

DIGITAL ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP AT HARVARD
DASH.HARVARD.EDU

HARVARD LIBRARY


The Merrie Monarch Festival: Hawaiian Cultural Survivance Through Hula Performance

Citation

Kohea, Kadi. 2023. The Merrie Monarch Festival: Hawaiian Cultural Survivance Through Hula Performance. Master's thesis, Harvard University Division of Continuing Education.

Link

https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37377216

Terms of use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material (LAA), as set forth at

https://harvardwiki.atlassian.net/wiki/external/NGY5NDE4ZjgzNTc5NDQzMGIzZWZhMGFlOWI2M2EwYTg

Accessibility

https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/digital-accessibility-policy

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. Submit a story

The Merrie Monarch Festival: Hawaiian Cultural Survivance Through Hula Performance

Kadi Kohea

A Thesis in the Field of Dramatic Arts

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

November 2023

Copyright 2023 Kadi Kohea

Abstract

The Merrie Monarch Festival, an annual event celebrating the cultural traditions of the Native Hawaiian people, has largely been overlooked in academic research despite its great cultural and historical significance. In particular, by providing an opportunity for the expression and celebration of Native Hawaiian culture, the Festival is strongly connected to its survivance, i.e., the Hawaiian Nation's continuity and the sovereignty of Native Hawaiians. The aim of this research was therefore to explore this connection with a particular focus on the Festival's *hula* competition. Employing interviews with *hula* dancers and *hula* instructors, and participant observation, I analyzed the Festival as both a physical and digital space for the expression of Native Hawaiian survivance through the celebration of Native Hawaiian culture, community building, and the sense of belonging and collective identity to which it contributes. Findings included the contribution of familial and communal interactions within the *hālau* (*hula* school), parade, art fair, and *hula* competition to the continuity and strength of the *lāhui* (Hawaiian Nation); the engagement and symbolization of natural elements throughout *hula* performances that attest to Hawaiians' strong connection to the land; the extension of national boundaries into the digital world; and use of the Hawaiian language to create a sovereign space for articulating Hawaiian culture. Thus, this study contributes to scholarship on cultural and performance studies, specifically Hawaiian cultural resistance and survivance, emphasizing the importance of the Merrie Monarch Festival in promoting Hawaiian cultural continuity and sovereignty.

Frontispiece



A dancer from Hālau Hi‘iakainamakalehua performs an ancient hula, “Hanohano Kaua‘i I Ka Mālie,” at the 2022 Merrie Monarch Festival. (Merrie Monarch Festival) Photo courtesy of Cody Yamaguchi.

Dedication

For Scott, who showed me the stars.

For Kairo, who taught me how to reach them.

Acknowledgments

‘A’ohe hana nui ke alu ‘ia.
“No task is too big when done together by all.”
Mary Kawena Pukui

In the academic field, I must mention first and foremost my director and mentor, Ju Yon Kim, Professor of English. I cannot express sufficient gratitude for her patience, wisdom, knowledge, and expertise, which have been invaluable in shaping my research and intellectual growth. I am truly grateful for Professor Kim’s countless hours of reading, reviewing, and providing feedback that unearthed ideas and chiseled away at the material until its essence came to light. Seldom have I had the opportunity to share my ideas and been met with such an open and welcoming reception by someone so enthusiastic about the discoveries to be made. Her guidance has instilled in me a lifelong love for learning and has been the driving force behind my success.

I would also like to express my enduring appreciation and esteem for Richard Martin, a true ally in the pursuit of academic excellence and intellectual exploration. From the inception of this research, Professor Martin has been a joy to work with and someone who approached each meeting with passion and zeal, always eager to hear my latest discoveries while opening my mind to the vibrant world of ethnography. Furthermore, this work is a symphony of effort and vision from the *hula* community, which so generously and graciously shared their deep devotion, ancient wisdom, and profound stewardship of *hula* and Hawai’i’s cultural legacy. Their love for *hula* has

expanded to the pages of this work, culminating in a beautiful fusion of enlightenment and creativity.

Specifically, a precious contributor to this endeavor was *Kumu* Mele Manuel, whose invaluable insights added depth and richness to this already profound undertaking. With open arms and a warm embrace, she immediately invited me to *experience* the beauty of *hula*'s artistry, an invitation she extends to nearly any individual she encounters—many of whom flocked to her *hula* classes completely entranced by her stories, unparalleled wisdom, and masterful dancing. I remain in awe of her ability to nurture and unite a community. Additionally, *Kumu* Mele's *hamauna* (students)—Jessica Kapua Anahu, Uluwehi Makuakane, Hannah Puakea Hendershot, Pua Kalauli Norris, Emma Malulani Tunison, Katie Kalikolehua Mulliken, and Michelle U'ilani Pisano—form a mosaic of talent and wisdom that elevated this research and added a human touch to data points and knowledge acquisition.

I must also express my deepest gratitude to *Kumu* Keano Kaupu, who, as *Kumu* (*hula* instructor) and dancer, embodies the philosophy that "*hula* is life" with raw honesty, vulnerability, and powerful confidence. As a pillar in the *hula* community, he unceasingly instills a reverence for and provides a novel outlook on the stories and perspectives concerning *hula*. Moreover, his life elucidates the extraordinary potential of dance to enact transformative change within individuals and communities alike, which is a principle that permeates this study.

My ongoing appreciation must also be expressed to *Kumu* 'Iliahi Paredes and *Kumu* Haunani Paredes and their students, Mana'olana Conley-Kapoi, Kalamakū Freitas, Faith Kealohapau'ole Paredes, Teva Medeiros, Christopher Freitas, and Jarvis Kalā,

whose interview was a masterclass in balancing familial love and professional expertise. Their infectious laughter during the interview left a lasting impression on me. While their successes are vast and varied both in Hawai'i and abroad, it is their unbreakable bond and shared allegiance to *hula* that served as a muse for the ideas expressed within this paper.

Finally, I offer a very special thank you to my beloved husband—whose constant refrain of "remember your heritage"—encouraged me to revisit my Hawaiian cultural roots and cherish the richness and beauty inherent in the traditions of my ancestors. My heart overflows with gratitude for his unwavering support, which emboldens me to take risks and push beyond my perceived limitations. I am also grateful to my daughter, a lover of dance, whose playful and ingenious movements have breathed new life into my writing and evoked a sense of childlike wonder that is reflected in this work. At one year old, her enthusiasm for life is an endless wellspring of inspiration. I will miss her little hands reaching for my keyboard in a bid to refine this scholarship.

.

Table of Contents

Frontispiece iv

Dedication v

Acknowledgments vi

List of Tables xi

List of Figures xii

Glossary xiii

A Note on Language xiv

Chapter I. Introduction 1

Chapter II. Navigating the Narratives of *Hula* Performance 9

Survivance: Moving Beyond the Authenticity Debate 12

Weaving the Ropes of Resistance: A Hawaiian Theoretical Framework 16

Chapter III. Portraits of a People: An *ʻAe Kai* Approach 20

Sampling Strategy 23

Instrumentation 25

Data Analysis 27

Positionality 28

Indigenous Ways of Knowing 30

Chapter IV. Gathering the Nation: Building Connection and Storytelling Traditions 34

Interpreting *Lāhui* 34

Competition and Community Bonds 42

Hula Family Belonging....45
Survivance Stories....50
Hula Lineage....53
Summary....61
Chapter V. The Gathering Place: A Space for Sovereignty....62
Ea....64
Venue: Creating a Sovereign Place....68
A Spiritual Connection to Place....80
Ethnographic Setting: *Hula* on Sacred Ground....82
Ethnographic Observation One: Coexisting with Nature....84
Ethnographic Observation Two: Movement Is Nature....86
Summary....89
Chapter VI. Conclusion....91
Works Cited....95

List of Tables

Table 1. Sampling in Ethnographic Research. 25

List of Figures

Figure 1. Aho, Single-Cord Principles.....18

Figure 2. Indigenous Research Agenda Model.....31

Figure 3. King David Kalālakaua. 37

Figure 4. Kalākaua's Jubilee.....39

Figure 5. The Edith Kanakaʻole Stadium 69

Figure 6. Hanohano Kīlauea Kū I Ka Laʻi.....83

Glossary

‘Āina	The land
Ali’i	Native leaders; ruling class
‘Auana	Modern *hula*
Ea	Sovereignty, rule, independence; life, air, breath
Hālau hula	*Hula* school
Haumana	Student
Hula	Traditional mimetic dance of the Hawaiian People
Kahiko	Ancient *hula*
Kakou	We
Kalo	Taro
Kanaka Maoli	Native Hawaiian
Kane	Male
Kuleana	Responsibility
Kumu hula	*Hula* instructor
Lāhui	Hawaiian nation, race, tribe, people; to assemble, to gather together
Ohana	Family
Pā hula	*Hula* troupe
Pele	The Hawaiian goddess of fire and volcano
Pono	Harmonious relationships; goodness, uprightness
Wahine	Female

A Note on Language

As a Native Hawaiian student studying Hawaiian culture and *hula* performance, this thesis embraces the inclusion of Hawaiian phrases and words as an integral part of the scholarly narrative. While it is preferred to abstain from italicizing Hawaiian words to promote equitable recognition alongside English and align with broader decolonization efforts within academia, this study acknowledges the significance of italicizing Hawaiian words to aid readers in understanding their deeper meanings. Similar to learning *hula*, where foundational footwork precedes the incorporation of other elements, this study prioritizes grasping the semantic essence of Hawaiian words over their conventional typographical style. It is my hope that this approach bridges Native Hawaiian knowledge with diverse cultures, fostering recognition, understanding, and collaboration.

Additionally, to promote accuracy and respect, it is vital to recognize that Native Hawaiians should not be conflated with Native Americans or considered a label for individuals residing in Hawaii, akin to terms like "Californian." The term Native Hawaiian constitutes a distinct people, *Kānaka Maoli*, of the Hawaiian archipelago and recognizes their nationality. In this thesis, the capitalization of "Indigenous" follows conventions observed by many Indigenous communities worldwide, recognizing their distinct status, contributions, and ongoing struggles. It signifies their cultural, historical, and political significance and their shared connection and belonging to ancestral landscapes.

.

Chapter I.

Introduction

The Merrie Monarch Festival, held annually in Hilo, Hawai'i, is a significant cultural event that brings to life the ancient art of *hula*, a traditional Hawaiian dance form. The festival, established in 1963, honors King David Kalākaua, the last monarch of Hawai'i who reigned from 1874 to 1891 and was affectionately known as the "Merrie Monarch" for his zealous promotion of Hawaiian traditions and love for lavish entertainment (Merrie Monarch Festival, *About King Kalākaua*). The prestigious and world-renowned *hula* competition is central to the festival, showcasing the best *hālau hula* (*hula* schools) from Hawai'i and the continental United States, who compete for prominent recognition for their artistry and expertise in the dance form. Additionally, the week-long festivities encompass Hawaiian cultural demonstrations, art exhibitions, and a grand parade, attracting a global audience of thousands, both in person and through broadcast, to celebrate Hawaiian culture.

Beyond its role as a competition and celebration of Hawaiian dance and traditions, the Merrie Monarch Festival is a potent site of survivance, or cultural survival and resistance for Native Hawaiians to disrupt the historical and ongoing forces of colonization and assimilation. Coined by the Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor, "survivance" *(Manifest Manners 3-4*)—the key analytical tool in this thesis—describes the enduring resilience and vitality of Indigenous cultures and traditions, despite colonization, oppression, and cultural genocide. A defining characteristic of

survivance is its active "sense of native presence and actuality" that counters narratives of cultural "absence, nihility, and victimry" imposed by imperial powers (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 85). By actively disseminating their traditions and enabling cultural dialogues through mediums such as performing arts and stories, Indigenous peoples defy cultural decay, confront colonial narratives, safeguard their culture, and underscore their significant contributions to contemporary society.

What is of particular interest in the context of this study is the term's references to the manifold ways in which Indigenous communities are not passive victims or inheritors of cultural ruins but become active agents in refashioning their culture and determining their futures (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 85). Highlighting the agency of Hawaiians in shaping their own culture is crucial in scholarly inquiry, particularly in contrast to the prevailing focus on the external control and commodification of Hawaiian cultural practices. For instance, scholars have frequently emphasized the potential "cheapening" (Trask, *Lovely Hula Hands* 23) of Hawaiian culture attributed to *hula* performances staged within the tourism industry. This stems from concerns about the dance form's loss of authenticity, cultural misrepresentation, and perpetuation of superficial stereotypes (Dolim).

These studies, although productive in uncovering power dynamics (Kapp 83) and the influence of globalization on Hawaiian culture (Stillman *Globalizing Hula 57*), tend to undermine the proactive efforts, resilience, and cultural expressions demonstrated by the Hawaiian community through their traditions and practices. Scholar Sharon Rowe describes that the Hawaiian practice of *hula* is not a "passive surface onto which society inscribes its political and social ideologies" (31); rather, dance is a medium for

participants to express and trace the intricate negotiations of culture. Hence, *hula* is more than mere entertainment that can be easily exploited. The dance is a prominent cultural expression, and its repertoires combine movement, song, and storytelling to convey the Hawaiian people's history, myths, genealogies, and values (Galla et al. 1).

The Merry Monarch Festival, as both a tourist attraction and a distinguished cultural platform committed to the "perpetuation, preservation, and promotion of the art of *hula*" (*History of the Festival*), presents a distinct opportunity to reconceptualize performance as a manifestation of survivance, where Hawaiians are actively engaging in and forming their cultural dialogue and preservation. This phenomenon has been examined by scholars in other settings, where Hawaiians have employed *hula* to protest political injustice and advocate for land rights (Trask, *From a Native Daughter 76-78),* confront cultural appropriation, challenge systemic inequalities, and preserve culture (Stillman, *Hawaiian Hula Competitions*). These studies have been valuable in understanding Hawaiian's active role in the perpetuation of their culture; however, their direct application in the context of the Merrie Monarch Festival remains relatively unexplored.

Given this premise, the inquiry arises: In what ways does the Merrie Monarch Festival, particularly the *hula* competition, facilitate Hawaiian survivance by challenging colonial narratives, transmitting cultural practices, and reinforcing the continuity of Hawaiian traditions, identity, sovereignty, and agency? Moreover, what can we infer about the cultural relevance of Hawaiian traditions in modern society based on the festival's popularity, which encompasses both in-person attendance and engagement through digital platforms, as well as the diverse demographics it attracts, including people

of different ages, races, genders, and geographical locations? This thesis seeks to demonstrate that the Merrie Monarch Festival has a substantive cultural resonance with its participants and audiences that surpasses what critics have often presumed is possible in the performing arts.

Drawing on Vizenor's understanding of survivance as an "active presence" (*Native Liberty* 1) and the sharing of traditions and stories, and building on scholar Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua's insights into Hawaiian resistance with the principles of *lāhui* (collective identity and self-definition) and *ea* (sovereignty and leadership) ("Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance" 2), I argue that the Merrie Monarch Festival–encompassing the *hula* competition, parade, arts fair, and the participating *hula* instructors and dancers in the festival–have an inherent potential to serve as a survivance site for Native Hawaiians. Because the festival cultivates community bonds, the exchange of native stories and *hula* repertoires, and a deep connection to the land, it provides Native Hawaiians with a platform to validate the ongoing presence of the Hawaiian Nation and assert their sovereignty through the art of *hula* performance.

Crucial to this investigation is adopting a decolonizing perspective guided by Linda Tuiwai Smith's work on Indigenous methodologies. By challenging dominant narratives, centering Indigenous voices and knowledge, and empowering communities to assert their agency, this approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the festival's cultural significance (Smith). Moreover, through qualitative ethnographic methods—such as observation of the Merrie Monarch Festival broadcast, in-depth interviews, participant observation of *hula,* and analysis of secondary sources—this thesis aims to not only illuminate how the festival serves as a site of survivance, but also why

and how *hula* dancer's engagement in the festival substantiates the importance of dance performance on perpetuating Hawaiian culture.

The Merrie Monarch Festival offers a compelling opportunity for observing survivance, as it transmits cultural knowledge and embodies the vibrant living tradition of *hula*, acknowledging the dance form's capacity to preserve ancient cultural roots while remaining relevant in the present (Scheffler 290). The origins of *hula* have been traced back to Hawaiian mythology, attributing its creation to Laka, the goddess of *hula* (Emerson 23). The dance was deeply intertwined with religious and spiritual practices, serving as a medium to honor gods, goddesses, and chiefs, establishing connections between the divine, rulers, and the people (Emerson 23). Under the guidance of expert *hula* teachers, known as *Kumu Hula*, dancers were trained at specialized schools called *hālau hula* (Kaeppler, "Acculturation in Hawaiian Dance" 38). Men and women learned a variety of *hula* repertoires, including standing or seated *hula,* intricate hand gestures, footwork, and hip movements synchronized with the rhythm of music and chanting (Kaeppler, "Acculturation in Hawaiian Dance" 40). The festival continues to showcase the transmission of cultural knowledge and *hula* repertoires from *Kumu* to students in their *hālau,* and to a global audience.

This study examines the relationship between the sharing of ancient knowledge and *hula* repertoires and cultural preservation at the festival. The research also explores how ancient knowledge is integrated into new and contemporary dance forms demonstrating cultural continuity. Adrienne Kaeppler refers to this process as "borrowing systems" ("Recycling Tradition" 294), in which dancers rediscover old dance movements and meanings and use it to create "contemporary traditional" ("Recycling Tradition" 294)

dances. It is evident that after more than two centuries of American colonization and tourism in Hawai'i, *hula* remains a living tradition and has evolved drastically from its pre-contact religious origins to its current iterations (Mead 3-5). Consequently, two distinct styles of *hula* can be observed at the festival: *kahiko* (ancient) and ‘*auana* (modern).

The former style, *kahiko*, is characterized by traditional instruments, such as the *pahu* (drum) and *ipu* (gourd), and the use of *oli* (chants) rooted in ancient Hawaiian oral traditions (Stillman, "The Hawaiian Hula and Legacies" 224). The latter, *‘auana*, arose as a modern adaptation of *hula* incorporating Western instruments and musical styles, such as the *ukulele* (small four-stringed guitar), and guitar, and features more contemporary themes (Stillman, "The Hawaiian Hula and Legacies" 224). Both styles are presented by competing *hālau* at the Merrie Monarch *hula* competition, with one night dedicated to each genre. Observing the interplay between *kahiko* and *‘auana* styles of *hula* reveals how the festival synthesizes ancestral customs with modernity for the continuity of Hawaiian culture. The central motif of blending ancient and modern elements extends to the historical influences that shape the festival. This includes the profound homage to King David Kalākaua, whose contributions to *hula* and the Hawaiian Nation in the late 1800s are celebrated during the event. This study will analyze how Kalākaua's efforts in preserving Hawaiian culture and the nation during his reign are upheld at the festival as a form of strength and sovereignty in the present.

Additionally, the festival also offers a distinct context for researching survivance, as it brings together a concentrated gathering of *hula* practitioners, experts, and enthusiasts. The 2022 *hula* competition featured eighteen participating *hālau*, assessed by

a panel of seven expert judges, and was viewed by a global audience. This study delves into the intricate dynamics of how these human interactions contribute to the shaping of collective identity, drive collective action, and foster lasting community bonds. In particular, the observations of the festival in this research take place through broadcast.

