RECLAIMING PARADISE: CINEMA AND HAWAIIAN NATIONHOOD[1]

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Pristine green cliffs and clear blue water, sun, sand, and sensual women: these images of the South Seas have presented Hawai'i to the world for over three centuries. Epitomizing the romance of a far-away island, Hawai'i has come to seem accessible to visitors, tourists, businessmen, and, in this paper, generations of filmmakers.

In this essay, I make a case for the persistence of images of "paradise" in contemporary portrayals of Hawaiian nationhood. I counter the assumption of a trajectory from romance to reality. Instead, I point to the reclamation of the romantic in order to assert present Native Hawaiian realities—the reality of a struggle for cultural autonomy, political sovereignty, and a "reorganized" place in the global arena.[2] Films made by activists turn the depictions associated with Western conquest into an attack against visual domination by imperial outsiders—the *malihini* (strangers) behind the camera. Indigenous filmmakers adapt the trope of paradise to an interpretation of Native Hawaiian nationhood in the present.

Recurring in films of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the trope defines a concept of nation in a context of bids for self-determination. The concept refers specifically to land, the *'āina*, that is the source of kinship and community. While outside observers have painted pictures of an Edenic environment for centuries, I show that the deceptively similar evocation of landscape harbors a newly resistant movement, representing a distinctly Hawaiian vision. The films I discuss can be viewed as components in

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the creation of an indigenous cinema. To the extent that they are successful, these films attract an audience, garner funding, and win acknowledgment of their messages.

When it comes to Hawai'i, there is an enormous amount of available visual material. From the many accounts by Cook and his sailors to the popular television program *Hawaii Five-O,* pictures of the islands circulate widely, familiarly, and appealingly. These generally obscure the threat that visual appropriation poses under pleasing images of pleasure and harmony. In the films I analyze, background becomes foreground, constituting a sharp critique of the history behind romantic portrayals. The critique may be implicit, embedded in plot or symbol, or it may be deliberate, the primary subject of a film; in either instance, the appropriation of image signifies a response to hegemonic control of representations. Visual exploitation of the islands as an *ideal* for the continent is reversed, and "continent" forms the mirror against which the islands assert an identity. "Through film, issues of national identity and concern to Pacific Islanders are raised and disseminated," Vilsoni Hereniko, a Rotuman filmmaker, writes. He continues: these films "present a Pacific perspective on history and Pacific politics that eclipses the romantic images on celluloid that pervade South Seas cinema from the 1890s to the 1990s."[3] Eclipse but do not erase.

I do not delineate the long legacy of films about Hawai'i; that has been done elsewhere.[4] As a starting point, I discuss two iconic productions that in different ways exploit the romance of the Pacific in the context of the island with a colonial relationship to the United States. Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* and George Roy Hill's *Hawaii* reimagine the trope of paradise under the familiarity that came with World War II and intensified statehood debates.

In the main part of the paper, I explore the persistence of romance in films that convey the reality of contemporary Hawai'i. Specifically, I analyze films in which reality is deeply embedded in a relationship to the past of intrusion, takeover, and ultimate control by the United States. This includes films made by outsiders as well as insiders and demonstrates the sharing of visual conventions in those films. My conclusion extends the discussion of visual hegemony and the possibilities for creating a Native Hawaiian cinema in the face of funding constraints, the power of Hollywood, and the complexity of what nationhood can mean in an American state.

Love in Paradise

Stereotypes of the South Pacific go back to early explorers and especially Captain James Cook with his boats full of image makers.[5] That devastating contact

released a flood of images that circulated around the world in the nineteenth century, the high tide of imperial intrusions into the Pacific (See Lepowsky; Lutkehaus, this issue). Particularly relevant to the case of Hawai'i, nineteenth century images conveyed a place the United States had a right to manage, make productive, and eventually effectively colonize. The ruling trope remains *paradise*, a place of softness and sweetness conveniently reinterpreted by US observers as a "pear ripe for plucking."[6] By the end of the nineteenth century, the spread of visual technology made film a primary medium for representing Hawai'i in the frame of enduring South Seas imagery.

From ethnological to documentary and, without much pause, to feature films, celluloid images reinforced a romantic representation of the islands that became an American territory in 1900. Feature films depended on inherited visual conventions to depict a place that was both a distant reality and a fond dream for viewers.

"Between 1920 and 1939 more than fifty feature films were made in or about Hawai'i," Jane Desmond notes in *Staging Tourism*. The films to which she refers were produced and distributed by major Hollywood studios. And they tended to play on the same themes: "A genre of South Seas island romance was particularly popular, often featuring interracial romance between native women and Caucasian men (businessmen, shipwreck victims) visiting the islands."[7] Heterosexual relationships symbolize the romance of the islands, at once epitomizing and obscuring the reality of sexual and racial encounters. The Second World War brought a new era: depictions of paradise reflected the impact of a war in which thousands of Americans reached Hawai'i, and US imperialism expanded its thrust.

In 1949, five short years after the end of the war, Rodgers and Hammerstein produced the play *South Pacific,* based on James Michener's 1947 *Tales of the South Pacific*. The Broadway play introduced themes and characters that gained pervasive influence on subsequent depictions of the South Seas. Nine years later the film version fixed romance to a place shattered by the realities of war. The place is not identified, but naval personnel, a Polynesian-looking supporting cast, and references to the danger of a Japanese invasion evoke the Hawaiian archipelago, where thousands of US servicemen and civilian workers spent the war years.[8] Scenes filmed on the gorgeous coast of Kaua'i substantiate the image of paradise that Hawai'i represented for a weary American public.[9] Yet what is remarkable about *South Pacific* is the twist in the familiar trope: this "Eden" in the Pacific carefully teaches a lesson about race and gender on the mainland—at home.[10] Remembered for a romantic narrative enhanced by music, the film initiates a reflection on the reality of US presence in the Pacific that in later films turned into vivid condemnation of American imperialism, militarism, and consumerism.

