

Contested Paradise: Dispossession and Repossession in Hawai'i

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Paradise stolen. Paradise raped. Paradise infected. Paradise owned, developed, packaged. Paradise sold.

—DAVID LODGE, *Paradise News*

This epigraph is how David Lodge portrayed Hawai'i in his angry, satirical novel, the traveler's tale *Paradise News* (1991). Like many contemporary travel writers, Lodge evoked the image of paradise only to banish it by using the overly familiar, clichéd idioms of a paradise lost, stolen, or sold. In this article, I offer my own traveler's tale from Hawai'i, grounded in the moving experiences of an Australian National University (ANU) Pacific Islands Field School in late 2015—moving across several sites and also moving in emotional terms. Unlike Lodge, however, I do not summarily banish the myth of paradise. Rather, I suggest that paradisiacal figures are not just spectral hauntings but that they have a continuing vitality in the dynamics of possession, dispossession, and repossession in Hawai'i. Indeed, past and present struggles between US imperial and Indigenous interests are palpable in this archipelago, where terrifying natural beauty and tragic human history conjoin.

I situate my story in a frame proffered by Sharae Deckard's book *Paradise Discourse, Imperialism, and Globalization* (2010), in which she traced the origins and persistence of the discourse of paradise not to offer a totalizing narrative of global history but to suggest its diverse sources from Occidental and Oriental genealogies and beyond (2010, 4). She suggested that the word "paradise" derives etymologically from Persian-Avestan roots and was used to designate a walled garden, thereby indicating its origins in early Zoroastrian rather than Judeo-Christian theologies of "heaven." In Deckard's view, these differing theologies were early merged in tropes of the Garden of Eden. But such paradise discourses were

still suffused with both spatial and temporal uncertainty, signifying both what was lost in the fall from grace and what was anticipated: a terrestrial holy city or a future, transcendent heaven.¹

Deckard traced the moving tropes of paradise in the context and contest of both Islamic and European expansion. Early ideas of paradise in Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean emerged when intensive agricultural practices and urbanization led to deforestation and desertification. She noted how at several junctures in global history the spiritual significance and theological meanings of the myth of paradise were conjoined with and veiled the processes of material appropriation and exploitation: “Spiritual mission was inextricably linked to material conquest” (Deckard 2010, 8). Thus, Columbus’s search for God’s paradise was also a search for an El Dorado, a city of gold able to be procured without labor. Of course, as Deckard observed, the extraction of gold was never without labor but relied on the forced labor of the Indigenous peoples whom the Spanish conquered. Gold was extracted with the sweat and blood of others, such as the Taíno peoples whom Columbus encountered in the Caribbean in 1492.

Deckard insisted that despite the seeming secularization of the European Enlightenment discourses of science and reason, spiritual elements of paradise were still enchained with material appropriation in myths about the “noble savage,” propounded both in voyage narratives and scholarly and popular literatures (for the Pacific, see Edmond 1997; Smith 1985; V Smith 2005; on Native Americans, see Lindberg 2013). When Indigenous resistance opposed exploitation or conquest, anti-paradise tropes were mobilized in images of “ignoble savages” or “lazy barbarians.”² From the epochs of nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperialism, through the decades of decolonization, to twenty-first-century manifestations of globalizing capitalism, Deckard perceived discourses of paradise thriving in promoting the formation of nations; in heightened desires for the consumption of transient, material things; and in feasting on “exotic” places through mass tourism, in which the “site becomes the sight” (Strachan 2002, 112, quoted in Deckard 2010, 16). Tropical islands in the Caribbean and in the Pacific have been canonical places for such processes, becoming sites saturated with paradise discourses. Deckard explored this unfolding history through the English-language literature about three sites that have been more marginal in this process—Mexico, Sri Lanka, and Zanzibar. Here, I instead focus on the Hawaiian archipelago, which has been cen-

tral in the pervasive quest for paradise in the Pacific—from the period of the first exploratory voyages of Europeans (see B Smith 1985) to the present—a paradise saturated with sensual pleasures and erotic delights (see Connell 2003; Jolly 1997, 20; Desmond 1999; O'Brien 2006).

This essay derives from a visit to Hawai'i for three weeks in November–December 2015 when, in an exciting collaboration with Bianca Hennessy and Maea Lenei Buhre, we three ran the ANU Pacific Islands Field School for fifteen dedicated undergraduate and master's students.³ I learned a lot in those three weeks—from our several site visits around the island of O'ahu and from the many classes and conversations we had with Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) and other local scholars and activists. Here, I offer a series of vignettes and reflections on those experiences orchestrated around three sites: Mauna Kea (the tallest mountain on the Island of Hawai'i, known as the Big Island); Aulani Disney Resort and the University of Hawai'i–West O'ahu campus; and Hālawā Valley on O'ahu—all places where there has been intense disputation about land, water, “the environment,” and the power of the first people of the place.

