PREFACE “Statehood Sucks”

The owner of a popular Facebook group, “We Grew Up on Maui,” posted a photo of a rusting green Chevrolet SUV. In keeping with displaying one’s place-based relation to a larger island community via their hopes or concerns, the straight-to-the-point bumper sticker read, “STATEHOOD SUCKS.” The caption to the photo added: “Just happened to see this bumper sticker today—Statehood Day—while I was eating breakfast in Kahului. #Ironic.”

Such irony is heightened under conditions of occupation as most residents of Hawaiʻi, and U.S. residents generally, view opposition to statehood as contradictory and unexpected. Such dissent is often dismissed as humorous and kolohe, or “mischievous,” yet futile because statehood is imagined as not only having been resolved back in 1959 but permanently settled, the highest form of U.S. governance attainable—the pinnacle of settler civilization. Yet, lying quietly just behind this dismissal is a well of discomfort. Such discomfort might serve as a space of learning, as Kanaka ʻŌiwi (Native Hawaiian) history and an ever-growing movement not only questions the very legitimacy of the United States in Hawaiʻi, but importantly offers culturally rich and historically meaningful alternatives to the current system. As such, “Statehood Day” or Admission Day becomes a state holiday that enables most to grapple with a major historical contradiction for anyone who has even moderately learned about Hawaiʻi’s history.

This contradiction, however, is not limited to Hawaiʻi. The neat and tidy spatial geographies of fifty U.S. states constrains imaginative space,

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Figure P.1 "Statehood Sucks" bumper sticker from the Facebook group "We Grew Up on Maui," August 16, 2013.

normalizing what Chickasaw scholar Jodi A. Byrd calls the "cacophony of colonialism."[1] The spatial and temporal framing of the fifty U.S. states—the fifty stars adorning the U.S. flag—produces a web of colonial and imperial formations that make absent the over 567 federally recognized tribal nations as of 2017. This number is still not an accurate index of the different Native nations navigating encroaching settler governments.[2] The discourse of fifty states further obscures U.S. territories in Guåhan (Guam), American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and, importantly, the diverse movements for self-determination across these sites. It similarly obscures the estimated eight hundred military bases as of 2015, outside of the United States, that make it the largest militarized empire in world

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history.[3] Still, this is only a glimpse into how far-reaching the United States is outside of the territorial borders of fifty states, given its use of black sites, drone warfare, and the imperial legacies of overt and covert wars that have led to the overthrow of numerous countries, including Hawai'i.[4]

U.S. states and their organizing power are such an intimate part of everyday life that they are often not considered a site of colonial critique. This is despite having emerged from intense colonial violence. The Native counterclaims to such obfuscating official histories of statehood are typically made public in the years when different states attempt to commemorate their statehood. In November of 2007, for instance, more than five hundred elders, adults, and children from a wide diversity of Native American nations gathered at the Oklahoma State Capitol to oppose the Oklahoma public schools, which as a part of their statehood celebration forced students to reenact the Oklahoma land runs. Taking place in the last decade of the nineteenth century, land runs enabled white settlers to claim Native lands, planting themselves in Indian Territory, which had already been designated by the federal government for different Native nations. Many of these same Native nations had been previously dispossessed and forcefully removed from their traditional territories under genocidal conditions to make way for earlier instances of white settlement. Protestors carried signs that read "THIS LAND IS OUR LAND" and "THE LAND RUN WAS ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION," along with a large banner that read "WHY CELEBRATE 100 YEARS OF THEFT?" The organizer of the Oklahoma Indians Survival Walk and Remembrance Ceremony, Muscogee Creek Nation citizen Brenda Golden, said she wanted to make a statement that the celebrations were "an affront to the true history of how Oklahoma was legislatively stolen from the people to whom it was promised."[5]

The following year, in 2008, Native demonstrations opposed the 150-year anniversary of the state of Minnesota. Carrying thirty-eight nooses—representative of the thirty-eight Dakota who were executed on Abraham Lincoln's orders on December 26, 1862—Native demonstrators highlighted the genocidal violence of state formation, showing how the public executions were the federal government's response to the Dakota War of 1862. The public mass execution of the thirty-eight Dakota is the largest in U.S. history. Dakota scholar-activist Waziyatawin states that