There are two romances in *South Pacific*. In one, Navy nurse Nellie Forbush falls in love with Emile De Becque, a handsome longtime resident of the island. In the other, Bloody Mary induces Lieutenant Joseph Cable to meet her daughter, the lithe and lightly brown Liat.[11] Linked by a dream of love in paradise, the dual stories expose the complexities of romance across racial and cultural boundaries.[12]

Nellie discovers the secret that De Becque harbors, when she learns that two dark-skinned children are his by a native woman. A girl from Little Rock, she finds it impossible to cross the "racial" barrier until De Becque proves himself to be a war hero. And, of course, he is French and not native—not the dark male whose presence even the daring Rodgers and Hammerstein avoid. In that case, the barriers to romance are national (or cultural—from Little Rock to Paris) and they easily fall. The barriers for Cable are entirely different, and his love story ends tragically, or inevitably, with his death. Unlike the heroic, and sometimes less than heroic, white males who did and do populate Hollywood films set in the Pacific, Cable sees his interracial romance through the lens of the racism he learned on the East Coast of the United States.

Cable meets Liat on Bali Haʻi, the "one perfect island" on a distant horizon. Clouded in mist and mystery, across a Technicolor-blue ocean, Bali Haʻi is a symbol for the distant and desirable—frequently seen but not ultimately accessible. Cable's story exposes the unattainable nature of perfection, the distance of Bali Haʻi from the lessons learned at home: a carefully taught and culturally acceptable racism. The contrast with the successful outcome of Nellie's romance further underlines the fault lines in the United States by region and class. Lieutenant Cable's elite Philadelphia upbringing keeps him more distant than does Nellie's provincial background from attaining the dream of the South Seas. Under its bright romantic coloring, *South Pacific* asks questions about a United States whose future was increasingly tied to the Pacific Islands. In the film, South Seas stereotypes of harmony and generosity show up an imperial nation whose values are the opposite.

Images subsumed under the trope of paradise became more significant as the United States expanded its strategic interests in the "sea of islands."[13] In Hawaiʻi, debates over statehood brought such visions to the forefront, where they influenced questions about the status of the place the United States occupied. The popularity of the tourist destination, the impact of jet travel, and the simple appeal of a tropical island to an urbanizing nation added to the already popular genre: Hawaiʻi became subject and site of hundreds of presentations to the American public, while politicians argued over statehood.[14]

A legislative act brought the Pacific island close to home in 1959, and subsequent filmmakers modified the trope of paradise by grounding the vision in

presumably faithful references to Hawaiian history. Paradise did not get lost but appeared in the depiction of antagonists and protagonists in that history. George Roy Hill's 1966 *Hawaii* is a prime example.[15]

Like *South Pacific*, Hill's film drew its themes and figures from James Michener, this time from his big novel that told the story of Hawai'i from the beginning of time until the mid-1950s (the book was published just before statehood in 1959). The story draws on Michener's account of the arrival of American Calvinist missionaries in 1820 and transforms the dichotomy of good and evil into a kind of trouble-in-paradise tale. The romance in *Hawaii* is less between a white man and a dark-skinned woman, or between lovers whose cultures keep them apart, than a romance of redemption. While the turmoil experienced by the white characters dominates the moral dimension of the film (see Lipset, this issue), the Polynesian figures are not totally silenced, nor are they excluded from being beneficently *saved*. In a final acknowledgment of native culture, the *ali'i nui*, Queen Malama, is redeemed when she turns back to custom.

Despite the role of Native Hawaiians, *Hawaii* remains the story of the West and of the United States in particular. Paradise is the place in which "we" change by choice, while the natives are changed by "us." Like *South Pacific*, the 1966 film was an enormous box office hit, but unlike the earlier film, it brings Hawai'i forward as a special case, an island of diverse inhabitants who struggle to attain an ideal of harmony.[16] In this respect, Hill's film redoes the trope by making social relations the constituents of paradise.

Less than a decade later, a Hawaiian cultural renaissance would alter representations of the archipelago in enduring ways. By then, too, the impact of persistent imagery affected the visions of insider as well as outsider filmmakers. As Margaret Jolly put it, filmmakers—both native and nonnative—saw through dual lenses. "Indigenous and foreign representations of the place and its people are now not so much separate visions as they are 'double visions,' in the sense of both stereoscopy and blurred edges."[17] This dilemma affects the creation of an indigenous film industry in Hawai'i or, better perhaps, the creation of cinema that represents an indigenous vision of "paradise." Working through the dilemma made land and not love central to the meanings of paradise.

Land/ʻĀina in Paradise

In 2009, Catherine Bauknight presented a film with the same title as George Roy Hill's 1966 blockbuster. Her *Hawaii*, however, has a subtitle that reveals its distance from a Hollywood production. *A Voice for Sovereignty* places Bauknight's film in a new era, one of bids for self-determination on the part

of Native Hawaiians. According to Bauknight's Web site: "This is the first documentary to feature Native Hawaiian's journey to sustain their culture, spirituality, and connection to the land."[18]

In my reading, her claim of "first" refers to the connections the film makes of culture to spirituality and of spirituality to land. With this as her overriding theme, Bauknight gathers the voices of a range of Native Hawaiians, *kanaka maoli*, whose stated identities are rooted in the land. Thus the film moves the argument for sovereignty away from the elite, the lawyers and politicians who speak in public, and brings it home to the ordinary resident—those who especially suffer from the desecration and devastation of the ʻāina. Behind the narrative lies a familiar vision: Bauknight's *Hawaii* presents a paradise lost image, vividly detailing an intrusion onto the shores of the archipelago by bulldozers, motorcycles, and speedboats—the screaming noise of modern technology. The "once-perfect island" does not lie in a distant mystical haze, but close at hand and subject to the whims of those who enter.

The film opens with an elderly Hawaiian man performing a traditional chant on the white sandy shore of a blue ocean. Contrasting scenes carry the narrative. A scene of men on motorcycles roaring their way into land marked as sacred is followed by a lone Hawaiian man contemplating the plumeria in his garden. "We fish and gather from the mountain," says an individual, standing by the side of a road. "We've done that all our lives." A shot of consumers, box stores, and parking lots precedes a view of children looking shyly into the camera. And so it goes: intruders spoil paradise with disregard, greed, and ignorance, while Native Hawaiians speak of the beauty and the generosity of the ʻāina. *Hawaii: A Voice for Sovereignty* is not a simple Manichean tale of good and evil, but the arrangement of scenes resonates with that enduring interpretation of Pacific Island history.[19]

Catherine Bauknight is not a native of the islands, nor does she claim to be. She does take the position of outsider advocate for Native Hawaiian sovereignty, and that leads to a certain ambiguity not only in the content but also in the distribution of the film.

