Preface

The year 1998 marked one hundred years of U.S. control of Hawai'i, which the international community of nations had recognized as an independent country—the Hawaiian Kingdom—since the 1840s. I spent that summer teaching a course in applied English for Kanaka Maoli students about to enter their senior year in high school.[1] The course was part of a state community college summer bridge program founded to address the underrepresentation of Native Hawaiians in higher education. Through a suite of courses, the students were to develop skills for navigating the postsecondary transition to a career or college. My friend and high school classmate Keola Nakanishi worked alongside me as a coteacher. Young educators fresh out of college, we were told that students should learn how to create résumés, write cover letters, complete job application forms, and practice other basic skills young people need in order to apply for college or enter the work force. We, however, were eager to teach literacy as a liberatory praxis rather than as just an economic expedient.

I had recently completed a bachelor's degree in Hawaiian studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, a program that encouraged students to analyze the political stakes of knowledge and to blend scholarship with robust community engagement. Like women's studies, ethnic studies, and Native studies programs elsewhere, Hawaiian studies grew out of social movements for justice. Our teachers approached education as part of a larger political project of Hawaiian self-determination and nationhood. Like them, I wanted to help my own students see their paths as embedded in larger terrains of collective struggle and survival. Keola and I titled our class Mana Maoli (True Power or Native Power), signifying what we wanted our students to recognize in themselves and in our people.

We opened that summer with a conversation about how our 'Ōiwi ancestors of the kingdom era had produced a level of popular literacy comparable to, if not exceeding, most nations in the world.[2] Within

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a generation after the introduction of a printing press in 1822, nearly the entire adult population had attended school and learned to read and write.[3] Amid waves of foreign-introduced diseases and imperialist designs on their country, nineteenth-century Kānaka wrote and published copious pages of histories, letters, songs, lamentations, and political commentary, particularly through the Hawaiian-language newspapers but also as books, personal correspondences, and legal documents.[4] In fact, the millions of pages of documents in the Hawaiian language comprise a unique treasure among Indigenous peoples worldwide, whose languages, cultures, and knowledge bases have been assaulted by processes of imperialism and colonialism. Literacy provided new avenues for articulating Hawaiian nationhood. It became a practice of Hawaiian survivance, a term which emphasizes "renewal and continuity into the future" rather than loss and mere survival "through welcoming unpredictable cultural reorientations."[5] As Vizenor writes, "Survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent."[6]

I have written this book as a twenty-first-century story of Hawaiian survivance. This uniquely Hawaiian story addresses broader concerns about what it means to enact Indigenous cultural-political resurgence while working within and against settler colonial structures. Contemporary Indigenous education seeks to rearticulate schooling (historically aimed at our assimilation to settler society) within projects of collective renewal and continuity.

Through our conversations on that first day of class, I was stunned to learn that none of our students, except the two who had been enrolled in Hawaiian-language immersion schools for the previous twelve years, were aware that our kūpuna (ancestors) exponentially and enthusiastically spread the skills of print literacy in the early 1800s. Powerful pedagogies of erasure caused such disconnection. For the bulk of the twentieth century, the settler state government in Hawai'i failed to support or fund any form of Indigenous education. Young people were severed from the legacy of Hawaiian literacy, as not a single school in the islands made the Native Hawaiian language or culture central to its curriculum until the advent of language-immersion schools in the mid-1980s.[7]

Kanaka social movements of the 1970s had successfully pressed for

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change in various aspects of life in the islands. Riding this wave of social movement, delegates to the 1978 state constitutional convention included provisions for a Hawaiian education program consisting of language, culture, and history in the public schools, and they affirmed Hawaiian as an official language of the state. Finally, in 1986 the ninety-year ban on Hawaiian language–medium instruction in public schools was defeated, and the first publicly funded Hawaiian-language immersion schools of the twentieth century began to emerge.

Yet there I found myself in a classroom twenty years after major constitutional change, and still a vast majority of my students were unfamiliar with the works of any of the most famous Hawaiian writers and scholars of the nineteenth century. Having entered kindergarten the year after the landmark 1978 constitutional convention, I had an experience in school that was quite similar to the students in front of me. Still, I was shocked that little had changed in the ensuing years. Prior to entering our classroom in their final summer of high school, most of our students had never been assigned literature by any Kanaka Maoli author, in Hawaiian or English. They had been taught little if anything of the richness of Hawaiian geography, chant, agriculture, aquaculture, navigational arts and science, or moʻolelo (stories/histories).

