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Introduction

WHAT MAKES US US

RED DIRT is about a struggle over my community's peoplehood—over what makes us *us*. Common frameworks that understand indigeneity primarily in terms of resistance or revitalization, omitting the contradictions of contemporary Indigenous identities and politics, are insufficient to make sense of, and thoroughly transform, the conditions that have shaped our experiences. This book argues that the realities of class and capital generate conflicting visions of Hawaianness, forming hidden pitfalls on the path toward liberation, and demand a different way of conceiving of and writing indigeneity itself.

I examine how the Indigenous people of Hawai'i have pursued projects of profound social *transformation* amid ongoing social *reproduction*—the tension of continuity and change. Following the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and over a century of assimilation and settler colonialism, the Second Hawaiian Renaissance that began in the late 1960s pollinated a reflowering of political, cultural, and language revivals that continue to this day (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua et al. 2014). This book asks: How have these movements been materially supported, reshaped, and constrained in settler colonialism and capitalism? And how does that force us to rethink “what” we aim to reconstruct, beyond a straightforward notion of revitalization or agency?¹ Call it self-determination, de-occupation, decolonization, or any other term, actors have sought to make the Native Hawaiian people and our lands thrive, despite the hegemony of capitalism, settler colonialism, and US occupation. While mired in these very relations, how have Native Hawaiians, and the organizations in which we work, attempted to materialize visions of change? Celebrations of Indigenous revitalization abound, as do debates about so-called decoloniality and decolonization, but we rarely speak about how “what” we aim to reclaim is itself deeply contested. This is a story about how indigeneity, if not difference itself, is asserted, transformed, and co-opted or subdued. I show that rather than being an assumed category, indigeneity is

better regarded as a *mediating process* continuously transformed and contested in capitalism.

I build a dialectical approach to indigeneity, opening inquiry beyond indigeneity and settler colonialism as mutually exclusive monoliths locked in opposition, and beyond discussion of clear-cut notions of agency and resistance. I argue for attending to internal contradictions, or indigeneity in motion, whereby indigeneity contains traces of settler colonialism and capitalism, while settler colonialism and capitalism contain traces of subversive Indigenous opportunity. Such contradiction, movement, and mediation drive change and contest what is seen to constitute our indigeneity itself. Building on the work of scholars like Ty Kāwika Tengan (2008), Barbra Meek (2012), and Tania Li (2000; 2014), I argue for seeing indigeneity as *process*, rather than *reification*. Indigeneity is fundamentally made and remade in changing historical conditions, contested from within and without, and not a transhistorical given upon which abstract theory can be lacquered.

I want to be clear here about how I use the terms “Indigenous” and “indigeneity” in the stories that follow. While these terms can be taken to refer to a group’s political and cultural status within settler colonial structure, my primary focus is talking about what is seen to constitute peoplehood (i.e., Hawaiianess, nationhood, etc.): our histories, values, practices, and other points of shared distinctiveness that are in fact deeply contested.² Thus, when I use the term “Indigenous,” I refer to people who, along with our land, are occupied and colonized, but my focus is on how we talk about our sense of ourselves.

Feeding the Sharks, Forgetting the Bottom Feeders

Over the years, I have worked with Hawaiians pursuing different visions of transformational change from a great variety of positions. Some ran one-person operations providing political, cultural, and science education at sacred sites scarred by evictions and military destruction. Some worked in underfunded schools specializing in Hawaiian language immersion or a Hawaiian culture focus. Others worked at places like Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate (KS): a \$15 billion education trust. KS is the largest private landowner in Hawai‘i and spends around \$300 million annually to operate three elite preparatory schools, a chain of preschools, and even its own academic press. KS also funds investments in Hawaiian education, agriculture, and other enterprises. KS funding and graduates are found at the helm of many of the grassroots organizations you will meet, as it became a primary benefactor providing funding and support for cultural education, which has been critical to the development of generations of Hawaiians. Following the overthrow and annexation, Hawaiian crown and government lands were seized by the

occupying government, while ali'i (chiefly) trusts like that of KS were somewhat respected as "private property." Thus, KS not only represents wealth and important lands but also carries a mantle of reverence, tracing an unbroken genealogical line of mana, compassion, and foresight—back through chiefs to our creation stories and forward to future generations. When KS is subject to dispossession at the hands of the settler state, or threatened by powerful settler interests, the community unifies around KS.

At the same time, communities have criticized KS for its "business" mentality, sometimes rocky community relations, support for gentrification, history of evicting residents in the path of development, leasing agricultural lands to companies like Monsanto, and cultural elitism. Therein lies a "love-hate relationship" similar to what Choctaw anthropologist Valerie Lambert finds in community sentiments toward a changing Bureau of Indian Affairs (2022, 27). KS as an institution, much like indigeneity, is better understood as a process: While on occasion it veers far from the community and cultural principles, times of common crisis tend to pull KS and community back into some degree of unity. As an estate in trust, KS works under the supervision of a settler probate court-appointed "Court Master." Endowed by the last will and testament of Ke Ali'i (the chief) Pauahi, under Hawaiian Kingdom law and not US law, trustees carried the fiduciary duty of maintaining and growing resources "in perpetuity." KS is beholden to oversight by the occupying state and the necessities of capital accumulation for survival, an entanglement that we follow through this book.

One of my interlocutors, Ka'ena, worked for years with Native Hawaiian students at nonprofits. One afternoon I visited her office, as she darted between meetings with young interns. A proud graduate of the public school system, she had seen hundreds of Hawaiian students go through community programs, many of whom were KS graduates. Speaking of the working-class districts Kalihi and Kapālama, which are literally below KS's hilltop campus, she joked:

Why are the ali'i [chiefs] sitting on the hill and the ghetto is beneath them? They butter up the Kapālama kai community, then will gentrify it, same thing like Kaka'ako. The ali'i up mauka [upland] are spinning their wheels trying to figure out how to spend millions, but everyone always forgets the bottom feeders. When KS looks at the ocean feeders, they're only feeding the sharks and the whales, and everybody else gets leftovers.

Kaka'ako, where KS had landholdings, is a formerly industrial district that was home to many local families but was redeveloped into a planned urban community of high rises, condominiums, and lofts (Grandinetti 2022). Ka'ena then referred to Kapālama kai, an area near Kalihi that KS also planned to develop.

Her comments on gentrification ran parallel to her criticism of institutional priorities that created people and places that were “haves,” at the expense and neglect of “have-nots.” She also referred to a recent reorganization of KS wherein certain leaders redirected funding away from public outreach services and toward shinier projects for “innovation,” “leadership,” and “entrepreneurship.”

She identified Kamehameha as a major feeder of Native Hawaiian students for community colleges near the campus area, and yet, she asked, “Why are they [KS] not fully at the table with the community colleges? They want everyone to go to four-year kine, but students say they wanna be with the community colleges and trades.” She explained that many students wanted a more secure wage and to stay in Hawai‘i by working in the trades, as opposed to a four-year degree that came with debt, uncertain job prospects, and the likelihood of leaving Hawai‘i.

Another worker visiting the office piped up: “It could be that the trades aren’t ‘cultural,’ or it could be their elitism.” A flagship program for a community college was intended to instill deep cultural practice and mentorship from elders, teaching workers to bring Hawaiian value sets into their trades to change them from within. Apparently, other community organizations heard that higher-ups at KS had no interest in supporting this. This visiting coworker discovered that I, like her, had worked at KS for a time, despite not being a KS graduate. “Only one or two of our whole department weren’t alums. The first Founder’s Day felt like the *Twilight Zone*,” she said, referencing a ceremony that revered the founding chief, Pauahi. “And that altar at headquarters!? Even the older generation says, ‘you know we neva do this kine stuff.’” Some experienced “this kine stuff” as a revitalization of practices revering chiefs, others looked on with skepticism, and some connected with both valences (Ramonés forthcoming). “I just didn’t feel like I belonged,” the visiting coworker said. The “in group” dynamic of KS graduates was a recognized stereotype in Hawai‘i. Ka‘ena then added that many students who did not win admission feel like they aren’t “good enough” or “Hawaiian enough.”

Talking about a new KS initiative, Ka‘ena said, “Terms like ‘Ōiwi [Indigenous, *lit.* of the bone] Edge.’ KS is good at buzzwords and branding something exciting, but it’s often smoke and mirrors. The difficulty I see is they never give things a chance before they decide to revamp.” Such was the challenge that we saw of a large institution. She continued, talking about the model that folks like her on the ground had: “I’m coming for you aunty, or uncle, I got you. We’re gonna get you off the streets. Why is nobody else at the table? Here’s a big middle finger to everyone turning a blind eye.” Ka‘ena’s words give a strong sense of the class divisions within the Hawaiian nation—a common theme in postcolonial discourse, but not in Global North discussions of indigeneity.

