Spectacles of Power: Cultural Representations and Structural Myth in the History of Hawai'i

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Abstract: This paper examines the structural and ideological transformation of Hawai'ian cultural forms under colonial and capitalist forces. Utilizing a synthesis of Marxist structuralism, Althusserian theory, and post-structuralist critiques from Foucault, Barthes, and Jameson, the paper explores how these indigenous practices have been commodified and re-signified for Western consumption. It critiques dominant historiography and tourism's mythologizing of Hawai'i as a timeless paradise, exposing the erasure of indigenous memory and agency. Through analysis of signifying practices and the cultural politics of performance, this work reclaims chant and hula as living symbols of resistance, identity, and sovereignty, offering a decolonial rereading of Hawai'ian history and representation.

Keywords: Hawai'i, cultural representation, decolonial theory, structuralism

"The history of the struggle for truth is the history of the refusal of a truth imposed by another, taken as the other."[1]

In the resorts of Waikīkī and Maui, staged spectacles like "Drums of the Pacific" present a seductive fantasy of Hawai'i: lush, rhythmic, erotic, and ultimately consumable. These performances, crafted for tourist audiences, reconfigure indigenous cultural forms into aesthetic commodities. Hula becomes a visual display; chant, a backdrop to a lu'au buffet. Removed from their genealogical, spiritual, and political origins, these practices are re-signified within a dominant myth of Hawai'i as paradise. This ideological operation is not benign. It performs a kind of epistemic violence—obscuring historical trauma, erasing colonial legacies, and recasting Hawai'i in the language of leisure and spectacle.

[1] Michel Foucault, "The Concern for Truth," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Alan Sheridan et al. (New York: Routledge, 1988), 256.

This paper interrogates how dominant ideologies restructure cultural representations of Hawai‘i through what Roland Barthes calls the "mythological system"[2]—wherein the historical becomes naturalized and culture is transformed into nature. Following Michel Foucault's genealogical method and Fredric Jameson's conception of narrative as a socially symbolic act, this analysis locates Hawai'ian chant, hula, and music at the intersection of power and representation. These cultural forms are not simply inherited traditions, but dynamic fields of contestation shaped by structural contradictions and ideological displacement.

Tourism in Hawai‘i commodifies not only space but also identity. The popular image of the "hula girl" or the emcee's exaggerated "Aloooo-ha" frames indigeneity as performance, available for consumption and devoid of resistance.[3] The historical development of this imagery aligns with the broader trajectory of Western epistemological dominance, in which oral histories, indigenous cosmologies, and communal memory are overwritten by Western historiography. These mythologies, reinforced through repetition in performances, literature, and media, construct a cultural unconscious that obscures historical complexity in favor of pleasurable simplicity.

But this is not merely a question of aesthetic appropriation. The cultural forms under scrutiny—especially hula and chant—once functioned as embodiments of sacred time, vehicles for transmitting cosmology, genealogy, and resistance. In the context of tourism, these forms become "floating signifiers", emptied of historical content and reinscribed with ideological meaning favorable to the colonial and capitalist gaze.

Building on the work of Althusser and Jameson, I argue that these performances operate within a structure of symbolic reproduction that masks contradiction and normalizes inequality. However, even within such hegemonic forms, moments of rupture remain possible. Contemporary Hawai'ian artists and activists have begun to reclaim these cultural forms, reinfusing them with historical consciousness and political resistance. The interplay between appropriation and reclamation demonstrates that cultural forms are never ideologically neutral nor fixed in

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[2] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972).

[3] Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai‘i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999).

meaning. They carry within them the tensions of their time—residues of suppressed histories and the potential for cultural revolution.

This article contributes to a growing body of work that treats cultural expression as a site of struggle over memory, meaning, and identity. Drawing from Marxist, structuralist, and post-structuralist methodologies, I offer a framework for analyzing Hawai'ian cultural forms not as inert traditions but as living, contested signs that mediate relationships between power, history, and representation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this paper draws upon the confluence of structuralist and post-structuralist traditions, particularly within Marxist cultural criticism. Central to this framework is the concept of ideology, not merely as a set of ideas, but as a material practice embedded in and constitutive of social relations. Louis Althusser's theorization of ideology as the "imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"[4] reframes ideology as a structuring force that operates through institutions, rituals, and language to reproduce the dominant relations of production.

