

Occupy Waikīkī: pushing the borders of land, sea and story-telling in Kristiana Kahakauwila's

Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega

▶ **To cite this version:**

Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega. Occupy Waikīkī: pushing the borders of land, sea and story-telling in Kristiana Kahakauwila's. Archivio Antropologico Mediterraneo, 2022, 24 (2), 10.4000/aam.5942 . hal-03973075

HAL Id: hal-03973075
https://upf.hal.science/hal-03973075

Submitted on 3 Feb 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

Archivio antropologico mediterraneo

Anno XXV, n. 24 (2) | 2022
Dossier monografico e Miscellanea

Occupy Waikīkī: pushing the borders of land, sea and story-telling in Kristiana Kahakauwila's *This is Paradise* (2013)

Occupy Waikīkī: This is paradise *(2013) di Kristiana Kahakauwila, oltre i confini della terra, del mare e del racconto*

Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega

Electronic version
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/aam/5942
DOI: 10.4000/aam.5942
ISSN: 2038-3215

Publisher
Dipartimento Culture e Società - Università di Palermo

Brought to you by Université de la Polynésie Française

Electronic reference
Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega, "Occupy Waikīkī: pushing the borders of land, sea and story-telling in Kristiana Kahakauwila's *This is Paradise* (2013)", *Archivio antropologico mediterraneo* [Online], Anno XXV, n. 24 (2) | 2022, Online since 31 December 2022, connection on 03 February 2023. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/aam/5942 ; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/aam.5942

This text was automatically generated on 1 January 2023.

Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Occupy Waikīkī: pushing the borders of land, sea and story-telling in Kristiana Kahakauwila's *This is Paradise* (2013)

Occupy Waikīkī: This is paradise *(2013) di Kristiana Kahakauwila, oltre i confini della terra, del mare e del racconto*

Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega

1 First of all, I'd like to thank Kristiana Kahakauwila, the author of *This is Paradise*[1], for her generous time reading this essay and sharing her thoughts on it. It wouldn't be what it is without our conversations (referred to as Kahakauwila 2021), which I'm immensely grateful for. *This is Paradise* is the story of three groups of Oceanian women who, in rotating series, narrate their occupations in Waikīkī[2] over a 24-hour period. There's a group of local surfers in their 20s, a group of Hawaiian career women in their 30s, and a group of married and mother-of-a-family Micronesian hotel housekeepers in their early-50s. Through their eleven short sequential narratives, in turns, each group incidentally reports occasional encounters with a young American female tourist. Her name is Susan and she keeps saying to all around her, «This is paradise». She is ultimately found dead on the beach, murdered by a foreigner. The picture of a *hula* dancer stands on *This is Paradise*'s cover. In the short story, prints of *hula* girls keep popping out, on T-shirts and restrooms walls. These «graphematic» (Spivak 2010: 22) icons, like Susan's leitmotiv and the title of the short story, reverberate and repeat hegemonic colonial discourse on Oceania. Since early Polynesian encounters, the West has constructed stereotypical narratives on Oceania revolving around the *hula* girl. Indeed, Teresia Teaiwa protests that Oceanian diversity has been «sacrificed at the feet of the 'hula dancer'» (Teaiwa 1999: 252).

2 I suggest reading Kahakauwila's narrative as an ecofeminist deconstruction of the hegemonic colonial discourse that says that Oceania "is paradise" and that constructs the *hula* girl[3] as an object for male consumption. While, in colonial discourse,

predominantly white Western male narrators dot their stories with the character of a thinly-sketched sexualised *hula* dancer (Largeaud-Ortega 2018: 135), here, Oceanian female narrators dot their own stories with thinly-sketched sexualised Susan. As far as her narrative status is concerned, Susan seems to be the counterpart of the *hula* girl: this time, the girl is white mainland American, a visitor in Oceania, and the narrators are groups of autochthonous women.

3 Through references to the works of historians, anthropologists, critics in post- and decolonial studies and environmental humanities[4], and with special references to Oceanian studies of autochthonous claims to sovereignty (Grandinetti 2017; Kajihra 2008; Teaiwa 2000; Trask 1999), I look at Susan as "the land that divides", and at the female narrators and author, as Oceanian agents attempting to decolonise land, sea, and story-telling. I claim that, in this counterhegemonic Oceanian identitarian narrative, Kahakauwila and her female characters all "Occupy Waikīkī"[5] each in their own ways, as colonials, as resistants, or as hybrid cultural agents.

Susan as the land that divides

Susan as colonialism

4 In Hawaiian colonial history, the land is what divides. The very concept of 'land' is divisive: to Hawaiians, land is «a living *'aina* (literally 'that which feeds')» whereas to the Euro-Americans, it is «flat and lifeless real estate» (Kajihira 2008: 176; Kame'eleihiwa 1992: 25). The latter concept has been dominant in Hawai'i since, against Native Hawaiian wishes, Americans overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy (1893), annexed the islands (1898) and obtained their "territorial incorporation as a state of the United States" (1959). Hawaiian homeland has been unilaterally redefined, and Native Hawaiians, displaced and dispossessed of their own country. Many have been actively fighting for their rights to sovereignty, self-determination and self-governance (Trask 1993: 16-8; Walker 2008; Kame'eleihiwa 1992).

