

Mauna Kea:  
Buried Epistemologies

By Emily Godinet  
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Brian Murton, Professor

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to apply the methodology and analysis techniques used in Bruce WillemsBraun's paper *Buried Epistemologies: The Politics of Nature in (Post) colonial British Columbia*, to examine and analyze the Mauna Kea Science Reserve Master Plan. The Master Plan was prepared for the University of Hawaii by Group 70 International, Inc.

The importance of this particular site of contention over the control of nature lies in recognizing the marginalization of native voices and the modern discursive practices that make it possible. Science, through astronomy, both exploits and constructs nature as devoid of culture at Mauna Kea, even while Hawaiians assert their desire to protect and revere Mauna Kea as sacred.

How exactly does an official entity like the University of Hawaii's Institute for Astronomy perpetuate colonial projects using embedded strategies in documents such as the Mauna Kea Science Reserve Master Plan?

## I Background

Western culture's legacy of colonialism is important to understand in the way it still infuses and affects our policy and practices in everyday life. A most prominent result of which is the nearly complete dispossession of Hawaiian control and ownership of land. "The history of Hawaii is a case study in the rapid progression of a Native society to christianity to capitalism to colonialism" (Kame'eleihiwa p. 317). In fact, the predictable progression of these systems together with rapid land acquisition is part of a colonialist project to assert a seemingly superior and more highly evolved western culture over "savages" and "heathens". The evidence of this legacy lies in the texts left behind. See here how a quote from Calvinist missionary Amos Cooke in 1851, a witness to the immediate aftermath of the Mahele land divisions, uses christian ideology to legitimize the appropriating of Hawaiian land by westerners at little or no cost:

While the natives stand confounded and amazed at their privileges and doubting the truth of the change on their behalf, the foreigners are creeping in among them, getting their largest and best lands, water privileges, building lots etc., etc.

The Lord seems to be allowing such things to take place that the Islands may gradually pass into other hands. This is trying but we cannot help it. It is what we have been contending against for years, but the Lord is showing us that His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are his ways our ways. The will of the Lord be done. (Kame'eleihiwa p.301)

The tactics of the colonial land grabbing projects, which many find disturbing today, are unfortunately still present. Indeed representations involving land use and policy are infused with different, but no less overt strategies of separating (Native people from their land), appropriating (the land), marginalizing (Native world views), and other western assertions of cultural domination via christianity, capitalism, colonialism and most recently, science.

Historically, the Hawaiian response to western land appropriating techniques was insightful as Hawaiian scholar S.M. Kamakau notes in 1869, (Kame'eleihiwa translation p.317):

The foreign races are quick tempered and hold nothing sacred in their anger, not even kings or chiefs ... as for the missionaries, some returned and others have become old residents here and their children have taken up the works of their fathers and helped to educate the people and work for the kingdom of God. (But) some of their children have bought land, become owners of stock farms and sugar plantations and have made slaves out of the people with work. And some have become steersmen and navigators for the government. The Hawaiian people welcome the stranger freely; rich and poor, high and low give what they can. The strangers call this love ignorance and think it is good for nothing.

Western tactics and motives were exposed by Hawaiians of the mid 1800's, as they are today, but it is the pervasive nearly invisible strategies of marginalization and minimization of culture that allows the dispossession to continue. A modern example of such colonial practices, met by Hawaiian resistance, lies at the crux of the debate over the use and abuse of the land at the summit of Mauna Kea, elevation 13,796 feet above sea level, on the big island of Hawaii. The University of Hawaii, through the Institute for Astronomy (IFA) commissioned a study (Master Plan) in support of their position to expand development of telescopes on the summit, most importantly, the "Kecks".

The largest of the 13 telescopes on the summit are the Keck twins. Engineers aim to ring the two massive Keck telescopes with four to six smaller connected telescopes and then pool the light for a combined imaging of distant objects 10 times more clearly than today, thereby creating the most powerful telescope on earth.

Proposed new development of the summit has renewed and made public debate over the contentious issues between the summit developers and numerous Hawaiian groups and individuals.

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Hawaiians are actively resisting plans to continue to build there because the summit of Mauna Kea is highly culturally and spiritually significant today as it has been for millennia. The debate over the use of the summit of Mauna Kea, a revered and sacred Hawaiian place is constructed by scientific interests as a realm separate from culture.

Protests against the construction and expansion of telescopes are based on past desecration of the sacred and natural including 1) building on top of pu'u, 2) construction on and near sacred burial and temple sites (including pu'u), 3) continued dumping of sewage and hazardous materials onto the porous ground via leach fields, and 4) no meaningful management or enforcement to protect sacred, cultural, historical and natural resources.

The cesspools and septic tanks/leach field systems and the hazardous material that is part of some facilities work including mercury, is especially disturbing because the waters of the summit lake, Wai'au, are used for medicine, blessing and cleansing, and are highly valued for their purity. This water is important for other reasons as well: (Pisciotta, p.6-7)

The nearest term to wealth in the Hawaiian language is waiwai. The Hawaiian word for water is wai. This relationship shows the cultural respect and importance the Hawaiian people attribute to water and its essence. The divine Kanekawaiola, revered in the traditions as the creator and protector of all fresh water, holds a special place in the traditions of Mauna Kea because of the "waters of life" generated there. Poliahu, although best known for her snowy kinolau (divine manifestation and bodily forms) is also of the water.

Separation of culture from important aspects of nature is made possible by contemporary discursive practices that abstract and displace the summit of Mauna Kea from its Hawaiian cultural meanings, and relocate it in the realm of science, the market, the nation and the global community (Willems-Braun).

What methods and strategies does the Institute for Astronomy use to perpetuate the colonial project by separating culture from nature to claim Mauna Kea for science? In a review of the 2000 Mauna Kea Science Master Plan, multiple methods were found as evidenced in the following three passages.

### **The Mauna Kea Master Plan Deconstructed**

The following quote first separates the historical Hawaiian relationship and any existing tenure rights to the mountain and appropriates it for all people equally. "Modem day astronomers" now have the voice and authority to speak for the space, usurping, through language, a Hawaiian voice.

The ancient saying "Mauna Kea kuahiwi ku ha'o i ka malie" (Mauna Kea is the astonishing mountain that stands in the calm) (Puku'i 1983:No.2147) expresses the feeling that Hawaiians and non Hawaiians alike have for this special place. Standing tall over the island of Hawaii, Mauna Kea is home to vast physical, natural and cultural resources. From early adze makers **to modem day astronomers, Mauna Kea** has long been a special place for work, worship and reflection (p. 1-1).

This introductory paragraph also serves to fix Hawaiians temporally in the past as "early adze makers" and astronomers in the present as "modem day astronomers." Because Hawaiians are now relegated to the past, and all people have the same sense of reverence for the mountain, the plan's authors are able to construct within modem day science the authority to speak for Mauna Kea. The native presence is contained in primitive culture: a culture that lies outside of and has no place in the unfolding history of modem science.

This next passage serves to make invisible Hawaiian practices and customs by omission.

The management plan offers an organizational solution and policy guidance to address some of the use conflicts, maintenance and access issues that exist today. The Master Plan assumes that the Mauna Kea Science, Reserve will continue, and even grow, in importance to scientists, educators, naturalists, and recreational users in the years to come (p. 14).

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The absence of culture here leads the reader to assume no modern meaningful cultural or spiritual activity takes place on Mauna Kea. So management will speak for the mountain, and all users. Also it could be read that use conflicts refer to Hawaiian use conflicts. Hawaiians are part of the problem, not part of what is going to "grow in importance" to everyone else. This is to be a "privileged site of authority in the western culture of science". (Willems-Braun, p. 8)

In this final excerpt, the authors adopt the language of inclusion to legitimize expansion. Mention of the indigenous peoples of Hawaii is barely made throughout the introduction, yet in the final paragraph, inclusion is professed.

This approach to the Master Plan is based on the principles of integrated cultural and natural resources management planning. This plan appreciates and respects the interrelationships of all facets of the natural systems and cultural context of the site and provides a framework for sustainable development on the mountain. The Plan values preservation and interpretation of indigenous natural and cultural resources and the uniqueness of those resources on Mauna Kea. The proposed Plan, in its simplest sense, attempts to balance economic and scientific prosperity, social equity, cultural values and environmental integrity.

At the end of the paragraph, just beyond the inclusionary language, the authors put all competing parties onto a scale. The word groupings are interesting for the balancing act: "economic and scientific prosperity", "cultural values and environmental integrity", with the phrase "social equity" inserted between. What is social equity? Is it a discursive method to insert science into the landscape as the legitimate speaker for Mauna Kea? This strategy of legitimating an "expert" to speak of and for nature came up earlier in the Plan excerpts in a different way, "expresses the feeling the Hawaiians and non Hawaiians alike have for this special place", where in the Plan appropriates Mauna Kea for all people equally. Equity. Everyone gets equal pieces? What does this mean for Hawaiians, for science?

Using language, the Plan's authors skillfully employ proven colonial technology of gaining and maintaining power and control over strategic resources, by separating, appropriating, omitting and temporally and spatially fixing indigenous peoples from their natural and cultural resources.

### **Buried Epistemologies**

Through the Plan, we are able to learn much about the Hawaiian people. Part of the reference material and officially commissioned studies is an 800 page document of the oral histories of some Hawaiians for whom Mauna Kea is significant. All of the people interviewed (save one) adamantly objected to further development of the summit on past and current lack of respect for the land and by extension, the sacred.

Readers of the Plan also get both an anthropological and archeological study of ancient Hawaiian peoples, their world view and the reasons they built shrines, etc., stories told by scientists about a people, so it seems, long gone. These studies serve to place Hawaiians temporally in the past and spatially removed from the summit, as current based cultural practices are not discussed. Furthermore, while Hawaiian culture is laid on the table through these studies for the public to dissect, any critical examination of western knowledge systems and the culture of science is silent, omitted and unquestioned. Additionally, descriptions, quotes and archival materials are used throughout the document to support and assert astronomy and science as the legitimate and worthy pursuit, at the expense of other ways of knowing about the summit.

The introduction to the Plan, deconstructed, reveals hidden colonial epistemologies on the part of the authors and developers, which continues on into subsequent sections. The goals and objectives section is rife with inclusive and contradictory language such as, "Developing a vision for the sustainable use and enhancement of the Mauna Kea Science Reserve as a Hawaiian place ... both locally and globally". How can "managers" make the "science reserve" a "Hawaiian place"? The ideologies of science and Hawaiian culture are radically different. Hawaiian understanding of their part in place specific nature is accumulated over thousand of **years and** involves qualitative and quantitative information, where all observations and interactions are considered relevant. Western science is interested in the comparative short term (**30 years for western astronomy on Mauna Kea**) and is primarily

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quantitative and frequently obtained by experimental data gathered under controlled rather than natural conditions; where by only certain variables are observed manipulated and measured (Roberts p. 62).

Hawaiian culture is further marginalized from Mauna Kea by this document through the use of the concept "research". This quote is from the goals and objective section: "Preserve the cultural landscape to enhance meaning, relationships, and resources for modern appreciation, research and practice". The term research is inextricably linked

to western colonialism. Indeed research alone is a significant site of struggle between the west and indigenous peoples. In complex ways the "pursuit of knowledge" is deeply embedded in multiple layers of colonial practices. As we have seen on Mauna Kea, science is not by any means a pure pursuit of the "truth". Its research is situated in a much larger cultural and social context of struggle (Smith p. 1-3).

Today Hawaiians protest further development of the summit because of the enormous amount of disrespect the Institute for Astronomy has shown the Hawaiian people and their relationship to this most revered and sacred place.

Mauna Kea is the highest and most renowned temple and Wahi Pana (sacred temple of worship) of the Native Hawaiian people. Its summit region is known as Wao Akua - the sacred realm of the Creator. The significance of the Mountain is acknowledged in oral histories throughout all of Polynesia. It is the burial ground of our highest born and most sacred ancestors; it is a temple for worshipping Akua (Creator), Na Akua (Divine Deities), and Na Aumakua (the Divine Ancestors).

Respect is integral to Hawaiian culture: respect for each entity and for each other. Denial by the Institute for Astronomy of basic humanity and self determination in one's relationship to those sacred parts of oneself, is what has marked relations between native Hawaiians and western science on Mauna Kea (Smith p. 120).

Because of the past and currently ongoing defilement of the summit, and the continued marginalization and separation of Native Hawaiian cultural beliefs and practices from Mauna Kea, this Plan, like the one before it, serves only to meet the goals and objectives of whom it was written expressly for, and thereby missing a historic opportunity to democratically shift power relations and create inter-cultural good will. The Plan as it is written furthers a colonial ideological strategy to control the land to exclusive ends, the history and continuity of which offends deepest sense of Hawaiian humanity and love for the land.

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