When Ka'ena got really fired up, she grabbed a small Hawaiian flag off her wall, holding it up. The Hawaiian flag sported the British Union Jack in the upper left quadrant, and stripes for each of the eight largest islands flowed horizontally.

"This best describes KS. We know it as this," she said, holding the flag upright. "If you can just think about the Union Jack, that's where all the wealth is, this is KS. Where is the wealth going? The top half! Only the elites. For me, the bottom of the hae [flag] represents the middle and bottom feeders. How much of them are touching this wealth?" She waited for my reply.

"They're not!" I said.

"Yes! This is the hae that we fly every day. But turn it the hanging way and the wealth goes down and touches 'āina [the land].³ Once it touches 'āina, then everyone can feel the wealth," said Ka'ena. While Hawai'i was not a British colony, Kamehameha I appropriated the Union Jack as part of a multidecade effort to win recognition of Hawai'i as a "civilized" nation-state not in need of colonization. Since that time, the flag has been a core Native Hawaiian political and cultural symbol. Ka'ena's visual description criticizes wealth only flowing to the upper bands of society, instead calling for wealth to be directed downward to all, not only including people but also the land itself. In a deeper sense, her words tell of a land-based form of communal wealth, not one of class stratification: the "ali'i on the hill" and their prized "sharks and whales," with the "bottom feeders" in the "ghetto." Indeed, we are all a lāhui, a nation and people, with shared histories and relations, but Ka'ena broached the issue of internal tensions informed by class. Our cultural and political revival as a Native nation was well developed but had a serious lacuna when it came to accounting for class. For many of us, not all instantiations of Hawaiianness were progressive. We wondered: Indigenous agency for whom, to what end, under what conditions, and in service of what project? Understanding such fine-grained processes requires a different analytic.

Dialectics of Indigeneity

To give a textbook definition of dialectics would be inherently anti-dialectical. In Fredric Jameson's (2009) opus on dialectics, he too refrains from doing so. Dialectics can be "understood above all as a *practice*, or what C. L. R. James aspired to do in his *Notes on Dialectics*: 'not explanations of the dialectic but directly the dialectic itself'" (Maher 2017, 14), also avoiding the "caricature of the thesis/antithesis/synthesis" (Jameson 2009, 14). More often than not, dialectics are deeply misunderstood: heuristic, and quite the opposite of dichotomous binaries, revealing how oppositions generate change and are co-constituted in a dynamic unity, a play of content and form. Proper dialectics do not entrench binaries—they explode them.

My notion of dialectics also begins here, echoing Jameson that “any opposition can be the starting point for a dialectic in its own right” (2009, 14) and attending to contradiction as the internal oppositions in a phenomenon. It is the open-ended (i.e., nonteleological) development and interpenetration of oppositions, rejecting solidified and irreducible thinking that holds concepts to be self-contained, self-evident, and consistent. My use of dialectics is also material, in the sense that it eschews looking to abstract ideals alone, situating dialectics in their material conditions. By examining multiple dialectics of indigeneity, in each chapter of this book, I follow Jameson’s idea of dialectical as an adjective and exclamation: “It’s dialectical!” The counterintuitive flash of realizing contradiction, peering past appearance, and discovering generative motion all stand to “rebuke established thought processes” and common sense (2009, 4). The many flashes of realization, that what I saw was not as it appeared, provide the scaffold for each chapter in this book.

My approach operates from a suggestion that dialectical materialism is, in many ways, a kindred epistemology to Native Hawaiian philosophy and science. I elaborate this point in the conclusion, demonstrating how dialectics made each chapter’s argument possible while also explaining the *sociological* possibility of Native Hawaiian epistemologies keyed to the *ecological* world. My engagement with thinkers in the dialectical tradition is therefore my extension of an Indigenous epistemological tradition that far predates Hegel himself.

Various forms of what dialectical materialists call “metaphysical” thought sit counter to this epistemology. Very often, indigeneity is implicitly invoked as an ontological given, consistent, ideologically pure, and a normative idealism upon which abstract theory can be grafted. Such work is metaphysical in the sense that it normatively casts peoplehood as internally coherent, indigeneity as irreducible and stable, dwelling in ideas rather than material conditions, and extricates phenomena from the connections that exist within and among things *as processes* (see Engels [2020, 57]). Such metaphysical thinking “reifies” indigeneity into the appearance of a self-evident essence, not grasping the movement of internal contradictions or imbrication in a wider social holism and instead abstracting certain aspects or assuming which bundles of properties apply or not (Lukács 1972). This metaphysical pattern remands our discussions to a reductive, and what I see as repetitive, “domination-resistance binary” (Richland 2007). There is an increasing corpus of research that does not fall into this metaphysical trap, yet it is often underrepresented or even sidelined.

This pushes the field to be more attentive to the stark realities and slipperiness of on-the-ground practice. I follow internal contradictions and how we self-constitute as a group through changing historical conditions. Eschewing

idealist and normative frameworks in favor of an *immanent* critique of internal contradiction and material conditions not only allows a fuller analysis of the dynamics of change but also has the potential to radically shift common invocations of indigeneity. Scholars have long pushed back against both popular perceptions of Indigenous peoples and earlier, more colonially tinged, scholarship. They have instead developed important frameworks focusing on the agency of Native communities, all of which have been critical to establishing Indigenous studies as a field. Yet in this vibrant discourse, a different form of inquiry struggles to be born.

“Resurgence” is a cornerstone concept in Indigenous studies. I join other scholars who are “intrigued and maybe even a bit troubled by the increased uptake of the term [resurgence] within the academy,” as Heidi Kiiwetinepine-siik Stark writes (2023, 3). This robustly diverse literature—which describes a politics of turning away from the assimilative institutions of the settler state, self-consciously regenerating traditional values and turning to grassroots direct action that draws from place-based relations and knowledges—seeks to create spaces and times of deep reciprocity and relation (Coulthard 2014; Corntassel 2008; L. Simpson 2017). At many sites of resurgence across Hawai‘i, actors are concerned with the autonomous regeneration of ancestral knowledges and relations, not directing their primary energies to justifying, explaining, or otherwise entering settler society’s binds of “recognition politics” (Coulthard 2014; Povinelli 2002).

“Refusal” has been similarly generative, even widely invoked outside of Indigenous contexts (A. Simpson 2014). Kahnawà:ke Mohawk political anthropologist Audra Simpson introduces this concept to give voice to the outright refusal of settler colonial recognition and governmentality. While resurgence is a turning away, “refusal” is a rejection of the terms of colonial recognition and an affirmation of Indigenous sovereignty. In Hawai‘i, as in many other Indigenous communities, scholarship on resurgence and refusal affirms our practices, modes of relations, and politics, carving out space-time for the thriving of that which is targeted for assimilation.

The third example of a cornerstone framework falls under “entanglement” and accounts for the messy practice of negotiation, compromise, and dexterity of “getting things done” in Indigenous communities. Although not all works in this area use the term “entanglement,” they share a goal of describing the complex and *necessary* interplays of Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions, worldviews, and notions of value, following the realities of pragmatic action that Indigenous actors take to materially support resurgence, sovereignty, or other aims (Cattellino 2008; Dussart and Poirier 2017; Kirksey 2012; Lambert 2023; Lewis 2019; Merry 2000; Myers 2002; Richland 2008; 2021; DeLisle 2021; Thomas 1991). As Osage anthropologist Jean Dennison writes,

“The term *entanglement* is particularly useful for describing ongoing colonial processes, since it marks the shifts created through unequal power dynamics without erasing the agency possible within them” (2017, 685). Such perspectives on the lived realities of Indigenous life are useful for understanding the messiness of *practice* and strategy, attuning to “frictions” (Tsing 2005) rather than a purified theory of ideal types.

You would be hard-pressed to read any contemporary work on indigeneity without encountering stories along these lines. I have been inspired by all these tools in various ways, and as I thought about connecting them to my own experience and my work with different Hawaiian organizations, I felt there were important aspects of Indigenous life that were not being adequately considered, and in some cases, were being actively written out of the story. Several scholars encouraged me to think in different, more critical directions. One was early Lakota anthropologist Beatrice Medicine, who writes of Native nations’ propensities to adapt and synthesize, in the face of a “unidimensional aspect of power” normatively positioning Native communities as objects of intervention (1987, 295). That has since transformed into a prevalent scholarly model of Native nations resisting or rejecting domination, proposing a unidimensional aspect of power in the reverse direction that displaces a much more complex field of diverse actors and interests, especially *within* Indigenous communities: traditionalists, progressives, differences in social capital, and the need to constantly take stock of one’s shifting position in these power dynamics (Medicine 1987, 296). More explicitly, Kanien’kehá:ka scholar Taiaiake Alfred delineates the many important differences internal to Native nations: those who work in the system and those who work on its fringes against it (2005, 180–205); those elites who use culture for “cynical manipulation” of the people, the “moderate activists, the tame and constrained legalism,” and those deemed “too militant” by elites (40–45). Osage anthropologist Jean Dennison (2012) also centers internal tensions in Osage efforts to rewrite and ratify a new constitution, revealing different constituents’ conceptions of sovereignty, belonging, and nationhood. While considering dissension, it is also important to critique the colonial stereotype of Native “factionalism,” as Onondaga anthropologist Theresa McCarthy “explores the question of why internal divisions and conflicts within a community are coded differently when that community is Indigenous” (2017, 115). The dynamics that Dennison, McCarthy, Medicine, and Alfred outline are crucial to understanding any community, yet such a holistic examination is not the common starting point. What happens when you step off the conventional path to engage these overlooked questions that, in my life, were always front and center?

