Transpacific Environmental Imagination: Comparative Analysis of Indigeneity in *The Healers* and *Burung Kayu*.

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Abstract

This study delineates the representation of Indigenous values in two literary works, *the Healers* and *Burung Kayu*, set in Hawaii and Mentawai, Indonesia, respectively. Employing Critical Island Studies as a framework, it analyzes how these novels depict the intricacies of island landscapes, societies, and histories. Both narratives affirm the interconnectedness of all entities based on familial ties and the creation myth of cosmology. Moreover, the analysis emphasizes the portrayal of *kahuna* and *sikerei*, custodians of Indigenous knowledge in their respective communities, highlighting their roles amidst the legacy of repression and persecution. Each narrative contextualizes unique historicity: Hawaii saw a resurgence of traditional beliefs post-Hawaiian Renaissance, while Mentawai faced intensified persecution during the Indonesian New Order era. This study highlights how indigeneity shapes cultural identities and resilience across diverse ethnic communities globally, especially on islands. To conclude, comparative studies of indigeneity offer a promising avenue for exploring the dynamics of island communities and their efforts to preserve their heritage.

Keywords: Critical Island Studies, Hawaiian literature, Indigeneity, Indonesian literature, Representation of Nature

Introduction: Contextualizing Indigeneity in Hawaiian and Indonesian Contexts

Islands, with their distinct geographic and cultural identities, have long captivated the imagination of scholars across disciplines. Critical Island Studies, an interdisciplinary field, examines the unique aspects of island life and the broader implications of islandness. As an inter- and trans-disciplinary focus, Critical Island Studies explores the concept of islandness and its impact on diverse fields, including ecology, human behavior,

and traditional academic disciplines (Baldacchino 3–5). Surrounded by water, islands can evoke geographical, psychological, and societal boundedness, fostering solid attachments to one's island. The debate on locality extends beyond spatial considerations, encompassing the cultural and historical landscape that can be produced, manufactured, or imagined into existence through political intentions.

In literary studies, island narratives are crucial in contextualizing our understanding of the natural world and human-environment interactions. The literary imagination is characterized by the involuntary wiring of language in human subjects as cultures shape their perceptions. In turn, it becomes a powerful lens through which to explore the complexities of island narratives. Soja's assertion that space is simultaneously lived, perceived, and conceived aligns with the cultural mediation inherent in islands' spatiality. As Soja's concept implies, islands stand out due to their unique place in our collective psyche, constantly reshaping natural spaces through the interplay of material and imaginary realms (43-45). Islands inherently represent a creative imperative, embodying the mutuality between the material, historical, and imaginary. They are both actual places and representations, socially constructed texts. In other words, islands are both forms and symbols, as Hatano suggests:

> The interpretation of landscape will differ greatly depending on whether its formation and change are viewed as "consumption" or as "production" of the landscape elements by the background events. (58)

Representation of nature in literary works is a critical lens through which we understand the natural world. Buell argues that the contemporary environmental crisis is not just an ecological issue but also a crisis of imagination, necessitating new ways to depict and engage with nature (*The Environmental Imagination* 2). This discussion intersects with Critical Island Studies, which explores islands' unique cultural and ecological dynamics. Nature writing, exemplified in works like *the Norton Book of Nature Writing* (1990), has traditionally centered on Anglo-

American authors such as Emerson, Thoreau, Leopold, and Carson, often neglecting the profound ecological wisdom of Indigenous communities worldwide (Nixon 234; Marland 849) This hegemonic narrative has frequently overshadowed the ecological wisdom preserved by Indigenous communities worldwide. Indigenous communities worldwide have long maintained their unique cultural identities by transmitting traditional knowledge and understanding that is often deeply rooted in the local environment. Critical Island Studies views islands as interconnected spaces with complex histories and relationships. Exploring Indigenous perspectives within this framework enhances our understanding of humanity's relationship with the natural world.

The term indigeneity has emerged to describe a state of being Indigenous or related to Indigenous-ness, rooted in traditional culture, community, and tradition ("Decolonizing and Indigenizing"). Merlan argues that this term assumes a collective identity among individuals who belong to a worldwide community of Indigenous peoples, separate from other groups (303). Recent scholarly discourse on the environment increasingly incorporates Indigenous viewpoints, recognizing the dynamic knowledge cultivated by these communities across the globe (Abonyi 46-53; Scanlan, "Jamaica Osorio's Indigenous Poetics" 8). Indigenous peoples and culturally connected groups emphasize the epistemological value of empathizing with the land, rooted in a natural acknowledgment of the emotional bond woven into their daily experiences with the land.

The intersection of island studies, the imaginative realms associated with islands, and discussions of indigeneity offer a common avenue into the shared circumstances surrounding the Hawaiian archipelago and Indonesia. These places are both parts of the tropics, located in the Asia-Pacific regions, and comprise diverse islands that shape their cultural and historical landscapes. Various islands within each archipelago harbor distinct communities woven with

unique cultural heritage and historical narratives. In this context, islands are more than geographical entities; they are repositories of collective memories, Indigenous traditions, and the prevailing legacies of colonial encounters. As stated by McMahon and André, the islands are seen as "a productive, generative space between material, historical and imaginary worlds to reveal some of the interactions between these domains of experience" (308).