In these and other contexts, Kānaka Maoli have challenged the sovereignty of the United States, claiming that they are not just US citizens but also an Indigenous people who, in the nineteenth century, lived in a sovereign state and independent monarchy. This state was created by Kamehameha I in 1795 when, through a combination of diplomacy and violent conquest using introduced firearms, he united all of the islands (except Kaua'i and Ni'ihau) under his rule. In 1810, the chiefs of Kaua'i and Ni'ihau finally acquiesced, creating a single Hawaiian Kingdom. The Indigenous monarchy was perpetuated through diverse and contesting royal lines until the 1893 overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani, which was effected by a group of American merchants, sugar planters, and US troops. Despite contest in both Hawai'i and on the US continent, the United States forcibly occupied and annexed Hawai'i in 1898 and ultimately absorbed it as a state in 1959. Kānaka Maoli who are active in the complex movements for Indigenous sovereignty see US dispossession as an “act of war” and themselves as an occupied people (see Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, Hussey, and Kahunawaika'ala Wright 2014; Kauanui 2008, 2018; Merry 2000; Osorio 2002). In movements for sovereignty, the tropes of a paradise discourse serving US imperial and tourist interests are refused and are opposed by contesting, alternative tropes of paradise deriving from Indigenous cosmologies, theologies, and genealogies.

MAUNA A WĀKEA

Our first site: Mauna a Wākea. Mauna Kea is the tallest mountain in the Hawaiian chain at 4,205 meters (13,796 feet) above sea level. If we measure from the sea floor, it is over 10,000 meters (32,808 feet) high, making it the tallest peak in the world and eclipsing even Mount Everest.⁴ The snow-covered peaks of this dormant volcano rise from the turbulent landscape of the Big Island of Hawai‘i, where the goddess Pele is constantly changing the shape of the land through active volcanoes. Before her lava flows surge into the ocean, they engulf houses and settlements and cut across the roads linking the island’s windward and leeward coasts, testifying to the impossibility of taming Pele’s fiery heart, palpable in devastating recent eruptions.

In ancient and some contemporary Hawaiian cosmologies, Mauna Kea is the most sacred place in the archipelago, the location of both the peak and piko (navel) of the earth, where the umbilical cord to the stars was cut when the earth and the heavens were separated. It is, to quote a Kanaka Maoli author, the first place in the islands to be “touched by the rising sun’s morning rays and the first to receive the highest clouds’ life-giving waters” (Peralto 2014, 236). This elevated place is associated with a particular descent line of ali‘i—the highest chiefs of ancient Hawai‘i. Born of the sacred union of the gods Papahānaumoku and Wākea, Mauna a Wākea (Mountain of Wākea) was the elder sibling of Ho‘ohōkū, a woman, and Hāloa, a man, both ancestors (kūpuna) to King Kamehameha III, who, revived after a stillbirth, claimed the mana and the ea—the breath of life—to rule, from 1825 to 1854. This genealogy, honored in a birth chant reproduced by Leon No‘eau Peralto, celebrates the reciprocal relationship of nurture between mountain and people “in order to remain pono, or balanced” (Peralto 2014, 233–234).

The dispersed polities and islands of ancient Hawai‘i were unified under the leadership of Kamehameha III’s more proximate ancestor, his father Kamehameha I, who reigned from 1782 to 1819. In the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Hawai‘i was recognized as an independent monarchy by many other nation-states, including several monarchies in Europe (see Merry 2000, chapter 2; Silva 2004). The power of the ali‘i was seen as crucial to the social and ecological sustenance of ancient Hawaiians. Patrick Kirch and other archaeologists have suggested that the first peoples settled in the archipelago around AD 800–1000 from the homeland of Hawaiki in the southern Pacific and, like other peoples speaking Austronesian lan-

guages, from an ultimate origin in south China or Taiwan (Kirch 1985, 2001). When Captain James Cook visited the archipelago on his third voyage in 1779, there were likely close to one million people living on these islands (Bushnell 1993; Stannard 1989). They sustained themselves primarily through intensive taro cultivation (in a complex combination of dryfield and irrigated systems); fishing in oceans, rivers and streams, and artificial ponds; and the extraction of breadfruit, bananas, coconuts, and birds from surrounding forests.

Land and resources were managed through the ahupua'a system, a series of wedge-shaped zones stretching from the mountain to the ocean. Mauna Kea was at the intersection of three of these zones on the Big Island. Its life-giving waters were critical to sustaining the biodiversity of the forests on its flanks (including *Sophora chrysophylla* [māmane], *Acacia koa* [koa], and *Metrosideros polymorpha* ['ōhi'a]); the irrigated taro zones below; and the clarity of the streams and ponds where fish were bred and harvested. There were complex systems of stewardship over land and water, but the balance and the self-sustaining properties of these ecological systems were ultimately linked to the mana of the ali'i—the high chiefs at the peak. Their mana was manifested not just in their rule and familial fertility but also in the fecundity of the 'āina (the land) and all its peoples (Chirico and Farley 2015; McMillen, Ticktin, and Springer 2017).

