

Indigenous Feminisms

“Long Term Strategies”

We can't rape men
put anything in them
against their will

pull down their secrets
chilled by fear, or force

tight apertures
fresh and wide.

We can't stalk and take
bleed the night

squeeze hysteria
from burning stars.

No, we cannot do
just what men do.

But in Pele's hills
beneath a bloody moon
young women dancers

learn castration
as an art.

-Haunani-Kay Trask, 1994
from Light in the Crevice Never Seen

Trask, Haunani-Kay. 1999. “Hawaiians and Human Rights” in *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai’i*, 25-40. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

“Today, in an age of rapacious transnational capitalism, Hawaiians are beginning to think beyond the habitual boundaries of state of Hawaii, even of the United States” (Trask 1999, 39).

In this chapter, Trask argues that the injustices committed against indigenous peoples, such as genocide, are outside of the civil rights discussion. Civil rights presume the legitimacy of civil societies and furthermore assume that indigenous peoples are protected from the state by the state. It is apparent throughout history that this is not the case. “...the single greatest injury to my people caused by the United States cannot be raised within the context of the U.S. Constitution” (Trask 1999, 26). Because of this inherent contradiction, Trask turns to international law and universal human rights as a means of seeking legal justice for Native Hawaiians. Throughout the chapter, Trask discusses the Articles within Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the American Convention on Human Rights.

Trask, Haunani-Kay. 1999. “*Kūpa’a ‘Āina: Native Hawaiian Nationalism in Hawai’i*” in *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai’i*, 65-86. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

Kūpa’a ‘Āina: hold fast to the land.

Throughout this chapter, Trask follows the birth and expansion of Native Hawaiian movements. With roots in anti-eviction, land (and water) struggles in the 1960s, these movements evolved into movements to assert Hawaiians’ “...historic and cultural claims to the land as the *first* and *original* claimants...” (Trask 1999, 67). She provides a brief background on the white and Asian settler control of electoral politics in Hawai’i. Trask challenges the legitimacy of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs as the governing agency for a Hawaiian Nation for various reasons. These reasons include the unbalanced voting constituencies, the inextricable link to the state of Hawaii, and the illogical approach in creating a nation from an agency. In contrast to OHA’s interpretation of sovereignty, Trask describes the “Ka Lāhui Master Plan: *Ho’okupu a Ka Lāhui Hawai’i*” (Trask 1999, 74). Ka Lāhui, in Trask’s view, is an exemplary, comprehensive, Native approach to self-determination.

AMERICAN QUARTERLY

Kauanui, Kēhaulani and Andrea Smith. 2008. “Native Feminisms Engage American Studies”. *American Quarterly* V.60 No.2: 241-249

“Native feminisms seek to go beyond a ‘politics of inclusion’ to a politics in which Native feminisms reconceptualize feminist theory and Native studies”. (Kauanui and Smith 2008, 248)

This chapter introduces the reader to the perceived conflicts between sovereignty movements and feminism. The authors explain that many Native activists, including women, reject feminism as an imperial project. Kauanui and Smith argue that feminism is not the oppressive force and that rather, patriarchal (heteropatriarchy) male dominance is the ultimate foundation of colonial oppression. This first chapter also offers brief overviews of the papers that will follow.

Simpson, Audra. 2008. “From White into Red: Captivity Narratives as Alchemies of Race and Citizenship”. *American Quarterly* V.60 No.2: 250-258

“...white women ‘became’ Indian in the eyes of the state through the conferral of status upon them. And in that, Indian women became ‘white women’”. (Simpson 2008, 256)

Simpson utilizes the famed story of Eunice Williams, a young girl who was taken from her Puritan family by a Mohawk tribe. A Mohawk mother had lost her own child, which prompted the kidnapping. Eunice was reared by the Mohawk, assimilated, and after time accepted by the tribespeople as Mohawk. Upon growing older, Eunice refused to return to her Puritan family and fervently insisted to remain with her Mohawk tribe. The story of Eunice was wildly popular in its time among white settlers. Simpson suggests that this popularity arises from the white settler’s desire to become Indian. The story also remained shocking because of Eunice’s choice to submit to an inferior status and reject her white value. The author contrasts this acceptance of Eunice by the Mohawk with historical (nineteenth century) and contemporary treatment of Mohawk women, particularly in cases of intermarriage. Simpson discusses that previous to Canadian intervention, the Mohawk determined power by rank along both matrilineal and patrilineal lines. One of the first gendered assaults on this system was the Canadian Indian Act of 1876. The act “conferred rights along the patrilineal line” (Simpson 2008, 254). This was the beginning of the dismantling of Mohawk power dynamics and followed an imperial agenda of disempowerment and dispossession.

