

Anita Budziszewska\*

## Investigating War Crimes and Human Rights Violations Commit- ted in the Hawaiian Kingdom

edited by Dr. David Keanu Sai, Head of the Hawai-  
ian Royal Commission of Inquiry, 2020, 380pp.

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**T**he subject of review here is the multi-author publication *Investigating War Crimes and Human Rights Violations Committed in the Hawaiian Kingdom*, edited by Dr. David Keanu Sai, Head of the Hawaiian Royal Commission of Inquiry, published in 2020. The book is divided into three parts, i.e. Part 1 *Investigating war crimes and human rights violations committed in the Hawaiian Kingdom*; Part 2 *The prolonged occupation of the Hawaiian Kingdom*; and Part 3 *Hawaiian law, treaties with foreign states and international humanitarian law*. This final part represents a collection of source documents in such fields as Hawaiian law, but also international-law treaties with foreign states (in fact 18 including the USA) – dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A selection of treaties from the sphere of international humanitarian law has also been made and included.

**T**he essence of the publication nevertheless resides in its two first parts, in which the authors offer an in-depth treatment of the complicated long-time relationship between Hawaii and the United States. Nevertheless, the thesis pursued here overall is the straightforward one that Hawaii has been

\* University of Warsaw, e-mail: [anita.budziszewska@uw.edu.pl](mailto:anita.budziszewska@uw.edu.pl), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1950-2612>

occupied illegally and incorporated into the United States unlawfully, with that occupation continuing to the present day and needing to be understood in such terms. The authors also pursue the difficult thread of the story relating to war crimes.

The above main assumption of the book is emphasised from the very beginning of Part 1, which is preceded by the text of the Proclamation Establishing the Royal Commission of Inquiry, recalling that that Commission was established to “ensure a full and thorough investigation into the violations of international humanitarian law and human rights within the territorial jurisdiction of the Hawaiian Kingdom.”<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the main aim of the above institution as called into being has been to pursue any and all offences and violations in the spheres of humanitarian law, human rights and war crimes committed by the Americans in the course of their occupation of Hawaii – which is given to have begun on 17 January 1893.

Presented next is the genesis and history of the Commission’s activity described by its aforementioned Head – Dr. David Keanu Sai. He presents the Commission’s activity in detail, by reference to concrete examples; with this part going on to recreate the entire history of the Hawaiian-US relations, beginning with the first attempt at territorial annexation. This thread of the story is supplemented with examples and source texts relating to the recognition of the Hawaiian Kingdom by certain countries (e.g. the UK and France, and taken as evidence of international regard for the integrity of statehood). Particularly noteworthy here is the author’s exceptionally scrupulous analysis of the history of Hawaii and its state sovereignty. No obvious flaws are to be found in the analysis presented.

It is then in the same tone that the author proceeds with an analysis relating to international law, so as to point to the aspects of Hawaii’s illegal occupation by the United States – including an unprecedentedly detailed analysis of the contents of documents, resolutions, mutual agreements and official political speeches, but also reference to other scientific research projects. This very interesting strand of the story is followed by Matthew Craven in Chapter 3 on the *Continuity of the Hawaiian Kingdom as a State under International Law*. Notwithstanding the standpoint on the legality of the occupation or annexation of Hawaii by the United States, the matter of the right to self-determination keeps springing up now and again.

1. *Proclamation Establishing the Royal Commission of Inquiry*, in: *Investigating War Crimes and Human Rights Violations Committed in the Hawaiian Kingdom*, ed. D.K. Sai, Royal Commission of Inquiry 2020, p. 8.

Considerable attention is also paid to the multi-dimensional nature of the plebiscite organised in 1959 (with regard to Hawaii's incorporation as a state into the United States of America), with the relative lack of transparency of organisation pointed out, along with various breaches and transgressions that may have taken place.