It is important, however, not to romanticize ancient Hawai'i. There was much ecological transformation and degradation over several centuries of Indigenous occupation; forests were dramatically reduced in the uplands as cultivation of taro spread from the well-watered fertile soils to dry valleys and plains on leeward coasts. Some birds became extinct because they were not just good eating but also good to wear, for example in the famous red and yellow feathered cloaks of the ali'i (MacLennan 2014, 18–21). Chiefs and later royals may be memorialized as maintaining balance and the breath of life, but they could also be tyrannical and order the killing of those who dared to breach their kapu (taboo) (Osorio 2002; Merry 2000).

Let us return to Mauna Kea today. It has become a sacred site in the practice of the global science of astronomy. European astronomy goes back to some of the earliest voyagers in the Pacific—witness the attempts by those on Captain Cook's second voyage to observe the transit of Venus at what was dubbed Point Venus in Tahiti (Salmond 2009). Mauna Kea—a spot favored by astronomers for its high elevation, dry atmosphere, stable airflow, and clear skies—has been a privileged pinnacle for observation since 1964, when an access road was constructed; thirteen telescopes,

funded by eleven countries, have since been constructed on its summit (University of Hawai'i Institute for Astronomy 2018). The plan to build a thirty-meter telescope (TMT) by a consortium of astronomers, including several at the University of Hawai'i–Mānoa (UHM), was approved by the State of Hawai'i in 2013 but has been successively disrupted by protests and blockades at the site and across the archipelago. During 2014 and 2015, the telescope's construction was opposed by many Kānaka Maoli in a struggle that served to unify and galvanize a diverse and often dispersed sovereignty movement. This groundswell of opposition was first mounted by roadblocks placed on the mountain itself, then sustained by protests in downtown Honolulu and especially on the UHM campus. As a result, construction was halted in late 2015.

There was a confluence of cultural and ecological arguments against the TMT: that this was a sacred Hawaiian place associated with divine cosmic origins, preeminent ali'i, and erstwhile royals, and that Mauna Kea was a crucial font of life, with sustaining water flowing from its peaks, nourishing the land (figure 1). Opponents claimed that the chemicals deployed in the construction of the astronomical infrastructure and in the use of telescopes (eg, the mercury used to clean their gleaming surfaces) polluted water sources. They also suggested that construction would compound the damage already done on the Big Island and elsewhere through the diversion of streams and rivers that are a crucial part of the monocultural cultivation of sugar (see next section).⁵

In a class at UH Mānoa, 'Ilima Long, a Kanaka Maoli scholar and activist, insisted that this was not a confrontation between science and culture and that Kānaka Maoli did not oppose the science of astronomy. Indeed, as inveterate stargazers themselves, they were at home in the heavens: How would they ever have reached these distant islands if they had not used the expanse of stars in the night sky, along with the movement of currents in the ocean, the flow of clouds, and the movement of birds and fish to strategically navigate their way in oceangoing canoes across the vastness of the Pacific with no compasses or maps?⁶

The dominant Kanaka Maoli view was that this was not so much a clash of Western science and Indigenous culture, as often asserted by supporters of the telescope, as a struggle of authority: who had control over the land and Mauna Kea itself. So, in the view of 'Ilima Long, it was a matter of "jurisdiction." For her, it was not just a matter of insufficient consultation with Kānaka Maoli about the telescope by the state but also the fact that Hawai'i is illegally occupied by the United States. The birth

chant—the genealogy alluded to above (reproduced in Peralto 2014)—connects the mountain and Hawaiian people, affirming the chiefly right of rule. Mauna Kea is a sacred ancestor of Kānaka Maoli.

During the last week of our Hawai‘i field school, on 2 December 2015, the Hawai‘i Supreme Court issued an important ruling that there had been



FIGURE 1 Kanaka Maoli protests against the thirty-meter telescope on Mauna Kea included this telling sign. Photograph copyright Marie Alohalani Brown, 5 April 2015; reproduced with permission.

inadequate consultation with Kānaka Maoli by the Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources. Because the state had issued the building permit for the thirty-meter telescope before a contested case hearing was held or opposing views could be heard, the court revoked the permit, stalling if not definitively halting construction. In 2016, contested case hearings were held in Honolulu. In July 2017, Circuit Court Judge Riki May Amano recommended that the project be allowed to proceed. The telescope consortium announced that, if the project could not start by April 2018, they would move to a backup site in the Canary Islands. On 28 September 2017, the Hawai‘i Board of Land and Natural Resources approved a revised construction permit, along with some new provisions (Associated Press 2017). Protests and legal battles continue at the time of writing (but see Perkins 2018).

In reporting on the protests and the hearings in the *New York Times*, Dennis Overbye depicted the contestation between the astronomers and Kānaka Maoli over the building of this “18-story colossus” as a dispute over what was sacred ground for both (2016). Kealoha Pisciotta, described as both a “former telescope operator on Mauna Kea” and a leader opposing further telescope developments on the mountain for over a decade, was quoted as saying: “This is a very simple case about land use. . . . It’s not science versus religion. We’re not the church. You’re not Galileo.”⁷ She thereby challenged the way in which Kānaka Maoli have been cast in the racist terms of a science/culture binary as inherently anti-modern and backward-looking. In opposing the TMT, Kānaka Maoli evoked the paradisiacal harmony of the past ecology and polity but in a way that was connected to contemporary ecological concerns about the pollution caused by overdevelopment in pristine environments and the flow of water.

WATER ON WEST O‘AHU: SUGAR’S LEGACY AND THE TRIUMPH OF TOURISM

We now travel from the snowy, elevated peaks of Mauna Kea to the leeward coast of O‘ahu. Whereas our first site—framed by urban protests, graffiti, photographic images, and graphic T-shirts (see Tamaira 2017)—entailed only a “virtual” visit by our class, we visited the second site of West O‘ahu in person. Our yellow Roberts Hawaii school bus took us first to the Aulani Disney Resort and then on to the University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu campus for a scintillating and challenging class led by Manulani Aluli Meyer.

The Aulani Disney Resort is an extraordinary oasis on the dry coast of West O‘ahu. Surrounded by emerald-green golf courses and gated communities of mansions and condominiums, the resort is a watery wonderland, exemplifying what has been described as an “artificial paradise” (see Deckard 2010; see also Tamaira 2015, 2016). Its luxury guest rooms, fine-dining restaurants, manufactured saltwater lagoon, and freshwater fountains, stream, pools, spas, and water slides all depend on huge amounts of water being channeled daily from the well-watered windward side of O‘ahu to the dry west. Many of these diversionary channels were created in the nineteenth century in the era when water-hungry sugar plantations and sugar mills dominated the landscape of O‘ahu.

Anthropologist Carol MacLennan’s brilliant book *Sovereign Sugar* (2014) shows how the sugar industry achieved such social, economic, and ecological dominance in these islands. One of the aspects of Hawaiian history that especially intrigues me is the very tight embrace of Christian missions and commodity economics in this archipelago. Of course, we might see these two imperial agents as always ultimately complicit in advancing notions of Christian civilization, land as property, and economic development (see Merry 2000). But their close linkages in Hawai‘i seem distinctive to me, coming as I do from research in the western Pacific and especially from my first Oceanic experience in the archipelago of Vanuatu (previously the New Hebrides/Nouvelles Hébrides). In the New Hebrides, there were not only contestations between the British and the French for possession but also full-frontal conflicts that engaged sandalwood traders, labor recruiters, and planters against Christian missionaries. For instance, resident missionary John G Paton and other Reform Presbyterians in the southern islands vehemently opposed the labor trades to Queensland, Fiji, and later New Caledonia (see Lindstrom 2016; Shineberg 1999). In contrast, as MacLennan showed, the precursors to the Big Five sugar companies in Hawai‘i—Castle and Cooke, Alexander and Baldwin, American Factors, C Brewer and Co, and Theo H Davies—had their origins in the missionary families, most of whom had migrated to the islands from New England in the 1820s.⁸ As MacLennan observed, “The organization of missionary family wealth into the powerful corporate system known as the Big Five is at the core of Hawai‘i’s massive environmental change from Hawaiian agriculture to the mono-crop makeover of island landscapes” (2014, 81).

Sugar’s sovereign reign ended abruptly after the 1970s, and by 1995 most sugar plantations and mills had closed. Only one isolated sugar plan-

tation remained on the island of Maui, but it too closed in late 2016. Sugar plantations were eclipsed by mass tourism, retail, and real estate development, but their consequences continue. The legacy of sugar remains sedimented in the landscape through the degradation of land (especially on the dry side of islands) and the unequal flow of water—once corralled into ditches and channels to feed hungry sugar fields, now greening golf courses and refreshing the mouths and bodies of tourists. In another session at UH Mānoa, Professor Jonathan Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio explained to our students how Waikīkī—so named (literally, “spouting freshwater”) because it evoked the bubbling water of wetland taro and fishponds—was drained and filled in during the 1920s, allowing for hotel construction, commercial development, and the creation of an artificial beach using sand imported from elsewhere (Hawai‘i Life 2014).

In West O‘ahu, the fresh and saltwater swimming and water play areas at Aulani are all manufactured. We were guided around Aulani by a graceful Kanaka Maoli guide who was keen to show us how the site simulates the ancestral spaces of the ahupua‘a—those ancient ecological zones stretching from the mountains to the sea. We were also guided by our critical consort, Mārata Tamaira, a Māori scholar and accomplished alumna of both UHM and ANU, where she completed a stellar doctoral thesis on contemporary Kanaka Maoli art. We had read her work discussing the vigorous debate about how the Disney Company had, in the creation of Aulani, tried to repair its reputation with Kānaka Maoli, which had been damaged by the appropriation of an ancient Hawaiian mele in the 2002 movie *Lilo and Stitch* (see Tamaira 2015, 2016, and this issue). This time, Disney engaged in extensive cultural consultation and commissioned some of the best of Hawai‘i’s contemporary Kanaka Maoli artists to help indigenize the resort and thereby legitimize its presence. Tamaira’s husband, Carl F K Pao, was one of the artists. Pao is a superb painter and sculptor, renowned for his staunch and sardonic send-ups of the imperial emasculation of Hawai‘i with his giant phallic works. His work on the facades of the buildings at Aulani, like much of his art, uses hidden meanings or kaona to critique the context and concept of the resort hotel (figure 2). Although we did not visit, the poignant irony of the location of this luxury resort was intensified when we were told that just north along the coast was a beach settlement of Kānaka Maoli—for the most part unemployed and poor—where violence and self-harm were rife and where, although they were not “homeless” (since this *was* their home as Hawaiians), they were dispossessed as “houseless squatters” (see Perkins 2018, 170).