Althusser expands Marx's base-superstructure model by proposing that society consists of relatively autonomous instances—the economic, political, and ideological—each contributing to the reproduction of the social totality.[5] Within this model, ideology plays a central role in social reproduction by interpellating subjects—calling individuals into specific social roles that appear natural but are historically constructed. The performative dimension of culture, including chant and hula, becomes a site where this interpellation is enacted and reinforced.

Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) illuminates the specific sites through which ideology is transmitted—schools, churches, media, and cultural institutions. These apparatuses operate not through direct coercion but through consent, reproducing the conditions necessary for capitalism to flourish. In Hawai'i, tourist performances of hula and chant function as ISAs in disguise, shaping perceptions of indi-

[4] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

[5] Ibid.

geneity and history through seemingly apolitical entertainment. These performances work ideologically by aestheticizing the past and erasing colonial violence under the guise of cultural celebration.

Importantly, Althusser's process of interpellation is not a passive one. It entails a misrecognition whereby individuals see themselves as autonomous and coherent subjects while actually being constituted through ideological structures. When a tourist hears a chant during a lu'au or witnesses a hula performance on a hotel stage, they are not only consuming culture—they are being positioned within a system of recognition that validates colonial logics. The performer, in turn, is interpellated not as a historical subject with political agency, but as an emblem of exotic hospitality. This dual interpellation naturalizes inequality and reinscribes the ideological order through performance.

Stuart Hall deepens this line of thought by arguing that ideology functions not only through textual representation but through practices of encoding and decoding. Cultural signs are produced with intended meanings but can be interpreted in divergent ways depending on context and positionality. In the Hawaiian context, while state-sanctioned hula competitions or hotel shows may encode a sanitized version of indigeneity, these same signs can be decoded as sites of irony, resistance, or mourning by Hawai'ian audiences. Hall's intervention reminds us that while ideology works to fix meaning, those meanings are never entirely closed.

Fredric Jameson advances this structuralist lineage by arguing that narrative itself is a socially symbolic act.[6] In his view, cultural forms are not neutral reflections of reality but symbolic solutions to real social contradictions. They operate unconsciously, mediating historical tensions and masking class antagonisms. Jameson introduces three interpretive levels: the political (texts as symbolic acts), the social (texts as part of class discourse), and the historical (texts as expressions of competing modes of production). These levels allow us to map the ways in which Hawaiian chant and hula resolve, obscure, or expose contradictions embedded in Hawaii's colonial history. Jameson's notion of the "ideologeme"—the smallest unit of ideological meaning—can be seen in the gestures of a dancer, the rhythm of a mele, or the silences in a televised broadcast of cultural performance. These ideologemes are not just expressions of aesthetic form, but containers of historical memory.

[6] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

Myth, as articulated by Roland Barthes, also plays a critical role in this study. In *Mythologies*, Barthes defines myth as a second-order semiological system that transforms history into nature.[7] By emptying signs of their historical specificity and refilling them with ideological meaning, myth presents contingent cultural constructions as universal and timeless. This transformation is especially evident in tourist-oriented representations of Hawaiian culture, where sacred practices are reframed as playful entertainments. For example, the hula ma'i—a sacred procreative chant originally reserved for ali'i (royalty)—is recontextualized as comic relief for Western tourists. In this way, the "myth of paradise" serves to naturalize the Hawai'ian Other as joyous, hypersexual, and apolitical.

Michel Foucault's genealogical approach deepens this analysis by tracing how regimes of knowledge and discourse shape the production of subjects and the exercise of power.[8] Power, for Foucault, is not centralized or repressive but dispersed and productive—it constitutes identities, norms, and social possibilities. Hawai'ian cultural forms, when filtered through the discourses of tourism, education, and entertainment, are subjected to these diffuse operations of power that reconfigure their meanings and social functions. Foucault's notion of the archive—the system governing what can be said, known, or remembered—applies directly to how certain Hawaiian chants, genealogies, and historical accounts have been silenced or selectively preserved. What becomes visible in tourist performance is not a neutral representation, but a curated memory structured by colonial desires.

Together, these theorists form a composite lens through which Hawai'ian cultural representation is examined—not as static tradition, but as a dynamic site where ideology, history, and aesthetics converge. In the context of colonization and globalization, chant and hula become contested terrains where dominant narratives are imposed, resisted, and transformed. They function simultaneously as instruments of hegemonic incorporation and as vehicles for counter-hegemonic expression.

Thus, this theoretical framework foregrounds not only the structural reproduction of ideology but also the potential for rupture. Moments when cultural practices exceed or contradict their commodified

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[7] Barthes, *Mythologies*.

[8] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

function reveal the latent tensions within social formations—what Jameson terms the "political unconscious."[9] These tensions emerge in the performances of contemporary Hawaiian musicians and dancers who intentionally invoke suppressed historical forms or reintroduce forgotten chants in ways that defy commercial expectations. The critical task, then, is to read these forms dialectically, uncovering the historical conditions they encode and the social contradictions they mediate.

Historical and Cultural Analysis

To understand the ideological function of Hawai'ian cultural forms, one must trace their historical transformation from sacred praxis to staged performance. Prior to Western contact, chant (oli), hula, and mele (song) were embedded within genealogical and cosmological systems. Hula, in particular, was not a dance of mere pleasure or sensuality, but a ritualistic form of knowledge transmission and ancestral invocation. Each movement encoded specific meanings, and each oli operated as an archive of collective memory. As Karl Marx observed, cultural forms arise from and reflect the material conditions of society; they are never ideologically innocent.[10]

The arrival of missionaries in the 19th century marked a decisive rupture in the cultural landscape of Hawai'i. Christian moralism and colonial governance collaborated to suppress hula, labeling it heathen and immoral. This ideological suppression was codified through legal prohibitions and moral education, enacting what Althusser would call a regime of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)[11] that worked to erase or neutralize indigenous cultural expressions. Mission schools functioned as disciplinary spaces in which Hawai'ian children were taught to disavow their language, bodily comportment, and ceremonial practices. In this sense, the missionary project aligned with the rise of a capitalist economy in Hawai'i based on sugar and pineapple plantations, which required a docile, disciplined labor force.[12]

Despite its prohibition, hula continued in clandestine spaces—what

[9] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 20.

[10] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S. W. Ryazanskaya (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970).

[11] Althusser, *Ideological State Apparatuses*.

[12] Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

might be understood as Foucault's heterotopias of resistance[13]—where it retained its sacred and genealogical function. These sites were not just spatial alternatives, but epistemological refuges where the logic of colonial time and capitalist productivity was suspended in favor of cyclical, genealogical rhythms. In this regard, the persistence of hula represents a form of embodied counter-memory that resists both religious conversion and historical erasure.

By the early 20th century, hula began to re-emerge in public through state-sanctioned festivals and the rise of the tourism industry. Yet this reintroduction was far from neutral. The hula that returned to the stage was sanitized and choreographed to align with Western sensibilities. It was stripped of its ritualistic complexity and re-coded as a signifier of leisure and exoticism. This transformation reflects what Roland Barthes would describe as the operation of myth: a historical sign emptied of its original content and refilled with bourgeois meaning.[14] Hollywood's representation of Hawai'i further compounded this transformation by replacing the Native with the native fantasy—docile, joyful, and ever-welcoming.

The transformation of hula mirrors the broader structural process identified by Fredric Jameson: the symbolic resolution of real contradictions.[15] The contradiction here is the legacy of colonial occupation and cultural violence, which is sutured over by the fantasy of aloha. The repetition of aestheticized hula in hotel courtyards and tourist brochures functions to deny that contradiction by presenting a harmonious, unbroken cultural continuity. This is the ideological work of spectacle—a term that, like Guy Debord's formulation,[16] may be employed here to describe the way commodified images supplant historical reality.