Despite the potential loss of intimacy with live performances, the broadcast has a compelling advantage in understanding the positioning of the festival and Hawaiian culture within the broader global context. The digital extension of the festival not only connects to a larger audience but creates a virtual space where Hawaiians can reinforce their cultural identity, exercise autonomy, challenge stereotypes, and fortify their sovereignty. This is explored by analyzing the digital content produced and shared during the festival, such as the commercials, commentary, and technological infrastructures, which impact the cultural narratives being shared.

To ensure the interpretations of the festival observations are accurate, this research incorporates the experiences of participating *hula* dancers and their *Kumu* in the Merrie Monarch *hula* competition. These firsthand accounts amplify the voices that are integral to performing arts and the ongoing dialogue on Hawaiian survivance, and offer rich, detailed descriptions of how *hula* performance and Hawaiian traditions have remained a staple in contemporary times. *Hula* is adopted by dancers from multicultural and multiethnic backgrounds, creating a complex space of inquiry to assert collective identity and exercise cultural agency (Desmond). Exploring that relationship is integral to this research.

Additionally, participating in a *hula* provides experiential engagement and access to cultural knowledge. Through direct involvement in the practice, this research aims to

develop a deeper appreciation for the cultural values, beliefs, and Hawaiian perspectives embedded within the art form. This experience builds upon the observations and interviews, adding a more intimate and nuanced understanding of the cultural context being studied.

Understanding the diverse ways the festival facilitates survivance is a complex and ongoing process. Still, current scholarship on performance and cultural studies may significantly benefit from an ethnographic study describing the phenomenon and its implications. Particularly, the festival occupies an understudied position within the realm of Hawaiian cultural survivance, making it an intriguing subject of investigation that has garnered limited scholarly attention. In illuminating how the Merrie Monarch Festival contributes to the survivance of Hawaiian culture, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge, providing valuable insights into its cultural, dance, and identity-related dimensions that dismantle colonial narratives and assert cultural autonomy and agency.

Chapter II.

Navigating the Narratives of *Hula* Performance

Hula performance is a subject of extensive scholarly examination, with two prevailing perspectives that often shape the discourse: *hula* as a commodity and *hula* as a means of cultural preservation. The commodification of *hula* performance has primarily occurred through the tourism industry and its representations in the media (Dolim). *Hula* is presented as a packaged, sellable product, often in a simplified and exoticized form, to appeal to a broader audience. Many performances are staged for entertainment purposes at hotels, restaurants, malls, airports, and cultural centers, offering a narration of Hawaiian culture and identity.

Cultural identity, is a dynamic construct, and is intimately tied to personal identity, shaped by individual experiences within the context of a community's beliefs, values, behaviors, and norms (Wilson). For Native Hawaiians, the commodification of *hula* is a potent force that alters cultural identity and traditions by imposing foreign norms and values, often attempting to suppress or erase traditional cultural practices (McKinley and Smith 4). One such example is the "*hula* girl" (Dolim 1) depiction, which has been widely portrayed in movies, television, imagery, and popular music.

The contemporary Native Hawaiian stereotype—a hip-swaying exotic *hula* dancer in a coconut shell bra and cellophane skirt—is rooted in the romantic images of the late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century colonial culture. In 1776, artist John Webber was appointed the official draughtsman for Captain James Cook's third and final expedition to the Hawaiian Islands. During his tenure, Webber illustrated the first *hula* dancer to ever be pictured. Drew Kapp suggests that these initial images likely supported hierarchical

ideologies, perpetuating the belief that Westerners were superior to Hawaiians; therefore, the West could take possession of Hawaiian land, culture, and people (83). Scholar Adria Imada argues that the commodification and popularization of *hula* performance, often racialized, sexualized, and exoticized, was a key component in the colonization of Hawai'i, reinforcing colonial power dynamics in Europe and the United States ("Transnational Hula as Colonial Culture" 149). Similar artwork of *hula* performances continues to articulate and influence prevailing perspectives of Hawaiian identity by establishing a sense of ownership of Hawaiian culture and people.

Scholar Rona Tamiko Halualani calls this process the "legacy of identity" (xxv), where Hawaiian identity is continually conveyed and reproduced through these historical events by robust Western structures. Due to the numerous forms of representation and commodification of *hula* performances, substantial criticism has been raised on the authenticity of *hula* exhibitions. Celia Lury, sharing a commonly held perspective among scholars, defines authenticity as encompassing a yearning for cultures that have remained "untouched by the process of commodification" (179). Hence, many academic experts view commodification as a negative phenomenon and have adopted a disapproving attitude toward it. They often consider the act of commodifying to be synonymous with the devaluation and degradation of cultures, implying that once a cultural entity has been transformed into a commodity, it has suffered a significant loss of value and integrity (Jackson 95).

For instance, Hawaiian academic Haunani Kay-Trask asserts that Hawaiians who entertain tourists with *hula* performances prostitute their culture and subject themselves to exploitation ("Lovely Hula Hands" 27). Trask also contends that *hula*, as a tourist

product, is inauthentic. Although these perspectives have stimulated decolonization efforts, they also illustrate *hula* dancers as passive victims who serve as unwitting pawns in the tourist industry's grip. Contrary to Trask's posit of touristic *hula* performance as depreciated culture consumed by the "pimp" ("Lovely Hula Hands" 25) hegemony, the Merrie Monarch reveals that despite the commodification and misrepresentation of their culture and identity, Hawaiian cultural value persists, and Hawaiians are actively engaged in making cultural decisions.

Scholar Jane Desmond observed that there is an overlap between the practice of *hula* in a tourist context and *hula* outside of the tourist sphere (84). The Merry Monarch Festival operates in this in-between space, balancing tourism and cultural preservation. The festival's website describes its active efforts as "tapping into the burgeoning tourist industry" (*History of the Festival*), bringing diverse spectators and participants together to perpetuate Hawaiian history, traditions, and cultural beliefs. Thus, in survivance, instead of Indigenous cultures defaulting to victimization, Native communities take control of their narrative while rejecting assimilation through their living arts, traditions, and cultural practices. Vizenor emphasizes, "Survival is a response; survivance is a standpoint, a worldview, and a presence" (*Manifest Manners* 93).

This study moves beyond existing studies that have examined the historical, cultural, and political aspects of *hula* in the tourist context. Instead, this research focuses on the proactive engagement of Hawaiians in the preservation and continuity of their cultural heritage. The following section will delve further into an important debate surrounding cultural authenticity in *hula* performance and highlight scholarly discourses on the cultural preservation aspects of the dance form.

Survivance: Moving Beyond the Authenticity Debate

As introduced earlier, the debate on the authenticity of *hula* and its role in shaping Hawaiian identity is a recurring theme in the literature. However, some scholars have focused on how *hula* performances promote cultural preservation. Amy Stillman attributes the successful revitalization of Hawaiian history in the late twentieth century to *hula*, which she termed a "resurrecting of archival poetic repertoires that re-membered the archive back onto and through the bodies of dancers" ("The Hawaiian Hula and Legacies of " 221–22). This suggests that *hula* dancers acted as living archives, embodying and preserving traditional Hawaiian culture through their movements of *hula* dancing (Stillman, "The Hawaiian Hula and Legacies").

Complementing Stillman, Adrienne Kaeppler emphasizes how dancers return to ancient choreography, history, and meaning to create contemporary performance art. This process has kept the Hawaiian culture alive, while also allowing it to evolve ("Recycling Tradition" 294). This "recycling" (Kaeppler, "Recycling Tradition" 294) of old traditions builds upon Stillman's idea of *hula* as a means for "resurrecting" ("The Hawaiian Hula and Legacies of " 221) history while also highlighting an important function of *hula*—reinterpreting something from the past. Thus, both Stillman and Kaeppler argue that *hula* provides a strong connection to Hawai'i's precolonial history. However, whereas Stillman and Kaeppler highlight *hula*'s role in preserving Hawaiians' ancient history and identity, previous scholars have not always shared this viewpoint.

Some scholars, like Keesing have challenged the traditional narrative of *hula* as an ancient practice, suggesting instead that it was "invented" (20) to assert cultural identity in response to colonialism. In an important debate involving Jocelyn Linnekin

and Haunani-Kay Trask, Keesing and Linnekin argued Hawaiian cultural traditions, including many contemporary forms of *hula* dancing, were merely a product of "mythmaking" (Keesing 20) stemming from an idealization of precolonial society. Unlike Stillman and Kaeppler, who advocate for revival and recycling of cultural elements based on what is known of past Hawaiian traditions, Keesing asserts that Hawaiians invented an imaginary past due to alienation resulting from colonialism. In support of Keesing's ideas, Linnekin highlights that tradition is fluid and "may be situationally constructed" (242).

In response, Native Hawaiian scholar Trask criticizes Keesing for neglecting critical resources from Hawaiians, instead gathering his information from the "mammoth tourist industry" ("Natives and Anthropologists" 161) that advertises Hawaiian culture, *hula*, and history. Trask accuses him of becoming a part of the colonization process.[1] Specifically, Trask states Keesing has become "part of the colonizing horde" who "seek to take away from us the power to define who and what we are, and how we should behave politically and culturally" ("Natives and Anthropologists" 162). What is important in the context of this thesis is that Trask sees Keesing's conclusions as a means to diminish Native Hawaiian cultural identity ("Natives and Anthropologists" 159).

The debate of authenticity, while unresolved, is central to discussions on *hula* and the cultural identity of Native Hawaiians. Keesing uses the word "reinvented" (23) to describe modern traditions that differ from ancient ones. This is not really all that

---

[1] Two recurring themes appear in Trask's discussions on *hula* and cultural identity under colonization—locating the authenticity of traditional Hawaiian cultural practices and determining what is credible and trustworthy research in discussions on Hawaiian culture, people, and traditions. In this way, Trask shifts the focus from inauthenticity in cultural practices to inauthenticity in research, both powerful concerns in contemporary scholarship (Trask, "Natives and Anthropologists," 160-61).

different from Stillman's definition of "resurrecting" ("The Hawaiian Hula and Legacies of Institutionalization" 230) of traditions or Kaeppler's "recycling" ("Recycling Tradition" 239) history. Moving beyond the debate on authenticity, this study focuses on the concept of survivance, coined by Gerald Vizenor, to emphasize the endurance and creativity of Indigenous cultures.

By examining the Merrie Monarch Festival and *hula* performance through the lens of survivance, this study offers a fresh perspective on the ongoing survival and vitality of Hawaiian culture. Rather than making value judgments or elevating traditional practices as inherently superior, this research seeks to understand the significance of *hula* performance as a tool for cultural expression and resistance. This approach seeks to acknowledge and embrace the complexities and contradictions of *hula* performance and its role in shaping and expressing cultural identity under the influence of colonization.

Scholar Adria Imada—an important source of inspiration for this thesis—made a groundbreaking observation by looking beyond the ideas of authenticity. Her book *Aloha America*: *Hula Circuits Through the U.S. Empire*, posits that *hula* practitioners negotiate the commodification of their bodies" (376), meaning dancers were engaged in their cultural dialogue, exchanging ideas, knowledge, and understanding with a growing audience. Imada contends that an overemphasis on the authenticity of *hula* performances may detract from understanding its current cultural meanings (*Aloha America* 16–17).

Additionally, seeking authenticity oversimplifies the dance forms richness and complexity, and its role in fostering cultural continuity, resilience, and survivance. It may also inadvertently portray Hawaiians as passive victims in a pre-determined historical narrative, thus undermining their agency in shaping their cultural traditions. Imada

proposes viewing *hula* performers as cultural brokers who actively negotiate their identity amidst colonization and commodification (*Aloha America*). These performers are not merely "objects of abuse operating under false consciousness" (*Aloha America* 17), but active agents making their own decisions regarding their cultural identity and survivance. This perspective invites a redefinition of *hula* performance, moving beyond the restrictive authenticity paradigm tied to pre-Western contact traditions.

My research builds upon Imada's exploration of *hula* performance, moving beyond the notion of "authenticity" to explore how the Merrie Monarch Festival relates and reproduces as well as defies or rejects colonial representations. Additionally, this research adds to Stillman and Kaeppler's work on *hula* performance as cultural preservation and continuity, however, applied in a new space of the Merrie Monarch Festival. As briefly mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, survivance encapsulates the persistence and resistance of Indigenous peoples in the face of colonialism and oppression (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 1). This concept challenges conventional Western frameworks that often depict Indigenous peoples as powerless bystanders and submissive recipients. Survivance provides a unique lens to examine the Merrie Monarch Festival, prioritizing Indigenous perspectives and worldviews. It highlights Native Hawaiians as agents of change and resilient responders to colonialism. Additionally, it promotes collaborative and ethical research practices that respect Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty (Smith).

Despite its importance, the Merrie Monarch Festival has received little attention in existing research and has often been marginalized within larger works, including in Imada's exhaustively researched book. This study seeks to address this gap by

incorporating the perspectives of *hula* dancers, offering rich, thick,[2] detailed descriptions of the festival and its role in Hawaiian tradition and cultural identity. Through in-depth interviews, this study delves into the desires and motivations underlying the survivance of the Native Hawaiian culture, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of cultural identity and representation within the *hula* community. This approach also unpacks the role of individual agency in (re-)defining cultural traditions.

Weaving the Ropes of Resistance: A Hawaiian Theoretical Framework

The introduction of Western ideologies has often invalidated and overlooked Indigenous epistemologies, such as the Native Hawaiian's ways of conceptualizing knowledge and identity (Gegeo 492). Scholars Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Marie Battiste note that the dominance of Western methods in academia—which are viewed as the only legitimate forms of knowledge production—, has led to a disconnect between research and the Indigenous communities being studied. Consequently, Native Hawaiians are still closely studied akin to how a scientist examines an insect: "The ones doing the looking are giving themselves the power to define (Fox 11). This power imbalance leads to little benefit for Native Hawaiians as a Western understanding is imposed on them.

This study, however, is committed to a different approach. It aligns with *Hawaiian studies*, rather than the *studies of Hawai'i*. The former prioritizes the

[2]A 'thick description' is a term coined by anthropologist Clifford Geertz and describes providing an in-depth understanding of the symbols, gestures, and meanings embedded in the social and cultural practices of a community. This process involves not just observing what community members do, but also, in contrast, to a 'thin description' that presents a factual record devoid of interpretation, understanding the cultural meaning behind their actions (Geertz 3-10).

survivance of Native Hawaiians as a people by critically engaging with published work by Native Hawaiians to avoid contributing to their marginalization and silencing. In this respect, scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests that Indigenous peoples should have the opportunity, through research, to present their historical positions and articulate their versions of their stories (Smith). This approach disrupts the traditional power dynamic between the researcher and the researched, allowing for mutually beneficial knowledge sharing (Smith). It also recognizes and respects Indigenous knowledge systems, epistemologies, and methodologies, which seek to ensure that research can be conducted in a more "respectful, ethical, correct, sympathetic, and beneficial fashion, seen from the point of view of Indigenous peoples" (Porsanger 107–108). This study incorporates the principles outlined by Smith, Battiste, and Porsanger, by maintaining the verbatim quotes and perspectives of *hula* practitioners and being attuned to the legacies of historical oppression and their potential impact on Hawaiian cultural practices.

The research methodology developed by Haunani-Kay Trask, known as the "Ropes of Resistance," is pivotal to this study. This approach utilizes four principles (*aho)*: *lāhui* (collective identity and self-definition), *ea* (sovereignty and leadership), *kuleana* (positionality and obligations), and *pono* (harmonious relationships) ("Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance" 2). Woven together, these four principles create an unbreakable "rope of resistance," affording a holistic understanding of Indigenous Hawaiian knowledge and a decolonizing framework that centers Indigenous Hawaiian knowledge and perspectives. Crucially, Goodyear-Kaʻōpua invites new generations of scholars to continue building on this *aho* since more undiscovered principles remain for future scholars ("Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance" 2).



Figure 1. Aho, Single-Cord Principles

This figure illustrates the four "aho" or single-cord principles. Each cord— lāhui (collective identity and self-definition), ea (sovereignty and leadership), kuleana (positionality and obligations), and pono (harmonious relationships, justice, and healing)— are integral to the scholarly exploration and research methodology of Hawaiian studies in today's academic landscape (Haunani-Kay Trask Blog, 2019).

This study gives particular attention to the principles of *lāhui* and *ea*, which aligned closely with the experiences reported by the *hula* practitioners interviewed in this research and were prominent in observations of the Merrie Monarch Festival broadcast. The *lāhui* principle underscores the importance of a unified Native Hawaiian community. This unity is vividly demonstrated during the festival, where people and resources come together to foster a shared sense of belonging through common values, practices, stories, and creative collaborations. Linked to sovereignty and leadership, the principle of *ea* is connected to the performative elements of the natural world that reaffirm the Hawaiian people's place in contemporary Hawaiian society. Festival participants narrate stories that highlight the importance of land stewardship and respect, thereby asserting their leadership and sovereignty through their responsibility for the land. This also extends to

the digital realm, providing a platform for Native Hawaiians to assert their presence as a sovereign nation.

By incorporating the principles of *lāhui* and *ea* into research, this study contributes to the ongoing practice of Native Hawaiian survivance, ensuring the ropes of resistance remain strong and adaptable. Moreover, these principles can empower future generations to build upon the legacy of Hawaiian knowledge and shape their innovative practices for the future. This theoretical framework, therefore, not only guides the research but also aligns with the broader goals of Indigenous scholarship and activism.

Chapter III.

Portraits of a People: An *ʻAe Kai* Approach

In the world of academia, the term "ethnography" has long been used to describe the practice of observing and documenting human behavior and culture. As noted by scholar Deidre Sklar, the term itself holds a powerful meaning, as it literally translates to a "portrait of people" (6). Through this lens, the study of dance becomes a means of exploring and understanding the cultural knowledge and traditions held by a community (Sklar 6). However, to fully capture and contribute to the comprehensive portrait of Native Hawaiian culture and community, it is imperative to go beyond the scope of traditional ethnography and employ Hawaiian epistemologies and worldviews. Hence, both Western and Hawaiian methodologies are implemented in this research, acknowledging the triangulation of meaning, or the multiple perspectives, sources, and knowledge systems (Meyer).

While the use of Western methodologies may be seen as aligned with a colonizing agenda, scholar Lina Tuhiwai Smith emphasizes that the decolonization of academia does not necessitate a complete rejection of Western theory (Smith). Instead, it provides an opportunity for Indigenous peoples to actively engage in dialogue and reclaim agency in shaping their own resistance efforts (Smith). The Hawaiian concept of *ʻae kai* metaphorically illustrates this relationship. *ʻAe kai* refers to the dynamic and in-between space where the land and sea converge, representing a meeting point of two distinct elements (Tamaira 171). It is a liminal space, as described by Greg Dening, characterized by its unresolved nature and potential for transformation (1). This expanded understanding of *ʻae kai* emphasizes its significance as a space of crossings, where

boundaries blur and new possibilities emerge. In the context of this study, ‘*ae kai* brings together ethnography and Hawaiian epistemology to explore and contribute to a comprehensive portrait that captures the richness of the Merrie Monarch Festival and Native Hawaiian culture.

To provide a clear structure, this research will first outline the ethnographic process and subsequently incorporate Indigenous methodology, presenting both approaches as integral components of the study. The three ethnographic methods of data collection employed—observation, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, which comprise methodological triangulation (Schensul and LeCompte 304), served to comprehensively explore the significance of the Merrie Monarch Festival as a site of survivance. With each method employed, there was a focus on incorporating the beliefs and values held by the Native Hawaiian community (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, “Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance”).