FIGURE 2 Aulani Disney Resort, West O‘ahu, with view of terraces, waterfall, and Kanaka Maoli art on façade. Photograph copyright A Mārata Keteriki Tamaira; reproduced with permission.

That afternoon we traveled south through the dryer plains to the modest cloisters of the West O‘ahu campus—its buildings simulating old sugar mills on the site—to meet with Hawaiian philosopher, scholar, and teacher Manulani Aluli Meyer. We had been reading Meyer’s essays that wrestle with the relation between the Western genealogy of philosophy she had experienced at Harvard and her own commitment to the home-grown empiricism of Indigenous philosophy (eg, Meyer 2003). She shared a wonderful joke with us about how, when she was telling a story about a colleague at Harvard who had called her “anti-intellectual,” her extended female kin misheard it as a celebration: Auntie Intellectual (see Meyer 2001, 190).

But the first thing we did in Meyer’s class was not to discuss her texts but to work in the taro and herb gardens that she and her colleagues and students had created. Called the University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu Student Organic Garden, it is used as teaching space for students, especially for those pursuing degrees on sustainable food systems. The humbling processes of getting our hands dirty, cleaning the harvested kalo (taro),

and planting corms was combined with enlightening discussions of the ancient history of diverse taro cultivars.⁹ Meyer stressed the need to cultivate kalo not just as a symbolic gesture of respect for the lifeways of the ancestors but also as an expression of renewed food sovereignty at a time of economic and ecological precarity. In Meyer's hopeful vision, like that of many Kanaka Maoli activists, cultivating kalo is not so much a nostalgic restoration of an ancient past as a means for creating a sustainable and abundant future in a world imperiled by climate change. So this full day evoked a dramatic contest between a manufactured, artificial tourist "paradise" and an envisioned paradise of a secure Indigenous future, grounded in the soil of a taro garden.

HĀLAWA VALLEY

It is the second week of our ANU Field School in December 2015. The rain has been unceasing and torrential since we arrived; the UHM campus is sodden, and its paths are flowing streams. But on this Saturday, the sun has emerged and rainbows play in Mānoa Valley. Our now canonical, canary-yellow Roberts Hawaii bus arrives right on time to take us on an excursion organized by Ulla Hasager, director of civic engagement with the UHM College of Social Sciences. This is part of a series of regular visits to Kanaka Maoli places that are central to the Indigenous renaissance and the sovereignty movement in Hawai'i. We are traveling in our bus, accompanied by several Kanaka Maoli colleagues and friends in cars, to Hālawā Valley, a site sacred both for its ancient temples and burial grounds and as a place of Indigenous resistance.

We travel along the chronically congested Interstate H-1, past the tourist temples of Waikīkī and the Ala Moana shopping mall. We drive west toward Pearl Harbor but then take a sharp turn down a dilapidated industrial backroad, past Hawaiian Cement, and onto a narrower dirt road leading deep into the lushness of Hālawā Valley. The road is blocked—giant boulders have tumbled down with the rains of the previous days—and our traveling companions up ahead get out of their cars and push them aside. But then a larger boulder comes into view, too immense to move or for our bus to get past. Our bus driver has to turn back; we distribute ourselves between the spare seats in the cars of our friends and colleagues and ride on, finally arriving at our destination.

Our guide here is a young Kanaka Maoli man, the grandson of a woman who was part of the spirited, protracted resistance to the building

of Interstate H-3 through the valley in the 1990s. He tells us how, when this group of women camped together in the valley, they found the water pure and curative of their aches and ills—even cancer! The women had slashed at the bush, ridding the site of invasive foreign species so as to cultivate Indigenous plants like breadfruit and kalo (taro) and a range of medicinal herbs. Kalo is kin, he tells us, its genealogy shared with human beings. He explains that for Kānaka Maoli even the rocks around us are alive, imbued with the potency of ancestors. We stop at ancient graves, where human remains were disturbed in the process of building the highway, and he tells us that some remains were secretly taken away to Bishop Museum. He leads us up and down the slippery, muddy paths of the women's temple site, walking past rocks with surfaces that we were invited to see as animated.