5 Highly Americanised Waikīkī, on the island of O'ahu, is an epitome of the land that divides, since «access to beaches near hotels is strictly regulated or denied to the local public» and the tourist industry is the major cause of «land dispossession, and the highest cost of living in the United States» (Trask 1999: 143-144). This dividing process has sometimes been reciprocated by Hawaiian communities, as in their declaration of a «ban on all resorts» (Hawai'i Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism 1989; Trask 1999: 245-250).

6 In Kahakauwila's short story, Susan is repeatedly referred to as "mainland" or "continental American" and I suggest that she embodies a colonialist – the land that divides. Indeed, she keeps to Americanised Waikīkī only. What's more, she holds on to her preconceived representations of the place as paradisiacal: «it's like Hawaiians are all pissed off. They live in paradise. What is there to be so mad about?» (Kahakauwila 2013: 23. Further references to this text list page numbers only). Susan therefore denies Waikīkī any situational context of history: she ignores «the real» (Barthes 1970: 239), alienates Hawaiians and sets them apart. This process is seen at work when she scathingly spurns the group of surfer girls' advice against Bryan (the man who's flirting with her and will eventually murder her):

> "You girls really don't want visitors to have a good time, do you?" Susan shrugs. "Whateves." With a tight smile, she snaps her purse shut and brushes past Lani. The bathroom doors swings in Susan's wake, and we are left staring at the empty space. (28)

7 By applying her own standards and definition to place and people, she metaphorically claims Waikīkī as her own (*nomen est omen*), she participates in its colonisation. Furthermore, by promoting the myth that Hawaiians are "happy Natives", she «disparage[s] Native resistance» to colonialism (Trask 1999: 42). She Occupies Waikīkī in the colonial sense.

Susan as 'militourism'

8 Susan also embodies 'militourism' (Teaiwa 2000, 1999; Gonzalez 2013) – an escalation on the concept of the land that divides. Militourism, as the word indicates, is the conflation of militarisation and tourism[6], and Susan in her bikini embodies this conflation. All three groups of narrators repeatedly pinpoint her «white bikini with red polka dots» (9, and variants 12, 17, 20). In July 1946, the United States dropped a fifteen-megaton hydrogen bomb over the Bikini Atoll (Maurer, Hogue 2020; DeLoughrey 2010: 106). At the very same time, public attention in the Western world was drawn to the launching of a sensationally skimpy swimsuit called 'bikini'. Susan's bikini-clad female body therefore appears as the «effective tool for hiding colonial violence» (Walker 2008, 109) which «substitutes and domesticates the unrepresentable chaos of nuclear war» (Teaiwa 2000: 92).

9 Militourism can also be observed at Susan's Waikīkī hotel, in the way management deals with the group of proletarian immigrant Micronesian female labourers. Tourist and military management work hand in hand, through treaties between the U.S. and the Federated States of Micronesia (Kahakauwila 2021) which «allow citizens of Micronesia to live and legally work in the U.S. without a visa» as «compensation for the loss of life, health, land, and resources» on the atolls. In return, «the U.S. has sole access and military and veto power over these islands» (US Department of the Interior 1985). The crowning touch of militourism is that the American-style hotel management now require Micronesian workers to «report suspicious activity [...] to fight terrorism» (13). Hotel management overexploits and segregates these workers. They toil through the day, starting at six in the morning. Their only authorised access to the hotel is through a basement back door on a sidewalk spotted with «the faint red splatter of a spilled shave ice» (14) – an uncanny reminder of Susan's red-polka-dot bikini.

10 Hawai'i is a major U.S. strategic place, as exemplified by Pearl Harbor. It has been until recently a key nuclear and missile testing ground. «The military is the second largest 'industry' behind tourism» and on O'ahu, the military controls about a quarter of the island (Kajihira 2008: 175, Trask 1999: 17). This much is implied by a narrative sequence on a dental convention being held in Waikīkī. It is described as a joke, with attendees showing off «travel toothbrushes, which causes riotous laughter among the group» (15). It smacks of sponsored tourism. But when the mainland dentists «*swarm the bridge*» and the narrators' cars are «*consumed* by a *mass* of people *armed* with travel toothbrushes» (16, my italics), the tourist-dental convention actually looks like yet another 'domestication' of military violence.

Susan and Pele

11 One ultimate way of associating Susan with the land that divides might be to compare her with Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of volcanoes. Owing to her sexualised female body and fiery temper, Susan might be seen as an American extremely minor mundane miniature of Hawaiian goddess Pele, who is renowned for her sensual «fire body» (Beckwith 1970: 179) and spectacular outbursts of wrath in the form of lava flows. I can also see a relation between goddess Pele, the deity of Hawaiian *volcanic* power, and Susan, an image of American *atomic* power. Goddess Pele is also associated with sacred *hula* dance and with romance (Beckwith 1970: 169, 179) and, strikingly enough, it is on the dance floor of «the Lava Lounge» that Susan and her lover meet – a profane club but metaphorically, like Pele's crater home, it has «*Been around for ever*» (30).

12 Bryan is «not a local boy» (23). He looks like a U.S. serviceman, he is from mainland U.S. and has just come out of prison – all signposts of the land that divides. Susan is actually Bryan's second choice of a flirting partner, after he is given a wide berth by the surfer girls. In Bryan's mindset, Susan's sexualised body replaces a Hawaiian girl's: an icon of American tourists, Susan is a substitute for the Hawaiian dancer; she is the next Waikīkī icon. Bryan's murder and presumed rape of Susan showcases Hawai'i as «a place of white male consumption – the U.S. military and the tourist industry being the primary utensils for this feast» (Walker 2008: 104). Susan is instrumentalised by the militourism to which she contributes: she is a sacrificial female victim of dominant white males (Teaiwa 2000: 92), as evidenced by the exposed bare bottom of her corpse.

