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Anarchist Charges and the Politics of Hawaiian Indigeneity and Sovereignty

J. Kēhaulani Kauanui

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In 2009, I delivered a talk at the Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies for an event critically reflecting on the fiftieth year of statehood for Hawaiʻi. My talk focused on the distinctions between de-occupation, decolonization, and indigenous self-determination. I challenged the notion that occupation and colonialism are mutually exclusive, as is often asserted by Hawaiian Kingdom nationalists. And, in turn, I proposed that we take up the analytic of settler colonialism, while also drawing on normative frameworks of international law as a tactic to challenge US Empire, and stressed the spiritual and material importance of decolonial resistance. I noted my affiliation with the nationalist movement, dating back to 1990, as a diasporic Hawaiian woman.

A video of my talk made its way to YouTube, and in the comments section, David Carr posted critical comments focused on nationalism and anarchism. From what I know about Carr, he is an

educator as well as the curator of the Hawai'i 70s–80s Punk Museum online. Here is an excerpt of his feedback:

> Post-modernists pass for radical these days. Indigeneity, tracing a geneology [sic] to precontact peoples is a racial claim to sovereignty. That's old fashioned 19th century politics. Thanks Heidegger and Foucault for helping to orchestrate this retreat from class. Academia is giving birth to these neo-anarchist bourgeois geniuses who never ever mention class, just as JKK did not for this entire speech. JKK represents the far right conservative wing of fake anarchism for our time. Sorry JKK, but anarchists don't promote ethnic nationalism, and no amount of confused pretzel logic can dress up your ideology as anti-nationalist. Why not just come clean and admit you are a liberal academic with a taste for postmodernism because it allows you to imagine yourself as a radical without having to actually engage in class war against capital?

Although I never identified myself as an anarchist in the talk, nor did my work on anarchism come up on the panel, I nonetheless want to respond to the charges Carr levied online since they offer an opportunity to distinguish the diversity of anarchist practices, clarify common misunderstandings about Hawaiian nationalism often held by non-Kanaka, and offer some initial thoughts on bringing together an indigenous sovereignty politic in relation to anarchist philosophy and activism.

Several comrades and colleagues who have read Carr's comments asked why I would even take time to respond to them. However, when one distills Carr's critique, he raises a set of questions that I have been asked by political radicals I respect, who have asked me in private how I reconcile my Hawaiian nationalist commitments with an anarchist political orientation. Moreover, Carr

unfortunately is not an outlier among radical leftists as he represents a revolutionary class-struggle anarchist position.

Here I aim to grapple with anarchist political frameworks vis-à-vis assertions of Hawaiian indigeneity and sovereignty. Bringing together an indigenous sovereignty politic in relation to anarchist philosophy and praxis can be challenging in light of a statist kingdom nationalist movement on the one hand, and a US statedriven containment of Hawaiian claims within federal policy on Indian tribes on the other. This fraught terrain begs for a decolonial anarchist approach that challenges settler colonialism while also engaging international law as a tactic to challenge US occupation. By turning to the non-statist/non-Western form of indigenous Hawaiian "sovereignty," known as ea, for guiding cultural principles toward ethical relationships, I argue that anarchism need not be at odds with lāhui (Hawaiian peoplehood, often glossed as nation). Thus, this short essay is my initial attempt to examine ways the two may come together. Hence, in tending to Carr's "anarchist charges" against me (his accusations), I offer my own understanding of "anarchist charges" (responsibilities) in the context of Hawai'i.

I should first note the irony that Carr would hurl the label of "postmodern" as an insult at any indigenous-identified person, given the colonial imposition of modernity premised on the notion of "progress" from that which has been deemed primitive and savage. Postmodernism involves a reappraisal of modern assumptions about culture, identity, history, and language. As myriad scholars and activists have documented, coloniality manifested throughout the world and determined the socioeconomic, racial, and epistemological value systems of "modern" society. This is precisely why coloniality does not just disappear with political and historical decolonization (when the period of territorial domination of lands ends and countries gain independence); it is part of the logic of Western civilization (Wynter, 1995; Mignolo, 2011). Relatedly, Carr's understanding of the Hawaiian sovereignty claim as a form of "ethnic nationalism" is not uncommon, yet it is a misnomer. For

one, citizenship within the Hawaiian kingdom was not limited to Kanaka Maoli. Moreover, ethnicity, race, and indigeneity are not the same as each other. Even in the case of those not advocating for Hawaiian independence, such as the many in support of a federally recognized Native-specific governing entity, they cannot be fairly understood to be "ethnic nationalists," since they are working within a US-Native trust model that is a policy for those who are indigenous and suffered the blow of US colonialism.

