maoli are not indigenous. What complex predicaments arise when Kingdom sovereignty claims are advanced at the expense of indigeneity?

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