13 What I argue, however, is that Susan's death epitomises the impasse where Western hegemony leads. Her death evidences that predominantly-American constructs – the «supposedly isolated» isles and islanders «safe» for bombing (DeLoughrey 2010: 106; Robie 1999: 143), the sexualised *hula* dancer and mainland female tourist – are murdered through the U.S.'s own doings. It foregrounds that American instrumentalisation and (self-reflexive) colonial gaze are fatally (self-)destructive. I therefore propose to see the groups of women's narratives on Susan and Bryan's relationship as an ecofeminist Oceanian response to Western hegemonic discourse. At the end of the tale, Bryan is eventually trapped in O'ahu: «On an island like ours, a man doesn't run. Can't run» (42). He is trapped by the island, the very supposedly female body the U.S. claims to possess and overpower. I will venture to say that he is also trapped by the Hawaiian goddess Pele who famously catches her runaway lovers within her destructive lava flows (Beckwith 1970: 190) – here, even after the lava has turned into stone. Bryan may be seen as a Western male «*kapu*[7] breaker» (Kahakauwila 2021). The latter, meanwhile, earns punishment from the Hawaiian female deity, who compellingly asserts her autochthonous/land power.

Female Oceanians reclaim land and sea

14 All three groups of Oceanian female characters – to varying degrees, and in each in their own fields – strive to reclaim the borders of land and sea. I suggest that, together, they Occupy Waikīkī, this time in the sense of protest. These groups are like metaphoric troops. Together they cover the whole range of land, beach and sea. Their strategic relation to space manifests their resistance to American hegemony. It also

determines their ability to speak for Oceania: their runs of narrative may sound like patrol rounds.

The career women

15 The group of «career women» (42) left Hawai'i for college on continental U.S. – except one, Paula Gilbert, who will be discussed further down. Back in Waikīkī, they're now part of the Hawaiian white collar rising class supposed to bridge the worlds of Indigenous and continental people. They belong to urbanised Americanised Waikīkī. They are always indoors, in cars, bars, lobbies or offices. Whenever they come across still-alive Susan, they feel for her – they would like to advise her against shopping in her bikini, or against going out with a stranger at night, unescorted – but their compartmentalised urban lifestyle prevents them from connecting with her. The sea metaphors they use also reflect an urban perspective: the convention center is «a squared fishbowl» (15), and when they are caught in heavy traffic, their «heels and briefcases» "slide" in cars that «lurch to a stop» (14), an urban mimicry of sea surfing. At home, they sleep «beneath hand-stitched Hawaiian quilts» (16), symbols of an Oceanian appropriation of American missionary handicraft – yet now expensive "markers of success", in turn appropriated by the urban American tourist industry (Kahakauwila 2021).

16 On the one hand, from a Spivakian perspective, they may be seen as the "Native Informant", «an instrument of colonial authority who speaks for the 'native' in service of efficient governing» (Birla 2010: 88). For instance, Laura, the group's architect, submits a project for an environmental-friendly resort. They celebrate her professional achievement but worry that this project of yet another tourist development «will push housing prices further upward, making it harder still for our people to remain on their land» (33). In that respect, they may be said to belong to the capitalist «middle class displacing the poor... pushing Indigenous geographies to the past or periphery, thereby precluding possibilities for a decolonial urban future» (Grandinetti 2017: 242-3).

17 On the other hand, these women may be seen as the 'Native Resistant'. Indeed, they do belong to native Hawai'i, and their active presence on Americanised Waikīkī and the strong bonds they maintain with their island are a political strategy.

> It doesn't hurt that we're from here. We are considered by our peers to be local women who've done well, left but come back, dedicated their education and mainland skill to put this island right. We speak at civic club gatherings and native rights events. We are becoming the pillars of the island community. (16)

18 Laura's LEED-certified project *will* mitigate environmental damage to the island. These women's professional skills allow them to infiltrate the American system and fight it with its own weapons. But not only that. Through their highly committed choice to come back to Hawai'i, they also prove they have female *mana* or *pono*[8] leadership: the ability to speak for the people and the land on field (Trask 1999: 95). And when they select a «*Modern. Moneyed. Mainland*» (30) Waikīkī hotel bar for their social gatherings, they Occupy colonised land. They remind readers that city land was originally Indigenous, and can be claimed by Indigenous peoples as rightfully as rural spaces «with natural and cultural 'integrity'» (Grandinetti 2017: 228; Goeman 2009: 170). They stand for the women at the forefront of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement (Trask 1999: 191).

19 As they themselves acknowledge, the price they pay for this commitment is high: they are single and childless. They often struggle with belonging to both Americanised land, and Oceanian sea in the sense of Hau'ofa's *We are the Ocean* (2008). At night, each in their own homes, they have a collective dream:

> we dream of the rolling ocean [...] of waves, of *room*, [...] and the space of the sea. We dream we are falling deep into the ocean. [...] We need air, and none exists beneath the weight of all this water. We hear a woman screaming for help, and we're not sure if the voice is ours or someone else's. (36)

20 In their collective unconscious, these women are like Susan: they fear drowning. They may indeed fear being sucked into the vortex of neoliberal capitalism of Waikīkī – a vortex to which they participate. On the day after, when they learn about the murder, they sympathize with Susan. They identify with her as female victims of mainland U.S. male hegemony. Their last, inconclusive words may reflect their difficulty of existing on both «land for revenue and land for resurgence» (Grandinetti 2017: 241).