Through our conversations during the rest of the summer, I learned about another disturbing aspect of this group's educational experiences: besides the two Hawaiian-immersion students, most of the others could not remember having Kanaka Maoli teachers in their regular schools. Native Hawaiians are indeed underrepresented in Hawaiʻi's teaching force, comprising roughly 10 percent, as compared with more than a quarter of the public school student enrollment.[8] I believe our students' experiences and recollections were also shaped by a historically rooted racial construction of Kānaka as pupils in need of tutelage rather than as teachers and intellectual leaders. In dominant narratives of the nineteenth-century explosion in Hawaiian literacy, white American Protestant missionaries are typically represented as the agents of change, the teachers who brought and bestowed literacy. When Kanaka teachers are mentioned at all with regard to the phenomenal growth of mass literacy, popular and academic histories typically dismiss them as ill prepared or unqualified.[9] The existing historiography of education in Hawaiʻi generally ignores the fact that Kānaka Maoli comprised a

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majority of the islands' teachers throughout the nineteenth century, right up until the 1893 U.S.-backed coup against Queen Liliʻuokalani.

Such erasures and misrepresentations are common in settler colonial discourses that work to legitimize the seizure of land and political sovereignty from Indigenous nations by infantilizing them.[10] For instance, simultaneous with the explosion of literacy in Hawaiʻi, American political leaders were justifying their policies of Indian removal by publicly describing Indians as children. Schneider observes that in the early decades of the 1800s, "Native nations stopped being hailed as external and sovereign, and in their inaugural addresses presidents began describing them as internal to the state . . . as eternally childlike, playing around the knees of a colonizing state."[11] Settler colonial schooling continues the imperial domesticating projects of subsuming the lands and peoples of independent and sovereign nations within the internal, or domestic, sphere of an imperial occupier.

The impact that a century-long disconnection from legacies of literacy, teaching, and educational excellence had on the group of passionate and intelligent young Hawaiians I had the privilege of teaching and learning from back in 1998 was clearly apparent to me. These were ʻōpio ʻōiwi (Native youth) who had succeeded through to the twelfth grade and were still considering higher education despite their less-than-empowering experiences with schools. Though they had powerful stories to tell and profound insights to make, they generally did not see themselves as writers or intellectuals, as eloquent and articulate with important things to say. Schooling had largely blinded them to their own brilliance. It failed to cultivate in them a strong sense of their own voices and the connections of those voices to a deeper, collective ancestral well. Against that backdrop, this book works against the deeply entrenched notion that intellectual rigor is incompatible with Indigenous cultures. As will become apparent, excellence in education is a Hawaiian cultural value, and Kānaka ʻŌiwi have demonstrated an enduring love for self-directed learning.

Against enduring racist, colonial constructions of Indigenous nations as children in the patriarchal family of a settler state, as perpetual pupils in the classrooms of empire, this book explores the work of contemporary Native Hawaiian educators who have struggled to articulate self-determined notions of education and nationhood. In

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this book I offer a story about twenty-first-century Hawaiian-focused public charter schools, a movement I became involved in shortly after teaching that literacy course in 1998. The opportunity to open public charter schools afforded local communities limited autonomous school governance, yet under the framework of a settler state system subject to Hawai'i state and U.S. federal laws such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Although Kānaka Maoli make up only about one-fifth of Hawai'i's current population, more than half of the charter schools that have been founded since 1999 are the initiatives of predominantly 'Ōiwi communities. Hawaiian culture–based charters tend to be community oriented, small scale, and staffed by a significantly larger percentage of Kanaka Maoli teachers than mainstream schools. In the context of significant budget constraints, they negotiate dominant knowledge regimes that alternately devalue and exploit Hawaiian culture.

The seeds for this book were planted during my involvement in the early years of the charter schools' emergence. In 1999 Keola and I became part of the core group of young educators and parents who founded Hālau Kū Māna (HKM), a secondary school that remains one of the only Hawaiian culture–based charter schools located in urban Honolulu. Like the other communities throughout the islands, we aimed to make Hawaiian cultural knowledge and practices—such as navigation, sailing, fishpond restoration, and taro cultivation—centerpieces for cultural revival, community building, and academic excellence. This was no small task, given that our schools were receiving significantly less per-pupil funding from the state than conventional public schools while also lacking the provision of adequate facilities and serving a significantly higher percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch and special education services.[12]

This book charts some of HKM's struggles, genealogies, and educational practices. It takes HKM educators as cultural-political actors who have used schools to sustain and reimagine the lāhui Hawai'i, the Hawaiian nation. How do an Indigenous people use educational institutions and technologies introduced as colonizing forces to maintain and transform their collective sense of purpose and interconnection—of peoplehood and nationhood? In the face of ongoing forces of imperialism, settler colonialism, and white supremacy, how can the practices

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and struggles that emerged in our school inform education for the future? One way HKM educators have done this is through *land-centered literacies* that form the basis of a pedagogical praxis of *aloha ʻāina*. By land-centered literacies, I mean a range of critically engaged observational, interpretive, and expressive practices that put land and natural environment at the center. Land-centered literacies can include narrower definitions of literacy that refer specifically to working with printed text, but they can also include reading the patterns of winds or the balance of water in a stream. Moreover, the Hawaiian land-centered literacies I discuss in this book include study of and engagement with historical and contemporary relations of power.