One of these rocks is a birthing stone. Our guide rather forcibly persuades one of our Kanaka Maoli women companions to lie down on the stone and assume a birthing position. She is not yet a mother, and he warns her that, having absorbed the power of this rock, her chances of becoming pregnant in the future are enhanced. He tells us that, in the past, infertile women became fertile after living in the valley and communing with this rock. He points to the other side of the valley, the men's temple site, which is congested with weeds and invasive species. He suggests that the distance and difference between these sites was the difference between martial men and nurturing women—a construction perhaps more consonant with the Judeo-Christian gendered ideologies brought to Hawai'i from the 1820s than those of ancient, pre-Christian Hawai'i, I thought. After this tour, we work hard weeding the kalo garden; we are praised for our work and fed a delicious lunch by our hosts. But as we are chatting and weeding the kalo in this enchanted, even paradisiacal valley, we can hear the roar of the traffic above, cars and trucks speeding on this elevated road from Pearl Harbor to the northeast side of the island. It is difficult to imagine a woman giving birth with the screams of the tires spinning above her head.

The first plans for H-3 were that it would run right through the valley floor, not just destroying the temple sites but also desecrating ancient graves. The occupation of the valley and the broader resistance to H-3 persuaded state authorities to elevate it on huge pylons. It cost over one billion dollars to build and is reputedly the most expensive highway ever constructed in the United States. Why was it so crucial? It connects the naval base at Pearl Harbor with the marine corps base in windward O'ahu. But although many opponents refused to drive on H-3 for years, some slowly



FIGURE 3 View of Ko'olau Mountains on O'ahu and Interstate H-3, which cost US\$1.3 billion and took thirty-seven years to build. Photograph by Andrea Seale, 2002; reproduced with permission of Alamy Stock Photo.

relented, for the road offers a quick passage and its flyovers deliver the most extraordinary vistas of majestic mountain ranges and sublime coasts. It is, even for locals, a perfect experience of militourism (see Teaiwa 1994, 2011), wherein an imagined paradise of leisure and pleasure and of natural beauty veil the vaulting material conquest of nature, the imperial possession of an Indigenous place, and the military might it connects and conceals (figure 3; Gonzalez 2013).

CONCLUSION: “PROTECTORS OF THE FUTURE NOT PROTESTORS OF THE PAST”

That the secularization of our age precludes belief in a literal terrestrial Eden does not mean that paradise has ceased to operate as modern fantasy, regulating and expressing nostalgia for that which is absent or desired.

—SHARAE DECKARD, *Paradise Discourse,
Imperialism, and Globalization:
Exploiting Eden*

We have come a long way from the origins of paradise in the walled gardens of ancient Iran and the Judeo-Christian notions of the Garden of Eden and heaven. But I conclude these three vignettes from our Hawai'i travels by suggesting that visions of paradise pervade both the imperial forces that have possessed Hawai'i and the Indigenous agents who have resisted that dispossession and who struggle to repossess their homeland—a repossession that is material, corporeal, and spiritual.

The imperial power of paradise discourse in Hawai'i is ubiquitous and often commented on (see Desmond 1999; Ferguson and Turnbull 1998; Trask 2002; Gonzalez 2013). In these islands, as in Tahiti, this image of paradise is suffused with an eroticism that is pervasive and perduring (see Kahn 2011; Alexeyeff and McDonnell, this issue; McDonnell, this issue). We can see how paradise discourse has been used, as Deckard suggested, to justify and to conceal the gross material appropriation of Hawaiian lands and resources (2010). This discourse has a particular resonance in that peculiarly Hawaiian complex of militourism analyzed so consummately by the late Teresia Teaiwa (1994, 2011). For her, the hypervisibility of sexuality and exposed bodies in bikinis veiled and deflected attention from the violence of imperial occupation, militarization, and nuclear testing.¹⁰ Mass tourism, with its promise of endless pleasure and leisure, is co-present with and helps to hide the raw military might of the United States in this archipelago (Ferguson and Turnbull 1998; Gonzalez 2013). Hawaiian resistance has often opposed those fantasies with anti-paradise discourse, stressing the venality of land deals, the ugliness of Waikiki and haole tourists, pollution, and the desecration of sacred places, as in the protests about the US military's use of Kaho'olawe for bombing practice (Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana 2017). The poetry of Haunani-Kay Trask frequently deploys such anti-paradise tropes (Trask 2002; see also Jolly 2005).

We might also discern an Indigenous appropriation and reinterpretation of "paradise." In the expansive and innovative collection *Touring Pacific Cultures* that she coedited with John Taylor, Kalissa Alexeyeff described how Cook Islanders living in Auckland have "re-purposed" the tropes of paradise by layering promotional tourist posters with family photos and gifted objects from the islands in their homes. She highlighted the racialized and gendered elements in such tableaux and concluded that "'paradise' is not just an image for outsiders but also a story upon which locals may map a geography of longing concerning here and there, now and then, and into spaces of the future" (Alexeyeff 2016, 420).