Internal Contradiction

Indigeneity is not a self-contained, internally coherent, transhistorical essence—a group’s Indigenousness does not mean the same thing everywhere, to all members, over all time. Despite this truism, indigeneity is still often implicitly understood as such. For example, to perennially elevate Indigenous resistance amid domination can omit accounting for the deeper textures of contradiction. At the expense of a holistic analysis that examines internal dynamics and change, many celebrations of resistance extricate a specific group, instantiation, or zone of Indigenous life without accounting for other aspects of community that sit in constitutive tension, or in other words, form an internal contradiction. Focusing only on groups that restore radical Indigenous lifeways and relations to land produces a limited, if not inspiring story; in contrast, chapter 1 of this book shows how elite classes of Hawaiians attempt to bring such radicalism to heel, to produce a “safe” Hawaiianness conducive to the status quo. In this case, to focus only on hopeful sites of Indigenous revival, in effect, occludes how Native elites attempt to carry out what I call “class assimilation.” Attention to such internal contradictions brings new insights and reveals hidden assumptions regarding indigeneity.

Scholarship in this vein tends to focus on bright spots of hope while excluding the complex contradictions and unsavory entanglements of what it takes to sustain Indigenous life, leading to a partial analysis that conceals both pitfalls and paths to liberation. Focusing on the resurgent or refusing aspects of Indigenous communities, extricating them from their constitutive conditions, sidelines the important power dynamics of, for example, Indigenous elites and conservatives. Many working-class and grassroots actors have been enmeshed with elites of Hawaiian society through kinship relation, work, funding, land access, media spheres, and accessing social capital. Although there has been a long-standing anthropological call to “study up” and direct attention to elites (Nader 1974), scholars of indigeneity can do more to take these elites into account, especially as more than simple stand-ins for internalized colonization, by engaging difficult questions of accountability. Hawaiian elites have played a disproportionate role in deciding institutional agendas and how resources in the hundreds of millions of dollars are allocated to certain causes and programs. How do this undergirding political economy and class dynamics entail contested formations of what we might call “Hawaiianness,” our indigeneity? The answer I found was different from rarified politics of simple moral purity, as Hawaiians have had to engage in a messy field of settler institutions and capitalist interests within the community. However, as some theories of “resurgence” rightly point out, such engagements also bring opportunities for co-optation, depoliticization, and assimilation—a caveat well taken by studies

of the depoliticization or “NGOization” of radical movements (Alvarez 1999; Ferguson 1994; Lang 1997). Focusing on resurgent or refusing members of an Indigenous society extricates them from the full context of elites, those working in the dominant system or clamoring for “recognition,” others who do not fit the mold of resurgence or refusal, and all who play critical roles in institutions, funding, and ideological trends. Looking past celebrated activists, I saw large swaths in my community who demanded reshaping our understanding of indigeneity. Despite the meaningful impacts of radical action, it is not the entirety, much less the majority, of one’s life and community. As Katsi’sakwas Ellen Gabriel, a longtime grassroots Mohawk activist from Kanehsà:ke frankly explains, “people accept things the way they are. Complacency and compromises are made because the colonial project has reached a certain level of success, they’ve worn people down and everyone just wants to survive” (2024, 84).

Even when acknowledging contradictions in the social field, one still runs the risk of reifying things that are decidedly “Indigenous” and things that are “non-Indigenous,” when there are *internal* processes of tension within the Indigenous, and even the non-Indigenous. The epistemological segregation of two ideal types de-emphasizes how indigeneity itself is internally contested and rearticulated *within* capitalist modernity (Li 2000; LiPuma 2000). Sustaining radical Indigenous revival, movement-building, or education programs in fact first require the ability to work in institutions that are antagonistic to agendas of liberation. At the same time, only celebrating the dexterity with which Indigenous actors have navigated these conditions could be seen to implicitly support simply dwelling in the status quo, instead of working toward more sweeping transformation. While this sufficed for some of my institutional interlocutors, many of my grassroots partners set their sights on a broader horizon of liberation, avoiding what one of them referred to as a “cleaner cage.” To put it differently, I and many from the grassroots community were interested in transformation, even revolution, not so much in resistance.

Appeals to the concepts of resistance or resurgence also risk taking indigeneity as a transhistorical constant, posing place-based ethics and relations as givens, uncontested and pure. Such a reifying framing displaces class differentiation and divides in political ideologies that were paramount in my own experiences and in other contexts of anticolonial struggle outside of North America.⁴ To ignore these concerns is to risk naturalizing the “Indigenous” in any context as a whole; it is depicted as being in a fight against settler colonialism, but internal contradictions and differentiation are obscured. This means leaving out dynamics that are key to the actual texture of Indigenous life. Capitalism is often theorized as contrary to, or separate from, indigeneity (Cattellino 2018), but both capitalism and indigeneity must be specified in concrete

terms, their intertwined dynamics of transformation brought to the fore. Native Hawaiian society has internalized capitalism throughout historical processes, while class stratification has produced Native Hawaiian capitalists, landlords, and workers; there are even those who explicitly seek to turn Hawai‘i into “the next Silicon Valley, but with Hawaiian values,” as I heard at the 2021 Native Hawaiian convention. These Indigenous elites wield significant power and purvey their own bourgeois models of social change, yet they disappear from accounts that frame indigeneity as irreducibly contrary to settler colonialism and capitalism.

Similarly, “refusal” offers the opportunity to elevate traditions of overt rejection, while decentering those voices that clamor for, and materially benefit from, politics of recognition. In the grassroots Hawaiian movement, I also saw actors holding lines of refusal, recognition, and even rhetorically switching between such different political modalities as a matter of necessity to secure resources. That is, there was a larger dynamic at work—one that demanded a more encompassing analysis. In following a more holistic and dialectical approach, we must attend to how the refusing factions negate, contain, and are informed by the pro-recognition factions. For example, in 2014 the US Department of the Interior (DOI) held hearings on the possibility of reestablishing a government-to-government relationship with a Native Hawaiian government. In those hearings, the overwhelming majority of verbal testimony refused the very grounds of federal recognition, some even dubbing it as “fed-wreck.” However, the DOI then published a Notice for Proposed Rulemaking regarding the 5,164 *written* comments and “suggested that a majority of written comments submitted in reference to the ANPRM supported federal recognition.” More than half were identical postcards in support of federal recognition, coordinated by a large Native Hawaiian organization (Maile 2019, 136). Subsequent uses of “refusal” in scholarship could extract those rejecting federal recognition as a textbook case of a politics of refusal, but what of the elite and powerful Native Hawaiian organizations that wanted to accept the offer of federal recognition? Returning to Katsi’tsakwas Ellen Gabriel’s account, her embedded attention to different actors and stakes sketches a different political and economic picture: “Settler governments are working with assimilated Indigenous people to push forward corporate agendas, to surrender our human rights of self-determination. There is a lot of money involved, so that can coerce Indigenous people to agree to their agenda” (2024, 83). In thinking beyond a select group of actors, what of the pro-recognition coordinated postcard campaign, or the Office of Hawaiian Affairs organizing a controversial Native Hawaiian roll in preparation for this “new” Native Hawaiian government? Many powerful institutions that explicitly or implicitly supported federal recognition controlled major flows of funding, service programs, land

bases, and overall social engineering strategies for Native Hawaiians. Given the large public backlash against settling claims with the US government, elite institutions had to respond to activist positions. One particularly nefarious campaign fearmongered that, despite the position of refusing activists, if one did not join the roll list, one's descendants would be ineligible for membership in the Native Hawaiian nation. A public debate between the positions ensued, taking to task our very peoplehood and precepts of genealogy—fundamentals of our indigeneity itself. Activists who rejected the very jurisdiction of US authority nevertheless testified at hearings, participating in the federal recognition procedure.

Native Hawaiians have long encountered cultural, political, and economic changes that we then appropriated, even sublated, to then emerge as augmented and changed.⁵ Like any other group, Native Hawaiian society also contains many internal contradictions (e.g., institutional reformists and radical activists), and these internal contradictions drive change in the nation. For example, in chapter 1 I explain how radical activists have pushed Native Hawaiian institutions to be more political, while elites have institutionalized activists' politics into reformist or symbolic measures. I argue that these internal contradictions push Native Hawaiian society through history and change. Focusing on a coherent "Native community" or stable "Native values" leads to over-privileging one resistant aspect while occluding the other aspects with which it moves in tension and from which it emerges, yielding an incomplete picture. Rather than fixating on one isolated aspect, we can dialectically examine the "mediation of apparently contradictory social currents."⁶

Political Economy

The money and people that feed Indigenous action must necessarily come from somewhere, and that source matters. Material issues of political economy are rarely *centered*, except, for example, in much needed work on small Native-owned businesses (Lewis 2019), the economic support for communities offered by tribal gaming (Cattellino 2008), or the ways in which indigeneity is remade and claimed in precise political economic conditions and market dynamics (Li 2000; 2014). "Economics" are of course present across studies of indigeneity, but I provide a different and critical analysis of political economy as a holism, from which "the economy" cannot be extricated. Many of my institutional interlocutors did not often encounter radical critiques of capitalism, while grassroots actors often held and practiced sophisticated challenges to the system. Some elites were unaccustomed to, or even combative toward radical critiques of capitalism—especially apparent when I presented portions of this book to those at elite institutions. Using what a grassroots friend jokingly came

to call the “c-word,” or explicitly calling out “capitalism,” was normal in some spaces and inflammatory in others. I argue here that capitalism should not be backgrounded or taken for granted but should instead be a primary and underlying problematic. For example, I participated in “systems mapping” meetings that convened representatives from a variety of Hawaiian organizations, nonprofits, and elite institutions. In one map focusing on “food systems,” the intent was to map the myriad institutions, barriers, and synergies, targeting points of intervention to catalyze a more sustainable local food system. The resulting chart formed a web of bubbles, connected by lines of inputs and outputs. Bubbles contained barriers like the lack of certain agricultural facilities, which were connected to bubbles like investment flows and local growers’ inputs. “Capital” was but one bubble and was treated as investment. The only input lines feeding into this capital investment bubble were job creation, policy, and viable programs. And yet, I thought of grassroots actors who critiqued the entire system that commodified food, operated on a profit model, underdeveloped certain sectors, and created mass inequality. I saw that the systems map cast capital as an investment blockage, while others saw capitalism as a fundamental logic pervading across realms. Elite Hawaiians, as well as some anthropologists, might privilege capitalism’s contingent articulations and localized meanings, rejecting a priori principles of capitalism; however, friends from the grassroots and working class saw and felt capitalism as a pervasive logic eating away at their lives, much like the rising tides that undeniably ate away at our shorelines.

Isolating and theorizing activities or zones as straightforward resurgence or refusal minimizes crucial economic realities and relations. My own family’s and research partners’ foremost concerns of housing, funding, land, and wages all begged questions of political economy. But metaphysical thinking not only excludes crucial internal dynamics, it also *extricates* and *isolates* Indigenous lives from their material conditions within capitalism. For example, some might describe Ho’oulu ‘Āina, a community health center and nature preserve in my home neighborhood of Kalihi, as a space of anarcha-Indigenous resurgence, noting its horizontal power structures and Indigenous land-centered value systems. Another common move would be to cast the site as an abundant “alternative,” somehow outside or withdrawing from the settler state and a withering capitalism (see Fujikane 2021). I too saw Ho’oulu ‘Āina as a bright spot, offering an array of medicinal, food, spiritual, ecosystem, and cultural benefits to the community, including myself. When I visited on community workdays, I saw resurgence in action, as activists turned formerly neglected lands into an oasis of Indigenous relations and lifeways. Yet that space emerged from skillfully negotiating a lease from the settler state, securing insurance, requiring volunteers to sign liability waivers, hiring grant-writing specialists,

being embedded in a federal healthcare clinic, and many other entanglements with the settler state and capitalism. Capitalist and settler structures do not simply wither away; instead, they actively co-opt or seek to eliminate counter-hegemonic projects when they cross the threshold from cultural curiosity to substantive subversion.⁷ Under such pressure, these projects cannot proliferate so simply to encompass an antagonistic wider society; often, they only survive by dexterously navigating the system, as there is no “outside” of capitalism. Metaphysical models glean idealisms instead of revealing the relations within concrete material conditions. Idealism contends that a new world can be whole cloth “invented out of one’s brain,” rather than rigorously accounting for structural conditions (Engels 2020, 65). Most debilitatingly, analytics of extrication or withdrawal limit our horizon to temporary, always-embattled underground zones of resistance, deferring the prospect of actively overturning the settler-Indigenous relation and capitalist relations of production writ large (Ramonés 2024).

For many actors I worked with, pockets of resurgence were deeply treasured, yet on their own were not the end goal. In the DOI hearings on Native Hawaiian recognition, many called for their country back instead of piecemeal concessions. What of those grassroots voices that call for a more total and sweeping vision of liberation? These are foreclosed by frameworks focusing on exclusive zones of embattled resistance or deferral of sweeping change to the future. Even more egregiously, such frameworks do not center the wisdom and dexterity with which Indigenous actors move at once against, with, and within dominant institutions. Ho‘oulu ‘Āina was an instance where elements of capitalism were bent to a different purpose, as I explore in chapter 3. It did not resolve the fundamental contradictions of exploitation, as it needed to be carefully managed; yet there were certain affordances and necessities, not only limitations, in such institutional engagements with capitalism, carefully tooling it to Indigenous ends (Cattelino 2008; Lewis 2019). And so, analytically isolating a project from capitalism, a politics of purity, of not recognizing activities and institutions outside of one’s politics, does not reveal how such a space of alterity is in fact *constituted* by engagements that would not be categorized as resurgence. While sharing an appreciation for Ho‘oulu ‘Āina, I was compelled to examine the material ways in which such zones are created, protected, and even structurally constrained or targeted for elimination. There is a profound difference between merely “criticizing” capitalism to “only simply reject it as evil,” a common thread in Indigenous studies, and *explaining* how it functions so that we may gain “mastery of it” (Engels 2020, 62).

Resurgence and resistance are indispensable frameworks, as they are crucial to this book and the experiences of many on the ground. But when we extricate sites, actions, and movements of “resurgence” from their constitutive

relations with the non- and especially anti-resurgent, important aspects fall away. The analysis occludes the necessary entanglements and pragmatic negotiation on the ground, assuming a purity of Indigeneity, as well as how it is reproduced *and* contested in a wider field. The dialectical materialist thinking that I develop peers past initial appearance to instead glean its underlying dynamics. For example, in chapters 2 and 3 I show how bright spots of cultural resurgence are in fact born from capitalist political economy, a relationship of dependence-in-opposition, offering a novel political economic analysis of resurgence. While the heart of resurgence is “turning away” from colonial structures, we cannot turn away so simply and completely. How does a group first sustain itself, even *know* itself, prior to even lodging resurgence or refusal? How does the process of reproducing a people also remake and contest their peoplehood?

Most importantly, our understanding of indigeneity and class remains a glaring lacuna. In part, this originates from the settler colonial focus on the theft of land as the primary mode of Indigenous oppression. Scholars tend to maintain that land dispossession, rather than proletarianization and exploitation, is the dominant factor shaping Indigenous life. However, thinking through land dispossession as structural to both settler colonialism and capitalism, the latter via primitive and ongoing accumulation, shows that proletarianization and dispossession are co-constitutive because they are different *moments* of the same *movement* of capital. Although land dispossession has proven destructive for Native Hawaiians, our working class finds itself mired in the trappings of low wages and exorbitant costs of living and housing that further dispossess us.

Writing in the context of Maya women’s migration, M. Bianet Castellanos states that the field is “also in need of research that critically examines how Indigenous people negotiate class hierarchies to join the middle and upper classes” (2017, 237). Some scholars provide direct analyses of how class functions in particular Indigenous contexts (Bauer 2009; Krupa 2022; Lewis 2019; Li 2000; 2014; Loperena 2022; Nash 1979; Postero 2007; Tengan 2008), but for the most part, if “class” is addressed, it is added to a list of intersecting oppressions that purportedly exist on the same plane under the umbrella of indigeneity. An encompassing *class analysis*, different from tipping one’s hat to class as but one “identity,” fundamentally shifts analyses of racialization and indigeneity (see Li 2014). Different from an intersectional framework, this analysis conceives of structures as tied to the mode of production, rather than as within their own systems—these are not separate issues that intersect but are inseparable and emerge from class society itself. But by foregrounding the Indigenous-settler divide, conflicts then appear in terms of cultural difference, racialization, or sovereignty. Focusing on these forms of domination and

discrimination backgrounds “the economy” and class, as if these forces and ideologies of domination come from outside the economy to shape its function, when these forms of domination are in fact immanent to the economy and class society itself (Cicerchia 2021, 612).⁸ The irony is that by naturalizing the “economy” and instead assigning domination to exterior ideologies, one repeats the logic of (neo)classical economists who saw the market as a self-regulating mechanism that only malfunctioned due to *external* forces or individual shortcomings (Cicerchia 2021). Instead of perpetuating an inside/outside of “the economy” framework, I examine the contestations of indigeneity within a politico-economic whole.

When my friend Ka’ena said she received a grant from the federal government, she joked, “Even if it’s from, you know, he’s not *my* Uncle Sam, but the dirty money of the United States. I’m gonna show you how I can turn your money into good and feed my people: the way that they should be fed.” Ka’ena was keenly aware of this broader political economy, noting the exploitation and extraction from which this money came. In Hawai‘i, the vast majority of Native Hawaiians work in service industries, administrative work, construction, technical trades, and civilian contractor jobs for the large US military presence. The largest industries in Hawai‘i are tourism and the US military: both sectors predicated on the dispossession of lands and the exploitation of workers and culture. In terms of dispossession, the US military controls around a quarter of all land on my island of O‘ahu alone, while US military housing allowances have driven up rent prices (Grandinetti 2022). In 2021 influxes of settlers and military occupiers, as well as the use of housing as investment properties, drove median home prices in Hawai‘i past \$1 million. For Native Hawaiian families, top concerns are housing and the cost of living. These material concerns stem from the privatization of formerly communal lands and the theft of over 1.8 million acres of Hawaiian Government and Crown lands following the overthrow (i.e., dispossession), as well as low wages and exorbitant housing and living costs (i.e., proletarianization). As Chickasaw anthropologist Shannon Speed (2017) argues in contexts of Latin America, for Native Hawaiians, the major forces of oppression have been both dispossession *and* proletarianization, two related processes that inform one another in the crucible of capitalism.

Applications of refusal operate in the realm of sovereignty and political theory but could do more to foreground fundamentally constitutive political economic forces that matter most when organizing on the ground. Those invoking refusal often treat it as a portable, self-contained model, instead of attending to complex entanglements with other processes. And yet, with a primary focus on “the political” as a discrete sphere excised from constitutive politico-economic relations, we risk presupposing that political idealisms are

primary. In Ellen Gabriel's account of Mohawk resistance in practice (2024), her analysis constantly returns to capitalism's actors and logics, revealing the fundamental need to center political economy. Is the oppression of Indigenous peoples primarily through political status, or is it a question of the politico-economic system and its reverberations? Or are they in fact best understood as related and co-constitutive within a dynamic whole? Many formally post-colonial nations granted full recognition as sovereign states encounter harsh economic realities of capitalism as imperialism and neocolonialism (Nkrumah 1965). To put it differently, how do Indigenous polities materially reproduce ourselves even prior to, and while engaging in, resistance or rejection?

A focus on abstract idealisms does not account for another scale of vital politico-economic processes: imperialism. When Ka'ena called her federal funding the "dirty money of the United States," she noted governmental funding's source of US empire; similarly, in chapter 2 I explain how KS private investments derive from imperialist extraction abroad. While the funding that supports Indigenous efforts derive in part from domination and extraction overseas, narrower analyses of Native nations and settler colonialism confine discussion to the domestic scale.⁹ Excess focus on Native nationalism has its limits. As Yup'ik scholar Shari Huhndorf points out, "Although nationalism is an essential anticolonial strategy in indigenous settings, nationalist scholarship neglects the historical forces (such as imperialism) that increasingly draw indigenous communities into global contexts. The concern of nationalism with cultural and political restoration deflects questions about the economic, environmental, and social changes that ongoing colonization has brought to Native America" (2009, 3–4). Native Hawaiians in Hawai'i are occupied by the United States, a global hegemon that has wreaked imperialist violence across the globe as well as within its claimed jurisdictions. Historian of Hawai'i Dean Saranillio writes that "statehood" itself was predicated on the "wish" for the lifestyle that one could have as a "first-class citizen" of the world (2018, 11). While most Native Hawaiians in the twenty-first century are working-class, following the closure of industrial plantations very little commodity *production* or resource extraction currently occurs in Hawai'i. Most cash flowing into Hawai'i came through the US military, tourism, development investment, and service industries linked into global capitalism. At the same time, most commodity production happens in the Global South, where conditions are much more dire than in Hawai'i, while resource extraction also occurs outside of Hawai'i. It is no accident that Hawai'i's more radical labor history of the twentieth century coincided with an era in which actual commodity production occurred in sprawling plantations. The circulation of capital to the islands today occurs at the expense of value-producing workers elsewhere, at the behest of US imperialism and unequal exchange. This is a familiar model:

Workers in developed countries benefit from the surplus-value extracted from developing countries where wages are lower. Holding a US passport, benefiting from cheapened goods, higher purchasing power, and US dollar hegemony constitutes more than a form of privilege: These advantages are materially built on exploitation elsewhere. Those who envisaged Hawai‘i as a “Silicon Valley, but with Hawaiian values” elided that technology industries are predicated on the most brutal exploitation far from our shores. This “labor aristocracy” in developed countries is indeed still exploited, but it is anesthetized by a better quality of life from the surplus-value derived from zones of exported poverty (Lenin 2020). Some have called this lifestyle the “imperial mode of living” (Brand and Wissen 2021), or to put more of a point on it, Che Guevara explains, “The tendency of modern imperialism is to share with the workers the crumbs of their exploitation of other peoples” (2006, 59, qtd. in Yaffe 2009, 241). Isolating particular instances of revival or rejection, or exclusively focusing on settler colonialism, effectively displaces the active neocolonial exploitation of others, including other Indigenous peoples, outside of Hawai‘i. Resurgence and resistance maintain a primarily inward focus on Indigenous interests and projects, yet if we are to truly be anti-colonial and adhere to our value systems, we must account for how *we* benefit from the imperialist exploitation of others.

A narrower focus affects the type of conclusions one can draw, as Native Hawaiians do not exist in a vacuum. It is important to address the relationship between settler colonialism and capitalism. In the context of Hawai‘i, capitalism facilitated the steady expansion of settler colonialism (Maile 2019, 56–81; Ramones and Merry 2021). Critique that stops at the level of settler colonialism, rather than centering the root of political economy, produces an incomplete analysis. Highlighting resistance or rejection, especially in developed settler colonies, can do more to address complicity in a global system of surplus-value extraction and circulation. Taxonomizing this political economy, as I undertake in chapter 2, therefore produces a markedly different political analysis.

Wai Means Water

Metaphysical uses of theory, as opposed to dialectical materialist analyses, also run the risk of delving into the *utopian* at the expense of the *scientific*. By “scientific,” I emphasize that I am not holding “Western science” above Indigenous knowledge. Quite the opposite: Native Hawaiian epistemologies are fundamentally materialist and scientific, a point I make in the conclusion. Traditional Hawaiian knowledge emerges from relating to, understanding, and building expertise in patterns of the natural world, based on intergenerational

observation and interaction with these patterns from Native Hawaiian worldviews (Kanahele-Mossman and Karides 2021; Nu‘uhiwa 2019). This knowledge from observation and interaction has been encoded in chants, songs, and stories, allowing for the transmission of scientific data. While these texts are rife with abstract concepts and metaphor, they consistently index material changes, specific places, and relationships. Sitting in a workshop on such knowledge, I asked the facilitators if a chant describing wai (fresh water), the vital life-giving resource that flows across the land, could be a metaphor for cultural and intellectual resources. After all, the Hawaiian word for wealth is waiwai. Gently correcting me, a facilitator said, “Here, ‘wai’ means ‘water,’ literally.” He went on to explain that the chant described the material behaviors and roles of water in the ecosystem and human health. He then paused the workshop session, explaining to the group that while it could be tempting to take our exegetic interpretations into higher metaphorical realms that catch our fancy, we should instead stay with the text and its actual referents: material processes entextualized in song. In this way, Native Hawaiian knowledge is based on the material processes, mutual dependence, and relations that undergird the totality of an ecology. I was struck by how our Indigenous knowledge systems were irrefutably material, with a dialectical grasp of how processes morph within a larger interconnected world.

When I began my research, it would have been easy for me to extricate the community-based programs with which I worked, to apply a designation of resistance or rejection to them and call it a day. But I was committed to deriving theory from, rather than imposing it upon, the messier contradictions of lived experience. And so, the material concerns and social practice first shaping the terrain of action demanded a better analysis. To simply ascribe a pure and idealist abstraction would yield a utopian, if not practically limiting result. The contention here concerns the difference between extricating a site or phenomenon as it *appears* and exalting its idealisms, as opposed to delving into its co-constitutive relations that challenge clean-cut idealisms (see Meek 2012).¹⁰ In this sense, a dialectical materialist approach apprehends how modes of resistance simultaneously mediate assimilationist or recognition politics, and vice versa, within a wider holism of concrete conditions. For example, in chapter 1 I argue that attempts to create distinctly Native Hawaiian neoliberal subjects, despite the appearance of supporting cultural revival, contain a new form of class assimilation. Rather than seeing such a policy as purely progressive or regressive, I examine it as a dialectical unity that also maintains its contradictory aspect of assimilation. That which appears liberatory indeed carries continuities of domination, much like sites of resurgence described in chapter 2 that are resourced by capitalist political economy. In the reverse sense, I also examine how something supposedly destructive, like hotel development near

an ancestral site in chapter 3, contains potentials of Indigenous growth and subversion.