The housekeeping labourers

21 The group of «women of housekeeping» (11) are immigrant labour from Micronesia working in Waikīkī. Low-paid jobs are their only employment opportunity in Hawai'i, and that allows them to send remittances back to devastated home. Globalising capitalism strictly delineates their social space. They are unauthorised in most places in Waikīkī, cut off from other people by the international division of labour. It is only logical that Kahakauwila also «occluded» (Spivak 2010: 28) them from the runs of narratives about Waikīkī at night. At night, these women are in their humble homes a long bus-ride away. They are the victims of «the intersectionality of [the] classed and raced violence that has shaped urban Honolulu», of the «urban displacement» which has been heading for «indigenous erasure» (Grandinetti 2017: 234, 236).

22 Management orders them to «always start with '*Aloha*'» (13) when answering the phone. This exercise in «subaltern ventriloquism» (Spivak 2010: 27) chimes in with what Trask calls «the prostitution of our culture by tourism» (Trask 1999: 143-4). Indeed, on the streets at night, prostitutes are likewise heard «whispering 'Aloha' in lilting voices» (34). The housekeepers are otherwise harshly and literally silenced by management. As unorganised urban proletariat, they try to transgress capitalist division through very small tactical moves: tucking tips into their shoes, passing left-overs on to night security. In their very limited ways, the subaltern staff join forces to outsmart their employers. Also, in an astute «strategy of mimicry» (Bhabha 2010: 122), they set down their own dividing criteria: they rank tourists according to their production of waste depending on nationalities/ ethnicities. This can't occult the fact that these women remain figures of the oppressed Global South.

23 They don't have a career, but they have children. This is their force. It is in their relation to Susan as mother figures that, gradually, they break down land divisions. When they first meet her they share a moment of laughter, which reminds them of their daughters. Laughter, in ancient Hawaiian *Makahiki* rituals[9], was an experience of a «common humanity» which «destroy[ed] the taboos» (Valeri 1985: 218, 220) – and at this particular moment in contemporary Waikīkī, it does so, too. Also, this laughter allows the group of housekeeping women to hold on to their collective agency, at least

for the day, and to make some transitory sense of Waikīkī: «We *decide* the American girl has brought us luck» (13, italics mine).

24 Family ties closely bind them to the ocean, their «home islands» (37), the «sea of islands» (Hau'ofa 2008) which is constantly on their minds, and where they wish they could send their children back. They represent the ocean that unites. When the ocean washes Susan's corpse to their feet the next morning, they instantly translate their class status into 'motherhood'[10]: «*We are here* [...]. *All us mothers are here*» (39). Without authorisation, they step out onto the material beach – reclaiming it as «public space that lies outside capitalism" (Kahakauwila 2021). They become a stubbornly silent but physically powerful presence, «very still and very tall» (40). They stand in a protective circle around the corpse and, notwithstanding management and police injunctions, they will not move. They Occupy the beach, where they stamp their own standards: against capitalism, they demonstrate that human respect is not marketable. For a brief moment, they reaffirm Oceanian female agency on Waikīkī. Their strong collective mother figure transiently pushes land borders, and allows the ocean to unite female victims of both Global South and Global North together.

The surfers

25 The group of female surfers' zone is the ocean itself: *ka po'ina nalu*, the surf zone. The short story's opening lines present it as a hostile place: signposts read "CAUTION", "DANGEROUS UNDERTOW" (9). This expresses a typically mainland American perspective (Hau'ofa, 2008: 30-4). Antagonistically, the surfer girls declare: «We ignore it. [...] We're not afraid of the beaches and breaks here in Waikīkī» (9).

26 Walker's 2008 article on the 1920s Waikīkī beachboys was at the forefront of Kahakauwila's mind when writing *This is Paradise* (Kahakauwila 2021), and indeed, the surfer girls are the beachboys' contemporary female variant. As in the early 20th century, early-21st-century *ka po'ina nalu* is a political place. Not only because surfing has been «an integral part of being Native Hawaiian» from time immemorial. But also because surf is «a *pu'uhonua* – a historic Hawaiian place of refuge from strict colonial laws», especially in ocean-based communities like Waikīkī (Walker 2008: 89-95). And from the very start, the surfer girls don't just Occupy the place: they rule it.[11]

27 At sea, they decide who belongs or not. Clearly, Susan doesn't: «*scared of da water. Haoles, yeah*» (9). She is «label[ed] for what she i» (10) – a tourist – and they paddle out and leave her in the whitewash. In contrast, Mel Chun belongs: although she grew up in San Francisco, her keen practice of competitive Native Hawaiian canoeing has won her the status of «one of us locals» (21). Together they ride «on top of a social hierarchy on the ocean» (Walker 2008: 107). Keeping closely posted on weather reports, they can tell when «da swell» is going to be «mean» (34) and organize their lives correspondingly. In *ka po'ina nalu* they are free from «colonial encroachment» (Walker 2008: 89) and exercise full Hawaiian sovereignty. In symmetry to the career women on land, they stand at the forefront of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement on sea.