What I discern in Hawai‘i is a process that is both similar and different. Paradisiacal tropes that I perceive in Kanaka Maoli resistance do not typically creolize tourist promotional images with intimate embodied experience to express longing in the differences between “here” and “there” but rather stress the differences between “now” and “then,” contrasting the present state of their islands with that of the ancient past. Indigenous Hawaiian notions of “the good life” typically stress balance (*pono*) and harmony between people and the natural world. Ancient Hawaiians did not distinguish between humans and nonhumans, between the sacred and the secular, or between religion and politics/economics in the way that Judeo-Christian theologies and capitalist cosmologies typically do. There is no doubt that Kānaka Maoli have been strongly influenced by the combined forces of Christianity and commodity economics, but many mobilize visions of ancient Hawaiian life—of harmony and kinship with the natural world and nonhuman beings and entities—to oppose imperial occupation and proclaim their sovereignty in their homeland (see Kame‘eleihiwa 1992; Goldberg-Hiller and Silva 2011; Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Hussey, and Wright 2014).

This is palpable in the three vignettes shared above. In the protests of those who oppose the development of the TMT on Mauna Kea, we see forms of resistance in which cultural and ecological arguments are powerfully combined, not disarticulated. Mauna Kea is an ancestor—its peaks embodying chiefly and royal rule and securing the balance and fertility of the land and its peoples—in contradistinction to the cultural and ecological degradation wrought by US imperial power and the consortium promoting the TMT. Opponents draw on the past to envisage a different future: not so much restoration of the monarchy as the restoration of harmony, balance, and fertility to the archipelago. On the west coast of O‘ahu, Manulani Meyer, in her writings on Indigenous philosophy and the daily practices of gardening, draws on homegrown empiricism and the knowledge of ancient diversities in taro cultivation to talk about sustainability in the future. She perceives the present as a time of cultural, ecological, and economic precarity, in which the particular wrongs done to Kānaka Maoli by US imperialism are now compounded by the global threats of climate change. For her, food sovereignty, rather than dependence on food importation and monocultural agriculture fed by fertilizers, is a crucial part of Indigenous claims for sovereignty. Taro is not just a nostalgic symbol of the past but rather a root that offers a route to a sustainable future. Finally, as we saw, Hālawa Valley has been

imaged as an Indigenous Eden, its ancient temple and burial sites reanimated by Indigenous occupation where the very power of the place—its waters, its plants and its rocks—worked to inspire and cure those women who lived there, even if their struggle was ultimately eclipsed by H-3 soaring above.

Kanaka Maoli resistance and protest can manifest the canonical properties of paradise discourse, combining anguish about a fall from grace and a desire to recuperate an idealized past with the hopeful anticipation of an idealized future—in this troubled world rather than the next. Drawing more from ancient Hawaiian cosmologies than Judeo-Christian theologies, we can witness an Indigenous contestation and repossession of place through alternative discourses of paradise. Contra Deckard (2010), and like most people, Indigenous Hawaiians do not live in a purely secular age. Kanaka Maoli notions of paradise do not separate material and spiritual dimensions, natural and cultural aspects; paradise for them is more an immanent than a transcendent state.

Crucially, these notions are not just nostalgic reflections on ancient Hawai‘i or on an Indigenous “paradise lost.” As Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua has argued so forcefully, the activists involved in the Mauna a Wākea movement are “protectors of the future, not protestors of the past” (2017).¹¹ Echoing the calls of Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada to “come join us,” Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua sees the movement as eschewing the false promises of progress and capitalist development and as stressing the “inextricable connections between humans and planetary health” at this critical moment in human history (2017, 185). She sees this as an example of Indigenous futurities opposing the violence and exclusions of settler colonialism, suggesting that such calls have a broader resonance not just for Indigenous peoples but for humanity as a whole, faced as we all are by the anti-paradisiacal futures of climate change.¹²

* * *

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Notes

1 Deckard 2010 also notes that even though distinctions might be made between the elsewhere of paradise and the nowhere of utopia, these distinctions are often blurred or murky in practice.

2 See Kabutaulaka 2015 for critical reflections on earlier and recent examples of this trope apropos Solomon Islands.

3 I have been a guest in Hawai'i on about fifteen occasions. I lived in Honolulu for six months in 1998 when I was privileged to have the Burns Chair in History at UH Mānoa, hosted generously by David Hanlon and his colleagues. That entailed giving a series of public lectures and offering a graduate class on gender in which the majority of students were from Hawai'i or the Pacific. I celebrate the fact that several of them went on to become great scholars, including Anne Perez Hattori, Kerri Inglis, Katerina Teaiwa, and Isaiah Walker.

