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Don't Call Me "Hawaiian-at-Heart": Self-determination and Identity Theft

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Abstract

This paper presents a major lesson I learned from my research on the roles of non-natives in the Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) sovereignty movement, one that should prove instructive for activists in other movements: when the federal and state governments, immigrants and settlers, and the Kānaka Maoli people compete to define Hawaiian identity and control access to Hawaiian people, land, and culture, who counts as "Native Hawaiian" matters. Yet, with so much at stake, even when common sense tells nonnatives we know what "native" means and it is not us, many forces collude to encourage nonnative appropriation of Hawaiian identity—identity theft. In order to make useful contributions to the movement as a non-Kanaka Maoli scholar and activist, I had to learn to recognize and respect the boundary lines that were being drawn and redrawn around Native Hawaiian identity in everyday movement practices, and to refuse the false comfort of the label "Hawaiian-at-heart."

Keywords: Hawai'i, indigenous rights, social movements, allies, white privilege

In the summer of 1996, I attended meeting of Hawaiian sovereignty activists in Hilo, Hawai'i. With both Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians) and non-Kanaka Maoli present, the group reached an initial consensus on participation: nonnatives were to serve as observers and resources, but would not participate in the discussion and decision-making process. However, when participants were asked to introduce themselves, most of the non-Kanaka Maoli avoided identifying themselves as "nonnative." Some named their home state in the U.S., while others claimed they "felt" Hawaiian or were "honorary Hawaiians." Kānaka Maoli participants I interviewed interpreted these claims as an attempt to appropriate their identity in order to gain power in the movement. Such behavior fits a larger pattern of colonial appropriation of Kanaka Maoli identity, a sort of collective identity theft, familiar to all island residents through the tourist industry's commercialization of "aloha spirit" and liberal conferral of the title "Hawaiian at heart" on all who pass through Waikīkī.

This story illustrates a major lesson I learned from my research: When the United States federal and state governments, immigrants and settlers, the Kānaka Maoli people, and their numerous sovereignty movement groups compete to define Native Hawaiian identity and control access to Native Hawaiian people, land, and culture, who counts as Native Hawaiian matters. With so much at stake, even when common sense tells us nonnatives we know what "native" means and it is not us, the promise of material reward, the psychological desire to belong and feel at home, and the privilege of membership in the dominant group collude to encourage nonnative appropriation of Native Hawaiian identity—identity theft.

As a researcher and activist trying to understand the roles non-Kanaka Maoli activists were playing in the movement, I had to learn to recognize the

boundary lines that were being drawn and redrawn around Native Hawaiian identity in everyday movement practices. Ultimately, my research led me to conclude that non-Kanaka Maoli, especially haole (white people), need to understand our relationship to Native Hawaiian identity as “other,” and reject the privilege that permits identity theft. I learned that misappropriation of Hawaiian identity, mistakenly seen as a shortcut to welcome and inclusion in the sovereignty movement, actually guarantees frustration and exclusion. I advocate instead the simple and common-sense acceptance by nonnatives that Native Hawaiian identity is not ours.

Background

I'm a middle class white woman from Pennsylvania, so it may seem rather strange to some readers to find me writing about Native Hawaiian identity. Given that my people had colonized the islands, stolen governance from their rightful owners, and redefined “Hawaiian” according to blood quantum to facilitate land theft, any and all writing about Hawaiian identity by haole authors is rightly suspect as yet another effort at colonial misappropriation. Nevertheless, in the course of my research and activism I did in fact learn a lot about Native Hawaiian identity. Some of the lessons came through listening and observing; others were learned the hard way, when I “forgot my place,” as friends in the movement would say, and ended up crossing the sometimes mobile and often contested boundary between Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian identity in inappropriate ways.

I quickly discovered that ethnic identity played a central role in this movement, especially as it separated Kānaka Maoli activists, who are seeking the return of their lands and nation and are therefore central to the cause, from

their nonnative allies, who are usually asked to play supportive roles. Many friends and teachers, too numerous to name here, helped me come to know the native people of the islands, their culture and its protocols. They also helped me discover the ways in which my haole status would come to define my own role in the movement. In order to be welcome in the movement, I had to come to an understanding of what Native Hawaiian *is*, to help me figure out what haole is, which in turn would help me understand the politics of roles in the sovereignty movement and my own place therein.

Yet, as Jon Osorio has written, when it comes to defining or even just describing this identity from the outside, “even the best-intentioned nonnative scholars can tell us little beyond how they perceive us” (2001: 376). So I had to begin by listening to those with insiders knowledge of Native Hawaiian identity—Kānaka Maoli people themselves—and the many ways they told me who they are. What I write here certainly begins with “how I perceive them.” I hope in the end it will also shed some light on why these perceptions sometimes matter.

