

“Suppose for a moment, that Keanu had reasoned thus”: Contagious Debts and Prisoner–Patient Consent in Nineteenth-Century Hawai‘i

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I have linked as similar ideas in the motives accompanying my application to His Majesty’s Privy Council to be allowed to perform some inoculation-experiments on the condemned convict Keanu. The application I made resulted in the sentence of death passed on the murderer being commuted to penal servitude for life. With the prisoner’s written permission I commenced operations on the last day of September 1884 ...

— Dr. Edward Arning,
Report of Edward Arning, M.D., on Leprosy, November 14th 1885, submitted to King Kalākaua and the Hawaiian Board of Health¹

Suppose for a moment, that Keanu had reasoned thus: “I readily submit to inoculation with leprosy, not only because I shall save myself from immediate death, but also for a higher reason. I have killed one man, and deep is my sorrow; should I by this inoculation become a leper, such a result may tend to save the lives of many.”

— Rector H. P. Wright, “The Inoculability of Leprosy,”
The British Medical Journal, 1888²

In the 1880s, an exchange took place within US and British medical journals. It concerned the life of an incarcerated Native Hawaiian, Keanu, and the “contagious nature of leprosy” (Hansen’s disease) across the Kingdom of Hawai‘i.³ Keanu was tried in the Supreme Court of the Hawaiian Islands, charged with the killing of a farmer, “one Charlie, a Japanese, on the February 16th, 1884 at Kohala, Hawaii.”⁴ On July 9, 1884, Justice Judd delivered a guilty verdict for first-degree murder along with a death sentence: Keanu was to be hanged “within the walls of the [Oahu] prison” on October 28, 1884.⁵ *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser* referred to the event as “The Kohala Murder Case” and described the murder as an unfortunate moment of meaningless violence: “There was no quarrel, no cause, except the bloodthirstiness of a beast of a man.”⁶ Within weeks Keanu petitioned—unsuccessfully—for his sentence to be commuted to life in prison, after which time Dr. Edward Arning, a German microbiologist recently arrived to Honolulu, submitted a special request to King Kalākaua’s Privy Council to permit the use of Keanu’s body for experimental leprosy inoculations. Arning promised to “really advance our knowledge of the obscure disease.”⁷ The Privy Council meeting minutes reflect the interest in Keanu’s case: the “committee to whom was referred the petition of Keanu for commutation of sentence, presented their report recommending that the petition be granted, in view of the valuable results to be obtained by experiments upon him respecting the action of leprosy.”⁸ The request was approved. With his written consent, a notion which I trouble later in the essay, Keanu was transferred to Dr. Arning to begin the experiments. Arning removed a “leprous nodule”⁹ from the cheek of a nine-year old girl to surgically insert the mass into Keanu’s arm. He began feeling rheumatoid pains within a month and “the cubical nerves began to become obstructed, this lasting until the 5th or the 8th month,” until September 25, 1888, when Keanu was officially diagnosed with leprosy and transferred to Kalaupapa, Moloka‘i.¹⁰ Keanu remained at the quarantine site created under the authority of the 1865 Act to Prevent the Spread of Leprosy until his death in 1892.¹¹

This essay examines the circulation of the *figure* of Keanu within medical discourse. Across space and time, from Hawai‘i to Trinidad, to England and then back to Hawai‘i, discussions and representations of Keanu moved medical professionals to navigate and negotiate definitions of race, coloniality, consent, criminality, and personhood—all flexible and usable categories. In some cases, as I discuss in the second half of this essay, the circumstances of Keanu prompted the medical impulse to imagine his very thoughts to rationalize the use of his body for fatally experimental procedures—and to do so through the language of humanitarianism and benevolence. The notions of consent in which Dr. Arning and others anchored their claims to Keanu—those tethered to the understanding that submitting one’s own racialized, criminalized body to science constitutes an acceptable form of societal debt-settling—provided the opportunity for medicine to advance knowledge globally. It is, I suggest, a claim dependent on the conditions that produce Keanu as a “native criminal” in the first place, and the same conditions that bring Dr. Arning to Hawai‘i: settler-colonial

discourses structuring sets of systems rather than singular events.¹² Arning’s initial motivation to travel to Hawai‘i were twofold: to research leprosy and collect photographic data on Native Hawaiians, a project funded by the Humboldt Institute of the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences. The Institute commissioned him, as O.A. Bushnell has noted, to “make a study-tour to Hawaii for the joint purpose of investigating leprosy and acquiring an ‘ethnographic collection.’” Bushnell added with disdain that if such a state-funded project were proposed in the 1960s, the decade in which he wrote his biographical essay on Arning, it would have been greeted with “suspicion if not with horror in an application for a research grant today.”¹³

The event of consenting to experimental inoculations, as an alternative to execution, might also be read as a complex negotiation of colonial legal power relations. Being attentive to these discourses of settler-colonial law, business, and medicine, which remade Keanu as criminal from multiple angles—as a murderer, as a patient infected with a criminalized disease, and as a colonial subject—at the same time opens the archive to be read against itself.¹⁴ It is central, therefore, to examine the economy of consent and raise several questions. For example, how has this medical archive negotiated the criminalization of disease and bodies? How has it navigated connections to the legal, economic, and political discourses deployed to dismantle Hawaiian sovereignty? Where has it produced something else, such as narratives of resistance, negotiations of power, and other strategic appropriations? As this case sits at the intersections of multiple forms of racialized criminality, how does it fit with those discourses, for instance, in the Act to Prevent the Spread of Leprosy, the 1887 Bayonet Constitution, the incarceration of Queen Lili‘uokalani, and the overthrow and annexation in 1898? Read alongside Keanu’s case and its narratives, the figure of the prisoner–patient bears out contradictions emerging from a body politic always tethered to settler colonialism and racialized forms of nation-building.¹⁵