Two contemporary literary works, *The Healers* (2016) by Kimo Armitage, a Hawaiian writer[2], and *Burung Kayu* - translated as *Wooden Bird* - (2020) by Indonesian novelist Ninduparas Erlang, focusing on the Mentawai Islands, contextualize the problematic issue of indigeneity. Kimo Armitage is an award-winning author who has published over twenty books, mainly for children and young adults. In his novel *The Healers,* he focuses on the cousins Keola and Pua, the next generation of healers in their family, and interweaves between the real and spirit worlds. Their paths diverge as Keola goes to Waianae for further training, and Pua falls in love with Tiki and gets pregnant. Erlang is a young Indonesian writer who received the prestigious *Kusala Sastra Khatulistiwa* (KSK) award for his novel *Burung Kayu*, which was written in 2020. *Burung Kayu* is an ethnographic novel that focuses on issues seldom explored in Indonesian fiction, specifically the dynamics of society in Mentawai, an island off the western coast of Sumatra. This novel exposes the culture, traditions, beliefs, and challenges they face concerning government intervention and reconciling local traditions with the majority Islam religion. Unlike Armitage, a *Kānaka* (meaning Native/Indigenous Hawaiian) writer, Erlang writes from the ethnographic perspective of an observer.

These novels articulate how the Native Hawaiians and the Mentawaians preserve their distinctive cultural identities in the face of outside perspectives. A notable theme in both narratives is the varying receptions toward traditional heritage. In the Hawaiian context, the traditional healers (*kahuna lā'au lapa'aurepla*[3]), rooted in Hawaiian epistemology, are

portrayed with reverence, highlighting the enduring respect for Indigenous knowledge. In contrast, *Burung Kayu* underlines the hostility toward Mentawaian *sikerei* (shaman) by the central government due to perceived pagan and heathen practices. This divergence underscores the impact of external, Westernized viewpoints that shape the reception of Indigenous traditions in distinct ways.

As the material and imaginary/representations of islands are closely interwoven, this paper briefly explores the historical, material, and imaginary conceptions shaping these island contexts. Historically, Indonesia and Hawai'i have been enveloped with paradisal imagery, imagined as exotic tropical archipelagos and sought-after tourist destinations. Wood notes how the construction of 'otherness' for Pacific tourists involves exotic locations and ethnic traditions (18-20). The allure of the Pacific islands, primarily derived from Western fascination with the 'strange' and 'primitive', is built on the contrasting tropical appeal of sun, beach, and sea against the temperate Western hemisphere. Simultaneously, this constructed image highlights the commodification of traditional heritage for the tourist-centred industry. The concept of the tropics, framed through a Western imperial lens, continues to shape our perception of tropical worlds. Resisting this tropicality, as Lundberg et al. posit, necessitates a more grounded look at the notion of 'islands,' perpetuated within Indonesia and Hawaii's historical, material, and imaginary circumstances (6-8).

Many people first encounter Hawai'i through their imagination; this archipelago has captivated global attention and literary interest since the times of Mark Twain and Robert Louis Stevenson (Rapp 9). In the past, the picturesque landscapes of the islands were often used as exotic backdrops for the fantasies of visiting white individuals. However, in recent years, the prevailing discourse has shifted towards acknowledging the challenges Native Hawaiians face and highlighting the resilience of Indigenous cultures[4]. Geographically, the entire Hawaiian

archipelago consists of 132 islands with eight main islands, reefs, and shoals stretching across 1,523 miles of the North Pacific Ocean. Natural phenomena such as tropical Pacific climate-related events like cyclones, the threat of volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis play a significant role in developing Polynesian culture (Matsouka and Kelly 33). For the *Kānaka*, life emanated from the land (*'āina*), infused with spiritual energy (*mana*), and offered everything essential for sustaining life. *Kānaka* have a familial relationship to the land, rooted in the generations of elders (*kupuna*) who inhabited the land beforehand and whose ancestral remains rest in the Hawaiian Isles. As Tatum and Ka'anā'anā elaborate, in the cultural worldview, the Hawaiian Islands are described in *mele koinonia* (genealogical chants) as the products of heavenly unions, descendants of *Wākea* (sky father), *Papahānaumoku* (earth mother), and *Ho'ohōkūkalani* (creator of the stars). The Hawaiian people and their staple food, kalo (taro), also descend from these unions, which makes the *kuleana* (responsibility) of stewardship a deeply personal connection (5).