28 On land, at the Lava Lounge, they have to share their space with tourists, military, and college kids. But they are still the «local girls», the ones who know how to surf the place: when to «wait, bide [their] time», and when to «cruise» (19, 21). Their tactics rely on sea metaphors: Cora Jones calls her seduction dance «her come-and-get-it wave, but we think it makes her eye look like squid tentacles are growing from it» (22), and they

laugh at the tourists who copulate on the beach at night as openly as «mating monk seals» (35). They govern their powerfully sexualised bodies and defy tourist expectations of sexual conquest, in resistance to the Western construct of the *hula* girl. They thereby «subvert colonial categories – which insist on Native passivity and compliance – and assert anticolonial identities» (Walker 2008: 107). On land also, they decide who belongs or not. They dub a humble young *haole*[12] guitarist «one kanaka» (27) for his Native Hawaiian slack playing skills and honouring of his *kūpuna*[13]. But as soon as they spot Bryan as potentially dangerous, they deploy their troops to drive him away from Mel, and to warn Susan against him. They're also keenly aware of land issues: «Our families are barely affording a life here, the land is being eaten away by developers, the old sugar companies control water rights» (23). They stake a claim «to both urban space and Indigenous sovereignty... at the intersection between the concept of the 'right to the city' and the value of *aloha 'aina*» (Grandinetti 2017: 243). So they Occupy the Lava Lounge. And sometimes suffer setbacks, as with Susan.

29 Upon Susan's death, they decide to elaborate on a hotel-sponsored remembrance ceremony organised on Waikīkī beach. They reproduce the housekeepers' protective female family circle, this time at sea, sitting on their boards in a tight circle as her "sistas". They «*pule*» (45), they pray, then toss flowers into the centre of the circle. These flowers, «invariably associated with deity» in ancient Hawaiian times (Beckwith 1970: 93), might be an offering to Kanaloa, god of the sea, or to Kane, «the leading god among the great gods», and to the sea, the «*tapu* water of Kane» (*wai tapu a Kane*)[14] (Beckwith 1970: 43, 61). The white petals reflected in the sunset seem to replace Susan's red polka dot bikini. It looks as if their soothing light had replaced Bikini's blinding atomic light, installing sacred peace and natural harmony over the sea. The surfer girls' genuine, holistic *aloha* culture represents the ocean that unites.

30 Back on land, however, they have to tread on left-overs from the hotel-sponsored remembrance ceremony, «a confused jumble» of flowers «wilting» in the heat (46). These are the closing words of the short story.

31 To none of these groups is the political struggle to reclaim the borders of land and sea an easy one. And the fight isn't over.

Pushing the borders of storytelling

We, the women of Oceania

32 Probably the short story's most salient feature is the extensive use of "We". Not only do the three groups of Oceanian female characters-narrators speak collectively, *always*: they also think collectively, they even dream collectively! This is one step further than Sia Figiel's narrator's arresting statement: «'I' doesn't exist [...]. 'I' is 'we'... *always*» (Figiel 1996: 137). This outstanding narrative strategy clearly highlights the women's sense of collective identity, or their Oceanian-ness – in sharp contrast with individual character Susan. Although collective, their identity is diverse: «even among locals and Natives, not everyone sees the islands the same», says Kahakauwila (McMahon 2013). The three "we"s therefore weave multi-perspective narrative threads. The cyclical structure of their narrative runs may evoke the Oceanian collective weaving of a multiple-strand shroud around Susan, and around the people and land destroyed by

Western militourism. It might also evoke the wave cycles of the ocean, their possibly restorative power.

33 Their collective identity is also eminently female, which enunciates the prominent role of women in Oceanian political activism. In the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, «both cultural and political restoration projects» were «more often headed by women than by men» (Walker 2008: 106; Trask 1999). Correspondingly, these female groups are highly protective. Their quality of caring, however doesn't subscribe to Western gendered essentialism, since the Hawaiian male characters – Paula's husband, the local boys at the Lava Lounge – are protective, too. Caring comes out, instead, as Oceanian expertise: «that's a job at which we are experts» (39). It perpetuates ancestral Oceanian caring for the land and the sea, *Mālama 'Aina*[15] in Hawaiian, as opposed to Globalising capitalist eagerness to «take-make-dispose» (Elisha 2020).

34 The short story gives these Oceanian women a voice – and, in literary terms, a supreme voice, to boot: the narrators'. Management forbids the housekeepers to speak – but they do speak directly to the readers. Susan silences the surfer girls – but with their assertive voices opening and closing the short story, they strike readers as the ones in charge. As to the career women, not only do they speak for their community, they also have Paula Gilbert. She is different because she chose not to study abroad and she doesn't have a white-collar job. Yet, as police officer, she is a figure of authority in Waikīkī: she stands as a Native female bulwark against destructive U.S. white male forces. Like the housekeepers, she is also a mother, bearing their second child to her Hawaiian husband. And like the surfer girls, she knows *ka po'ina nalu*: on the beach, they watch the waves together «with the same longing» (41).

35 Paula's voice binds the three groups of women together. She unites forces with the housekeepers, the surfers and the other career women, to identify Bryan: they / their voices / their bodies / their islands lay the female foundations to overpower the foreign male murderer. Under her clear-sighted and articulate leadership, the three groups of women make some headway towards Native sovereignty. In that respect, they may illustrate international / global resistance to militarism and capitalism that keeps erupting throughout the world – as in Hawai'i, the Philippines and Guam / Guåhan, to demand the closing and cleaning-up of US military bases. This resistance «proclaims a radical new vision for the world where genuine security is based on human needs, human dignity, cultural integrity, environmental preservation, and global solidarity» (Kajihira 2008: 189).

A hybrid tale

36 Kahakauwila is «a *hapa*[16] writer of *Kanaka Maoli*[17] (Native Hawaiian), Norwegian and German descent» (Kahakauwila 2021). She went to mainland college, is now an academic at the University of Hawai'i Mānoa, and a mother and a surfer. Her story-telling is hybrid, like the Waikīkī beach which she «redefine[s] and reconstitute[s]» (Walker 2008: 91). To do so, she draws from both her "literary lineage" and her "Oceanian lineage" (Kahakauwila 2021).

37 In *This is Paradise*, some lines – «Do we already know she is marked, special in some way?» (10) – seem to show that, like Aristotelian heroes, Susan has a tragic flaw. Other questions like «Haven't we hurled ourselves past this moment?» (19), «*How did we drink so much? How did we laugh so hard?*» (29) signal that some superior power is toying with

the characters – is it the three Greek Fates, determining the three choruses' destinies? One of the surfers, Cora, the "group's academic" «majoring in theatre at the University of Hawai'i» (24), reads Bryan's tattoos (a smiling and a tearful mask) according to Greek drama. Her approach is overruled by the other surfer girls as inadequate: they see prison marks instead. Yet Cora's reading is proven equally adequate, by the plot itself. Like Bar Ambrosia in the Waikīkī hotel where the career women enjoy their night drinks, Kahakauwila seems to feed her readers the eponymous food of Greek and Roman gods. In our conversations, the author has kindly confirmed that she sees her groups of Oceanian female narrators as "a Greek chorus" commenting on the dramatic action. She also conceives of the tight unity of place, time and action, as Aristotelian (Kahakauwila 2021).

38 But the author also agrees that the short story's oral quality also stands in the line of Oceanian oratory and oral transmissions of (hi)story (Kahakauwila 2021). I suggest that her masterfully orchestrated Oceanian polyphony delivers a modern *mo'olelo*, a multiple-meaning word which defines as "story, history, legend, chronicle, myth", etc. (Kahakauwila 2016). In Hawaiian *mo'olelo*, «there are many examples of women as empowered agents» (Walker 2008: 109). This *mo'olelo* might be a profane contemporary Pele "legend", a genre where women play a leading role, standing «between the semihistorical figures of more or less authentic history and [...] fictitious heroes, product of the free play of the imagination» (Beckwith 1970: 404).

39 Not only is Kahakauwila's story-telling multivocal, it is also multilingual. Each group of narrators has their own languages, and code-switch according to who is listening. Languages span from the career women's very posh «Thank goodness» (30) to the surfer girls' Pidgin – addressed to Paula, or spoken amongst the younger generation – and vernacular Hawaiian, spoken only in *ka poʻina nalu*. I will therefore say that Kahakauwila's short story Occupies the contemporary Oceanian literary scene by appropriating division factors and subsuming them in cultural hybridity.

A founding tale

40 The short story's treatment of time is intriguing also because it narrates events that took place in the past and are reported in hindsight, but it narrates them... in the present tense, *always*. This seems to thrust readers somewhere outside diachronic time – time, that is, as conventionally represented in dominant historiography. But time is different in Oceania: «all time is now time», «centered in the being» and «the centered being in this now time simply reaches out in any direction towards outer circles, these outer circles being named 'past' and 'future' only for our convenience» (Grace 1986: 39). In *This is Paradise*, the merging of past and present delivers «present history» (Kahakauwila 2016), a process of "re-membering" that links Hawaiians' past to their present (Walker 2008: 92).

> The Hawaiian stands firmly in the present, with his back to the future, and his eyes fixed upon the past, seeking historical answers for present-day dilemmas. Such an orientation is to the Hawaiian an eminently practical one, for the future is always unknown whereas the past is rich in glory and knowledge (Kameʻeleihiwa 1992: 22-3).

41 The narrative may be said to approach the quality of a "myth" – another meaning of *mo'olelo* – in the sense of a founding tale. In Oceanian epistemology, a myth is a «narrative of constant actuality» (Segal 2004: 179). It performs a fundamental social

and cultural function, that of explaining the world, defining each person's place within that world (Wood 2007: 119). It is «*repeatable*, since it serves as a model, and also a justification, for all human acts» (Eliade 1957: 22). This short story may be seen as a profane variant of a founding tale, as it narrates and explains features of Waikīkī / Hawai'i / Oceania in their 21st century context.

42 The plot hinges around the Banyan Hotel, i.e. a metaphorical tree, or *kumu*. The first banyan tree was introduced in Hawai'i in 1873 by American missionaries, to commemorate their arrival on the archipelago. The banyan species is remarkable for its expanding aerial roots which «embrace and ultimately envelop the host tree [...] forming a compound trunk» (Perez 2021: 39-40). It has indeed expanded into Hawaiian landscape, and history (and Waikīkī boasts a magnificent banyan tree outside its oldest hotel). But *kumu* also, and more prevailingly, means 'teacher', or 'source'. In that respect, *kumu* is knowledge sourcing from the base, from the land, from the islands' original foundations. With the Banyan Hotel as its «textual tree trunk» (Perez 2021: 57), *This is Paradise* explores the epistemic sources of Waikīkī, both Western and Oceanian.

Conclusion

43 In protest against mainland Americans occupying the land, Kahakauwila's groups of Oceanian women Occupy Waikīkī, which becomes a place of Native political and cultural resistance. They denounce American colonialism and militourism, and Globalising capitalism. They defend the oppressed female figures from both Global South and Global North, they metaphorically reinstate a Hawaiian goddess's autochthonous supremacy. Through their powerful narrative voices, *This is Paradise* weaves together land and sea, annexation and resistance, the material and the spiritual, the literary and the oral, the present and the past, and by doing so, it masterfully and militantly accounts for aspects of Hawai'i's present situation. It restores their historical and spiritual polysemy to land, beach and ocean in Waikīkī. A counterhegemonic source of knowledge, this ecofeminist tale deconstructs the colonial statement, *This is Paradise*. It allows readers to explore, instead, multiple facets of Oceanian identities, under the guidance of a leading contemporary Hawaiian female author who stakes a claim on the cultural and political field and powerfully declares: "This is Waikīkī".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bhabha H., 2010 [1994] *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, New York.

Barthes R., 1970 [1957] *Mythologies*, Point Seuil, Paris.

Beckwith M., 1970 *Hawaiian Mythology*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.

Beckwith M. 1972 [1951] (transl. and ed.) *The Kumulipo, a Hawaiian Creation Chant*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.

Birla R., 2010 «Postcolonial studies: Now That's History», in R.C. Morris (ed.), *"Can the Subaltern Speak?" Reflections on the History of an Idea*, Columbia University Press, New York: 87-99.

DeLoughrey E.M., 2007 *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.

Éliade M., 1957 *Mythes, Rêves et Mystères*, Folio Essais, Paris.

Elisha Otekenari D., 2020 «Moving Beyond Take-Make-Dispose to Take-Make-Use for Sustainable Economy», in *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, June, XIII (3): 497-516.

Figiel S., 1996 *Where We Once Belonged*, Pacific Island Studies, Wellington.

Goeman M.R., 2009 «Notes Toward a Native Feminism's Spatial Practice», in *Wicazo Sa Review*, 24, n. 2: 169-187.

Grace P., 1986 *Pōtiki*, Penguin Books, Auckland.

Grandinetti T., 2017 «Urban aloha 'aina: Kaka'ako and a decolonized right to the city», in *Settler Colonial Studies*, 9, 2: 227-246.

Hau'ofa E., 2008 *We are the Ocean: Selected Works*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.

Hawai'i Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (1989), The 1989 Declaration of the Hawai'i Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism Conference. Avalaible from American Friends Service Committee, Honolulu.

Kahakauwila K., 2013 *This is Paradise*, Hogarth, London-New York.

Kahakauwila K., 2016 «To Weave with Water», Presentation of Kauhakauwila's work in progress, *To Weave with Water*, at Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.

Kahakauwila K., 2021 Personal communications, November 2nd and 9th, and December 5th.

Kajihira K., 2008 «The Militarizing of Hawai'i. Occupation, accommodation and resistance», in C. Fujikane and J.Y. Okamura (eds), *Asian Settler Colonialism. From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.

Kame'eleihiwa L., 1992 *Native Land, Foreign Desires: Pehea Lā E Pono Ai? How Shall We Live in Harmony?*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.

Largeaud-Ortega S., 2018 «Nordhoff and Hall's *Mutiny on the Bounty*: a piece of colonial historical fiction», in *The Bounty from the Beach: Cross-Cultural and Cross- Disciplinary Essays*, ANUP, Canberra.

McMahon T., 2013 «Novels Masquerading as Stories: An Interview with Kristiana Kahakauwila», July 8, https://fictionwritersreview.com/interview/novels-masquerading-as-stories-an-interview-with-kristiana-kahakauwila accessed 11/21/2022.

Maurer A., Hogue R.H., 2020 «Special Forum Introduction to Transnational Nuclear Imperialisms», in *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, XI (2), UC Santa Barbara.

Perez C.S., 2021 *Navigating CHamoru Poetry. Indigeneity, Aesthetics, and Decolonization*, The University of Arizona Press, Tucson.

Robie D., 1999 *Blood in their Banner: Nationalist struggles in the South Pacific*, Pluto Press Australia, Leichhardt.

Segal R.A., 2004 *Myth: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Spivak G.C., 2010 «Can the subaltern speak?», revised edition, from the «History», chapter of *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, in Morris R.C. (ed.), *"Can the Subaltern Speak?" Reflections on the History of an Idea*, Columbia University Press, New York: 21-78.

Teaiwa T., 1999 «Reading Paul Gauguin's *Noa Noa* with Epeli Hau'ofa's *Kisses in the Netherends*: Militourism, Feminism, and the 'Polynesian' Body», in V. Hereniko, R. Wilson (eds.), *Inside Out; Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham: 249-263.

Teaiwa T., 2000 «Bikinis and other S/pacific N/oceans», in Hanlon D. and White G. (eds.), *Voyaging through the Contemporary Pacific*, Rowan and Littlefield, Lanham, MSD: 91-112.

Thompson D., 2013 «Occupy movement in Hawai'i», in *Honolulu Magazine*, April 8 www.honolulumagazine.com/field-notes-occupy-movement-in-hawaii-2, accessed 11/21/2022.

Trask H.-K., 1999 [1993] *From a Native Daughter. Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.

U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Insular Affairs, Compact of Free Association Act of 1985, www.doi.gov/oia/about/compact, accessed 11/21/2022.

Valeri V., 1985 *Kingship and Sacrifice. Ritual and Society in Ancient Hawaii* (transl. Paula Wissing), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.

Walker I.H., 2008 «Hui Nalu, Beachboys, and the Surfing Boarder-lands of Hawai'i», in *The Contemporary Pacific*, XX (1): 89-113.