The Production of Social Debts and the Case of Keanu

In the decade following the initial 1884 inoculations, Arning and Keanu became internationally known in journals and popular media, and this sensational narrative impacted policy, public health regulations, and medical practices.¹⁶ Popular magazines and medical journals, as well as journalistic and fictional representations deploy—and occasionally unsettle—racialized, criminalized narratives of Keanu.¹⁷ Soon after the initial experiments, news traveled to the Caribbean and caught the attention of Dr. Beaven Rake, the Trinidad Leper Asylum medical supervisor. On August 20, 1887, Rake published an article entitled “Leprosy and Vaccination” in *The British Medical Journal*. The journal provided the platform for physicians and scientists across the globe to weigh in on the Keanu case, as well as comment on their own and other medical experiments. When the details of Keanu’s case reached Trinidad, Arning’s work was already perceived as groundbreaking and as a valued precedent in colonial medical discourse.¹⁸ Rake interpreted this value against the unsuccessful attempts to identify,

through non-human experimentation, how the *Mycobacterium leprae* bacterium was transmitted. He wrote: “Seeing that inoculation experiments on various animals with leprous material (tubercles, pus, etc.) in different parts of the world—Spain (Neisser), England (Thin), Hawaii (Arning), and Trinidad (*loc. cit*)—have hitherto failed to transmit leprosy, I think one is justified in arguing *a fortiori* that vaccination with pure lymph is incapable of doing so.”¹⁹ Rake discovered in the Keanu “criminal” case the discursive space to mark a particular kind of medical value in colonized, racialized bodies. Rationalizing an institutional move away from failed animal experimentation, he championed prioritizing experimental work on human subjects—what Arning at one point describes as “human soil.”²⁰ “I have had no hesitation,” Rake continues, “in vaccinating both my own children out here [in Trinidad] from native arms, Hindu and negro.”²¹

The case articulates the legal, medical, and cultural frameworks for producing the discursive figure of what I am describing as the “prisoner–patient”—a figure emergent from conditions across several imperial medical conversations and practices in Hawai‘i, the Caribbean, and England in the late nineteenth century. Keanu’s consent to participate in these procedures—likely represented by an x-mark signature, such as the x-mark made on his criminal case court documents—provided the mechanism to commute his death sentence to life in prison, and to discursively transform Keanu into another kind of subject: Arning’s prisoner–patient. Reading Keanu’s consent not simply as an act of agency, as many conveniently did in medical and scientific communities, but rather as an expression of contradictory discourses of colonial violence, presents a very different story than the one in the official record. Following the body of transnational scholarship that foregrounds the movement of not only people and bodies across borders and oceans, but also ideas, cultural discourse, and knowledge production, this essay examines this exchange as one that unfolded as a global conversation, moving across empires through colonial medicine. Perhaps most notable in this discussion is the fact that it represents a multi-sited and temporally unfixed medical public, where racial hierarchies are made visible within the historical conditions of colonialism, racial capitalism, and the maintenance and naturalization of whiteness as a possession.²²

Accounts of Keanu’s case in *The British Medical Journal* and other journals, newspapers, and books consistently describe him with the same biographical details. He was “a murderer in Hawaii, named Keanu,” “the convict Keanu,” the “Sandwich Island convict,” “a condemned murderer,” and, as one widely read history of Hansen’s disease frames the case, “Keanu, the Murderer.”²³ The documents reporting on Keanu locate his “criminal” status or his Hawaiian identity (often both) as the central framework through which Keanu can be justifiably used in medical procedures. In *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lisa Lowe locates such narrative processes within what she terms the archives of liberalism. Lowe asserts that in examining state archives produced by such historical events, we can better interrogate “the ways in which the archive that mediates the imperatives of the state subsumes colonial violence within

narratives of modern reason and progress.”²⁴ To critically examine the colonial archive at the center of “forcible encounters, removals, and entanglements [that have been] omitted in liberal accounts of abolition, emancipation, and independence,” Lowe argues for other ways of reading that resist the processes through which “the forgetting of violent encounter is naturalized, both by the archive, and in the subsequent narrative histories.”²⁵ This new way of reading takes for granted economies of affirmation and forgetting and the ways they formalize archives of liberalism, therefore stabilizing a claim to civilize, to develop freedoms for some while “relegating others to geographical and temporal spaces that are constituted as backward, uncivilized, and unfree.”²⁶ This alternative method presents a way to read the archive produced around Keanu’s case against itself, and to reckon with settler-colonial logic guiding a medical community to situate racialized bodies as the raw materials for advancement.²⁷ The value of the body, especially when conflating the category of “human” with the category of “free,” is linked to persistent narratives that demarcate indigeneity from conceptions of modernity—both spatially and temporally.²⁸

The constitutive processes informing the ideological formations of modernity in the context of Keanu’s case provided a special moment for science and medicine. That is, racializing the figure of Keanu outside of modern time situates it against liberal accounts of the “human”; at the same time, it constructs life as criminal and, therefore, possessed by the state. As such, life is perceived as usable as a precariously situated body to benefit “modern” subjects. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, in formulating the emergence of white possessiveness as a narrative force within modernity that defines itself against indigeneity, argues that possession over land, property, wealth, or one’s very body, thoughts, and actions requires “a subject to internalize the idea that one has proprietary rights that are part of normative behavior, rules of interaction, and social engagement.”²⁹ Moreton-Robinson’s critical analysis of Western modalities of “the modern” helps to locate possessiveness as a discourse that makes possible the necessary revaluing of Keanu’s racialized and criminalized body, but in particular when presented as existing outside the very framework that would otherwise define bodies as human.

