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This article uses a Native Hawaiian example to raise difficult questions about the role and responsibility of non-Indigenous educators in teaching and supporting Indigenous studies. It challenges educators and educational researchers to think closely about how they might serve as allies in Indigenous struggles for self-determination. [Indigenous, Native American, Hawaiian education]

As a Native Hawaiian who has gone through grade school as a minority in my own island home, I understand the recent demands by Indigenous groups across the globe to see themselves reflected in school curricula. Indeed, nearly every progressive thinker in education, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, would agree on the need for multicultural school curricula that address the unique experiences and perspectives of Indigenous and other historically oppressed minority groups. However, as Indigenous peoples are making gains in terms of our cultural presence in school curricula and course syllabi, most of us continue to lag sorely behind when one considers our virtually nonexistent physical presence as classroom teachers and administrators on school and university faculty. Consequently, when Indigenous studies curricula are promoted in the absence of significant structural changes that provide for the recruitment and employment of Indigenous classroom teachers who are qualified to teach this curriculum, it is difficult to predict what these progressive curricular efforts will actually look like in practice.

Using a Native Hawaiian case study as an example, this article relates a cautionary tale of a well-intended Indigenous studies curriculum, which, when carried out without accompanying structural changes in school personnel and community power relations, has had many unanticipated and counterproductive effects. This article is about education in Hawai‘i, but it carries much wider implications, as the struggle for curricular inclusion and linguistically and culturally compatible education in which Native Hawaiians are engaged parallels similar efforts by other Indigenous groups. There is also a message here for non-Indigenous educators and educational researchers who hold positions of power from which they can potentially serve as allies to these and other efforts in Indigenous education and self-determination.

Historical Context

Over 100 years after the illegal overthrow of the Native Hawaiian monarchy and Hawai‘i’s forced annexation to the United States, the (post)colonial state of Hawai‘i remains economically and politically dominated by a colonial settler population that is approximately one-third white and one-third Asian American. Although whites and Asian Americans dominate Hawai‘i’s state institutions and public educational system, the Native people of Hawai‘i, who comprise approximately one-fifth of the state population, are significantly underrepresented as public school teachers and, until recently, have had little representation in K-12 and postsecondary curricula. Inspired by nationwide civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, in 1978 the Hawaiian renaissance and sovereignty movement
pushed through the state legislature a constitutional amendment mandating that Native Hawaiian people’s stories and experiences be included in school curricula. However, there have been few if any studies that critically examine how this Indigenous Hawaiian curriculum is actually carried out in classroom practice.

A Glimpse into a Hawaiian Studies Classroom

My concern about the messages that are communicated through classroom Hawaiian studies lessons began with my visit to a fourth-grade class in Honolulu. The class is located in a public elementary school in a residential neighborhood of modest single-family homes and townhouses. The school’s population of approximately 400 students come from a mix of middle-class and working-class families. As is the case for nearly half of the public school classrooms in Hawai‘i, the class is taught by a middle-class, Japanese-American teacher whose grandparents immigrated to Hawai‘i in the late 19th or early 20th century. The student population at the school, similar to the student population of public schools throughout the state, is racially and culturally heterogeneous with students of Japanese, Chinese, Caucasian, Native Hawaiian, and numerous other ancestries. The following transcript is taken from my field notes on a Hawaiian studies lesson that transpired during a visit to this classroom.

It is the culminating day of a week-long independent study project on self-selected topics related to early Hawaiian life. The students are expected to get together with their research partners and present their findings to the class. After allowing for a few minutes of final preparations, the teacher calls the class into session. She positions herself with a note pad at the back of the class while the students situate their seats theater-style facing the now empty space in front of the class chalkboard. The first pair of volunteers is called and the presentations begin.

Kai and Holly jump from their seats, push in their chairs, and assume their positions at the front of the room. Giggling sheepishly, they stand shoulder to shoulder, each holding a corner of their single script. They take a deep breath and read from their script in a familiar sing-song register:

**Kai and Holly** (in unison): We’re doing a report about ali‘i [chiefs].

**K:** Ali‘i are very important because they were the first class and they were the high chiefs.

**H:** They were bigger than everyone else and they had more things and more rights.

**K:** A lower chief had to bow down before a higher chief.

**H:** A common person had to lie down before the high chief so they would not make their head higher than the highest chief. They could not get in the path of a chief’s shadow.

**K:** Any questions?

As Kai and Holly hurry back to their seats, the teacher thanks the girls for a well-delivered presentation and calls the next pair of volunteers to the floor. Shannon and Amy come forward to share their report on the chief’s helpers. They speak in unison throughout their presentation:

**This group is called the chief’s helpers. The chief had many people to help him.**

They helped him by helping run the island. They also paid taxes.

Many people helped the chief by cooking and serving him.

He also had someone to carry his kāhili [feather standard symbolic of royalty].

He also had someone to care for his clothes.

A high chief usually had a little over one hundred people to wait on him and care for all his needs. Do you have any questions?

These presentations are followed by similar-sounding reports on the kahu (guardians) who taught the chief about sports and war, the maka‘ainana (commoners) who fought in battles for the chief, helped him build roads and temples, and worked in the chief’s taro patches, and Celia and Robin’s report on the Hawaiian kāhuna (priests):
Celia: I'm Celia and this is my pal, Robin.

Robin: We're going to be researching about kāhuna.

C: The first thing we researched about was that the kāhuna were skillful people.

R: It took lots of learning to be a kahuna [priest, singular].

C: They helped the people pray.

R: Most of them were kāhuna because they had special powers.

C: They used their powers.

R: They prayed people to death.

C: They helped their ali‘i win wars.

Next is Malia and Sarah's presentation on the pu‘uhonua (place of refuge). The girls explain how women, children, and old people went to this refuge when the men were fighting in wars, and how others could go there if they broke a kapu (prohibition) and they did not want to get killed. They explain that in old Hawai‘i there were many kapu or rules about what people could not do:

Sarah: If you were a woman you couldn't eat certain foods.

Malia: You had to eat separate from the men and you couldn't cook.

S: Everyone had to lie down when the chief came.

M: Sometimes you had to stay inside all day and you couldn't make any noise.

S: Your animals had to be quiet too.

M: If you got caught breaking a kapu they would kill you.

S: They would beat you to death with a club or strangle you with a rope.

M and S (in unison): But if you could run to the pu‘uhonua before they could catch you, you were safe and they couldn’t kill you.

Matt and Andy follow with their report on human sacrifice and the Hawaiian war god. They introduce Kū as a vicious, bloodthirsty god with an insatiable appetite for sacrificial victims:

Andy: Hawaiians had lots of gods. The main one and the meanest one was Kū.