The pervasive Western imagination of Indonesia has long been influenced by the historical narrative surrounding the Spice Islands and the romanticized allure of the archipelago as an exotic paradise. This exoticism aligns with Said's concept of Orientalism, wherein the West has historically crafted an imaginative, albeit often distorted, portrayal of Eastern cultures (16-18). The historical framing of Indonesia frequently overshadows its diverse culture, reducing it to a singular, exoticized narrative, impacting perceptions of the nation and its indigenous cultures. The question of defining 'what Indonesia is' has never been easy. In the context of Indonesia, with the complexity of its formative elements, it is almost impossible to pinpoint a specific entity as a national culture (Susanto xx–xxi). Cultural contact is not unfamiliar to regions in Indonesia, whether it is contact between Indonesian/Nusantara cultures or between Nusantara cultures and those outside. The recent shift from centralized control to regional autonomy at the beginning of the new millennium further articulates the prominence

of regional cultures and literary traditions in Indonesia (Putra 24). Contemporary Indonesian narratives, such as Erlang's *Burung Kayu* and Abroorza A. Yusra's *Danum,* shift away from the Java-centric storytelling tradition to explore the cultures of Indonesia's outer island chains.

In short, critical island studies provide a comparative framework to understand the complexities of island landscapes, societies, and histories. Within this framework, the analysis of *The Healers* and *Burung Kayu* explores the representation of Indigenous values. These narratives delineate the concept of indigeneity, focusing upon the holistic affirmation of the natural world based on Hawaiian and Mentawaian traditions. Central to these tales are the figures of *kahuna* and *sikerei*, respected figures due to their wisdom, guidance, and adherence to ancestral beliefs. However, their portrayal varies due to distinct historical contexts and experiences of persecution. These contrasting depictions offer insights into the resilience of Indigenous communities to retain their cultural identities in contemporary society.

Scant attention has been given to comparative analyses concerning Indonesian and Hawaiian literature. Hawaiian literature has typically been explored with other Pacific works, such as Juliana Spahr's examination of *Kānaka* author Alani Apio's *Kamau A'e* and Maori writer Robert Sullivan's *Star Waka*. This analysis foregrounds colonized subjects' challenges in Hawaiian and Maori contexts (75–80). Conversely, comparative studies concerning Indonesian literature often explore its juxtaposition with Malaysian literature, given their shared geography, culture, and mutual concern for environmental issues. Wiyatmi et al. have explored works such as *Api Awan Asap* and *Tanah Tabu* (Indonesian) alongside *Penunggu Rimba Tombiruo* and *Anak Belantara* (Malaysian), focusing on deforestation issues in Malaysian narratives (29–39). Responding to this concern, a comparative analysis of Indonesian and Hawaiian literature delineates the shared problem of indigeneity within the wider transpacific environmental imagination.

The analysis is structured as follows. In the first part, we explore how indigeneity is represented in both novels. We elaborate on the cosmological perspectives presented in the narratives, highlighting the interconnectedness between humans, nature, and spiritual entities. These perspectives are integral to understanding how these relationships shape identity, community dynamics, and broader societal structures within their respective Indigenous contexts. The second part of the analysis compares the roles of *kahuna* in Hawai'i and *sikerei* in Indonesia to explore the contested space of indigeneity within these regions. It considers historical contexts that have influenced how Hawaiians and Mentawaians were perceived and marginalized. By contrasting these contexts, the study reveals how colonial histories, cultural suppression, and contemporary revitalization efforts impact these Indigenous spiritual leaders.

Representations of Indigenous Knowledge in *The Healers* and *Burung Kayu*

This section contextualizes the representation of Indigenous knowledge based upon the holistic acknowledgment of the natural world in *The Healers* and *Burung Kayu*. Indigeneity encompasses an intricate web of relationships between humans and the natural world, rooted in principles of equality and interconnectedness. In traditional native knowledge systems, there is respect and trust for inherited wisdom, often communicated through an oral tradition, and for knowledge that has proved its utility in everyday practice (Meyer vii-ix). This knowledge system produces stories that connect the particulars of knowledge to holistic worldviews, values, and lifeways. Mythical stories about creation and the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and the cosmos play a central role in depictions of contemporary issues (Heith 29). Knowledge is often collective, evolving in a community of users, knowers, and actors instead of singular individuals.

Epistemologically, the ability to empathize with the land holds paramount importance in the worldviews of many Indigenous peoples and other land-based, ecologically attuned cultural groups. The epistemologies draw from an implicit comprehension of the affective relationship between individuals and the land through the ordinary occurrences of daily life. As articulated by Bladow and Ladino, feeling with the land becomes a profound epistemic practice, weaving together cultural traditions and the lived experiences of communities (106). A sense of belonging and attachment to the land is essential in the worldviews of many Indigenous peoples and other land-based and ecologically attuned cultural groupings. It emphasizes the need to reshape human and non-human relationships around equality and reciprocity. As Whyte (143) further argues, "Indigenous knowledge teaches us how to understand our role as agents in relation to other beings, entities, and systems with their forms of agency."