As several of the medical reports on his case note, Keanu had been awaiting his execution date when asked to consent to these experiments. In an 1888 *British Medical Journal* article, “The Inoculability of Leprosy,” for instance, H. P. Wright justified Arning’s decision to use Keanu this way. A rector of Greatham Parish in England, prolific author on colonial diseases, and champion of the British Empire, Wright upheld the sovereignty of the British state as the foremost authority to “grant” or “take [the] life” of a criminalized body for the sake of the “civilized nations.”³⁰ In a statement that narrates biopolitical state imperatives, Wright calls on the state’s sovereign power to justify medical violence against Keanu.³¹ He insists, in other words, on the state’s moral right to kill: “The State, which could take life for the terror of evil doers, could also grant life in order to stay, if possible, in some degree, the advance of the most terrible

disease that tortures man.”³² By Wright’s account, the constant threat of this “most terrible disease” provides the state the necessary grounds to narrate Keanu out of modern time, especially when such action protects and benefits a fully human white citizenry—what Moreton-Robinson calls the “emergence of a new subject into history within Europe.”³³ By placing Keanu within this criminalized “prehumanity,” Wright’s justification serves to inscribe criminality and indigeneity as prehuman existence—in Wright’s shorthand, the qualities of the “evil doer.” And while this situates Keanu as a racialized and criminalized subject existing outside of modernity, it also places him within a “modern” time just enough to hold him criminally culpable for crimes against society.

Perhaps this is how we can read this medical archive against itself, as Lowe asserts that colonial relations have been at the heart of European philosophical notions of human freedom. Critically unsettling the “unevenly inhabited and inconsistently understood aftermath of these obscured conditions,” we can begin to see how the archive absorbs colonial medical violence within those narratives of modern reason and progress. Constructions of differentiated humanness, in other words, work from liberal notions of freedom and frame native criminality as a discursive space to great effect. It is the body which maps value and utility, and it does so across spatial and temporal transits of empire. In this way, the figure of Keanu is made and remade, narrated and revalued for medical science. Conjuring such a figure is indicative of the conditions that produce the language of consent and the larger production of liberal humanism and autonomy. Scott Richard Lyons, examining the x-mark within a matrix of Native assent to treaties, has described this as “the agreement one makes when there seems to be little choice in the matter.”³⁴ Those discourses constituted political, religious, and cultural colonialism, and helped produce Keanu as a liberal, autonomous subject—important for narrating a figure who possesses and is in control of his own body only enough to consent to giving it over as payment and the advancement of medicine.

Tracing criminality, racialization, and settler colonialism, we can see this event as a series of entanglements moving beyond the constructions of consent offered up at the time of Keanu’s inoculations and eventual death. In this framing, his body finds its early articulations within legal and historical constitutions entwined with questions of sovereignty. As Jonathan Kamakawiwo’ole Osorio has argued, Hawaiian sovereignty was subjected to processes of dismemberment, not only through direct and physical seizing of lands, “but through a slow, insinuating invasion of people, ideas, and institutions.”³⁵ Luana Ross connects criminality and sovereignty in her work on criminalization in Montana, asserting that the production and deployment of Native American criminality is intricately tied to not singular but manifold discourses on sovereignty, noting the disruptive impacts of formal and informal federal and state policies that “chipped away at the sovereign status of Native people.”³⁶ Through various state and federal procedures, US law consistently defined Native people as “deviant” and “criminal” as a way to undermine rights to land through racial criminalization and systematic incarceration.³⁷ Racialized bodies framed within this

discourse and binary structure become legible as either citizen or criminal, as a part of or apart from the nation, and as subjects are divided into naturalized categories of those who belong, those who need to be contained, and those who can be used to maintain those categorical divisions. In the late-nineteenth century, *The British Medical Journal* provided the discursive platform to work through and reconfigure such notions of criminality and value, while also serving as a venue for talking about human experimentation even as it naturalized those discussions as acceptable, even humanitarian. Across the Pacific and through colonial sites, it also made natural the practice of observing, experimenting on, imagining the thoughts of, and literally speaking for medical subjects.

Scientific Print Culture and the Criminal Medical Subject

In the following, I examine two essays published in one of the many medical archives on Keanu produced in late-nineteenth century England. Within the context of the making and remaking of value through the figure of the Native criminal prisoner–patient outlined in the last section, I read these archives against the grain to argue that H. P. Wright—English rector and prolific writer of lay medical commentary—documents the public production of Keanu as a usable subject for medical experimentation in his publications on preventing Hansen’s disease from infecting European nations. Analyzing Wright’s 1890 article “The Inoculability of Leprosy” as an example of medical exchange, I argue that those speculative accounts of what Keanu *might* have thought when he consented to experiments illustrate the production of a figure. This figure ultimately provides the conditions of possibility for legitimized medical violence at that moment, and even finds ground as a legal precedent in future justifications of human experimentation, such as the Nuremburg Trials.³⁸ This section introduces the contradictions between articulating a racialized and criminalized figure as both imprisoned (and therefore, an available body under the care of the state) and at the same time free to consent to experimental inoculations.

