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NARRATING RITUAL, PERFORMING IDENTITY: READING OKA RUSMINI'S *EARTH DANCE* AND JASMIN HAKES' *HULA*

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This paper examines how Oka Rusmini's *Earth Dance* and Jasmin 'Iolani Hakes' *Hula* explore women's identities within island societies shaped by caste, kinship, and colonial legacies. Drawing on Mary Douglas' theory of pollution, the analysis shows how *Earth Dance* uses *sebel* and purification rites (*menakwangi*, *patiwangi*) to discipline women's bodies while policing caste boundaries. Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern illuminates how female protagonists navigate silence and constraint as sites of limited resistance. In parallel, the paper uses J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's critique of blood quantum and Amy Stillman's reading of hula as a living archive to interpret *Hula*'s portrayal of dance as embodied resistance to colonial definitions of Hawaiian identity. Both novels position women's cultural roles as paradoxical sites of control and survival, where kinship and custom can marginalize and empower. While *Earth Dance* exposes how caste hierarchy persists through ceremonial discipline, *Hula* highlights performance as a counter-narrative that restores genealogy and belonging beyond colonial categories. These texts reveal how cultural practices are powerful sites for negotiating identity within postcolonial island contexts.

Keywords: comparative studies; Hawaiian literature; Indonesian literature; indigeneity; postcolonialism

1 Introduction

Questions of identity and belonging emerge most sharply where Indigenous customs intersect with enduring colonial legacies. Despite being separated by thousands of miles, Bali and Hawai'i share parallels in how land, lineage, and ritual obligations define social membership and cultural continuity. Both islands maintain intricate kinship structures and ceremonial practices that bind people to place and community (Geertz & Geertz., 1975; Kana'iaupuni & Malone, 2006). These islands are often romanticized as "timeless, exotic paradises" (Trask, 1993, p. 50). However, their local systems of kinship and ceremonial practice are entangled with colonial and capitalist histories that redefine notions of purity, pollution, and authentic identity.

In Bali, the stratified caste system governs social status and marriage through rituals that manage pollution and preserve group hierarchy, placing women at the center of efforts to maintain family honor (Cahyaningtyas, 2016). Similarly, Hawai'i's colonial-imposed blood quantum laws and hula dance are gatekeepers for claims to land, ancestry,

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and authentic identity (Kauanui, 2008). While these frameworks sustain cultural continuity, they also produce tensions, as ritual and kinship can reinforce social control even as they enable collective resilience. Women’s bodies and social roles thus become sites of negotiation, where the burdens of cultural preservation meet the demands of ritual purity and community regulation. Oka Rusmini's *Earth Dance* (2011) and Jasmin 'Iolani Hakes’ *Hula* (2023) examine how gender, ritual, and identity are constructed under the weight of local practice and colonial inheritance.

Earth Dance examines the persistence of caste divisions and ritual obligations in modern Balinese society, highlighting how these structures influence women’s status and autonomy. The novel centers on Luh Sekar and her daughter Telaga, whose inter-caste marriages generate upward mobility and ritual consequences that sever ties to kin or require purification ceremonies. Through descriptions of domestic life and temple rites, Rusmini shows how women become guardians of caste purity while being subject to discipline through the concept of *sebel* (pollution). The novel emphasizes how gender, ritual, and social hierarchy remain deeply interconnected in Bali's contemporary transformation. *Earth Dance* thus situates women’s ritual obligations as sites where modernity and tradition collide under Indonesia’s postcolonial context. After independence, the Indonesian state formally abolished caste distinctions; however, local *adat* (customary law) and rituals continued to shape social life, especially in Bali (Hauser-Schaublin, 2013). This tension deepened under the New Order[1] regime (1966–1998), which promoted modernization while reinforcing *adat* to secure social control in rural communities.