But what lies beneath the impulse to excise and elevate the idealisms within which a site or movement appears to an observer? Metaphysical thought isolates a “thing” rather than a process, from its constitutive relations and wider material context, making it immutable, and rigidly identifies it as one essentialized thing and not another, what Engels calls thinking in “absolutely unmediated antitheses” (2020, 57). Metaphysical thinking sees the drivers of change in utopian idealisms at the expense of actual conditions, for it “cannot see the woods for the trees” (57). In the case of Indigenous language revitalization, Comanche linguistic anthropologist Barbra Meek challenges idealized and straightforward notions of revitalization, arguing that “we must focus on all (or several) aspects of the sociolinguistic environment, as a totalizing, holistic phenomenon that has both positive and negative effects, both intended and unintended” (2010, 55). Metaphysical and straightforward frameworks can be ideologically inspiring and useful to those pursuing Native Hawaiian liberation, but they also provide a partial view of Indigenous life and avenues for achieving said liberation. A narrower vision also risks confining our horizon to spatio-temporally limited instances of resistance, ironically reproducing settler colonial dynamics of confinement, rather than bushwhacking a path for the wider struggle. Bushwhacking requires a machete, not rose-tinted glasses.

I eschew a metaphysical focus on ideal appearance, instead offering a dialectical demystification of underlying contestations, a wider web of relations, revealing how the Indigenous social formation is both rebuilt and demolished, block by block. This is akin to ‘ike pāpālua, meaning “double sight/knowing.” A commonly used traditional chant titled “Nā ‘Aumākua,” adapted from David Malo’s *Hawaiian Antiquities*, beseeches deified ancestors for protection, knowledge, power, and flourishing (1898, 31). In a litany of requests, the latter portion of the chant asks:

E hō mai i ka ‘ike	<i>Give forth knowledge</i>
E hō mai i ka ikaika	<i>Give forth strength</i>
E hō mai i ke akamai	<i>Give forth intelligence</i>
E hō mai i ka maopopo pono	<i>Give forth proper understanding</i>
E hō mai i ka ‘ike pāpālua	<i>Give forth insight (lit., double knowledge/sight)</i>
E hō mai i ka mana	<i>Give forth power</i>

This classic chant requests different and distinct dimensions of knowing: knowledge, intelligence, proper understanding, and double sight. These dimensions of knowing play on the polyvalence of ‘ike as knowing, seeing, awareness, and even revelation. Pāpālua is a duplication of pālua, meaning

twice as much or doubly. ‘Ike pāpālua indicates a double knowledge/sight, which I invoke as knowing epiphenomenal appearance while also peering through it to grasp the underlying phenomena at work.¹¹ I offer ‘ike pāpālua as somewhat akin to a dialectical materialist approach to understanding, which is neither purely metaphysical and epiphenomenal, nor a vulgar economism that reduces all phenomena to a material base.

On another level, the metaphysical trap rears its head in analyses that over-privilege politics and idealisms as autonomous or even determinative, backgrounding or omitting their undergirding politico-economic basis. Instead, a proper dialectical materialist approach apprehends the co-constitutive relationship between ideological formations and institutions with their material base (see Cain and Hunt [1979, 50]).¹² At the same time, I reject a crude reductionism of the material base that unidirectionally determines other aspects of the social formation. I conceive of various fields of activity—politics, cultural forms, and institutions—within a differentiated, structured, and complex whole of the social ecosystem (see Hall 2021, 86). Rather than reifying spheres of the so-called economic, political, and cultural, this method approaches phenomena as conceived within *social reproduction* in capitalism, or “the reproduction of the social relations of production” (87). As more than a theoretical move, and speaking from my on the ground perspective, it is “only when we can grasp and comprehend the dense, opaque integument of capitalist societies—their base and their complex superstructures . . . are we likely to be able to develop a sufficiently informed practice to transform them” (Hall 2021, 88). The chant “Nā ‘Aumākuā” therefore culminates in asking for mana, power or generative potency, showing the Hawaiian understanding that incisive forms of knowing endow power and efficacy in practice. As both Hawaiian epistemologies and Marxist thinkers have long understood, deep analysis and insight form the basis not just for understanding the world but for acting within and changing it.

Approaches like this are not new and were common in earlier eras of anthropology, with Native Hawaiian philosophy far predating the discipline of anthropology. I draw methodological and theoretical reinvigoration from what is now called the Manchester School of mid-twentieth-century anthropology, which focused on the dynamism and internal contradictions that drove social change, all within the context of colonialism. Examining internal contestations and shifting layers of allegiance, nested within overarching domination, dissolves the notion of a monolithic Native Hawaiian community in a dominated-dominating relation alone. My focus on “structurally generated oppositions” sets aside timeless “norms” as proof of abstract Indigenous values in equilibrium, instead illuminating the very dynamics of how Native Hawaiian society reconstitutes itself through time (see Kuper [1973, 180–90]).

Rather than focusing only on Native Hawaiians' resistance in a unidirectional model of domination, I parse out the "total political situation" (180), from urban elites to rural knowledge-keepers, from proponents of a new assimilation to Hawaiians without formal cultural education, all to paint a fuller picture of Native Hawaiian life.

The Politics of Scholarship

Why is a more metaphysical approach so alluring in scholarship of indigeneity? British-Ghanaian art historian Kobena Mercer (1990) offers the helpful concept of the "burden of representation": Members of minoritized groups carry a burden to produce redemptive and respectable self-representations. Focusing on Black artists, Mercer describes a particular exhibition that "was burdened with the role of making present what had been rendered absent in the official version of modern art history" (1990, 62). This burden of representation binds marginalized artists to "speak for" their communities and to offer corrective portrayals, emerging from historical and ongoing erasures or un-gainly, even hostile misrepresentations.¹³

Indigenous scholars also carry a burden of representation. Centuries of hegemonic misrepresentation and historical erasure have disenfranchised and marginalized Native peoples. You can see this process in the settler colonial writing of history (O'Brien 2010), in the suppression of Native histories, and in the branding and naturalization of Hawai'i as a colonial possession (Kame'elehiwa 1992; Saranillio 2018; Silva 2004; Trask 1999). The field of Hawaiian studies was itself born out of a political struggle to recover subjugated histories while disrupting settler colonial narratives (Trask 1999). An example of my own burden lies in my first encounters with the work of Marshall Sahlins, whose sustained scholarship on Hawai'i critically reshaped anthropology. I remember first reading Sahlins's calculation of the weight and body size of Hawaiian chiefs, and the comparatively "poorly fed" status of the common people, which seemed to be a demagogic depiction of our leaders that was more than insulting, if not politically uninformed (Sahlins 1994, 433). My own separate journey led me to explore class contradictions within Native Hawaiian society, but what I now realize was a knee-jerk reaction revealed my own deep-seated awareness of my people's embattlement, misrepresentation, and denigration. As in the wider field of Indigenous studies, central to these projects are the relational obligations of being Native while in the academy and a searing awareness that Indigenous peoples remain embattled in a settler colonial context. In my visceral reaction to Sahlins's argument, I found myself aligning with my people, by way of our chiefs, over the internal divisions of class. My reaction was against the larger historical and political conditions of

settler colonialism and racism, even as my appreciation of the predations of capital and class was subordinated to my reaction of Indigenous embattlement.

Some Indigenous scholarship examines internal tensions or disagreements.¹⁴ And yet, while settler colonialism remains the overarching force, it does not explain everything that I lived with and encountered in Hawai‘i. An implicit presupposition in Indigenous studies, settler colonial studies, and anthropology bends us to an us-versus-them framework of two irreducible polities. The contestation between these two self-contained antitheses is one of dispossession and accumulation, ontological difference, intervening and intervened; there is little mediation that forms the texture of the social whole. And yet, the material reality of Indigenous life in Hawai‘i is, and was, a complex landscape of commoners, a Native bourgeoisie, a Native comprador class, Native corporate landlords and gentrifiers, even Native venture capitalists. Add to this the high ethnic diversity brought by migration during and after the plantation era, and one can see that certain strains of grassroots politics increasingly grow not from reified identities but from the pragmatic and class-attentive work of gaining allies and expanding power in a highly diverse field of forces—a politics of “insurgent Indigeneity” (Ramones 2024). Leaving such identity categories unexamined produces analyses constrained to issues of ontology, cultural difference, sovereignty, abstraction, and idealism, sometimes with an invocation of the *word* capitalism. The material contradictions of Native life, especially class, disappear from the text and sometimes even from the struggle. This also marks an understandable tendency by any scholar working with Indigenous communities to only highlight strengths, while allocating any harms *externally* to an invocation of settler colonialism or a generalized gesture to the word “capitalism,” portrayed as a force stalking in the background rather than an internally transformative process demanding thoroughgoing analysis.

