

# Resurgent Refusals: Protecting Mauna a Wākea and Kanaka Maoli Decolonization

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With construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope threatening to desecrate and destroy Mauna a Wākea, protection of the sacred mountain on Hawai'i Island has been steadfast in stopping the development. In this article, I investigate the complex and diverse discourses circulating in and around the movement to protect Mauna a Wākea. Using a makawalu method within a queer-Indigenous-anarchist methodological framework, I argue the corporeal refusals and collective resurgence against the Thirty Meter Telescope can forcibly be made complicit with, and undermined by, settler colonial state power. I demonstrate how this occurs in settler state law, science-neutral opposition, decolonization debates, and gendered public narratives. Nevertheless, I suggest that Kanaka Maoli activism against astronomy-industry development illustrate non-statist forms of decolonization, which I theorize as "resurgent refusals" that offer interventions into both Hawaiian studies and critical Indigenous studies.

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Discussing the undergirding philosophy of the movement to protect Mauna a Wākea from the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT), Lanakila Mangauil said, “Our stance is not against the science. It’s not against the science. It’s not against the TMT itself” (Callis, 2015). Mangauil, alongside other Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians), is a *kia’i* (guardian, protector) of our sacred mountain, Mauna a Wākea.

In 2014, the TMT International Observatory organized to construct an eighteen-story industrial telescope complex on Mauna a Wākea, a sacred mountain on Hawai’i Island. As Brown (2016) suggests, there are many examples that Mauna a Wākea is sacred to Kānaka Maoli. For instance, Mauna a Wākea is the genealogical kin of Papahānaumoku and Wākea, detailed in the birth chant crafted for Kauikeaouli, King Kamehameha III (Pukui & Korn, 1979), called “Hanau-a-Hua-Kalani” (Silva, 2017) as well as “He Kanaenae No Ka Hanau Ana O Kauikeaouli” (Peralto, 2014). According to Chang (2016), “The birth chant of Kauikeaouli evokes an identification between the newborn chief and the land,” which “sacralized the ali’i and also the land” (p. 203).

From the TMT International Observatory’s earliest incarnation in 2003 as the Thirty Meter Telescope Observatory Corporation, *kia’i* have physically stopped construction of the TMT, since it aims to desecrate and destroy the mountain. In 2015, protection of Mauna a Wākea continued in the form of corporeal refusals and collective resurgence. However, the TMT threat remains, as proponents of desecration entwine capitalist development and settler colonial domination in the name of scientific knowledge production. This nefarious menace has resulted in *kia’i* being repeatedly arrested, incarcerated, and criminalized. Between April and September of 2015, the State of Hawai’i made fifty-nine arrests and has

suggested, ironically, that protectors are an “imminent peril to the public health or natural resources” (Lincoln, 2015). In opposing construction of the TMT, *kia’i* have emphasized that the issue is not about science. And yet, the TMT, as a state-supported project, would exact violence upon the land—the ‘āina (that which feeds)—and on Kānaka Maoli *in the name of science*.

This article therefore interrogates the multiple, complex, and competing discourses circulating in and around the movement to protect Mauna a Wākea from the TMT. I do this by addressing the following questions: Why has the defense of Mauna a Wākea made repeated claims that *kia’i*, in general, and Kānaka Maoli, in particular, are not anti-science? How is the protection of Mauna a Wākea regulated and disciplined by settler colonial state power? How do the corporeal refusals of and collective resurgence against the TMT jibe with non-statist forms of Kanaka Maoli decolonization?