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while the protestors pushed for Minnesota state officials to use this year for "truth-telling," state leaders "refused and wanted to continue with their birthday celebration and not let truth-telling get in the way."[6] In her book *What Does Justice Look Like?*, Waziyatawin asks, "What does it mean that Dakota extermination and forced removal (as well as Ho-Chunk removal) were the price of Minnesota's statehood? And, what does it mean in the twenty-first century when Minnesotans celebrate the establishment of the state, despite its shameful historical legacy and the harmful consequences to whole nations of Indigenous peoples?"[7] When the state of Minnesota commemorated its sesquicentennial celebration with a Statehood Wagon that was to travel 101 miles to the state capitol, Dakota people blocked the wagon as it passed Fort Snelling. Fort Snelling offered the colonial force necessary for settlers to create Minnesota statehood, and the fort was itself built overlooking the sacred site of creation for the Dakota. It was also at Fort Snelling that the Dakota were held in concentration camps. Indeed, every U.S. state has a statehood story to tell. These improvisational histories are unique and geopolitical, and continue to play out by normalizing a general silence around Native histories. Whether forcing schoolchildren to reenact land theft or using a Statehood Wagon to commemorate scenes of conquest, the theatricality of the settler state aims to produce good citizen-subjects who revisit historical moments of colonial violence to renew and legitimate ongoing forms of settler colonialism.

In this way, the formation of U.S. states is the violent work of replacing one landscape with another, various modes of life with another, various peoples with another, all of which necessitates a discursive regime—underpinned by juridical and military force—that normalizes occupation and makes sense of the genocide that this kind of replacement requires. Thus, while the Northwest Ordinance of 1787—a blueprint for expansion and the formation of U.S. territories and states—is popularly imagined as foundational U.S. national policy, Philip J. Deloria (Dakota) argues that it should instead be understood as U.S. Indian policy.[8] A clear-cut example of how U.S. states are formed via complex processes of settler colonialism, the Northwest Ordinance illustrates how settler state formation lies at a complicated intersection of diaspora and indigeneity, how those deemed settlers are at once both displaced and displacing.[9] The Ordinance states that after achieving a large enough settler population (five

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thousand "free male inhabitants of age") white settlers could proceed to organize and incorporate themselves as new territories. After proving capable of reaching a population of sixty thousand and drafting a state constitution, these territories could petition Congress to recognize them as newly formed states on equal footing with previous U.S. states. It is through the fictive creation of nation, states, and property that such settlers are able to seize Native wealth.[10]

The colonial discourse of fifty U.S. states, thus contains one's temporal and spatial imagination of the scale of U.S. empire while also denying the violent imperial histories on the very land beneath our feet. While the linear transition from Native territories to U.S. territories and then to statehood is narrated as the recognition of a maturing government—the destiny of incorporated territories—these transitions are underpinned by racial and gendered discourse. In other words, U.S. statehood has meant not only the containment of seemingly primitive Native nations, but settler expansion was often animated by "proslavery imperialists."[11] Statehood thus masks the very settler-colonial makeup of the settler nation wherever it claims territoriality, which then absolves individuals and governments of any wrongdoing even as its continued existence relies on an expansion of racial violence and the ongoing containment of Native political, cultural, and spiritual associations with place.

In Hawai'i, as elsewhere, statehood operates as a knowledge-making spectacle that abates U.S. occupation and settler colonialism by giving the illusion of settler state permanence, yet requires constant recalibration to shore up ongoing processes of dispossession. There is a photograph that graced the front page of the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* on the fiftieth anniversary of Hawai'i's admission as a U.S. state that visually illustrates these tensions. It was taken from inside the Hawai'i State Capitol, looking up through the open-air rotunda. Flowing red and black banners that read "HAWAIIAN INDEPENDENCE" wave in the wind in the foreground and are juxtaposed with two military fighter jets doing an aerial flyover of the capitol building in the background. The atrium of the state of Hawai'i capitol building frames the fighter aircraft and the independence banners. A similar photograph in the daily paper—which in the decades prior to statehood was firmly committed to shaping public opinion in its favor—colors with unease and ambivalence the front-page headline "50 YEARS OF STATEHOOD."