Hakes’ *Hula* (2023) examines Hawaiian identity through the lens of cultural preservation and colonial disruption. The novel centers on Hi’i, a young woman from Hilo’s prestigious Naupaka family who grapples with questions of belonging amid family rejection and community exclusion. Hi’i’s turn to hula becomes both personal salvation and cultural reclamation. Hi’i’s embrace of hula becomes an attempt at personal belonging and a form of cultural reclamation against colonial definitions of Hawaiian identity. Through multiple narrative voices, Hakes traces how hula stands at the intersection of preservation and commodification, as tourism and land politics threaten to reshape its meaning. References to movements like the Protect Kahoolawe Ohana ground Hiʽi’s story in the broader context of Hawaiian sovereignty struggles. The narrative’s cyclical structure—Hiʽi’s departure from and eventual return to Hawai'i with her daughters—mirrors the ongoing negotiation of identity, inheritance, and survival across generations. Hula emerges as both a site of

[1] Indonesia's New Order Government (1966–1998) was a military-based authoritarian regime that came to power by opposing President Soekarno and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). This "repressive-developmentalist" system pursued modernization through conservative policies while maintaining strict authoritarian control. The regime's collapse in 1998 marked Indonesia's transition toward democratic governance (Aspinall & Fealy, 2010, pp. 4–5).

healing and a contested space where authenticity and cultural continuity are continually tested.

Together, *Earth Dance* and *Hula* demonstrate how colonial structures intersect with local systems of ritual and kinship, shaping women's identities and constraining their choices. Both novels show that women's bodies, marriages, and ritual responsibilities become sites where community boundaries are drawn and policed. This comparative analysis argues that seemingly local practices—Balinese ritual pollution and Hawaiian blood quantum politics—are shaped by colonial legacies, producing paradoxes of constraint and survival. While these systems restrict women's mobility and autonomy, they also create spaces for cultural endurance and resistance.

This paper proceeds in three stages. First, it outlines the theoretical connections between gender, ritual, and the formation of postcolonial identity. Second, it examines how Rusmini's *Earth Dance* reveals inter-caste marriage and *adat* rituals as instruments of social control that both constrain and complicate women's agency in postcolonial Bali. Third, it analyzes how Hakes' *Hula* exposes the colonial imposition of blood quantum as an apparatus for fragmenting genealogical identity, and how hula itself becomes an embodied form of cultural survival and resistance. Taken together, these novels show how women's ritual roles become sites where tradition, modernity, and colonial legacies collide—limiting their autonomy and enabling strategies of endurance and negotiation.

2 Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on several theoretical lenses to compare how ritual and colonial structures shape women's identities in Bali and Hawai'i. These frameworks show how seemingly local practices and imported colonial logics entangle to produce paradoxes of control and survival. Drawing on Mary Douglas' work on ritual purity, it treats pollution and cleansing as social tools for policing identity boundaries. Leela Gandhi's critique of colonial entanglement highlights how local customs, such as adat, work alongside modern state power, rather than outside it. Spivak's question of whether the subaltern can speak frames how women's ritual roles expose tensions between silence, compliance, and agency. In the Hawaiian context, Kauanui's analysis of blood quantum demonstrates how colonial regimes reframe genealogy as a racial metric to fragment Indigenous identity. Finally, Stillman's idea of hula as a living archive illustrates how cultural performance can become both a practice of survival and a subtle act of resistance. Together, these perspectives provide a foundation for reading *Earth Dance* and *Hula* as parallel critiques of how ritual, kinship, and colonial power intersect on women's bodies and lives.

Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966) provides a foundational lens for understanding how ritual pollution serves as a form of social control. Douglas shows that what a community labels "pollution" is not literal dirt but matter "out of place" that

threatens social coherence (1966, p. 7). Such beliefs serve as practical symbolic systems that "protect the prevailing social order" by establishing boundaries for behavior, kinship, and social interaction. Taboos and cleansing rituals thus reaffirm a community's internal divisions and hierarchies, focusing mainly on the body, reproduction, and sexuality—domains where collective identity appears most vulnerable to contamination. The Balinese notion of *sebel* illustrates Douglas's framework**;** inter-caste marriage and women's reproductive roles become key sites for ritual intervention to restore perceived social balance. Seen through Douglas's lens, *sebel* shows how pollution taboos regulate individual conduct while safeguarding the wider caste and kinship system.

