

Reading Paradise: Imagining Tourism in Postcolonial Hawaiian Literature

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Much has been written about the tourism imaginary that emerged from Euro-American interactions with the islands of Hawai'i, and the image of smiling, carefree islanders who are brimming with *aloha* is one of the most recognizable in the world. It is a classic imperialist trope of child-like non-Western natives who are eager to share the paradise of their land, their culture, and their bodies with outsiders. Edward Said recognized that "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism," and was "immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences" (*Culture and Imperialism*, 1993, pp. xiii). He identifies the novel, specifically, as having been a powerful cultural locus of the creation and consumption of narratives of self/other in the modern Western empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (p. xiii).

In Hawai'i, novels written by outsiders, such as James Michener's *Hawai'i* (1959), crafted narratives of a once wild land and people that under the influence of American missionaries and businessmen had become civilized, capitalist, and available for consumption by visitors. Walking that fine line of exotic, yet tamed, American, yet foreign, different, yet recognizable, proud, yet friendly - all wrapped in a package of undeniably balmy weather - has made Hawai'i an incredibly successful tourism product. It has also created an economy in which Native Hawaiians are financially dependent on a model that sells them as "the other" in their own homeland.

Said argued that as colonized people come to recognize the power and influence of cultural forms such as the novel, "stories become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history" to the world (p. xii). Indeed, the publication of indigenous short stories and novels has formed a critical part of postcolonial movements around the world. In places such as Hawai'i, where tourism is a major industry shaping the daily lives of all of the islands' inhabitants, directly or indirectly, tourism and tourists are common subjects for postcolonial dissection and critique.

This paper examines the portrayals of tourism and tourists in postcolonial fictional narratives written by Native Hawaiians, focusing particularly on four works released in the last twenty years. In Georgia Ka'apuni McMillan's *School for Hawaiian Girls* (2005), Kiana Davenport's *Shark Dialogues* (2010), Kristiana Kahakauwila's *This is Paradise* (2013), and Jasmin 'Iolani Hakes' recently published *Hula* (2023), tourism brings opportunities for both success and destruction to the Hawaiian land, its culture, individuals, and families. Each encounter between host and guest creates an opportunity for communication, or "reading" (in a Geertzian sense) each other's cultural and individual texts. Collectively, these stories shed light on the complex relationships of power, gender, race, class, and cultural identity that underpin Hawai'i's status as a tourist paradise, as understood/imagined by its indigenous people. Through analysis of these *fictional* narratives, a deeper understanding can be gained of how *non-fictional* Hawaiians experience the power dynamics of guest/host and (former) colonizer/colonized in their daily lives.