One such approach was the utilization of conversational interviews, colloquially known as “talk story” where the exchange of information occurs through unstructured dialogue and storytelling (Kaholokula et al.). In addition, participant observation was employed as a means of learning, where an immersive approach to understanding the *hula* dance was utilized. Through these culturally appropriate methods, the study aimed to uphold the community’s oral tradition, promote relationship-building, and prioritize trustworthiness and ethical research practices.

The first method involved observing the Merrie Monarch Festival broadcast, which features a premier *hula* showcase held for three consecutive nights in Hilo, Hawai’i. Through this qualitative inquiry, social patterns were investigated across three

categories of *hula* competitions: Miss Aloha *Hula*, *hula kahiko* (ancient *hula*), and *hula ʻauana* (modern *hula*). While attending the festival in person was not possible, notations were made, and each night was digitally recorded for reference. Importantly, the broadcast featured commercials and interviews with competitors, thus providing valuable insights into Hawaiian traditions and identity.

The second method consisted of conducting in-depth interviews (lasting approximately 30-45 minutes) with *hula* dancers from traditional *hālau* (*hula* schools) who performed at the festival. Participants were identified through the festival's website list of the *hālau* along with their *Kumu* (teacher), and interviews were conducted via Zoom, a videoconferencing platform, and recorded for data collection. Before carrying out the interviews, appropriate Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was secured to protect participants' personal information and receive their permission to share the interview findings presented in this study, including personal identification by using their names and the names of their *hālau.* To maintain confidentiality, a pseudonym was assigned to one interviewee who chose not to be identified, and this pseudonym is consistently used throughout the thesis. These interviews aimed to explore undefined cultural domains (Schensul and LeCompte 200) and gain insight into how *hula* dancers understand and engage with the creative dance form, as their perceptions and contributions are crucial to promoting survivance at the festival.

The third ethnographic method involved the researcher's participant observation of *hula* practice with *Kumu* Mele's *hālau* (*hula* school) in Volcano, Hawai'i. Since the focus of this research was Native Hawaiian cultural survivance, it was crucial to participate in Native Hawaiian ways of understanding and experiencing *hula* (Goodyear-

Ka‘ōpua, “Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance”) to gain a profound comprehension of the cultural practice of *hula* that would have been unattainable solely through passive observation or scholarly investigation. Through methodological triangulation of data sourcing described above, this study sought to achieve a more holistic perspective of the Merrie Monarch Festival as a site of survivance. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, utilizing an inductive approach that allows themes to emerge from the data and make the project more manageable (Coffey 84). The remainder of this chapter provides further details of the research process discussing sampling strategy, data collection and analysis, research instruments, as well as the limitations and benefits of using an ethnographic approach.

Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy employed in this qualitative inquiry used criterion-based selection to identify individuals who possessed traits relevant to the study’s main inquiries (Schensul and LeCompte 410). *Hula* practitioners who participated in the Merrie Monarch *hula* competition in April 2022 were key informants due to their deep knowledge and experience of *hula* dance. [3] Thirteen students and five *Kumu Hula* (*hula* instructors) from four different *hālau* were selected for interviews. Some participants had been dancing the *hula* for most of their lives and had participated in the festival multiple

[3] The Merrie Monarch Festival is an invitation-only competition, and although many dancers around Hawaii and the world apply, only a few with an extensive *hula* background and experience are invited to participate.

time, whereas others were fairly new to *hula* but had demonstrated a strong commitment and high level of expertise to its practice.

Specific attention was given to the *Kumu hula* because of their influence in determining the presentation of dance at the *hula* competition and their students' experiences related to the dance. The *Kumu* is also considered the gatekeeper to Hawaiian cultural knowledge embedded within the *hula*, and is highly respected in the *hula* community, and essential to this study. As experts, they have undergone rigorous training to achieve the honor of having their own *hālau*, having spent years training under their own *Kumu* to ensure that *hula* repertoires are passed down from generation to generation. To identify additional participants, the study also utilized chain referral selection, known as snowball sampling (Schensul and LeCompte 417).

Table 1 below shows the *hula* instructors and their students who participated in this study. All the *hula* instructors had at least 30 years of dancing experience, and all the interviewees had participated in the Merrie Monarch Festival of 2022, and previous years. The number of students who participated in my study ranged from 0 to 7. The sample is believed to accurately represent *hula* dancers' experiences at the Merrie Monarch Festival.

Table 1. Sampling in Ethnographic Research.

Hālau (*hula* school)	Merrie Monarch Festival	Kumu (teacher)	Years of *hula* experience	Student participants
Hālau Hula Ke ‘Olu Makani O Mauna Loa	Yes	1	30+	7
Hālau Hi‘iakainamakalehua	Yes	1	30+	0
Hālua Hawai’i	Yes	1	30+	0
Hālau Kekuaokala'au'ala'iliahi	Yes	2	30+	6

Study participants, and relevant characteristics.

It is acknowledged that the small sample size of thirteen *hula* dancers and five *Kumu Hula* may limit the generalizability of the findings. Particularly since *hula* and cultural knowledge are not homogenous across all instructors *and hālau* but are unique to each. Therefore each *hālau* teaches knowledge and dances that have been passed down through generations and so constitute its own distinct *hula* lineage. However, this limitation does not significantly undermine the reliability of this research since the study aimed to explore undefined cultural domains, and the findings are useful for researchers and practitioners interested in understanding the significance of the Merrie Monarch Festival on cultural survivance.

Instrumentation

The primary aim of this research was to gather detailed personal stories from participants, using Indigenous research methodology employed in a qualitative inquiry design following (Kovach 40). As the researcher, I played a crucial role in data collection (Schensul and LeCompte 48). To ensure a rigorous and systematic approach to data

gathering, a protocol was developed to create field texts to document information obtained in interviews and through observations.

Firstly, observations were made by viewing the festival broadcast online, which was recorded and analyzed to identify common themes throughout the festival presentation. On the one hand, watching the festival online allowed me to observe the festival at my own pace, enabling me to revisit and analyze the footage more comprehensively. The digital context of the festival was also important; commercial breaks and interviews shown during the production offered insights into how the festival was communicated to an audience. On the other hand, some festival-related materials were not available for online viewers. Furthermore, not physically attending the festival potentially limited my ability to capture the full scope of the festival's atmosphere and bodily interactions among festival-goers—this study recognizes this limitation.

Secondly, interviews with participants were conducted through conversational storytelling (Kovach 40), establishing continuity between participants' experiences and the festival production data. Interview procedures and questions with which to conduct my research were developed and based on Schensul and LeCompte and Coffey, with input from Goodyear-Kaʻōpua and Linda Tuiwai Smith's expertise when working within Indigenous communities. The authorized Informed Consent form from the IRB, provided by Harvard Extension School, was utilized verbatim.[4] This includes receiving permission to use interview participants' names in this study (with the exception of one interview,

[4] Throughout this thesis pseudonyms are used for one interviewee who requested to conceal their identity as a research participant. All other participants in this study permitted their names to be used in this study.

who was assigned a pseudonym as discussed earlier) and properly discarding their information after the research as a step to protect their identity.

Lastly, participant observation of *hula* dancing included my own active participation in a two-hour *hula* class in Volcano, Hawai'i, at the Volcano Art Center. The class was led by *Kumu* Mele Manuel, and this research method was meant to supplement the information gathered through interviews and observations of the festival. Additionally, this method incorporates understanding and learning from Native Hawaiian's perspective and illuminates how *hula* dancers understood and engaged with dance and the Merrie Monarch Festival and how they engaged in survivance. Of course, some interviews and fieldwork observations may have benefitted from more time to uncover additional details and meanings. Doing ethnographic work in a short time frame as dictated by a postgraduate program unavoidably imposed some methodological constraints, such as time.

Data Analysis

The present study incorporated various qualitative data sources, including field notes, interview transcripts, interview notes, and personal journal reflections. This diverse set of data sources provided an in-depth analysis and developed a nuanced understanding of the research topic. As recommended by (Schensul and LeCompte 459) to ensure the integrity of the study, the analysis took an objective approach anticipating results diverging from initial expectations. For example, the analysis uncovered the notion that community and belonging are necessary for *hula* performance, which was unexpected.

Through the interviews with *hula* dancers and instructors, it became clear that *hula* is not just an individual pursuit but a collective effort that requires a sense of

community and connection. Another unexpected finding was the importance of the connection Hawaiians have to the land, which was highlighted in the digital space, and through my own participation in *hula*. The broadcast of the festival included segments about the land and its significance, which showed how the festival transcends the corporeal performances and serves as a platform to reinforce the connection Hawaiians have to their culture and land. By employing an objective approach, the analysis was able to uncover new insights and unexpected patterns within the data, thus enhancing the credibility and validity of the findings.

During the interview phase, a meticulous examination of field notes and interview transcripts was conducted, with frequent revisiting of the interviews to identify any previously overlooked nuances. I also reviewed field notes and replayed recordings for the observational research to gather the necessary data (Coffey 47). Evidently, data-related limitations include the potential risk of bias and the incomplete state of data collected during observation and participatory research. This limitation, however, is not unique to this study, as all ethnographic research is prone to the subjective interpretation of data. By using an inductive approach to analyse the data, this study aimed to mitigate the risk of bias and ensure that the themes emerged from primary data.

Positionality

Positionality in ethnographic research refers to the researcher's personal background, experiences, and perspectives that shape their worldview and influence their research. This involves taking stock of

> where the researcher is coming from, [and] concerns ontological assumptions (an individual's beliefs about the nature of social reality and what is knowable about the world), epistemological assumptions (an

> individual's beliefs about the nature of knowledge) and assumptions about human nature and agency (individual's assumptions about the way we interact with our environment and relate to it). (Holmes 1-2)

In the case of my research on the Merrie Monarch Festival, my positionality as a Native Hawaiian woman, who was brought up with "Hawaiian" values, but has resided away from Hawai'i for an extended period, significantly influences my interpretive lens. As a Native Hawaiian without a *hula* background, my connection to the subject matter is both intimate and limited. This introduces potential biases in my analysis but also offers unique insights.

Despite my extended absence from Hawai'i, my understanding of Hawaiian values has been continually nurtured—e.g., by learning from my own family members of cultural beliefs and hearing their stories of losing land, language, and other Hawaiian traditions to the impacts of colonization. As such, my positionality as an insider and an outsider to the Merrie Monarch Festival shapes my approach to the research and the concept of survivance; as discussed, the latter is central to my examination of the festival's role in promoting cultural perseverance and resistance against colonial and oppressive forces.

I am mindful of the power dynamics inherent in the research process, particularly when engaging with other native Hawaiian individuals, communities, and environments with which I am unfamiliar. In carrying out my research, I strive to maintain a critical, humble, and reflexive stance, acknowledging the complexities that my background and perspectives bring to my work. I also prioritize the voices and perspectives of my research participants, which will be discussed further in the next section.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

In the initial stages of this research, to learn about Hawaiian dance and culture, I contacted *nā Kumu hula* (*hula* instructors) who had previously participated with their students in the Merrie Monarch Festival. In response, *Kumu* Keano Kaupu, a renowned *Kumu hula* with an award-winning *hālau* (*hula* school), posed a critical question that emphasized the need to incorporate Indigenous perspectives in research pertaining to their respective communities,

> How could this [research] help my cultural practice or the people of my cultural practice? Recently, I have decided to ask people this question because I realized most of it is for commercial use and our cultural practice does not benefit at all, except it becomes a subject of entertainment or an experiment [*sic*] that rarely benefits those who have given their life to *hula*.

This inquiry revealed the historical and contemporary challenges often surrounding Hawaiian research that has typically been one-sided, wherein Indigenous means of inquiry are often overlooked. Although Western methodological tools can be helpful, they are not the only source to draw from when studying Indigenous people. Given that this study pertained to the Native Hawaiian population, it was essential to attend to the significance of and so incorporate Indigenous research methodology as part of its analytical framework. As mentioned in the previous chapter, traditional Western research methodologies employed in examining Indigenous cultures have been criticized for failing to adequately capture the intricacies and subtleties of Indigenous epistemologies (Smith).

Therefore, incorporating Indigenous methodology in this study sought to foster a culturally sensitive comprehension of Indigenous culture. As Kovach (40) describes, Indigenous research methodology embodies the Indigenous worldview. Furthermore, as

noted by (Smith), Goodyear-Kaʻōpua ("Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance"), and Windchief and Ryan, scholars who have employed this methodology have also sought ways of enhancing the well-being of Indigenous communities. Thus, this study, attuned to the importance of Indigenous research, was designed to contribute to the advancement of Hawaiian epistemologies.

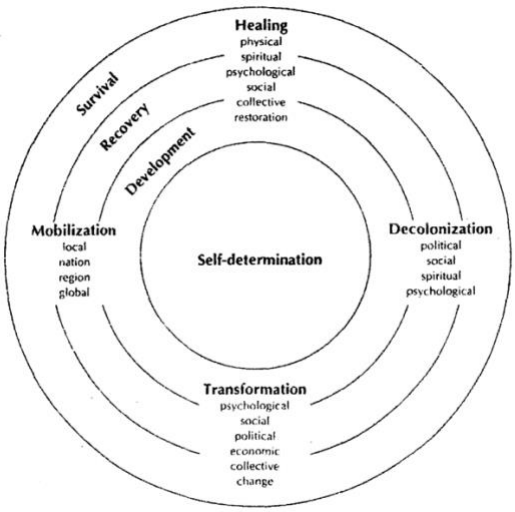


Figure 2. Indigenous Research Agenda Model.

The circular model represents a process of change that requires a flow of inward and outward ideas, actions, and reflections to incorporate in indigenous methodologies (Smith 177).

This research project was committed to respecting, valuing, and incorporating the perspectives of Hawaiian people, including their knowledge systems and cultural practices. Moreover, it sought to align the research with the principles of Hawaiian ways of knowing, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all things, the importance of relationships and community, the recognition of multiple forms of intelligence, and the

centrality of cultural traditions and practices. In this way, the research aimed to honor Hawai'i's Indigenous knowledge systems while contributing to the ongoing revitalization and preservation of Hawaiian culture. One step towards this is implementing Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Indigenous Research Agenda.

The circle encompasses the principles of healing, decolonization, self-determination, and transformation and mobilization (Smith). Healing acknowledges the historical and ongoing traumas experienced by Indigenous communities as a result of colonization. It recognizes the importance of research as a means of addressing and redressing these traumas, promoting healing, and restoring well-being within Indigenous communities (Smith). Decolonization centers on challenging and dismantling colonial systems, structures, and ideologies that have oppressed Indigenous peoples. It seeks to restore Indigenous sovereignty, self-governance, and self-determination, and to reclaim Indigenous knowledge, language, culture, and land (Smith).

Self-determination emphasizes the right of Indigenous peoples to determine their own futures, make decisions that affect their communities, and control their own resources and institutions. It supports the empowerment and agency of Indigenous communities in research processes and outcomes (Smith). Transformation and mobilization highlight the transformative potential of research in effecting positive change and mobilizing Indigenous communities towards social, political, cultural, and economic empowerment. It encourages research that contributes to the resilience, revitalization, and self-sufficiency of Indigenous communities (Smith).

Ultimately, to ensure culturally responsive research, this study followed Smith and Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua's instructions on prioritizing Native Hawaiian

perspectives, engaging in collaborative and community-based methods, and considering the cultural context as shown throughout this chapter. The study aligned with Hawaiian ways of knowing and adopted an Indigenous research approach to contribute to the revitalization and preservation of Hawaiian culture, support the empowerment and well-being of Hawaiian people and communities, and demonstrate respect for Indigenous knowledge systems.

Chapter IV.

Gathering the Nation: Building Connection and Storytelling Traditions

This chapter examines how cultural continuity and storytelling contribute to advancing Hawaiian survivance during the Merrie Monarch Festival within the framework of Vizenor (*Native Liberty* 1). Grounded in Goodyear-Kaʻōpua's understanding of *lāhui* as Hawaiian collective identity and self-definition ("Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance" 2), the analysis explores how the festival fosters a profound sense of togetherness and cultural connection among Native and non-Native Hawaiians while concurrently challenging and disrupting prevailing colonial narratives. It begins by situating the *lāhui* within the festival's contemporary context before examining its components, such as the parade, arts and crafts fair, *hālau* participation, and *hula* performances, emphasizing their contribution to Hawaiian survivance.

Interwoven through the chapter is the continued legacy of King David Kalākaua, the festival's namesake and advocate for the Hawaiian Nation through *hula* performance. Ultimately, the Merrie Monarch Festival represents the rich interconnectedness of these various aspects and embodies the essence of *lāhui*, reinforcing the cultural identity and survivance of the Hawaiian people. Therefore, this chapter is a tribute to the ongoing presence and renewal of Indigenous cultures and their resilience in the face of cultural suppression.

Interpreting *Lāhui*

Similar to many other languages, the Hawaiian language has depth and complexity that defies easy translation into English. Each syllable in Hawaiian is a portal

to a world of cultural significance, creating a labyrinth of meaning. The word *lāhui* is a prime example of this phenomenon, with its multifaceted meanings in Hawaiian culture, which has been translated as "Hawaiian Nation," "people," "tribe," and even "species" (Osorio 31). Each English synonym expresses some portion of the comprehensiveness of the translation of *lāhui*, with "Hawaiian Nation" emphasizing political sovereignty, "people" highlighting the social and demographic features of its members, "tribe" accentuating the genealogical connections to the ancestors, and "species" foregrounding the ecological and spiritual interdependence of the Hawaiian people with the natural world and their deity. Together, these interpretations symbolize centuries of cultural resilience and the continuity of the Hawaiian people through foreign colonization, the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, and the loss of Hawaiian land and cultural resources.

However, the etymology of *lāhui* reveals a rich tapestry of meaning that extends beyond the tenets of the modern Hawaiian language, comprised of two roots: *lā* refers to "day" or "light" (Pukui and Elbert 188), while *hui* represents "the act of coming together" (Pukui and Elbert 86). Therefore, *lāhui* can denote a day dedicated to a "gathering," "assemblage," or the "union of many" (Pukui and Elbert 190). However, by stressing the "light" connotation of *lā*, it can also signify a purposeful gathering, a time for en*light*enment dedicated to reinforcing the identity of the Hawaiian people. My research indicates that "gathering" is a unifying thread in the multifaceted definition of *lāhui,* highlighting the importance of bringing together people, resources, and cultural knowledge to reinforce the survivance of Hawaiian heritage and its legacy for future generations.

Emphasizing the significance of "gathering" in its various forms at the Merrie Monarch Festival reinforces Goodyear-Ka'ōpua's view of *lāhui* as the first strand of the *aho* and a primary component shaping Hawaiian collective identity and self-definition, as noted earlier in this thesis ("Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance" 2). Despite the centrality of the *hula* competition to the Merrie Monarch Festival, the festival's role in strengthening the Hawaiian collective identity and self-definition through shared performance, *hula* repertoires, stories, and the celebration of ancestral traditions takes precedence over competition. As explained by *Kumu* Keano Kaupu in an interview, while competition is important, it is not as valuable as relationships. Instead, he understands the festival as a "catalyst that unites people and connects many Hawaiian cultural practices, even those beyond *hula* dancing."

Accordingly, while the festival's *hula* performance can ostensibly be perceived as competition, a mere spectacle, or a pastime for those dedicated to the dance and its teaching, the Merrie Monarch Festival is indeed a "gathering" of the Hawaiian nation during which *hula* practitioners and cultural advocates strengthen their bonds to ensure the preservation of their heritage. The research findings specifically support the idea that gatherings dedicated to the communal sharing of cultural knowledge, values, and storytelling in a designated gathering place are crucial to preserving and promoting the Hawaiian Nation in a colonized world.