Grydehøj et al. elaborate on how Island spatiality fosters complex associations between indigeneity and islandness by promoting cultural distinction and connections between people and place (14). *The Healers* and *Burung Kayu* articulate this holistic relationship among all entities, delineating unique characteristics of island ecosystems and cultures. Armitage's narrative focuses on cousins Keola and Pua, raised by their *Tutu* (grandmother) in Native Hawaiian healing. *The Healers* articulates how the traditional *kahuna lā'au lapa'au,* or herbal healers, continue their healing practices using native Hawaiian plants and spiritual healing arts. The story emphasizes the healing effects of prayer, a sense of connection with nature, and the transformative power of hope, as illustrated by the saying, "If there is no hope, there is no cure" (146-47). The narration contextualizes the inheritance of the ancestral healing tradition, *lā'au lapa'au*[1]*,* where illness is perceived as a loss of spiritual energy or *mana*. Sickness is intricately linked to relationships with family (*'ohana*), society, nature, deified ancestors, and the gods (*'akua*), providing equilibrium between the *Kānaka* and wellness (Inglis 45). Set in

contemporary times, the narrative weaves stories within stories as Tutu recounts tales of Kawanana and Kealo of Waialua, who had unwavering faith in the gods, and her cousin Laka of Kalaupapa, born without arms and legs. These stories are integral to Keola and Pua's history, connecting them to the past and guiding their future. They underscore the enduring relevance of ancestral wisdom, highlighting a holistic relationship with cultural heritage, nature, and spirituality.

Through their cosmology, Native Hawaiians perceive a familial connection with the natural world. The Hawaiian worldview regards every element as part of an indivisible lineage, interrelated by shared familial descent (Beckwith 294). This fundamental cultural bond offers insight into the Hawaiian lifeway and their communal relationship with the environment. This holistic perspective finds expression in healing, as restoring balance (*Pono*) disrupted by sickness. Throughout the narration, Keola's apprenticeship with the esteemed *kahuna* Laka deepens his understanding of the interconnections between healing, nature, and cultural heritage:

> Healers needed this communication with the people they were healing. They also got this from their environment. Once they understood the environment, they could understand how the world works. Once they understood the way it works, they were able to understand the nature of healing. Once they understood the nature of healing, they could understand people. Thus, healing was restoring the balance of the universe. (Armitage 214)

The Healers articulates how Hawaiian epistemology illuminates the natural cycle of life, emphasizing an inseparable connection between *Kānaka* and *'āina*. Trask argues that *Kānaka* shares a familial bond with the land, particularly the taro plant, considered their elder sibling or *kua'ana* (*From a Native Daughter* 66). This epistemology asserts the notion of islandness, emphasizing the deep-rooted connections between *Kānaka* and their environment. Moreover, indigeneity, as Fujikane concurs, continues to be a material positionality connecting *Kānaka*

to Indigenous peoples worldwide (11). Each individual possesses *mana*, with the *iwi* (bones) becoming its repository after death. The *iwi* have to be buried in the ground to impart their *mana*, which sustains the lives of the living, forming a cyclical relationship between humans and the land. Additionally, Native Hawaiians believe in the responsibility of family members to *malama* (care for) *na iwi kupuna* (the bones of the ancestors), fostering a profound attachment to their place of belonging. This connection, as exemplified in the narration, forms the basis of *Kānaka's* sense of belonging and attachment:

> Death, birth, and life were what he had learned with Kumu. The story of *Haloanakalaukapalili* explains this cycle. When Hawaiians died, their bodies were interred in the land. After a time, their bodies became the earth. The earth became a womb for the plants. Men consumed these plants. When a man died, he was returned to the earth. It was a spectacular cycle. This is how Hawaiians are connected to the earth. If a family had lived in an area for generations, their ancestors made the land where they lived and grew their food. (Armitage 165)

The notion of islandness is also articulated in how the Mentawai ethnic group embodies a holistic relationship with all entities. The Mentawaians deeply believe that every element in nature possesses a soul—stones, animals, and plants should all be treated with respect, a belief intricately woven into the fabric of the *Arat Saburungan*[6] culture. *Arat Saburungan* acknowledges two realms of existence: life in the tangible world and the supernatural realm, inhabited by the spirits of the departed ancestors. The Mentawaians believe that the souls of ancestors and inhabitants of the universe live in harmony alongside humans. This affirmation of the supernatural does not distinguish between mystical and human agency as Western society does.

An integral element of traditional Mentawaian culture revolves around the figure of the *sikerei*. *Sikerei* is a healer possessing knowledge, skills, and expertise in traditional medicine, bridging connections with spirits and souls in both the tangible and supernatural realms (Nurjanah et al. 5). Beyond serving as a healing and spiritual figure; the *sikerei* assumes the

role of a ritual leader in every customary ceremony or festivity held in the *uma* (traditional house). *Burung Kayu* commences with a *muturuk*, a ceremonial dance crucial to initiating a *sikerei*. *Muturuk* is a traditional dance/ritual of worship for their ancestors performed by a young *sikerei* in a customary ceremony, where offerings are presented to the spirits of both the living and the deceased by tribe members (Crane 5–7). The *muturuk* dance symbolizes the resilience of Indigenous wisdom, as the young *sikerei* receive ancestral blessings during their anointment.

