

Black Presidents, Gay Marriages, and Hawaiian Sovereignty: Reimagining Citizenship in the Age of Obama

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On November 4, 2008, the United States elected the first African American/biracial/nonwhite president, Proposition 8 outlawed gay marriage in California, and Hawai‘i rose in national prominence as the childhood home of the new president. While these three simultaneous election moments may seem unrelated, I argue that they each offer productive sites for thinking about how citizenship in this country has long been (re)produced through the violences and exclusions that establish normalcy. Barack Obama’s victory has been heralded as the final victory in the achievement of civil rights for Black Americans, the fulfillment of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “dream.” Meanwhile in California, Proposition 8 amended the state constitution to limit marriage to a union of a man and a woman. The state and national LGBT leadership cried foul, claiming marriage as a fundamental civil right. Ironically, in the days after the election, many white members of this community rushed to blame Black voters for the Prop 8 win, drawing on citizenship and civil rights analogies as a shaming tactic. And no “state” voted for Obama in higher proportions than Hawai‘i. Yet, Hawai‘i has a tenuous relationship to the United States given the U.S.-backed illegal overthrow of the monarchy and the subsequent vexed annexation just over one hundred years ago. Many native Hawaiians (who comprise 20 percent of the population) strongly resist any kind of American citizenship, holding firmly to their historical national and genealogical native identities.

Critical studies of U.S. citizenship have generally followed disciplinary lines focusing either on the state (governmental formation) or the nation (“imagined community” formulated via articulations of belonging). This paper draws from the interdisciplinary fields of queer theory, critical race theory, feminist political theory, disability studies, and indigenous studies to explore the interrelation between state and nation in dominant and emergent/nondominant articulations of citizenship. Here I enter into, and draw together, conversations about how dominant narratives regarding citizenship are being reinforced through color-blind notions of a postracial nation (including a reinscription of the myth of meritocracy), emphasis on civil rights claims by gays and lesbians, and resurgent American exceptionalism and assimilationist narratives. These moves work to reinscribe a coherent teleological narrative of U.S. national progress through continual adaptation and flexibility that seek, but never completely succeed at, appropriating and/or nullifying radical transgressive initiatives toward broader, more diverse, nonnormative conceptions of citizenship.

The teleological progress narratives and conceptions of normalcy, which are at the heart of dominant constructions of citizenship, are tied inextricably to blood logics and heterosexual reproduction. Blood logics enable assumptions about “what is natural” and therefore “normal” to obscure the processes through which categories such as race, sexuality, family, disability, and nation are historically produced. Nature doesn’t just trump history, it makes it invisible. As Stuart Hall reminds us, “the hope of every ideology is to naturalize itself out of History into Nature, and thus become invisible, to operate unconsciously” (as quoted in Moore, Kosek, and Pandian 2003, 42). “Blood” is a trope, a symbol standing in for all-powerful, yet always innocent Nature. Heterosexual reproduction is fetishized as one of the purist (most “normal”) acts of nature and simultaneously one of the most dangerous because of the threats of “contamination” (which assumes something pure to be contaminated) in blood mixing. Feminist theorist Donna Haraway writes, “fascination with mixing and unity is a symptom of preoccupation with purity and decomposition” (Haraway 1997, 214). The dominant narratives that uphold normative constructions of a white, heterosexual, able-bodied, non-native, non-alien citizenry are fortified by bloody notions about purity and decomposition.

In the final part of each section, I explore how these three election events highlight the workings of blood logics in constructing and controlling the parameters of citizenship, foreclosing broader possibilities for “imagined community” and civic membership. I am motivated by questions about how the state is implicated in, and constituted through, normative kinship practices which secure a disciplined, knowable, contained futurity (Stevens 1999; Butler 2004; Somerville 2005; Edelman 2004). I hope to contribute to the consideration of ways to “detach political belonging from (hetero)sexual reproduction” (Somerville 2005, 672). Enabling these detachments requires a radical queering of citizenship, releasing it from its moorings not just in heterosexism, but also in white supremacy, ableism, and patriarchal nationalism as well.

The Obama Victory & Black Citizenship

It is cliché at this point to speak of Barack Obama’s overwhelming victory as “historic,” which it certainly was in many ways from being tech savvy, to turning out youth, to campaign spending. Yet, in popular discourse references to the historic nature of the victory almost exclusively signal it as a triumph for African American civil rights. There is certainly amazing symbolic value, beyond even what we recognize, in the United States finally having a president of color. Narrowing this achievement, however, to fit a mainstream Black civil rights narrative seems to both sell it short in terms of cross-racial and global impacts, and to expect too much from it in terms of postraciality. In fact, there is a strong strain of this discourse that marks this moment not simply as “a” triumph, but as “The” culminating victory, the end of the struggle, the ultimate achievement. There are numerous examples of this but the referencing of the fulfillment of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “dream” seems most prevalent. In one political cartoon, King is sitting, holding a copy of his “I have a dream” speech with a text bubble that says simply “Pinch Me” (See figure 1) (Lowe 2008).

Thinking about this narrative through the lens of the normative powers of citizenship enables us to uncover two significant limitations, a reinscription of the myth of meritocracy, which is often configured as American exceptionalism, and an allegiance to the Black-white binary. We were repeatedly told the Obama



Figure 1: Political cartoon by Chad Lowe run in the *South Florida Sun Sentinel* after Barack Obama’s election. Courtesy of Chad Lowe and the *South Florida Sun Sentinel*.

story throughout the campaign: African father from Kenya, white mother from Kansas, raised in Indonesia and Hawai‘i on modest incomes and educational scholarships. Careful not to overplay (unlike John McCain’s incessant references to his Prisoner of War story), Obama marked the ways his racial, class and geographic origins made him unusual (queer?) presidential material. He reminded us in his moment of victory, “I was never the likeliest candidate for this office” (Obama 2008).