Barker, Joanne. 2008. "Gender, Sovereignty, Rights: Native Women's Activism against Social Inequality and Violence in Canada". *American Quarterly* V.60 No.2: 259-266.

"...the structures and impact of patriarchal colonialism are neither post nor neo: we live in them still" (Barker 2008, 264).

Barker expands on the negative impacts upon Indian tribes by the Indian Acts of 1868 and 1876. The author argues that although heteropatriarchy was introduced to Indian tribes by white settlers and Christian missionaries, Native men have adopted the values of sexist patriarchy and are subsequently oppressing women within their own tribes in a truly colonial fashion. She discusses the difficulties women's constituencies had within Indian tribes in passing amendments in 1983 and 1985 that "partially reversed the 1876 criterion" (Barker 2008, 259). Male tribe leaders were reluctant to the changes due to their relatively newfound male privilege within tribal government. Women's status quickly became hinged upon the status of her husband, regardless of tribal rank. In reading her work, I've compiled what appears to me, to be the Molotov cocktail of colonial institutions: capitalism, Christianity, heteronormativity, racism, patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, and I would add misogyny. I call it a Molotov cocktail not to diminish its size and impact, but rather to suggest that once taught the method, it is simple to assemble and even easier to ignite and execute.

Million, Dian. 2008. "Felt Theory". *American Quarterly* V.60 No.2:267-272

"American studies is a mutually wrought field of action that should recognize how each account, particularly those that have been silenced make the other" (Million 2008, 267).

In her piece, Million argues that the narratives which comprise history are, in and of themselves, political acts. Million argues that Native feminisms are key to exposing and the inaccurate, sexist histories of Indian people as well as abolishing the embedded sexism within their own contemporary tribes. Though feminism is often framed as a white, imperial construction, Million points out that it is feminism that has brought to light issues formerly categorized under "familial privacy" (Million 2008, 269) such as domestic violence, and sexual abuse against women and children. The author argues that sovereignty movements that are dominated and male-led mirror imperial, patriarchal values. Million's *Felt Theory* is a move to expose the truths in history and today by "telling' ...colonialism as it is *felt* by those who experience it..." (Million 2008, 272).

Hall, Lisa Kahaleole. 2008. "Strategies of Erasure: U.S. Colonialism and Native Hawaiian Feminism". *American Quarterly* V.60 No.2: 273-280.

"Because colonization relies on forced forgetting and erasure the need to bring the past forward into our consciousness is ongoing" (Hall 2008, 279).

"The deliberate destruction of non-heteronormative and monogamous social relationships, the indigenous languages that could conceptualize these relationships, and the cultural practices that celebrated them has been inextricable from the simultaneous colonial expropriation of land and natural resources." (Hall 2008, 278)

Hall argues that colonialism is dependent on historical amnesia and the erasure of race. Within the United States, Hall argues that this is achieved through the fervent pursuit, belief, and marketing campaign towards "multiculturalism" and the "fetishization of individualism" (Hall 2008, 276). This erasure is reinforced with regards to Hawaiian indigeneity by the racial groupings: Asian/Pacific, Asian and Pacific American, and Asian and Pacific Islander. By grouping Hawaiians as an immigrant group, with the pan-ethnic category of Asian, indigeneity is quite effectively vanished. Hall addresses the internalization of patriarchal colonialism within indigenous groups, the reversal of which is complex and difficult. Hall refers the reader to the Hawaiian metaphorical approach discussed in Leilani Holmes' *Ancestry of Experience: A Journey into Hawaiian Ways of Knowing*, that "we face *forward* to the past; it does not lie behind us" (Hall 2008, 279).