Matt: Kū had many large temples. Many people were killed and offered to Kū.

A: The rules for praying at Kū's temple were very strict. You had to sit in a certain way. You couldn't move or make any noise at all.

M: If you didn't follow the priest's rules you were killed and offered as a human sacrifice.

Scott and Bobby conclude the class with a presentation on the lowly kauwā (societal outcasts) who were used as sacrificial victims when kapu breakers could not be found:

Scott: The kauwā were the lowest class of people. They were outcasts.

Bobby: Other Hawaiians stayed away from them. They looked down on the kauwā.

S: The kauwā had tattoos on their foreheads. They lived apart from everyone else.

B: Hawaiians killed the kauwā as offerings to the gods.

S: The kahuna went to where the kauwā lived. He called out a name and that person had to come.

B: Then he killed the kauwā and took him to the heiau [place of worship] to offer him to the gods.

As the recess bell sounds and the students give themselves a hearty round of applause, I struggled to make sense of what had just transpired before me. The experience can best be described as uncanny—oddly familiar and strangely estranged. Many aspects of the lesson—the nervous giggles, the students speaking in unison, and the sing-song, almost poetic register—were quite ordinary. At the same time, however, something about the lesson was “odd”—‘queer’—‘wrong’—‘strange’—‘fishy’” (Zizek 1991:53). In Slavoj Zizek’s (1991) terms, something about
the lesson had definitely gone awry. How is it, I asked myself, that a curriculum designed to foster an appreciation for the Native people of Hawai‘i could lead to such horrific depictions of Hawaiian sadism and violence? More specifically, I wondered: Where did the children acquire these exaggerated notions about Hawaiians? And how could the classroom teacher allow these misconceptions to be perpetuated in her classroom? In the discussion that follows I apply multiple interpretive strategies, including Bakhtinian discourse analysis and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) metaphor of the rhizome, in an attempt to answer these questions.

Methodology

Although the transcript that opens this article tells the story of students and teachers at one particular school site, the analysis that follows draws upon two years of fieldwork involving observations, interviews, and document analyses conducted in eight elementary schools throughout the state of Hawai‘i. In selecting these school sites, I aimed to mirror the range of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic demographics found in the Hawai‘i school system at large. As is increasingly the case in urban public school systems throughout the United States, the diverse racial and ethnic makeup of Hawai‘i’s student population is not adequately mirrored in our teaching staff, which largely comprises middle-class individuals from the state’s politically and economically dominant racial and cultural groups. Although the largest percentage of students in Hawai‘i’s public schools is of Native Hawaiian ancestry (24.7 percent), the large majority of classroom teachers are Japanese American (46.4 percent) and Caucasian (27.9 percent) (Hawai‘i Department of Education 1999). These general demographics are similarly reflected across the eight schools in which I conducted my fieldwork.

In an attempt to verify the typicality of my classroom observations, over the course of conducting this research I consulted with numerous classroom teachers and administrators and presented my findings in a variety of forums across the state. As I presented my findings in these various forums, it became clear that I had not just happened upon a few extreme examples. The problems I observed were not simply chance occurrences, but instead were typical, common and, in many instances, inevitable as they reflect structural features of Hawaiian society in general and the Hawai‘i school system in particular.

In my effort to expose the deep structural problems in Hawai‘i’s educational system, I make every attempt to mask the identities of the individual teachers and students involved, but make no effort to mute or dull the sometimes shocking nature of the classroom content I observed. My purpose is not to criticize these particular individuals or their unique circumstances, but to use familiar aspects of their experiences to make general points about pervasive problems that are common to Hawaiian studies education throughout the state. It is my hope that these familiar themes and characters may resonate with the experiences of other Indigenous people and hold lessons for Indigenous education in other communities as well.

Hawaiian Violence and Bakhtinian Text Mapping

My analysis begins with an attempt to understand the origins of the exaggerated depictions of Hawaiian sadism and violence that fill the classroom transcripts that open this article. Interestingly, part of the explanation for the children’s emphasis on sadism and violence can be found in the students’ textbooks. Although my previous research (Kaomea 2000) suggests that the violence that Captain Cook inflicted on the Polynesians has been largely edited out of elementary Hawaiian studies textbooks, Hawaiian violence remains.

When I spoke with the classroom teacher about my concerns regarding the students’ reports of brutal Hawaiian killings and human sacrifice, the teacher replied, “I know it might sound gory, but it’s true.” She pulled out a copy of her class’
Hawaiian studies textbook, *The Hawaiians of Old*, and read aloud from a chapter entitled “Hawaiian Life Had Many Rules”:

The kapu of old Hawai‘i . . . made life hard for the Hawaiian people. The people were scared to break a kapu. If they did, the gods would be angry, or if they were caught, they would be killed . . . The *i l¯a*maka was like a policeman. He found people who broke the kapu. Then the *mi¯i* (public executioner) who worked for the *kapuna* [*sic*, “kahuna”] killed them with a cord or club. The priest offered the dead person to the god Kū. [Dunford 1980:40]

This 1980 textbook is widely used in fourth-grade Hawaiian studies classrooms throughout the state. It was one of a handful of elementary-level Hawaiian studies books in print during the period immediately following the Hawaiian studies legislative mandate, and was consequently purchased in bulk by many elementary schools when the Hawaiian studies program began in the early 1980s. Since textbooks are expensive and our public schools are on tight budgets, *The Hawaiians of Old* continues to be one of the central Hawaiian studies textbooks used in many elementary classrooms today. Although my earlier textbook analyses (Kaomea 2000) led me to immediate skepticism about this dated, non-Hawaiian authored text that mistakenly refers to kahuna as “kapuna,” the classroom teacher, with few other resources to draw from, cited the words of the textbook with no question as to their origin. A similar phenomenon may be occurring with the students. Bakhtin (1981) teaches us that language is inherently heteroglossic. Each utterance inevitably draws from, cites, echoes, or repeats other texts and utterances. In the case of independent classroom study projects in which students with rudimentary summary skills, working within restricted time limits, are expected to produce a coherent report from a sparse selection of classroom resources, how could it be otherwise?

In many respects the preponderance of sadism and violence in the students’ reports echoes similar messages in their colonially influenced Hawaiian studies textbooks. Western colonial discourses about Hawaiians (or any “First World” discourse about the “Third World”) have often included images of sadism and violence, especially the Native rulers’ violence toward their own people. This is one means by which the colonizers justified their colonial intervention. Colonial histories of Native civilizations contrast the horrors of a savage or heathen life of infanticide, cannibalism, and random sacrificial killing with the “brighter, happier days” of contemporary Europe or the civilized present (Thomas 1994:127). The history of Hawaiians reflected in elementary Hawaiian studies textbooks and echoed in the children’s independent study reports is no exception.