To examine Kanaka Maoli resistance to the TMT, I analyze, in the words of Cacho (2012, p. 27), an “eclectic and unruly” archive by reading together seemingly disparate sources. These sources include legal documents and cases, news articles and reports, political cartoons, and a TMT public relations artifact. “Assembling these varied and often disjunctive primary sources,” Puar (2007) writes, “is crucial to countering the platitudinous and journalistic rhetoric that plagues those public discourses most readily available for consumption” (p. xv). This chaotic archive of mine is activated by a *makawalu* method. Translating literally to “eight eyes” (Pukui & Elbert, 1986, p. 258), *makawalu* holds *kaona* (hidden meaning) that conveys a diversity of perspectives. In theorizing *makawalu*, ho’omanawanui (2014) observes that Kānaka Maoli “accept and even appreciate multiple and sometimes conflicting accounts,” which she states is

“reflected in the ‘ōlelo no‘eau (proverb), ‘a‘ohe pau ka ‘ike i ka hālau ho‘okahi (not all knowledge is contained in one school)” (p. xxxi). Makawalu offers a Kanaka Maoli method for analyzing the legion of discourses produced in the movement to protect Mauna a Wākea from the TMT. Engaging makawalu methodology, I argue that corporeal refusals and collective resurgence against the TMT can forcibly be made complicit with, and undermined by, settler colonial state power. In this article, I demonstrate how this occurs, as discursive grids of intelligibility, in settler state law, science-neutral opposition, decolonization debates, and gendered public narratives. I conclude that Kanaka Maoli activism against astronomy-industry development illustrate non-statist forms of decolonization, which I theorize as *resurgent refusals* that provide interventions into both Hawaiian studies and critical Indigenous studies.

### Queer-Indigenous-Anarchism

The methodological approach I use to orient my analysis of the protection of Mauna a Wākea integrates tools from anarchism and queer theory within a central framework of critical Indigenous studies. This *queer-Indigenous-anarchism* offers a methodology in the spirit of what Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2016) calls selective promiscuity, which “draw[s] heavily on our ‘Ōiwi [Indigenous] lineage” while “selectively bring[ing] in other lineages or thinkers who provide us with traction to move the lāhui [people, nation] forward” (p. 9). In this section, I briefly map out scholarship from anarchism, queer theory, and critical Indigenous studies, discussing some of the key debates and contributions, in order to establish my unruly methodology.

Claiming anti-state critiques of oppression, anarchism has neglected settler colonialism. Lewis (2015) states,

“The desire to resist all forms of oppression and domination is perhaps one of the hallmarks of anarchism” (p. 146). For anarchist studies, the state and its techniques of power are targeted for critique. Yet, Lewis posits that “fighting the state and capitalism is not enough” (p. 146). He suggests US and Canadian state power exists through white supremacy, which is animated via settler colonial dispossession of land, accumulation of capital, and Indigenous genocide. As such, Lewis implores white settler anarchists to engage with Indigenous movements for decolonization. He intimates, however, this could repurpose decolonization for incorporation. On this point, Walia (2015) asserts that incorporation can “subordinate and compartmentalize indigenous struggle within the machinery of existing leftist narratives” (p. 42). She exclaims, “We have to be cautious to avoid replicating the state’s assimilationist model” (p. 42).

Despite anarchism’s affinities with Indigenous theories and movements, my methodology moves away from a flattened equivalency that would position anarchism as an Indigenous philosophy or even Kanaka Maoli protectors of Mauna a Wākea as anarchists. Taking a cue from Ramnath’s (2015) caution, I’m not looking for anarchism. The more productive imperative is for an Indigenous-centered anarchism that pursues anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist critiques of the settler state. This is the line of critique I follow in this article.

The impulse of my methodology is an Indigenous anarchism that makes critiques of the settler state accountable to what Brandzel (2016) calls the “violence of the normative.” *Queer Indigenous Studies*, the edited volume and its attendant analytic, has simultaneously intervened into queer theory and Indigenous studies by “pay[ing] attention to the ways that heteronormativity—the normalizing and privileging of

patriarchal heterosexuality and its gender and sexual expressions—undermines struggles for decolonization and sovereignty” (Driskill, Finley, Gilley, & Morgensen, 2011, p. 19). This approach also works to queer anarchism by, in the words of Daring, Rogue, Volcano, and Shannon (2012), “making anarchism strange” (p. 14), or making it estranged from white supremacist, settler colonial, and heteronormative structures of power. With this queer-Indigenous-anarchist orientation as a backdrop, the next section analyzes the protection of Mauna a Wākea and critiques the violence manufactured by the TMT’s settler colonial capitalism.