Who is the “Self” in “Self-determination”?

In pursuing my study of the roles of non-Kanaka Maoli in the sovereignty movement, I read every piece of movement literature, both activist and academic, I could get my hands on. I conducted more than 50 hours of formal interviews with 32 movement activists, including 15 Native Hawaiians. And I wrote detailed field notes as a “participant-observer” covering a full year’s worth of both formal movement events and informal conversations in which I took part.² My research on and activism taught me that self-definition creates the foundation of self-determination for any indigenous movement.

One legacy of colonial conquest is that control over the definition of native peoples has been seized by outsiders, by others, by the colonizer's government (Trask, 1993: 53-54). Self-definition, reclaiming the power to determine who belongs to one's nation, is therefore a foundational act of resistance to colonialism, a key step on the road to decolonization. Sovereignty and independence movements, which are based on the self-determination of peoples, thus begin with this question: "Who is the 'self' in 'self-determination'?" Issues of identity are clearly at the heart of any such movement, and definitions of native identity are thus political as well as technical.

Feminist theorist Marilyn Frye offers an analysis of power and its relationship to naming practices that can help us understand the significance of self-identification in the sovereignty movement. Frye theorizes two "faces of power," access and definition. She writes first that "differences of power are always manifested in asymmetrical access" (1993: 95). For example, in Hawai'i the federal government controls the distribution of federal Hawaiian Homes lands, while Native Hawaiians die on the waiting list hoping to gain access (Faludi, 1991: A1). Access is the first face of power.

In addition, Frye tells us the powerful control definition, the second face (1993: 96). In the 1920 Hawaiian Homes Commission Act the United States Government defined "native Hawaiians" biologically by blood quantum, including only those with 50% or more indigenous blood (Kauanui, 1999: 123). The Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act of 2007, commonly known as the Akaka Bill, if passed, would institute a new federal definition:

...the term 'Native Hawaiian' means—(i) an individual who is 1 of the indigenous, native people of Hawaii [sic] and who is a direct lineal descendant of the aboriginal, indigenous, native people who—(I) resided

in the islands that now comprise the State of Hawaii on or before January 1, 1893; and (II) occupied and exercised sovereignty in the Hawaiian archipelago, including the area that now constitutes the State of Hawaii; or (ii) an individual who is 1 of the indigenous, native people of Hawaii [sic] and who was eligible in 1921 for the programs authorized by the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (42 Stat. 108, chapter 42) or a direct lineal descendant of that individual (United States Senate, 2007).

This definition would remain in force until a Native Hawaiian government with its own definition of “Native Hawaiian” is recognized by the United States.

This last provision appears to return the power of self-definition to Native Hawaiians; however, having controlled access to the creation of this governing entity by exercising the power to define its constituents, and retaining the power to give or deny “recognition” once it is established, the federal government actually maintains absolute power in this legislation to determine who is “Native Hawaiian.” Although such government control over group identity is routinely deployed against indigenous peoples in the United States (Jaimes, 1992), nonnatives rarely encounter such state-defined identities.

Frye concludes that those seeking power over their own lives (women in her study, Native Hawaiians in this essay) must seek control of its two faces by “re-patterning” access to themselves and their resources, enabling them to claim control over definitions of their group (1993: 97). This is why activists in the Kanaka Maoli sovereignty movement are so familiar with the question: “Who is the ‘self’ in ‘self-determination’?” Reclaiming the right to define their own identity and rejecting federal definitions, Native Hawaiians are drawing new boundaries to control access to their people, their nation, and their land.

Kānaka Maoli

A terrific illustration of this process in progress appear in Kekuni Blaisdell's 1989 article, "'Hawaiian' vs. 'Kānaka Maoli' as Metaphors." Reflecting on the variety of ways various powerholders such as government officials, haole scholars, and others define "Hawaiian" and "Native Hawaiian" in ways that assign this identity to virtually every island resident, he highlights abuses of this face of power. Early in the 20th Century, the 50% "blood quantum" definition facilitated United States theft of Kānaka Maoli lands by drastically restricting the numbers of eligible Hawaiians. Later in the 20th Century, a United States Secretary of Health succeeded in verbally erasing appalling Native health statistics invisible by counting all Hawai'i residents as "Hawaiian" at a time when the state as a whole had the best health ranking in the country. The power to define was thus deliberately employed to limit access to land and health services.