Also note how Carr claims that assertions of indigeneity—by way of the tracing of one's genealogy to precontact peoples—are a racial claim to sovereignty. Yet, as I documented extensively in my book, Hawaiian Blood, genealogy and race are not one and the same. The 50 percent blood quantum rule that Kanaka Maoli are subject to equates Hawaiian cultural identity with a quantifiable amount of blood. This classificatory technology of the state emerged as a way to undermine Hawaiian sovereignty and reduce Kanaka Maoli to a racial minority, reinforcing a system of white racial privilege bound to property ownership. This correlation of ancestry and race imposed by the US government on Kanaka Maoli has had far-reaching legal and cultural effects. In any case, indigeneity and race are divergent from each other, and also from ethnicity and nationality. While all are arguably socially constructed, these categories of social difference are all distinct.

It is not uncommon for anarchists who maintain (out) dated doctrinaire notions to dismiss assertions of indigeneity as a problematic form of identity politics and/ or retrograde ethnic nationalism. Those attached to enduring constructions of what is known as early "big-A Anarchism" tend to assert the primacy of class struggle and workers' movements. In contrast, many contemporary "small-a" anarchists have been compelled to grapple with the realities of anarchist practices increasingly deployed by on-the-ground struggles—such as Idle No More, Black Lives Matter, and the resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline. These anarchist engagements have entailed a reckoning with

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the evolving intersectionality of classic anarchist preoccupations with capitalism and the state. This is not to create a binary of the "old" big-A Anarchism with a "new" small-a anarchism, since intersectional thinking has a long history tracing back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially (but not exclusively) with regard to gender and sexual oppression. But anarchism from the mid-twentieth century to the contemporary period has taken up more expansive cultural questions that are often rejected by those who are wedded to singularly class-based politics, elevating class to foundational status.

In his book, *Unruly Equality: U.S. Anarchism in the Twentieth Century*, Andrew Cornell (2016) offers the first comprehensive intellectual and social history of American anarchist thought and activism across the twentieth century. He challenges the prevailing historiography that suggests anarchism disappeared after the Red Scare following the Bolshevik Russian Revolution of 1917. Alternately, Cornell argues that far from fading away, anarchists dealt with major events such as the rise of Communism, the New Deal, atomic warfare, the black freedom struggle, and a succession of artistic avant-gardes stretching from 1915 to 1975 (p. 26). Cornell notes that classical anarchism reached its highest point of influence in the decade before World War I and ended with its lowest point of influence at the onset of World War II. The foundation for the contemporary anarchist movement began in the 1940s with the formulation of radical pacifism during World War II. Although Cornell identified three major strategic tendencies within classical anarchism—insurrectionary, syndicalist, and bohemian—anarchists did not form unified political parties with concrete policy platforms, and instead belonged to a series of informally connected anarchist labor unions, literary groups, newspapers, and other organizations loosely grouping anarchists by cultural background, language, and strategic preference, but generally subscribing to the same "anarchist praxis." His central argument addresses the shift in the focus of American anarchism from "classical an-

archism," which was focused around the organization of workers, to one of social anarchy, which foregrounded political activism around ecology, feminism, and opposition to cultural alienation—addressing the intersectional hierarchies of class, race, gender, and sexuality in relation to the state (p. 12).

This history is crucial to understanding the divergences within the anarchist tradition that have shaped debates as to what constitutes anarchism today. Carr represents a class-struggle anarchist position. His tirade reveals resentment of how the late nineteenth and early twentieth century anarchist movement expanded from the narrow, traditional focus on class struggle to a broader, more diverse organizing against all forms of social domination and hierarchy. Notably, during the shift documented by Cornell, the global movement of decolonization in the 1950s and 60s challenged American anarchists as to how they might take anticolonial stances without aiding and abetting in a similar power structure taking the place of any overthrown state system. As Colin Ward (2004, p. 33) notes, anarchists often hold hostility toward territorial politics.