Wood B., 2007 «Mana Wāhine and Ecocriticism in some Post-80s Writing by Māori Women», in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 14.I, Summer.

NOTES

1. *This is Paradise* is the title of Kristiana Kahakauwila's collection of short stories. This essay only examines the volume's first, eponymous short story, *This is Paradise*. I have chosen to parse Kahakauwila's work because so far, it has not been subject to any extensive scholarly examination, and it is important that this new voice in Oceanian literature should start gaining the international academic recognition it deserves. The reason why I focus on the eponymous short story only is, as I'll try to demonstrate, that this specific narrative resonates, with particular accuracy, with the rationale of this *Archivio Antropologico Mediterraneo* special issue – "The sea unites what the land divides".

2. Waikīkī was the first capital of the Kingdom of Hawai'i from 1795 to 1796, on the south shore of the island of Oʻahu. It is now a neighborhood of Honolulu, capital and largest city of the US state of Hawai'i. Waikīkī is most famous for its seafront filled with high-rises and resort hotels, and its surf with long rolling breaks ideal for long boarding.

3. Popularized images of the female *hula* dancer – as a gentle, scantily-clad and alluring Polynesian woman who gives a welcoming smile as she shimmies her hips – have deviated far from their origins and perpetuated stereotypes of the sexualized Polynesian woman.

4. Given the current colonial situation of Hawai'i, this essay refers to postcolonial studies as a means of engaging with decolonisation.

5. In coining this expression, I'm nodding both to 'Occupy Wall Street', and to the Hawaiian '(de)Occupy' movement, originally called 'Occupy Honolulu' – the «(de) was added in solidarity with the Hawaiian sovereignty movement». Started in 2011, this movement assembles «people invigorated by the struggle against inequality and unchecked authority on all fronts» (Thompson 2013, www.honolulumagazine.com/field-notes-occupy-movement-in-hawaii-2, accessed 11/21/2022).

6. Militourism is the conjunction of «overdetermining and undermining factors in Pacific Islands cultural and political economies» (Teaiwa 1999: 260).

7. *Kapu* (the Hawaiian variation of tapu) is a pan-Polynesian word originally meaning 'forbidden' to commoners because 'sacred'. Since contact with the West, it has been integrated the English language as 'taboo'.
8. *Mana* is sacred spiritual energy of power and strength. *Pono* stands for righteousness and balance with all things in life.
9. The Makahiki rituals celebrated the ancient Hawaiian New Year. They were days for resting and feasting. Today, the Aloha Festivals reactivate the Makahiki tradition.
10. The word 'proletariat' comes from the Latin proles meaning 'offspring, progeny'. Historically, it identifies producing offspring as one of the proletariat's major strengths.
11. They rule it, not as owners, but as guardians and caretakers.
12. *Haole* means 'foreigner'. In modern usage it has come to mean 'a white person'.
13. *Kūpuna* means 'ancestors', or here, 'forefathers'.
14. The particle *a* instead of *o* denotes direct handiwork rather than possession (Beckwith 1970: 61).
15. *Mālama ʻĀina* means «serving and caring for the Land» and the adjoining Sea (Kajihira 2008: 176).
16. *Hapa* is Polynesian transliteration of the English word 'half'. It refers to Polynesian islanders of mixed ethnic ancestry.
17. *Kānaka Maoli* translates as 'Polynesian people'.

ABSTRACTS

This essay explores Kahakauwila's short story *This is Paradise* from the angle of post- and decolonial studies and environmental humanities, and presents it as an ecofeminist and counterhegemonic Oceanian identitarian narrative. With special references to autochthonous antinuclear protests and claims to sovereignty (Trask, Teaiwa, Walker), it argues that female author and characters all Occupy Waikīkī, as colonials, as resistants, or as hybrid cultural agents. The beach becomes a place of Native political, environmental and cultural resistance, where American colonialism, 'militourism' and Globalising capitalism are being challenged. It defends the oppressed female figures from both global South and global North, metaphorically counters colonialism and restores their historical and spiritual polysemy to land, beach and ocean in Waikīkī.

In questo saggio, attraverso le prospettive teoriche postcoloniali e decoloniali, le proteste antinucleari e le rivendicazioni indigene per la sovranità di diverse realtà dell'Oceania, analizzo i modi in cui il racconto di Kristiana Kahakauwila, *This is Paradise*, decostruisce il discorso egemonico sulle Hawaii come paradiso. Tale vibrante opera polifonica e identitaria di gruppi di narratrici oceaniane, è impegnata a trasformare la spiaggia più famosa delle isole hawaiane in uno spazio di resistenza culturale e politica che ha generato vari movimenti sociali, raggruppati nell'espressione "Occupy Waikīkī". Attraverso la denuncia ecofemminista del colonialismo americano, del 'militourism', del capitalismo globale e dell'oppressione delle donne sia del Nord che del Sud del mondo, il testo di Kahakauwila restituisce alla terra, alla spiaggia e al mare di Waikīkī la loro polisemia storica e spirituale.

INDEX

Keywords: Kahakauwila, Hawaii, Pacific studies, postcolonial studies, militourism, ecofeminism
Parole chiave: Kahakauwila, Hawaii, Pacific studies, studi postcoloniali, militourism, ecofemminismo

AUTHOR

SYLVIE LARGEAUD-ORTEGA

Université de la Polynésie française sylvie.ortega@upf.pf