So now, every child (or at least every boy-child) in the United States is being encouraged to believe anew that anyone can become president—that with hard work, the sky’s the limit (girls must be content not to reach the sky, but to continue banging away at the glass ceiling ala Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton). “Only in America” has been reinvigorated as a national mantra right behind “Yes we can” (which, even in its original Spanish—*Si sé puede*—my Texas undergraduates attribute solely to Obama or Disney and not to the United Farm Workers who first adopted it as their motto). This revitalization of the myth of meritocracy, as I have suggested, is largely racialized. Conservative pundits and the mainstream media alike hammer home our new postracial status. We have officially become a colorblind society. We have put the past (read: bad, racist) behind us. The fallacy of this line of thought has been pointed out by many, including historian David Roediger. In “Race will survive the Obama Phenomenon” he calls attention to “an overwhelming desire to transcend race without transcending racial inequality” and cites the overwhelming statistical evidence of continued inequality, including the recent subprime-mortgage crisis (Roediger 2008).

I am certainly not the first to note that casting the Obama victory as the culmination of the struggle for African American civil rights also reinscribes the Black-white binary. Even though we know of his white mother, she is easily forgotten and that genealogy obscured as Obama is claimed continually as this nation’s first Black president. Obama himself has offered disruptions to totalizing Black narratives in his March 2008 Philadelphia “race” speech when he spoke of his white mother and grandmother, and in his references to himself as a “mutt.” Still, outside of the academy and some communities of color, you rarely see references to his biracial or mixed heritage. In a class discussion one of my astute African American undergraduates relayed a story of watching election results with her white roommate who became increasingly agitated. This student finally told her roommate she didn’t know why she was so upset since “he’s got you too,” something the white woman seemed not to have considered. This is not to suggest that thinking about Obama as the first Black president is wrong, it is simply to point out that seeing him as exclusively so is limiting because among other things it obscures his hybridity. Along with millions of Americans, he is neither simply Black, nor simply biracial, he is both . . . and so much more. Part of that “so much more” is this: having grown up in Hawai‘i and acculturating to island culture, Barack Obama is also “local.” One could also argue that given his family genealogy and history of migration, he has at least as much in

common with immigrant families as with Black American descendents of those who were enslaved.

Histories of immigration run through Hawai‘i’s local communities. Local identity in Hawai‘i is more than a marking of residence. It is an identity formed as an amalgamation of native Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Islander cultures with political origins in resisting the racial hierarchies and white supremacy imbedded in the sugar and pineapple plantations. Its essence is hybridity which is born out in census figures showing that over 21 percent of Hawai‘i’s population identifies as mixed race, as opposed to 2 percent on the continent (Okamura 2008, 22-23). (This is not to suggest that the local is some sort of postmodern racial panacea. There are historic inequalities within the local and between the local and native Hawaiians). Local people often refer to their mixed heritage as being “mixed plate” (island lunch that includes a little bit of cuisine of many local cultures) or “poi dog” (mixed breed). Obama’s Americanized “mutt” is a clear reference. The language of the local is Hawaiian Creole English (HCE), popularly known as pidgin, and reflects the hybridity of its origins. Black culture is not one of the original elements of the local, as Black people were not one of the groups brought to work on Hawai‘i’s plantations. Still, Obama can be local because, more than anything else, local is performative, cultural, and fluid, less burdened by blood logics than other identities.

Michelle Obama has said that “You can’t really understand Barack until you understand Hawai‘i” (Rucker 2009). Whether Obamamania will inspire more Americans to try to understand Hawai‘i remains to be seen, although an emerging cottage industry in the islands hopes to exploit the connection. Barack Obama has said “There is no doubt that the residue of Hawaii will always stay with me, and that it is a part of my core, and that what’s best in me, and what’s best in my message, is consistent with the tradition of Hawaii” (Rucker 2009). While people in Hawai‘i were inspired by the notion of Obama as the first Black president, they were much more excited about embracing him as the first *local* president. While there is local speculation about whether Obama can still speak pidgin (significantly, this speculation is far surpassed by discussions of his Ebonic intonations), local folks are encouraged by the many signs of localness he demonstrates, especially when in the islands.

Local markers include attire: slippers (flip flops), aloha shirts or t-shirts, and dark wrap around shades. There is also food: plate lunch, shave ice, dim sum, and even spam musubi (Song 2009). Most importantly, Obama acts local. In the islands, as elsewhere during the campaign, he was low-key not showy or aggressive (what pundits have called his “cool,” attributing it exclusively to Black culture), and often made fun of himself (humility and self-effacing humor are keys to local performance). He memorialized his mother by casting flowers from a lei into the ocean where her ashes were spread, and he came home to be with his tūtū before she died (respect for elders and ancestors is emphasized in many of the cultures that make up the local). And of course, there is the naming of his daughter Malia, a very popular name in Hawai‘i.

The clincher to Obama's local credibility however, occurred, not surprisingly, in the water. To the delight of many, he charged the waves at Sandy's (notorious neck-snapping body surfing break on O'ahu) as he had done in his high school days, and showed good local boy form in the water, even sans fins (See figure 2) (Nakaso 2008). Lois-Ann Yamanaka, a successful author of local literature, wrote an op-ed about Obama in the *New York Times* that ran inauguration week. She said she never defined Obama as local, until she saw the Sandy's photo. "He had that local-boy reach of the arm as he glided down a huge summer swell, the grace of his relaxed face, proud, turned into the tidal force of current, the way only a local boy can take a real wave and make it his very own ride, sleek and easy. A natural local boy" (Yamanaka 2000).