But today, even social anarchists, like the editorial collective of "An Anarchist FAQ" (2009), assert a categorical rejection of nationalism. They address two directly related queries: "Are anarchists against nationalism?" and "Are anarchists opposed to national liberation struggles?" In response to the first, they answer, "Yes, anarchists are opposed to nationalism in all its forms." To defend this position, they first define what they think anarchists mean by nationalism and the importance of distinguishing between **nationality** (which they define as "cultural affinity") and **nationalism** (which they assert is "confined to the state and government itself"). They continue, "nationalism, at root, is destructive and reactionary, whereas cultural difference and affinity is a source of community, social diversity and vitality." They go on to assert that nationalism "creates the theoretical justification for authoritarianism. . . . In addition, nationalism hides class differences within the 'nation' by arguing that all people must unite around their supposedly com-

face of aggressive attacks on our nation and lands. Meanwhile, it is crucial to resist this ongoing theft and all attempts by the fiftieth state and the US federal government to alter our existing political status. In other words, we must not forfeit our national rights under international law or otherwise surrender. Asserting our national rights is a necessary *tactic* by which to challenge US domination. The concept of lāhui may be a sticking point for many anarchists who bristle over the abidance to any notion of distinct peoplehood. But this is about our survival as a people—a decolonial project that does not hinge on the restoration of any state. This is not "confused pretzel logic" as Carr claims; this is about insisting on an indigenous distinction in the face of ongoing settler colonial domination and military occupation. This is about envisioning sustainable sovereign futures.

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In those valleys were the villages and the people who lived, and they had their own decentralized power over their valleys, their water, their land, their resources, their politics—and collectively they made up the nation. . . . Even with over 120 years of US occupation, colonization, forced assimilation . . . we've never lost the sense of the ahupuaʻa . . . the [concept] is still very much paramount now in local politics, government politics. . . . The ahupuaʻa . . . was a very efficient way to manage the resources in a way that was . . . sustainable (Perez & Kauanui, 2013).

Although the makaʻāinana worked in relationship to the konohiki—who were accountable to the paramount chief of said island—the way in which Kanaka Maoli viewed land offers insight into Hawaiian epistemological frames that are relevant today for indigenous revitalization of the lāhui. One of these tenets is that of aloha ʻāina, reverence for the land, which is core to Hawaiian values and premised on ecological and spiritual balance, as well as responsibility. It is also important to note that the makaʻāinana can and did challenge chiefly authority, and the ties between the common people and the chiefs were premised on cultural ethics of reciprocity.

There are many projects in Hawaiʻi that serve as rich examples of decolonialist undertakings—including traditional voyaging practices, hula, and taro cultivation, to name just a few—ones that are restorative and revamp ways for ethical living for the well-being for the lāhui and others. For some, this mode resembles a form of prefigurative politics "Hawaiian style"—but is perhaps more aptly described as "indigenous resurgence."

With regard to the current nationalist movement in Hawaiʻi, we must not rely on the US state and its subsidiary, nor wait for the resurrection of the Hawaiian Kingdom. Pursuing ea is critical, given the complex political realities we encounter as Kanaka Maoli in the

mon interests (as members of the same 'nation'), when in fact that have nothing in common due to the existence of hierarchies and classes." Here we see their assumption that "nation" is linked to "state."

I have encountered anarchists who have strong reactions against any forms of nationalism because they see it as inextricably tied to aspirations for state power and always already linked to separatism, patriotism, xenophobia, or ethnic chauvinism—rather than autonomy. With regard to the quest to form a new state as an end goal to national liberation, this has never been a supposition indigenous peoples could make, especially given the fact that today's international law, which purports to be secular, still affirms the sovereignty of states over peoples. Here, "peoples" is a distinct concept that is often synonymous to "nations" as a way to describe collective polities of those related by kinship.