While ritual pollution enforces social boundaries through local custom, blood quantum functions as a colonial mechanism that redefines Indigeneity as a measurable racial fraction. This system transforms kinship from a relational, genealogical practice into an administrative category. Blood quantum emerged in early U.S. federal policy toward Native American nations, replacing Indigenous understandings of descent and belonging with fixed biological calculations. As Lisa Kahaleole Hall (2005, p. 405) notes, this system "threatens [s] to divide Hawaiians from each other" by imposing artificial distinctions of ancestry. Building on this, Kauanui argues that blood quantum acts as "a fractionalizing measurement" that severs land rights and cultural belonging from Indigenous genealogical frameworks (2008, p. 111). Rather than affirming descent as a living claim to land and identity, it reduces belonging to a legal threshold that shrinks with each generation—a mechanism Kauanui calls "the calculated disappearance of the Native" (2008, p. 9). The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1921 formalized this logic by tying land access and legal recognition to minimum blood percentages. Blood quantum operates as a settler-colonial technology within this system, transforming community membership from cultural practice into bureaucratic arithmetic and state surveillance.

While ritual pollution and blood quantum explain how boundaries are maintained, postcolonial feminist theory clarifies how these structures shape women's positions within overlapping systems of control and survival. Gayatri Spivak's influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) argues that subaltern women face double marginalization. They become visible only when serving as "the conduit for power" rather than as agents in their own right (1988, p. 287). This insight highlights how ritual and kinship systems position women inside and outside dominant symbolic orders. Leela Gandhi expands this analysis by arguing that local custom and colonial modernity are "entangled, rather than oppositional" (1998, p. xii). These theoretical frameworks demonstrate that practices such as ritual purification or genealogical performance serve dual functions. They preserve cultural continuity while reinforcing hierarchies that marginalize women's agency. A postcolonial feminist approach views women's ritual roles not as passive markers of

tradition, but as active sites of negotiation. Women navigate—and sometimes strategically contest—the contradictions between local hierarchy and colonial legacy.

3 Rituals of Purity and Pollution: Women, Caste, and Social Order in *Earth Dance*

Oka Rusmini's *Earth Dance* is a contemporary Indonesian novel that centers on female experiences to critique the Balinese caste system and its control over identity and social order. The work achieved substantial commercial success, with seven printings totaling 33,000 copies between 2000 and 2007—an exceptional achievement for Indonesia's literary market. International recognition followed with the German translation *Erdentanz* (2007). Rusmini's inclusion in the influential *Angkatan 2000* (Generation 2000) anthology (Rampan, 2000) marks her as part of a new generation of Indonesian writers who emerged after the fall of the New Order, many of whom write from explicitly female perspectives. Drawing on her own conflicts with her brahmana family, Rusmini uses fiction to expose the tensions and exclusions inherent in the caste system. Her female protagonists challenge, negotiate, and resist the ritual and kinship structures that attempt to contain them.

In *Earth Dance*, Luh Sekar, born into a low-income family marked by social exclusion and political suppression following her father's death during the 1965 anti-communist purge[2], seeks a way to improve her family's status. In Bali's caste system, women's bodies are not only carriers of caste identity but also the sites where caste boundaries are policed. Urged by her mother, Sekar's ambition to marry a wealthy Brahmin man is driven by economic necessity and the desire to escape the stigma of her family's past. Sekar expresses her frustration with poverty, telling her companion, "I'm tired of being poor... Please, find me an Ida Bagus. Whatever I must pay, I am ready!" (Rusmini, 2011, p. 17). Though traditionally viewed as politically powerful and economically privileged, the Brahmin class in contemporary Bali is not necessarily dominant (Putra, 2011, p. 169). Sekar's journey, while offering a form of liberation from poverty, also reveals the gendered limitations of such a system. Sekar's marriage to a Brahmin offers her family a chance for social elevation, but this comes at the cost of her ritual purification. Through the *menakwangi*[3] ritual, her body becomes a site where caste boundaries are reinforced.