### Protecting Mauna a Wākea

The State of Hawai‘i’s Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) issued a general lease in 1968 to the University of Hawai‘i for the purpose of building a single telescope complex at Mauna a Wākea. Upon doing so, multiple telescope complexes began developing, and public protest emerged, claiming that the new development violated the state’s initial general lease. After the University of Hawai‘i applied in 2011 for a Conservation District use permit for permission to build the TMT, a petition was filed with the BLNR for a contested case hearing. However, the BLNR steamrolled the process and approved the use permit before holding the contested case hearing. This occurred even as the language in the university’s application, on page 158 under environmental assessment, explicitly declared, “The impact on cultural resources has been, and would continue to be, substantial, adverse, and significant.” However, the Hawai‘i Supreme Court ruled, on December 2, 2015, this was “putting the cart before the horse” and was a violation of due process. The court therefore invalidated the building permit and remanded the case back down to

the BLNR to hold a new contested case hearing. This new contested case hearing concluded with the hearing officer recommending that the BLNR approve the building permit for the TMT. On September 28, 2017, the BLNR voted in favor of granting a Conservation District use permit for the TMT. This brief synopsis poignantly shows how the state, despite the Supreme Court decision against the TMT, has played a significant role in authorizing the project.

With the pattern of decision-making about land use in mind, I suggest Hawai‘i’s settler state is co-constitutive of astronomy-industry development. Arguing that state-sanctioned astronomy-industry development is tied to empire, Byrd (2011) contends:

Transit refers to a rare astronomical event, the paired transits of Venus across the sun, that served in 1761 and again in 1769 as global moments that moved European conquest toward notions of imperialist planetarity that provided the basis for Enlightenment liberalism. The imperial planetarity that sparked scientific rationalism and inspired humanist articulations of freedom, sovereignty, and equality touched four continents and a sea of islands in order to cohere itself. (pp. xx–xxi)

In other words, astronomy-industry development emerged through the dispossession and elimination of Indigenous peoples by imperial nation-states trying to universalize absolute truth of Enlightenment science. When the State of Hawai‘i sanctions the TMT, it not only marks how the state entity constitutes itself on stolen lands via settler colonial dispossession, but it also demonstrates that the state’s support of astronomy-industry development proliferates settler colonial power

so as to reinforce its institutionalization in the formation of Hawai‘i as a settler state. Such proliferation of power, at the expense of Hawai‘i’s Indigenous lands and people, is the centerpiece of the settler state.

Settler colonial state power, therefore, regulates the protection of Mauna a Wākea. Even as the settler state sanctions the TMT it has simultaneously interpellated, or hailed and coerced, protection of Mauna a Wākea to conform to settler state law. In discussing legal discursive formations, Barker (2011) asserts:

The law is a discourse that operates in historically contingent and meaningful ways, articulated to other discourses ideologically, strategically, and irrationally. It informs the constitution and character of power relations and knowledge between Native peoples and the United States, and within Native communities. (pp. 7–8)

Because the settler state mediates social relations through law, Indigenous people face a double bind where “the state is assumed to be the center of political life, and people seek sanction within an already assimilative, disempowering and unequal framework” (Goodyear-Ka’ōpua, 2011, p. 131). My trepidation with relying on settler state legal frameworks as *the* avenue for liberation or *the* horizon of freedom to protect Mauna a Wākea aligns with Goodyear-Ka’ōpua’s reflection: “What concerns me is the way sovereignty discourse has contributed to shifting emphasis and energy,” she laments, “away from direct action land struggles—confrontations on the ‘āina (land, literally ‘that which feeds’) over its usage—toward court battles, state and federal legislation, and research about historically appropriate legal strategies” (p. 134). Regulation’s partner in crime is indeed discipline.