Similar dynamics are at play in the representation of Hawaiian music. Traditional mele were genealogical texts—oral recordings of ancestry, land, and historical events. In the context of settler colonialism, however, mele became decontextualized and commodified into easy-

[13] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, October 1984.

[14] Barthes, *Mythologies*.

[15] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

[16] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

listening "Hawaiian music". Instruments such as the ʻukulele and slack key guitar, introduced under colonial conditions, were rebranded as "authentic" while the function of chant as an epistemological and political form was marginalized. In both cases, the content was displaced by form: melody and rhythm overshadowed meaning and genealogy. As Marx noted in his analysis of the commodity form, the fetishism of form over substance obscures the social labor and historical relations embedded in a cultural product.[17] The tourist economy transforms culture into commodity, where authenticity becomes a marketing strategy and historical trauma is rendered invisible.

Althusser's analysis of ideological reproduction helps clarify these transformations. As ISAs, cultural festivals, hotels, and media institutions do not simply entertain—they train individuals to see, feel, and remember Hawaiʻi in particular ways. They function pedagogically, inculcating narratives of hospitality, harmony, and cultural resilience while masking the structural conditions of dispossession and exploitation. These institutions produce what Foucault might term a regime of truth, in which certain representations of Hawaiʻi become thinkable, desirable, and normative, while others are disqualified or silenced. This process is not only aesthetic but biopolitical: it governs the body, desire, and perception.

Even language is enlisted into this ideological apparatus. The overuse of Hawai'ian phrases like "aloha" and "mahalo" within English-dominant spaces offers a linguistic simulation of cultural engagement while leaving intact the structures that marginalize Hawai'ian speakers and epistemologies. This phenomenon reflects Stuart Hall's insight that cultural representation operates within a field of power and struggle, where dominant meanings are imposed but also contested.[18] Hall's theory of articulation is especially useful here: hegemonic discourse does not erase indigenous meaning but disarticulates it from its original context and rearticulates it to serve new ideological ends.

Yet these cultural forms retain the capacity to exceed their ideological framing. In contemporary practice, there has been a resurgence of Hawai'ian resistance aesthetics. Hula practitioners such as those in

[17] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1990).

[18] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language*, eds. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Routledge, 1980).

the Hālau Hula movement reject the tourist aesthetic, instead emphasizing the political and spiritual gravity of the form. Many hālau now teach not only dance and chant, but moʻokūʻauhau (genealogy), ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi (language), and land-based epistemologies. Chant is being revitalized in ceremonial and protest contexts—at Mauna Kea, for instance, where oli becomes a mode of refusal and a declaration of land-based identity. Hawai'ian hip hop and reggae acts increasingly incorporate ancestral references, genealogical motifs, and anti-colonial critique. These hybrid forms signal not a loss of authenticity, but an evolution of cultural resistance.

Thus, while dominant institutions continue to repackage Hawai'ian culture for global consumption, cultural practitioners are reasserting the historical and political density of these forms. Their work challenges the myth of Hawaiʻi as paradise and re-centers it as a site of struggle, survival, and resurgence. These performances, rooted in history and sharpened by critique, resist the ideological function of spectacle and begin to reconstruct an epistemology of presence, not absence.

Language, Myth, and Power

Language is never neutral. As Ferdinand de Saussure teaches, signs acquire meaning not through intrinsic essence but through their differential relation to other signs within a system.[19] Language operates as a code—structured and arbitrary—yet insidiously naturalized. In colonial contexts, this structuralist insight gains political weight. For colonized subjects, language is both a medium of dispossession and a potential site of resistance. Hawai'ian cultural expressions—hula, chant, mele—once encoded in a system bound to genealogy, cosmology, and place, have been subjected to violent re-signification. When filtered through English-dominant discourses or repackaged for global consumption, the original system of meaning is disrupted. The result is a residue of form detached from ontological depth, hollowed and re-inscribed by the hegemonic order.