During the election and even now, the media was filled with stories questioning or affirming Obama's Blackness. How does he speak, dress, act? Who does he affiliate with? Is he authentic or "just frontin'"? Who can forget the controversial fist butt between him and Michelle, not to mention the seemingly unending Reverend Jeremiah Wright saga? Since Michelle Obama is seen as increasing her husband's Black quotient, she has come under similar scrutiny despite her lack of (immediate) mixed heritage and her family's deep ties to Chicago's Black communities. This framework seeks to capture Obama as Black/not-Black/not-Black-enough, obscuring his much more complicated racial and cultural identities and genealogy. Recognizing him as local breaks this frame, although it also raises Hawai'i's profile in complicated ways. I come back to that in the discussion of Hawaiian sovereignty.

Race, Blood logics, and the Heterosexual Reproduction of a Citizenry

Part of what is attractive about thinking about Obama as local, is that it moves us beyond blood logics that still entrap us, even when thinking about someone as bi- or multi- racial. Critical race theorists have established the history of the use of blood logics in U.S. law to maintain a white citizenry (Crenshaw et al. 1995; Delgado and Stefancic 1999; Haney-López 1996). Federal law directly restricted immigration on the basis of race until national origin quotas were lifted in 1965 (although that certainly did not end racist immigration policy) and birthright citizenship did not include all racial groups until 1940 (Haney-López 1996, 37-41).

With regard to naturalization, one of the starkest demonstrations of the production of a white citizenry were the prerequisite cases which span the period from 1878 to 1952 (Haney-López 1996). The 1790 Naturalization Act allowed citizenship to be granted only to a "free white person." At the time, most Black people were enslaved and considered the property of their slave masters. To be Black was to be owned by someone else; to be unfree. To be native was to be heathen or savage and certainly not white. This law catalyzed the prerequisite cases in which residents not automatically assumed to be white (Asians, Middle Easterners, Mexicans, those with mixed heritage, etc.) tried to prove their white-



Figure 2: Barack Obama body surfing at Sandy Beach on O’ahu in August 2008. Courtesy of the Associated Press.

ness in court and were scrutinized according to the contradicted models of race science and common knowledge. Race science was established to “prove” alleged biological foundations of race and natural racial hierarchies and worked to support eugenics philosophies. Common knowledge approaches were based on how a “reasonable” person would judge race and largely relied on visual markers (phenotype, hair, body type, etc.). Conventional knowledge was employed to argue someone was not white due to their appearance, even if they were able to establish white/Caucasian bloodlines.

While common knowledge approaches in this way defied blood logics, that they could be trumped by the law of hypodescent (when someone tried to argue that by appearance they were white), demonstrates the persistence of racialized blood technologies at the base of determining who is not white and therefore disqualified from naturalization. Writing about these logics Neil Gotanda states, “the metaphor is one of purity and contamination: White is unblemished and pure, so one drop of ancestral Black blood renders one Black. Black is a contaminant that overwhelms white ancestry” (as quoted in Haney-López 1996, 27). As is clear from our history of racist violence, discrimination (including anti-miscegenation which is all about blood purity), and disfranchisement, simply

granting African Americans citizenship could not stamp out these acculturated notions of white supremacy.

Obama is well aware of this history, and it directly impacts how he understands himself (Obama 2008). While he may act local, he sees himself very much situated in the gap between the white world he was acculturated to and the Black world he feels pressured to represent. For him, the struggle was how to recognize his white ancestry as he came to increasingly recognize himself as a Black man (again, not an easy thing in Hawai‘i, even if his father had been around). “I knew . . . that traveling down the road to self-respect my own white blood would never recede into mere abstraction. I was left to wonder what else I would be severing if and when I left my mother and my grandparents at some uncharted border” (Obama 1995, 86). He echoed this sentiment in the Philadelphia “race” speech during the campaign—arguably the most nuanced discussion of race by a president-elect/president, and yet still heavily reliant on the Black-white binary.

In this section I have used Obama’s election to think about the ways citizenship has been constructed as white through a negation of Blackness, thereby leading to a desire to claim a progressive reversal by way of a Black Obama. As I have suggested, as tempting as they may be, reversals usually flatten more complex realities. As the prerequisite cases show, and volumes of indigenous/ethnic/racial studies scholarship highlights, determination to build a white nation necessarily extended beyond exclusions of Blackness. The United States is founded on the colonization of native peoples, and I discuss issues of indigeneity and citizenship in the third part of this paper. As increasing numbers of Asian immigrants threatened a “yellow peril” contaminating the body politic, immigration restrictions were imposed, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act being exemplary. The United States eagerly swallowed half of Mexico with the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (while Texas was annexed in 1845, Mexico did not relinquish its claims until ratification of the treaty), but was ambivalent about conferring full citizenship to residents (Gómez 2007). Deportations of Mexicans have escalated in times of national crisis. It is estimated that 500,000 Mexicans were forcibly returned to Mexico during the Depression, half of whom were U.S. citizens (Haney-López 1996, 38). How many people will be deported, or simply disappear in detention facilities, in our current economic crisis? None of this would be possible without the blood logics tied to racist ideologies and dependent on heterosexual reproduction.

Clearly birthright citizenship is all about the material production of citizens through heterosexual reproduction. New citizens are literally produced every time current citizens, or those residing on U.S. soil, give birth. Since this citizenship is automatic and considered “natural,” Siobhan Somerville has noted that the other citizenship process which entails “the nonsexual production of national subjects” reveals that there is “something very queer at the heart of the naturalization process” (Somerville 2005, 663). Additionally, the current anti-Mexican immigrant backlash is fueled by a segment of the citizenry that fantasizes the whole as consisting of whites and “honorary” whites. The vitriol reserved for

women “sneaking over the border” to bear children on U.S. soil is telling of the depths of the fantasy of a white nation.