The children’s presentations and the textbooks they draw from depict precontact Hawai‘i as a dark and scary world with merciless rulers, senseless rules, and harsh life or death consequences; a world where commoners had to submit to the oppressive kapu system or risk being caught and clubbed to death or brutally strangled with a rope; where life was so tenuous that on any given day an innocent person could be prayed to death by a kahuna or simply called out from his or her house and killed in cold and calculated ritual sacrifice.

Scholars such as Stannard (1991) and Tobin (1997) have recently begun to question these discourses of Hawaiian savagery. They argue that many of these discourses, such as the discourse of Hawaiian infanticide, were European colonial myths that the colonizers carried with them to Hawai‘i—preexisting European conceptions that were actually more reflective of the tensions of 18th-century European society than of the precontact Hawaiian condition. However, despite their questionable origin, such discourses continue to live on in our Hawaiian studies textbooks today.

By using a form of Bakhtinian discourse analysis we can take the words of the children’s Hawaiian studies reports (such as their vivid descriptions of ruthless human sacrifice) and trace them back to the official discourse of the classroom textbook and then one step further to the exaggerated depictions of colonial missionaries
and sailors. Through this analysis we find that the children’s reports echo and cite a series of very old but enduring colonial discourses that justify the demise of our Hawaiian civilization, our culture, our religion, and our government. These discourses legitimize past colonial oppressions of the Hawaiian people, create a fear or distrust of current movements toward Hawaiian self-determination, and continue to influence the way children and teachers think and talk about Hawaiians today.

Colonial Justifications for the Hawaiian Demise

Consider, for instance, the children’s comments concerning the instability of life in old Hawai‘i. According to the children’s reports, life in old Hawai‘i was tenuous. If you were a Hawaiian living at that time there were many ways in which you could meet your death. You could be “prayed . . . to death” by a kahuna, “beaten . . . to death” for breaking a kapu, “killed” for making noise while praying at Kū’s temple, or “offered as a human sacrifice” at virtually any time with no warning, explanation or provocation. If somehow you managed to survive these daily threats, you were likely to be slaughtered in one of the frequently mentioned wars that you were forced to fight for your chiefs.

Although we might initially be taken aback by the children’s gruesome depictions of Native Hawaiian life, these morbid reports become even more disturbing when we realize that in many instances they are fairly accurate reflections of the messages communicated in the children’s Hawaiian studies textbooks. By reading the students’ remarks alongside selections from their Hawaiian studies texts and other comments made about Hawaiians historically, we see that the children are in fact citing and echoing a familiar and pervasive colonial discourse concerning the Native Hawaiian decline. According to colonial discourse, Native Hawaiians, through their savage and self-destructive practices, such as human sacrifice and internal warfare, have historically killed themselves off in record numbers, ultimately bringing about their own demise.

The catastrophic depopulation of Native Hawaiians during the years following their first contact with Europeans has been and continues to be a topic of great interest to Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians alike. Although recent scholars (Stannard 1989) attribute the genocidal drop in population (from a precontact civilization of 800,000 Hawaiians to a ghostly 40,000 after a century of Western contact) to the mortality, morbidity, and reduced fertility caused by the white-introduced diseases of syphilis, influenza, and tuberculosis, others continue in the age-old colonial tradition of blaming the Natives for their own demise, arguing that Hawaiians had been recklessly killing themselves off long before whites appeared on our shores. This self-serving colonial perspective can be traced to the words of early seafarers and missionaries who sought to absolve themselves of the guilt of the rapid Hawaiian depopulation coincidental with their arrival. According to this tradition, the massive decline in the Native Hawaiian population was due to a number of internal factors, including the Hawaiians’ alleged practices of infanticide, abortion, sacrificial killing, and civil warfare (Nordyke 1977).

Sacrificial Killing

Human sacrifice, a popular topic in the children’s presentations, has long been a favorite subject of missionary journals, which simultaneously intrigue and horrify readers with vivid (second-hand) depictions of wholesale Hawaiian massacres, all the while justifying the necessity of missionary influence in the islands. In a section of his classic Narrative of a Tour of Hawaii, or Owhyhee (1979), 19th-century English missionary William Ellis expounds on the “method of obtaining human sacrifices and of killing” in vivid detail, reminiscent of but even more gory than the accounts of the children cited earlier. He describes how the victims were stabbed to death or “despatched by a blow on the head with a club or stone,” how “every article of clothing they might have on was taken off,” how their naked bodies
were laid in a row face-down on the altar while offerings of slaughtered hogs were piled at right angles across them; and how the whole lot was then “left to rot and putrefy together” (1979:97–98). Although Ellis acknowledges that his second-hand accounts (some reporting “upwards of eighty victims” slain at one time) were based on Native legends that often “taxed [his own] credulity,” he says it “serves to show the savage character of the [Hawaiian] gods, who, in the opinion of the natives, could require such prodigal waste of human life” (1979:260).

Internal Warfare

Another waste of life, according to both the colonists and the children’s independent study reports, were the Hawaiians’ constant bouts of internal warfare. War was another frequently mentioned topic in the children’s presentations: The kahuna “taught the young ali’i about sports and war.” The kahuna made human sacrifices to “help . . . their ali’i win wars.” Women, children, and old people would go to the pu’uhonua for safety “when the men were fighting in wars.” And the maka’a‘inana would have to abandon their farming, fishing, and craft-making to fight for their chief “whenever he wanted to have a war.”

One might assume that the children’s descriptions of the frivolous reasons for which these wars came about (simply because the chief “wanted to have a war”) represent but a child’s understanding of a complicated subject. However, I argue that the children’s comments are actually quite perceptive as they reiterate a predominant colonial perspective on Hawaiian warfare that pervades classroom textbooks and is likewise communicated in classroom lessons.

The Hawaiians of Old (Dunford 1980) dedicates an entire chapter to the subject of Hawaiian warfare. Entitled “Hawaiians Had Many Wars,” the chapter begins by explaining that “the Hawaiian chiefs liked to fight.” “Wars were almost like a game to them,” and “sometimes they started a war just to get even with another chief” (Dunford 1980:140). It explains how these frivolously started wars drove Hawaiians to kill each other off in large numbers, sometimes by the thousands and in some cases with Hawaiians killing their own relatives. The chapter then gives a detailed account of various Hawaiian weapons, complete with illustrations and all too vivid descriptions of how each weapon was used in battle. The chapter concludes:

The Hawaiians had many wars . . . They fought often with each other. The chiefs seemed to enjoy fighting . . . But these wars were . . . hard on the maka’a‘inana who had not even started the war . . . Many of these people were killed in battle . . . Wars were awful for most of the Hawaiians. [Dunford 1980:152]

The textbook, like the missionary journals, combines horrifying images of early Hawaiian violence inspired by bloodthirsty rulers with sympathetic descriptions of oppressed commoners to convey a message about precontact Hawai‘i that comes through loudly and clearly: Hawaiians were a savage people with reckless, self-destructive rulers who were always fighting amongst themselves and would one day kill each other off if not for the intervention of Western colonists.