In his work on "postcolonial anarchism," Roger White, a member of Anarchist People of Color, has written of anarchists' hostility to nationalism. He explains:

The rejection of nationalism by many North American anarchists is often an expression of a colonial mindset that requires all of the peoples of the world fighting for liberation to define their social selves in relation to the class war. In this war there are two classes—the workers and the ruling class. . . . Other anarchists who don't subscribe to industrial age class war dogma simply would like to see anarchists cut their ties to the left completely. This severance would presumably free them of all of the political baggage that solidarity with revolutionary nationalists and indigenous autonomist struggles attract. The two above interpretations of the international role and responsibility of the anarchist movement with respect to the fight against neo-colonialism and imperialism are not the ideas of

> an anti-state fringe. They represent the two strongest tendencies in the North American scene. *(White, n.d., p.3)*

Here White's snapshot of the tensions inherent in anarchist apprehension of indigenous struggles gets at the polarization in Carr's dismissal of my political position on Hawaiian sovereignty as a bourgeois ethnic nationalist movement that he assumes neglects class struggle.

In the Hawaiian context, the formation of the Kingdom as a state must entail an acknowledgment of the role of Western imperialism. Kamehameha established the monarchy in 1810, after forging a battle to unify the islands starting in 1795. This was arguably a response to nearly two decades of foreign encroachment. These decisions were already taking place within a field of imperialism, and this increasing pressure on Hawaiʻi likely played a large role, as efforts to create legal sources for Hawaiian authority intensified. By 1843, the Kingdom gained international recognition when Britain, France, and the United States acknowledged its sovereignty. But that is only part of the story.

In the 2009 film, Hawaiʻi: A Voice for Sovereignty, Kanaka scholar and activist Kaleikoa Kaeo commented on the Kingdom's motto—*Ua mau ke ea o ka ʻāina i ka pono*—the life of the land is perpetuated in justice. Kaeo explains that for Hawaiians, sovereignty does not come from kings, constitutions, or guns: instead, "sovereignty comes from the land. . . . the land itself is our sovereignty." The motto of the kingdom was declared by Kamehameha III at an 1843 ceremony after the Paulet Affair, whereby English Admiral Richard Darton Thomas ended a short-lived British occupation—through a diplomatic resolution—and affirmed the United Kingdom's recognition of Hawaiian sovereignty. But, although the monarch promulgated the motto, we can see how it has the potential to undermine notions of Western state power with a nonproprietary relationship to the land as the

foundation. The motto includes the word ea—the power and life force of interconnectedness between deities, ancestral forces, humans, and all elements of the natural world (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, 2013). Ea contrasts with the Westphalian system of states and so articulates sovereignty according to a land-based system rather than a state-centered system. Thus, acknowledgment of Hawaiian indigeneity also allows for the more general consideration of non-Western models of sovereignty and how they may inform our politics and social practices.

There are other points of reference that may relate to anarchist sensibilities in terms of the how the common people lived on the land. Reverence for the land (ʻāina, that which feeds) is front and center; the mountains, streams, winds, animals, and trees are not anonymous inanimate objects—they are living entities with names and may be the kinolau (embodied manifestation) of deities, while others are ʻaumākua (ancestral). To be sure, precolonial Hawaiian society was stratified along the lines of genealogical rank, a chiefly hierarchy. But for the question of anarchism and resonances with pre-monarchal Kanaka governing practices, we might look to the ahupuaʻa system. Each island, or mokupuni, was ruled by a mōʻī (paramount chief) and divided into large sections, or moku-o-loko. These moku were further divided into ʻokana or kalana—districts—and each district was comprised of many ahupuaʻa (wedgeshaped sections of land). The mōʻī allocated ahupuaʻa to lesser chiefs who entrusted the land's administration to their local land stewards, the konohiki. In turn, they managed land access for makaʻāinana (the common people) who labored for the chiefs and fulfilled tributary. The ahupuaʻa usually followed natural geographical boundaries, such as ridgelines and rivers, and ran from mountain to sea. Thus, ahupuaʻa included all the materials required for sustenance for members of the society who had shared access. As grassroots Kanaka Maoli activist Andre Perez noted in an interview I conducted with him for the anarchist radio program, Horizontal Power Hour: