

***Decolonizing Traditions:  
Native Hawaiian Women and the Question of Feminism***

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This talk will address the politics of contemporary Native Hawaiian women's nationalist activism and the complicated historical relationship to feminism, explores the enduring tensions between Hawaiian sovereignty and Native Hawaiian women's equality as a form of U.S. civil rights. The contemporary Hawaiian nationalist movement consists of two oppositional self-determination projects: the pursuit of indigenous self-determination within U.S. federal policy for Native American tribal nations, and the struggle to restore full independence for Hawai'i from the United States based on international law. Native Hawaiian women are very prominent in both. However, feminism is typically viewed as superfluous given Native Hawaiian women's prominent role in the movement, the popular understandings of traditional Hawaiian gender roles as egalitarian, and the cultural concept of *mana wahine* (women's power). Many contemporary Native Hawaiian women rely on a collective understanding of an egalitarian pre-colonial history – including robust cosmological traditions that include female deities – because it offers many rich examples of powerful women. However, this system was transformed by Christianization, especially as the founding of the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1810 was in response to western encroachment. By the mid-to late 19th century, Native Hawaiian men gained social and political footing above Native Hawaiian women. Despite this complicated history, there is a paucity of work constituting a body of Native Hawaiian feminist thought, which is one of the developments (or lack of) that the talk explores – investigating how feminism may pose an epistemological problem for Hawaiian sovereignty and the reclamation of *mana wahine*.