When Sekar marries a Brahmin, she undergoes *menakwangi*, a traditional practice in which a woman of a lower caste must adopt a new name and title upon marrying a man

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[2] The 1965 anti-communist purge followed an alleged coup attempt by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). This state-sponsored violence resulted in mass killings of an estimated 500,000 to one million people, targeting party members, leftist intellectuals, ethnic Chinese communities, and perceived communist sympathizers (Day & Foulcher, 2002)

[3] *Menak* literally means upgrade, and *wangi* means fragrance or respect. See (Putra, 2011, p. 154).

from a higher caste. In Sekar's case, her new name becomes *Jero Kenanga*, symbolizing her transition from the Sudra caste to a Brahmin woman, though this change is far from being a straightforward ascent in social standing. As Douglas' ritual pollution makes clear, such naming rituals do not merely mark status; they actively police social boundaries and maintain hierarchy by transforming the woman's body into a site of purity management. Even after marrying into a higher caste, Sekar's status remains precarious. She is still subject to her husband's family's customs and social expectations, and her new identity does not immediately secure her full acceptance. The novel illustrates this precarious status through Sekar's lived experience in her husband's household:

> While in the grand family of her husband, Sekar was still like a Sudra. She had to speak softly and politely to the people in the griya. She was not allowed to share the glass with her child or give her leftovers to the griya people, including her own child (Rusmini, 2011, p. 61).

The story of *Earth Dance* unfolds in the post-1960s period, when the *patiwangi* ritual—an essential purification practice for women marrying into lower castes—was no longer mandatory. Although this ritual is less commonly practiced today, it remains in some areas of Bali, underscoring the deep integration of the caste system into *adat* and religious practices. This persistence demonstrates how formal governmental regulation does not easily dismantle such systems of purity and social order. Despite legal reforms that abolished certain caste practices, the caste system endures within the cultural fabric of Balinese society, perpetuated by sacred customs that govern daily life.

Theoretically, this continuity highlights how women's bodies continue to be central to maintaining ritual purity and social order. Douglas' concept of ritual pollution reveals that women often serve as guardians of cultural purity and as targets of purification when social stability is threatened. The *sebel* framework includes perceptions of cleanliness, pathology, and abnormality, such as through contact with death, menstruation, or sexual intercourse (Cahyaningtyas, 2016, p. 202). Rusmini's *Earth Dance* critiques this double bind: women must shoulder the burden of maintaining purity while remaining trapped within rigid caste hierarchies that simultaneously marginalize them. The novel exposes how the caste system, reinforced through *adat* and gendered ritual practices, constrains women's agency in contemporary Balinese society.

Similarly, the caste system imposes a similar ritual burden on women who marry men of lower castes (hypogamy). In such cases, the woman is required to undergo the *patiwangi*[4] ritual, which serves to avert the social disorder perceived to result from this marriage. It is significant that while inter-caste marriage alters the woman's caste status, it is the woman, not the man, who must perform the ritual of separation and reintegration. This gendered division of labor is rooted in the patrilineal nature of Balinese society, where

[4] Pati literally means died, and wangi means fragrance or respect. See (Putra, 2011, p. 154)

women's roles are defined by their connection to the family they marry into. Additionally, the ritual highlights the mythological belief that women are inherently more vulnerable to contamination through inter-caste unions. Women, in this context, are viewed as potential pollutants whose marriage to a lower caste man must be ritually purified to restore social order.

> A Sudra man was not allowed to marry a Brahmin woman. It would cause misfortune if Wayan took Telaga as his wife. The Sudra woman believed in the myth that Brahmins are Surya, the sun that lights up the darkness. If the sun is stolen, who knows what the consequences will be (Rusmini, 2011, p. 137).

The *menakwangi* and *patiwangi* rituals maintain social order when caste boundaries are transgressed through inter-caste marriages. Rooted in *sebel*, these rituals restore balance when women are perceived as bringing contamination into their husband's families. Women are viewed as primary bearers of *sebel*, and inter-caste marriages are seen as threatening the family's social and spiritual purity. Telaga exemplifies this dynamic as an outsider marrying into a Brahmin family. She becomes the scapegoat for family misfortunes, with her mother-in-law demanding she perform the *patiwangi* ritual to prevent further troubles. In Spivak's terms, Telaga's ritual obligation shows how the subaltern woman appears only as a vessel through which caste anxiety is managed—silenced yet central, disciplined yet indispensable**.** This demonstrates how the caste system utilizes ritual to purify individual bodies and the entire symbolic structure it upholds. Telaga's outsider status is made visible precisely through the ritual burden she must carry to cleanse herself and her family of *sebel* (Rusmini, 2011, p. 129).