Protection of Mauna a Wākea against TMT has been disciplined into science-neutral opposition. Kealoha Pisciotta, a *kia’i*, cultural practitioner, and legal advocate, said in an interview with *Discover Magazine*, “It’s not a question that we’re against astronomy. We’re just for Mauna Kea” (Hall, 2015). In a report by *Big Island Video News* (Corrigan, 2015a), *kia’i* Kaho’okahi Kanuha made similar remarks, suggesting that opposition to TMT is impartial and neutral to science. If the settler state of Hawai‘i buttresses violence through a scientific project like the TMT then Kānaka Maoli *are not responsible to defend science*. This is particularly poignant as proponents of the TMT, like Richard Ellis from Caltech, an institutional member of the US-based consortium that funds the project, have unabashedly boasted, “We’re searching for truth and knowledge. . . . We don’t need to apologize” (McFarling, 2001, p. 2). And yet, Kānaka Maoli are callously expected and even demanded to apologize. I am not arguing against the corporeal refusals of the TMT enacted by *kia’i* confronting construction crews on the ‘āina. Rather, I take issue with resurging against the TMT without opposing science, because this leaves settler colonial state power unscathed. The TMT is an astronomy-industry development proposed in the name of science, mediated and sanctioned through the settler state, which will in fact desecrate and destroy Mauna a Wākea, if constructed. This is neither neutral nor apologetic. Our critiques of the TMT must name scientific knowledge production and the settler state of Hawai‘i as the perpetrators they are.

In a political cartoon by Dave Swann (fig. 1), published in the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, science-neutral opposition is structured by discourses of scientific progress. In the left panel, *kia’i* defending the Mauna are relegated to “THE PAST” whereas, on the right, “THE FUTURE” ushers in a fully constructed TMT, gazing at the stars

above. The image manufactures a primitivism in which the TMT's construction is inevitable and protection of Mauna a Wākea is futile, simultaneously signifying astronomy-industry development as modern and Kānaka Maoli as anachronistic.

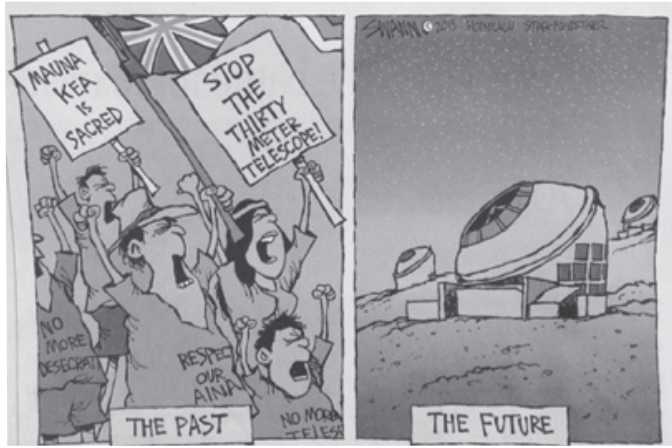


Figure 1. A future of capitalist-colonialist violence disguised as scientific progress. Credit: Dave Swann and the Honolulu Star-Advertiser.

This signification of scientific progress camouflages capitalism's racist, and also colonial, developmentalism: develop through time by developing space. In his retooling of Karl Marx's theory of so-called primitive accumulation, Coulthard (2014) argues that settler colonial dispossession of Indigenous peoples' territories opens up proletarianization, or the insertion of subjects into labor markets, capitalist modes of production, and the accumulation of profit. For Coulthard, this is how spectacular violence transitions into concealed forms of violence cultivated vis-à-vis settler colonial state power, or what he refers to as "colonial governmentality" (p. 15). Swann's political cartoon is a visual portrayal of scientific progress disguising the TMT's capitalist-colonialist violence. As science-neutral opposition to TMT neglects,

and perhaps excuses, this structural dynamic of astronomy-industry development, it reifies settler colonialism and capitalism.