An Alternate Perspective

I will not attempt to argue that there was no human sacrifice or civil warfare in precontact Hawai‘i. Rather, I suggest that accounts of these events are highly exaggerated and that the number of deaths because of such circumstances probably fell far short of the image of massive wholesale killing that early colonists and our reporting schoolchildren have imagined. Although there is little doubt that Hawaiian chiefs engaged in intermittent wars in the quest for greater status and mana (supernatural power), there is no good evidence of a high death rate from such precontact (and low technology) warfare. In fact, early Western observations suggest that Hawaiian warfare, like that of our relatives the Tahitians, may well
have been more ritualistic than murderous (Stokes 1936). Paleopathological analyses of skeletal damage occasioned by trauma points to an extremely low level of death from violence attributable to war, a scenario that is very common among Indigenous peoples for whom warfare often is more a ritual quest for status than a bloodthirsty means of conquest (Stannard 1989). (For another example of a supposedly warlike society in which few people were killed in battle see Ron Adams' [1984] discussion of the Indigenous people of Vanuatu.)

In spite of a wealth of evidence to the contrary, the colonial message that the Hawaiian demise was due to internal fighting and our own reckless behavior continues to be the pervasive message in our school classrooms. Beyond serving as an explanation for our fate historically, it also serves as justification for the sorry fate of the Hawaiian population today. Often when Hawaiians in positions of power, such as the Kamehameha Schools trustees, trustees of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, or advocates for different forms of Hawaiian sovereignty, fail to agree, newspapers and local news reports highlight and exaggerate our differences, once again reaffirming the colonial myth that Hawaiians, because of our tendency toward reckless infighting, will never successfully govern ourselves. When Democrats and Republicans disagree in the state legislature or Congress, it is healthy—a system of checks and balances. However, when disagreement occurs between Hawaiians, it is dysfunctional or self-destructive, evidence that we should never be entrusted with positions of power.

**Senseless Rules and Overly Harsh Consequences**

Another predominant theme in the children’s presentations is evident in their numerous comments concerning rules and consequences. According to the children’s reports, “In Hawai‘i there were many... rules about what people couldn’t do.” A content analysis of phrases including the words “had to,” “could not,” and “couldn’t” yields a list of over 15 rules. You “had to lie down when the chief came.” You “could not get in the path of a chief’s shadow.” When praying at Kū’s temple, “you had to sit in a certain way” and “you couldn’t move... at all.” “Sometimes you had to stay inside all day and you couldn’t make any noise”—even “your animals had to be quiet too.” If you broke these rules, the children explained, you faced dire consequences: “If you got caught breaking a kapu they would kill you.” “They would beat you to death with a club or strangle you with a rope.” “If you didn’t follow the priest’s rules you were killed and offered as a human sacrifice [to Kū].”

One could argue that the references to rules and consequences in these reports are a result of the children’s preoccupation with such things. Students, like others who spend a good part of their days in worlds in which they have little say or power, learn quickly to clue into the established rules of behavior in a given setting in order to avoid offending the people in command and suffering the resulting consequences. However, although this may be partly what is going on here, I believe the explanation lies beyond childish preoccupation. Once again the children are clueing into and citing a deeper message of the text, one that intends for the children to see precontact Hawai‘i as a world with senseless rules and overly harsh consequences; a world that was scary, oppressive, and unjust; a world that makes contemporary times (the contemporary school classroom notwithstanding) look quite appealing in comparison.

At one level, this kapu world of old Hawai‘i is probably quite familiar to children who spend the majority of their waking hours following the directives of adults. School, like the Hawai‘i of their reports, is a world with many rules about what one cannot do. It is a place where those in charge are often “mean” and the rules are “very strict;” where sometimes you have to “sit a certain way without moving,” and where it is not unfathomable that on some days you might have to “stay inside all day” and not make any noise at all.
The necessity of rules to keep a society orderly is one of the points driven home by classroom lessons on the Hawaiian kapu system. The Hawaiians of Old chapter entitled “Hawaiian Life Had Many Rules” begins by explaining that “Hawaiians had a government which was very orderly and strict . . . Each person had his own job to do” (1980:28). “There were many strict rules. The people could not do as they wished” (1980:37). Up to this point, there seems to be little difference between old Hawai‘i and the school classroom, where students are constantly reminded of their responsibilities and their “jobs,” and where they are told time and again that with a class of so many children, individuals must refrain from simply doing “as they wish.”

Indeed, making children appreciate the necessity of rules seems to be part of the lesson communicated in Hawaiian studies classrooms. But the deeper lesson is that although rules and consequences are necessary for a degree of order in any society, the rules and consequences of early Hawaiian society had to be overturned because they were unnecessarily harsh and oppressive, strictly benefiting the chiefs and kāhuna while oppressing the commoners. This point was made time and again by missionaries who eventually overturned the Hawaiian kapu system, an “important and essential part of [the Hawaiians’] cruel system of idolatry” (Ellis 1969:385), only to replace it with their own taboo of Christianity.

The senselessness and oppressive severity of the Hawaiian kapu system is a core message of the elementary Hawaiian studies curriculum. Consider, for instance, the “Kapu in Old Hawai‘i/Kapu in School” lesson that I observed in another fourth-grade classroom. Drawing a comparison between the kapu system of old Hawai‘i and the daily rules of school, a teacher had her class brainstorm a chart outlining the early Hawaiian kapu system and the “kapu system” in their elementary school. The group came up with the following list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kapu in Old Hawai‘i</th>
<th>Kapu in School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No men and women eating together</td>
<td>No running in the hallways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No eating certain foods (for women)</td>
<td>No fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No touching anything that belonged to the ali‘i</td>
<td>No talking back to the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No standing in front of the ali‘i</td>
<td>No shooting spitballs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After asking the students about the consequences they would face for breaking each of the rules in school (which varied from getting a warning from the teacher, to having to see the principal, to suspension, depending on the rule broken), the teacher explained that in school the punishment fits the crime, but in old Hawai‘i, there was just one punishment: “You break the kapu, you die.” It did not matter how serious the crime was, the teacher continued, the consequence was still the same. If you ate a food that you were not supposed to eat or if your shadow fell on an ali‘i, then you were put to death.