With its first showing, *Hawaii: A Voice for Sovereignty* entered a political arena. Even before the film reached an audience in Hawaiʻi, Bauknight brought the production to a quite different environment: the US federal government. There, in the nation's capital, prominent figures from the islands and from the mainland attended a private showing. The event occurred in the White House visitor's center: "the screening also included a ritual that celebrated the new home of the statue of the legendary Hawaiian King Kamehameha in the Center's Emancipation Hall."[20] A statue of Hawaiʻi's famed monarch marked a recognition of the Hawaiian nation by the United States that had little to do with (and perhaps was meant to distract from) the

debate in Congress over a bill proposing a "reorganization" of the relationship between Hawai'i and the United States.[21] The opening in Washington DC attached *Hawaii* to a pressing political issue and, in the face of a congressional bill, emphasized a meaning of sovereignty—and nationhood—Bauknight downplays. Two months later the film opened in Maui and viewers witnessed a cinematic presentation of the lush, green-blue South Seas landscape the tourist bureau of the "valley island" touts.[22]

The film opened on Father's Day, 2009, not a trivial choice. Celebration of the place entangled with events marking an emblematic American holiday. Moreover, the location—the Sand Dance pavilion at a Maui resort—echoes the more famous mainland Sundance film festival. The sponsors of the festival talk of "the power of creativity to enlighten" and of the film's presentation of a "reality" few malihini know, but the emphasis on outsider consumption complicates the relationship of Bauknight's film to an indigenous production.[23] Cautiously avoiding debates over the status of *nation*, the film presents sovereignty as a return to customary modes of subsistence.

Bauknight shies away from the romantic implications of her images of the islands. Ultimately, she is less concerned with Native Hawaiian sovereignty than with the devastating impact of the West on native environments (see Kempf; Flinn, this issue). In an interview soon after the film opened, Bauknight extended the message of *Hawaii* to a global situation of climate change and loss of sustainability: "to be separated from their culture, land and spirituality could result in *the extinction of a culture*. These are extremely critical issues not only for the Hawaiians but for the entire global community as well" [emphasis added].[24]

The film turns the spotlight from politics to culture and from the particular to the general. Committed to the cause of saving native cultures across the globe, Bauknight depicts the ruin of a way of life by using the visual conventions that have romanticized Pacific Islands for centuries (see Lutkehaus; Flinn, this issue). These conventions shift the imperialist narrative to a pro-environmentalist stance, and the route to redeeming a once-perfect island lies in restoring self-sustainability—*malama 'āina*, care for the land. In *Hawaii: The Voice of Sovereignty* the Bali Ha'i of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* persists as the ideal the Western world at once yearns for and spoils.

Bauknight's film is neither about the conquest of a nation nor a plea for asserting national identity. That may be the burden native filmmakers uniquely bear—as Vilsoni Hereniko claims. In "Representations of cultural identities," he draws attention to the increasing importance of native-made media that represent identity. "Through film, issues of national identity and concern to Pacific Islanders are raised and disseminated. Merata Mita's *Patu*,

Albert Wendt's book-made-into-film *Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree*, and Puhipau and Joan Lauder's documentary *Act of War* present a Pacific perspective on history and Pacific politics that eclipses the romantic images on celluloid that pervade South Seas cinema from the 1890s to the 1990s."[25]

The documentary *Act of War: The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation* came out in 1993, a response to the hundredth-year anniversary of the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani by US military forces. The subtitle announces the history the film will deliver. Yet returning to Hereniko's point: does the film's imagery actually "eclipse" romance or does it rather exploit familiar tropes in order to fight back against appropriation by outsiders?

In contrast to *Hawaii: A Voice for Sovereignty, Act of War* was produced and distributed by a Native Hawaiian company, Nā Maka o ka 'Āina, or Eyes of the Land. The company is affiliated with a consortium of indigenous media companies, Vision Maker Media, whose Web site announces: "Vision Maker Media shares Native stories with the world that represent the cultures, experiences, and values of American Indians and Alaska natives." Vision Maker Media receives major funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and from the National Endowment for the Arts.[26] Benefiting from financial support, *Act of War* is lavish, technically sophisticated, and a highly dramatic rendering of "a historical event of which few Americans are aware."[27] At 58 minutes long, the film fits a television timeslot and potentially reaches a wide audience.

Much is filmed in documentary style, offering a straightforward presentation of the history of the islands. But *Act of War* is a documentary with an agenda, and the outrage of US conquest demands the techniques of drama: conflict and resolution; villains and heroes; fateful decisions and noble reactions. Reconstructions and reenactments (Queen Lili'uokalani at the piano, for instance) bring the history alive, engaging an audience in the *actuality* of events. The narrative arc is clear, as the story moves from a condition of well being through the forceful overthrow of a nation to a return to harmony—*pono* of land and people. Pono means good, righteous, excellent, and harmonious (Kame'eleihiwa 1992). The form the return takes is unmistakable: only restoration of political sovereignty will restore the original state of well being to the islands.

To convey that "original state," the film draws on South Seas imagery but in this case not sand, sun, and sea. The stereotypical imagery in *Act of War* refers to social relations and to the interactions that constitute a *people*. This is both an important difference from and an important extension of the significance of romantic images that have described the Pacific for centuries. Shunning blue ocean and green hillsides, coconut palms and sinewy bodies to convey a prelapsarian state, *Act of War* highlights the performed collectivity

that evokes the state as *lāhui*, Native Hawaiian nationhood. To convey this condition, the film draws on enduring depictions of sociability, welcome, and generosity that as thoroughly represent Bali Haʻi as misty mountains in the distance.

The images are appropriated by indigenous filmmakers who cooperate through Nā Maka o ka ʻĀina. If we accept the arguments Faye Ginsburg has made about indigenous media, therein lies the importance of *Act of War:* the control of production and distribution by indigenous people. Her discussion of Igloolik Isuma, an Inuit-controlled production company, can be applied to Nā Maka o ka ʻĀina: "indigenous people are using screen media not to mask but to recuperate their own collective stories and histories."[28] Producer, director, and actors cooperate in "taking back" or "giving vitality to" images that have been diffused about them for decades. These films revise without rejecting a long history of "romantic images on celluloid."

Like Igloolik Isuma's most famous production *Atanarjuat* (2000), *Act of War* received numerous prizes and continues to be shown on television, in classrooms, and at special events. Unlike the Inuit film, with its adaptation of features of Hollywood entertainment, *Act of War* did not achieve wide box office success. Subsequent films produced through Nā Maka o ka ʻĀina similarly emphasize documentary style educational films and semi-ethnographic accounts of custom, told from a native point of view. A robust and impressive list, this raises further questions: is it that shunning Hollywood-type productions asserts the *reality* in indigenous cinema? That in order to reclaim the romance imposed by Western observers for centuries, indigenous media makers privilege information over entertainment? Essentially, is the process of *recuperation* seen to be best served by one form of filmmaking and not another? I approach an answer in the next section.

From "Paradise" to Nationhood

In 2009, the release year of *Hawaii: A Voice for Sovereignty*, a film called *Pidgin: The Voice of Hawaiʻi* came out. The echoing subtitles hint at similar goals, but the concept of voice also forecasts an important difference between the two films. *Pidgin* is a collaborative effort of Kanalu Young, a Native Hawaiian activist and professor at the University of Hawaiʻi (now deceased; the film is dedicated to him), and Marlene Booth, a filmmaker and also a professor at the University of Hawaiʻi. Like the coincidentally timed *Hawaii*, *Pidgin* portrays a community whose features distinguish it from the romantic vision perpetuated by Western filmmakers. *Pidgin* tells the story of a shared way of speaking and of a language that evolved over time, from the plantation workers of the nineteenth century to the local population of the

twenty-first century. If *Hawaii* argues for the restoration of traditional ways of sustaining land, *Pidgin* looks to shared language as the heart of a restored Hawaiian nationhood. *Pidgin* diverges from Bauknight's film by including the locals along with the kanaka maoli as primary actors.

Playful, humorous, and enlivened by the antics of pidgin guerilla Lee Tonouchi, *Pidgin* seems at first sight to reject past portraits of the South Seas and the quintessential paradise, Hawai'i. Clowning is not ordinarily an element of that trope, and cartoons have almost always been bad press for Native Hawaiians. A surprising exception occurred in 2002, when Disney released the animated feature *Lilo and Stitch,* with its drawn figures rather than "real" characters. *Lilo and Stitch* was a hit, and not least among the Native Hawaiians I know. The Disney production company cleverly used humor not to mock but to represent customs and interactions, apparently succeeding with local viewers in the islands (see Pearson, this issue). Moreover, the film makes fun of predecessors—the embarrassing Elvis Presley vehicle, *Blue Hawaii*, for instance, takes on new meanings when Stitch learns to play the ukulele. Small, awkward, and alien, Stitch acquires Hawaiian values in a series of lessons that contradict the easy assumption of *aloha* or "Hawaiian at Heart."[29] At the end of the film, the little fellow is welcomed into the family, a member of the *'ohana*.

Like *Lilo and Stitch*, *Pidgin* uses animation, cartooning, and humor to break down pictures of Hawai'i that embed the island in a misty aura of paradise. While the Disney vehicle transforms enduring (mostly cinematic) stereotypes through the science fiction framework of an alien's perspective on Hawaiian custom, the Young and Booth film uses familiar stereotypes in the interest of taking back the history of Hawai'i's people from the nineteenth to the early twenty-first century. In both instances, however, mockery of stereotypical imagery accentuates the complexity of contemporary Hawai'i and its legacy of visits from strangers who penetrate, alter, and imitate the customs they encounter. Moreover, the diverse display of "talk" in *Pidgin* illuminates the longer story of intrusion by foreigners who alternately resist and accept the terms of entry into Hawaiian culture—the story cheerfully told in Disney's film, with its happy ending. Humorous as *Pidgin* is, the documentary does not have a happy ending. Rather, the film provides a realistic assessment of the role that language can play in enforcing divisions when, and if, its many speakers are silenced. The point of *Pidgin* is to give voice and to turn shared language into a political act.

Pidgin is fast and funny. Scene follows scene, in rapid succession, with the result that pidgin seems to be all over the place. Members of distinct groups—a Japanese, a Filipino, a *haole* (Caucasian)—recite "to be or not to be" in pidgin accented with ethnic inflections. The Shakespearean lines

unify the speakers and draw an audience of outsiders into the routine. Other scenes exclude strangers, defined in the film as non-pidgin speakers. A scene in which teenagers sit at a beach and speak in quick staccato to one another closes out the person who only understands Standard English. The association between Standard English and a history of discrimination is supported by the inclusion of a case against two newscasters who were fired because they sounded "local" and by interviews with adults who remember being punished for speaking pidgin in school. And always the documentary conventions, interviews, and borrowed footage are deflated by a subsequent antic episode: Lee Tonouchi rapping in pidgin or mocking his teachers.

The informational content of indigenous media is also mocked. In one scene, four scholars sit at a picnic bench, trees and ocean in the background. They discuss linguistic structures and admit hesitation about using pidgin in certain settings. Like much else in *Pidgin*, the scene operates at several levels. The language is analyzed, as is its role in the social hierarchies of Hawai'i. Simultaneously, the location of this scholarly conversation reminds a viewer of stereotypes that have long characterized Hawai'i—swaying palms and blue water. In fact, this is not the only beach scene in the film or the only teasing reference to images inherited from the past.

The cover of the DVD is revealing. Two tanned and toned male surfers face the camera, a sepia print behind the title. The stereotypical native "boy surfer" seems an odd introduction to a film about language and a shared linguistic community. An episode, however, illuminates the cover and extends the concept of nationhood in *Pidgin*. In that scene, a bunch of visitors try to surf at a wave-ridden shore. Quickly they are chased away by another group, local by looks, behavior, and, notably, speech. The tone is light-hearted—no one is really threatening or threatened—but the gist is serious. As the locals pursue the malihini, the chase acquires broader implications: the possession of a sport by those to whom it originally belonged. Like pidgin itself, the claim to the beach is a claim to history, to insider status, and to rules of inclusion and exclusion.[30] Those rules reiterate the concept of nationhood the film upholds—a collectivity based on language and not on the ethnic or racial categories imposed by corporate, academic, or government elites.