Proposition 8 and Lesbian & Gay Civil Rights

If Obama’s victory is touted as the climax of civil rights for Black Americans, the passage of California’s Proposition 8 in the same election has been framed as a major set back for lesbian and gay civil rights. To the surprise of many, voters in the relatively liberal state of California voted to amend the state constitution to insure that the definition of marriage be the union of a man and a woman. Here I analyze the campaign against Prop 8 (“No on 8”), demonstrating the limits of civil rights discourse embedded in its ties to analogous frameworks, progress narratives, and conservative representations. Rather than move us toward a radical queering of citizenship, the No on 8 campaign reinvigorated a limited assimilationist identity politics celebrating conformity and alienating many in the very community it was purportedly fighting for.

After nearly a century of marriage critique, most activists are aware of the gate-keeping aspects of marriage, as well as its 50 percent failure rate. Historically, the institution has provided a major pillar of support for patriarchal, classed, and racist social structures. Less well known is how marriage has been key to producing the standard of able-bodied citizenship through the exclusion—both legal and social—of disabled people. That many state statutes combined restrictions against marriage of people of color and people with disabilities is clear evidence of the strength of eugenic thinking and the conflation of marriage with procreation (while anti-miscegenation laws were overturned in 1967 by *Loving v. Virginia*, as late as 1980, 42 states and the District of Columbia had statutes restricting marriage for persons with disabilities) (Sales 1995). All of this raises questions about the mainstream gay and lesbian movement’s unequivocal embrace of marriage to the near exclusion of all other issues, and the compulsion that every self-respecting lesbian or gay man join the fight to secure it. Sue Hyde of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) writes, “Marriage equality may be the ultimate civil right for same-sexers, and marriage equality may finally subvert heterosexual supremacy as nothing else has. . . . [S]upporting state and local GLBT political advocacy isn’t a luxury; it’s a simple necessity . . .” (Hyde 2005, 24). One feels one must answer this call to arms by taking up rank; there seems to be simply no other respectable option.

In order to give the argument for gay marriage more resonance, the gay leadership has hooked its cart to the analogy of the African American civil rights movement—a strategy employed by nearly every social movement since the 1960s. Gay activists argue broadly that gays should have equal protection under the law like people of color, and specifically with regard to marriage, that bans on gay marriage are similar to anti-miscegenation laws and need to be eliminated. Beyond the discursive power of the analogy and the progress narrative it relies upon, groups attempt to link their discrimination with racial

discrimination because it provides the highest level of legal protection—“strict scrutiny” of racial discrimination cases requires “compelling” justification on the part of the respondent (Pascoe 2000, 102-104). While categorization and comparison are inevitable, intersectional theory cautions us to be wary of dualistic frameworks because they overdetermine difference and separation in order to produce the fiction of discrete, whole categories. Remaining within an analogous frame obscures the multiple interrelations between LGBT and African American identities, communities and histories, further whitening the perception of the LGBT community. As legal theorists have demonstrated, the law is one of the most hostile venues for the articulation of multiple, intersecting subjectivities.

In “Homosexual Unmodified,” Mary Eaton writes, “the possibility of cross-identification or consubstantial oppression is utterly unintelligible in a mode of reasoning that depends upon a separation between identities or oppressions. ‘Black homosexual’ is therefore an oxymoron in an analogical comparison of blacks and homosexuals” (Eaton 1995, 61-62). The article looks at judicial opinions focused on “homosexual” rights and finds only two that mention the race of the parties involved (*Williamson v. A.G. Edwards & Sons Inc.* and *Watkins v. U.S. Army*). Since the legal figure of the homosexual therefore is almost never raced and whiteness is the legal norm, homosexuality is legally produced as white. Further, building on Kimberlé Crenshaw’s work in intersectional theory (Crenshaw 1991), Eaton finds that in the two federal cases in which race is mentioned, it is not considered as having any impact on the circumstances of the case since it is legally trumped by the subject’s homosexuality. Eaton calls for the legal “re-racialization” of homosexuality (as opposed to an assumed whiteness) drawing from the Foucauldian notion of the law as not simply regulatory but also productive, thereby creating an LGBT community that imagines itself only as white (Eaton 1995, 68-69).

Jaspir Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages* takes this argument out of the realm of law and into popular culture, academia, and political discourse demonstrating that the construction of the “good gay” (a term she borrows from Michael Warner identifying those who approximate the norm: white, middle class, patriotic, monogamous/ “married”) can further narratives of U.S exceptionalism and nationalist projects. Thus Puar adds to Eaton, referencing “a pernicious binary that has emerged in the post civil-right era in legislative, activist, and scholarly realms: the homosexual other is white, the racial other is straight” (Puar 2007, 32). And indeed, it appeared that it was this imaginary that at least partially fueled the No on 8 campaign.

The bifucation of these two communities could not have been made clearer than in the blame-game following the passage of Prop 8. Initial erroneous exit polling indicated Black people voting overwhelmingly in support of the proposition (the initial figure reported was 70 percent, while in reality it was more like 58 percent) (Wildermuth 2009). The media picked up the story and broadcast it nationwide with storylines that were all variations on a theme: how could a community that had fought so hard for civil rights and had finally been “given”

a Black president turn around and deny rights to another oppressed community. Gay activists were all too willing to once again use the civil rights analogy, this time to publicly shame the Black community (as if it were some sort of monolithic force). Jon Stewart, host of *The Daily Show*, even got in on the action mimicking Black voters exalting “free at last, free at last . . . whoa, whoa, where are *you two* going” (Stewart 2008)? Some in the gay leadership tried to undo the damage, but the story had already made its mark, and retractions never make headlines.