While *Earth Dance* strongly opposes the caste system, it acknowledges the connection between caste practices and *adat* (customary law) that governs Balinese society. *Adat* encompasses inherited traditions and values that regulate social roles, relationships, and cultural practices across Indonesian societies. While often viewed as protecting cultural identity, *adat* can impose rigid obligations, particularly in hierarchical societies where ritual and status are central. Drawing on Gandhi's critique, *Earth Dance* shows that local tradition and colonial modernity are not simply opposed but deeply entangled. The novel demonstrates how attempts to transcend caste boundaries—such as Sekar's and Telaga's inter-caste marriages—become subject to *adat* rituals that paradoxically reinforce the very system they challenge. These rituals preserve hierarchies while appearing to accommodate social mobility. In Bali, these traditions prove difficult to abandon, even for those seeking to escape the limitations of caste.

Earth Dance culminates in a powerful scene where Dayu Telaga undergoes the *patiwangi* ritual, accepting her grandmother's foot on her head to symbolically transform from Brahmin to commoner (Rusmini, 2011, p. 159). Through this deliberate act of

submission, she turns ritual humiliation into a strategy of refusal. In Spivak's terms, Telaga's choice shows how a subaltern woman—silenced within caste hierarchy—can still "speak" through bodily gestures that invert their intended meaning. What was designed to reinforce social order becomes a site for unsettling it. By embracing ritual disgrace, Telaga exploits the same symbolic economy of purity and pollution to break caste ties on her terms. Her body becomes both the target and the agent of disruption, embodying Spivak's insight that the subaltern can speak only indirectly—here, through the ritual grammar meant to contain her.

Rusmini's narrative critiques the caste system and its deep ties to *adat* practices. The novel shows how women's roles in ritual purification uphold social order while limiting their agency. Through ritual pollution, Rusmini illustrates how women's bodies become sites of both social mobility and oppression. Cultural traditions preserve identity but also enforce rigid gender roles. The persistence of *adat* demonstrates how inequality endures despite legal reforms. *Hula* offers a contrasting approach to identity and ritual. Here, hula serves as a reclaiming act that empowers women to assert their agency against colonial and cultural pressures. Unlike Bali's constraining rituals, hula becomes an active means of resistance and a cultural survival tool. This marks a shift in how women engage with tradition—from passive submission to active empowerment. The novels also differ in their treatment of identity construction. While *Earth Dance* examines how caste systems create fixed social categories, *Hula* critiques the artificial colonial construction of blood quantum. Both works reveal how external systems—whether traditional hierarchy or colonial classification—attempt to control women's identities and limit their possibilities for self-determination.

4 Challenging Colonial Construction of Hawaiian Identity through Hula

Hakes draws on her *hapa* (mixed-ethnicity) background to explore the complexities of Hawaiian identity and authenticity in the context of colonial disruption. Rather than focusing on distinguishing "part" Hawaiians from Native Hawaiians, Hakes emphasizes the preservation of culture itself. As she explains in interviews:" I'm not here to claim anything. What I'm here to do is learn this enough to make sure it survives to the next generation" (Slaughter, 2023, p. 3). This approach aligns with Stuart Hall's understanding of identity as fluid and historically constructed, continuously shaped by lived experience and collective memory (1990, p. 226). In postcolonial contexts, identity must navigate between cultural continuity and external pressures that threaten fragmentation. *Hula* situates this tension within one family's struggle to maintain genealogical ties, land, and ritual knowledge amid shifting definitions of who counts as Hawaiian.