> The young *sikerei* dances alongside the spirits of the ancestors who have been invited and enticed by seven elder *sikerei* with offerings, including the left ear of a pig. Surrounding them, the seven elder *sikerei* sit in a circle, singing incantations in the Sabulungan language, understood only by the ancestors. The elder *sikerei* know that the spirits of *sikerei* from various *uma* (traditional houses) and eras are currently blessing the young *sikerei*, who now leaps into the fire and continues to dance. (Erlang 2)

Sikerei performs a crucial role as a medium between the spirit and the physical world. When attending to an illness, *Sikerei* examines the ailment, recites mantras, and then receives guidance on which leaves should be used to craft the remedy. The novel illustrates how, despite the encroachment of modernity, some choose to endure in the *uma*, "preserving pigs and tending to the life-sustaining leaves passed down from their ancestors for thousands of years" (Erlang 86). The Mentawai people believe in the division between the tangible and supernatural worlds. Both realms can coexist harmoniously when environmental sustainability aligns with the desires of the inhabitants of the mystical realm, intertwining with the bodies of the deceased. The novel contextualizes how *sikerei* ensures the safe journey of the departed spirit to *Langgai Sabeu* (the origin of ancestors):

> *Sikerei* continues to work, warding off *pitok*, driving away malevolent spirits that emerge from the decomposed bones and flesh of the corpses. Simultaneously, they entice the *sirimanua* souls to stay content in the *uma*, preventing them from following the spirits of the departed summoned by the ancestors and sailing towards the grand *uma.* (Erlang 64)

The Healers and *Burung Kayu* reflect the concept of islandness through the recurring theme of interconnectedness between the tangible and supernatural worlds. The Mentawaians believe in the symbiotic relationship between the natural and magical realms—spirits and mystical forces are inseparable (Parlan 15–16). The natural environment, including water and forests, is considered the dwelling place of spirits and requires careful preservation. Forests hold significant value for the Mentawai people, serving as a collective natural resource and a gathering place for ancestral spirits. This connection can be seen in this quote: "The boat moves forward, heading towards the boundless ocean, facing away from the forests, where ancestral spirits and the leaves of life reside" (Erlang 48).

Similarly, the supernatural plays a significant role in *The Healers*, mainly through the representation of *'aumakua*[7]. Tutu's family aumakua, including Kaleihepule, a shark, Uluhala, a bat, and Poepoe, a moth, were once human and ascended to become gods (*Akua*). Prayers to the family guardians or aumakua were important to the healing process. Keola, through chants praising nature and honoring these family gods, can "access the other realm of consciousness where all sources of knowledge lie" (Armitage 102). In this state, he can perceive the nature of both the body and the spirit, as illustrated below:

> When my three gods came to help and support me, I felt dizziness and started to chant. It was as if I had been taken to another place. A man's body is a house for his spirit. This prayer asked Kanekapolei to allow a person's spirit to return to his body. The words came from my gods. (Armitage 107)

This section articulates the shared theme of indigeneity in both *The Healers* and *Burung Kayu*. It delineates the profound interconnectedness among all entities, emphasizing the integral roles of healers, namely *sikerei* and *kahuna,* in maintaining this holistic relationship. The narrative highlights the profound importance of healers' wisdom, rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems and collective wisdom. The analysis foregrounds the representation of both tangible

and supernatural worlds from Mentawaian and Native Hawaiian perspectives. Furthermore, the discussion explores the concept of islandness, where islands' geographical and cultural distinctiveness play a significant role in shaping these narratives. Both narratives portray islands as physical landscapes and spaces where cultural identities are deeply embedded and sustained over generations.

From *Kahuna* to *Sikerei:* the Contested Space of Indigeneity

In the past, indigeneity has been subject to negative perceptions, often being labeled as backward or primitive. The colonial lens, influenced by social-evolutionist ideologies, depicted Indigenous communities as inferior to the supposedly rational West. This derogatory perspective also manifests in literature, where portrayals of indigeneity were frequently confined within the discourse of primitiveness (Ashcroft et al. 26). Colonial discourse involves a complex system of signs and practices that structure social existence and reproduction. This discourse elevates Western civilization by emphasizing rationality, science, and pragmatism while disparaging non-Western cultures as superstitious, emotional, and unscientific. As illustrated by Critical Island Studies, decolonizing this Eurocentric discourse requires acceptance of non-Western/indigenous knowledge. Literary representation of Indigenous knowledge contextualizes the interplay of material and imaginary realms within each historical context and circumstance. Ash-Milby argues that "the land is a complex space, encompassing personal and collective memory, history, and narrative (71)." Postcolonial writers' subjectivity is deeply intertwined with the natural and traumatic history of their settings, as reflected in their literary imagination.