Blaisdell then asks a key question: "...[if] anyone in Hawai'i is or can be 'Hawaiian,' or even 'Native Hawaiian,' then *who* are *we* Hawaiians? Nobody?" (1989: 78). Certainly this linguistic erasure, which at first may appear to be trivial, merely a matter of semantics, could have devastating physical consequences for Native Hawaiians, who would lose access to much needed health care. Their survival, therefore, requires resistance.

To enact this resistance, Blaisdell claims the power of definition by reclaiming the name his ancestors used for themselves—Kānaka Maoli (1989: 79). While the term itself is sometimes contested within the movement (Silva, 2000: 10), the fundamental move to claim power by reappropriating the power of self-definition and choosing a traditional term for self-identification embodies the act of self-determination. Claiming control over the definition of the group and its identity becomes the first stop to repatterning access to the

people, their land, their language and culture.

Native Hawaiians

Blaisdell's strategy to reclaim Native Hawaiian identity as Kanaka Maoli identity has been adopted by many, but not all, sovereignty activists. In day-to-day movement practice, I found most often that the terms Kanaka Maoli and Native Hawaiian were used interchangeably, though some groups and individuals preferred one to the other.

Of course, no peoples ever speak with only one sole unified voice, but the meaning in practice of any term used for indigenous identity usually seems to involve a combination of two essential elements: self-identification by the individual *and*, importantly, recognition by the group. For instance, while attending a conference in Australia in 1996 I heard this definition of local natives: "An aborigine is anyone who identifies him or herself as an aborigine and is accepted as an aborigine by other aborigines." I also saw this in practice in Hawai'i, for example, at the meeting in Hilo described at the beginning of this essay, when nonnative claims to Kanaka Maoli identity were immediately challenged. There is an element of personal choice, but this factor by itself never serves as the sole determinant of group membership. The group in question must concur.

So, for example, Blaisdell rejects the claims of "... 'wannabees'—those non-Hawaiians who claim to be 'Hawaiian-in-heart'" (1989: 78). While welcoming their support, he rejects their claims to Hawaiian identity, pointing out that they do not suffer the consequences of "anti-Hawaiianism." He goes on to argue the need for Kanaka Maoli leadership in reclaiming sovereignty, beginning by reclaiming the power to define the identity itself. Given the numerous claims and entitlements at stake for indigenous peoples in identity

debates today, this group control over the determination of who belongs is essential, as we shall see in the discussion of wannabes later in this essay.

Years of research, informed by my participation in the sovereignty movement and interviews with Native Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian activists, led me to conclude that in the sovereignty movement today “the indigenous, first people of Hawai‘i are the Kānaka Maoli, the Native people. In general practice they define themselves as anyone descended from those who were in the islands prior to the arrival of Captain Cook in 1778” (Kraemer, 2000: 184). This approach to identity springs from tradition, tied to genealogy, ancestral and family connections that today help to define who is Native Hawaiian, and can be traced back through the generations to pre-colonial times. A nonnative may be added to the genealogy of a Hawaiian ‘ohana (family) through marriage, but this does not change that person’s group identity. Instead, Hawaiians are today defined by genealogy, by ancestry, by blood relationship to the people who inhabited the islands prior to Western contact (Osorio, 2001: 361).

Cultural Hawaiians

However, while this is the “generally agreed” definition of Native Hawaiian identity, and the one I found most commonly used within the sovereignty movement, I did encounter other definitions of what it means to be “Hawaiian.” One competing interpretation, offering a broader conception of Hawaiian identity based on traditions of hospitality and inclusivity, is described by James Nakapa‘ahu:

Culturally speaking, we don’t define ourselves by blood ... You have to look at the way people *live* before making a judgment ... If you were born in this place and call this place home, you’re Hawaiian—anybody. We have Hawaiians of German descent, Hawaiians of Filipino descent

(Mast & Mast, 1996: 382).

For Nakapa‘ahu, whose family includes step-brothers with no Hawaiian ancestry who are, nevertheless, his brothers, this cultural definition of Hawaiian identity is rooted in experience. His brothers identify as Hawaiian, “and we treat them as Hawaiian, as family” (Mast & Mast, 1996: 382).

In this case, at-home experience in the ‘ohana provides evidence to support an inclusive definition of Hawaiian identity. Lynette Cruz likewise cites the inclusive practices of her family as the source of her commitment to this more inclusive sense of Hawaiian identity:

When people talk about Hawaiians being really inclusive in their culture, I absolutely believe it because I lived that with my mother and my grandmother ... There are many people who support the movement who are not Hawaiian, not even a drop. I think it’s because they have become culturally Hawaiian... (Mast & Mast, 1996: 382).