Kauanui, J. Kēhaulani. 2008. "Native Hawaiian Decolonization and the Politics of Gender". *American Quarterly* V.60 No.2: 281-287.

"Although processes of colonialism eroded Hawaiian women's status, it is unclear whether Hawaiian nationalist projects can help to restore that status..." (Kauanui 2008, 282).

"...we risk treating the problem of contemporary forms of gendered oppression as secondary to the restoration of political sovereignty" (Kauanui 2008, 285).

Kauanui is interested in explaining why Native men and women silence feminist voices within the Hawaiian independence movement. She describes that within Hawaiian culture, prior to missionization, gender was not a category that stood alone; it was always accompanied by rank, which was determined by genealogy. Women were able to, and did, hold positions of power just as men. These systems of power stratification were abolished upon the aggressive colonization of Hawai'i. Through Western laws and legal

action, white males settlers took power away from Hawaiians, but additionally, this process was gendered. Kauanui offers the following example to demonstrate these gendered actions: “By 1900, Hawaiian men were enfranchised, but Hawaiian women did not gain franchise until 1920” (Kauanui 2008, 285). Even within colonial oppression, there exists gender imbalance. The author recognizes the internalization of heteropatriarchy by many Native Hawaiians and challenges Hawaiian nationalist movements in this regard. She warns against the argument that sexism and gender imbalance are colonial imports and therefore if the colonizer is eradicated, then systems of discrimination will be dismantled along with it. She does not argue against decolonization, but rather begs a more critical approach to gender relations within a contemporary and future nationalist movement.

Denetdale, Jennifer. 2008. “Carving Navajo National Boundaries: Patriotism, Tradition, and the Diné Marriage Act of 2005”. *American Quarterly* V.60 No.2: 289-294.

“Indian military enlistments formed in the American imagination both colorful images of ‘real Americans’ fighting...and about Indians’ predisposition for war and combat. Alongside the fascination with images of the Native warriors unleashing his wartime prowess on behalf of the American nation, observers...argued that military service moved Native Americans toward integration...by directing them away from tribal relations and toward white civilization” (Denetdale 2008, 290).

In this piece, Denetdale correlates the Diné Marriage Act of 2005, which restricts Navajo marriage to heterosexual couples, with the patriotic fervor that followed the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. She demonstrates that many Navajos have aligned themselves with America, and particularly the American military, despite the intrinsic contradiction in doing so. This internalization of American colonization by indigenous peoples leads to the forgetting of years of attacks on Indian domestic soil, of much larger scale than the attacks on September the 11th, 2001. Denetdale points out that not only does this vanishing of history lead to the continued oppression of Indians, but it perpetuates violent American colonialism around the world via U.S. military and furthermore, it is executed by enlisted Indians themselves. The proposal by Navajo Nation council delegate Larry Anderson to outlaw homosexual marriage is a prime example of internalized colonialism and zealous patriotism within Indian nations. Denetdale argues that this legislation was succinct with American “patriotism” on the rise, which was loosely being translated into militant xenophobia, cultural intolerance, and the aggressive proliferation of fundamental Christianity. This measure not only supported the Americanization of Indians, but it completely ignored historical gender

roles within Navajo society. Navajo society recognized a third, and possibly a fourth gender. The *nádleehí* (hermaphrodite) played an integral role in gender mediation. Denying these rich and diverse histories furthers the effects of American colonization. *“Asking how [did] we c[o]me to equate Navajo concerns and priorities with U.S. foreign policy objectives and oppressive gender-sex systems...”* (Denetdale 2008, 294).

Goeman, Mishuan. 2008. “(Re)Mapping Indigenous Presence on the Land in Native Women’s Literature”. *American Quarterly* V.60 No.2: 295-302.

“Colonial spatializing of our lands, bodies, and minds has occurred since contact: maps, travel logs, engravings, newspapers, almanacs, and many other forms of colonial writings formed a systematic practice of confining and defining Native spaces from land to bodies” (Goeman 2008, 296).