Roland Barthes' theory of myth as a second-order semiological system is instructive here.[20] Myth, for Barthes, is not a lie but a depoliti-

[19] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).
[20] Barthes, *Mythologies*.

cized speech. It transforms history into nature. A hula performed for ancestral veneration becomes a signifier of sensuality. A chant once used to preserve genealogical knowledge becomes ambient noise for tourist consumption. These are not innocent transformations—they are ideological. The spectacle, as Barthes writes, does not suppress meaning but displaces it. The ideology functions not through overt repression, but through substitution and naturalization. In Hawai‘i, such mythological operations are pervasive. The performance of Hawai'ian culture is often more palatable to global markets than its epistemological core.

Michel Foucault's analysis of discourse, power, and knowledge underscores how language is regulated by regimes of truth.[21] Discourse is not merely linguistic but institutional—it governs what can be said, remembered, and imagined. The conversion of Hawai'ian cultural forms into mythic images is enabled by an ensemble of discourses that produce legitimacy. This regime privileges the visual over the oral, the commodified over the sacred, the tourist over the native practitioner. The chant, once embedded in sacred ritual, becomes part of the effective labor of hospitality. It serves not to challenge colonial history but to veil it.

This ideological recontextualization is also evident in the politics of translation. Words like "aloha" are not simply borrowed—they are ideologically mobilized. Aloha circulates in state mottos, tourism slogans, and corporate branding as a polyvalent signifier of kindness, peace, and welcome. Yet, in its original usage, aloha denotes a relational ethic grounded in kuleana (responsibility), reverence, and embodied care. Its truncation into a marketable cliché is a form of symbolic violence that strips language of its ontological depth. As Althusser suggests, ideology interpellates subjects through ritualized repetition, recruiting them into structures of recognition that appear natural.[22] The repeated "A-loooo-ha" of a hotel emcee is a mode of interpellation; it positions both the speaker and the audience within a colonial semiotic regime.

Stuart Hall's theory of cultural representation as a site of struggle offers further insight.[23]Meaning is not fixed but negotiated, constructed,

[21] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

[22] Althusser, *Ideological State Apparatuses*.

[23] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

and contested within asymmetrical relations of power. Hall's notion of articulation—whereby disparate elements are temporarily unified under a dominant logic—explains how sacred forms are rearticulated to support neoliberal ideology. A chant used in the overthrow of the Hawai'ian Kingdom becomes rebranded as a wellness practice. The mu'umu'u, once a garment imposed by missionaries to discipline the Hawai'ian body, becomes heritage fashion marketed in upscale boutiques. These articulations are historically contingent and ideologically saturated. They reveal that culture is not static but forged in struggle.

Structuralist and post-structuralist theorists alike have emphasized the role of language in subject formation. Julia Kristeva's conception of the symbolic and the semiotic suggests that language is not merely external but constitutive of the subject.[24] Similarly, Judith Butler, drawing from Althusser, argues that the subject is formed through performative acts of citation and repetition.[25] In the context of Hawai'i, language becomes the terrain upon which identity, history, and resistance are enacted. The institutional marginalization of 'ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawai'ian language) has historically served the colonial state's interest in producing a docile, assimilated subject. Yet efforts to reclaim 'ōlelo Hawai'i disrupt this process. They constitute what Foucault would call a "counter-conduct"—a deliberate refusal of colonial governmentality.[26]

The revival of 'ōlelo Hawai'i is more than pedagogical; it is ontological. Language immersion schools such as Pūnana Leo do not simply teach vocabulary; they cultivate a worldview. Within them, language is treated as an epistemological system bound to land ('āina), genealogy (mo'okū'auhau), and ceremonial time (ka wā kahiko). The protocols of chant, the cadence of prayer, and the naming of winds and rains resist the temporal flattening of tourist temporality. These linguistic acts reinscribe presence in a landscape narratively erased.

Moreover, public chants at political protests—such as those at Mauna Kea—function as embodied refusals of settler state sovereignty. They reassert a collective memory that is not archived in state texts but

[24] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

[25] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[26] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

inscribed in breath and voice. These chants reterritorialize space, transforming it from a site of extraction to one of relation. As Deleuze and Guattari note, deterritorialization can be met with reterritorialization—a reclaiming of affective and material ground.[27] Hawai'ian language, in this context, becomes a praxis of reterritorialization.