Beyond the simplistic view of the kapu system that overlooks the benefits of the clearly helpful kapu (such as the periodic kapu on war, or kapu that were established to conserve natural resources), and the fact that this perspective overlooks how the ali‘i were subject to and inconvenienced by these kapu as well, the comparison made in this lesson is particularly mismatched and unfair. By placing the early Hawaiian penal system side by side with the benign rules and consequences of a contemporary elementary school, the teacher has created a situation in which precontact Hawai‘i will inevitably appear frightening and oppressive in comparison.

If studies of a society’s penal system are indeed instructive for learning about a culture, and if cultural comparisons are an appropriate way to highlight a civilization’s salient aspects, then instead of comparing the Hawaiian penal system with the benign rules and consequences of an elementary school, why not teach it alongside the U.S. penal system? When learning about how Hawaiian kāhuna hunted down kapu breakers and the vivid details of how they put these offenders to death, students could also learn about police brutality, prison conditions, and the
various methods of capital punishment used in America today. For example, they could be taught how the internal organs of one’s body implode when given a lethal injection, how that compares with what happens to the body during electrocution, and so on. They could also learn the specifics about what goes on in contemporary American prisons: the size of the prison cells, the monotony of the prisoners’ days, and how prisoners filled with rage and deprived of contact with women routinely rape each other. If such lessons seem vulgar or offensive it is because we have come to accept such topics as natural or appropriate subjects of discussion when teaching and studying about “primitive” cultures, yet these subjects are taboo when teaching about Western cultural systems. Westerners rarely use such topics in reference to themselves.

One might assume that such a comparative study of penology in precontact Hawai‘i and the contemporary United States would again make early Hawaiians appear more barbaric in contrast. I argue otherwise. Through his studies of society’s changing notions of appropriate forms of punishment, Foucault (1977) undermines the belief that contemporary penal systems are less brutal now than they were in the past. Comparing the gory details of an 18th-century execution with the closely regulated schedule of a day in the life of a 19th-century prisoner, Foucault shows how careful control of every aspect of a prisoner’s life can represent a more complete exercise of power than the more dramatic and sporadic displays of public torture and executions. With thousands of Hawaiians currently incarcerated in Hawai‘i’s state penitentiaries (or sent off to facilities in Texas and Arizona because our state accommodations cannot keep pace with the growing number of incarcerations), I cannot help but wonder if Hawaiians are really better off now than before.

Unfit and Unjust Rulers

A similar argument can be made concerning the children’s comments about those who, according to the textbooks, missionaries, and other colonists, were ultimately responsible for the human sacrifices, wasteful wars, and the oppressive kapu system—the Hawaiian chiefs and ali‘i. The children’s independent study accounts of early Hawaiian chiefs make them sound strikingly similar to contemporary schoolyard bullies. They were “bigger than everyone else,” and thus “had more rights.” Using their size to their advantage, they bullied everyone within their reach, demanding payments of “food,” “taxes,” and various other services. They had someone to carry their things, others to do their work, still others to fight their battles, and a sidekick/hit man (the kahuna) to take out anyone who disobeyed them or stood in their way.

This is the essence of the message conveyed in classroom Hawaiian studies lessons, which reiterate familiar colonial depictions of Hawaiian leaders as power-hungry tyrants, “object[s] of fear among [their] people,” and “wild and extravagant in . . . actions and manner” (Day 1974:15). Writing in the early- to mid-19th century, New England missionary Hiram Bingham described Hawaiian rulers and their priests as “wholesale butchers of their fellow-men,” who “under the garb of religion” seized men and women “at pleasure,” “binding, strangling, or beating them to death,” and “offering them up in sacrifices to their malevolent deities” (1981:22). This exaggerated and sensationalized description is not too far from the depiction of Hawaiian leaders that is communicated in many of our Hawaiian studies textbooks and curriculum materials today.

One lesson outlined in the Hawai‘i State Department of Education’s fourth-grade Hawaiian studies curricular guide (Pescaia 1981) suggests that teachers ask two student volunteers to play the roles of a Hawaiian chief and a contemporary, democratic governor in situations involving the people over whom they rule. The children are to simulate hypothetical situations and verbalize how they think the ali‘i and the governor would respond. Three of the given situations and their accompanying “correct answers” are listed below:
[1] A little keiki (girl) has such great love for you that while you were visiting in her kauhale [residential compound], she came up to you and touched you.

_**Answer:**_ The chief would order the child killed and the governor would probably pick up the child and give her a hug.

[2] While walking through a kauhale, an older woman and a few children clapped their hands.

_**Answer:**_ The chief would order them killed and the governor would probably smile and greet them.

[3] A newborn baby [boy] is born into your family. He has a large brown birthmark on his face and has only one arm.

_**Answer:**_ The chief would order the child killed and the governor would probably keep the child and raise him. [Pescaia 1981:105]

In actuality, these hypothetical situations were highly improbable in early Hawai‘i as every precaution was taken by both commoners and chiefs to prevent such instances from occurring. However, no mention is made of this fact in the outlined lesson. No mention is made of the fact that in most instances the people wanted their chiefs to be very religious and strictly enforce the kapu, for such rulers would carry the favor of the gods and ensure that the village would prosper (Kame‘eleihiwa 1992). No mention is made of the interdependent relations between the ali‘i and the maka‘ainana; that while there may have been some cruel ali‘i, they usually did not last for long, for if the maka‘ainana felt their ali‘i was unjust or did not care for his people properly they could appeal to a higher chief for the ali‘i’s removal or move to a new village themselves (Handy and Handy 1972). No mention is made of the ali‘i’s early training during which time he was made to experience poverty, hunger, and hardship, so that by reflecting on these things he could learn to care for his people with “gentleness and patience” (Malo 1951:53–54). No mention is made of how the relationship between the maka‘ainana and the ali‘i was a personal one in which “ardent affection” was the prevailing feeling, or how the ali‘i was “in most instances, more like a father to his people than a despot” (Handy and Handy 1972:326).

Instead, such lessons, through the reiteration of familiar colonial discourses, simultaneously discredit Hawaiian rulers of the past and present, building within the children an appreciation for the democratic government of today and a fear of ever returning to the days of fierce Hawaiian monarchs. These messages served the interests of early colonial governments who justified their colonial rule in the name of protecting the Hawaiian commoners from their own despotic rulers, and the same messages continue to serve the purposes of Hawai‘i’s (post)colonial government today, as they caution Hawai‘i’s up and coming generations against the dangers of allowing Hawaiians to regain our sovereignty.