In turn, in Chapter 4 – on *War Crimes Related to the United States' Belligerent Occupation of the Hawaiian Kingdom* – William Schabas makes attempts to verify the assertion, explaining the term war crimes and referring to the wording of the relevant definition that international law is seen to have generated. The main problem emerging from this concerns lack of up-to-date international provisions as regards the above definition. The reader's attention is also drawn to the incomplete nature of the catalogue of actions or crimes that could have constituted war crimes (in line with the observations of Lemkin).<sup>2</sup>

While offering narration and background, this Chapter's author actually eschews Hawaiian-US examples. Instead, he brings the discussion around to cases beyond Hawaii, and in so doing also invokes examples from case-law (e.g. of Criminal Courts and Tribunals). While this is a very interesting choice of approach, it would still have been interesting for the valuable introduction to the subject matter to be supplemented by concrete examples relating to Hawaii, and to the events occurring there during the period under study.

Chapter 5 – on *International Human Rights Law and Self-Determination of Peoples Related to the United States' Occupation of the Hawaiian Kingdom* – allows its author Federico Lenzerini to contribute hugely to the analysis of the subject matter, given his consideration of the human rights protection system and its development with a focus on the right to self-determination. The author separates those dimensions of the law in question that do not relate to the Hawaiian Kingdom<sup>3</sup>, as well as those that may have application to the Hawaiian society.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the process ends with *Applicability of the Right to Self-Determination During the American Occupation* – a chapter written with exceptional thoroughness, objectivity and synthesis. The author first tells the story on how the human rights protection system came to be formulated (by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Covenants of 1996, but also by reference to other Conventions). Rightly signalled is the institutional dimension to the protection of human rights, notably the Human Rights Committee founded to protect the rights outlined in the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It is of course recalled that the US is not a party to the relevant Protocols, which is preventing US citizens from assert-

2. W. Schabas, *War Crimes Related to the United States Belligerent Occupation of the Hawaiian Kingdom*, in: *Investigating War Crimes and Human Rights Violations Committed in the Hawaiian Kingdom*, ed. D.K. Sai, Royal Commission of Inquiry 2020, p. 156.

3. F. Lenzerini, *International Human Rights Law and Self-Determination of Peoples Related to the United States' Occupation of the Hawaiian Kingdom*, in: *Investigating War Crimes and Human Rights Violations Committed in the Hawaiian Kingdom*, ed. D.K. Sai, Royal Commission of Inquiry 2020, p. 212.

4. Ibidem, p. 214.

ing the rights singled out in the 1966 Covenants.<sup>5</sup> Again rightly, attention is also paid to the regional human rights mechanism provided for by the 1969 American Convention on Human Rights, which also lacks the United States as a party.

**T**he focus here is naturally on the right to self-determination, which the author correctly terms the only officially recognised right of a collective nature (if one excludes the rights of tribal peoples). The further part of the chapter looks at the obligations of states when it comes to safeguarding their citizens' fundamental human rights. The philosophical context underpinning the right to self-determination is considered next (with attention rightly paid first to liberty related aspects and the philosophical standpoints of Locke and Rousseau<sup>6</sup>, along with the story of the formulation of this right's ideological basis and reference to what is at times a lack of clarity regarding its shape and scope (not least in Hawaii's case).<sup>7</sup> What is therefore welcome is the wide-ranging commentary offered on the dimensions to the above rights that do relate to Hawaiian society as well as those that do not.

**I**n summing up the substantive and conceptual content, it is worth pointing to the somewhat interdisciplinary nature of the research encompassed. Somewhat simplifying things, this book can first be seen as an in-depth analysis of matters historical (with much space devoted to the roots of the relations between Hawaii and the United States, to the issue of this region's occupation and the genesis of Hawaii's incorporation into the USA). These aspects have all been discussed with exceptional thoroughness and striking scrupulousness, in line with quotations from many official documents and source texts. This is all pursued deliberately, given the authors' presumed intention to illustrate the genesis of the whole context underpinning the Hawaiian-US relations, as well as the further context through which Hawaii's loss of state sovereignty came about. This strand to the story gains excellent illustration thanks to Dr. Keanu Sai.