Pidgin, says Tonouchi, "provides our Hawaiian roots." And the film consistently reminds the viewer of the source of those roots: the waves of newcomers who sustained the economic institutions of the archipelago through backbreaking work in cane and pineapple fields. Young and Booth stress, and show through old footage, the key role of plantation workers for whom pidgin offered a route to shared consciousness and, eventually, formed the basis for a *local* identity. Scenes of workers and, equally, of teenagers, surfers,

and shoppers, offer a history of Hawai'i that replaces a vague and Western-generated "perfect island" with the specifics of social interaction (Hawaiian pono) in a class-based setting.

In its emphasis on ordinary individuals—the everyday residents of the islands—*Pidgin* indirectly addresses the overthrow of the Hawaiian nation by the United States. That is, for most of the film the energy of the *local*, expressed in speech, counteracts the assumption of complete Americanization, with its measures of worth through demeanor, dialect, and dress. Tonouchi's antics wave in the face of homogenization according to an American model and, in Ginsburg's phrase, *talk back* to media conventions that have reduced diversity to an effortless "melting pot."

The film also has footage of the march in 1993 that marked the anniversary of the overthrow, a march in which Young participated. The crowds in that footage bear Hawaiian flags, wear traditional clothing, and carry placards that protest the continued occupation of an independent nation. Young's prominence in that footage indicates the wider message of *Pidgin*: that the source of Hawaiian nationhood lies not in kanaka maoli exclusivity but in the gathering of forces rooted in a polyglot, multicultural past. Yet the fact that the parade scene replicates representations of the march in *Act of War* argues for the significance of visual conventions that condemn American imperialism by exploiting "old" imagery.

In some ways, *Pidgin* has its own romantic flavor, represented in the honorable (and moral—see Lipset, this issue) aspects of the local working-class population. The film does not fight directly against the wrongs perpetuated by the United States and it does not obey the strict definition of an indigenous film—one made by members of an indigenous group. Booth is not kanaka maoli, and Young demonstrates his composite background when he shifts from Standard English to Hawaiian to pidgin in the film. While Young illustrates the fluidity of identity, other filmmakers took on the task of creating a distinctly Native Hawaiian mode of representation.

Native Hawaiian activist and filmmaker Anne Keala Kelly inspired a good deal of that effort. In 2008, she released a film she had been working on for 10 years, *Noho Hewa: The Wrongful Occupation of Hawai'i*.[31] The film is a powerful attack against the pollution of Hawai'i by corporate, military, and tourist interests. A freeway there, a housing development here, and endless shopping centers cover the graves of kānaka maoli, despite meetings, protests, and well-meaning developers. Kelly tells the story of the rape of the 'āina in a series of vignettes: individuals shouting at a town meeting; a scholar speaking in front of a military plane; shoppers ignoring the sign pointing to a burial ground; and, notably, the large Wal-Mart constructed on top of ancestral graves.

A tale of desecration, ignorance, and arrogance, *Noho Hewa* does not reduce protagonist and antagonist to one-dimensional figures. Rather, the range of incidents Kelly includes depict a lack of consensus, competing interests, the pull of temptation to which ordinary individuals succumb. In one scene, for instance, protestors yell at a Native Hawaiian woman who wants to shop in the Wal-Mart. She goes in anyway: cheap prices are a strong draw and economic stringency may outweigh a spiritual attachment to the land on which the box store sits. In another scene, young men stop a car from entering what is a designated sacred space. The local girls in the car shout expletives at them. Who cares, they say clearly—and realistically—about the dead?

Verbal battles alternate with protest marches, interviews with the shouts of teenagers; a developer explains how his resort will help the economy and a crowd asks how the violation of sacred land can help anyone. The film does not array good against bad characters, but it does make the villain of the piece unmistakable. Multinational corporations, real estate developers, the state government, and, last but not least, the US military trample over "paradise" thoughtlessly and greedily. Each institution offers the temptation of progress, an apple proffered in a uncertain economy, and each puts vested interests ahead of care for the ʻāina. Like temptation in its original formulation, the poison in the apple may not be immediately apparent, intensifying its evil impact.

The specific target is the United States, the military, capitalist, and consumer-based nation that denigrated Hawaiian culture and stole Hawaiian land. In the words of a reviewer: "Kelly makes the case that native Hawaiians face systematic obliteration at the hands of an American system that promotes militarism, tourism and over development."[32] While *Noho Hewa* shares with *Act of War* an accusation against the United States, Kelly's film focuses less on the loss of political sovereignty than on the blatant disrespect for land upon which Hawaiian nationhood is based. The outstanding trope in *Noho Hewa* is the land, ʻāina, the core of Native Hawaiian culture and the victim of US greed. In the depiction of land, Kelly's film recalls generations of images in the Western canon: pristine and green acreage, lush forests, and high cliffs that rest against an azure sky. But these images are used to convey the tragedy of loss under US rule.

Similar in some respects to Bauknight's use of land to represent a prelapsarian state, Kelly adds a distinctly kanaka maoli interpretation. *Noho Hewa* presents an interpretation of land as kin, the extension of relational affiliation from people to place. When land is desecrated, the film shows, social relationships collapse, pulling up the roots of Native Hawaiian collectivity. With its complex story of competition over land,

differences within and not just between kamaʻāinana and malihini groups, *Noho Hewa* argues that only a new consensus can redeem the way of life lost beneath box stores, military installations, and rampant materialism.

The film is not slick, and it contains none of the high-tech animation or effects that *Act of War* uses. On first sight, *Noho Hewa* looks amateurish, a hand-held camera moving from scene to scene, jumpily and often nonsequentially. According to one reviewer, the film looks "raw and unscripted" and another calls it "raw and passionate."[33] Both comments are positive, implying that the blunt YouTube style increases the power of the film. Kelly's is a view of Hawaiʻi that is rarely seen, and her images are "the stuff of sleepless nights rather than placid fantasies."[34]

From Kelly's point of view, however, comments about the film's amateur look underline another issue, that of financing and funding. The look of *Noho Hewa* suggests a lack of resources, which Kelly mentions as a downfall for indigenous film. Whether she chose the look in order to make the point about financial stringency or whether she was strapped by lack of funding does not vitiate her primary position. In an interview two years after the film appeared, she remarks (with as much irony as optimism): "I'm looking for someone with the resources to invest in my work and by doing that invest in Hawaiian filmmaking. And whoever does that is going to make more than their money back—they're going to make history."[35] But the deck remains stacked against highly funded indigenous film.