Yet even this more inclusive notion of who counts as Hawaiian is rooted in a strong sense of Native self-determination. Cruz asserts: “This is our life. This is how we live. If we bring you into our life, then you’re in” (Mast & Mast, 1996: 382). Claiming an “*inherent* sovereignty... in my gut,” experientially rooted in the practice of aloha ‘āina, Cruz contrasts Hawaiian tradition with the dominant, exclusive system rooted in money and power, and asserts an inclusive, traditional alternative:

In building a new nation and a new community, there are not many people in the movement who look to exclude anybody. How are we going to do that? We married them all! We have been pushing for a change in the system so that we *all* can fit in (Mast & Mast, 1996: 383).

Neither Cruz nor Nakapa‘ahu use the word “native” when discussing cultural Hawaiians. The absence of the adjective opens the door for those without

Hawaiian "blood," but also continues the assertion of native self-determination.

Hawaiian Nationals

Another complication related to the identity question in the sovereignty movement resides in the way definitions of identity must play a role in determining political status of individuals within the Hawaiian nation. Different sovereignty groups use different methods for defining political status.³ Some, like Ka Lāhui Hawai'i, use Native Hawaiian pre-contact ancestry as the determining factor, and grant full citizenship only to "Native Hawaiians and their descendants" (Ka Lāhui Hawai'i, 1993: 2). Non-Hawaiians may enroll as Honorary Citizens, with no voting power.

Others, such as Ka Pākaukau, combine the cultural conception with genealogy and ancestry, asserting the traditional Kanaka Maoli value of *lōkahi*, or unity with all humanity, while maintaining the indigenous right to leadership (Blaisdell, 1989: 79). They maintain Kanaka Maoli control while extending hospitality:

We speak as Kānaka Maoli, a people indigenous since time immemorial to our homeland, Ka Pae'āina ... Our restored nation is for all, non-Kanaka Maoli as well as Kānaka Maoli, who share our two basic ancestral cultural values ... reverence for our sacred environment ... and compassion for all as our 'ohana, family (Blaisdell 1996: 1).

Here again, Native self-determination precedes the inclusion of nonnatives: "*our* restored nation is for all."

Increased attention in recent years has focused on a more purely political, legally defined identification of citizenship for a category of people commonly referred to as "Hawaiian nationals." This identity has been most clearly articulated by Keanu Sai's Hawaiian Kingdom organizations as derived from

kingdom law, with reference to United States and international law as well:

...the Hawaiian citizenry of today is comprised of descendants of Hawaiian subjects and those foreigners, excepting United States nationals, who were born in the territory of the Hawaiian Kingdom (Sai, n.d.).

Since Hawaiian subjects under Kingdom law included many nonnatives, their descendants today, with or without Native ancestry, qualify as subjects of the restored kingdom, or Hawaiian nationals in this model. Only United States Nationals are excluded, though the legislature would have the power to create alternative paths to citizenship, such as naturalization.

Another group, the Independent and Sovereign Nation-State of Hawai‘i, more commonly known simply as the Nation of Hawai‘i, offers this option by defining two types of citizens. Kānaka Maoli Nationals are descendants of the original inhabitants of the islands prior to 1778. Naturalized Citizens would “choose to become citizens of the Nation” through a legal process defined by the nation’s legislature (Nation of Hawai‘i, 1995), and could become Hawaiian Nationals with full citizenship status, including voting rights.

Given all of this competing terminology emerging from the Kanaka Maoli community itself and the potential political and material consequences of being included or excluded from citizenship the nation, nonnatives can find it all too easy to blur the lines between political and social group identity. Suddenly Native Hawaiian identity becomes contestable and may appear to be readily accessible for nonnatives seeking to understand their place in the movement and in the islands. Never Native Hawaiian, but sometimes culturally Hawaiian and/or potentially politically Hawaiian, it's a short step to the slippery slope of political and cultural identity theft.

Identity Theft: Wannabes and "Hawaiians-at-Heart"

The federal government defines Native Hawaiians by blood quantum. Kānaka Maoli activists use a variety of competing terminology—Kānaka Maoli, Native Hawaiians, Cultural Hawaiians, and Hawaiian Nationals (or citizens or subjects). A history of betrayal by foreigners demands indigenous self-determination, while a tradition of inclusivity requires hospitality toward others.

In this context, we can return to the question with which this essay begins: why did the non-Kanaka Maoli I encountered at the meeting in Hilo (described at the start of the essay), who certainly knew they had no Kānaka Maoli ancestors, refuse to identify themselves as non-Kanaka Maoli or haole? If we apply Frye's theory of power to that situation, we can begin to understand their actions. At the Friday night meeting Kānaka Maoli activists repatterned access their group by limiting discussion and decision-making to Kānaka Maoli, defined as those having ancestors in the islands prior to 1778. One could argue then that those who resisted identifying themselves as "non-Kanaka Maoli" were resisting the drawing definition of identity boundaries that reallocated access to power; they were resisting a loss of power, trying to maintain their own access to a central place in the movement.