In 1884, Dr. Edward Arning chose Keanu as, in his view, an ideal subject for medical experimentation. Arning later noted that Keanu was an excellent subject because, among other factors, he was “a large, well-built Kanaka, to all appearances in robust health.”³⁹ On the issue of contagion, he admitted in correspondence with H. P. Wright that the “question [...] could only definitely be settled by the inoculation of a healthy individual of untainted nationality in a country free from leprosy.”⁴⁰ Arning received his training under the German microbiologist Robert Koch, the soon-to-be famous German scientist known for isolating the bacterial causal agents of cholera and tuberculosis, advancements in microbiology that ultimately won Koch the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1905. He adopted Koch’s then-experimental methods for his own leprosy inoculations, which initially used potato slices, gelatin, and eventually, guinea pigs for his raw materials. When it became apparent that those materials were not ideal, he aggressively sought the human subject option—a medical subject he at

one point described as a kind of human soil: “As every seed requires its peculiar condition of soil, atmosphere, etc., to allow it to strike ... so does the leprous germ ... [need] human soil.”⁴¹

Descriptions of the ideal medical subject, such as Arning’s above, are telling. Arning notes that the experiments require “a healthy individual of untainted nationality in a country free from leprosy,” revealing the degree to which the doctor’s own thinking was framed by the concepts “individual,” “untainted nationality,” and “country.” These discourses were pervasive in colonial medicine, particularly as an expression of how definitions of nation were measured against ideas of the colony and the colonized. Arning’s descriptions of the ideal subject, announced without reservation, point to the regularized documentation of human experiments.⁴² As a result, the concern over Keanu’s physical and mental health, and his status as a criminal native, loomed large in the medical imaginary and regularly comes across as haphazard and clumsy scientific speculation. Published images, charts, and written dialogues traced Keanu’s family genealogy, guessing at whether Keanu might have had contact with Hansen’s disease in earlier periods of his life; scientists researched and argued over his status as a “clean” subject for over a decade after the initial procedures—all in efforts to categorize Keanu as untainted. Questions about the status of Keanu’s family, including Keanu, his son, Eokepa, and his nephew, David, became important parts of this medical story (see *Figures 1, 2, and 4*).



Fig. 2.—David, Keanu’s nephew.



Fig. 3.—Eokepa, Keanu’s son.

Figures 1 & 2: A sketch of Keanu’s nephew, David (left), and of Keanu’s son, Eokepa (right). Both images were printed anonymously in the *British Medical Journal* in a medical report on the health status of Keanu’s family entitled “The Contagious Nature of Leprosy” (1890).

In the 1890 article, “The Contagious Nature of Leprosy,” for instance, sketches of the three men served to map anxieties around kinship, heredity, and disease, accompanied with descriptions of the men’s biometrics, general health, and, specifically, how advanced their cases were. The author points out that Keanu’s death sentence “was commuted on condition that he submitted to the experiment [and much] interest was attached to the case, as it seemed to be one in which the appearance of the disease was only to be accounted for on the supposition that it had been communicated by the inoculation of leprous matter. It was stated that there was no history of leprosy in his family.”⁴³ A genealogical chart of Keanu’s family visually documents the investments the institutions of medicine and security—which Foucault called nineteenth-century “sub-State level” mechanisms⁴⁴—placed on such cases (see Figure 3).

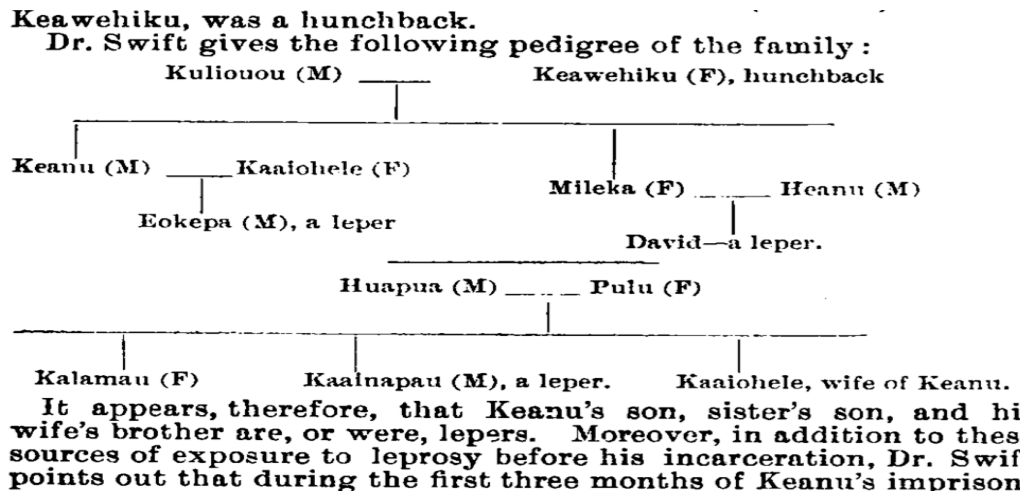


Figure 3: Keanu’s “pedigree,” putatively charting traces of Hansen’s disease in his family, printed in “The Contagious Nature of Leprosy” (1890).