This study examines how *Hula* portrays the struggle for Hawaiian identity through two intertwined elements: the colonial blood quantum system that reduces identity to

racial fractions, and hula as an embodied practice of cultural survival and resistance. Hi'i's journey captures this conflict. When she discovers she is not biologically Hawaiian but *hānai* (adopted), she is barred from performing her family's sacred genealogical dance, the *Moʻolelo no Kuʻula*. This exclusion highlights how blood quantum laws fracture traditional notions of kinship. In *Hula*, questions of who may dance, who decides what is authentic, and how culture is passed on reveal the ongoing impact of colonial definitions. Blood quantum and land rights continue to shape, divide, and inspire Hawaiian identity today.

When colonial powers establish permanent settlements, they create complex politics of identity and belonging. In Hawai'i, the settler-colonial imposition of blood quantum laws exemplifies this entanglement. The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA) of 1921 redefined Hawaiian identity as a racial percentage linked to land rights. Initially managed by the U.S. Congress and transferred to state control at statehood in 1959, the HHCA limited land access to those with at least "one-half" Native Hawaiian ancestry. As Kauanui argues, this "fractionalizing measurement" assumes that blood alone determines cultural orientation (2007, p. 111). This system severed Hawaiian identity from its traditional basis in genealogy and collective connection to the *'āina* (land). By promoting anxiety about "dilution," blood quantum facilitated the myth of the "vanishing Hawaiian" and concentrated land and power in settler hands (Rohrer, 2016, p. 119). The system's definition of "Native Hawaiian" persists in later legislation, including the Admission Act and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs in 1978. These racial categories continue to undermine Indigenous sovereignty.

Hi'i struggles to find her place within her prestigious hula family. Her mother, Laka—a former Miss Aloha Hula champion—actively discourages her from pursuing a dance career. Her grandmother Hulali, a political activist and the respected head of the renowned Hālau o Luahine, keeps an emotional distance. Local children deepen Hi'i's sense of exclusion, mocking her as "Haole Girl" and "mosquito food". Despite this rejection, Hi'i believes hula is her birthright: "Her tutu was Hulali Naupaka. Hula, this *hālau*, was her blood" (Hakes, 2023, p. 38). Determined to win the Miss Aloha Hula competition like her mother, she plans to perform the required *oli* (chant), *ʻauana* (modern hula), and *kahiko* (traditional hula). She chooses the family's sacred genealogical dance, Moʻolelo no Kuʻula, for her signature piece. She must first secure her family's blessing for the performance to be *pono* (proper). Her quest for acceptance reaches a turning point when Laka reveals the truth: Hi'i is neither a Naupaka nor Hawaiian by blood.

Hiʻi's adoption highlights the tension between Hawaiian and Western ideas of identity, kinship, and belonging. In Hawaiian culture, identity has never depended solely on bloodline but on genealogical ties and shared responsibility, as embodied in the practice of *hānai*. Derived from a word meaning "to feed" or "nourish," *hānai* describes the

permanent adoption of a child by someone other than their biological parents, creating bonds rooted in care and obligation rather than biology alone (Pukui et al., 1972, p. 67). Traditionally, a *hānai* child is fully integrated into the family, entitled to inheritance and family name, while adult *hānai* ties often reflect affection or respect (Marsh, 2004, p. 10). However, Hiʻi's *hānai* status undermines her claim to belonging. Her identity is questioned by her grandmother Hulali and the broader community, exposing the clash between customary kinship and colonial blood quantum. This conflict is apparent in Hulali's warning to Laka, urging her not to adopt Hiʻi in the first place:

> You know, we Hawaiians was always differen' from haole in how we saw family. We always had hānai, da babies go to da gran'parens or da frien' dat no can have bebeh. But Laka, if dis bebeh hānai, dis not da way. T'ings moa complicated now, yeah? Gotta have blood (Hakes, 2023, p. 134).

In ancient Hawai'i, *hānai* was a binding custom: a simple declaration could make a child a full member of a new family, carrying all rights and responsibilities (Hakes, 2023, p. 171-172). The novel demonstrates how blood quantum not only divides identity by external law but also reshapes local kinship**.** Hiʻi's status as *hānai* (adopted) would once have guaranteed her complete belonging under Hawaiian custom, but colonial blood quantum transforms genealogy into a legal fraction that overrides relational kinship. Colonial rule and local custom do not stand apart: they become entangled, producing new contradictions that fracture the community from within. Hiʻi's exclusion is not simply the work of U.S. policy; it is enforced through her grandmother's insistence that "you gotta have blood," showing how colonial categories and Indigenous anxieties merge.