The importance of gatherings of the Hawaiian Nation is not novel. In the late 1800s, King David Kalākaua, who advanced the motto "*Ho'oulu Lāhui,*" which translates as "increase the nation" or "uplift the people," utilized gatherings of Hawaiian traditions, people, knowledge, and history to strengthen Hawaii's political position as a sovereign

nation in the face of colonization. Due to the pressures imposed on Hawaii by the United States for ownership and control of its land, resources, and political destiny, this period was critical for the Hawaiian Nation to assert its political independence and address concerns about sovereignty, self-determination, and collective identity.



Figure 3. King David Kalālakaua.

Sometimes called the Merrie Monarch, King Kalālakaua was the last Monarch of the Hawaiian Kingdom, reigning from February 12, 1874, until his passing in 1891. From the Digital Archives of Hawai'i (https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/item/ark:70111/1CMd).

Scholar John Osorio states that this time's most important and complicated question was, "To whom does the nation belong?" (49). Upon close examination, it is evident that one of the ways King Kalākaua responded to the question of political control by foreign hands was through his transformation of the meaning of *lāhui*. Prior to his intervention, *lāhui* was commonly used to denote the "Hawaiian race" (Osorio 49). However, by conjoining the term "increase" with *lāhui*, the king transcended the term's static ethnic confines, instigating a call to action to grow and expand Hawaiian culture and national presence. Hence, *lāhui* developed beyond describing a group of people into a mandate for their development and increased influence.

This motto inspired public performances of *hula* and cultural demonstrations, as shown in Fig. 3 below. King Kalākaua gathered Native Hawaiians from all the islands to promote the strength of the Hawaiian Nation and cultural pride; these gatherings have since become a rallying point for Hawaiian cultural and political identity. As Noenoe Silva observes, prior to the arrival of foreigners, Hawai'i was not viewed "as a singular entity" or *lāhui* but rather as "the individual islands Hawai'i, Maui, Oahu, and so on" (88). Hence, the *lāhui* came to be recognized during Kalākaua's time and existed within the shared imaginations of Hawaiians, who envisioned themselves as a community united by similarities, such as a common language, culture, and resistance to outsiders and colonial advances (Silva).



Figure 4. Kalākaua's Jubilee.

Hula dancers from Kauai perform at Kalākaua's 49th Birthday, Nov 18, 1885. From the Digital Archives of Hawaii. Photo credit Dr. Eduard Arning. https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/item/ark:70111/1DjJ

Therefore, the Merrie Monarch Festival exemplifies a contemporary manifestation of "increase the nation" by bringing together *hula* dancers from diverse regions, including the Hawaiian Islands and the continental United States. Many of these dancers would have most likely not interacted unless united by this common goal. Despite belonging to different *hālau* (*hula* schools), all interviewees in the study shared a deep awareness of an imminent threat to Hawaiian cultural preservation, and this shared understanding strengthened their dedication to *hula* performance as a means of perpetuating their cultural heritage for present generations and future ones. One of *Kumu* Iliahi Paredes dance students articulates this sentiment:

> I dance for our culture itself because, for so long, we've been fighting this never-ending battle to keep our culture from slipping away from us. So, I feel like we're always trying to perpetuate our culture and make sure it never dies out because if it dies out, we lose our identity as people. What I want people to take away from the Merrie Monarch is that our culture is close and dear to us. And it's really important that a lot of people know about *hula* so that it never slips away from us.

This *hula* dancer of *Kumu* Paredes emphasizes the importance of a wider audience having access to and knowledge of *hula* to prevent cultural erosion while safeguarding the continuity of the Hawaiian culture. Hence, this audience must include non-Hawaiians, whose knowledge of *hula* and the Hawaiian culture also contributes to preserving and promoting Hawaiian culture. In contrast to the objectives of King Kalākaua's era, the festival plays the important role of expanding the *lāhui* beyond the Hawaiian community. Michelle Uilani, another *hula* dancer, shares this feeling, noting,

> I definitely would love to see *hula* all over the world. It would be great as long as it's held sacred and as long as it's done with the right intentions of continuing the Hawaiian culture, and as long as it's done well and with heart, I think that's where it should be no matter who you or where you are from.

In her *hālau*, *Kumu* Mele Manuel stresses the significance of her *hula* dancers' embodiment of the Hawaiian culture, regardless of their "blood ancestry," so her dancers have a "responsibility to carry the culture forward." Hence, Manuel states that the contemporary Hawaiian Nation at the festival and within the *hālau* is supported by those who "respect and live the cultural foundation of *hula* and Hawaiian values" rather than solely by those of Hawaiian descent. Thus, non-Hawaiian participants are integral to nation-building efforts because they share the responsibility of cultural continuity, build bridges of understanding, and confront future challenges, such as balancing cultural preservation with modernization while ensuring that "respect and reverence continue for the Hawaiian culture" (Manuel).

This sentiment is echoed within Kumu Mele's *hula* school, where multi-ethnic dance students often describe themselves as a "rainbow" due to their diverse backgrounds. *Hula* dancer Pua Norris aptly expresses, "I have an array of sisters of different ethnicities and backgrounds. We are all trying to portray the Hawaiian culture and what *hula* means to us individually." The students collectively strive to portray and honor the Hawaiian culture through *hula*, showcasing the inclusive nature of the festival. Thus, individuals of different nationalities convene to engage with and appreciate the significance of *hula*, contributing to the preservation of Hawaiian cultural traditions while embracing modern concepts of diversity and unity.

Additionally, many instructors and dancers use the phrase "Hawaiian at heart" with sensitivity and caution, thus seeking to identify non-Hawaiians who express genuine love and respect for Hawaiian culture and actively engage in learning, promoting, and supporting Hawaiian initiatives. Dancer Uluwehi Makuakane states,

> For me, it's like, if you have the heart and you are going to do it for the right reasons like respect and understand Hawaiian culture, it doesn't matter what blood you have. You're *hula* dancer and Hawaiian at heart. You are Hawaiian because you were perpetuating this cultural practice.

Furthermore, the usage of *lāhui* concerning "gathering" aligns with elements of Native Hawaiian culture and meaning. In the Hawaiian language, *kakou* translates into "gathering," "we," and "all" (*Hawaiian Dictionaries*), so the concept underlying the word reflects the importance of community and unity and the belief that individuals are strongest when deciding and acting collectively. Closely tied to these aspects of Native Hawaiian culture are mutual obligation and responsibility, which entail caring for and supporting one another, with the community's well-being dependent on its members' collective efforts (Kanakaʻole 149).

Kumu Mele Manuel describes how "learning *hula* involves learning how to embrace each other." In this sense, the Merrie Monarch Festival embodies cultural values associated with *kakou*, promoting community and belonging through reciprocal relationships that expand the Hawaiian Nation. As this work progresses, the term *lāhui* specifically refers to the Hawaiian Nation. However, the connotation of *gathering* and Goodyear-Kaʻōpua's concept of collective identity and self-determination complement the literal definition, enabling a robust portrait of the Merrie Monarch Festival's role as a site of survivance.

Competition and Community Bonds

In its nascent stages, the Merrie Monarch Festival was intended to boost the town of Hilo's economy after a devastating tsunami took out Hawai'i's sugar industry in the 1960s. The event featured activities such as a King Kalākaua beard contest, relay races, and a Holokū Ball. However, interest in the festival began to decline after only a few years. *Kumu* Mele Manuel describes, "When the festival started, you couldn't pay people to come and see it. People saw it as just *hula*; there was nothing to see. Tourists didn't even know about it." However, in 1971, eight years after the festival's inception, the Merrie Monarch Festival underwent a significant transformation with the introduction of the *hula* competition. *Kumu* Mele Manuel states, "When the competition came, the festival grew and received more attention." She describes that the attention did not come from tourists but from the gathering of different *hālau* who wanted to "watch, perform, and learn from each other."

While dance competitions can be filled with rivalry and individual success, the festival demonstrates that dance communities often form within these competitive

environments, fostering a sense of support, unity, and a shared heritage among participants. Scholar La Pointe-Crump highlights that the Latin root of compete, *competere*, means "to seek or strive together" (4), stating that "competition does not always prioritize pitting oneself against and at the expense of others" (4). Instead, competition can organize communities, form meaningful relationships, and nurture collective action.

Additionally, the festival embraces a renewed focus on honoring and preserving Hawaiian traditions. The rebranding initiative to perpetuate *hula* and Hawaiian culture has given the community a shared goal. Thus, through their collective efforts, they shape the performance of *hula* and influence the broader cultural continuity of the Hawaiian Nation. For example, the festival establishes explicit eligibility criteria, including age and experience, for participants to compete. Additionally, it establishes judging criteria, objectives, rules, and rewards, which effectively govern the presentation of *hula* and Hawaiian culture. The outcome of the competition, determined through the collective decisions of the judges, serves as a mechanism for rewarding or rejecting specific traditional and innovative performances. Consequently, this process plays a pivotal role in shaping the culture and trajectory of the dance form.

Although dance competitions have been criticized for provoking "issues of authenticity, authority, and control of culture" (Dodds 6), these spaces also stimulates cultural preservation and awareness by bringing people together. As *Kumu* Keano Kaupu states,

> Will we ever get to our culture pre-contact? Probably not. I don't think that's realistic anymore. A lot of our culture is not pristine; we're putting pieces together. I think we're doing a good job at doing so, but I think the only way to move forward is if all the cultural practices, like *hula,* can

> come together and share each other's practices and traditions so that we can know more about our culture. The sense of the knowledge that we can gain from sharing and practicing our culture together is very possible. We are doing this in our community now.

The community also comes together in collective action at the Merrie Monarch Parade, a festival highlight, where locals and tourists flock to witness the procession. The parade is a public demonstration of unity in several ways. For example, community collaboration and planning require members to work towards a shared goal, which can strengthen bonds within the community and create a sense of belonging among participants.

Moreover, by participating in the parade, individuals can actively shape the narrative of their culture and community and represent their cultural identity. Among the displays of local school bands, beauty queens, cowboys, and *hula* dancers, there are cultural symbols such as the Hawaiian flag, images of influential *hula* instructors, activists, and monarchy perpetuating Hawaiian culture, music, and dance. Thus, the parade is a visible and tangible expression of a collective narrative, reinforcing a sense of pride, unity, and cultural continuity within the community.

Additionally, it was observed that family, friends, and visitors attending the parade support those who participate. Often, these relationships are intergenerational, bridging knowledge, experiences, and cultural understanding from one generation to the next. The parade also attracts diverse audiences, including people from outside the community. By showcasing their culture and traditions, the community can foster understanding and appreciation among those who may not share their background. Such an understanding can help break down barriers and create a sense of belonging for all.

Furthermore, the audience from abroad can reconnect to their culture. For instance, as I watched the festival remotely via the internet, I observed that a chat box

was made available for online viewers to share their excitement, ask questions, and provide insight during the broadcast. Despite the diverse range of messages in the chat box from various people, many messages poured in from self-identified Native Hawaiians in the diaspora who expressed seeking a sense of "home." Therefore, due to their physical distance from Hawai'i, the festival broadcast provides the audience with a connection to their cultural roots, a sense of belonging, and an opportunity to re-engage and participate in their culture, *hula*. As a result, they feel the "*aloha*" spirit, enjoy Hawaiian music, and use their native slang. Hence, this gathering reasserts *lāhui* as a strong and enduring aspect of their lives while providing an anchor, particularly for Natives, strengthening their sense of community, even beyond Hawai'i's shores.

Hula Family Belonging

Despite the prominence of the Merrie Monarch Festival, for many of the *hula* dancers interviewed for this research, the purpose of the competition is not about the accolades, trophies, or recognition but the vital connection they have to their *hālau,* community, and ancestors. *Kumu* Iliahi stresses the unsustainability of focusing solely on winning awards at the festival due to the intense competition and slim chances of victory each year. Therefore, by having a meaningful purpose beyond the awards, *hula* practitioners can navigate the rigors of the competition and find lasting fulfillment in perpetuating their culture with their peers. For *Kumu* Iliahi's *hālau,* their purpose includes strengthening their bond with each other and their ancestors while sharing their stories with the community.

According to Pua Norris, a *hula* dancer, "A big part of this competition is making my *hālau* proud; they're my family, and I have a responsibility to share *hula* with my

family and community." Like Pua, many of these dancers view their *hālau* as their *'ohana* (family), feeling a deep *kuleana* (responsibility) to their *Kumu* (*hula* instructor), peers, and ancestors to carry on the traditions and stories. These emotional and cultural connections are the festival's most cherished elements, correlating as the most discussed aspects during the interviews, with many of the *hula* dancers and *Kumu* attributing their success as *hula* dancers to the strength of the familial bonds they feel toward other members of their *hālau*. Moreover, such *hula*-based families are a crucial factor in Native Hawaiian survivance.

Historically, *hula* has been preserved within biological families highly regarding its cultural and historical significance while diligently passing down their ancient knowledge to their successors (Kanaka'ole 153). Despite the arrival of Western influence in the 1700s, the subsequent ban on public *hula* performances in 1830, and a strict licensing system to perform *hula* in the 1850s, some *'ohana* have remained dedicated to maintaining the Hawaiian Nation's *hula*, chants, and legends (Kanaka'ole 153). Thus, the present understanding of Hawaiian cultural practices is largely inflected by the traditions and customs sustained within these families (Kanaka'ole 153).

Today, the preservation of *hula* through the *hālau* (*hula* school) remains a firm foundation of the strength and continuity of *lāhui*. Gathering people into the *hālau* constitutes an act of survivance, creating a strong social network supporting members through familial-like ties. In this regard, scholar Maya L. Kawailanaokeawaiki Saffery states that Native survivance begins on an individual level but cumulates to encompass an entire people:

> One person at a time, one family at a time, one community at a time . . . that is how resurgence is collectivized and raises the consciousness of a

> people so that they are inspired to act and bring about change not only for their survival but also for their survivance. (102)

The *hula* family, comprised of the *hālau,* is the means through which this process operates. Understanding the familial aspect of the *hālau* contributes to a deeper appreciation of the cultural and social significance of the festival, highlighting the interconnectedness of individuals and the collective spirit fostered through *hula* and shared experiences. *Kumu* Mele, who started her *hālau* after recognizing the need for a sense of community in her hometown, exemplifies this experience, extending her *hālau* to anyone who wants to join:

> What we have to offer is a place of belonging. Whether you are of Hawaiian descent or not, you have a place. We tell them all the time, this is your home; you will always be connected to us.

Today, her *hula* studio and dance practices are attended by students and their families alike. *Hula* dancer Uluwehi Makuakane describes, "My husband and kids go to practice with me. We load up our car and drive to *hula*." Like Uluwehi Makuakane, many dancers are mothers who sometimes securely strap their infants to their bodies as they dance at *hula* practice. *Kumu* Mele encourages these experiences between mother and child: "These tiny babies, only a few months old, will not comprehend the tempo, rhythms, or movement immediately, that comes later, but this is how carrying on our traditions start."

Although the festival does not permit children to compete, one intriguing aspect emerging from the interviews was the early awareness and desire dancers had to participate in the Merrie Monarch Festival, underscoring the festival's role in shaping the aspirations and trajectories of young individuals within the *hula* community. Hence, children seek opportunities to dance alongside seasoned dancers and work with a

renowned *Kumu* who has experienced the festival and many other *hula* events. Participation in the festival necessitates joining a *hālau*, in which dancers learn what it means to be part of a community. Thus, the festival becomes the pinnacle of the dancer's collective efforts, showcasing their dedication, talent, and unity as a *hula* family.

Further reflecting the *hula* familial bond is the common practice among *hula* dancers of addressing one another as "*hula* brothers" and "*hula* sisters," with some dancers addressing their *Kumu* as "Mom." This familial vocabulary mirrors hula dancers' appreciation and reverence for their *Kumu*, who is highly respected in the community, often acting as a parent, mentor, and guide. Relatedly, *Kumu* Keano Kaupu provides a helpful depiction of *Kumu*, stressing the numerous roles they assume:

> You have to be the mother, the father, the sister, the brother, the grandmother, the grandfather, the psychiatrist, the marriage counselor, the bodyguard, the friend, and sometimes even the child. You have to play all of these roles. And then you can't be a friend because, number one, you need to be their *Kumu* first.

Because a *hālau* is viewed as an *'ohana*, it provides a unique opportunity for communal learning of cultural knowledge, values, and traditions. Moreover, sharing cultural knowledge strengthens bonds among participants, thus further strengthening their cultural identity. Artistic collaboration as a group is a particularly potent form of survivance for Native Hawaiians, resisting cultural erasure while asserting their presence, collective strength, and resilience (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 1).

One of the festival's fundamental objectives of *hula* performance is learning to dance as a cohesive unit. On the Merrie Monarch stage, dancing together displays seamless unity. Uluwehi Makuakane, a *hula* dancer, describes it as "being uniform in all our movements, but also in trusting one another." As each *hula* dancer glides across the stage, every hand gesture, footstep, and body posture harmonize to convey the portrayed

story or emotion. Ideally, the dancers dance as one, which is not only aesthetically pleasing to witness but necessary in competition. One of the judging criteria at the Merrie Monarch *hula* competition is the ability of a *hālau* to be in sync, emphasizing that each member belongs to the *hula* family and is responsible for working together within it. If the dancers move to their own rhythm, unaware of the other members of their company, a low score is given to the entire performance.

Kumu Keano Kaupu states that dancers must "submit to the collective" to prevent this misstep. This submission involves becoming one with the group, being supported by the group, and reciprocating that support back into the *hālau* and the community. *Kumu* Keano refers to the "collective" as foundational to *hula* performance and Hawaiian culture, fostering a sense of community and belonging:

> If you're not connected to every single person in that line, you or they don't belong there. If you're not investing in this group, then you don't belong there. Dancing together teaches them the importance of the collective as opposed to staunch individualism. I think in this world, we need to start thinking about the collective because we're such staunch individuals—and what does that contribute to the rest of your community? Nothing!

Kumu Keano's words speak to the utmost importance of the "collective" in Hawaiian culture. Strengthening social bonds among members of the *hālau* also occurs in the costuming and dressing for the competition. As the *hālau* dress for their performance backstage, they continue demonstrating unity and cohesiveness. *Kumu* Keano Kaupu instructs his dancers to tie each other's *leis* (flower necklaces) and adornments for the performance. If one person drops a *lei* or an adornment becomes untied, *Kumu* Keano Kaupu pauses the ritual so that dancers "feel the accountability" of being "out of harmony" with one another. His dancers must then "make things right" by maintaining the group's cohesiveness.

Likewise, the *pā hula* (*hula* troupe) from *Hālau Hula Ke ʻOlu Makani O Mauna Loa* reinforces their bonds of camaraderie and unity through the shared act of dressing. *Kumu* Mele, the head of *Halau Hula Ke ʻOlu Makani O Mauna Loa*, explains that the dancers don their costumes in unison, starting with anklets and moving on to skirts, bracelets, and headdresses. By dressing together, the dancers enhance their presence and reinforce the evident bond on stage.

Finally, unity is witnessed during the Merrie Monarch *hula* competition when *Nā Kumu Hula*, the participating *hula* instructors, gather on stage to collectively perform to the song "*I Aliʻi No ʻOe*" just before the Awards Ceremony. This powerful display of solidarity showcases these participants not as competitors but as companions in the spirit of community-building and cultural preservation that lies at the heart of the festival. Thus, by showcasing the collective strength and talent of the *Nā Kumu Hula*, the festival celebrates the individual artistry of each *Kumu* while reuniting these *hula* families to emphasize the collective power of the Hawaiian Nation.