Photographs of Keanu and other people, taken by Dr. Arning as part of his ethnographic research in Hawai‘i, documented people and places as exotic subjects.⁴⁵ One photo of Keanu depicts him posing, as seen in the hundreds of photographs taken of patients in the Pacific Islands by physicians attempting to document various stages of Hansen’s disease, entirely nude, standing with his arms straight beside his hips. The uniqueness of Keanu’s dehumanizing photo lies in the highly visible, tightly bound steel shackle around his right wrist, indicating that the image was taken immediately after Arning “acquired” Keanu from the Honolulu jail. In contrast to such medical photographic images, taken as part of Arning’s attempt to document the stages of the experiment, is the large, carefully sketched image of Keanu produced two years after the initial experiments (see Figure 4). The image depicts Keanu’s fingers wrapped in bandages—one of the more visible markers of Hansen’s disease patients—meant to protect the parts of the body that are numb, unfeeling, and exposed, but also to make

the effects of the disease less visible to those who did not want to see it. But the dark patch on Keanu's arm, which is roughly one inch long and half an inch wide, is perhaps the most telling detail of the illustration, as it registers the visible work of Dr. Arning's original inoculation procedures.



Fig. 1.—Keanu.

Figure 4: A sketch of Keanu in 1890, printed in “The Contagious Nature of Leprosy.” Note the patch of scarred tissue on Keanu's left arm, where Dr. Edward Arning surgically implanted the “leprous nodule” excised from the cheek of a twelve-year old Native Hawaiian female.

Appearing in the second column opposite a detailed description of Keanu, the sketch accompanies an essay that also details Keanu's age, his physical state, the accounts of the painful accidents he suffered while detained in the hospital due to “attacks of vertigo,” and his appetite and mental state.⁴⁶ Regarding his mental and physical condition, the author of this article reports: “The prisoner was then suffering from bruises of the face, head, back, and lower extremities, received by falling down a metallic winding staircase in the gaol at Honolulu during a fit.”⁴⁷ The article continues by mapping a visual and biometric sketch, noting that Keanu's nephew, David (see *Figure 1*), is also a patient in the same hospital ward, with a bed next to Keanu's. David, the twenty-year old son of Keanu's deceased sister, Mileka, is described as “a far advanced tubercular leper, covered with sores, almost blind, nearly deaf, and utterly helpless.” Finally, the report identifies several family members with illnesses, as well as Hansen's disease, including Keanu's son, Eokepa: “Nor is this Keanu's only relative, his own son Eokepa [...], aged about 23, and his first cousin Maleka, on his mother's side, are both lepers, and reside at the Leper Settlement. Eokepa has been a leper since

1873, leaving school in that year on account of the disease. Keanu's brother-in-law, Kaainapau, died a tubercular leper at Kalawao, in 1885, and his (Keanu's) mother, Keawehiku, was a hunchback" (918). The report does the work of identifying Keanu as both a prisoner and a patient, indicating, on the one hand, the ways these discussions nearly always depend on Keanu's status as a "criminal" patient, and, on the other, rhetorically evoking in readers the sentimental tropes of benevolent humanism.

Even though there were many supporters among the medical community, Arning had several critics as well. Many such discussions occurred in print, not only in medical journals, but also in popular literary magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*.⁴⁸ Within the first three years of the inoculation, for example, H. P. Wright published the 1888 article "The Inoculability of Leprosy" in *The British Medical Journal*. In this essay, Wright fiercely defends the reputation of Dr. Arning as a humanitarian and advocate for Hawaiian people afflicted with Hansen's disease. He ultimately uses the journal to criticize Arning's detractors, stating: "Sir, —Allow me to say a few words in defense of Dr. Arning. In England and on the Continent he has been severely blamed for inoculating Keanu, an Hawaiian, with leprosy. Surely such an attack is most unjust. This able physician is world-known for his long and skilful labour in behalf of the leper. [...] And what is the return he gets for this faithful devotion to his profession? He is publicly accused of cruelty and heartlessness for inoculating with leprosy a condemned murderer, who, to save his life, submitted willingly and gladly to the experiment."⁴⁹ This defense of Arning, his work, and his place as a humanitarian presents a moral claim by situating the doctor as the benevolent savior, and Keanu as the desperate "condemned murderer." While Arning was motivated by a desire to advance his career, H. P. Wright insists that he should be perceived as a heroic crusader. At the same time, Wright's position situates Keanu as a figure deserving to be killed—a cunning man who "saves his own life" by opportunistically taking advantage of Arning's well-known humanitarian efforts "in behalf of the leper."

In the remainder of "The Inoculability of Leprosy," Wright moves from his defense of Arning and the "unjust" attacks on the benevolent doctor to a peculiar speculative commentary about what Keanu might have said in this moment of consent, indexing for this discussion an important display of how a discourse of Keanu's personhood emerged in print culture. Determined to show that Keanu possessed a "self" that was legible to his readers, he imagines Keanu's thought process, enabling Wright to speak not only for, but also literally in place of the former. Wright lauded Arning's work, and of course was not alone in his public praise of utilizing racialized, colonial, and especially criminalized subjects like Keanu for such experiments. What Wright's work demonstrates is not simply a sense of ownership and power over the thoughts and intentions of Keanu, but also and much more the production of a subject. Anthony Bogues, drawing on Michel Foucault, notes that such forms of imperial power "could not be exercised 'without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct

it.”⁵⁰ In this framing, the power to know and shape “conscience” became a form of power that sought to control and maintain colonial rule at the ideological level, a “drive to capture [a colonial subject’s] desire and reshape it.”⁵¹ This key distinction depends on a visible shift that makes and remakes the “private intentions” of Keanu available for public discourse and consumption. Wright continues in his defense of Arning:

Suppose for a moment, that Keanu had reasoned thus: “I readily submit to inoculation with leprosy, not only because I shall save myself from immediate death, but also for a higher reason. I have killed one man, and deep is my sorrow; should I by this inoculation become a leper, such a result may tend to save the lives of many.” How far such thoughts were in the mind of Keanu we cannot say, most likely they were not there at all; but this we can say, the great benefits arising from such a result were well in the mind of Dr. Arning, who simply carried out a compact made between Keanu and the State. The State, which could take life for the terror of evil doers, could also grant life in order to stay, if possible, in some degree, the advance of the most terrible disease that tortures man.⁵²