There are many ideas circulating about why the No on 8 campaign failed: complacency; diversion of attention to the presidential campaign (no major candidate supported marriage; Obama only supports civil unions); a lack of organizing in communities of color (again using a civil rights analogy, one activist noted, “It’s kind of like if the freedom riders of the ‘60s never left Harlem”); a failure to preempt obvious anti-gay stereotypes; and so forth (Fulbright 2008). Discussions about “the Black vote” and organizing in “communities of color” in the days after the vote suggest many white gay activists continue to imagine “their” community as white, and tend to think about race only by way of analogy. This failure to develop a more complicated intersectional analysis is at least partially about trying to approximate normalcy in the quest for full citizenship. Queer theorists have been building a critique of assimilationist gay politics for some time now, demonstrating how they play into heteronormativity, class privilege, and white supremacy (Warner 1999; Duggan and Kim 2005; Puar 2007). The No on 8 campaign played along. Rather than show the diversity of the community and humanize the issue, the campaign relied on abstraction and straight spokespeople.

The campaign seemed to bend over backward not to talk about the gays and lesbians, much less trans folks. We were encouraged to vote against Prop 8 because it was “Wrong. Unfair. Discriminatory” (See figure 3). Californians, they encouraged us to think, are “better than that” (except, of course, for our hardcore discrimination against migrants/immigrants, our anti-affirmative action policies, our astronomical incarceration of people of color, and so forth). Many lesbians and gays fit these other categories as well, but it seems this reality is not only too complicated for the law, but certainly too complicated for electoral politics. In what played as a quintessential demonstration of closeted behavior, organizers barely whispered a word about who was facing discrimination. The campaign chose not to highlight photos of the gay couples (of all varieties) who married between June and November, even though these couples are proof positive that the apocalypse is not now and that “we” are not only everywhere (as the saying goes), but everyone as well. Instead they ran commercials featuring über-straight politicians (Senator Dianne Feinstein and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger) talking about how “discrimination is wrong” and supposedly giving us the legitimacy our queer selves lack. Had “we” won, what kind of victory would it have been? If you can’t call me by name, do I really want your vote?



Figure 3: No on 8 campaign poster.

Sexuality, Blood logics, and the Heterosexual Reproduction of a Citizenry

Not only has state mobilization of blood logics and heterosexual reproduction been used to produce a white citizenry, it has also clearly produced a heterosexual citizenry. In her article tracing a “queer history of naturalization” Somerville makes a convincing argument about the ways “the state itself (rather than the nation) might be understood as sexualized and sexualizing” (Somerville 2005, 660). She focuses a queer lens on immigration and naturalization policies showing how embedded assumed heterosexual reproduction is to the creation of citizens, as well as national belonging. If the president is the definitive citizen, it is worth thinking about how, while we may have loosened the compulsory whiteness of the office in this election, it is difficult to imagine queering it. In fact during the campaign, all the attention to Obama’s young, robust, able self and family often felt like an attempt to compensate for his lack of whiteness by accentuating his normative gender, sexuality, and family structure. Not only was he pulling on married heterosexual male privilege, but also there are clear ties to ableism here as well (the basketball playing, body-surfing Obama couldn’t be more able).

While it is clear that heterosexism is at the heart of opposition to gay marriage, it is worth thinking about how it is specifically rooted in an exclusive reverence for heterosexual procreative sex as a means to secure a coherent normative future. We are repeatedly told that “God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” That is apparently significant, not just because in gay sex “the parts don’t fit,” but more importantly because there is no prodigy as a result. The notion of perversion at the base of homophobia has roots deep in the naturalization of heterosexuality (and ableism and whiteness since perversion has meant non-

normative embodiments in these modalities as well). In fact, thanks to Michel Foucault, we understand the construction of homosexual perversion specifically to be inextricably tied to the naturalization and normalization of heterosexuality, a relatively recent socio-political move (Foucault 1978). One of the most oft repeated arguments against gay marriage hinges on the notion of “natural” and therefore “normal” sex as procreative, thereby producing (normal) children to carry the family and nation forward. While many have pointed out the fallacy of tying marriage too strongly to procreation (what about the increasing numbers of heterosexual couples who don’t want children, can’t have children, or have children outside of marriage), this argument persists.

So strongly associated are marriage and heterosexually-produced “biological” children that even when some form of gay union is recognized, it is often severed from parental rights. Judith Butler writes, “the figure of the child of nonheterosexual parents becomes a cathected site of anxieties about cultural purity and cultural transmission” (Butler 1999, 112), where “cultural purity and transmission” have everything to do with “implicit norms of racial purity and domination” (Butler 1999, 110). Feminist disability studies scholar, Alison Kafer would add that anxieties over nonheterosexual reproduction point not just to fears of racial hybridity, but also to cultural anxiety over failures to comply with cultural mandates that we must do everything possible to prevent disability and/or queerness. She explicates this in her analysis of the 2002 media sensationalization and cultural sanctioning of two deaf lesbians who seek out a deaf sperm donor to increase the chances that they might have a deaf child, which they do. They are doubly condemned for “working against nature” in their desire for a queer disabled family (Kafer 2009, 2010 (forthcoming)). So, what we are talking about here is the complex management of blood logics, compulsory heterosexuality, white supremacy, and ableism to produce the normative citizen of the state’s desire.

Gays should not be allowed to marry, we are told, because this would be harmful to “the children.” The harm apparently stems from the obvious need children have for “a mother and father” (understood as natural sex-gender formations), purportedly to keep them straight in more ways than one. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wryly put it, “advice on how to help your kids turn out gay . . . is less ubiquitous than you think. On the other hand, the scope of institutions whose programmatic undertaking is to prevent the development of gay people is unimaginably large” (Sedgwick as quoted in McRuer 2006, 150). Of course, married or not, gay couples are going to continue to parent children, but this is not considered and neither is the preponderance of social science research finding children of gay parents to be as healthy as any other (COLAGE). In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychological Association, among others verify this finding (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force 2004).