Wannabes

Members of a dominant group who want to hold on to power when members of an oppressed group are reclaiming self-determination often try to "pass" for members of the oppressed group. This is the problem of the "wannabe."⁴ Wannabes claim Kānaka Maoli identities for themselves; they try to pass for Hawaiian. They are called "wannabes" because they "wanna (want

to) be Hawaiian.”

A Hawaiian woman activist I interviewed identified two kinds of wannabes: (1) non-Kanaka Maoli who want to take on a whole new identity, and (2) non-Kanaka Maoli who “just want to belong because sovereignty is ‘in.’ And they want to be there on the cutting edge of history.” According to this informant, Type One wannabes are “people who come and think it’s a very superficial thing, that our cultural history is something that can be explained away, educated away, or simply adopted.” As Kānaka Maoli reclaim the power of self-determination by reasserting control over their language, their culture, and government, Type One wannabes try to claim access to that same language, culture, and government by pretending to be Hawaiian. Blaisdell gave an example of this type in 1989, reporting “... at a recent community meeting, a *haole* woman identified herself as a ‘Native Hawaiian’ because she was born in Hawai‘i, just as her mother was a Native Texan because she was born in Texas!” (1989: 78). Native Hawaiian identity, stripped of history and political context, becomes a matter of geographical trivia—one’s birthplace determines one’s identity.

Wannabes who are trying to pass for Hawaiian resist Native Hawaiian challenges to their identity claims. Another Kanaka Maoli woman I interviewed described a “Chinese/Haole” acquaintance as a wannabe. One day a friend introduced this person by saying “Oh, she looks Hawaiian, but she’s not.” She complained, asking “What did you tell him for? People think I’m Hawaiian.” According to my interview subject: “That was really offensive to the Hawaiians. Just be proud of who you are. Why do you want to be us?”

She went on to suggest that the wannabe issue was a frequent problem with non-Kanaka Maoli people trying to work as allies for her particular sovereignty group. She noticed that these allies spent little time interacting

among themselves:

That was the interesting thing is each of them was there because of wanting some affiliation with Hawaiians or having some affiliation with Hawaiians. But they have no affiliation with each other ... they just want to be with us.

After hearing this story, I began to monitor my own behavior and noticed I, too, sometimes followed this pattern, which became easier to monitor and try to change as some of my Kānaka Maoli colleagues began to send new haole allies to me to learn what I had been learning. I noticed that these would-be allies often had little interest in talking to me, because I was not Kanaka Maoli and therefore not at the center of power in the movement.

Two of the non-Hawaiian allies I interviewed would be classified as wannabes by many of my Hawaiian interviewees. A local Japanese man mentioned an event he went to and said "I stood the vigil with the rest of the Hawaiians all night, like all the other good Hawaiians." When I asked about his ancestry, he did not claim any indigenous, pre-contact ancestors.

An older woman, identified as "haole" to me by several Kānaka Maoli friends, but not self-identified as such, told me she had been raised in a Hawaiian neighborhood, and used the words "we" or "our" three times when referring to Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture. When asked about her ancestry she named the countries of origin of some European ancestors, and then said she might be Hawaiian. She expressed some uncertainty due to not knowing part of her family history and "because of the Hawaiian streak in me," which she left undefined.

Not knowing the details of her heritage myself, I hesitated to question her self-identification as possibly Hawaiian. Yet at the same time, experience in the movement suggested to me that many Kānaka Maoli activists would challenge

her to prove her ancestry before using the first person plural. As a Native Hawaiian college professor once told me:

This is offensive to Hawaiians ... You want to be supportive, then don't ever say 'we' and include yourself when you're talking about Hawaiian people: 'We Hawaiians believe in this' or 'Our Hawaiian ancestors believed that.' What are their ancestors, you know what I mean?

When non-Hawaiians try to pass for Hawaiian, she told me, it's "a theft of who you are. It's an outsider trying to steal our mana (spiritual power) and tell us what to do." Other Hawaiians have also told me they find this sort of wannabe attitude insulting, annoying, and a drain on their time and energy.

At the Hilo gathering described above, a woman who said she "thought" she was Hawaiian was challenged to name her ancestors and could not. A woman who identified herself as "an Honorary Hawaiian with Ka Lāhui" found herself immediately corrected by a member of that group and informed that she was an Honorary Citizen, not an "Honorary Hawaiian." Here again, we see Kānaka Maoli claiming the power to define their own group. These identity contests are repeated over and over again at meetings, retreats, and rallies, and in my experience do indeed consume a great deal of time and energy.