From a community organizing perspective, a purely celebratory mode limits our abilities to better analyze co-optation, internal change, and complicity. The allure of such “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 1990), however, is clear: With ties and responsibilities to embattled peoples, we too must hold the line, remain unified, and not highlight division. While postcolonial scholars have established a long tradition of debating capitalism and the roles of their own bourgeoisie, intelligentsia, and compradors, such discussion would be distasteful, if not dangerous for an Indigenous community. This discursive taboo is a living legacy of settler colonialism that I attempt to transgress. Settler colonialism recursively supports capitalism in this case, such that our avoidance of public division restrains critique of Native elites, thereby displacing class politics. Following Laura Nader’s (1974) touchstone call for the importance

of “studying up,” I recognize the urgency of examining those in society who hold inordinate amounts of power, while crucially remembering how they mediate forces larger than themselves. Although this book analyzes certain affordances of Indigenous capitalism, indeed a more acceptable engagement, it also proposes a reflexive critique, one that usually dwells backstage as many scholars cannot express such critiques aloud.

I join a rising group of Indigenous scholars and activists who eschew idealism in favor of class analysis and centering political economy. During a visit with a friend and organizer on Hawai‘i Island, he and I chatted about the shifting Native Hawaiian political landscape. Several years after thousands gathered to protect Mauna Kea from the construction of a telescope complex, even creating a self-sustaining community atop the mountain, we observed a rise of the Left after “the Mauna activated us,” he said. He observed that some had moved away from a position of simply asserting the Kingdom through international law, noting that then “we had our anarchist moment,” eventually engaging other Leftist frameworks that offered historically proven political programs and analyses. Of course, we agreed that this rise of the Left was no coincidence as ultra-nationalist rightwing ideologies had also found a new base among some Native Hawaiians. This is another crucial point, as I had seen currents of “decolonization” or “decoloniality” turn into a hunt for purity, purging anything summarily cast as colonial. Therein lies another urgency for this book, calling the field to not take for granted what we mean when we deal in a people’s “indigeneity.”

Following the height of the coronavirus pandemic, this leftist surge extended beyond Hawai‘i; it was indeed global, seeing rejuvenated union activity, anti-racist organizing, climate action, and mobilization against fascism. This occurred despite decades of baggage encouraging us otherwise. The hangover from the West’s Red Scare targeted families like mine while famously rendering anything akin to “socialism” a bogeyman at worst and flawed at best. In the mid-twentieth century, the CIA funded and influenced programs promoting abstract forms of art, academic conferences and presses, translations of French postmodern theory, and support for those academics and cultural producers critical of Marxism (Saunders 2000). The great protest decade of 2000–2010 also saw the New Left naturalize a set of protest tactics that praised leaderless horizontal movements and spontaneity while exhibiting a distaste for historically Marxist organizing strategies (Bevins 2023). My own argument is a genealogical continuation of the liberatory tools used by my Filipino grandfather and Hawaiian great uncle. Anti-colonial, Marxist, feminist and other radical scholarly projects seeking revolutionary transformation have lost ground to the rise of poststructuralism, liberal politics of representation, those privileging particularism and its dwelling in minutia, and those remaining

reactionary against grand narrative, totality, and universals. “Class” is collapsed into the lexicon of other forms of “difference,” stripped of its structural and politicized character, and “the cultural” entrances scholars while disenchanting “the economic.”¹⁵ Radical projects contend that such positions are indefensible amid the intensifying violence of capitalism. The point of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist projects is liberation for all.

This is the political landscape upon which Indigenous research has marched. Indeed, there is yet another bifurcation in Indigenous scholarship emerging from the Global North vis-à-vis the Global South. As Shannon Speed describes, Global North scholars are well-versed in settler colonialism while needing heartier analyses of capitalism, and Global South discussions focus on capitalism at the expense of potential settler colonial analyses (2017, 784; 2019, 14–16). I reckon with the substantial privilege and dominance of Global North Indigenous theory in the academy, while Global South thinkers, especially those theorizing through class analysis and political economy, remain sidelined from syllabi and scholarship. I radically reincorporate such excluded lineages into analysis, pushing past the dismissal of Global South Marxist theory, noting Hawai‘i’s own specific history of radical class-based multiethnic politics.

Some Indigenous figures reject Marxist analysis as “foreign.” However, this reproduces the same problem it claims to reject. As Samir Amin (2009) argues, that path of resistance to Eurocentrism can take the form of simple negation, a reassertion of cultural identity and heritage as an end in itself. This “nationalist culturalist retreat” is a fundamentalism that in fact mirrors the structure of Eurocentric fundamentalism (204). In this view, “Western” theory remains the domain of Euro-American identity, and Indigenous peoples must then oppose it in the name of authenticity. But this essentializes both the “West” and the “Indigenous” as irreducible categories, creating an artificial binary between modernity and indigeneity. Modernity is not the property of the West, and its emancipatory elements can and should be appropriated by Indigenous societies on our own terms. This potential is especially salient given the Hawaiian proclivities of historically appropriating foreign tools and knowledges: for example, Native Hawaiians appropriated missionary technologies of literacy and the printing press to proliferate cultural knowledge and political consciousness (Silva 2004; 2017). To dismiss Marxism as foreign is not a rejection of Eurocentrism but an “inverted” Eurocentrism (Amin 2009); it denies colonized peoples the agency to shape and repurpose theory for our own liberation. The depoliticizing irony is also noteworthy, as many historically anti-colonial and Indigenous movements in the Global South developed Marxist theory for their own objectives (Raza, In Press). My research brought me in conversation with several Native Hawaiians who had no qualms

appropriating Indigenous concepts to further capitalist ideologies, a topic I explore in chapters 2 and 3. More commonly, many scholars have also mobilized tradition for their own critiques of pro-capitalist machinations. A third path, one I share with other groups of friends and actors, appropriated Marxist theory and practice for a different conceptualization of modernity. True decolonization lies not in retreating into essentialized identities but in building a dialectical modernity—one capable of transcending both domination and isolation.

In the context of Hawai‘i, Marxism was not a colonial force but was instead wielded as a tool of transformation and pursuing a better life. A friend once showed me an 1891 newspaper article titled “Socialism,” written by famed pro-independence leader, John Ailuene Bush. Bush defended the leading nationalist newspaper’s recent articles on socialism, and despite rejecting the idea that Hawai‘i was ready for socialism in the 1890s, he admitted agreement with its analyses, even stating that “we believe that, in the continued struggle of labor against capital . . . of the starving proletariat against the idleness and viciousness of the wealthy aristocracy or upstart plutocracy . . . will in process of time evolve a social revolution that will establish forms of government upon the basis of socialism” (1891, 4). In her work that partly concerns KS, Hawaiian political scientist Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua asks how inculcating certain categories of Hawaiianness might be “leaving little space for other possibilities (i.e., Hawaiian Buddhists, Hawaiian Atheists, Hawaiian socialists, etc.)” (2005, 134). To be clear, I do not repeat the trope of non-Indigenous Marxists pontificating about historical materialism to misguided Natives, a tendency I would call *maha‘oi*: presumptuous, rude in asking questions. Rather, this book began from stories in my genealogy and continues with me joining other Indigenous scholars and organizers in a rising tide of those generating leftist analyses from our conditions: a Fourth World Marxism that this book develops. The mode of critique I follow comes not from the vantage point of an external figure peering into a petri dish, but from an internal position of concern, if not alarm.

Time and again, grassroots friends remarked on the need for someone to examine these institutions and elites. I write from the position of an anthropologist and as a Native Hawaiian, what Beatrice Medicine (1987) calls our “dual lives,” and I produce a story whereby each position contests, contains, and informs the other. Quoting Tewa anthropologist Ed Dozier, Medicine writes that many Native Americans “went into anthropology as a means of helping their people” (1987, 284), and that is the core motivation of this work. Some may take issue with this project or see it as insufficiently “decolonizing,” to which I reiterate Amin’s (2009) warning against inverted Eurocentrism and his reclamation of modernity for the colonized. Despite coming from my

genealogy, if this book provokes questions about my being sufficiently “Indigenous” or “Hawaiian,” then such reactions prove the very need to reexamine what we take for granted about “Indigenous.”

As I wrote this book, I found my ethnographic approach diverging from more common approaches in anthropology. While some in the discipline may describe their practice as “bearing witness” to human experience, in my own case it seemed to shirk my *kuleana*. Only a few days after I returned home for fieldwork, I explained to a friend and fellow cultural educator that I had been away during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that I was hesitant to weigh in regarding curriculum design. She confronted me by saying, “Don’t be a *haole* [foreign, white] anthropologist. You’re with *us* and *have* *kuleana* in this. We want you to speak up.” And so, I grasped at developing such an ethnographic practice. The political complexity of my work turns on its head more straightforward notions of “community engaged” research, as some call it. I worked toward finding my voice within “*kuleana* anthropology,” an anthropology of obligation, relationality, and not of the individual ethnographer alone.¹⁶ In my attempt to create a practice of *kuleana* anthropology, the “burden of representation” weighed heavy in my chest, the dizzying, crisscrossing accountabilities binding my fingers into a knot floating stubbornly above the keyboard.