Anne Keala Kelly received a Master's degree in filmmaking from the University of Southern California. Her degree did not bring her the reward of major funding, limiting her work to a documentary genre. Kelly's situation is not unusual: "most Hawaiian directors have been working in that form, largely because feature-length, theatrical films are prohibitively expensive to produce."[36] "That was the most unfunny movie I will ever make," Kelly remarks about *Noho Hewa*. "The next will be a political comedy."[37] Whether or not political comedy actually constitutes her next work, Kelly suggests that restriction to the documentary genre keeps Native Hawaiian (and other indigenous) filmmakers in a "subject" relationship. In her view, indigenous filmmakers are colonized by corporate interests, Hollywood controlled media, and well-funded independent work. Until indigenous media cross the boundary out of the local into the global, the genre runs the risk of remaining subsidiary, separatist, and stored away. Limited to educational or informational films, indigenous filmmakers remain *minor* compared with those who make popular films, stunning epics, and high-revenue features.[38]

Two Sides of Paradise

The seizing of Hawai'i by well-funded filmmakers continues, and with it the perpetuation of an imagined Eden. At the same time, these newer media adapt Bali Ha'i to contemporary concerns. The far-away island still provides a lesson to the West, but its components are new. A Hawaiian cultural renaissance in the 1970s slowly but surely influenced films made by non-Hawaiians, who climbed on the bandwagon of bids for independence, for a return to customary modes of subsistence, and for restoration of the land. In 2009, the same year as *Pidgin* and Bauknight's *Hawaii*, a film called *Barbarian Princess* appeared in an International Film Festival in Honolulu. Two years later, the extremely successful *The Descendants* drew large audiences around the world. Otherwise different, the films share an effort to tell the real story of Hawai'i through a focus on individuals whose experiences exemplify the presence of the United States in the islands. Furby's originally titled *Barbarian Princess* occupies the conventional heroic mold: a royal figure battling for a nation against the call of love and passion. *The Descendants*, by contrast, features a central figure marked by troubles, by split affiliations, and by an excruciating dilemma: the "hero" is not even king of his castle.

The film about "one of Hawai'i's most beloved princesses" caused controversy, not least because of its title.[39] The filmmaker, Marc Furby, changed the title for its distribution on the mainland, where it appeared as *Princess Kaiulani*. Furby is not Native Hawaiian, though he is married to a Hawaiian.[40] Reversing the tradition of romanticized histories like George Roy Hill's *Hawaii*, by transferring the moral energy from "outsider" to "native," Furby yet maintains the spirit of a South Seas romance. The film follows the life of the designated successor to the Hawaiian throne as she tries to save her nation. In the end, her love for a Caucasian man succumbs to duty, and she returns home to Hawai'i, only to find the nation defeated by the military might of the United States. Princess Ka'iulani died at 23, in 1899, the year before Hawai'i was annexed to the United States. The film ends with her death.

Furby claims that the only fictional element is the love affair. Like its many predecessors, however, *Princess Kaiulani* offers a version of Bali Ha'i. Not shrouded in distant mist, the imagined island here is a place where women are strong, people are united in loyalty to a nation, and tanned young men speak their native tongue. If Bali Ha'i in *South Pacific* taught a lesson about racism, Furby's "perfect island" teaches the lesson of feminism, of loyalty, and of duty. Furby makes no secret of his politics, and of his commitment

to telling Native Hawaiian history. At the same time, he bows to the conventions of Western feature film, emphasizing the tragic fate of a beautiful princess. The actor who plays the princess, Q'orianka Kilcher, is a Peruvian-Swiss human rights advocate, a choice that blurs Hawaiian history into contemporary grassroots activism and that pushes aside the significance to Native Hawaiians of a vanished monarchy.

George Clooney and Alexander Payne tried something more ambitious in *The Descendants*. The 2011 film takes place in the present and refers to incendiary disputes over land currently occurring in Hawai'i. Based on a novel by a Hawaiian writer, Kaui Hart Hemmings, the film embeds the story of 'āina in the details of a family drama—the fictional element that carries the plot.[41] Narrative devices—adultery, recalcitrant teenagers, and disputatious kin—blur the existence of a distinct Hawaiian dilemma into the universals that sustain a Hollywood blockbuster.

The main figure, Matt King (played by Clooney), is the descendant of a haole banker and a Hawaiian princess, and he is the trustee of a gorgeous sweep of land on Kaua'i. The plot has two threads: one is King's discovery of his wife's adultery, and the other is the decision he faces about 25,000 acres of virgin land. Developers are begging for the land, tempting King away from the trust nature of his inheritance.[42] The two plots intersect when he discovers that his wife's lover is a middleman in the real estate deal. But she is no longer alive, and the opening shot of a sailboat skimming the waves off famed Waikiki Beach evokes the stereotypical Hawai'i and anticipates the tragedy that is to come.

But any hint of paradise is immediately disturbed. "Fuck paradise," Matt King says, and the viewer sees a parade of figures: a woman in a wheelchair, an old Asian man, a homeless person with her dog on the beach. The film shuns the stereotypical trope further by showing rain in Hawai'i, mist on the beaches, wet roads, and crowded residential neighborhoods. As Jeffrey Geiger writes about an earlier film, "much like a flimsy Hollywood set, there is both a front and a back to paradise."[43] The "front" is the land on Kaua'i, an interpretation underlined by the camera's loving gaze over green mountains, placid cows, temple stones, and aquamarine ocean. The "back" exists not only in the early scenes of dampness and despair, but also in the dilemma an individual faces in the presence of paradise. The dilemma comes not from the intrusion of race, as it did for Cable in *South Pacific*, but from an intrusion of profit into King's view of his "one perfect island."

In the end, King decides not to sell the land—a sign of the redemption that plays out through the final scenes. Redemption, too, is a familiar aspect of Pacific Island media: a white man is redeemed by refraining from spoiling paradise with his sexual or financial greed (see Lipset; Lutkehaus, this issue).

King is also redeemed in a perfectly American sense: he forgives his wife her love affair and he embraces his daughters over a carton of ice cream.