In an "Elevator Talk Brochure" (fig. 2) for the TMT, crafted by the TMT International Observatory and circulating as a public relations artifact, science and astronomy open up "new frontiers." By asserting the TMT's scientific mission will unlock new frontiers, reminiscent of Fredrick Jackson Turner's (1893) thesis, the message produced by this brochure indicates the universe is a new frontier requiring penetration, presupposing Hawai'i as a frontier already tamed. The logic suggests that Hawai'i has been conquered, which is simultaneously the condition of possibility as well as the motivational impetus to open up new frontiers and conquer additional sites. This hierarchicalization of frontiers elucidates, as Wolfe (2006) suggested, settler colonialism's irreducible element of territoriality, whereby astronomy-industry development has an insatiable hunger for land. It is an unyielding desire for our 'āina. The TMT's language of new frontiers invokes US empire's murderous conquest of Native Americans and is deployed, like manifest destiny's western frontier, to produce and camouflage violence against Kānaka Maoli.

Published in *Indian Country Today*, Marty Two Bulls's political cartoon (fig. 3) reveals the TMT as a scientific project tethered to settler colonialism and capitalism, which furthers the destruction and desecration of Mauna a Wākea.

This signification, I believe, is an important foil and lesson for science-neutral opposition. The image exposes the facile rationalizations of "scientific benefit" and "public good" that funnel critiques of the TMT into impartiality for science. For Two Bulls, protection of

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The TMT International Observatory (TIO) is a collaboration among Caltech, the University of California (UC), the National Institutes of Natural Sciences of Japan, the National Astronomical Observatories of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Department of Science and Technology of India, and the National Research Council of Canada.

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Figure 2. TMT brochure suggesting the need to penetrate new frontiers and conquer new sites.

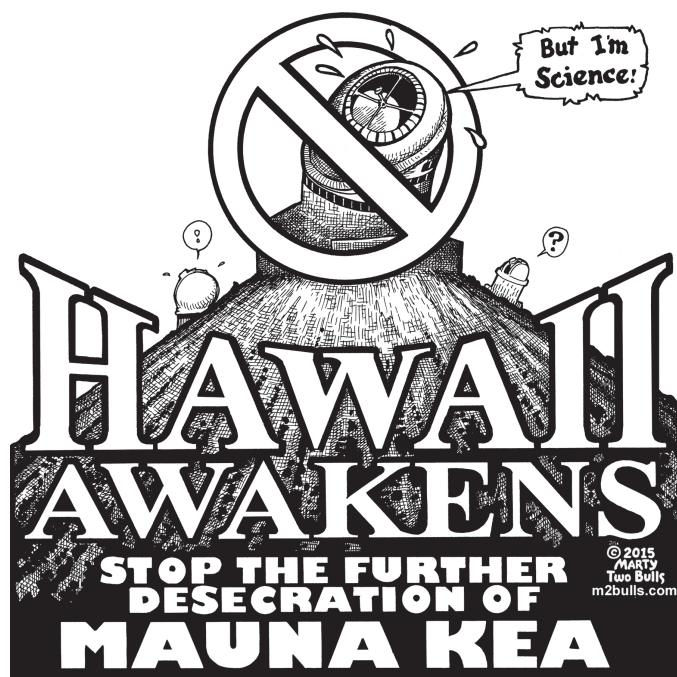


Figure 3. Opposing construction of the TMT while challenging scientific ideology.  
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the sacred mountain crucially connects how “HAWAII AWAKENS” by refusing the construction of the TMT, even as it impotently attempts to defend itself: “But I’m science!” The ideological force of science simply does not justify the building of the TMT at Mauna a Wākea. In sum, I argue that collective resurgence requires us to forge criticisms of the TMT as a project of astronomy-industry development that produces and is a product of settler colonial capitalism.