But as a *kuleana*, I knew I must write. Continuing with Mercer’s “burden of representation,” I draw from Faye Ginsburg’s description (2012) of a “New Wave” of Indigenous Australian cultural activists who portray less palatable complexities of Indigenous experience, following the first wave that fought important battles to create positive representations of their peoples. Such works led to difficult conversations for communities and carried definite risks of reinforcing colonial tropes of Indigenous Australians. To borrow or to bend this concept for Indigenous scholars, I offer this book as a foray into that New Wave. The burden of representation has set the academy on the trajectory of tailing the movement, elevating spaces of hope and externalizing harms, when we can instead dare to synthesize bolder paths forward. Fanon’s assessment of colonized and anticolonial intellectual and artistic production usefully sets out three formations of work (1963, 206–48). The first is mimicry of the aesthetics and content of the colonizer, an attempt to prove one’s competence and humanity on par with the colonizer. The second is an attempt to lose oneself in the masses, reclaim a denigrated past, and redeem the dignity of one’s people, with romanticism figuring prominently here. In the third instance, “fighting literature” or “combat literature” seeks to awaken and “shake” the people. This combat literature grows from “feel[ing] the need to speak to their nation,” rather than *for* it, and to “become the mouthpiece of a new reality in action” (Fanon 1963, 223). The burden of representation that conscripts us to

redemptive and defensive scholarship falls under the second Fanonian phase of developing national culture. Of course, there are outliers like Haunani-Kay Trask (1987; 1999), who discussed Native elites and drew from revolutionary traditions like that of the Black Panthers and Marxism, to rouse and awaken our people. My approach of “combat literature” attempts to “shake” and awaken, as a frank but gentle conversation to our people, forming part of a new wave of those challenging the burden of representation to seek new paths forward.

From Fieldwork to Homework

Several days after returning home for research, I joined my friend Lani at a cultural site she stewarded, a place for educational programs serving students and formerly incarcerated community members. She gave me a hug and said, “I’m so happy you texted last night and came over to help. It’s been really hard.” The previous night, she shared that KS had cut her funding. Out of the blue, they notified her that the program funding her would be “sunset.” She was visibly distressed, and I could see the gears spinning in her head. I had heard similar stories and that KS was pivoting to “innovation,” “leadership,” and “entrepreneurship.” After setting up a plan to revise her funding pitches, I packed my gear into my car as she shouted, “Kaika! You gotta write an exposé on this! We all know somebody needs to.”

Unfortunately, I cannot, and neither do I want to, write an “exposé” of KS—as much as some grassroots partners wanted me to. Neither will I write a puff piece free from productive candor. If I wanted to write a celebration of sites of resistance and revival, ethics like attributing names, places, and relationships that are the cornerstone of Indigenous research would be a more straightforward matter. However, by examining internal inequalities, I could risk the livelihoods, reputations, and safety of grassroots folks, as well as that of key figures trying their best within large institutions. In this light, community-based research is not so simple, especially when “studying up” to examine the elites of an already embattled group. The idea of community-engaged research requires more precise conversation about conflicting allegiances and cross-cutting power relations. This ethnography straddles those who are resilient yet vulnerable, and those who hold considerable amounts of power while still beholden to occupying institutions and pernicious logics. To address this, I draw on “ethnographic refusal” to protect these figures (Simpson 2007). This necessary move runs counter to Native Hawaiian ethics that devote a primacy to honoring place, specific genealogies, and stories, and identifying those who have dedicated their lives to protecting and restoring them. I heavily de-identify places and actors to prevent any “dramalanis” from seeking

retribution, and I withhold certain important details out of ethical consideration, agreements with organizations like KS, and the politics of the topic.¹⁷ In true dialectical fashion, I also refuse ethnographic refusal, as I refuse to smooth over tensions so that I may illuminate issues that grassroots members of my community have themselves identified as needing inquiry.

I examine the web of institutions, movements, and community-based organizations (CBOs) that do the work of reviving Native Hawaiian cultural practices, knowledge, and political mobilization.¹⁸ Despite enduring processes of assimilation, dispossession, and oppression, Native Hawaiians and our accomplices have enjoyed a vibrant language revitalization movement, have won legal battles in water and land rights, proven precontact voyaging knowledge, created a network of Native Hawaiian schools, reclaimed the sacred island of Kaho'olawe from US military bombing, continue to generate mass support to defend Mauna Kea from construction of an astronomical observatory, and overall used a diversity of tactics to awaken our people's consciousness and spur resurgence in many pockets (Finney 2003; Fujikane 2021; Goodyear-Ka'opua 2013; Goodyear-Ka'opua et al. 2014; McGregor 2007; Oliveira 2014b; Peralto 2018; Tengan 2008a; Vaughan 2018). I examine the material factors that have supported and constrained this broad and diverse movement, following the contestations and frictions involved in reproducing and transforming Native Hawaiian society in practice.

This movement has been sustained by philanthropic, governmental, and private funding. With no tribal or national government following the overthrow of the Hawaiian Crown, Native Hawaiians look to an array of organizations for support. These include the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, emerging from a 1921 congressional act and tasked with remediating the effects of dispossession by providing land leases to Native Hawaiians who qualified according to an imposed racist blood quantum minimum (Kauanui 2008); the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), a quasi-governmental agency with a budget of tens of millions of dollars a year, dedicated to the perpetuation of Hawaiian culture and the protection of Indigenous rights; and the Hawaiian Council (formerly known as the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, or CNHA), a non-profit that receives grant and governmental monies to coordinate programs for cultural, economic, and community development. There are also four ali'i (chief) trusts, endowed by the financial and land holdings of royal chiefs who saw dire need among their people. The first three of these include the Lunalilo trust, founded by King Lunalilo who died in 1874, supports the Lunalilo Home for elders; Queen's Hospital, founded by Queen Emma and King Kamehameha IV in 1859, which has shifted to a corporate institution no longer providing free services to Native Hawaiians after the hospital tax was repealed (Blaisedell n.d.); and a trust for orphaned and destitute Hawaiian children founded by

Queen Lili‘uokalani, the monarch overthrown in 1893, who committed her lands and monies in 1909. The fourth, and largest of these, is KS.

At the grassroots level, there are dozens, if not over a hundred, CBOs that run programming for political and cultural education, the restoration and protection of biocultural sites, reclaiming traditional agriculture and aquaculture systems, community health, and many others. Some are large nonprofits with multi-million-dollar budgets, some are stalwart one-person operations, and others are intentionally not 501(c)(3) nonprofits so that they are able to engage in political organizing. There are also Hawaiian culture-based schools and Hawaiian language immersion schools. CBO staff are people of the land, maintaining connection to and knowledge of place, *doing aloha ‘āina*: a term meaning both patriotism and love for the land. This network of organizations and resources has been instrumental in facilitating Native Hawaiians’ abilities to articulate ourselves as a people through time.

I have worked with various CBOs for over a decade, even helping to run a community-based program, and also worked as an analyst at KS from 2016 through 2017. I carried out my most intensive period of research over twenty months from 2021 to 2023, primarily working with four organizations on O‘ahu, one on Hawai‘i Island, and two on other neighboring islands. I do not even name these islands, as doing so would make it easier for these projects to be identified. During my work with CBOs, I found myself transporting goods, cleaning facilities, aiding in education programming, writing strategic plans, helping with grant applications and spent many, *many* hours pulling weeds. In larger institutions like KS, OHA, or the Hawaiian Council, I interviewed key staff of different generations, helped to develop internal metrics, examined public institutional documents, attended public hearings and conferences, analyzed media put out by these institutions, and even examined three years’ worth of “Court Master” probate court documents overseeing one ali‘i trust. Along the way, I conducted over forty formal interviews and “life stories” (see Ginsburg 1998), in addition to engaging in hundreds of informal conversations and extensive participant observation, or more accurately, being an “observing participant.” As an “observing participant,” I engaged in observation while foremost being a participant with an actual stake in my “homework.”

I have structured this book around the various contradictions, instances of bivalency, and counterintuitive flashes of dialectics that “rebuke established thought processes” and common sense (Jameson 2009, 4). Attending to these contestations provides better understanding of the dynamics of change for Hawaiian indigeneity itself, recasting indigeneity not as an assumed category but as a process in motion. Aside from providing a necessary overview of Hawai‘i’s history, chapter 1 delves into the tension between assimilation and liberatory politics, examining how eugenic history repeats itself “the first time

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