Gay marriage would apparently also harm children more broadly because it would mean the “gay lifestyle” would be taught in schools (this was a key, if completely fabricated, argument used by the proponents of Prop 8), and gener-

ally legitimized and this would be confusing for “the children.” The assumption of course is that all children are always already straight—completely debunked by the astronomical rates of teen suicide among nonheterosexual or questioning youth. We are also supposed simply to accept that somehow queer kinship is more “confusing” than any number of other kinship arrangements we have completely normalized, for better or for worse (divorce, joint custody, adoption, “step” parents/siblings, “in-laws,” the confinement of grandparents/aunts/uncles to nursing homes, the institutionalization of disabled siblings). It is worth considering how adult homophobia is being projected on to children who are as a whole more open and willing to embrace difference. And then there is the persistent association of gayness with pedophilia that is always lurking in the shadows even if not verbalized.

In the last few years, queer theorists have been engaging in important work exposing how the image of the child and heteronormative assumptions about longevity and hope for the future have regulated political discourse. Who, after all, wants to be cast as arguing against “a future for our children” or the “hope of posterity?” Lee Edelman calls this the logic of “reproductive futurism”—“an ideological limit on political discourse . . . preserving . . . the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations” (Edelman 2004, 2). Judith Halberstam writes about queer uses of time and space which resist heteronormativity by living lives unscripted by conventions of family, inheritance, reproductivity, risk/safety, and child rearing (Halberstam 2005, 2-6). Robert McRuer “crips” this by claiming these unscripted lives as examples of a “resistance to becoming normate” which recognizes that “compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness, and visa versa” (McRuer 2006, 198 and 2). These theorists and others make clear that because these queer lives resist convention and refuse “reproductive futurity,” they are often unintelligible to others and met with dismissal or violent hostility.

The point here has been to use Prop 8 to help in thinking about how compulsory whiteness, heterosexuality, and ableism are linked to citizenship in complex, largely unrecognized, ways utilizing blood logics. Given all of this, it is perhaps not surprising that the No on 8 campaign was so oblique in its message, so lacking of a subject being championed, and so vulnerable to arguments about what is good for “the children.” Lisa Duggan would chalk this up to the “new homonormativity” which “does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2002, 179). Consequently, instead of talk about queers, the No on 8 organizers appealed to the national value of equality, called up the legacy of civil rights, and tried to look as “normal” as possible.

Hawaiian Exoticism, Exceptionalism, and Sovereignty

Part of the tenacity of the right-wing charge that Obama was not born in the United States and is therefore ineligible to be president is due to ignorance about Hawai'i's history (it is important to note that had he been born in Puerto Rico his citizenship really would be tenuous). Hawai'i is more frequently thought of in the same frame as Cancun, the Bahamas, or any of a number of exotic tropical vacation destinations, than alongside, say, Iowa or North Dakota as a state in the union. Outside of images of Waikiki and the bombing of Pearl Harbor, what do most U.S. citizens know about Hawai'i? With the increasing interest in all-things-Obama has come a new attention to the islands. Driven mostly by Obamania, thus far the attention has mainly continued this trend of exoticizing Hawai'i. Reporters from the continent follow Obama around when he is on-island and conjecture about the strange food he is eating (in direct contrast to the local press which exalts in it) and the bizarre hand sign he keeps flashing (shaka).

The Fantasy Island image of Hawai'i was clearly articulated by Cokie Roberts during Obama's August 2008 trip to Oahu. In a statement on ABC's *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*, Roberts said Obama's trip to Hawai'i "does not make any sense whatsoever." She continued, "I know his grandmother lives in Hawaii and I know Hawaii is a state, but it has the look of him going off to some sort of foreign, exotic place. He should be in Myrtle Beach, and, you know, if he's going to take a vacation at this time" (as quoted in Cataluna 2008). Thinking she had a winning point, and furthering the characterization of Obama as elitist, Roberts repeated her assertion the next day on NPR's *Morning Edition*. This time she characterized the choice of Hawai'i as "odd" since Obama "made such a point that he is the boy from Kansas" and this "makes him seem a little more exotic than maybe he wants to come off . . ." (as quoted in Montange 2008). Local columnist and playwright Lee Cataluna expressed the general island response to this stereotyping when she rebuffed Roberts for "dissing Hawai'i" as "a place for tiki bars and surf lessons, not a place where real people actually live and work" (Cataluna 2008).

Getting past the orientalist notion of Hawai'i as some "exotic, foreign" place usually means focusing on the Americanization of the islands—notice how Roberts tries to guard against charges of ignorance by stating that she knows "Hawai'i is a state." Perhaps more people now know that Hawai'i became a state in 1959, but attention to statehood occludes comprehension of a continuing colonization and a strong oppositional sovereignty movement. What continues to be largely unknown is that Hawai'i was its own nation, operating as a constitutional monarchy with treaties with all major European and Asian nations until 1893 when Queen Lili'uokalani was overthrown in a U.S.-backed coup—an act President Cleveland subsequently opposed as "an act of war" (Silva 2004; Coffman 1998; Churchill and Venne 2004). It is impossible to understand the history of Hawai'i outside this imperial context. Because the Queen never relinquished her throne, there are many native Hawaiians who contest U.S. control and demand recog-

dition of their sovereignty (See figure 4). In a speech on the one-hundred-year anniversary of the overthrow, Hawaiian sovereignty leader and scholar Haunani-Kay Trask emphatically stated, “I am not an American. I am not an American. I will never be an American. I will die a Hawaiian” (Nā Maka o ka ‘Āina 1993).