Survivance Stories

Hula has been an integral dance form throughout Hawaiian culture for centuries, conveying stories through movement, *mele* (music), and *oli* (chants) (Uchiyama 1). Each *hālau* showcases unique and shared (hi)stories of their culture, so each performance is crafted to effectively convey the underlying messages in the lyrics. Through intricate choreography, elaborate costumes, musical instruments, and appropriate props, ancestral and contemporary stories are brought to life. The festival stages diverse narratives through *hula* performances, from customary folklore and fables to accounts of the Hawaiian monarchy, nature, ancestry, modern-day concerns, and personal encounters.

Combining body languages, such as hip sways, footwork, hand gestures, and facial expressions, *hula* dancers communicate the characters' sentiments in the tales (Uchiyama 1). Through these performances, the voices and perspectives of the Native Hawaiian people are honored, their history is reenacted, and their ongoing presence is displayed. In an interview with *hula* dancer Emma Tunison, she describes the experience in this way:

> Every dance is somebody's story. Every chant is a history. What we're trying to do is not just tell people about our culture but also tell people that there's more than just what they see in Hawai'i. It's not only palm trees and coconut bras; we are people that have all this really cool history, and we want to share it. On the Merrie Monarch stage, we're able to show people a part of our world with our bodies, our voices, and our spirits as well.

Additionally, storytelling can help dancers find a personal connection to and meaning within the practice and the larger community. Katherine Mulliken describes,

> Kumu always emphasizes that we should dance for our ancestors. I think that resonates with the girls who are Native Hawaiian, but for me, I think dance is more about telling the story because the songs have meaning, and that's where I feel a connection to this culture and where I can contribute."

Telling a story through *hula* performance is an active and intentional endeavor. Vizenor views the concept of survivance as intricately woven into the fabric of Native stories, incorporating "natural reason, remembrance, traditions, and customs and is clearly observable in narrative resistance and personal attributes, such as the Native humanistic tease, vital irony, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage" (*Native Liberty* 1).

For *hula* practitioners, the journey from story to stage begins with the *Kumu,* who collects and documents all story elements as envisioned for the upcoming performance. A comprehensive factsheet covers every aspect of the performance, including the song's storyline, selection, and significance; the songwriter's background; the intricacies of the choreography, including the dancers' positioning and movements; and their appearance.

For *Kumu* Mele, this process can sometimes involve visiting a specific place referenced in a song to discover a story's meaning, history, and subtle details, including their relationship to her. These findings are considered when determining which colors should be incorporated into the costuming, what flowers to put in the dancer's hair, what materials to use for a *lei,* and what movements are needed to convey the story.

As the festival approaches, the *hālau* presents the factsheet to the judges, who closely examine the compiled information to gain insight into the chosen choreography, costuming, *oli*, and *mele*. Thorough research is required to enable the judges to grasp the dance's narrative and its ties to the *hālau*, which also assists the *hālau* by uncovering stories about their community, homeland, and cultural heritage. According to *Kumu* Mele Manuel, this process of gathering information and materials gives her creative authority in shaping her experiences and interpretations of a story. Vizenor's concept of survivance stories emphasizes the creativity and engagement of Indigenous people in writing or performing their own narratives (*Survivance* 1). By presenting the culmination of her work at the Merrie Monarch Festival, *Kumu* Mele contributes to the broader narrative of survivance, asserting her voice while reinforcing the cultural resilience and vitality of the Hawaiian people. Thus, her learning and creative expression deepen her understanding and appreciation of the culture while fostering inclusivity, cultural exchange, and unity among diverse participants.

While the festival features numerous stories that can be analyzed as survivance narratives, this research specifically highlights the significance of stories and *hula* repertoires passed down from previous generations, referred to as the *hula* lineage, in preserving Hawaiian culture and fostering its continuity. Ancestral stories through the

hula lineage are constantly referenced throughout the festival broadcast and interviews. These stories are fundamental components of cultural identity and nation-building that connect Native Hawaiians with their ancestors, deities, and land. Exploring how the ancestors and *hula* lineage foster survivance and transmit cultural knowledge is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of the performances at the Merrie Monarch *hula* competition. Through this analysis, one can grasp the event's pivotal role in the resurgence and survivance of Hawaiian cultural identity and the strengthening of *lāhui,* as depicted in the following section.

Hula Lineage

Hula performances are a significant way the *lāhui* connect with their ancestors and history through stories passed down over time. As Goodyear-Kaʻōpua states, "*Kanaka Maoli* (Native Hawaiians) are defined by our ancestry. This is who we are" (6). Scholar Kameʻeleihiwa, a leading authority on Native Hawaiian genealogies, explains,

> Hawaiian genealogies are the histories of our people. Through them, we learn of the exploits and identities of our ancestors—their great deeds and their follies, their loves and their accomplishments, and their errors and defeats. Even though the great genealogies are for the *Ali'i Nui* and not of the commoners, these *Ali'i Nui* are the collective ancestors, and their *mo'olelo* (histories) are histories of all Hawaiians, too. (611)

In *hula*, as in Hawaiian history, genealogy retains particular importance. Accurate *hula* genealogy is crucial to understanding Hawaiian history and preserving Hawaiian stories. The significance of genealogy in *hula* is due to many dances being passed down through families and lineages (Kameʻeleihiwa 611). Therefore, maintaining precise records of family connections and accounts is vital to the continuity of ancestral stories. Thus, it emerges that genealogy is highly valued in Hawaiian culture, and the knowledge

and expertise of skilled genealogists are greatly respected. Tracing the roots of *hula* through lineage is about preserving the past while asserting the ongoing presence and vitality of Hawaiian culture and identity.

According to Kameʻeleihiwa, tracing one's genealogy was paramount during Hawai'i's precolonial period and involved tracing the divine origins of a family, starting from the mythical ancestors and extending through a line of literal ancestors of the current rulers. Furthermore, each prominent chiefly line had a unique genealogy chant used to establish its legitimacy to rule (Kameʻeleihiwa 611). For instance, King Kalākaua was required to establish his lineage to legitimize his claim to the monarchy before ascending to the throne as the king of Hawai'i. This task proved considerably challenging since he lacked direct descent from the reigning royal family. Silva notes that Kamehameha I and his descendants held sole control of the country from the kingdom's establishment until William Lunalilo's death" (Silva 91). In contrast, Kalākaua was not of the Kamehameha line, which contributed to much of the cultural renaissance he fostered (Silva 91).

Hula lineage provides a similar means of legitimizing the authenticity of one's *hula* practices and Hawaiian identity on the Merrie Monarch stage. The historical traditions of one's *hula* lineage provide credibility in a contemporary Hawai'i oversaturated with many different genres of *hula*, such as "tourist *hula*," "exercise *hula*," and other popular types. For instance, a student and *hula* dancer, Hannah Henderson, explains in an interview the need to "dance the *hula* with integrity," which takes years of practice and rigorous training to achieve. However, she states that some people "call themselves *Kumu* who have not gone through any of that training." Hannah recalls an

advertisement that offered a six-week speed course to becoming a *Kumu*, causing considerable distress among *hula* practitioners. By forging a connection with the stories and histories of their ancestors, dancers affirm and bolster their Hawaiian identity. Another example is *Kumu* Iliahi and his *hālau* differentiate themselves from other dance groups by connecting their roots to ancient Hawaiian people, dancers, rulers, land, and traditions. Additionally, familiarity with the generations of *hula* practitioners and ancestors who came before them is also a requirement for participating in the Merry Monarch *hula* competition. Thus, the *hālau* must demonstrate their *hula* lineage at the festival and how they have continued perpetuating it.

Nevertheless, this act is not meant to be exclusionary but facilitates sharing stories deeply rooted in Indigenous beliefs and practices, performing an act of survivance within the community. While the Merry Monarch *hula* competition requires evidence of the *hula* lineage, it does not necessarily exclude those without a direct ancestral connection to *hula*. In fact, individuals can be "adopted" into a *hula* lineage by demonstrating their commitment to learning the values and teachings of the *hālau*, as mentioned previously regarding *hula* families. Indeed, this practice of integrating individuals dedicated to perpetuating Hawaiian culture into the *hula* lineage is not uncommon, promoting inclusivity, cultural exchange, and a foundational respect for ancient Hawaiian cultural practices.

Furthermore, lineage links the past with the present while providing a foundation for future generations of dancers. In Hawaiian culture, the past is referred to as *Ka wā ma mum* ("the time in the front or before"), while the future is *Ka wā ma hope* ("the time which comes after or behind") (Kameʻeleihiwa 683). According to Kameʻeleihiwa, these

designations suggest that "Hawaiians stand firmly in the present with their backs to the future, seeking historical answers for present-day dilemmas" (683). Kameʻeleihiwa continues, "Such an orientation is, to the Hawaiian, an eminently practical one, for the future is always unknown, whereas the past is rich in glory and knowledge. It also bestows upon us a natural propensity for the study of history" (683). By looking to their past, Hawaiians are better equipped to face present-day challenges and create a brighter future for future generations. Therefore, lineage allows dancers to honor their ancestors, preserve their cultural heritage through stories, and envision new stories and futures grounded on the solid cultural foundations of previous generations.

The dancers' discourse reflects this seamless integration of the past, present, and future. For instance, *Kumu* Iliahi's thoughts about the future are anchored in his connection to the past: "I hope I am a good ancestor." Similarly, *Kumu* Keano Kaupu envisions his legacy as a means to immortalize his *hula* teacher for future generations:

> When I see my students dance, and I see my *Kumu* dancing in them, that is profound for me. That's when I think I'm most elated about where I come from and where I'm going. That's when I'm most content with what my legacy would be—when I can see my *Kumu* dancing in my dancers because then I know that I did my job.

By bringing stories and hula repertoires of the past into the present through *hula*, dancers connect to and strengthen the *lāhui*. As such, *Kumu* Iliahi Parades recalls in the interview, "What we put on stage is a bold statement—this is our *hālau*—this is *who we are,* and the art is backed up by this rich history of tradition." The historical credibility behind these *hula* performances represents the perceived continuity of the style, stories, and identity of that particular family line and its culture. Indeed, the Merry Monarch Festival is an event that reenacts the historical monarchy of Hawai'i, thereby immortalizing historic figures and genealogical relationships while contributing to the

survivance of the culture and the continuity of *lāhui*. For example, in the category of *hula ʻauana* (modern *hula*), "*Kuʻu Ipo Kēhau*" is derived from the private collection of Mary Kawena Pukui, which the Merrie Monarch Program 2022 describes as follows:

> This name chant was composed for Prince Jonah Kūhiō, son of Princess Kekaulike, Queen Kapiʻolaniʻs sister. Haku mele Nahinu was a cousin of Queen Kapiʻolani and Princess Kekaulike. As a child, Prince Kūhiō was affectionately known as Prince Cupid and was beloved by the Kauai people. He was also passionate about Hawaiian cultural preservation during King Kalākauaʻs reign. ("Hālau Kekuaokalāʻauʻalaʻiliahi")

These events and the characteristics of Prince Kūhiō are thus brought into the present through the Merry Monarch Festival, extending the historical *lāhui* of the Hawaiian people into contemporary times. Through this reenactment of nationhood and the historical monarchy, *hula* immortalizes these historic figures in Native Hawaiian history and genealogical relationships, further contributing to the culture's survivance and the continuity of *lāhui.*

Hula practitioners learn their *hula* repertoires and particular movement style. Certain practices—preparing an altar for the goddess Laka or learning by watching and imitating (not by asking questions), for instance—are handed down from master to disciple through the generations. The dances of *Na Kumu hula* (*hula* instructors), Iliahi and Haunani Paredes, and their *hālau*, *Kekuaokalāʻauʻalaʻiliahi*, are innovations based upon those of *Na Kumu hula* Brian Eselu and Thaddeus Wilson, under whom Iliahi trained as a student. Thus, the dance style is unique to their ancestry, as they currently explore dances reaching back to the 1800s that represent "a rich history and traditions of motions and movements and feet work" (Iliahi Paredes) passed down through generations.

When creating a particular dance, Iliahi Paredes states, “We make sure we use the traditional knowledge of our mentors, our *Kumu*, to build our choreography.” This intention was evident at the Merrie Monarch Festival when the *kane* (men’s) troupe won first place for *hula ʻauana* (modern *hula*) and first place for *kane* overall. In both performances, the dance’s intricate steps and hand motions paid tribute to the *hālau*’*s hula* lineage, which they intentionally “kept intact.” Concerning the costumes and song, the *hālau* put their “own spin on them” (Paredes) to welcome future innovation. This combination represents another example of Vizenor’s previously discussed “transmotion” (*Fugitive Poses* 15-16), whereby dancers negotiate unique contemporary styles while maintaining the essence of their traditions.

Another such example is the *Kawailiʻula hula* troupe, under the guidance of *Kumu hula* Chinky Māhoe, who is renowned for his playful and mischievous *hula* performances, redolent of a comedic style. For his men’s group ‘*auana* performance, Māhoe chose the piece “*Uʻi ʻUʻa*,” a *mele* he composed that boasts of men leading healthy lifestyles. These men, who frequent the gym and surf, admire their reflections while exhibiting behavior that the song describes as “handsome and vain” (*Merrie Monarch Festival Program 2022* 6). The lyrics suggest that these men engage in narcissistic behavior and seek to be the center of attention, declaring, “Here I am; look at me! (Merrie Monarch Festival, “Hula Auana//Kāne”).

In this performance, Māhoe’s dancers exude confidence, moving across the stage with a playful arrogance in their facial expressions, which are both animated and haughty, adding humor to their performance. The dance’s aesthetic embodies Māhoe’s unmistakable flair, which the *hula* community recognizes as his signature style. While

Māhoe's dance may be one-of-a-kind, it upholds the legacy of his *Kumu*, who learned from his *Kumu,* speaking to the point made in this section: that the *hula* tradition is passed down from generation to generation through the art of movement. In this context, survivance refers to preserving cultural heritage through contemporary expression. Thus, Māhoe simultaneously honors the past while embracing the present and shaping the future. This interplay between traditional *hula* dancing and progress ensures that *hula* remains relevant and alive in contemporary society.

This section has established that honoring ancestors strengthens community bonds, reinforces cultural values and traditions, and inspires future generations to continue the legacy by retelling stories celebrating the connection to the ancestors while recognizing their sacrifices and contributions and fostering a greater appreciation for the Native Hawaiian community's struggles and triumphs. Similarly, paying tribute to ancestors fosters unity and belonging within the present-day *lāhui.* Acknowledging their ancestors' common heritage and shared experiences makes people feel more connected and builds stronger relationships based on mutual respect and understanding.

Such a performance was exemplified by *Hālau Nā Mamo O Pu'uanahulu* from O'ahu, under the direction of *Kumu* William Kahakuleilehua Haunu'u "Sonny" Ching and Lopaka Igarta-De Vera, who performed "*Kū Ha'aheo E Ku'u Hawai'i,*" a song composed as a rallying call to unite Hawaiian people. The *Merrie Monarch Festival Program 2022* describes it as, *"*[B]e honored always, oh beloved descendants of the land. The new dawn for our people of Hawai'i is upon us" (10). Thus, the dance is a survivance story that acknowledges ancestors and lineage while asserting an active presence in contemporary times.

Survivance was apparent in another performance by *Hālau Hi‘iakainām akalehua* under the direction of *Kumu* Robert Ke’ano Ka’upu IV and Lono Padilla. The story told through this performance, “*Pū’inokolu A Hina,*” acknowledged the land and its deity, the Goddess Hina, who

> protects Moloka‘i, her island child. When the land is mismanaged or neglected, Hina opens her wind gourd, Wāwāhonua’aho, releasing storms—the Ilinahu wind that uproots trees and scatters shrubs, the Uluhewa, causes flooding and destruction to property, and most dreaded Luluku, a slayer of many and cleanser of the land. (*Merrie Monarch Festival Program 2022* 10)

This description honors the natural world surrounding Hawaiians, as their survivance depends on the land from which they also draw their inspiration.

Finally, some stories are inspired by everyday occurrences. Thus, dancers can transform mundane experiences into contemporary dance forms that document their history while highlighting the dynamic and ever-changing landscape around them. By incorporating elements of their personal lives into their choreography, these dancers produce powerful works that resonate with their audiences and future generations. A prime example is the *hula* troupe, *Kawai‘ulaokalā,* under the direction of *Kumu* Keli‘iho’omalu Puchalski. The troupe performed “*Mika Lawai‘a*,” which pays homage to the importance of fishing as a traditional Hawaiian pastime. This *mele* was composed by *Kumu* Chinky Māhoe and *‘lokepa* De Santos and was dedicated to Chinky’s grandfather, who often fished with nets off Kailua Beach (“Hālau Kekuaokalā‘au‘ala‘iliahi”; Merrie Monarch Festival). The collaboration of music, lyrics, and choreography weaves together elements of their personal lives with modern techniques and styles, creating a unique blend of tradition and innovation that reflects the changing landscape of their

communities. Hence, these performances serve as a form of creative expression and a means of preserving cultural traditions, passing on essential stories to future generations.

Summary

This section demonstrated that the Merrie Monarch Festival is a highly esteemed event in Hawai'i that celebrates the art of *hula* and pays tribute to King David Kalākaua, a patron of the arts and a champion of Hawaiian cultural traditions (Merrie Monarch Festival, *About King Kalākaua*). The festival brings *hula* practitioners from across Hawai'i and other parts of the world to showcase their skills and share their cultural knowledge with each other and the wider community. *Hula* practitioners and supporters convene to exchange unique *hula* repertoires and ancestral stories, reinforcing the collective bond of *lāhui* while promoting a sense of belonging and community. Hence, the festival is a site of survivance, a platform for asserting Hawaiian identity and cultural traditions against ongoing efforts to erode and marginalize them. Specifically, it creates a space for celebrating and transmitting Hawaiian cultural practices and knowledge, allowing *hula* practitioners and supporters to resist assimilation and affirm the enduring vitality of Hawaiian culture.

Chapter V.

The Gathering Place: A Space for Sovereignty

The concept of "place" is intimately connected to Hawaiian cultural traditions (Kanaʻiaupuni) and survivance. In this chapter, "place" will be explored in its broader dimensions, extending beyond mere geography to examine the festival's significance as a repository of cultural heritage, a space for sovereignty, and a spiritual connection to the land. The overarching theme that permeates this discourse is the single-cord principle *ea*, as articulated by Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua as sovereignty and leadership ("Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance" 5).

Firstly, *ea* is conceptualized, providing a lens through which to examine the various aspects related to Hawaiian cultural traditions and survivance. Second, the festival's location at the Edith Kanaka'ole Multi-Purpose Stadium in Hilo, Hawai'i, serves as a gathering place and holds great cultural and historical significance as a sovereign space rooted in the community's heritage. The stadium is a testament to the enduring cultural legacy of *hula*, the land, and the Hawaiian people—a powerful reminder of its survivance. Moreover, this idea extends into the digital world, where sovereign gathering places allow people to connect and express their cultural traditions, thereby increasing the reach of physical spaces by transcending geographic boundaries. Additionally, the Hawaiian language further situates people in the larger world context, a crucial factor in shaping cultural identity, continuity, sovereignty, and so enabling survivance.

Secondly, *hula* performances incorporate elements of the *āina* (land), including its natural features, plants, oceans, and skies. The dances often portray stories and legends

about specific locations and landscapes, such as the sea, mountains, and forests. Thus, through body movements and gestures, dancers can depict the land's features and the natural elements essential to the narratives. This practice is rooted in a profound spiritual connection to the *āina* and its deities, providing longevity for perpetuation.