The Descendants is without question the story of Hawai'i told by non-Hawaiians. Payne and Clooney tried hard to bridge the gap: before filming, for instance, they held a ritual to gain the consensus of local Hawaiians, and they consulted with Native Hawaiian storytellers in adapting the novel for a movie. The gaps remain. There are no Native Hawaiians in the film except for one passenger on the plane to Kaua'i. The dilemma King faces concerning his trust is not given enough detail to distinguish it from the problems faced by any rich family on the mainland. And to the extent that the infidelity of his wife and their mother dominates the interactions between King and his children, this is very simply a Hollywood tale.

Supporters of the film cite the background music as evidence of the Hawaiian presence in the film. Furthermore, based on the discussion of land in the film, critics praise the realistic picture of a place usually trivialized as "paradise." *The Descendants* certainly moves beyond romantic depictions of the islands, shunning the legacy of the 1966 *Hawaii* and its many successors. "Fuck paradise" announces the new view of Hawai'i that will unroll in the remainder of the film. The white hero is tormented by his wife's secret life and not by an attraction to the "dark" woman of conventional South Seas drama. King's story involves a journey to forbearance (he forgives his wife) and to acceptance of responsibility for the trust he inherited. Yet the realism—the antiparadise aspect—of the narrative is limited by a focus on the upper 1% and a disappearance of the 99% who appear in the opening scenes. The poor and homeless vanish, as do the indigenous residents of Hawai'i.

Land is there, but the cultural meaning of 'āina plays little part in the King family battle over real estate development. In the end, *The Descendants* falls between cracks: a family drama balanced against a historical and contemporary issue that is crucial to the people who do not appear in the film. Shunning the meaning of trust land for Native Hawaiians and pushing a domestic drama to the forefront, the film remains, in Geiger's words, "a reflection both of the fascination and the deep distrust that marked America's relationship to the South Pacific."[44]

The film attempts to diminish the tension between fascination and distrust by normalizing life in the Pacific Island state. In focusing on King's problems with kin, the film brings Bali Ha'i close to home and affirms the assimilation of Hawai'i into the United States. Disputes over property reduce fascination with the "exotic" to a realistic account of contemporary American life. At the same time, King's decision to preserve the land on Kaua'i, undeveloped and pristine, recalls the particular history of US–Hawai'i relationships and the

role of land in that relationship. The film resolves the matter of *distrust* by implying the acknowledgment of indigenous rights accorded by a *trust*.

The Payne–Clooney film does not repeat the worst of earlier depictions—the easy conquest of native woman by white man, the wildness of savages tamed by the good Christian civilizer, the lazy native lying in the sun or surfing a wave. *The Descendants* does, however, relinquish ʻāina to land and Hawaiʻi to the United States. In that sense, realism represents an island in which descendants of a Hawaiian–haole elite transmit land, resources, and power to succeeding generations—an appropriated Bali Haʻi.

Retaking Bali Haʻi

"I have come around and now I'm working on a comedy," Kelly said in 2010. "I couldn't be funny with *Noho Hewa*. There's nothing funny happening in front of the camera. So I had to think about what's my best chance to get a theatrical film made and not sell out?"[45]

In advocating the production of a blockbuster, if granted the resources, Kelly tests the boundaries between speaking/filming in a Hawaiian voice and bending to the conventions a feature film demands. Her remarks suggest an ironic glance at the impact of spectacular epics, given the importance of "minority discourse" to the assertion of cultural and political autonomy. Her speculations about mass-market media stand against current alternatives to that Western-dominated genre: on the one side, educational and informational documentaries and, on the other side, the digitalized productions increasingly distributed across the Internet.

The mission statement of Nā Maka o ka ʻāina suggests the difficulty of making "theatrical film" and maintaining an indigenous voice. "We exist to document and give voice and face to traditional and contemporary Hawaiian culture, history, language, art, music, environment and the politics of independence and sovereignty."[46] In giving voice to Native Hawaiians, the company produces mainly educational and instructional videos. Yet the list is impressive, and the videos are widely distributed; moreover, the range of subjects offers a full account of the reality of Hawaiian history, including present bids for sovereignty. Revival of custom, respect for the wisdom of elders (*kūpuna*), and acknowledgment of the values of the past constitute the "paradise lost" in these indigenous productions. As in *Act of War* and *Noho Hewa*, the documentary form both facilitates and frames the cinematic representation of a new nationhood.

Digital technology and the Internet provide an alternative mode for giving voice to traditional and contemporary Hawaiian culture. Recent productions steer away from Western cinema conventions to create an aesthetic that

represents a distinctly Hawaiian reality. Visually and verbally, these videos "speak" Hawaiian, drawing forth the lessons of a community and a cultural constituency. Ty Sanga's 2009 *Stones* is an excellent example: abstract images evoke the lineaments of an ancient Hawaiian myth and the words are in Hawaiian (*ʻolelo Hawaiʻi*). The film won a prize at the Maui Film Festival, but it is not easy to interpret, and distribution is limited. In the end, Kelly may be right—that "for Hawaiian cinema to truly break out, it needs that one big theatrical hit."

Her conclusion requires that the filmmaker negotiate a way between the conventions that create a "hit" and the visual images that represent a distinctly indigenous perspective. A big theatrical hit certainly counteracts the marginalization of indigenous film and its relegation to festivals, classrooms, and an occasional television show. But can the romantic comedy Kelly yearns to make convey the realities of US imperialism that fuel her role as a Native Hawaiian activist? The answer may be that just as the bid for sovereignty is a battle for ʻāina—the land that incorporates care, kinship, and community in an environment of pristine green cliffs and pure blue ocean—so the bid for a new cinema entails reclaiming images of paradise. The project does not reject stereotypical images of the South Seas but rather occupies the meaning of those images. "Paradise" is appropriated, not a utopia or a garden innocent of sin but rather the locus and the distillation of relationships that bind human beings to ʻāina. For Hawaiʻi, from the eighteenth century on, the perception of paradise tempted outsiders who disguised their motives behind the claim of preserving Bali Haʻi, justification for armed conquest, annexation, and statehood. In the media produced by Bauknight, Kelly, and Booth and Young, the "taking" of paradise undercuts the imperial legacy of that trope.