How are we to think then about the citizenship of these Hawaiians? This raises questions about how are we to think about other internal colonies of the United States including Guam, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (all non-self governing territories), as well as Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands (both commonwealths). It also suggests we attend to the friction between indigeneity and U.S. citizenship and the labyrinth of federal, state and tribal regulation that burdens native nations. Scholars J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Andrea Smith ask that we consider “what happens to studies of American empire if we focus on empire from the context of the United States as a settler colonial country” (Smith and Kauanui 2008, 244). If one’s genealogy reaches back before there was a United States, how can one articulate that identity both individually and collectively? These are questions outside the scope of the U.S. civil rights discourse that frames mainstream African American and LGBT struggles because they trouble the very assumption of a cohesive, coherent U.S. nation-state. Nor are these questions reducible to a discussion of competing nationalisms, since the concept of the nation-state is itself a Western construct (Alfred 2001). For those in American studies in particular the challenge is how to think “America” without assuming the nation or state.

Hawai‘i raises these seemingly irreconcilable differences because, while there are those who want to be considered Hawaiian nationals (citizens of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i), there are others who emphasize their indigeneity as dating back pre-contact, and certainly pre-monarchy. While many would argue that these positions are not incompatible, some would like to use their indigenous history and culture to rethink their citizenship. They are not invested in recuperating a nation-state that was modeled on Western powers and constructed in opposition to traditional governance and social structure. Native Hawaiian scholar Noenoe Silva writes:

So now it is up to us to weigh how much and which aspects of haole [white] culture have been (and are) harmful to us and which are useful, and which aspects of the culture of our ancestors we wish to revive and perpetuate. We too are cloaked in haole culture and language but remain ‘Ōiwi [native] as the descendents of the people who have lived in the islands from time immemorial. Now we must decide how to govern ourselves and how we want to live together as a lāhui [people, nation] (Silva 2004, 203).

Here Silva offers an opening for a conversation among native Hawaiians about the future they desire. Implicit in the statement is a rejection of the notion



Figure 4: 1993 Hawaiian Sovereignty march, Honolulu Hawai‘i. Courtesy of photographer Ed Greevy.

that indigenous people are anachronistic relics (outside of time in some ways similar to queers) who will eventually vanish. Silva resists both nostalgia and hopelessness. She admits to the native complicity and acculturation, as well as the resistance, that comes with the unevenness of colonial processes. Questions about governance and the future of the lāhui are for Hawaiians to debate and decide, not some foreign culture and government.

Instead of raising these difficult issues of colonization and indigenous belonging, Hawai‘i is often touted as a model of racial harmony. This discourse is very familiar in the islands, having been used for decades to mask the colonial history, racial inequalities, and particularly, haole (white) political and economic hegemony. Through the lens of the harmony narrative, Hawai‘i is perceived as an amazing “racial laboratory” or an ideal race relations model. Historian Lawrence Fuchs, ends his canonical *Hawaii Pono* thus:

Hawaii illustrates the nation’s revolutionary message of equality of opportunity for all, regardless of background, color or religion. This is the promise of Hawaii, a promise for the entire nation and, indeed, the world, that peoples of different races and creeds can live together, enriching each other, in harmony and democracy (Fuchs 1961, 449).

Appropriately then (read also: through gestures of appropriation), Hawai‘i is for us (non-Hawaiians), not just as a vacation paradise, but as race relations

model. Hawai‘i will save us in more ways than one—that is its “promise” and purpose. So compelling (and selling) was this idea of Hawai‘i’s exceptionalism that it quickly became integrated into local discourse, political speeches, novels, and tourist propaganda. Some exaltations of local identity are guilty of reinforcing this idea in the ways they dismiss inequalities between local immigrant communities and on-going colonization (Fujikane and Okamura 2008). Trask, Silva, and other Hawaiian sovereignty activists are swimming hard against this current, fighting representations of Hawai‘i as exotic vacation destination and racial paradise. Their challenges interrupt the assimilationist assumptions embedded in contemporary citizenship discourses. In fact, in their appeals to genealogy and lāhui, their challenges occur outside rights discourse that is founded on appeals to the state for recognition and protection.

Indigeneity, Blood logics, and the Heterosexual Reproduction of a Citizenry

Blood technologies have been used as instruments of colonization for centuries and in many instances have been incorporated into tribal politics. In a reversal of hypodescent, indigenous peoples in what is now the United States, have been held to high blood quantum requirements to maintain their native identities, which in many cases has also meant their land and federal, state, or tribal benefits. There is a saying among Native Americans that modern Americans “are always finding ‘blacks’ (even if they look rather un-African), and . . . are always losing ‘Indians’” (Jack Forbes as quoted in Garrouette 2003, 48). A policy of forced inclusion, no matter how ambivalent, can “vanish” native peoples in a literal whitewash; their claims are thereby silenced or made illegitimate. If there are no “real” Indians or Hawaiians, there can be no obligations toward them, no claims from them. In her book *Hawaiian Blood*, native Hawaiian scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui argues,

in considering the racialization of indigenous peoples, especially through the use of blood quantum classification, a genocidal logic of disappearance is tied to the project of selective assimilation for those Natives who still exist yet don’t measure up for entitlements or benefits. But these specific rights are based on sovereignty (Kauanui 2008, 24).