In all these ways, the Merrie Monarch Festival incorporates *āina* into its performances, emphasizing the cultural and spiritual importance of the *āina* and the natural environment in Hawaiian *hula* and traditional practices. *Āina* (land) plays a central role in shaping the Hawaiian way of life, and a deep connection to the *āina* is fundamental to being Hawaiian (Kanaʻiaupuni). In traditional Hawaiian society, *āina* was passed down through families and viewed as created by, and is itself considered to be a God, making it a sacred ancestor to be worshiped and respected (Kanaʻiaupuni). However, Western influences introduced land ownership to Hawai'i, barring many Hawaiians from accessing food sources and sites of religious rituals, thereby effectively alienating them from their homeland (Kameʻeleihiwa 450). Private land ownership was a new and devastating concept that disrupted the intergenerational transmission of the land (Kanaʻiaupuni).

Interestingly, many political sovereignty movements today are over these *āina* struggles (Bauer 110). As such, the concepts of the *ea* (sovereignty) of the Hawaiian nation and *āina* are deeply intertwined with Hawaiian culture and history (Kameʻeleihiwa 450). As discussed previously, the Merrie Monarch Festival is a site of Hawaiian cultural survivance, creating a sovereign gathering place where Hawaiians fortify their cultural traditions while rekindling their deep-rooted connections to the land and their forebearers.

Ea

The two-letter Hawaiian word *ea* is instrumental in understanding the survivance of Hawaiian culture and identity (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, "Introduction" 3). *Ea* carries deep and multifaceted meanings reflecting Indigenous Hawaiian values, beliefs, and practices. According to Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, *ea* encapsulates vital concepts such as sovereignty, life, and the breath of the land and people (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, "Introduction" 7). These meanings of *ea* have persisted throughout Hawaiian history, providing a source of strength and vitality for Native Hawaiians (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, "A Nation Rising").

One of the primary meanings of *ea* is political independence, referring to the sovereignty of the Hawaiian people (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, "Introduction" 3). The deposing of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 and the annexation of Hawai'i by the United States in 1898 directly assaulted the *ea* of the Hawaiian people, stripping them of their political power while undermining their ability to govern themselves (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, "Introduction" 4-5). The pursuit of Hawaiian sovereignty remains relevant today, with several organizations and movements, including the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement, the Hawaiian Kingdom Government, and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs who persistently advocate for Hawaiian autonomy. According to Bauer, *ea* is the "force that gave birth to and sustains" (110) these movements.

Ea is not only significant in legal and political considerations but is also profoundly spiritual and cultural. *Ea* is the spiritual life force that animates all living things, closely tied to Native Hawaiians' deep relationship with and connection to the *āina*. To Native Hawaiians, the *āina* is imbued with spiritual, living significance, providing them physical and spiritual nourishment, inspiration, strength, and identity and

which therefore compels them to be conscientious stewards of their environment to preserve and protect the *āina* for future generations. The loss of Hawaiian sovereignty has profoundly impacted the *ea*, disrupting the delicate balance of the natural world and threatening the well-being of the Hawaiian people and its cultural traditions (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, "Acknowledgements").

Goodyear-Kaʻōpua reminds us that, "like breathing, *ea* cannot be achieved or possessed; it requires constant action day after day, generation after generation" (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, "Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance" 4). Actively shaping Hawaiian identity and traditions is essential to cultural survivance, as the previous chapters have implied. Thus, the notion of *ea* as an "active state of being" (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 1) is a prevalent and recurring theme in this chapter. While I reference all meanings of *ea* throughout this chapter, the definition and focus of this chapter will be sovereignty, as this aligns most closely with my research findings. Therefore, I focus my analysis on this interpretation, which offers the most insight into the themes and concepts emerging from my study.

The Merrie Monarch Festival comprises a variety of dances that successfully capture and express the essence of the natural world. This act—mirroring the natural world—enables Native Hawaiians to establish a sovereign space that embodies their collective identity as *lāhui* while also affirming their individuality as a people. By providing a platform for perpetuating and celebrating Hawaiian culture and traditions, the festival plays a significant role in creating a sovereign space for Native Hawaiians. It is an opportunity for the Hawaiian people to showcase their ancestral practices–such as *hula*, *oli* (chant), and *mele* (song) – to a global audience.

Moreover, the festival strengthens the connection of the Hawaiian people to their ancestral land and traditions by offering a space for them to showcase their rich cultural heritage. This platform promotes awareness and understanding of Hawaiian culture to a broader audience. However, identifying and accessing sites of cultural importance to the Native Hawaiian community can be a challenging feat, particularly in light of the ongoing and dynamic evolution of the Hawaiian landscape. Dancers, in particular, frequently encounter this challenge.

This became palpable in my observation of the performance *"Hanohano Kaua'i I Ka Malie," with pā hula* (*hula* troupe) *Hālau Hi'iakainamakalehua*, led by *Kumu* Robert Ke'ano Ka'upu IV and Lono Padilla, showcasing the Kona district of Kaua'i. The dance honored a *mele ho'oipoipo* (love song) called "*Mālie*," which celebrates the district's notable affluence, natural wonders, and serene and welcoming sea (*Merrie Monarch Festival Program 2022* 12).The poetic use of elemental interaction with the environment and its lush foliage generated stunning imagery that paid tribute to *Ka'aikūlani* (*Merrie Monarch Festival Program 2022* 10). Paired with their lush green *leis* and leafy headpieces, the earthy, terra-cotta color of the dancers' dress reflected the land the song spoke of, and each movement sought to transport the audience to the island of Kaua'i.

It is important to acknowledge that the content and format of this performance can be assumed to present an essentialist view of nature and heritage. Differently put, it might imply that Hawai'i is a static and unchanging entity, devoid of the realities of Hawai'i's colonial history and the impact this has had on the environment and cultural practices. Nonetheless, this is not the case, as *Kumu* Keano recognizes that when we converse about or dance about these landscapes, the intention is to reconstruct and reconnect with these

environments and their complex histories rather than turn a blind eye to the present realities.

While the performance offered a visual representation and immersive experience of Kaua'i, *Kumu* Keano highlights that sometimes crafting such a piece can be difficult, given the extent to which the current landscape deviates from the one depicted in the performance. As *Kumu* Keano Kaupu explains,

> I want future generations to know what Hawai'i's landscape looked like because that is part of us. I'm creating choreography for many songs composed in the seventeen hundreds, such as our performance at the Merrie Monarch, and I'm looking at the words in the song, and I cannot imagine what this place even used to look like because all I see today are buildings! Lots of buildings! Our lands have changed! So when we talk or dance about these famous places or significant landscapes, the environment is no longer the same, and we must reconnect to the land and the history to remember so we can create for the future.

The Merrie Monarch Festival is taking steps toward ameliorating the persistent difficulties faced by Native Hawaiians, such as that described by Kumu Keano, in their search for spaces conducive to preserving their cultural traditions, including ways to communicate spaces changed by colonialism and creating tangible links between past and present. Establishing a sovereign environment can be accomplished by creating a physical location imbued with sovereignty, developing a digital platform for such a space, and rejuvenating the connection to the land through dance. These initiatives foster a sense of safety and belonging, providing a welcoming gathering place or collective forum for Hawaiians to perform their identity and preserve their heritage.

Venue: Creating a Sovereign Place

The venue of the Merrie Monarch Festival is the Edith Kanakaʻole Stadium located within the Hoʻolulu complex ("to gather together") in Hilo, Hawai'i. In a thought-provoking observation, Teri Skillman notes that this location represents a sovereign place in two distinct ways. First, the stadium's architecture boasts an inherent openness that allows the natural elements such as rain, wind, and sunlight to shape the ambiance (90). In addition, one end of the stadium has an open view of Mauna Loa, a culturally and spiritually significant mountain to Native Hawaiians that has long been venerated as a place of worship, whose eruptions have been interpreted as a symbol of sovereignty (216). Therefore, the stadium emphasizes the continuous spiritual connection between humans and the natural world, rendering it an ideal venue for the Merrie Monarch Festival

Secondly, Skillman asserts that the Edith Kanakaʻole Stadium embodies the spirit of the *ʻIolani* Palace, a site historically associated with Hawaiian sovereignty and opposition to colonialism (216-217). The *ʻIolani* Palace, once home to Hawai'i's last reigning monarchs, is located on the island of Oahu. In 1886, King David Kalākaua marked his 50th birthday, also known as the Silver Jubilee, by organizing a two-week-long series of festivities at the *ʻIolani* Palace (Merrie Monarch Festival, *About King Kalākaua*). The celebration included a grand parade, musical performances by chanters, and exquisite *hula* dances. This pivotal event was instrumental in establishing *ʻIolani* Palace as a self-governed space for Native Hawaiians to uphold their cultural heritage. Prior to this, Christian missionaries and the United States government had forbidden public performances of *hula* and other Hawaiian traditions. Therefore, the public display

of these practices at this historical juncture marked a significant act of rebellion against colonialism's erasure of Hawaiian traditions and identity (Skillman 217). However, in contemporary times, the palace no longer remains accessible for such ostentatious exhibitions of sovereignty but is currently under colonial government control (Skillman 217). Hence, the stadium in Hilo offers a more sovereign space for the Merrie Monarch Festival (Skillman 216-217).



Figure 5. The Edith Kanakaʻole Stadium

The Merrie Monarch hula competition features the king's court positioned in the lower center of the image, set against a backdrop of the natural environment (Lee, The New York Times, Preserving Hula, the Heartbeat of Hawaii).

The stadium is also situated among cultural landmarks sacred to Hawaiians, including volcanoes. Moreover, Hilo's geographical distance from Honolulu and its saturated governmental influence and tourism has allowed the Native community a greater degree of autonomy in preserving their cultural heritage (Skillman 216-217), allowing it to exist more holistically and draw inspiration from Native epistemologies and traditional knowledge systems (Skillman 216-217). This environment allows the Festival to thrive as a celebration of Hawaiian culture and assert their active presence (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 1).

Building upon Skillman's insights, my research found that the Merrie Monarch Festival's adaption to the digital realm effectively integrates natural elements and recreates the spirit of the *'Iolani* Palace by highlighting King Kalākaua's historic celebrations. This intentional approach allows the festival to create a sovereign space for a digital audience to engage with and experience Hawaiian culture. Its online broadcast and participation in social media extend the reach of the Merrie Monarch Festival beyond its physical locale in Hilo, thereby creating a virtual space for Native Hawaiians to assert both their presence and active engagement in contemporary times. As scholar Jessica McLean observes, digital spaces provide opportunities for transformative change (177). Seen through this light, the utilization of digital technology by Indigenous people can be recognized as a potent and innovative means of resisting the impacts of colonialism (Carlson and Mongibello 2). Simply by being online, they can subvert traditional colonial notions of Indigenousness as a physical identity and push back against practices of invisibilization and delegitimization, ultimately working toward a decolonial agenda (Carlson and Mongibello 3).

Thus, analogous to its physical location, the Merrie Monarch Festival's digital venue serves as another means through which Native Hawaiians can establish their presence and assert their sovereignty. For instance, as its physical location—the Edith Kanakaʻole Stadium in Hilo, Hawai'i—is set against the backdrop of the natural elements of Hilo's landscapes, the festival broadcast is framed by nature and Hawaiians' connection to the natural world through the commercial breaks, interviews, and featured stories interspersed among the performances. A recurring theme in the commercials is the concept of *malama āina* (stewards of the land), which refers to the Hawaiian practice of caring for and respecting the land and its products. These vivid commercials depict a community cleaning debris on Hawai'i's beaches, students cultivating traditional Hawaiian crops such as *kalo* (taro), a family practicing responsible fishing by taking only what they need and expressing gratitude for the use of the land's resources with a Hawaiian *oli* (chant).

This *malama āina*-themed backdrop of the festival broadcast establishes a sovereign digital space by framing the festival, Hawaiian people, and their traditions within the context of their unique natural habitat, cultural beliefs, and practices of environmental stewardship. By practicing sustainable land stewardship, conservation, and cultural preservation, *malama āina* promotes self-governance and assertiveness in shaping the future of the land. This narrative reflects the Hawaiian people's commitment to protecting their heritage, cultural autonomy, and their role as caretakers of the land, serving as a tangible expression of sovereignty rooted in the relationship between the people and their ancestral territories. Additionally, *malama āina* contrasts the colonial digital narratives which have framed *hula* performances for tourist vacation packages,

honeymoon resort deals, and exotic or erotic entertainment (Imada). These historical narratives have often positioned the land as something to be possessed and used versus cared for and respected.

Revisiting Vizenor's conceptualization of survivance as a means of defying hegemonic narratives of Indigenous nihilism and even victimry (*Native Liberty* 1), the shift in the festival's messaging contrasts sharply with this viewpoint, establishing a distinct digital space that provides a sovereign location where Native Hawaiians can express their values, choose their practices, and observe their traditions in a manner that aligns with their priorities rather than catering to external expectations (Duarte 6). For instance, elements of the natural environment can also be seen in the "Talk Story" segment of the broadcast. In these segments, where the exchange of cultural stories, history, and expertise is framed by traditional Hawaiian furnishings depicting the land and the Hawaiian way of life. The interview environment has flooring that is covered in Hawaiian *kapa* cloth made from the inner bark of the *wauke* tree and woven to create a strong rug (Brigham). The room is decorated with corals and shells adorning the shelves and walls and infusing the set with elements of the ocean. A flower *lei* drapes over the furniture, and woven baskets cradle tribal artwork. A traditional Hawaiian drum, an *ipu*, rests on the floor, and the Hawaiian flag stands in the background. Seen together, these elements carve out a symbolically charged space reflecting the values and traditions of Hawaiians and how their profound connection with the land permeates every facet of their lives.

Crucially, the digital milieu of the "Talk Story" setting also embodies the traditional Hawaiian household, giving rise to a unique and autonomous space that

deviates from the conventional interview format characterized by formal attire, structured question-and-answer sessions, and an austere ambiance. Instead, the sense conveyed by "Talk Story" is of being in a private Hawaiian home, with the interviewee and interviewer, both barefoot as is the Hawaiian custom in a home, regaling each other with personal stories intended to impart knowledge to their listeners. The atmosphere fosters a sense of familial intimacy, akin to that prevailing when family gathers in a domestic setting. This familial ambiance not only creates a space where Indigenous traditions can thrive but also reinforces a sense of place for the Hawaiian community to learn from each other, and engage in critical cultural dialogue to amplify their voices, perspectives, knowledge, and resistance.

Beyond the physical characteristics showcased in the digital environment of the festival, access to cultural knowledge is a core pillar of creating a sovereign space. As *Kumu* Keano Kaupu aptly questioned, "if we don't make our knowledge and traditions accessible, how will is our people practice their culture?" *Kumu* Iliahi Paredes describes the festival as a "sounding board and an opportunity to really put our practice on an international stage so that it's accessible and people can see what *hula* really is." The festival, particularly through the broadcast, serves as a facilitator of learning by connecting a global audience with cultural experts[5] to understand and engage with Hawaiian culture, and challenge misconceptions.

---

[5] The term 'expert' here doesn't necessarily mean commercially oriented; rather, it signifies individuals who possess a high level of experience, commitment, and depth of understanding of Hawaiian culture. As described previously, the festival places a strong emphasis on professional *hālau* with a hula lineage, who have demonstrated its long-standing commitment to perpetuating Hawaiian culture and *hula.*

The “Talk Story” segment features experts in Hawaiian traditions, art, and culture, e.g., *hula* practitioners, musicians, artists, *lei* makers, chanters, and previous winners of the Merrie Monarch *hula* competition, who share their experiences and answer questions related to their areas of expertise. Having cultural authorities present Hawaiian arts and traditions is a form of re-creating Hawaiian space using Hawaiian narratives. As discussed in previous chapters, the media often portrays *hula* performance and Hawaiian culture as exoticized, eroticized, and racialized. These portrayals are often attributed to individuals lacking expertise or a deep understanding of *hula* and Hawaiian traditions’ cultural nuances. Consequently, these stereotypes have reduced the complexity and richness of *hula* to a simplified and narrow representation failing to capture the depth, cultural significance, and artistic intricacies embedded within the dance form. Collective engagement of cultural experts demonstrates the intricate nature of Hawaiian traditions, beliefs, and practices, enriching the understanding of their complexity and contributing to the establishment of a sovereign space.

Kumu Mele Manuel states that one common misconception about *hula* “is that it is easy. It’s just a hoochy coochy dance, nothing more.” The Merrie Monarch Festival broadcast allows Hawaiians to present their culture in its genuine multifaceted form. For example, during the broadcast, the Merrie Monarch Festival showcases *hula* dancers as dedicated students who devote extensive time and effort to learning intricate dance steps and movements in collaboration with their peers and individual practice, while also featuring experts who contribute to *hula* through music composition, language acquisition, and costume creation. This comprehensive portrayal dispels misconceptions about *hula* as an easy dance form, highlighting the rigorous work and dedication it

entails, and thereby addressing the misinformation surrounding *hula* and Hawaiian culture. As stated by Trask, "When awareness begins, then so too does decolonization" ("Lovely Hula Hands" 29).

This is also in line with Vizenor's theory of survivance, where Hawaiians are not merely victims of colonial narratives that have historically pervaded the representation of their culture. Rather, the active agency of the Hawaiian community is contesting and correcting these stereotypes and ensuring the accessibility and awareness of accurate cultural knowledge. Another misconception that is being dismantled at the festival is the feminization of *hula*. Scholar Adria Imada describes that *hula* performances in the continental United States illustrated Hawai'i as a "feminized space, disposed to political, military, and tourist penetration" (6). The prevalent image of the *hula* girl has overwhelmingly shaped the prevailing perception and popular understanding of Hawaii and Hawaiian culture. In 1976 the festival opened the *hula* competition to men *hālau*. *Kumu* Keano Kaupu describes,

> *Hula* still holds that negative connotation of being for girls only, but now that there is accessibility to the dance, we are breaking down those barriers. A lot of it doesn't even have to do with *hula*. It's more about equality, and society, and what people will accept. But that's a win for everybody, especially for *hula* and my people because, we always fought this stereotype. Now, there's more openness for kane (male) dancers in() *hula*. Compared to the women, it's still not as much, but within the last 20 or 30 years there's a huge jump of men participating.

The increase in the number of male dancers on the Merrie Monarch stage, as observed by *Kumu* Iliahi Paredes, signifies a significant shift in the perception and participation of *kane* (male) dancers in *hula*. In the past, the norm was to have a smaller number of male dancers, typically around 5 to 7 (Paredes). However, there has been a remarkable change over time, with larger groups of 25 to 35 now showcasing their talents

on the prestigious stage of the festival (Paredes). This shift challenges the stereotype that *hula* is exclusively for women and highlights the growing recognition and acceptance of male participation in *hula*. The increased presence of *kane* dancers not only showcases their dedication, talent, and commitment but also reflects a broader societal shift towards inclusivity and the dismantling of gender barriers within the realm of *hula*. By highlighting the historical and present inclusion of men in *hula*, the festival aims to correct misperceptions and educate the audience about the original link between *hula* and Hawaiian men. One dancer under *Kumu* Iliahi states,

> "We've always fought this stereotype that *hula* is only for women, which it isn't. Some people believe that *hula* only included men initially, and was linked to a type of Hawaiian martial arts as a way of training warriors for agility and strength and flexibility, which we can show on stage and fix those perceptions."

