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Visual Ideologies & Imagining a Hawaiian Nation

Abstract:

The desire for the Hawaiian Kingdom to be restored and recognized as a nation-state has been a common interest among Hawaiians since illegal US occupation in 1893. This research seeks a deeper understanding of how the nation is defined by investigating the relationship between imagining a Hawaiian nation and visual signs in the contemporary Hawaiian environment. Street signs, advertisements and even marked and unmarked landscapes comprise a public structural environment that expresses and inspires nationalist sentiment. These visual elements of daily experience indicate or portray imaginings of a Hawaiian nation. Some contain Hawaiian and/or Pidgin language; others present images of current local culture. This study focuses on the role of such visual elements in imagining a Hawaiian Nation and the relationship between visual ideologies and national aspirations in general. Fieldwork will be conducted with native and non-native residents or visitors on the island of Hawai'i. Three ethnographic methods, (1) participant and researcher photographic observation, (2) photo-elicitation, and (3) pile sorting, will be conducted with an ethnographic technique called a walk-through. Photographs elicited and interviews with participant's photographs taken by participants during the walk-throughs will provide information about conceptualizations of a nation-state. Results will include photographs taken by participants and synthesized participant interviews. The aim of this study is to provide information useful to Hawaiians seeking to change current political definitions of Hawaiians and Hawaiian lands.