**The Rhizome and Rhizoanalysis**

Through the preceding application of Bakhtinian discourse analysis, I have demonstrated how one can trace the sadism and violence in the children’s presentations to long-standing colonial discourses about Hawaiians, which continue to find voice in classroom textbooks and Hawaiian studies lessons. This finding has led me and other Native Hawaiian educators (Kaomea 2000; Nā Mamo A Lililahua 1999) to argue for the need to replace these colonially influenced textbooks with new Hawaiian studies textbooks written from a Native Hawaiian perspective. However, even as we engage in this task of writing a new, Hawaiian-authored textbook (Nā Mamo A Lililahua in press), I remain skeptical about the change it will bring.

Building upon Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of the rhizome in _A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia_, the remainder of this article applies the metaphor of the rhizome to this Hawaiian studies classroom situation and explores the insights to be gained by considering the repressive structures of colonialism and neo-colonialism as rhizomatic rather than monolithic. “Rhizome” is a
botanical term for a root system that spreads across the ground (as in bamboo and various ferns and weeds) rather than downward, and grows from several points rather than a single tap root. The metaphor of the rhizome was first popularized by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in their critiques of psychoanalysis. It has since been used in postcolonial theory to demonstrate how colonial power does not operate in a simple vertical way from the institutions in which they appear to be constituted, but instead, operates dynamically, laterally, and intermittently (Ashcroft et al. 1998).

Although scholars have traditionally viewed colonial power as monolithic and hierarchical, postcolonial theorists have begun to use the notion of the rhizome to suggest that there is no “masterplan” of imperialism, and its advance is not necessarily secured through violence and oppression. Instead the repressive structures of colonialism operate through an invisible network of filiative connections, psychological internalizations, and unconsciously complicit associations. The complex operations of imperialism problematize the existence of simple political categories of identification, as categories such as “colonizer” and “colonized” are constantly diffused and intersecting within the rhizome of imperial contact (Ashcroft et al. 1998).

For colonized peoples, the rhizomic nature of imperialism is especially difficult to combat because of the intermittent, overlapping, and intertwining nature of its operation. A rhizome may be broken or shattered at a given spot, but will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Consequently, seemingly viable anti-colonialist and decolonizing movements are sometimes less than successful in combating colonialist and neo-colonialist legacies whose practices inherit the rhizomic operations of imperialism.

Following a similar line of reasoning, I have suggested elsewhere that the many shortcomings of the current elementary Hawaiians studies program are due in part to biased or ill-informed, non-Hawaiian textbook writers, unsupportive school administrators, and well-intended Native Hawaiian classroom elders who are unwittingly complicit in the perpetuation of colonial stereotypes of Native Hawaiians (Kaomea 2000, 2001, 2003). In the remainder of this article I take a closer look at the complicit role played by yet another collaborator in this scenario: the classroom teacher, whose presence in these discussions has thus far been noticeably absent. For ultimately, the unfolding of events in the Hawaiian studies lesson that opens this article could not have taken place without the consent of the classroom teacher who relinquished her control over the lesson through her physical withdrawal and silence.

The Classroom Teacher’s Role in the Hawaiian Studies Program

In many respects, the teacher’s decision to abandon her position at the head of the classroom, sit back with the students, and let the lesson run its course is consistent with the student-centered, inquiry-based approach of progressive, child-centered pedagogy. The teacher allowed the children to choose their own research topics and work independently on their reports, and maintained a similar laissez faire policy toward their presentations. As a former elementary educator, I understand a teacher’s inclination to remain silent and respect the natural flow of students’ oral presentations. At the same time, as a politically conscious Native Hawaiian, I cannot help but question this teacher’s decision not to intervene in this particular lesson, where colonial discourses of Native Hawaiian sadism and savagery were reproduced without challenge.

According to the Hawaiian studies curriculum guide (Hawai’i Department of Education 1984), the classroom teacher ultimately holds the primary responsibility for the integration and coordination of this constitutionally mandated program. As stated in the guide, “the [classroom] teacher has the most important role in the implementation of the Hawaiian studies program in the classroom” (1984:vi). The teacher is responsible for monitoring the weekly 30-minute classroom visits by
Hawaiian studies elders, reviewing and reinforcing the elders’ lessons with follow-up lessons, and providing regular instruction in those aspects of the curriculum not covered by the elders. However, the classroom teacher’s Hawaiian studies instruction is not as closely monitored as the elders’ instruction, and hence classroom teachers respond to the curricular mandate with varied degrees of enthusiasm and compliance.

Teachers’ responses to the Hawaiian studies mandate are complicated by the fact that Hawai‘i’s classroom teachers are largely from non-Hawaiian backgrounds. As mentioned earlier, although the largest percentage of students in Hawai‘i’s public schools are Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian (24.7 percent), the large majority of classroom teachers are Japanese Americans (46.4 percent) and Caucasians (27.9 percent) (Hawai‘i Department of Education 1999).

When I first met the teacher whose classroom transcript is featured at the beginning of this article, I was conducting a related study of Hawai‘i’s elementary school Hawaiian elder program (Kaomea 2003). Because fourth grade is the grade level where Hawaiian studies is the central emphasis of the state social studies curriculum, I focused my study on fourth-grade classrooms. Relying on a network of personal and professional contacts, I met individually with eight fourth-grade teachers from different schools across the island. I explained the intent of my study and asked the teachers if I could visit their classrooms during the Hawaiian elder’s instructional time.

The classroom teacher introduced at the beginning of this article was recommended to me by a friend and colleague of mine who was a third-grade teacher at the same school. When I initially asked the teacher if I could visit her classroom during the Hawaiian elder’s instruction time, she handed me a copy of the Hawaiian elder’s teaching schedule and gave me an open invitation to drop by any time when the elder was teaching. After sitting in on several of the Hawaiian elder’s lessons, I became curious about how this instruction intersected with the classroom teacher’s Hawaiian studies instruction. However, when I asked the classroom teacher if I could observe during her own Hawaiian studies instructional time, she was a bit more hesitant.

The teacher confessed that Hawaiian studies was one area of the curriculum in which she was not particularly confident or proud of her program. As she thumbed through her planning book, searching for an appropriate visitation date, she apologetically explained that she did not teach Hawaiian studies nearly as often as she probably should. Admitting to an over-reliance on outdated texts and workbooks, she welcomed me to visit in a couple of weeks but asked me to be forgiving of any inaccuracies that I might observe in her factual teaching or Hawaiian language pronunciation.

When asked to elaborate on the difficulties she faced in teaching Hawaiian studies, the teacher explained that she never enrolled in a course in Hawaiian studies as a student at the University of Hawai‘i and only vaguely recalled taking a course in Hawaiian history in high school. Through the years she relaxed her concerns about her lack of content knowledge in the subject, developing an independent study approach that allows her to “learn along with the kids.”