This representation on stage helps to dispel stereotypes and reshape perceptions surrounding *hula*, promoting a more accurate understanding of the art form's inclusive nature and the significant contributions of men.The festival's sovereignty is also amplified by its reenactment of King Kalakaua's Royal Court during each evening of the Merrie Monarch *hula* contest, with chosen participants taking on the roles of the mo'i Kane (king), mo'i wahine (queen), and other royal courtiers. These performers don authentically fashioned apparel and accessories that mirror the aesthetics of King Kalākaua's court from the late 19th century. The responsibility of embodying King Kalākaua and Queen Kapiolani is considered a privilege and treated with the utmost reverence by the participants. In preparation for the festival, the participants adhere to the ancient Hawaiian lifestyle and religious discipline known as Kapu, which includes various prohibitions. Symbolizing their sacred commitment, the actors abstain from certain foods, including pork, bananas, and coconuts. They also commit to an intensive

schedule during the festival, making appearances and attentively observing the entire three-night *hula* competition, as each *hālau* showcases their distinctive dance style. This resurrection of the Hawaiian Kingdom, with dancers performing in honor of the king, enhances continued presence and sovereignty.

The festival's enactment of King Kalākaua's Royal Court not only enhances a tangible sense of sovereignty but also significantly contributes to strengthening the digital sovereignty of the community. By capturing this recreation and broadcasting it through various digital platforms, the festival allows a wider audience to experience the richness of Hawaiian culture. This digital representation serves as a virtual stronghold of Hawaiian cultural heritage, connecting dispersed communities and making these important traditions accessible to people around the globe. Furthermore, this digital dissemination reinforces the cultural narrative and historical legitimacy of the Hawaiian Kingdom, shaping perceptions and understanding on a global scale.

Marisa Duarte's assertion that Indigenous peoples' use of digital platforms is not a phenomenon alien to their cultural and historical experiences. Instead, their methods of engaging with the digital world are deeply intertwined with the tribal philosophies, spiritual practices, and traditions, which are shaped by their collective histories and memories (5). Similar to the physical space of the Merrie Monarch Festival, the digital venue carries these traditions and histories forward to create a sovereign place.

The Merrie Monarch Festival's sovereign space is of paramount importance, not only in its digital domain but also in the way it presents and discusses its traditions, particularly in their Native language—which is the final point of this section. By prioritizing the use of the Hawaiian language, the festival actively promotes preserving

and propagating the language and, through it, the Hawaiian cultural heritage, serving not only to maintain the integrity of the language but also to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Hawaiian values and traditions. As George Steiner aptly posits, "The death of a language signifies the loss of a potential world" (15). Therefore, the Festival's utilization of the Hawaiian language, which elevates its significance, is a crucial aspect of its efforts to promote and sustain the cultural legacy of Hawai'i and establish a sovereign space.

The first evening of the Merrie Monarch *hula* competition, is dedicated to showcasing the performances of ten female soloists, all vying for the coveted title of Miss Aloha *Hula*. Each dancer was required to deliver a presentation encompassing the *kahiko* (ancient *hula*) and *auana* (modern *hula*) styles. Pi'ikea Lopes, a dancer from the renowned *hula* troupe *Ka Lā ʻŌnohi Mai O Haʻehaʻe,* delivered a *hula* performance that earned her the title of Miss Aloha *Hula* for 2022. Upon receiving the award, Lopes expressed gratitude to her family and performed a Hawaiian chant. It thus emerges that "the language of the ancestors and the language of the land" (Osher,"Piʻikea Lopes Wins) underpinned her on- and off-stage life. Scholar Haunani-Kay Trask describes that speaking the Hawaiian language, culture, and traditions is,

> [A] continuing refusal to be silent, to join those groups of indigenous peoples who have been disappeared.... Hawaiians are still here, we are still creating, we are still resisting. ("Writing in Captivity" 43)

The political significance of the work of contemporary Native Hawaiian speakers that concerns the Hawaiian people and culture is noteworthy in its challenge of the colonial narratives and its ideological endurance. Notably, Lopes' performances gesture to the urgency of performing the resilience of the Hawaiian community, the perpetuation of their connection to their elders, and the possibility of reclaiming what has been lost.

In addition to her title of Miss Aloha *Hula* at the 2022 Festival, Lopes was presented the Office of Hawaiian Affairs ʻōlelo *Hawaiʻi* award for her unwavering dedication and remarkable fluency in the Hawaiian language. What distinguished the occasion, however, was Lopes' use of the Hawaiian language off-stage, an unexpected prioritization of her Indigenous tongue over the English language. This behavior is seen here to exemplify survivance, which originates from the context of the festival, but carves out a place for Hawaiians beyond the performance itself.

After receiving the award described above, Lopes participated in a live televised interview streamed on KFVE/Hawaii News Now, during which she responded to questions exclusively in *ʻōlelo* Hawai'i (Hawaiian language) becoming the first Miss Aloha *Hula* to do so. Although the interviewer, Keahi Tucker, acknowledged that he did not understand her words but stated that he could feel their power. He then inquired if Lopes chose to speak, think, and live in Hawaiian, which she confirmed and further stated, *"Oia ka ʻōlelo ko kahu poe kupuna. Oia ka ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi nei. Oia kou ka ʻōlelo. E ola mau ka ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi,"* which roughly translates to "That is the language of the guardians, of the ancestors. That is the Hawaiian language. That is your language. The Hawaiian language shall live forever" (Osher,"Piʻikea Lopes Wins).

Lopes' act of speaking, thinking, and living in Hawaiian is a powerful act of survivance. It should not be only seen as a form of resistance to colonization but also as evidence of the recovery process discussed earlier by Trask. By deliberately utilizing the Hawaiian language, Lopes breaks the barriers that have long suppressed Hawaiian voices, promoting the survival and power of the language of her ancestors in contemporary

society. This practice carves out a space for Hawaiians to speak and live their traditions without fear of being silenced or marginalized.

As I have shown, the Merrie Monarch Festival plays a significant role in creating a sovereign space for Native Hawaiians to celebrate and perpetuate their culture and traditions. Furthermore, creation of a sovereign digital space is also essential for Native Hawaiians to express their culture and communicate in the modern era. The widespread use of digital media provides various online platforms that Native Hawaiians can use to connect and assert their cultural sovereignty in new and innovative ways. By utilizing digital platforms to share their stories, practices, and perspectives, Native Hawaiians thereby create a digital space that embodies their collective identity and strengthens their connection to their ancestral land and traditions. Additionally, this section has sought to illustrate that by using the Hawaiian language, both in person and in digital spaces, enables Native Hawaiians to create a sovereign space that affirms their identity and promotes the survival and flourishment of their language and culture.

A Spiritual Connection to Place

As Native Hawaiians continue to reclaim their language and cultural practices, they also appear to prioritize protecting and preserving their ancestral land. In the future, connecting to the land will be an essential component in strengthening Hawaiian cultural survivance. By establishing a deeper connection to the land, the Hawaiian people can continue to connect with their traditions and ensure these remain a vital part of their cultural heritage for the generations to come.

For Native Hawaiians, the land is more than just a physical space; instead, they see it as a living, breathing entity having a spirit and imbued with spiritual energy, or

mana. Many Hawaiians therefore feel a strong connection to the earth (Kame‘eleihiwa 625), and their relationship with it is not simply one of admiration or appreciation but active engagement and coexistence (Vizenor, *Survivance* 11). Native Hawaiians thus regard themselves as an integral part of the natural world rather than a separate entity, fundamentally influencing how they approach and draw inspiration from it for their *hula* dances.

This viewpoint aligns with Vizenor's notion of survivance, highlighting the deep affinity between the natural world and creative processes (*Survivance* 11). Vizenor contends that this bond arises from a profound awareness and an unyielding presence that stems from personal experiences in the natural world. Thus, he states,

> [N]ative stories of survivance are prompted by natural reason, by a consciousness and sense of incontestable presence that arises from experiences in the natural world, the turn of seasons, sudden storms, migration of cranes, the ventures of tender lady's slippers, chance of moths over-night, unruly mosquitoes, and the favor of spirits in the water. (*Survivance* 11)

By immersing themselves in the natural world, Native Hawaiians discover their identity, uphold their traditions, and glean insights for their *hula* dances, a theme that was particularly evident in my participant observation research of *hula* dancing. This research was conducted at the edge of the world's most active volcano, Kīlauea, where the Volcano Art Center is located. For centuries, the dynamic and potent landscape of the Kīlauea region has profoundly influenced Hawaiian culture, inspiring the creation of crafts, songs, dances, and stories by Native Hawaiians (*Volcano Art Center*).Vizenor describes Indigenous people as seeing the world alive and full of spirits and as drawing inspiration from their connection to the natural world for their stories and in their daily lives (*Survivance* 11).

At the historic Volcano Art Center, I met with *Kumu* Mele to participate in her *hula* class. According to folklore (that is, the traditional beliefs, customs, and stories that are passed down through generations), Kīlauea is the home of Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of fire and volcanoes and creator of the Hawaiian Islands. Pele is also a significant figure in the history of *hula* since she is a key character in many Hawaiian legends of the *hula* dance origins. *Hula* practitioners routinely make offerings to Pele before *hula* competitions, and worshipers perform rites at the crater itself. Pele is often spoken of with reverence, and her compelling visual presence is woven into the *hula* dance form, the beliefs and values of *hula* dancers, and the stories they tell, forming a continuation of Native Hawaiian culture.

The following sections investigate the spiritual interconnection between the people of Hawai'i and their ancestral land so as to explore the impact of the Merrie Monarch Festival on sustaining and propagating Hawaiian cultural traditions. By delving into the intricate relationship between Hawaiians and their natural environment, I employed participant observation to explore how the Merrie Monarch Festival's efforts, operating on a deeply personal level, extend their influence far beyond the local community and assert Native Hawaiian survivance.

Ethnographic Setting: *Hula* on Sacred Ground

The Volcano Art Center's is situated in a profoundly significant and sacred setting. It is a unique gathering place for *hula* practitioners who seek to establish a personal and collective connection to the *ea* (breath) of the land and deities. Upon entering the art center for the first time, I immediately observed that the studio embodied the external environment of Pele's abode, evoking a sensation akin to a sacred place or

place of worship. Adorning the far end of the room, a series of portraits depicting Pele emerging from a fiery volcano embellished the wall, symbolizing the integral role of nature and mythology in Hawaiian culture. The dark wood beams on the wall and ceiling contributed deep earth tones to the setting. The sights and surroundings of this place bore witness to the inseparable bond between Hawaiians and the land.



Figure 6. Hanohano Kīlauea Kū I Ka Laʻi.

Hālau Hula Ke' Olu Makani O Mauna Loa perform "Hanohano Kīlauea Kū I Ka Laʻi" for their ʻauana (modern dance), which was composed by Eric Lee and Louis "Moon" Kauakahi, was a tribute to the "natural elements at the crater and at the summit, acknowledg[ing] two goddesses, Pele at Kīlauea and Poliahu at Mauna Kea (Merrie Monarch Festival, 2022 Hula ʻAuana Gallery)."

Ethnographic Observation One: Coexisting with Nature

Observing Pele's habitat surrounding the art center revealed two significant insights, both of which play a crucial role in promoting Indigenous survivance. The first was the degree to which humans and the natural world coexisted. The second insight pertains to the longevity and depth of this relationship form, an essential part of Hawaiian cultural identity, as showcased by the *hula* practitioners featured on the Merrie Monarch stage who draw inspiration from the natural elements and deities. According to Vizenor, these two aspects are critical in promoting Indigenous survivance through a profound connection with the land.

> Survivance is not a mere romance of nature, not the overnight pleasures of pristine simulations or the obscure notions of transcendence and signatures of nature in museums. Survivance is characterized by natural reason, not by monotheistic creation stories and the dominance of nature. Survivance stories create a sense of presence and situational sentiments of chance. Monotheism takes the risk out of nature and natural reason and promotes absence, dominance, sacrifice, and victimry. (*Survivance* 11)

Put differently, survivance is rooted in understanding the natural world and how to live in harmony with it (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 88). It involves recognizing the capriciousness and unpredictability of nature while cultivating a sense of mindfulness and connection to the environment. The Indigenous concept of survivance contrasts with monotheistic creation stories that promote dominance over nature and often feature its control and subjugation by humans, where land is something to be conquered or tamed. These views also promote sacrifice and victimization as central themes, creating a sense of absence and powerlessness in individuals and communities. In contrast, survivance views nature as a force coexisting with us from which we must learn, within which we must evolve, and to which we must adapt (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 88).

A powerful example of not only drawing inspiration from the natural elements but also honoring its dynamic and ever-changing state and its deities can be observed from the *ʻauana* (modern) performance *Hanohano Kīlauea Kū I Ka Laʻi,* by *Kumu* Mele's troupe, *Hālau Hula Ke' Olu Makani O Mauna Loa.* The song was composed by Eric Lee and Louis "Moon" Kauakahi, and showcased two distinct natural locations in Hawai'i and the deities associated with them. Pele, the goddess of fire and volcanoes, is associated with Kīlauea, one of the world's most active volcanoes; in contrast, Poliahu, the goddess of snow and ice, is associated with Mauna Kea, a dormant volcano and the highest peak in Hawai'i.

The dance recognizes the presence of these gods in contemporary Hawai'i, and the association of the differing natural characteristics of the land with the two deities is viewed as sacred, valuing natural reason and situational awareness over dominance and control. This performance was a tribute to the "natural elements at the crater and at the summit, acknowledg[ing] that though opposite and intense in personal characteristics, both are present today" (Merrie Monarch Festival, "*Hula* Auana//Wāhine"). Additionally, each movement and piece of costume used in the performance were meticulously crafted and were dedicated to conveying a connection to the natural world and to the two deities.

Vizenor also argues that survivance is not a mere abstract concept but instead viewed as a concrete, tangible practice not replicable through superficial or fleeting experiences (*Survivance* 89). Within this framework, *hula* practitioners provide the preeminent exemplar. Embodying the natural elements in their daily practices with their movements and songs, they internalize the stories and meanings associated with their traditions and impart them to their audiences. Furthermore, *hula* practitioners perceive

their homeland and the surrounding elements as an inseparable component of their identity and view their value as originating from their ecological milieu.

Ethnographic Observation Two: Movement Is Nature

In the art center, situated beneath the portraits of Pele, a raised platform was designated for *Kumu* Mele to instruct the class on *hula*. With a sense of reverence and eagerness, the *haumana* (students) formed five lines across the room facing *Kumu* Mele, eagerly awaiting their initiation to the dance. To them, *hula* was obviously not merely a dance form but rather a practice rooted in spirituality and cultural depth, connecting them to Hawaiian traditions and beliefs. The dancers' exuded a profound reverence for the spiritual knowledge they await. *Kumu* Mele's instructions were met with attentive silence as they absorbed every detail. Their purpose was not merely to dance but instead to discover their interconnectedness with the world through the art form of *hula*, as observed in my research.

November 5, 2022

> Visually, our lineup resembled genealogical lines. Each of the five lines appeared to represent a new generation, connecting to the deities and the land and represented by Pele's images on the wall. After learning a few steps– (which seemed to begin with easier steps and then gradually became more difficult as class progressed)–*Kumu* Mele shared a story of how Hawaiians came to be. Gods and goddesses such as Pele had an active role in Hawaiian creation. She told how humans were made from the earth, specifically *kalo* (the taro plant), and, as a result, the gods and the land are ancestors of the Hawaiian people. Every movement of *hula* reflects nature and the deities from which Hawaiian's are descended, she explains. These beliefs and stories are passed down to each generation and are the foundation of the survival of Hawaiian culture, traditions, and identity.

Anderson wrote a creation story in *Ke Ola* Magazine, which bears similarity to *Kumu* Mele's account. According to Anderson,

> Wākea the Sky Father, and the goddess Ho'ohōkūkalani, the Earth Mother, had a son, but the child was stillborn. The infant was buried on the east side of their home, where he might be warmed by the sunlight each morning, after being wrapped in kapa cloth and placed in a lauhala basket, Ho'ohkkalani sobbed and sang over the grave in her grief till a tiny stem appeared there.
>
> The slender stem reached towards the sky Anderson continues, and a broad heart-shaped leaf unfurled, waving in the breeze as if to reassure Ho'ohōkūkalani, "I am here, sweet mother." Each morning a drop of water gathered in the center of the leaf—like the tears Ho'ohōkūkalani had cried for her son. This plant became known as Hāloanakalaukapalili, meaning the long stem of the trembling leaf, and became the first *kalo* (taro).
>
> Ho'ohōkūkalani gave birth to a second son, the first human, whom she named Hāloa in honor of his older brother. Hāloa, meaning *eternal* or *long breath*, was strong and healthy. He managed the land, tending to the plants that grew from his brother's grave. The kalo plant grew and multiplied from the center corm—called *'oha*. The word *'ohana*, meaning *family*, is derived from the word *'oha* to describe our families as growing like kalo plants. When an *'oha* is removed from the corn, it is replanted to become the center of its own *'ohana*.

This story is a poignant reminder that, in Native Hawaiian culture, the land is family, a living and sacred entity closely connected to their ancestors' spirits. This belief is grounded in the Native Hawaiian worldview, which sees all living things as part of an interconnected web of life. For Native Hawaiians, the land is thus not merely a physical place but also an ancestor, a source of spiritual sustenance having a profound connection to the past. The land is also believed to embody ancestral spirits and to be a wellspring of cultural knowledge, spiritual nourishment, and community. Scholar Kay-Trask notes that, grammatically, the word *'aina* assumes a possessive meaning similar to 'of the body' or 'of the parents,' illustrating the inherent connection between the land and the people. (*From a Native Daughter* 116). This understanding forms the foundation of *hula*.

November 5, 2022

> During my experience learning *hula*, I discovered that every motion of body during the dance reinforced the people's centuries-old bond with the land. This realization was, initially, overwhelming, as I was not only learning new dance movements but also absorbing the knowledge that accompanied them. It quickly made learning the dance feel like a responsibility (which was mentioned at one point in class, but now was processing through movement), that what I did had a purpose that exceeded my own desires or entertainment.

Kumu Mele started by showing us how to move our feet, demonstrating from the stage every movement and pause needed on the footwork, along with which the hips were also to move. According to her, the different steps in *hula* depict the movement of the earth:

> Our people were very *akamai* (smart). That was so many years ago, and yet they already knew that the earth moved, and that's why the hips move like a pendulum, and when the hips move, that's what it's replicating.

Continuing, she described the various foot movements, including the *hela*, which is a fundamental foot movement in *hula* and involves touching one foot to the side at a roughly 45-degree angle in front of the body. While keeping most of their weight on the other foot and maintaining a bent-knee stance, dancers return the foot to its original position before repeating the same movement with the opposite foot *(Roberts Hawaii*). According to *Kumu* Mele Manuel this set of movements acknowledges the four cardinal points (north, south, east, and west) as well as the changing of the seasons that are unique to the Hawaiian Islands, such as the movement of the ocean's tides and by what fish are available to catch and eat.

In *hula*, the feet mimic the motion of the earth revolving around the sun, the hand gestures tell the story, and the feet acknowledge the gods within the earth, the seasons, and the four points of the compass. The hip rotation mimics the earth's rotation and so reflects the people's eternal connection to the land. The land is also deeply connected to *lāhui* (people or nation) and cultural identity since it is where a particular group of people has lived for generations, developing unique customs, traditions, and practices. The land thus serves as a spiritual and emotional source of connection for many Indigenous peoples and so is often considered sacred. Additionally, the land can be a source of collective and community identity, as people gather to protect and preserve it for future generations. The dancer's movements thus mimic the land, revealing how every movement reinforces his or her connection to it.