The “private” is revealed here as the intimate knowing of Keanu’s mind, soul, and “innermost secrets,” serving to produce and reimagine Keanu as, at once, rational and irrational, selfless and criminal, savage and civilized, and ultimately, *free* and *unfree*. To put this another way, Wright’s speculation works to create a liberal, autonomous subject whose criminal subject position (as a prisoner) denies sovereignty over his own life, but offers control enough over his own body to consent to Arning’s experiments for “a higher reason” and for the benefit of Wright’s narrow understanding of humanity. In Wright’s speculative account of Keanu’s thoughts, Keanu is made to speak his consent in a way that makes legible medical science while at the same time subsuming medical violence. To “[s]uppose for a moment, that Keanu had reasoned thus” registers the degree to which this public discourse unfolded around Keanu, focusing most on articulating an unsettling subjectivity based in guilt and criminality. Wright’s imagined confession places new value onto this criminal figure to engage the “higher reason” of both scientific enlightenment as well as Wright’s own understanding of Christian morality. Aware of those tensions around human experimentation—reminded, perhaps, by Arning’s critics—Wright deploys a logic that situates Keanu as deserving to be killed. When Wright follows with the statement, “[h]ow far such thoughts were in the mind of Keanu we cannot say, most likely they were not there at all,” it illustrates how a cultural discourse of white possession manifested at this moment and structured an organizing principle of empire, and at

the same time intersected with discourses of benevolence and charity. Arning and a host of others were emboldened to literally speak for Keanu, further stabilizing the conditions for Wright’s explicit move to, in the same sentence, imagine, and then immediately dismiss Keanu’s thought processes.

Wright concludes:

Dr. Arning, in a letter received by me a few days ago (December 3rd), gives the following important particulars, and asks a very reasonable question: “The experiment was performed after mature deliberation, and on the authority of the advisers of the Crown and the Privy Council of State; influential foreigners, laymen, and learned judges reporting in committee on the subject. It was done with the condemned criminal’s written consent, and with all due care and exactness as to really advance our knowledge of the obscure disease. Will it not stand as having been done in the interests, not against the laws, of humanity?”

The shifting value of Keanu’s life and body in this text—legally and institutionally devalued as a prisoner sentenced to death, yet extremely valuable as a medical subject—points to a logic of exchange that produces the conditions of possibility for white supremacist science and racial governmentality to occur publicly and relatively unchallenged within these venues, for “advanc[ing] our knowledge of the obscure disease,” as Dr. Arning put it above.⁵³ Wright’s quoting of Arning’s “reasonable question” demonstrates how attuned the actors were to the ways settler–colonial medicine and various state mechanisms structured Keanu’s commuted sentence, ultimately allowing for systematic reproduction of the conditions of impossibility for control over one’s own racially marked body.

By connecting these colonial histories in Hawai‘i to Keanu’s own complex subject position, this article argues that the formations of Keanu as a racialized, colonized prisoner–patient, and the public debates surrounding this case, were intimately tied to the conditions of *impossibility* for consent that was manufactured by settler–colonial public health forces. I suggest that, when reading these archives against themselves, the emergence of the figure of Keanu ought to be situated at the intersections of the long histories of Hawaiian sovereignty movements and resistance to conditions of colonialism. The medical archive in this context emerges not, as what Lisa Lowe has described, as a static collection of given facts produced by official recorded histories about Hawai‘i, but rather as sites of knowledge production to be read as ways to know a narrative of colonization that “attest[s] to its contradictions, and yield[s] its critique.”⁵⁴ This article turns to these archives to locate where the producers of these kinds of knowledge, fictions, and narratives erect their subject, Keanu; at the same time, it relies on these archives as the producers of Keanu as a

criminal, Native subject in order to open up a theoretical space to read those documents against themselves, moving beyond the meanings and the logics of empire.

Notes

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¹ Edward Arning, "Report of Edward Arning, M.D., on Leprosy, November 14th 1885." Series 334-35, Folder "Dr. Edward Arning: 1883 – 1888," Board of Health, Hansen's Disease, Hawai'i State Archive.

² H. P. Wright, "The Inoculability of Leprosy," *British Medical Journal* 2 (1888), 1359.

³ Anonymous, "The Contagious Nature of Leprosy," *British Medical Journal* 1 (1890): 917-18.

⁴ "King vs. Keanu: Opinions of Judd C.J. on Motion for New Trial." July 18, 1884, Box 1052: Criminal, Folder 002: Criminal Case Files of the First Circuit Court, Hawai'i State Archive.

⁵ "King vs. Keanu: Death Sentence in English and Hawaiian." July 18, 1884, Box 1052: Criminal, Folder 002: Criminal Case Files of the First Circuit Court, Hawai'i State Archive. For an early discussion of the case proceedings within the context of medical history, see Arthur Albert St. M. Mouritz's 1916 *The Path of the Destroyer: A History of Leprosy in the Hawaiian Islands and Thirty Years Research Into the Means by Which It Has Been Spread* (Honolulu: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, LTD, 1916), 153.

⁶ *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*. (Honolulu, Hawaiian Islands), 22 July 1884. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015418/1884-07-22/ed-1/seq-15/>>

⁷ Wright, "The Inoculability of Leprosy," 1359.