The second type of wannabe, trying to do the "in" thing and make history, tends not to last very long in the movement. A young Kanaka Maoli man described Type Two wannabes he has seen as people who "want to have the soul or whatever without going through the bullshit," and said "they get iced out" quickly. He pointed out that they often act defensively, wanting to distance themselves from racism by disowning their racial identity, rather than by doing proactive anti-racist work. This type tends to vanish quickly upon learning that joining the sovereignty movement will not turn them into instant Hawaiians.

Another informant told me what Type Twos really want is "to be loved by

Hawaiians. They don't want to be bad haoles or bad foreigners or bad whatever." She said this type is easy to spot, because they try to work out their identity problems at meetings:

They've got a psychological disability that they're trying to work through in the meetings. And you can always tell them because they have a certain sort of talkativeness. They talk too much. Whereas real people ... they listen very carefully and they say "Here's a little contribution." And pau [finished]. But these other kinds they sit there and they start telling me their life story ... and how they love Hawaiians.

At the Hilo meeting I found myself challenged by two older Kānaka Maoli women who, upon learning some of my personal history, wanted to know why I was at their meeting in Hawai'i instead of back in the United States supporting my own people in their struggles with the government. My response was weak at best, as I tried to explain how "my people" are generally satisfied with our government, and how, since I objected to my government's treatment of their people, I came to the meeting to help. I had the typical wannabe reaction and sought to justify my presence. So I limped through my argument, knowing that words were inadequate and my actions would eventually have to speak for me.

Haunani-Kay Trask has also analyzed the Type Two wannabe in her well-known book *From a Native Daughter*:

In general, Hawaiians need to be wary of "wannabe" *haole*, i.e., those *haole* who want to be Hawaiian because they can't stomach being identified as *haole*. Wannabes, like other aggressors, usually still want control (1993: 250).

Trask lists non-Hawaiian takeover of Hawaiian groups and leadership as one of the most damaging wannabe behaviors, because it leaves Hawaiian practices and Hawaiian leaders marginalized in their own movement. Eventually, she

argues, the result is that the Native Hawaiians leave the group (1993: 251).

Hawaiians-at-heart

A variation on the wannabe is the “Hawaiian at heart,” a label used by the tourist industry and others to give nonnatives uncritical access to all things native, including Native Hawaiian identity. In this case, nonnatives do not try to “pass” for Hawaiian; rather they barge their way into Native Hawaiian identity by changing its definition. David J. Baker describes the Hawaiian-at-heart as “Hawaiian by affinity, if not by lineage. You have adopted the ethos of the islands—aloha, generosity, conviviality—and this is what makes you quintessentially Hawaiian” (1997: 655). He points out that this opportunity to choose to be Hawaiian holds great appeal for nonnatives in an era when Kanaka Maoli sovereignty claims raise fears of “racial disharmony” (656). Erase race; erase disharmony. And we’re all one big, happy family.

Though Baker refers to the Hawaiian-at-heart approach as a form of “aracism” (657), comforting for the haole, if dangerous for the Kanaka Maoli, I would argue that it is in fact a racist attitude. A Kanaka Maoli friend quickly deconstructed the racism at the core of the “Hawaiian-at-heart” concept for me in 1997:

So do people go up to you and be like, “Oh, you know, I really can empathize with you. I’m really a rich banker at heart. I’m really a haole corporate lawyer at heart. I’m really German at heart?” Basically what that’s saying is that we have no intelligence, that we have no true understanding, all we have is our emotions. And so what you’re saying is that you have the emotion, but you have the intellect, too, that comes from your haole ancestors. Basically you’re saying “I’m better than you.” So that’s an insult.

Nonnatives may remain oblivious to the racism inherent in the concept, because on the surface it appears to be a complement, suggesting "I want to be like you." However, if anyone can be "Hawaiian at heart," Native Hawaiian identity loses its significance in the islands, and Native Hawaiians have no special claim to land or to self-determination.

Baker argues that "it is precisely because these claims for nongenetic Hawaianness can be made, and are sometimes even accepted, that sovereignty leaders must be so vehement in their denunciation of them" (1997: 656). My interviewee pointed out that some Native Hawaiians will themselves identify some non-Hawaiians as "Hawaiian at heart," but she finds this practice more acceptable because "that's a way of including you." Small wonder, then, that many nonnatives cling to this form of inclusion. Who would reject such hospitality?