The Healers and *Burung Kayu* explore the distinct historical contexts of Hawaii and Mentawai Island in Indonesia, particularly in the reception of Indigenous beliefs and customs. Previously, the existence of restrictive laws such as the 1896 Act, which officially prohibited

the teaching of the Hawaiian language in public schools, was one of America's colonial apparatuses to eradicate Hawaiian traditions and culture (Trask, "Natives and Anthropologists" 163). The position of *kahuna* as religious and cultural leaders in Hawaii was threatened by American dominance and explicit Western ideologies that prohibited their existence as deemed practitioners of occult knowledge. In 1905, the territorial government of Hawai'i declared *kahuna* as an outlawed group through The Revised Laws of Hawai'i, Chapter 89, Section 1077 (Osorio 48). *Kahuna* only regained their prominent role within Hawaiian society after the Hawaiian Renaissance in the 1970s, marked by a resurgence of pride in traditional Hawaiian beliefs and practices.

The Healers, written post-Hawaiian Renaissance by a *Kānaka* author, represents the shift in the portrayal of *kahuna*. The recognition of *lā'au lapa'au* gained prominence in 1988 with the passage of the Native Hawaiian Health Care Act by Congress, aiming to enhance the health status of Native Hawaiians (Young and Braun 176). The central characters, such as Keola, Pua, Tutu, and Laka in the present, and the narratives of Kawanana and Kealo in the past, all hold the position of *kahuna lā'au lapa'au*. This position is inherited, as Tutu acquired healing knowledge from her grandmother and great-grandmother, who were healers (Armitage 94). The narrative employs multiple voices and periods, offering insights into Hawaiian culture, where nature, humanity, and the spirit world coexist harmoniously. Amidst these narrative devices, a shared theme emerges—the shared role of esteemed *kahuna* held by each protagonist. The celebration of Kealo's newborn child underscores this issue, as the child possesses the innate ability to heal others:

> This child was going to ease the pain of other people. You see, even before this baby had even seen its first light of day, it already had a high expectation placed upon it. This baby was going to be a healer. Its knowledge would not be limited only to those medicines that come from the mountain but would include those that come from the ocean. This was placed on the child. It was right there even before birth. (Armitage 46)

Laka, a prominent character in the narrative, stands out as a skilled practitioner of Hawaiian medicine despite being born without arms and legs to a mother who had contracted leprosy. In Western terms, Laka would be categorized as disabled and disfigured, typically facing societal stigma and prejudice, leading to their exclusion. Garland-Thomson highlights that being disabled relegates individuals to a marginalized status in society, encompassing culture, economics, and politics (5). According to Western norms, a disfigured individual like Laka should not be able to participate fully in society and has to be tended to by others. However, the narrative challenges this expectation, portraying Laka not as an outcast but as a revered member of his extended family, endowed with life-affirming potential. Despite lacking physical arms and legs, Laka serves as a medium that bridges the gap between the physical and spiritual realms (Armitage 192). The initial encounter between Laka and Keola illustrates that Laka is not defined by his disabilities; instead, he is respected and admired for his extraordinary healing abilities:

> "Does my appearance scare you?"
> "No," Keola responded. "It inspires me that even though you have no arms or legs, you have become one of the most renowned healers in Hawaii." (Armitage 107)

As a healer, Laka perceptively identifies profound wounds inflicted by colonial violence and imparts his wisdom to the next generation of healers. According to the narrative, a healer must be attuned to the sense of guilt and trauma embedded within, not only physical but also traumatic mental scars (Armitage 112). They must know the chants to pull the universe's healing energy into the sick patient. Healers, including Laka, dedicate themselves to studying and becoming experts in the environment and ceremonies specific to their region. All this knowledge is essential to be a proper *kahuna lā'au lapa'au*, and Laka is exceptionally proficient and respected in healing. *The Healers'* positive portrayal of *kahuna lā'au lapa'au* embodies the heritage and preservation of Native Hawaiian culture. Their portrayal decolonizes

the colonial discourse, which stigmatizes Indigenous practices as backward, instead asserting *kahuna* as an essential part of Hawaiian tradition.

While the prior section outlines the refiguration of *kahuna lā'au lapa'au*, *Burung Kayu* by Erlang underscores the prevailing stigma and persecution toward *sikerei* in Indonesian society. Efforts to eradicate *Arat Sabulungan* began during the Old Order era and intensified during the New Order under Soeharto through police and military apparatuses. Ali Sastroamidjojo, prime minister from 1953 to 1955, formed an interdepartmental committee to review religious beliefs in society through Decree No.167/PROMOSI/1954 (Nur 94). In early 1954, under Indonesia's national unity and cultural adaptation, the National Government introduced a civilization program designed to "integrate tribal groups into the mainstream social and cultural currents of the state" (Persoon and Schefold 88). This legal avenue provided a compelling justification for the National Government to eradicate *Arat Sabulungan*, which was viewed as incompatible with Indonesia's religious principles. In the modern era, *Arat Sabulungan* is no longer seen as primitive or *kafir* (heathen) but an integral part of Indonesian's local wisdom (Nurjanah et al. 2). *Sikerei* was recognized as a cultural heritage by the Directorate General of Culture in 2019 through its designation as Intangible Cultural Heritage. ("Sikerei").