This teacher’s lack of confidence in her Hawaiian studies instruction was not unique. The large majority of teachers with whom I spoke confessed to similar concerns in this subject area, in which they unanimously reported feeling inadequately prepared. As the teachers’ comments suggest, this is one area of instruction that in the past has been overlooked in the University of Hawai‘i’s teacher education program and perhaps in the university at large. Until recently, it was not uncommon for newly licensed elementary teachers from the University of Hawai‘i to be placed in fourth grade where Hawaiian studies is the focus of the social studies curriculum, and have had no formal instruction in Hawaiian culture, history, or language. Fortunately, this situation is rapidly changing with an ever-growing number of university course offerings in Hawaiian studies and Hawaiian language, and an increasing number of education courses that focus specifically on preparing
prospective teachers to teach in Hawaiian communities, Hawaiian charter schools, and schools for Hawaiian language immersion.

In addition to a lack of instructional preparation, classroom teachers also complain of a limited supply of outdated instructional resources and insufficient funds to support a comprehensive Hawaiian studies curriculum. These are all valid issues that need to be addressed if this program is to run successfully. However, as the metaphor of the rhizome suggests, the problem here is much more entangled and complicated than it appears on the surface.

Lengthier conversations with several classroom teachers reveal a genuine ambivalence about this constitutionally mandated curriculum. One non-Hawaiian teacher frankly explained that since the majority of the students in her school come from non-Hawaiian backgrounds, she did not think it was “fair” to spend so much time on “just the Hawaiian culture.” This teacher teaches her Hawaiian studies curriculum not as a study of one culture in particular, but instead as a “multicultural celebration” of the many different ethnic groups that currently reside in our islands. Her unit on Hawaiian voyaging and migration, for instance, strangely collapses time and simultaneously discusses the third-century migration of the first Hawaiians alongside the late-19th and early-20th century immigration of plantation laborers and the more recent arrival of Southeast Asian and Pacific Island immigrant groups. “This way,” she explains, “the children can see that no matter what their ethnic background is, we are all immigrants here.” (This “we are all immigrants” perspective is one with which I and other Native Hawaiian descendants of the aboriginal people who inhabited and exercised sovereignty in these Hawaiian islands for nearly two,000 years vehemently disagree.)

Many classroom teachers view Hawaiian studies as one more subject added on to an already crowded school day. They question whether the Hawaiian elders’ weekly classroom visits with the children is time well spent, and go for months at a time without any Hawaiian studies instruction on their part. When calling to schedule Hawaiian studies visitation appointments, I was struck by the number of teachers who asked if I could please call back in a couple of months. I was frequently told that because of the upcoming holiday program, parent conferences, and so forth the class would not be “doing” Hawaiian studies for a while but would likely pick up on it again later. As one fourth-grade teacher candidly explained:

Some fourth-grade teachers might do Hawaiian studies all year round, but in my classroom we don’t. I feel that there are so many other important things to teach and so little time in the school day that I just do it [Hawaiian studies] when I can.

When asked why Hawaiian studies so often seems to be the subject that gets pushed aside, another veteran teacher explained:

Hawaiian studies was one of those things where someone from the DOE [Hawaii Department of Education] came down one year and said we had to teach it. Like now they’re coming down and saying we have to teach character ed. There’s always something different. But I don’t think anything mandated like this is going to work unless the teacher truly feels that it’s something that the kids should learn. If teachers don’t buy into the mandate, they won’t put much time or energy into teaching it.

Faced with a Hawaiian studies mandate that they do not necessarily believe is important and less than adequate instructional time, preparation, and resources, these classroom teachers in many respects, like the Hawaiian studies elders discussed in my earlier research (Kaomea 2001, 2003), are caught up in a system mandated from above. In contrast to the elders, however, the classroom teachers occupy an anomalous position in these ideological struggles. Like shop foremen or plantation supervisors, they are neither purely labor nor management, neither all-powerful nor completely powerless in the way they represent the interests of those above
(and below) them, and therefore are afforded at least some degree of agency and responsibility.

So while I and other Native Hawaiians begin to recognize our complicity in Hawai‘i’s (post)colonial situation and strive to do our part to remedy our current condition, I ask that non-Hawaiians, classroom teachers included, begin to question how they may be wittingly or unwittingly serving as collaborators in the perpetuation of Hawai‘i’s hegemonic dynamics. As the metaphor of the rhizome suggests, a new Hawaiian-authored Hawaiian studies textbook alone will not have a major impact on elementary Hawaiian studies instruction without the support of the still predominately non-Hawaiian classroom teachers who will ultimately be the ones to decide if and how they will use the new text.

Classroom Teachers and Kuleana (Rights and Responsibilities)

In an effort to reconceptualize the role of the predominately non-Hawaiian classroom teacher in the execution of the elementary Hawaiian studies curriculum, I turn to the recent “settler colonialism” scholarship of third- and fourth-generation Japanese American scholars in Hawai‘i who have begun to question their kuleana as settlers in this Indigenous land.

The story of the Japanese American rise to power in Hawai‘i is a familiar and inspiring tale. It tells of how, through hard work and perseverance, Japanese immigrants of humble beginnings strived to achieve the American Dream, and, within a short period of one to two generations, pulled themselves up from a life of poverty as plantation laborers to financial success as respected professionals, businessmen, educators, scholars, and state and federal legislators. According to third-generation Japanese American Eiko Kosasa (2000), this inspiring success story of hard work and triumph in this “great immigrant nation,” continues to be passed down from generation to generation in the Japanese American community today. However, as Kosasa (2000) and other politically conscious Japanese American scholars in Hawai‘i point out, this dominant story of Japanese American immigrants living the American Dream in this “land of democracy” obscures an “other” history in which Asian immigrants were involved in the creation of a colonial paradise at the expense of the Indigenous Hawaiian people (Kosasa and Tomita 2000).

Through a critical examination of the colonial history of Hawai‘i, these Asian American scholars recognize the hypocrisy of the dominant ideology of the United States as a pluralistic, egalitarian nation of immigrants where everyone has equal access to the American Dream, and acknowledge that dominant white and Asian settler communities in Hawai‘i did not become successful within a democratic and egalitarian system, but within a colonial one (Kosasa 2000). They affirm that Hawai‘i’s history is a violent one of genocide and land theft, and that their presence as settlers in Hawai‘i was established through a colonial process in which Native Hawaiian people lost their human rights of self-determination and self-government (Fujikane, 2000; Kosasa 2000).