Hula exposes the entangled struggle between traditional Hawaiian identity and the colonial imposition of blood quantum by foregrounding Hi'i as a figure of the subaltern. Her status as *hānai*—which under Hawaiian custom should guarantee full kinship—becomes invisible under a colonial system that redefines identity as a rigid racial fraction. Despite her deep connection to her *'ohana* (family) and her dedication to hula, Hi'i is silenced by the external logic of blood quantum and her family's demand for blood-based legitimacy. In Spivak's theory, Hi'i embodies the subaltern: she is spoken about, regulated, and excluded, but denied a direct voice within the legal and familial structures that claim to define Hawaiian belonging. Her only means of articulation comes through hula itself—an embodied act that resists the erasure that blood quantum enforces. Hi'i's eventual departure to mainland America marks how these overlapping systems fracture kinship, displace identity, and perpetuate cycles of cultural loss.

The legal constraints of blood quantum sharply define the struggle for Hawaiian identity under colonial rule. Yet, in Hula, this imposed fragmentation is countered through the dance itself, which emerges as both a cultural expression and a vital act of resistance. As Hakes explains, "the only reason we had any culture was because of hula... our gods

and goddesses, but also our geological events, our volcanoes, were recorded through dance… Hula was what we all stood on" (Strong, 2023, p. 2). Within the novel, hula becomes both personal legacy and collective survival. The Naupaka family's guardianship of authentic hula preserves it as a symbol of Indigenous endurance, standing apart from commodified versions staged for tourists. For Hi'i, dancing is not merely a performance, but a means to reconnect with her roots, assert her identity, and carry her heritage forward. As a living archive, hula holds together memory, resistance, and sovereignty. It offers a path for the next generation to claim what blood quantum tries to erase.

Hula serves as a vital means of cultural preservation and a pathway for reclaiming Hawaiian identity. Hi'i teaches from her *kumu* (teacher)—herself a student of Hulali—that hula is not merely movement but an embodied commitment to safeguarding Hawaiian history. The novel explains, "Our story is a hula, to honor and preserve in our ancestral fingerprint this place we love, not a hula how-to masquerading as a story" (Hakes, 2023, p. 36). This distinction between authentic, ancestral hula and its commodified forms underscores the dance's deeper purpose. Through her *kumu's* instruction, Hi'i understands that hula binds her to the natural elements and historical narratives of her islands: "You are the dance. Bound to our history and the elements of our islands" (Hakes, 2023, p. 47). In this way, hula dancing is presented not simply as art, but as an inherited responsibility—an obligation to carry forward collective knowledge and protect it for future generations.

> What you will learn here is an honor, a torch. Here you will malama honua, learn the ways, the language of our blood. You will be the caretakers of our land, our ocean, our culture and community. This knowledge, this `ike, is already inside you. Here you will ask it to speak louder, and you will learn to listen. One day we will look to you to keep this knowledge alive, to pass it down. To be here is to accept that responsibility (Hakes, 2023, p. 47).

Despite her ancestry, Hiʽi remains qualified to perform hula because of her connection to the tradition, her family's legacy, and her commitment to preserving cultural knowledge. As Stillman notes, hula performers carry a sacred duty to understand the ritual and cultural meaning of their art (2017, p. 192). Yet when Hiʽi learns the truth about her parentage and cannot secure Hulali's blessing, she abandons hula and leaves Hawai'i. This moment shows how the colonial logic of blood quantum displaces individuals and undermines cultural ties that tradition alone would sustain.