Goeman argues that colonialism attempts to map the geographical, spatial, social, and physical bodies of indigenous people. The author encourages the usage Native feminist critiques as a method of counteracting the colonial process. She suggests that the utilization of such methods will “...uproot colonial discourses” (Goeman 2008, 296). The physical, geographical relocation of Indians has served the interests of the United States Empire by disassociating Indians from their land. By removing the Indian from her land, the United States is able to appropriate the land and vanish the former Indian presence. Once removed from the land, the Indian is encouraged to assimilate into American culture, which is to abide by capitalistic and Christian values. “Engendering men and women in the image of the imperial family was of utmost importance in claiming and reordering Native spaces” (Goeman 2008, 298). Understanding and embracing Native places in a geographical and spiritual sense will defy colonial attempts to erase the indigenous.

Ramirez, Renya K. 2008. “Learning across Differences: Native and Ethnic Studies Feminisms”. *American Quarterly* V.60 No.2: 303-307.

“...highlighting our heterogeneity is essential for appreciating our varied experiences as indigenous women. Indeed...this diversity encourages me to argue for the development of multiple feminisms rather than a singular feminism” Ramirez 2008, 304).

In her article, Ramirez argues that interdisciplinary cooperation i.e.: between Native, Ethnic, and American studies, is beneficial for the continued intellectual expansion of each discipline, including Native discourses. She also suggests that this cooperation across fields will not lead to the homogenization of Natives peoples, rather it will encourage the exchange of shared experiences, create solidarity, and help to create

multiple feminisms that address each groups specific needs. Ramirez contends that feminism is not only useful, but also necessary in the indigenous context. Gender imbalance can occur in even the most progressive of activist groups. Ramirez demonstrates this through an example of gender roles within the American Indian Movement (AIM). According to Ramirez, male leaders expected women to assume subordinate roles, even to the extent of being “...expected to satisfy and fulfill the sexual desires of AIM’s male leaders” (Ramirez 2008, 303). In a defense of her idea, Ramirez criticizes Haunani-Kay Trask’s views on feminism. Ramirez states that Trask “...assumes *feminism* and *white feminism* are interchangeable terms” (Ramirez 2008, 304). Her reaction to what she argues is a misconception is as follows “Native scholars’ prioritizing of race and tribal nation over gender is a mistake, since sexism and racism oppress indigenous women at the same time” (Ramirez 2008, 305).

Smith, Andrea. 2008. “American Studies without America: Native Feminisms and the Nation-State.” *American Quarterly* V.60 No.2: 309-315

“When we do not presume that the United States should or will always continue to exist, we create the space to reflect on what might be more just forms of governance, not only for Native peoples, but for the rest of the world. Native women activists have begun articulating spiritually based visions of nation and sovereignty that are separate from nation-states” (Smith 2008, 312).

Smith challenges the legitimacy of the nation state as it stands, and suggests that alternative structures that are not heteropatriarchal are achievable. She asks the reader to look beyond the nation-state, beyond the politics of inclusion, beyond the hyper-violent revolution, and beyond the “machismo-leninismo” (Smith 2008, 313) models towards a decentralized, grassroots, and spiritually informed existence. She argues that violent revolution with weapons will always be won by the state, as they will always have more ammunition. What the state does not have is people power. Indigenous and non-indigenous activist groups alike can subvert the nation-state by living and creating their own “autonomous zones” (Smith 2008, 314). Once this concept has been adopted by a critical mass, there will be nothing the state military can do. Smith acknowledges that conflict is unavoidable, but clarifies that it is not the primary means of revolution. In order to sustain these community created autonomous regions, it will be necessary to challenge, critique, and ultimately abandon the white-colonial, capitalistic, heteropatriarchy. So long as the populous is complicit with patriarchy, the imperial project is succeeding. The moment large groups of humans begin to wholeheartedly reject the notions of patriarchy is the moment the chains of patriarchal oppression will break.

Questions:

Is patriarchy by its very nature misogynistic?

Is the Nation State inherently patriarchal?

Is Capitalism inherently patriarchal?

Is feminism a western construction?

Can indigenous peoples utilize feminism within their own movements?

What is the relationship between sexuality and sovereignty?

What are your thoughts on multiculturalism?

What is the role of the feminist voice in Hawaiian independence movements?

Does international law provide a feasible route towards justice for Native Hawaiians?

How do we, on a day-to-day basis work to breakdown heteropatriarchy?