⁸ Privy Council meeting minutes. Vol. 14; page 131, Hawai'i State Archive.

⁹ O. A. Bushnell, "Dr. Edward Arning, the First Microbiologist in Hawaii," *The Hawaiian Journal of History* 1 (1967): 3; Nicholas Turse, "Experimental Dreams, Ethical Nightmares: Leprosy, Isolation, and Human Experimentation in Nineteenth-century Hawaii," in *Imagining Our America: Toward a Transnational Frame*, eds. Sandhya Rajendra. Shukla, and Heidi Tinsman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 138.

¹⁰ Araújo (1936), quoted in Benchimol, Jaime L. and Magali Romero Sá, *Adolpho Lutz-Hanseníase-v. 1, Livro 2* (Editora Fiocruz, 2004), 196.

¹¹ The significance of the 1865 Act to Prevent the Spread of Leprosy and the settlement on Kalaupapa, Moloka‘i have been discussed widely and continues to be a flashpoint for critical scholarship. For this discussion, see Pennie Moblo’s “Defamation by Disease: Leprosy, Myth, and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century Hawai‘i” (Doctoral dissertation, University of Hawai‘i, 1996), Kerri A. Inglis’s *Ma‘i Lepera: Disease and Displacement in Nineteenth-Century Hawai‘i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2013), Michelle T. Moran’s *Colonizing Leprosy: Imperialism and the Politics of Public Health in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), Noenoe K. Silva’s *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), and Neel Ahuja’s *Bioinsecurities: Disease Interventions, Empire, and the Government of Species* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 29-70.

¹² See J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Mask: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

¹³ Bushnell, “Dr. Edward Arning, the First Microbiologist in Hawaii,” *The Hawaiian Journal of History* 1 (1967): 3, 4. In the negotiations for this stipend, Bushnell notes: “Arning’s sponsors were two of Germany’s most prestigious scientists: Dr. Rudolf Virchow, the foremost pathologist of his time, and Dr. Emil du Bois-Reymond, an eminent physiologist.” Reprints of Dr. Arning’s photography collection: “Eduard Arning Photograph Collection: 1883–1886,” Hawaiian Historical Society Library.

¹⁴ Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Medak-Saltzman, “Transnational Indigenous Exchange: Rethinking Global Interactions of Indigenous Peoples At the 1904 St. Louis Exposition,” 591. On reframing the question of coloniality, power, history, and the archive, see also Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed* and Kamanamaikalani Beamer, *No Mākou ka Mana: Liberating the Nation*.

¹⁵ I draw on Glen Sean Coulthard’s definitions of settler colonialism discussed in *Red Skin, White Mask*. Coulthard, in dialogue with Patrick Wolfe, Lorenzo Veracini, Robert Young, and James Tully, defines a settler–colonial relationship as “one characterized by a particular form of domination; that is, it is a relationship where power—in this case, interrelated discursive and non-discursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power—has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority” (6-7).

¹⁶ See Wright, including *Statutes of the Hospital of the Holy Virgin Mary of Siena, AD 1305*, Tr. by H. P. Wright (1880), xv.; *Leprosy and Segregation* (London: Parker and Co., 1885); “Leprosy—An Imperial Danger,” *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 98, no. 6

(1889); “The Spread of Leprosy,” *British Medical Journal* (1889). Wright published extensively in the 1880s and 1890s promoting his view that leprosy in the colonies posed an imminent threat to European nations.

¹⁷ For example, see the 1963 novel *Molokai* about Keanu and Dr. Arning’s experimental inoculations written by medical historian O. A. Bushnell.

¹⁸ For a broader context of imperial medicine and the insights gained from colonial practice, as well as resistance to them, see Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) and Kerri A. Inglis, *Ma’i Lepera: Disease and Displacement in Nineteenth-Century Hawai’i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i, 2013).

¹⁹ Beaven Rake, “Leprosy and Vaccination,” *The British Medical Journal* 2 (1887), 443.

²⁰ John Tayman, *The Colony: The Harrowing True Story of the Exiles of Molokai* (New York: Scribner, 2007), 147.

²¹ Rake, “Leprosy and Vaccination,” 443.

²² Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xxiv; Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property.” *Harvard Law Review* 106 (1992): 1707; Maile Renee Arvin, “Pacificaly Possessed: Scientific Production and Native Hawaiian Critique of the ‘Almost White’ Polynesian Race” (PhD dissertation, La Jolla: University of California, San Diego, 2013).

²³ Rake, “Leprosy and Vaccination,” 433; Jonathan Hutchinson, “Remarks on Some Facts Illustrating the Early Stages of Leprosy,” *The British Medical Journal* 1 (1890): 529-31; O. A. Bushnell, “Dr. Edward Arning, the First Microbiologist in Hawaii,” *The Hawaiian Journal of History* 1 (1967), 3; Arthur Albert St. M. Mouritz, *The Path of the Destroyer: A History of Leprosy in the Hawaiian Islands, and Thirty Years Research Into the Means By Which It Has Been Spread* (Honolulu: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, LTD, 1916), 152.

²⁴ Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 2.

²⁵ Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 2-3.

²⁶ Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 3.

²⁷ For two discussions on cultural fantasies of the Pacific, see Paul Lyons, *American Pacificism: Oceania in the U.S. Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and Rob Wilson, *Reimagining the American Pacific: From South Pacific to Bamboo Ridge and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). In another context, Rona Tamiko Halualani locates such narrative processes in longer historical narratives of colonization—a phenomenon she calls “abstract nativism.” Halualani, Rona Tamiko, *In the Name of Hawaiians: Native Identities and Cultural Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 6.