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Figure P.2 Banners that read “HAWAIIAN INDEPENDENCE” with military fighter aircraft. Photo taken from inside the Hawaiʻi State Capitol building, March 18, 2009. Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Shishido.

March 18, 2009, the day the photograph was taken, commemorated the signing of the Admission Act, and the Hawaiian Independence Action Alliance (HIAA) had organized a demonstration to counter the state’s celebration of itself. Throughout 2009, the HIAA organized marches and public art actions; produced television shows, radio shows, and public talks; held film screenings and community events; and provided other spaces for public dialogue about Hawaiʻi’s admission as a U.S. state.[12] The group aimed to create an alternative message by using alternative media forms and, unlike the Statehood Commission, which had a $600,000 budget to commemorate U.S. statehood, the HIAA was a strictly grassroots effort with no financial support. Anticipating such actions, the state of Hawaiʻi ruled that no signs would be allowed inside the open-air capitol building. The group planned accordingly and each participant wore a black shirt with a single bright-green letter to collectively spell out the phrases “FAKE STATE” and “HISTORY OF THEFT.” Longtime organizer and professor of anthropology Lynette Cruz argued to the press: “There was no treaty of annexation. Show me the treaty. There’s been an incorrect interpretation of history all these years.”[13] Although the

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Figure P.3 The Hawaiian Independence Action Alliance (HIAA) demonstration at the Fiftieth Anniversary of Statehood Commemoration at the Hawai'i State Capitol, March 18, 2009. Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Shishido.

local newspapers and news channels limited their coverage of the demonstration to a brief mention, coverage by the Associated Press provided the group with national and international attention. The late Hawaiian activist Richard Pomai Kinney, who was nineteen years old at the time of statehood, is quoted as saying: “Statehood is a fraud. My parents said Hawai'i would become only a place for the wealthy. Look at it today. There's nothing to celebrate.”[14]

At the time of the action, I was a graduate student finishing my dissertation on Hawai'i's admission as a U.S. state and actively organizing with the HIAA. As a fourth-generation Filipino and Japanese settler from Kahului, Maui, I was informed by recent scholarship on settler colonialism in Hawai'i which challenged and expanded my working-class worldview. I had been exposed to Kanaka 'Ōiwi histories and struggles as an undergraduate at the University of Hawai'i, but much of this became crystalized while working as a valet in Waikīkī. Wayne Kaumualii Westlake (whose poem “Statehood” is the frontispiece to this book) and his 1973 poem about working as a janitor in Waikīkī, one of which says simply that he “wrote poems to keep from going insane,” resonated with me.[15]

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At work, I would witness racist and colonial dynamics play out nightly, in unexpected ways, and the violent realities of occupation kept me up at night. This is to say that by the time I was writing the dissertation the stakes of what I was studying felt urgent and I aimed for my scholarship to be accountable and relevant outside of the university. Knowing that the commemoration of U.S. statehood lent itself to conversations between Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians, I planned the completion of my dissertation at the University of Michigan to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of Hawaiʻi statehood in 2009. Throughout the year, I was invited to speak at different events and made every effort to make my work publicly accessible through presentations at community centers, bookstores, television and radio talk shows, local television news interviews, national and local newspaper interviews, university talks, conference panels, colloquiums, and various events throughout the islands. I aimed to offer a "history of the present" that placed the commemoration of statehood within a genealogy of settler colonialism and U.S. imperialism, by offering historical evidence of Kanaka ʻŌiwi opposition to statehood and showing how such resistance was targeted for silencing by state agencies.[16]

In the planning of the March 2009 action, Lynette Cruz asked me to carry the banners that read "HAWAIIAN INDEPENDENCE" into the capitol building, saying she would take photos of the moment when security attempted to stop me from entering. As a security guard confronted me, I tried my best to create a useful photo op but, because he was older than me, it felt disrespectful to argue with him and we instead ended up talking story. He eventually let me through and as I looked toward Lynette to see if she had gotten a good photo, she simply laughed. As the action continued, Uncle Kekuni Blaisdell, Auntie Terri Kekoʻolani, Lorenz Gonschor, Johanna Almiron, and S. Heijin Lee held each other's hands as they moved directly in front of the U.S. Pacific Fleet Band, interrupting their performance of U.S. naval songs to spell the word *theft*. There were numerous similar actions, enough for those celebrating statehood to move behind closed doors into the chambers of the state House of Representatives. The HIAA group moved together to Beretania Street where motorists driving by read the signs and many honked their horns in solidarity. As we moved back into the capitol building, the Uncle who was working security stopped me and spoke softly: "If you like one good picture, put

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Figure P.4 Members of the HIAA together spell the word *theft*, March 18, 2009. Photograph courtesy of Jonathan Shishido.

your banners in the rotunda when the jets fly over." He told me what time the flyover was supposed to start and I notified artist and media activist Jonathan Shishido, whose photo of the moment is featured here (figure P.2), as well as the media journalists covering the action.