Unlike *The Healers*, written from the perspective of a *Kānaka* author in which the focal characters are all Native Hawaiians, *Burung Kayu* is an ethnographic novel written from a researcher/outsider perspective. This perspective foregrounds the cultural anthropology of the Mentawai people, critiquing the influences of government policies and the dominant religion toward *Arat Sabulungan.* The state apparatuses in this narrative consist of local authorities, police, social services workers, and village chiefs. The novel portrays several government policies which incite conflicts, notably the relocation of *uma* to *barasi* (state-build villages).

This policy denies the holistic, self-sufficient relationship of the *sikerei* with the environment, as one character solemnly notes:

> "'Alei, how abundant life once seemed, with all the blessings provided by the universe," Leugemanai pondered. "But why must the government's development programs, promising welfare, progress, education, and services, also entail the displacement of forests while mocking and criticizing the traditional way of life in our *uma*?" (Erlang 72)

In the decision-making system, the Mentawai people utilize the *paruru*[8] method (Aji et al. 3317). The Mentawaians negotiate with and confront various external cultural influences, how the state-recognized religion seeks to replace their beliefs, and how government-built settlements to 'civilize' the Mentawai people erode their kinship ties (Redaksi 3). Such interventions are rooted in colonial discourse, promoting the superiority of one central culture while denigrating the Other as primitive and in need of reform. The novel depicts the conflict within Mentawaian family dynamics, with some supporting government projects and others fiercely defending their traditional customs:

> Family meetings within the *uma* discussing various issues—from inheritance divisions to news about the expanding government development projects—lead to inevitable clan disputes. Some opt to accept offers and reforms from the outside world, from the *sasareu*, which may prove beneficial. (Erlang 35)

In 1954, the Indonesian government officially banned *Arat Sabulungan* and forced the Mentawaians to choose one religion within three months: Catholicism, Protestantism, or Islam. The government also implemented a local transmigration program to distance Mentawai people from their old culture. As a result, *Arat Sabulungan,* which was the heart of Mentawai culture, vanished. The polemic manifested in how, after Legeumanai migrated to Padang, he abandoned *Arat Sabulungan* to embrace Islam. The postcolonial perspective delineates how colonial and neocolonial powers undermine indigenous traditions deemed incompatible with the centrist perspective. Such enforced cultural shifts reflect the dominant power's attempt to marginalize

and erase Indigenous identities (Ashcroft 33). The following quote highlights the derogatory perspective toward native traditions, which are deemed incompatible with the dominant religious values imposed by the state:

> However, when Legeumanai settled in Tanah Tepi, in Padang, and spent more time with *Sipuisilam* (Muslim), he converted to Islam. Initially, it was to please his in-laws and to be accepted and seen as different. Gradually, however, Legeumanai also became entangled and even began to view his ancestors from the perspective of his *Sipuisilam* friends and colleagues. (Erlang 23)

Legeumanai embodies the standard identity crisis experienced by Indigenous Indonesian youth, torn between holding onto ancestral beliefs, abandoning them, or practicing both. Throughout his journey, Legeumanai explores various foreign religions—Baha'i, Catholicism, Protestantism—before returning to his ancestral *Arat Sabulungan* while still identifying as a Muslim. This identity politics experienced by marginalized individuals such as Legeumanai reflects broader struggles within postcolonial societies. Indigenous people strive to preserve and maintain their cultural heritage amidst ongoing pressures to conform to dominant cultural paradigms. In recent years, there has been a shift toward accepting Indigenous beliefs, a change reflected in the narration. Embracing one of the state-facilitated religions while continuing to practice ancestral beliefs is observed widely among Indigenous communities in the archipelago[9]. This plurality and acculturation underscore the diversity of Nusantara culture, as depicted in the novel:

> "And we must accept it. We have known Baha'i, the religion of solidarity. That's good. But we've also been Protestant. That's also good. Then, we moved to Catholicism, which accommodates our ancestral heritage. That's also good. We don't have to oppose *Arat Sabulungan* or *Arat Catholic* rituals and *Arat Islam*." (Erlang 189)