²⁸ In *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*, Noenoe K. Silva describes one of “the most persistent and pernicious myths of Hawaiian history” as “the Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians) passively accept[ing] the erosion of their cultural and loss of their nation” (1). Silva’s study refutes the myth through documentation and study of “the many forms of resistance by the Kanaka Maoli to political, economic, linguistic, and cultural oppression, beginning with the arrival of Captain Cook until the struggle over the ‘annexation,’ that is, the military occupation of Hawai‘i by the United States in 1898.”

²⁹ Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, 50.

³⁰ Wright, “The Inoculability of Leprosy,” 1359.

³¹ For discussion of biopower and state racism, see Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 239-264. For an interrogation and further development of Foucault’s concept biopower, see Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003).

³² Wright, “The Inoculability of Leprosy,” 1359.

³³ In Moreton-Robinson’s framing, such subject formations emerged directly out of Indigenous dispossession: “Most historians mark 1492 as the year when imperialism began to construct the old world order by taking possession of other people, their lands and resources. The possessive nature of this enterprise informed the development of a racial stratification process on a global scale that became solidified in modernity. Taking possession of Indigenous people’s lands was a quintessential act of colonization and was tied to the tradition from the Enlightenment to modernity, which precipitated the emergence of a new subject into history within Europe” (49).

³⁴ Scott Richard Lyons, *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 1.

³⁵ Jonathan Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio, *Dismembering Lāhui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), 3.

³⁶ Luana Ross, *Inventing the Savage: the Social Construction of Native American Criminality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 5.

³⁷ Ross addresses histories of Americans Indians in Montana. The framework developed in Ross’s work connects to the lack of recognition of self-determination, eliding, in the official narratives, Native sovereignty and subjectivity as autonomous, complex, and historically situated and racialized.

³⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 156. Agamben calls attention to the significance of medical state-sanctioned violence, noting that it is hardly an exceptional characteristic, but rather an indication of the legitimacy produced and

expressed by these institutions. He notes the use of the figure of Keanu as justification for Nazi human experimentation at Dachau. Pointing to the ethical and logical hoops necessary to jump through when utilizing prisoner consent, Agamben details long history of medicine benefiting from incarcerated bodies: “What is ... disquieting is the fact (which is unequivocally shown by the scientific literature put forward by the defense and confirmed by the expert witnesses appointed by the court) that experiments on prisoners and persons sentenced to death had been performed several times and on a large scale in our century, in particular in the United States (the very country from which most of the Nuremberg judges came). Thus in the 1920s, 800 people held in United States prisons were infected with malaria plasmodia in an attempt to find an antidote to paludism. There were also the experiments – widely held to be exemplary in the scientific literature on pellagra – conducted by Goldberg on twelve prisoners sentenced to death, who were promised the remission of their penalty if they survived experimentation. Outside the United States, the first experiments with cultures of the beriberi bacillus were conducted by R. P. Strong in Manila on persons sentenced to death (the records of the experiment do not mention whether participation in the experiment was voluntary). In addition, the defense cited the case of Keanu (Hawaii), who was infected with leprosy in order to be promised pardon, and who died following the experiment” (90).

³⁹ Anonymous, “The Case of Keanu,” *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 43 (1890), 87.

⁴⁰ Wright, “The Inoculability of Leprosy,” 1359.

⁴¹ Tayman, *The Colony*, 147.

⁴² See the long history of racial medical violence in Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans From Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

⁴³ Anonymous, “The Contagious Nature of Leprosy,” *The British Medical Journal* 1 (1890), 917.

⁴⁴ Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976*, 250.

⁴⁵ Arning’s collections are kept in Hawai‘i and Berlin, Germany; however, the photo of Keanu I examined is housed at the Hawaiian Historical Society Library under the title: “Eduard Arning Photograph Collection: 1883–1886.”

⁴⁶ Tony Gould, *A Disease Apart: Leprosy in the Modern World* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), 83.

⁴⁷ Anonymous, “The Contagious Nature of Leprosy,” 918.

⁴⁸ Anonymous, “Shall We Annex Leprosy?: By a Hawaiian Government School Teacher.” *The Cosmopolitan; A Monthly Illustrated Magazine* (1898), 24, 5. Reference to Keanu and Dr. Arning appeared in this widely circulated 1898 *Cosmopolitan* essay. The anonymous author contributed to anti-annexation debates at their peak, as the United States

government was maneuvering to overthrow the Kingdom of Hawai‘i in 1898. The author asserts the racist discourse that the annexation would provide an entryway for the east to infect the United States through racially mixing as well as through contagious diseases. Arning and Keanu are discussed, though not named: “Some eminent scientists in Honolulu have been experimenting. They tried the virus on a man who was condemned to be hanged and he was sent to Molokai as a leper” (560).

⁴⁹ Wright, “The Inoculability of Leprosy,” 1359.

⁵⁰ Anthony Bogues, *Empire of Liberty: Power, Desire, and Freedom* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2010), 18-19.

⁵¹ Bogues, *Empire of Liberty*, 19.

⁵² Wright, “The Inoculability of Leprosy,” 1359.

⁵³ For Dr. Arning’s full analysis of the Keanu experiments and, more broadly, his evaluation of Hansen’s disease in Hawai‘i, see the official report he submitted to the Board of Health, “Report of Edward Arning, M.D., on Leprosy, November 14th 1885.” Series 334-35, Folder “Dr. Edward Arning: 1883 – 1888,” Board of Health, Hansen’s Disease, Hawai‘i State Archive.

⁵⁴ Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 4.

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