
REVIEWS

Jocelyn Linnekin, *Sacred Queens and Women of Consequence: Rank, Gender, and Colonialism in the Hawaiian Islands*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990. Pp. xxiv, 276, illus., glossary, bibliography, index. US\$15.95.

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Several years ago, in reviewing a collection of ethnohistorical essays about gender relations among elite Polynesians, I asked the question: "would further informed examination of the evidence provide insights into the lives of ordinary women?" From Linnekin's book I have an affirmative answer. The "women of consequence" in her title are ordinary or commoner women of Hawaii, and it is her elucidation of the lives of ordinary Hawaiian women and men in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that makes her book unique. The better known "sacred queens" and kings of the Hawaiian elite receive their measure of attention, too.

The book is structured as an answer to an apparently simple question (p. 3): Why in the mid-nineteenth century was there "a statistical shift in the inheritance pattern such that land increasingly came into the hands of women"? The explanation takes the form of a series of chapters, all providing clues of different kinds. In the end the question is answered--only to raise other questions. The reader, increasingly informed, begins to anticipate the author's answer, and this reader found both the investigation and the answer convincing.

It may all sound very straightforward, but it is not. In fact, the great virtue of Linnekin's work is that she does not treat her question as a simple matter. She examines it in a broad historical and theoretical context, so that the book is an ambitious excursion of elucidation and critique in

the course of which propositions and arguments concerning Hawaiian history and society are reviewed and reinterpreted, and new evidence is brought to bear. The ambiguities in the received interpretation of pre-contact Hawaiian woman as *noa* ("common, 'free' of *kapu*"; p. 252) yet "vessels of highest *kapu* rank" are scrutinized, and the notion of "female pollution" critically revisited. Turning from the abundant literature on ritual and rank, women (mainly chiefly ones) are portrayed as actors--as producers and exchangers "vying for control of resources and jockeying for relative status" (p. 58). Moving away from an examination of chiefly Hawaiian society, the patterns of chiefly and commoner lifeways are both contrasted and related to one another; then the patterns of local or ordinary or commoner social relations teased out from the evidence of statements made by claimants in the land records and an informed consideration of the ethnohistorical literature. The Hawaiian political economy from 1778 to 1860 is examined as it changed both economic and social relations between elite and ordinary people. With her own interpretation of these aspects of Hawaiian history and society firmly grounded, Linnekin returns to her initial question of women and land. She argues that the statistical increase in women's land-holding was a pragmatic and conservative response under the circumstances and one that was compatible with Hawaiian cultural concepts. In the absence of male cognates and on behalf of their families, women claimed land as guardians or "place-holders"--an apt coinage. However, the story does not stop here, for this conservative response in turn brought about a transformation in women's social roles. In conclusion she addresses the wider issue of how women fare (*vis-à-vis* men) in colonial situations, arguing against the proposition that they are inevitably "devalued."

I leave to other reviewers more familiar with the abundant literature on Hawaii to uncover whatever holes there may be in the trees of Linnekin's complex argument. For me, the forest she has constructed is both plausible and illuminating. My competence is in the general area of Polynesian social relations, structure, and organization; and in this regard I record my particular appreciation of the book.

Linnekin's explorations of the lives of Hawaiian commoners in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is enlightening and intriguing. Enlightening because there is so little sophisticated analysis of commoner lives (compared with those of chiefs) and intriguing because her analysis resonates with features of the ordinary lifeways of other Polynesians past and present, rural and urban. There, in nineteenth-century Hawaii, were older women who stayed put, holding the land

and the family (however defined) together. There was the salience of the mature sister and brother as together the core of a cooperative group of kin (whatever its actual membership). There were mobile youth in casual unions and settled adults raising their valued grandchildren. There was a tendency towards local endogamy and uxorilocality. There was a strong sense of "place," of where people were born and raised, and ultimately belonged, which was associated with their attachment to the land. I find this a far more plausible picture of "Ancestral Polynesian Society" than the neatly ramifying conical clan (see Kirch 1984) or the "hypothetical ancestral Polynesian pattern" of paternalistic chiefly encompassment (Thomas 1989). The society that Linnekin depicts may be less exotic, but it makes a good deal more sense. Perhaps the picture does not apply to the chiefly minority who have received so much attention, but it probably does apply to the commoner majority.

Her discussion of the commoners and the land is subtle, and tolerant of some ambiguity. She contrasts the wandering of chiefly personages (p. 93) with the people's attachment to the soil, quoting Kamakau: "Strangers move about but native sons remain" (p. 85)--shades of Fijian "stranger-kings" and "land people" (Sahlins 1981). In jural terms, she confirms the hierarchy of chiefly rights to land, but then, again quoting Kamakau, contrasts the transience of chiefly control with the people's continuity based on burial sites. This connection to the land through ancestral burial places resonates all over Polynesia and is something that has not been attended to sufficiently. Linnekin does not pursue it either--but then it is not the subject of her book.

Linnekin's explanation is predicated on an open, analytical framework. She asserts right at the beginning that any social system provides alternative patterns and practices, but these "alternative practices are never random . . . [and] may accord well with other cultural premises" (p. 5) and, at the end, that the answers to the questions must be complex and specific (versus simple and global)--her series of *because* phrases (p. 238).

Linnekin takes issue with propositions of several of her colleagues--Valeri, Gailey, Pukui, etc.--with grace and tact. These are not strawpersons whom she is setting up to play off of, nor is she asserting that she is absolutely right and they are dead wrong. This is indeed refreshing and I hope it is indeed one of the features of feminist scholarship (see Linnekin's comments on this [p. 229]).

I have one criticism, or better put, something I found irksome, though it is related to comments above. Repeatedly the author makes brief comparative references to Samoa (where she has been doing

ethnohistorical research) of the ilk "like Samoans," "as is found in Samoa," "similarly, in Samoa," "echoes of the Samoan," and so forth. These "just like" throwaway lines do not really illuminate or support her argument, even though they do suggest something of the basic nature of the social patterns that she describes. If comparisons are to be made they should be sustained explorations of differences as well as samenesses and based on some rationale of comparison, that is, why are these particular societies being compared?

This, however, is a minor quibble about a major contribution to Polynesian studies--both in substance and theory. Furthermore, my quibble points to a task for other scholars, who, following Linnekin's lead, might investigate with similar ethnohistorical sophistication the lives and social arrangements of the nonchiefly men and women in the hierarchical societies of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Polynesia.

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