On the other hand, non-Kanaka Maoli attempts to claim this identity on their own raise the question "Where is your heart? Why have you lost it?" Kahu Charles Kauluwehi Maxwell (2002) has illustrated the significance of this problem as a challenge to Native Hawaiian identity today:

Our culture is being used by everyone in the world...It is now the "in" thing to use a Hawaiian word because it is "exotic." What is even more comical but sad is that there are those who move here because they "feel" this is their homeland, while those whose homeland this really is move to the Mainland to provide better for their families. For shame! If anyone can feel Hawaiian, or be "Hawaiian at heart," where does this leave us as true Hawaiians, as Kanaka Maoli?

The professor I mentioned earlier summarized the heart of the matter when I spoke to her:

I guess for those of us working in the sovereignty movement it's always

that when we meet a nonnative who wants to be supportive we kind of hold our breath and hope that this isn't going to be another burden to us or another idiot who thinks they want to be Hawaiian ... We all should celebrate our own history. We all have ancestors. We should celebrate who they are.

Don't Call Me Hawaiian-at-Heart

It's hard, though, to celebrate one's ancestors after coming to know them as oppressors, colonizers, settlers, and racists. Who wants to celebrate a legacy of colonial conquest? I certainly went through my own period of denial. When enrolled in a course on colonialism and colonization, I found myself absolutely unable to understand the usage and meaning of the terms "colonizer" and "colonized." Students in the class routinely applied the theoretical material we read to Hawaiian history and contemporary politics. In the course of class discussion, as I dimly began to recognize that I might be a "colonizer" in Hawai'i, I tried to rationalize my way out of this distressing identity by asserting that missionary wives in 18th century were "colonized, too," because they were oppressed by their sexist husbands.

When a Native Hawaiian classmate informed me flat-out that I was wrong, the wall of denial began to crumble, and I suddenly recognized the source of my resistance: I was raised in the United Church of Christ, the same church that sent these white women missionaries to Hawai'i! Of course I'd benefited from their legacy in numerous ways. No need to learn Hawaiian before coming to study at the University of Hawai'i. No need for a student visa or a passport. I was, indeed, a colonizer.

Denial of the past in this context is a political cop-out, and yet so tempting to the non-Kanaka Maoli. It's easier to deny the past, deny difference, claim to

be "Hawaiian" or accept an invitation to name oneself "Hawaiian-at-heart," because then we don't have to be accountable in the present for the privilege and power those despised ancestors have passed on to us as our unwanted heritage. I admit I can still find it pleasing when a Native Hawaiian person tells me my heart is Hawaiian; but I've learned too much and can no longer rest comfortably in such a moment.

If I reject that temptation, another invites me to acknowledge the past while trying to reject the legacy of privilege. I will be different from my ancestors; I will treat all Kānaka Maoli people with respect; I will not steal their land. I love my Hawaiian friends; I love the Hawaiian culture; I'm really Hawaiian in my heart...and down the road we go again. I'm not accustomed to experiencing my ancestry as a limiting force in my life, raised as I was in a world of white American dominance. But if I really do want to support Kanaka Maoli sovereignty and self-determination, and if I am honestly willing to listen to and learn from my Native Hawaiian friends and teachers, denying my own ancestry and pretending to be just like them is hypocritical at the very least.

Our circumstances are just too different to support this fantasy. Many have taught me what Kekuni Blaisdell has articulated so clearly in print with regard to non-Kanaka Maoli allies:

While we Hawaiians have traditionally welcomed their sharing enjoyment of things Hawaiian, and their support for our needs, it is *only we* who can truly feel the pain of anti-Hawaiianism, and who must assert the necessary leadership in revitalizing our culture and people, and correcting the injustices against us (1989: 78).

And painful as our racist legacy is to confront, we must pay attention when Haunani-Kay Trask tells us that "... the constant refusal of many nonnatives to understand their place—that is, who and where they are—means their claims of

equal status as Natives, or worse, superior status over us, are nothing but racist arrogance” (1993: 249). She highlights the undeniable significance of our different origins, such as the ways the Hawaiian language and everyday practices are intimately tied to land from which they spring, while the languages and cultures of our ancestors are not and the ways. In the struggle for control of land and power in Hawai‘i, these things matter. Sustainable lifeways rooted in 1500 years of practice in the islands promise a far better, healthier, more economically sound future than the current wasteful, imported lifestyle, and 1500 years of practice cannot be simply appropriated.