The romanticized (for non-natives) image of the vanquished Indian riding into the sunset never to be seen again is realized via the dual strategies of high blood quantum requirements and selective or forced assimilation. In Hawai‘i, those with 50 percent or more indigenous blood are eligible for certain benefits, while those with less than 50 percent blood are eligible for less, producing what Kauanui calls the “bloody mess” of blood quantum (Kauanui 2000, 4). Native Hawaiians traditionally base their identities on genealogies that date back

before Captain Cook landed in 1778—the moment marked as “discovery” and therefore inscribed as the beginning of history, at least the history that matters, for the islands. Genealogies do not follow patriarchal heterosexual conceptions of lineage. They are neither delimited by Western notions of linear time (and thus generation), nor constrained by rigid separations between social, spiritual, and natural worlds (and thus androcentrism and assumed heterosexual human reproduction). Native Hawaiian scholar Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa writes,

Hawaiian identity is, in fact, derived from the Kumulipo, the great cosmogonic genealogy. Its essential lesson is that every aspect of the Hawaiian conception of the world is related by birth, and as such, all parts of the Hawaiian world are one indivisible lineage. Conceived in this way, the genealogy of the Land, the Gods, Chiefs, and people intertwine with one another, and with all myriad aspects of the universe (Kame‘eleihiwa 1992, 2).

Within this expansive understanding of kinship, anxieties about containment, contamination, and purity that animate blood logics are incomprehensible. The processes of colonization, including racialization via blood quantum, uprooted native Hawaiians from their genealogical foundations and caused a violent “dismemberment” of the lāhui. “Colonialism literally and figuratively dismembered the lāhui (the people) from their traditions, their lands, and ultimately their government. The mutilations were not physical only, but also psychological and spiritual” (Osorio 2002, 3).

In this section I used Hawai‘i’s coattail reemergence on the national stage to explore assumptions of national belonging built in colonial and assimilative processes that vanish indigeneity via the violences of blood logics. The historical regulation of, and violent interference in, the reproductive capacities and sexualities of native, non-white, and disabled women is further evidence of the construction of a normative citizenship that is white and able bodied. Cherokee scholar Andrea Smith’s *Conquest* convincingly argues that sexual violence has been an integral tool of colonialism and indigenous genocide. To make her case, Smith cites the construction of native women as inherently “rapable,” the sexual abuse in Indian Boarding Schools, sterilization and reproductive control, medical experimentation, environmental racism, and spiritual appropriation (Smith 2005). Dorothy Roberts’ *Killing the Black Body* makes a similar argument about the violence perpetrated against Black women in order to control or eliminate their reproductive capacities (Roberts 1997). Native scholars like Kauanui demonstrate the ways that material-semiotic genocides eliminate their national and territorial claims. Black scholars explicate the linkages between the state violences against their communities and the diminished ability to make claims for reparations. While as far as I know, a comparable text has yet to be written about disabled women, the control of their reproduction has been part

and parcel of their medicalization, quite literally “standard operating procedure” (Asch and Fine 1988; Meekosha 1998). Medicalization has kept disabled women caught in the snares of “patient” and “case,” struggling toward “citizen.” In all three instances, eugenics is used and tied to a social policy set on decreasing the “burden of unproductive, dependent citizens,” by foreclosing their indigenous, sovereign, and civil rights claims.

Conclusion

Jaspri Puar asks: “Can we keep our senses open to emergent and unknown forms of belonging, connectivity, intimacy, the unintentional and indeterminate slippages and productivities of domination, to signal a futurity of affective politics” (Puar 2007, xxviii)? A “futurity of affective politics” may be possible if we embrace Somerville’s charge to “detach political belonging from (hetero) sexual reproduction” (Somerville 2005, 672) and we think about Alison Kafer and other disability scholars’ proposition of desiring a queer crip world. We might consider the words of the late Essex Hemphill who wrote, “every time we kiss we confirm a new world coming” (Hemphill as quoted in Freeman 2002, 218). “Confirming” here is distinctly different than a self-assured knowing or prescriptive politic. It is an acknowledgement that the “new world” will emerge through desire and relation in amazing heterogeneity.

My hope is that this brief exploration of Black presidents, gay marriages and Hawaiian sovereignty has opened up some productive space for rethinking U.S. citizenship outside of the exclusionary and restrictive conceptions of normalcy tethered to blood logics. Dominant citizenship narratives attempt to contain and manage the future through a disciplined heterosexual reproduction that disallows the unbounded, contingent, unmappable messiness of hybrid/queer/crip/indigenous desires. Can we imagine Barack Obama as a local president and break free of the Black-white binary? Can we imagine queer kinship instead of gay marriage and move beyond heterosexual reproduction and the suffocating normalcy of the nuclear family? Can we imagine Hawaiian sovereignty and indigenous governance based in genealogy (not race or blood) and outside the stranglehold of federal law and Western nation-state models? Can we stretch our understanding of intersectionality toward the multiple and complex interrelations between these three moments? And if we can, what further possibilities yet to be imagined will open to us?

Perhaps the age of Obama will be a time when, following Hawai‘i’s local culture among others, we begin to move from an all-knowing hubris to humility. Perhaps the economic crisis will help catalyze this shift. Judith Butler reminds us that “the future with and for others, requires a certain openness and unknowingness . . .” (Butler 2004, 39). A “future with and for others” is integral to kinship, vibrant civil engagement, and national belonging. As we rethink citizenship, can we hold ourselves open to unknowingness? What would happen, what possibili-

ties would be enabled, if we stopped using blood logics to literally reproduce today's nation and state tomorrow?

Note

Thank you to my reviewers for their encouraging and helpful comments. A huge thank you to Alyson M. Cole for encouraging me to write this paper and reading an early draft. Mahalo to my mother, Georgia K. Acevedo, for keeping me current on Hawai'i news. Finally, I am infinitely grateful to my partner, Dorrie Mazzone, for reading many drafts and helping me talk my way into understanding.

This article was accepted for publication by *American Studies* on February 9, 2010.

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