The ANU Pacific Islands Field School was conceived by Katerina Teaiwa and first convened by her in 2010. The program first visited Hawai'i in 2014 when Katerina taught the three-week course with Areti Metuamate as a tutor. In 2015, we were fortunate to inherit many of the contacts and lecturers developed for the first Hawai'i iteration of the field school but also added several others, especially Kanaka Maoli scholars. Under a memorandum of understanding signed between ANU and the University of Hawai'i in 2014, we were hosted by Terence Wesley-Smith and his team at the UHM Center for Pacific Islands Studies with the excellent assistance of Mary Hattori. We also thank the following who presented to our class, hosted us, or assisted our visit in vital ways: Moana Nepia, Alexander Mawyer, Ty P Kāwika Tengan, Jonathan Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio, Mārata Tamaira, Carl F K Pao, Ulla Hasager, Noelle Kahanu, 'Ilima Long, Luciano Minerbi, Manulani Aluli Meyer (UH–West O'ahu), and Jerry Finin (East-West Center); as well as several staff of Brigham Young University–Hawai'i and the Polynesian Cultural Center (including Hiagi Wesley and Tēvita O Ka'ili), the Bishop Museum, and the Aulani Disney Resort. We thank all for their generosity and the insights given to us and our students.

4 Its prominence has been disputed; some claim that its partner on the Big Island, Mauna Loa, at 17,069 meters (56,000 feet) from the sea floor, is taller and thus the second highest in the solar system after Olympus Mons on Mars (Overbye 2016). The relative heights above sea level given by my *Times Atlas of the World* (2017) are 4,205 meters (13,796 feet) for Mauna Kea and 4,169 meters (13,677 feet) for Mauna Loa.

5 This argument about pollution on Mauna Kea was not restricted to Kanaka Maoli activists. Mauna Kea is located on “ceded lands,” recognized as earlier belonging to the Hawaiian Kingdom but now under state administration, allegedly for “the benefit of Hawaiians.” In 1968, the University of Hawai‘i was granted, for a dollar a year, a sixty-five-year lease on 11,000 acres on the Big Island, of which 500 acres of the Mauna Kea site were designated a “science preserve.” The university was criticized in a state audit in 1998 for failing to “protect the mountain and its natural and cultural resources,” and even NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration), in a 2007 study of environmental impact, concluded that “30 years of astronomy had caused ‘significant, substantial and adverse harm’ to Mauna Kea” (Overbye 2016).

6 I thank Bianca Hennessy for her important insights about the full resonance of ‘Ilima Long’s presentation and about the racist dimensions of the opposition between science and culture, so often mobilized by the supporters of the TMT.

7 Kealoha Pisciotto is reported by Overbye 2016 as saying she did not have the mathematical skills to become a professional cosmologist as she had hoped. But her professional dreams had also been dashed by the cavalier treatment of family shrines and ancient burial sites in cinder cones on the mountain. Overbye 2016 also reports on other Kānaka Maoli who had ancestral connections to Mauna Kea, like Wallace Ishibashi Jr, being in favor of the TMT, comparing the project to Hawaiians’ own search for “the ancestral origins of the universe.”

8 Although not all plantations were started by missionary families, by 1920 the descendants of four missionary families controlled them (MacLennan 2014, 52).

9 Tasia Yamamura, a dedicated assistant in the garden at University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu, also shared her immense knowledge and skills with us.

10 Teaiwa’s original paper focused on the conjunction of the bikini swimsuit and the Bikini Atoll site of US nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands, but the notion of militourism was extended to other places in Oceania.

11 Again my thanks to Bianca Hennessy for her insightful comments on this essay and for bringing this article to my attention.

12 One anonymous reviewer asked me to amplify my treatment of “climate change” in this article. I cannot do so here, but see Jolly 2018 where I point out the problems with the continuing Euro-American distinction of nature and culture, despite the fact that we are dealing with anthropogenic climate change. See also Cox and others, this issue.

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Abstract

Perhaps of all the archipelagos of the Pacific imagined by Euro-Americans as “paradisiacal,” Hawai'i has been the most “possessed” by an unusually harmoni-

ous combination of Christian, capitalist, and imperial agents of the United States. The notion of paradise, rooted in Zoroastrian and Judeo-Christian imaginaries, projected ideas of the harmony and beauty of a primordial state. But just as Christians saw darkness harbored in the Garden of Eden, so did the imperial occupation of Hawai‘i usher in an era of ecological and cultural devastation. Reflecting on the embodied experiences of the ANU Pacific Islands Field School in 2015, this essay considers how the occupation and possession of Hawai‘i, depicted by Teresia Teaiwa as “militourism,” has deployed imaginaries of paradise. But it also suggests how Kānaka Maoli engaged in the sovereignty movement are mobilizing alternative notions of paradise in projects of repossession. This is explored through stories of three sites focal to our visit: Mauna a Wākea on the Big Island, Aulani Disney Resort and the University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu campus, and Hālawa Valley. Kanaka Maoli notions of “paradise” emphasize balance (*pono*), genealogical connections between the human and the nonhuman, and the intimate imbrication of corporeal and spiritual well-being. These ideas draw from the past to imagine a future: the “fall from grace” from ancient Hawai‘i to contemporary occupation and precarity is to be redressed by projects to restore social and ecological harmony.

KEYWORDS: Hawai‘i, paradise, dispossession, repossession, Kānaka Maoli, sovereignty