The political and material stakes are high. Those who claim victory in the struggle to define things Hawaiian will control access to Hawaiian people, to Hawaiian culture, and to over one million acres of Hawaiian land and resources, and they will determine the political future of the islands. And if we look to history, to the resistance to the overthrow of Hawaii’s queen and to annexation of the islands by the United States, we learn that Hawaiian traditions of aloha and inclusivity did not prohibit an exclusive self-definition by the Native group (Silva, 2000: 10). As Jon Osorio reminds us, in the Hawaiian Kingdom, the lives of Kanaka Maoli and haole may have been intimately intertwined as they voted together, lives as neighbors, even intermarried, but none of this made haole citizens into "natives" (Osorio, 2001: 372).

One of my young Hawaiian informants pointed out in our interview that “before haole came” Kānaka Maoli “did not have separation ... we were just people.” But one consequence of colonization was abuse of Kanaka Maoli aloha and inclusivity, including nonnatives using adoption and marriage as the means to gain access to power. She went on to argue for the need to focus on Native Hawaiian identity and empower Kānaka Maoli within the movement.

Another Kanaka Maoli friend told me: “We are all one people in certain

circumstances. When the plane crashes and we're trying to all survive in the water, we're all one people." But when land and culture are being stolen, damaged, and destroyed, when some people are benefiting from the oppression of another people, *whether they want to benefit or not*, we're not all one people. Kanaka Maoli survival is threatened; mine is not.

Colonial history and white privilege teach haole people in Hawai'i that appropriation is our natural right. We appropriated Kanaka Maoli lands in the Mahele; we appropriated their bodies as labor on the sugar plantations; we appropriated their language and culture for the tourism industry. In this context, appropriation of Kanaka Maoli identity seems natural and logical; privilege disguises the true nature of this act when we should acknowledge it for what it is—identity theft. I could deny, evade, play the wannabe or the Hawaiian-at-heart, and get away with an awful lot of it because my people rule in Hawai'i today. But in the end, I won't fool anybody:

... race definitely matters to us. It is important to us that we are, in the first place, Hawaiian. Moreover, our attitudes toward haole have not really changed all that much over time. We were ambivalent about them in the nineteenth century and we remain so today. We allowed them to live here, prosper, and even rule us, but we always recognized that they were not Hawaiian (Osorio, 2001: 365).

He haole au. I am haole. I am not Kanaka Maoli. I am not Native Hawaiian. I am not Hawaiian. And please don't ever call me "Hawaiian-at-heart." There. It's not so hard to admit it; after all, it's true. I didn't choose it; I didn't get to pick my ancestors, so I cannot claim a "do-over" and pick someone else's ancestors for my own. And why should I want to, when the most important and lasting lesson I learned from my work in the sovereignty movement tells me I can use my haole identity to help end the

oppression of the Kānaka Maoli people? My voice will often be heard in situations where Native Hawaiian voices are being ignored. I can share what I've learned with haole people in a way that my Kānaka Maoli friends and colleagues cannot.

He haole au. I am haole. Maybe it's easier for me to say than it is for others. After all, I was 26 years old and my identity well-formed before I ever set foot in Hawai'i. Seven years ago I moved to Minnesota, which I now call home. Hawai'i was my second home, and it's still my home away from home, but at this point in time, I have a lot less at stake than nonnative residents of the islands. The material and political consequences of a victorious Kanaka Maoli sovereignty movement won't touch me much. Maybe I'll need a visa to visit; maybe I'll have to bring my passport and change my money. Maybe I'll have to dial an international code to call my friends. I can live with that pretty easily.

But for now I still have my haole privilege. I could move back tomorrow without a visa, without a passport, and spend my American dollars. I can tap into that ancestral legacy any time I want; or, I can look to the future and try to help create a new legacy. The old one is rooted in betrayal and taught that haole people cannot be trusted. Why not begin a new story with the haole people doing the trusting? Trust that identity theft, pretending to be Kanaka Maoli, is a sure path to further conflict, strife, and oppression. Trust that if sovereignty comes for Kānaka Maoli tomorrow we will not be put on boats and shipped back to America (or for local people Japan or Korea or China...). Trust that our respect for fundamental Kanaka Maoli human rights will be returned ten-fold with respect for our own fundamental human rights in a sovereign Hawai'i. My experience trying to put this approach into practice in the sovereignty movement tells me such trust will be richly rewarded with acceptance and opportunities to work together and create strong and loving ties that identity

theft would always and forever deny us.

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Endnotes

- 1 For more details on my research methodology, see Kraemer (2000).
- 2 For a more complete discussion of status of non-Hawaiians in a future Hawaiian nation, see Anthony Castanha's "The Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement: Roles of and Impacts on Non-Hawaiians" at <http://www.hookele.com/non-hawaiians/>
- 3 Marilyn Frye does not discuss the problem of the "wannabe" in her article, perhaps because her focus is on separatism in the women's movement, which hasn't faced a problem of male allies who "wannabe" women.