What is haunting to me about the photograph is that the major players in Hawai'i's contemporary history are represented while in movement. The constraining logics of the settler state frame the photo, while the coercive nature of empire via its military jets are in the background. Hawaiian independence is figured not only, however, in words but also in a particular form that illustrates how this independence endures but also exceeds the political possibilities of the United States. Donna Burns, the prolific Kanaka 'Ōiwi artist who created the banners (most from Hawai'i would be familiar with her design of the Local Motion Hawai'i logo) conceived of the independence banners to look like the symbol of Lono, a major deity of peace, agriculture, rainfall, and fertility. Military fighter jets designed to resolve political issues with warfare are juxtaposed against a notion of political sovereignty expressed in sacred form tied to life, farming, and peace.

Scholar and activist Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua argues against seeing the settler state as the center of political life, and asserts that sovereignty is

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not something to be recognized or achieved, but instead practiced at both an individual and collective level. Ea—translated as "rising," "life," "breath," "sovereignty," or "autonomy"—is realized in the present via actions and does not require waiting for the United States to leave Hawaiʻi. In her introduction to the anthology *A Nation Rising*, Goodyear-Kaʻōpua argues that Kanaka ʻŌiwi notions of sovereignty precede and exceed Western notions of sovereignty. Ea is first attached to state-based sovereignty in 1843 after British occupation of the Hawaiian Islands ends and King Kauikeaouli consequently declares, "Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i ka pono," roughly translated as "The life or sovereignty of the land is perpetuated by righteousness." Referencing the work of Leilani Basham and Kaleikoa Kaʻeo, Goodyear-Kaʻōpua points out that even in this moment of deoccupation, Kauikeaouli locates sovereignty not in the government but in the land.[17] Such ways of conceptualizing Hawaiian independence are beyond the political imagination of Western and settler sovereignty; instead, they aim for the flourishing of the conditions of life—the very thing that the permanent conditions of warfare, rampant capitalist development, and their progeny, climate crisis, can destroy. As kumu hula Olana Ai is often quoted as saying: "Aloha is the intelligence with which we meet life."[18]

Despite my expectation that the non-Hawaiian security guard at the state capitol was not an ally for Hawaiian independence—and I am sure that I looked out of place to him as well—it is thanks to his astute political and creative imagination that the photograph with the words "HAWAIIAN INDEPENDENCE" appeared on the front page on the fiftieth anniversary of statehood and is thus archived in the official historical record. Although I argue that the histories existent in this book are very much alive in the present, as evidenced by the interactions between the security guard and me they do not overdetermine our present; and we collectively mediate and change such histories with every action and choice we make.

In this way, diverse non-Native communities can remain vigilant in resisting oppressive systems that enhance various vulnerabilities against us, while also working to become aware of the colonial structures ingrained in U.S. nationalism that render invisible the genocidal violence committed against Kānaka ʻŌiwi. More to the point, not taking into account structures of settler colonialism and occupation can unwittingly reproduce the appearance of legitimate sovereignty by the occupying U.S. settler state. While migration in and of itself does not equate to

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colonialism, migration to a settler-colonial space—where Native lands and resources are under political, ecological, and spiritual contestation—means that the political agency of diverse non-Native communities can bolster a colonial system initiated by white settlers. The inverse, however, is also true. The political agency of various non-Native communities can also play an important role in bolstering Native movements for deoccupation, many of which are organized around the flourishing of the conditions of all life. Settler states have no interest in non-Natives identifying with Native movements as that opens our visual world to an awareness of processes of settler accumulation by Native dispossession, thus opposing a system set by white supremacy that, while *differently*, comes at the expense of *all of us*.

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