Acknowledging the colonial roots underlying the privileged position that they currently enjoy in these islands, these Asian American scholars raise difficult questions regarding their personal and collective complicity in the continued oppression of Indigenous Hawaiians. Artists Karen Kosasa and Stan Tomita ask of themselves: “How are we as Sansei, third-generation, local Japanese, involved in the colonization of Hawai‘i and the Hawaiian people through our everyday lives and artistic practices?” (2000:xii). Similarly, English professor Candace Fujikane asks: “What are the institutional ways that we [Asian Americans] reinforce colonialism over and over again in our relationships with Native Hawaiians?” (2000:xix).

Striving for greater social and political justice, these courageous scholars have found numerous ways to serve as allies in Native Hawaiian struggles for self-determination and call upon other settlers in the community to do the same (Fujikane 2000; Kosasa 2000; Kosasa and Tomita 2000). In a stirring call to action
to her third- and fourth-generation cohorts, Sansei activist Eiko Kosasa eloquently attests:

We Sansei and Yonsei currently have the political and economic means to assist in terminating the U.S. imperial hold on the islands. As Japanese settlers, we have ascended from being collaborators in a colonial system to being enforcers and keepers of that system. Therefore, it is our obligation, our responsibility to the Native Hawaiian people and our community to change this unequal, colonial situation. [2000:84]

Following the lead of these Asian American scholars, I urge Hawai‘i’s elementary classroom teachers to ask themselves similar questions about their kuleana regarding the Hawaiian studies curriculum, and to consider how their daily decisions concerning the teaching (or not teaching) of Hawaiian studies challenge or reinforce the colonization of Native Hawaiians. I ask that classroom teachers who teach Hawaiian studies as a multicultural celebration of immigrants, assume a laissez faire approach driven by student-directed projects, or give up on teaching Hawaiian studies altogether follow in the wisdom of these Asian American scholars. I ask that they seek ways to further their education on Native Hawaiian issues and concerns, and, if they are willing and able, consider how they might use their positions as classroom teachers to serve as allies in Native struggles to reverse centuries of economic, cultural, and political oppression of the Indigenous people of this (post)colonial state.

A Note of Caution

As I issue this call for non-Hawaiian classroom teachers to take a more proactive role in Hawaiian studies education, I do so with a certain amount of ambivalence and apprehension. In Hawaiian culture there are formal processes for studying Hawaiian cultural practices under lengthy apprenticeships and for graduating only when one’s teacher determines that one has achieved mastery and is prepared to teach others and work on one’s own (Blaich 2003). As my Native Hawaiian students and colleagues remind me, there are already far too many instances of non-Hawaiian people studying Hawaiian arts and cultural practices for relatively brief periods of time before self-proclaiming “expert” status and passing on their superficial knowledge to others. For instance, it is not uncommon for outsiders to our culture to attend a large group workshop on Hawaiian cultural practices, and then set up a business, advertising themselves as “experts” in the Hawaiian art of lomilomi (massage) or Hawaiian healing, before they are truly mākaukau (prepared or ready) to teach and practice on their own. These instances are not only a violation of the Hawaiian apprenticeship process, they are also potentially dangerous to our cultural perpetuation, as these individuals assume positions from which they will pass on superficial, kāpulu (careless), and incomplete versions of our culture (Blaich 2003).

In related situations, other Hawaiians have expressed unease over outsiders who have become so deeply imbued in the Hawaiian language and culture that they presume themselves to be “more Hawaiian than the Hawaiians.” Of particular concern are those outsiders who promote themselves to leadership roles in Hawaiian revitalization movements where they speak for and make decisions for Hawaiians, and ultimately silence the very people whom they claim to represent (Warner 1999).

In light of these legitimate and very real concerns, until the Hawai‘i school system hires larger numbers of Native Hawaiian classroom teachers, the team-teaching of non-Hawaiian classroom teachers with Native Hawaiian community elders and cultural experts may be our best hope for culturally appropriate Hawaiian studies teaching in Hawai‘i’s public schools. However, these partnerships need to be pursued carefully, with a clear recognition of who indeed is the expert in these cultural contexts. As my earlier research has shown (Kaomea 2001, 2003), in the past such arrangements have on many occasions led to unseemly situations in which,
upon entering the public schools, Native Hawaiian elders and cultural experts are treated as second-class citizens or hired hands, “uncredentialed” teaching assistants whose curricula and day-to-day instruction are subject to the dictates of the supervising classroom teacher. Contrary to the liberatory intent of the 1978 state constitutional amendment that mandated this Hawaiian studies curriculum, such disrespectful use (and misuse) of Native Hawaiian elders and cultural experts serves to reinforce the unequal power dynamic between Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians, and undermines our Native right to assume authority over our Native culture.

Ultimately, Native peoples should have authority over Native issues. In the case of Hawaiian studies instruction, this means that in order for Hawaiian/non-Hawaiian team-teaching alliances to be effective, non-Hawaiian classroom teachers will need to take a back seat to Hawaiian elders and cultural experts, and assume a supportive role that allows Hawaiian experts to take the lead.

**Implications for Indigenous Self-Determination**

At a more global level, this study sheds light on the intricate and ever-pervasive workings of colonialism. It sends a warning to Indigenous communities that until Indigenous groups gain more power and influence in educational systems and other domains of government, there may be times when our movements toward Indigenous education and self-determination will depend on the assistance and support of non-Indigenous educators and other allies. However, dependence upon non-Indigenous allies is a complicated and risky endeavor.

Non-Indigenous people have a long history of speaking and deciding for Indigenous people in virtually every aspect of our lives. The results of such intrusions have been devastating, including the disenfranchisement of Native people from our land, our sovereignty, our language, our culture, and even our identity (Warner 1999). Although Indigenous communities may from time to time find ourselves in a position in which we need non-Indigenous support, the Indigenous people involved must be the determining voice in the form and substance of that support. As Haunani Trask (2000:21) suggests, allied support “is only beneficial when non-Natives play the roles assigned to them by Natives.”

Perhaps the most helpful role that can be assumed by non-Natives who are interested in assisting with Indigenous self-determination efforts—whether one is a classroom teacher faced with the task of teaching Indigenous studies curricula or an educational researcher working in Indigenous educational communities—is to work collaboratively with Native allies, listen closely to our wisdom as well as our concerns, interrogate unearned power and privilege (including one’s own), and use this privilege to confront oppression and “stand behind” Natives, so that our voices can be heard.

As poet ʻImaikalani Kalāhele writes in his poem “Huli” [to overturn]:

If to help us is your wish then stand behind us.
Not to the side
And not to the front. [2002:51]

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**Notes**

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1. Throughout this article I use the terms Hawaiian and Native Hawaiian interchangeably to refer to the Indigenous people of Hawai‘i: the descendants of the aboriginal people who inhabited and exercised sovereignty in the Hawaiian islands for over 1,500 years prior to the 1778 arrival of Hawai‘i’s first European explorers.

2. All names in this analysis are pseudonyms.

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