Hi'i's choice to teach her daughters the Hukilau song, though simple and Americanized, shows how preserving hula helps mend the disconnection created by colonial definitions of identity. Although she feels self-conscious about passing on a version she sees as less authentic, this act becomes her way to reclaim what blood quantum sought to sever. As she reflects, "All it had taken was one night, one performance for everything to come rushing back—the energy and purpose it brought, the immediacy, the feeling of being connected to everything around her" (Hakes, 2023, p. 235). In this

moment, Hi'i demonstrates that cultural memory survives in its purest forms and through everyday transmission. Even in this altered form, preserving hula becomes an everyday act of resistance against displacement—and an inheritance of connection for future generations.

The narrative presents hula as an anti-colonial performance that affirms Hawaiian identity, inheritance, and resistance. More than a cultural expression, hula embodies memory, a connection to the land, and ancestral continuity. Missionaries once told Hawaiians that "everything we did was wrong—our gods and ways, our prayers and language and life". (Hakes, 2023, p. 69) beginning a long history of cultural suppression under colonial rule. Yet as the narrator reminds us, Hawaiians have "survived extinction before," and to face what lies ahead, they must "look to history to figure [their] way into the future" (Hakes, 2023, p. 23). In this sense, hula preserves historical knowledge and functions as a guide for cultural survival. As the novel affirms:

> Our veins run deep, our song louder than their noise. Roots too deep to extract. That's the thing about hula. Burn your books, rewrite your history, build walls, plant flags. Hula is written within the swirls of our feet. It's our umbilical cord, our pulse. Our battle cry, our death rattle, our moment of conception. The chants are archived in the stars. Hula is the heat rising from within our volcanoes. It is the pull of the tides, the beat of the surf against our cliffs. It is our hair, our teeth, our bones. Our DNA (Hakes, 2023, p. 288).

Hula is described as more than a dance; it is a vital force rooted in blood, history, and resistance. In this sense, hula is a living protest against colonial and capitalist encroachment on Hawaiian land and culture. By the 1990s, it had become central to Hawaiian identity politics and expressions of emerging nationhood (Stillman, 2007, p. 222). Contemporary practitioners use hula to engage in political discourse, addressing issues such as land rights and environmental justice through culturally meaningful choreography. The 2019 Mauna Kea protests illustrate this role: Native Hawaiian dancers performed traditional hula at the site to assert spiritual and ancestral claims to the mountain and resist state-sanctioned development (Andone et al., 2019).

In the narration, hula emerges as more than performance: it is a living archive that preserves ancestral memory and embodies cultural resilience. Through Hi'i's journey, Hakes illustrates how hula enables both personal reclamation and collective survival in the face of colonial erasure. By passing on this knowledge, the younger generation challenges the colonial-imposed definitions of Hawaiian identity and reasserts ties to land, genealogy, and community. In this way, hula is a quiet yet enduring form of anti-colonial resistance, promising that cultural inheritance will persist despite the forces that seek to divide it.

5 Conclusion

Earth Dance shows how ritual ideas of purity and pollution continue to shape women's identities within Bali's caste system. Drawing on Douglas' framework, it illustrates how

sebel and rituals such as *menakwangi* and *patiwangi* discipline women's bodies to maintain social hierarchy. These practices reveal how *adat* functions not only as a means of cultural preservation but also as a form of social control. In line with Gandhi's critique, the novel illustrates that local customs and modern social change are deeply intertwined, reproducing old exclusions under new conditions. Spivak clarifies how women appear as both guardians of ritual order and subaltern figures whose agency is constrained. Yet by accepting ritual humiliation strategically, Telaga reveals that even within strict systems, women can negotiate limited forms of resistance. In this way, *Earth Dance* makes visible the paradox of women's ritual roles as sites where tradition, power, and agency intersect

In contrast, *Hula* shows how ritual performance can become a means of resisting imposed boundaries. The novel reframes cultural practices as acts of survival and quiet defiance. While blood quantum laws seek to fragment Hawaiian identity into measurable fractions, hula serves as a living archive that reconnects people to their genealogy, land, and community. Hi'i's journey demonstrates how knowledge embodied in dance can mend ruptures that legal definitions create. Even when formal claims to kinship are denied, performance becomes a way to sustain belonging on different terms. Through hula, the novel affirms that cultural memory and practice can persist despite the constraints of colonialism.

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