### Resurgent Refusals

To conclude this article, I examine Kanaka Maoli decolonization in the context of Mauna a Wākea. Theorizing Indigenous decolonization, Simpson’s (2014) politics of refusal offers an ethic and practice to interrupt racialized, gendered economies of capitalist-colonialist violence against Indigenous peoples by refusing the “gifts” settler states offer—the TMT being one such “gift” offered to us in Hawai’i. She asserts, “To accept these

conditions is an impossible project for some Indigenous people, not because it is impossible to achieve, but because it is politically untenable and thus normatively should be refused” (p. 22). In a similar vein, Coulthard (2014) advocates Indigenous resurgence in the face of settler colonial state recognition and its concealed violence. He recommends “redirect[ing] our struggles *away* from a politics that seeks to attain a conciliatory form of settler-state recognition for Indigenous nations toward a *resurgent politics of recognition* premised on self-actualization, direct action, and the resurgence of cultural practices” (original emphasis, p. 24). Refusal and resurgence, together, offer an Indigenous anti-state politics that antagonizes settler colonialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy, which I theorize as *resurgent refusals*. It is a theoretical concept, political philosophy, and embodied practice that exercises decolonization beyond the orbit of settler colonial state power.

Resurgent refusals emanate from on-the-ground struggles at Mauna a Wākea against the TMT. On June 24, 2015, more than seven hundred *kia'i* organized on Mauna a Wākea, chanting “hewa” and “aloha ‘āina,” calling the TMT wrong, and standing in love of the land. As settler state law enforcement—officers who specifically were deployed from Hawai‘i County Police and the Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement—escorted TMT crews to the northern plateau, protectors mobilized multiple blockade lines and spread out across the access road. Kaho‘okahi Kanuha mentioned, “The plan wasn’t to get arrested. But, the plan was to kūpa‘a, to stand, and stand until physically taken away” (Corrigan, 2015b). When the standoff culminated, twelve *kia'i* were arrested, and all construction was blocked. The strategy was to stall TMT crews. He stated, “Ten minutes, sixty-four lines, eight hours, and they’re done.” Kanuha also crystallized their solidarity, asserting, “Every inhabited

island, we got em here. This is not a Hawai‘i Island issue” (Corrigan, 2015c). In an interview after being released from his arrest at the June 24 blockade of the TMT, *kia'i* Kaleikoa Kā‘eo noted, “It really showcased the power of our people. The power of aloha ‘āina ‘ōia‘i‘o, which is the love—the genuine love. Love, the land, and truth” (Corrigan, 2015c). These are direct action blockades, embodied performances of decolonial love, and inter-island coalitions that operate exterior to structures of the settler state for protecting and repatriating Mauna a Wākea. They are resurgent refusals by Kānaka Maoli against astronomy-industry development as a project of settler colonial capitalism. “We have a word in our culture,” Pua Case powerfully said on *Viceland*, in criticism of the TMT’s settler colonial capitalism, “it’s called maha‘oi. It’s when you overstay. And not only do you overstay your welcome, but you move in. And not only do you move in, but you push the original owners out” (Latimer, 2017). These resurgent refusals expose what is maha‘oi and what is hewa by fighting to aloha ‘āina.

For decolonization to succeed, Kanaka Maoli movements, and other movements championed by Indigenous peoples, must be reflexive. I conclude by discussing two examples to make this point. First, the protection of Mauna a Wākea has deployed legal rhetoric from international law to claim that TMT construction is illegal insofar as its jurisdiction is legislated by a US state that illegally occupies Hawai‘i. While Sai’s (2008, 2004) arguments mobilize international laws of occupation to claim rights of national sovereignty to refuse TMT construction against the occupying US nation-state, this logic tends to flow in a direction whereby de-occupation is incommensurable with decolonization, which Kauanui (2008) has crucially described. Such an argument for de-occupation re-centers international law in a way that normalizes the Westphalian nation-state

system, miscasting Indigeneity as inapplicable via claims that “Hawaiian” is purely a marker of nationality. Writing about how Native peoples invoke international legal systems, Barker (2011) reflects:

Given histories of genocide, dispossession, assimilation, and discrimination are enacted and rationalized through the law, it is perhaps ironic or simply confusing that the law would continue to be regarded by indigenous peoples or other disenfranchised people as a tactic of resistance or reform. (p. 10)

“The question that lingers is not *why* Native peoples would use the law as a means of reformation,” she further observes, “but *how*, in those uses, they seek to rearticulate their relations to one another, the United States, and the international community” (original emphasis, p. 11). Similar to using settler state law as a tactic, the question that must be asked is *how* international law gets mobilized in assertions of Kanaka Maoli sovereignty. Protecting Mauna a Wākea by separating Indigeneity and decolonization from de-occupation and nationalism, thus, is not a resurgent refusal.

Second, *kia’i* Brannon Kamahana Kealoha has openly criticized the TMT and Mailani Neal, a young Kanaka Maoli wahine (female), for creating a pro-TMT petition. Publicized on social media and further narrativized through news media, Kealoha’s remarks asserted Neal should be “dealt with blows” (Walden, 2015)—a serious threat of physical violence. It is curious, as an informative anecdote, that my invocation of this story for analysis has been dismissed and silenced by some scholars, including a reviewer of this particular article. Let me be clear here. I am not suggesting that *kia’i* in the movement to protect Mauna a Wākea, or Kānaka Maoli

at large, be generalized, essentialized, or universalized as patriarchal, misogynistic, or sexist. To make such an interpretation would be a gross misreading. Kealoha’s remarks, unfortunately, demonstrate how patriarchal domination and gendered violence have been rhetorically justified as a way to protect Mauna a Wākea. This, quite simply, should not be tolerated. We should not shy away from or compromise this point, nor should it be dismissed and silenced. Calling attention to these forms of hewa does not weaken our claims and movement but rather strengthens them in profoundly intersectional ways. It is as both Coulthard (2014) and Simpson (2014) assert: Indigenous peoples’ decolonization *requires* gendered justice. Any heteropatriarchal violence in the movement to protect Mauna a Wākea must be abolished.

Resurgent refusals provide a grounded project to guide non-statist practices of decolonization. As such, my theoretical contribution intervenes into both Hawaiian studies and critical Indigenous studies. By utilizing *makawalu* as a Kanaka Maoli method of discourse analysis, and by utilizing a selectively promiscuous methodology of queer-Indigenous-anarchism, the arguments in this article provide preliminary answers to Goodyear-Ka’ōpua’s (2011) question, “how do we *unsettle* settler state authorities, without replicating the violences and exclusions we aim to stop?” (p. 132). And in theorizing resurgent refusals as a non-statist form of decolonization by examining Kanaka Maoli activism against astronomy-industry development, this article has engaged and intervenes within Coulthard’s (2014) and Simpson’s (2014) arguments for Indigenous resurgence and refusal. However, I do not intend to highlight these interventions over contributions by *kia’i* resurging and refusing the TMT on the ‘āina. And the fight is not over. This is especially true since construction still threatens to begin. My main hope is that this article can offer a guide, or blueprint,

for resurgent refusals in the name of *kia'i* and for Mauna a Wākea.

From the deployment of de-occupation rhetoric to decolonize Mauna a Wākea, to the corporeal refusals of blockades on the 'āina interrupting flows of settler colonial capital, protection of Mauna a Wākea elucidates how the politics of refusal and resurgence coalesce. Yet, as I have attempted to demonstrate, refusals of the TMT that re-center settler state law, remain neutral to astronomy-industry development, separate Indigenous decolonization from nationalist de-occupation, and

bolster colonial heteropatriarchy, undermine resurgence against the settler state. Although queer-Indigenous-anarchism enables us to read these recuperations of settler colonial state power, we must continue to interrogate how decolonial movements for sovereign futures can be co-opted. Only when anti-state critiques within Indigenous movements are genuinely anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-sexist can decolonization manifest. While Mauna a Wākea signifies such a possibility, we must remain self-critical, coalitional, and altogether steadfast.

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