**T**he second part is obviously international law related and it also has much space devoted to it by the authors. The publication's core theses gain support in the analysis of many and varied international documents, be these either mutual agreements between Hawaii and the United States or international Conventions, bilateral agreements of other profiles, resolutions, instruments developed under the aegis of the UN or those of a regional nature (though not only concerned with the Americas, as much space is devoted to European solutions, and European law on the protection of human rights in particular). There is also much reference to international case-law and juris-

5. Ibidem, p. 177.

6. Ibidem, p. 209.

7. Ibidem, p. 214.

prudence in a broader sense, the aim being to indicate the precedents already arrived at, and to set these against the international situation in which Hawaii finds itself.

However, notwithstanding this publication's title, the authors here do not seek to "force-feed" readers with their theses regarding Hawaii's legal status. Rather, by reaching out to a wide range of sources in international law as well as from history, they provide sufficient space for independent reflection and drawing of conclusions. In this regard, it would be interesting if few remarks were devoted to present-day relations between Hawaii and the rest of the USA, with a view to achieving a more-profound illustration of the state of this relationship. However, it might seem from the book's overall context that this was done deliberately so that the foundations of this unique dispute gain proper presentation. All is then augmented further by Part 3 – the collection of agreements and documents considered to sustain the main assumptions of the publication under review. Were I to force myself to point out any failure of the book to meet expectations, I would choose the cultural dimension. There is no way of avoiding an impression – only enhanced by cover-to-cover reading – that this publication is deeply rooted in the Hawaiians' sense of cultural and historical identity. So it would have been interesting to see the cultural dimension addressed, including through a more in-depth analysis of social awareness. At the very least, I have in mind here Article 27 UDHR, traditionally regarded as the source of the right to culture and the right to participate in cultural life. To be added to that might be Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. While (as Boutros Boutros-Ghali noted in 1970) the right in question initially meant access to high culture, there has since been a long process of change that has seen an anthropological dimension conferred upon both culture and the right thereto. A component under that right is the right to a cultural identity<sup>8</sup> – which would seem to be the key space in the Hawaiian context. The UN and UNESCO have in fact been paying a great deal of attention to this matter, with the key relevant documents being the 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* that in general links these issues with the human rights dimension as well as the *Recommendation on Participation by the People at Large in Cultural Life and their Contribution to It* (1976).

So a deeply-rooted cultural-identity dimension would have offered an interesting complement to the publication's research material, all the more so as it would presumably reveal the attempts to annihilate that culture (thus striking not merely at statehood, but at national integrity of identity). An interesting approach would then have been to show in details whether and to what extent

8. See: Y.M. Donders, *Towards a Right to Cultural Identity?*, Intersentia 2002.

this is resisted by the USA (e.g. in regard to the upholding of symbols of material and non-material cultural heritage).

**H**owever, given the assumption the book is based on – i.e. the focus on state sovereignty (not the right of cultural minorities, but the right of a nation to self-determination), the above “omission” actually takes nothing away from the value of the research presented. However, the aspect of national identity – of which cultural and historical identity is a key component – may represent an impulse for further, more in-depth research.

**I**n regard this publication as an exceptionally valuable one that systematises matters of the legal status of the Hawaiian Kingdom, taking up the key issues surrounding the often ignored topic of a difficult historical context occurring between Hawaii and the United States. The issue at stake here has been regenerated synthetically, on multiple levels, with a penetrating analysis of the regulations and norms in international law applying to Hawaii – starting from potential occupied-territory status, and moving through to multi-dimensional issues relating to both war crimes and human rights. This is one of the few books – if not the only one – to describe its subject matter so comprehensively and completely. I therefore see this work as being of exceptional value and considerable scientific importance. It may serve not only as an academic source, but also a professional source of knowledge for both practicing lawyers and historians dealing with the matter on hand. The ambition of those who sought to take up this difficult topic can only be commended.

Donders Y.M., *Towards a Right to Cultural Identity?*, Intersentia 2002.

*Investigating War Crimes and Human Rights Violations Committed in the Hawaiian Kingdom*, ed. D.K. Sai, Royal Commission of Inquiry 2020.

## Bibliography