Summary

The Merrie Monarch Festival, as elucidated in this chapter, plays a pivotal role in Hawaiian cultural survivance by enabling an active contestation of colonial narratives and bolstering Hawaiian sovereignty both physically and digitally. The festival creates a a tangible sense of sovereignty and active presence. Additionally, by harnessing digital platforms to globally broadcast these enactments, the festival strengthens digital sovereignty and creates a virtual stronghold of Hawaiian cultural heritage, underscoring the intricate relationship between indigenous practices and modern digital engagement. Moreover, the emphasis on the Hawaiian language not only sustains its integrity but also facilitates a deeper understanding of Hawaiian values and traditions, crucial for cultural resilience and recovery. Notably, the persistence of language, as demonstrated by Pi'ikea Lopes, Miss Aloha Hula for 2022, exemplifies an active resistance to cultural erasure.

Furthermore, the deep spiritual connection between Native Hawaiians and their land, seen as a living entity imbued with spiritual energy, fuels their cultural identity, traditions, and inspirations for hula dances. Overall, the festival's collective practices powerfully demonstrate the continued cultural survivance of Native Hawaiians.

Chapter VI.

Conclusion

Through a comprehensive analysis of the Merrie Monarch Festival, with a specific focus on the *hula* competition, combined with interviews with *hula* dancers and *Kumu hula*, as well as participant observation of *hula*, this thesis demonstrates the festival's significant role in promoting the survival and resilience of Hawaiian culture, or "survivance" as defined by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor. The central question for this research is, in what ways does the Merrie Monarch Festival serve as a site of survivance, specifically regarding the perpetuation of the Hawaiian nation's continuity and the assertion of sovereignty for Native Hawaiians?

The findings of this research emphasize the importance of the festival in creating a space for and contributing to Hawaiian cultural survivance in a dramatic way through facilitating community building by bringing people together and creating a sense of belonging and collective identity among members. In particular, the festival demonstrates the continuity and strength of the *lāhui* (Hawaiian nation) through familial and communal interactions within the *hālau (hula* school), parade, art fair, and *hula* competition, which enables the sharing of unique *hula* repertoires and stories from individual *hula* lineages. By sharing stories, festival participants contribute to the collective knowledge of the community and document their own experiences of the present, further reinforcing their connection to the Hawaiian nation.

Additionally, stories showcased at the festival use survivance narratives, illustrating the resilience and agency of the Hawaiian people in their ongoing struggles for cultural preservation and self-determination. The festival also displays survivance by

providing a sovereign space for the Hawaiian people, which reinforces their Hawaiian identity and showcase Hawaiian *hula* and cultural traditions to a wider audience. As survivance, this demonstrates resistance to the erasure of Hawaiian identity and supports the continuity of Hawaiian sovereignty. Additionally, the festival and the dancers utilize nature throughout their performances. As survivance, this demonstrates the continuity the Hawaiians have to the land, and therefore as survivance, resists the colonial efforts to separate Hawaiians from their homelands. This also further expands their boundaries as a nation to the digital world. Further, the Hawaiian language creates a sovereign space by resisting the previous effects of colonial authority to ban the Hawaiian language. As survivance, this demonstrates that by speaking in their own tongue, they are embracing the teachings, beliefs, and thoughts of Hawaiians rather than the traditional Western ideologies.

Survivance has been studied in Native American scholarship and has proven to be a forward-moving approach for indigenous cultures that have survived, thrived, and continue to resist colonial influence. Although beneficial, this has not been applied to Native Hawaiian culture, even with the vast amount of scholarship on Hawaiian resistance. This work provides this perspective while also using the Merrie Monarch Festival as a study site. The festival is prestigious and significant to Hawaiians; however, few scholars have looked into it. Some scholars will mention the Festival as a smaller part of their research, but only a few have dived deeply into it, such as Teri Stillman, who looks at the festival and sovereignty.

Survivance also highlights that *hula* is a living tradition, and Hawaiians can continue to narrate their own history and stories. Additionally, the festival provides

opportunities to learn about Hawaiian culture, traditions, and identity, while also changing the perspectives and attitudes of those who did not know about Hawaiian culture before. By doing so, the festival continues to extend the Hawaiian traditions, culture, and identity to the rest of the world.

This research has raised new questions for future study. The Merrie Monarch Festival is often associated with traditional Hawaiian culture, but what about the experiences of other groups in Hawai'i? Future studies could explore the intersection of Hawaiian culture with other cultural identities, such as those of immigrants or other marginalized groups. This could include examining the ways in which different cultural traditions are incorporated into the festival or exploring the experiences of non-Hawaiian performers and attendees. How do those with no Hawaiian background experience the festival? Why do they go? And What do they take away from it? These are questions that often came up during this process and could benefit from further exploration.

The globalization of the festival has possibly changed its dynamics. This expansion and transition to a global audience has not been deeply investigated, and new understandings and insights could be gained from this research. There is also room to investigate the choreography of *hula* to examine the ways in which *hula* choreography reflects and expresses Hawaiian cultural values and traditions. This analysis could explore the use of movement, gesture, and expression in *hula* performance and the ways in which choreography has evolved over time.

Although there is more to explore, this current study can be connected to a broader debate by addressing appropriation verse innovation. Additionally, it can also connect to how indigenous groups work to revive their culture, language, dance, and

traditions and how they adapt to or reflect the changes in society. Overall, the Merrie Monarch Festival is an important event for the preservation and promotion of Hawaiian culture and tradition. It serves as a platform for reviving *hula* and Hawaiian culture, passing on knowledge and skills, fostering community and belonging, and creating a sovereign place for Native Hawaiians to assert their identity in their colonial circumstances.

Works Cited

Anderson, Brittany P. "The Past Is Present: Kalo Farming on Hawai'i Island." *Ke Ola: Hawai'i Island's Community Magazine*, 17 Feb. 2019, https://keolamagazine.com/agriculture/kalo-farming-on-hawaii-island/.

Battiste, Marie. "Research Ethics for Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: Institutional and Researcher Responsibilities." *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, edited by Norman K. Denzin et al., SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008, pp. 497–510.

Bauer, Natalee Kehaulani. "A Nation Rising: A Review." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education Society*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2015, pp. 109–17, https://www.academia.edu/73496739/A_Nation_Rising_A_review.

Brigham, William T. *Ka Hana Kapa, Vol. 3: The Making of Bark-Cloth in Hawaii*. 1911. Forgotten Books, 2018.

Bruddion, et al. "Haunani-Kay Trask: Her Contribution as a Pacific Thinker and Overall Impact on Pacific Studies." *Haunani-Kay Trask*, 17 Aug. 2020, haunanikaytraskblog.wordpress.com/2019/04/08/haunani-kay-trask-her-contribution-as-a-pacific-thinker-and-overall-impact-on-pacific-studies-2.

Carlson, Bronwyn, and Anna Mongibello. "Indigenous Resistance in the Digital Age: An Introduction." *Anglistica AION: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1–8, https://doi.org/10.6093/2035-8504/2021/1.

Coffey, Amanda. *Doing Ethnography*. SAGE Publications, Ltd., 2018.

Dening, Greg. "Performing on the Beaches of the Mind: An Essay," History and Theory 41(2002):1–24

Desmond, Jane C. "Invoking 'the Native': Body Politics in Contemporary Hawaiian Tourist Shows." *The Drama Review*, vol. 41, no. 4, 1997, pp. 83–107, https://doi.org/10.2307/1146662.

Dodds, Sherril. *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Competition*. Oxford Handbooks, 2018.

Dolim, Noah. "Misperceptions of the 'Hula Girl.'" *Hohonu*, vol. 12, 2014, pp. 1–5, https://hilo.hawaii.edu/campuscenter/hohonu/volumes/documents/MisperceptionsoftheHulaGirlNoahDolim.pdf

Duarte, Marisa Elena. "Connected Activism: Indigenous Uses of Social Media for Shaping Political Change." *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*, vol. 21, 2017, pp. 1–12, https://doi.org/10.3127/ajis.v21i0.1525.

Emerson, Nathaniel B. “Unwritten Literature of Hawaii.” *American Anthropologist*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1906, pp. 271–75, https://archive.org/details/jstor-659001.

Fox, Alistair. *Coming-of-Age Cinema in New Zealand: Genre, Gender and Adaptation*. Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

Galla, Candace Kaleimamoowahinekapu, et al. “Perpetuating Hula: Globalization and the Traditional Art.” *Pacific Arts*, vol. 14, no. 1/2, 2015, pp. 1–18, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Candace-Galla/publication/301650216_Perpetuating_hula_globalization_and_the_traditional_art/links/571fc0d308aead26e71b71ca/Perpetuating-hula-globalization-and-the-traditional-art.pdf.

Geertz, Clifford. The Interpretation Of Cultures. United Kingdom, Basic Books, 1973.

Gegeo, David Welchman. “Cultural Rupture and Indigeneity: The Challenge of (Re)Visioning ‘Place’ in the Pacific.” *The Contemporary Pacific. Special Issue: Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2001, pp. 491–507, https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2001.0052.

Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, Noelani. “Acknowledgements.” *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty*, edited by Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua et al., Duke University Press, 2004, p. xv.

---. “Introduction.” *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty*, edited by Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua et al., Duke University Press, 2014, pp. 1–35, https://doi.org/978-0822356837.

---. “Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance: Hawaiian Studies Methodologies.” *Kanaka ʻŌiwi Methodologies: Mo’olelo and Metaphor (Hawai’inuiākea)*, edited by Katrina-Ann R. Kapã’anoakalãokeola Nãkao Oliveira and Erin Kahumawaika’ala Wright, University of Hawai’i Press, 2016, pp. 1–29.

Halualani, Rona Tamiko. “*In the Name of Hawaiians: Native Identities and Cultural Politics*. University of Minnesota Press, 2002. “Hālau Kekuaokalāʻauʻalaʻiliahi - Kāne (2022 Hula Kahiko).” *Hawaii News Now*, 22 Apr. 2022, https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/video/2022/04/23/hlau-kekuaokalaualailiahi-kne-hula-kahiko/.

Hawaiian Dictionaries. wehewehe.org/gsdl2.85/cgi-bin/hdict?e=q-11000-00---off-0hdict--00-1----0-10-0---0---0direct-10-ED--4--textpukuielbert%2ctextmamaka%2ctextandrew%2ctextparker%2ctextpeplace%2ctextclark%2ctextchd%2ctexthllt-----0-1l--11-en-Zz-1---Zz-1-home-kakou--00-4-1-00-0--4----0-0-11-00-0utfZz-8-00&a=d&d=D6425#hero-bottom-banner.Henderson, Hannah. Interview. Conducted by Kadi Kohea. 25 May 2022.

“History of the Festival.” Merrie Monarch Festival, https://www.merriemonarch.com/history-of-the-festival/. Accessed 1 Jan. 2023.

Holmes, Andrew Gary Darwin. “Researcher Positionality – A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research – A New Researcher Guide.” *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2020, pp. 1–10, https://doi.org/10.34293/ education.v8i4.3232.

Imada, Adria L. *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire*. Duke University Press, 2012.

---. “Transnational Hula as Colonial Culture.” *The Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2011, pp. 149–76, https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2011.607260.

Jackson, Peter. “Commodity Cultures: The Traffic in Things.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1999, pp. 95–108. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/623343. Accessed 14 June 2023.

Kaeppler, Adrienne L. “Acculturation in Hawaiian Dance.” *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*, vol. 4, 1972, pp. 38–46, https://doi.org/10.2307/767671.

---. “Recycling Tradition: A Hawaiian Case Study.” *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2004, pp. 293–311, https://doi.org/10.1081/dnc-200033871.

Kaholokula, Joseph Keaweʻaimoku, et al. “Culturally Responsive Approaches to Health Promotion for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.” *Annals of Human Biology*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2018, pp. 249–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/03014460.2018.1465593.

Kameʻeleihiwa, Lilikalā. *Native Land and Foreign Desires Pehea LA E Pono Ai? How Shall We Live in Harmony?* Bishop Museum Press, 1992.

Kanaʻiaupuni, Shawn Malia, and Nolan Malone. "This land is my land: The role of place in Native Hawaiian identity." *Hūlili: multidisciplinary research on Hawaiian well-being* 3.1 (2006): 281-307.

Kanakaʻole, Ryan Kananiokahome Poiekeala. “The Indivisible ʻOhana: Extending Native Hawaiian Gathering Rights to Non-Hawaiian Family Members.” *Asian-Pacific Law and Policy Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2011, pp. 146–69.

Kapp, Drew. Pictorial Representations of Hawaiʻi: A Critique of Cultural Landscape Imagery Produced by European Artists in Hawaiʻi, 1778-1821. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i at Manoa, 1998.

Kaupu, Keano. Interview. Conducted by Kadi Kohea. 14 July 2022.

Keesing, Roger M. “Creating the Past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific.” *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 1, no. 1/2, 1989, pp. 19–42, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23701891.

Kovach, Margaret. “Conversation Method in Indigenous Research.” *Articles*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2020, pp. 40–48, https://doi.org/10.7202/1069060ar.

LaPointe-Crump, Janice D.. “Competition and Dance Education.” *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance* 78 (2007): 4 - 9.

Lee, Mya. “Preserving Hula, the Heartbeat of Hawaii.” *The New York Times*, 8 May 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/07/style/hawaii-merrie-monarch-festival-hula.html.

Linnekin, Jocelyn S. “Defining Tradition: Variations on the Hawaiian Identity.” *American Ethnologist*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1983, pp. 241–52, https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1983.10.2.02a00020.

Lury, Celia. Consumer Culture. United Kingdom, Rutgers University Press, 1996.Makuakane, Uluwehi. Interview. Conducted by Kadi Kohea. 17 May 2022.

Manuel, Meleana. Interview. Conducted by Kadi Kohea. 17 May 2022.

McKinley, Elizabeth Ann, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith. “Towards Self-Determination in Indigenous Education Research: An Introduction.” *Handbook of Indigenous Education*, edited by Elizabeth Ann McKinley and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Springer Singapore, 2019, pp. 1–16.

McLean, Jessica. *Changing Digital Geographies: Technologies, Environments and People*. Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2020.

Mead, Margaret. “The Future as the Basis for Establishing a Shared Culture.” *Daedalus*, vol. 94, no. 1, 1965, pp. 135–55.

Merrie Monarch Festival. *About King Kalākaua*. 2023, https://www.merriemonarch.com/history/.

---. “Hula Auana//Kāne.” *Facebook*, 24 Apr. 2022, https://www.facebook.com/themerriemonarchfestival/posts/10158987706444200.

---. “Hula Auana//Wāhine.” *Facebook*, 26 May 2022, https://www.facebook.com/themerriemonarchfestival/photos/pb.100050231180825.-2207520000./10158987410444200/?type=3.

Merrie Monarch Festival Program 2022. 2022.

Meyer, Manulani Aluli. “Hawaiian Hermeneutics and the Triangulation of Meaning: Gross, Subtle, Causal.” *Social Justice*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2003, pp. 54–63.

Mulliken, Katherine. Interview. Conducted by Kadi Kohea. 25 May 2022.

Norris, Pua. Interview. Conducted by Kadi Kohea. 26 May 2022.

Osher, Wendy. "Pi'ikea Lopes Wins 2022 Miss Aloha Hula Title, 'Ōlelo Hawai'i Award at Merrie Monarch Festival." *Maui Now*, 22 Apr. 2022, https://mauinow.com/2022/04/22/pi'ikea-lopes-wins-2022-miss-aloha-hula-title-'olelo-hawai'i-award-at-merrie-monarch-festival/.

Osorio, Jon Kamakawiwo'ole. *Dismembering Lāhui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2002.

Paredes, Illiahi. Interview. Conducted by Kadi Kohea. 21 June 2022.

Porsanger, Jelena. "An Essay about Indigenous Methodology." *Nordit*, vol. 15, 2004, pp. 105–20, https://doi.org/10.7557/13.1910.

Pukui, Mary Kawena, and Samuel H. Elbert. *Hawaiian Dictionary: Hawaiian-Engish English-Hawaiian*. Revised ed., University of Hawai'i Press, 1986.

Roberts Hawaii. *Hawaiian Hula Dance 101*. 2023, https://www.robertshawaii.com/blog/hawaiian-hula-dance-101/.

Rowe, Sharon Māhealani. "We Dance for Knowledge." Dance Research Journal 40, no. 1 (2008): 31–44. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0149767700001352.

Saffery, Maya L. Kawailanaokeawaiki. "Welina Mānoa: A Hawaiian Language Curriculum That Exposes Acts of Settler Colonial Erasure and Reveals Stories of 'Ōiwi Survivance." *Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2019, pp. 99–134, https://doi.org/10.37712/hulili.2019.11-2.03.

Scheffler, Samuel. "Equality and Tradition: Questions of Value in Moral and Political Theory." *Mind*, vol. 124, no. 496, 2015, pp. 1385–88, https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzv073.

Schensul, Jean J., and Margaret Diane LeCompte. *Essential Ethnographic Methods: A Mixed Methods Approach*. 2nd ed., AltaMira Press, 2013.

Silva, Noenoe K. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Skillman, Teri Leigh. *The Merrie Monarch Festival in Hilo, Hawai'i: Sovereign Spaces Reclaimed and Created through Hula Competition, 1963–2010*. University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 2012, http://hdl.handle.net/10125/101547.

Sklar, Deidre. "II. On Dance Ethnography." *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1991, pp. 6–10, https://doi.org/10.2307/1478692.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 2nd ed., Zed Books Ltd., 2013.

Steiner, George. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 1998.

Stillman, Amy Ku'uleialoha. "Globalizing Hula." Yearbook for Traditional Music, vol. 31, 1999, pp. 57–66. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/767973. Accessed 8 January 2023.

---. "Hawaiian Hula Competitions: Event, Repertoire, Performance, Tradition." *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 109, no. 434, 1996, pp. 357–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/541181.

---. "The Hawaiian Hula and Legacies of Institutionalization." *Comparative American Studies an International Journal*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2007, pp. 221–34, https://doi.org/10.1179/147757007x204402.

Tamaira, A. K. (2018). From a Native Daughter: Seeking Home and Ancestral Lines through a Dashboard Hula Girl. Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal, 1. http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/R71141463 Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9ps0d7z3

Trask, Haunani-Kay. *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*. University of Hawai'i Press, 1993.

---. "Lovely Hula Hands: Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture". *Border/Lines*, no. 23, July 2016, https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/bl/article/view/24958.

---. "Natives and Anthropologists: The Colonial Struggle. The Contemporary Pacific." *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1991, pp. 159–67.

---. "Writing in Captivity: Poetry in a Time of De-colonization." *Wasafiri*, vol. 12, no. 25, 1997, pp. 42–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/02690059708589532.

Tunison, Emma. *Interview Conducted by Kadi Kohea*. 17 May 2022.

Uchiyama, Māhealani. *The Haumāna Hula Handbook for Students of Hawaiian Dance*. North Atlantic Books, 2016.

Vizenor, Gerald. *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

---. *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*. Wesleyan University Press, 1993.

---. *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*. University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

---. *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

Volcano Art Center. *About*. 2021, https://volcanoartcenter.org.

Wilson, Victoria. "What Is Cultural Identity and Why Is It Important?" *Exceptional Futures*, 16 Feb. 2023, https://www.exceptionalfutures.com/cultural-identity/.

Windchief, Sweeney, and Kenneth E. Ryan. "The Sharing of Indigenous Knowledge through Academic Means by Implementing Self-Reflection and Story." *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2018, pp. 82–89, https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118818188.