This section explores the historicity of *The Healers* and *Burung Kayu* concerning the varying receptions of Indigenous values and how both narratives challenge the colonial discourse. Written by a *Kānaka* in the post-Hawaiian Renaissance period, Armitage's narrative outlines

the prominence of *kahuna* within Hawaiian society. Across diverse narrative voices and temporal perspectives, a common thread is the role of *kahuna lā'au lapa'au* held by each protagonist. The story challenges Western notions of disability, portraying Laka as a respected member of his *ohana* rather than a disabled person. Conversely, Erlang problematizes the nuanced perception of *sikerei*. Long-standing state policies once deemed *Arat Sabulungan* incompatible with Indonesian religious principles led to persecution of *sikerei*, which has gradually diminished in recent years. *Arat Sabulungan* is no longer seen as a primitive and heathen belief but a core cultural heritage within the broader Nusantara culture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this analysis has engaged with the framework of Critical Island Studies, drawing upon the literature of Indonesia and Hawaii to explore the complexities of island landscapes, societies, and histories. In line with the recent development of Indigenous literature, indigeneity emerges as a central theme, reflecting a shared perspective among diverse ethnic communities worldwide. The examination of indigeneity serves as a crucial thread in understanding the representation of Indigenous values in both *The Healers* and *Burung Kayu*. The narratives highlight the interconnectedness of all entities, grounded in the cultural perspectives of the Hawaiian and Mentawaian communities.

Expanding on the comparative analysis, we discern distinct portrayals of indigeneity in the two works. While both narratives venerate *kahuna* and *sikerei* as custodians of Indigenous knowledge, their depiction and reception are shaped by unique historical contexts. In Hawaii, the post-Renaissance period has seen a resurgence of pride in traditional beliefs and practices, allowing *kahuna* to regain prominence after a period of suppression. Conversely, in Mentawai, the New Order era under Soeharto intensified persecution against *Arat Sabulungan*, a belief

system that has only recently resurfaced. In conclusion, the comparative analysis of indigeneity presents a novel area for future studies to explore further aspects of island communities.

Notes

1. The term Indigenous presents a challenge as it seems to group diverse populations with significantly different experiences under imperialism. In this context, 'Indigenous' is an umbrella term, allowing communities and peoples to unite beyond their colonized contexts and varied experiences. These groups find common ground as people who have endured the colonization of their lands and cultures. See Drugge (29-31)
2. As with many regions in America's colonized imperium, Hawai‘i grapples with issues linking its literature to its shifting geopolitical status. Scholars struggle to define Hawaiian literature, with some considering it geographic—encompassing all literature from Hawai‘i—and others seeing it as thematic, referencing Hawaiian culture. Today, thanks to the Renaissance in Hawaiian culture and national consciousness, Hawaiian literature is more accurately defined as writings by *Kānaka*—the indigenous inhabitants connected genealogically to the archipelago of the Pacific islands known as Hawai‘i-. (Ho’omanawanui 227)
3. *Kahuna* in Hawaiian culture refers to an expert or professional in various fields, encompassing roles such as doctors, surgeons, dentists, priests, sorcerers, magicians, and ministers. Historically, *kahuna* has held significant importance in Hawaiian society, denoting individuals with deep knowledge and expertise. Hawaiian culture recognizes the *kahuna* as a figure of authority and knowledge, playing essential roles in spiritual, healing, and practical domains (Mitchell 80)
4. The Hawaiian Renaissance from the late 1960s until the early 1970s was a period of social and political activism that revitalized the interest in Hawaiian arts, culture, and language. During this period, Native Hawaiians actively pursued initiatives for sovereignty and self-determination, aiming to reclaim their ancestral lands and political autonomy. A notable aspect of this resurgence was the revitalization of the *'olelo 'oiwi*, or Hawaiian language. The outcome was the emergence of a renewed cultural identity rooted in traditional *kānaka* culture, diverging significantly from the tourism-centric image that had previously defined Hawaii on the global stage. See (Luangphinith 220)
5. *Lā‘au lapa‘au* is a traditional medical practice of Native Hawaiians. The Hawaiian words *lā‘au* and *lapa‘au* mean vegetation, treat, heal, or cure, respectively. This practice involves using native plants, herbs, and spirituality to treat ailments and injuries. In the Native Hawaiian culture, it is believed that health results from *pono* or right living and that the loss of harmony and balance causes illness. Traditional Native Hawaiian medicinal practices are based on holistic healing in which the mind, body, and spirit are intertwined. See (Donald D Kilolani. Mitchell 65–68; King 20)
6. *Arat Sabulungan* is the native religion serving as a guide in the lives of the Mentawai ethnic community. This belief system has been passed down through generations since ancient times. *Sabulungan* originates from the term *sa*, meaning a collection, and *bulung*, referring to leaves considered to possess mystical powers, thus necessitating their inclusion in every ritual ceremony. The tradition holds that all beings in the universe have spirits, leading to rituals with specific obligations and taboos that the Mentawaian community must observe. See (Elfiondri)
7. Pukui and Elbert (73) define '*aumakua* as ancestral spirits revered in the forms of animals, plants, rocks, and clouds. Unlike the collective beliefs in Hawaiian deities, '*aumakua* is a more private/specific communal belief since each family worships its specific *'aumakua.*

This belief is based on the notion that deceased family members persist in their immediate presence as spirit animals.

8. Literally translated to *berkumpul*/gathering (Lenggang et al. 72).

9. *Penghayat Kepercayaan*, also known as followers of traditional beliefs or Indigenous religions, are a group within Indonesian society who practice traditional beliefs passed down from their ancestors

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