Kelly's film, *Noho Hewa*, offers a vivid portrayal of the many destructive ways in which the United States occupies a once independent nation. An interpretation of nationhood emerges from the film's condemnation of militarization, consumerism, and exploitation of the land: Hawaiian lāhui is the protagonist to these antagonist elements. Bauknight's *Hawaii: A Voice for Sovereignty* similarly bases its argument on land and cultural relationships with the land, but its message links the Hawaiian situation to a global disaster in which the United States is only one of several perpetrators. *Pidgin: The Voice of Hawaiʻi* differs from the other two in its emphasis on language rather than land. Like the other two, however, the film creates a nation in opposition to the imperial power whose presence spans centuries. *Pidgin* advocates the local, encompassing ethnic identities and the working-class history of the archipelago. The film announces that pidgin provides our Hawaiian roots, and an emergent Hawaiian nationhood is based on shared language. The film

offers an alternative to the view that a reorganized Native Hawaiian government is the only appropriate goal in the twenty-first century.

Of the three films, Bauknight's comes closest to an essentialist version of nationhood: a return to traditional modes of subsistence and survival. In its emphasis on paradise lost couched in terms of a "vanishing culture," *Hawaii* evokes an essential Hawai'i, predating the intrusion of the West. Yet Bauknight modifies the cultural essentialism by considering Hawai'i the victim of contemporary failures to respond to global warming.

Noho Hewa presents an interpretation of nationhood that skirts the problems of essentializing by focusing on power, control by elites, protests by commoners, and fights that disrupt communities of presumed shared interest. This is a picture of struggle, not just against an *outside* force—too often simply defined—but implicating competing desires within. *Noho Hewa* is about war, though not about an act of war. Kelly's film presents the constant battling that constitutes nationhood, and *Noho Hewa* displaces the fixed figment of both imperial and indigenous imagining.

Pidgin, in its distinctive format, avoids essentializing a "pure" Hawai'i, a nation innocent of conflict, envy, and evil. Straying far from the political on its surface, *Pidgin* is deeply political in its content: the nation that film portrays is a sharp contrast to the "ethnonationalism" implied in a more directly political film like *Act of War*.[47]

In the contemporary context, Native Hawaiian filmmakers are undertaking the task of constructing a nation that can, in the future, set the terms for an Oceanic cultural—and thus political—unity. In this task, there is no more consensus among filmmakers, or in their crafts, than there is in any other genre that moves a people from colonialism to nationhood. It is exactly the diversity of representations that sets the groundwork for bringing Bali Ha'i back from its distance on the horizon.

NOTES

1. For: *From Romance to Reality: Representations of Pacific Islands and Islanders.*

2. In 2000, Senator Daniel Akaka introduced a bill in Congress for "Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization." After being introduced every subsequent year, the bill died in Congress in 2012.

3. Hereniko (1994, 423).

4. See, for example, Mawyer (1998) for a summary of early films, beginning in 1898.

5. Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific* provides a classic history of pictorial appropriation of the Pacific Islands.

6. A pear ripe for plucking was the image the US Minister to Hawai'i used for justifying armed take over of the throne in 1893; quoted in Kent (1993, 63).

7. Desmond (1999, 109).

8. Bailey and Farber (1992).

9. Reyes (1995, 107).

10. I refer to the song in the film, "You have to be carefully taught," an unambiguous commentary on racism in the United States.

11. Jolly argues persuasively that Liat is not Polynesian, but rather represents a Tonkinese and reflects the migration of Tonkinese to the Pacific Island; Jolly (1997: 112–113).

12. Bhabha and Burgin refer to the latent homoeroticism in the film, which in fact can serve the same function of reducing romance to individual encounters (Bhabha and Burgin 1992, 73).

13. I borrow the phrase from Hau'ofa (1994).

14. "During the 1940s, sixteen feature films were made in or about Hawai'i," writes Jane Desmond, who adds: "during the next decade this number more than doubled to thirty-eight" (Desmond 1999, 132).

15. Lipset's piece in this collection provides a detailed analysis of Hill's *Hawaii*.

16. The diversity was ameliorated by the benign image of the native: Polynesians, light-skinned and docile; see Jolly (1997) and Mawyer (1998).

17. Jolly (2007, 509).

18. Catherine Bauknight, cbauknight@othilamedia.com.

19. Smith (1985, Chapter 11).

20. http://www.catherinebauknight.com/pressrelease.htm.

21. See note 2.

22. http://www.gohawaii.com/maui.

23. http://www.catherinebauknight.com/pressrelease.htm.

24. info@hawaii-nation.org.

25. Hereniko (1994, 423).

26. http://www.nativetelecom.org.

27. http://www.hawaiianvoice.com.

28. Ginsburg (2002, 40). In the same essay, Ginsburg notes that media uniquely provide a way of talking back "through the categories that have been created to contain indigenous people" (Ginsburg 2002, 51).

29. Hall (2005).

30. In 2011, Isaiah Helekunihi Walker published *Waves of Resistance: Surfing and History in Hawai'i,* a book that expands the thesis implied in the *Pidgin* scene. "Decades later, the media were labeling Hawaiian surfers as violent extremists who terrorized haole surfers on the North Shore. Yet Hawaiians contested, rewrote, or creatively negotiated with these stereotypes in the waves;" http://www.uhpress.hawaii.edu/p-7459-9780824835477.aspx

31. *Noho* means to occupy and *hewa* means wrong in Hawaiian.

32. info@hawaii-nation.org.

33. http://pacific.scoop.co.nz/2010/01/militant-film-on-occupation-of-hawaii-wins-special-festival-jury-prize/.

34. Teaiwa (2011, 313).

35. http://honoluluweekly.com/cover/2010/08/toward-a-native-cinema/.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. See Kupferman (2011, 162) on the problems and the potentials of a "minority discourse" in filmmaking.

39. http://honoluluweekly.com/cover/2010/08/toward-a-native-cinema/.

40. He is not more precise about her background.

41. "I was inspired by historical facts and current events, yet this book is a marriage of reality and fiction, and fiction wears the pants in this family" (Hemmings 2011, *Acknowledgments*).

42. Though this is not stated explicitly, the land King "owns" is held in trust for the Native Hawaiian people.

43. Geiger (2002, 104).

44. Ibid., 116.

45. http://honoluluweekly.com/cover/2010/08/toward-a-native-cinema/.

46. http://www.hawaiianvoice.com/who-we-are/.

47. The term is used by Nicholas Thomas (1997).

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