The central problem for Indigenous Hawaiian charter schools operating under the existing settler state is that although we have begun to reclaim kuleana (responsibility, authority) for educating our youth, the ultimate authority for determining what children should learn and when they should learn it still remains with the settler state government.[13] The success, funding, and survival of these schools are determined by authorities that do not necessarily value Indigenous cultural knowledge or values. The regimes of knowledge supported, for example, by the existing Hawaii Content and Performance Standards and the U.S. national Common Core State Standards focus on conventional literacies that marginalize important Indigenous knowledge practices and reify constructions of literacy that exclude the kinds of land-based literacies that have enabled Indigenous survivance for generations. Yet the struggle to assert and practice these knowledges and the bonds that connect Kānaka Maoli to the ʻāina (land that feeds) have always been tempered by the struggle to survive as an institution within a settler-dominant system.

One of the ironies of Hawaiʻi's charter school law was that although charters were intended to give communities some autonomy from the state's board of education (BOE), the BOE was the only body authorized to grant a charter.[14] In other words, the centralized educational authority that groups were trying to get out from under was the very body evaluating applications and granting permission to operate. The centralized nature of the state's system is both a remnant of the colonial past and evidence of the colonial present.

In December 2000 Keola and I pulled into the well-lit suburban

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middle school parking lot in Mililani on the night HKM's charter was up for consideration by the Hawai'i state BOE. It was a forty-five-minute drive from HKM's urban Hawaiian neighborhoods to this middle-class suburb, and as it was a weeknight, no other members of our community were able to attend. When our item came up on the agenda, Keola and I were instructed to sit at a tiny desk with one microphone in front of the board members who sat along the full length of a long table at the front of the room. Over the PA system, someone instructed us to "go ahead and speak."

Our presentation was an exercise in delicate rhetorical maneuvering. On one hand, we had to demonstrate a need for a school like ours, basically telling the board members that they and the Department of Education have been unsuccessful in addressing the needs of Native Hawaiian youth. I briefly discussed the educational status of Native Hawaiian students in the public school system, using safe words like "culturally inappropriate" rather than "racist" or "colonial." There we were, approaching the very agency we were criticizing—in an arena where they clearly had the upper hand—and saying that we could do a better job through a Hawaiian culture–driven program. Keola elaborated on what the actual program would look like, stating our goal of educational self-determination yet also explaining how we would maintain accountability to the board.

As we talked, few of the board members looked directly at us. When we finished our presentation and the board opened its discussion, they spoke only to each other. Instead of engaging with our proposed curriculum or governance structure, they debated whether they had the authority to grant our charter. After twenty minutes of contemplating their own authority, they exercised it and granted us the first charter to a start-up school on O'ahu. Keola and I spontaneously embraced each other in relief, elation, and hopefulness. It felt a joyous moment, a moment of victory. Still, I felt the board members silently watching us in our moment of celebration. By the time we left the meeting, I felt more conscious of how my own words and emotions had been shaped by the relations of force and authority around us.

Later that evening when I returned home, the sheer happiness was tempered by reflection and questioning. Why should a board comprised wholly of settlers be the sole authority to tell us, as Indigenous

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educators, whether we are worthy and capable of schooling our own children? Why does their approval make us so happy? Why should they have the exclusive authority and control of resources such that their approval is required in the first place? As more Hawaiian-focused schools like ours were authorized, would our efforts to create alternatives to the mainstream system absolve the rest of the Department of Education from their responsibilities to Hawaiian youth and other marginalized people? What does it mean to "exercise educational self-determination" in these contexts?

In exploring some of these questions, this book draws on my own participation and observation at HKM over ten years, as well as conversations and more formal interviews with cofounders, teachers, students, and alumni. The book elaborates the ways educators navigate these often competing forces of state accountability, self-determination, and a received sense of kuleana. I posit Hawaiian engagements with schooling and Hawaiian social movements not as homogenous monoliths whose characteristics are dictated by a static political or cultural trajectory but as a discursive field in which individuals, communities, ideas, and practices are deeply genealogically tied while always fertilizing new genealogical connections.

Over the past thirteen years, I have watched and worked alongside committed educators and families tirelessly laboring to grow Hālau Kū Māna and other "New Century" Hawaiian culture–based public charter schools against all odds. I have never ceased being amazed that a people can see so much hope and possibility in institutions that have been forcefully assimilative and deeply inadequate. The story of HKM and Indigenous Hawaiian charter schools that I tell in this book is, like all stories, situated, partial, and unfinished. It is offered with the hope that it will inspire not only further innovation in Indigenous education but also the transformation of the deep structures of settler colonialisms and imperialisms. Will more people—both Indigenous and settler—join together in the coming decades to further transform the educational systems that have marginalized Indigenous people and our knowledges? The lyrics that form the introduction's second epigraph, written by an early group of HKM students, remind us that the coming generations of Native youth will be a force to be reckoned with, one way or another.

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