Thus, language is not merely descriptive but world-making. It frames perception, organizes memory, and envisions futures. Control over language—its narrowing, commodification, and suppression—is a mechanism of colonial rule. But when Hawai'ian is spoken, chanted, and lived, it constitutes an insurgent semiotics—a refusal to forget, a commitment to reimagine.

Conclusion

This study has sought to illuminate the ideological operations embedded within the commodification and performance of Hawai'ian cultural forms. By applying a composite theoretical framework drawn from Marx, Althusser, Foucault, Barthes, Jameson, Hall, Kristeva, and Butler, the analysis has demonstrated how cultural representation functions not merely as reflection but as production—of knowledge, of subjectivity, and of social reality.

The transformation of chant, hula, and mele into consumable spectacles reveals the mechanics of colonial myth-making. These practices, once integral to sacred time, genealogical transmission, and political affirmation, have been hollowed and reinscribed by dominant ideologies that privilege profit, visual pleasure, and docile exoticism. As Althusser has shown, ideology operates not through overt domination but through the interpellation of subjects into positions that sustain the existing social order. Hawai'ian cultural forms—when appropriated and aestheticized—do the quiet work of producing consent, cloaking the economic and political structures of settler colonialism in the familiar garb of cultural celebration.

Yet these forms are not reducible to the ideological functions they have been co-opted to perform. As the essay has shown, they remain sites of contradiction and contestation. Drawing from Jameson, one might say they operate as symbolic mediations of real antagonisms—

[27] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

resolving contradictions at the level of form while preserving their political charge beneath the surface. Similarly, Stuart Hall's notion of articulation affirms that culture is not fixed but a field of struggle, open to rearticulation and resistance. Cultural meanings are never guaranteed; they are historically contingent, and the ability to reframe or contest them is central to any project of decolonial thought.

The role of language within this analysis is critical. As both a symbolic system and a material practice, language emerges as a primary terrain upon which colonial power and indigenous resistance contend. The flattening of ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi into a series of commercial catchphrases represents not merely linguistic loss but the attempted annihilation of a worldview. As Barthes cautions, myth empties signs of their historical density and retools them to suit bourgeois ideology. The counter-effort—seen in Hawai'ian language immersion schools, protest chants, and academic revitalization projects—is nothing less than a reconstruction of the symbolic order itself.

These acts of cultural resistance extend beyond symbolic reclamation. They are simultaneously ontological and epistemological interventions. The reanimation of hula as a spiritual-political act, the chanting of genealogies at protest sites, and the reterritorialization of space through naming and ritual are all efforts to recover not only cultural forms but indigenous modes of being and knowing. The Hawai'ian subject, long alienated within a capitalist semiotic regime, is being reconstituted as an agent of refusal, remembering, and reimagining. As Butler would suggest, these are not merely cultural gestures but acts of becoming—performative ruptures in the matrix of subjection.

To study these processes philosophically is to affirm that aesthetics is political, and that cultural forms—no matter how co-opted—retain the capacity to resist, rupture, and reimagine. Against the epistemic violence of colonial translation, Hawai'ian cultural practices assert an alternative ontology, one that prioritizes relation over possession, memory over forgetting, and presence over absence. The performance of chant at a protest is not merely expression—it is enactment, it is world-making, it is refusal.

The work of decolonial philosophy, then, is not only to critique representation but to listen for what survives it. It is to attend to the fragments, to the breath, to the pulse of ancestral memory vibrating beneath the surface of commodified spectacle. This essay offers itself as

one such act of listening—a speculative tracing of the material and symbolic afterlives of Hawai'ian culture under capitalism and empire. It invites further reflection on how language, performance, and memory may yet be wielded against the very systems that seek to erase them.

Ultimately, the conclusion reached here is not merely analytic but ethical. It affirms that Hawai'ian cultural forms, even in their most distorted reproductions, hold within them the seeds of radical rearticulation. They call us to question not only what has been lost, but what still remains—and what might still be made possible. In the face of erasure, they endure. In the face of silence, they chant. In the face of spectacle, they remember.