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REIMAGINING PARADISE: POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM IN SELECTED HAWAIIAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT. The contemporary Hawaiian literary landscape provides a profound lens for deconstructing the pervasive paradise trope associated with the islands. This deconstruction reveals a postcolonial Hawaii marked by environmental shifts and tourist-driven development exploiting the paradise myth. This paper reads contemporary Hawaiian literature, Alan Brennert's *Moloka'i, Honolulu* and Kristiana Kahakauwila's *This is Paradise*, to contextualize the consequences of modernity and exploitation of Native Hawaiians and immigrant populations. The narratives juxtapose the idealized perception of Hawai'i as a tropical paradise with the harsh realities faced by plantation laborers, lepers, and marginalized Indigenous within the tourist industry. This analysis highlights the disparity between the idealized portrayal of Hawai'i and the challenging conditions marginalized groups face. These narratives serve as critical instruments in dismantling the paradisal myth, delineating the historicity of Hawai'i as a postcolonial space.

Keywords: American literature, Hawaiian literature, indigeneity, postcolonial ecocriticism.

REIMAGINANDO EL PARAÍSO: ECOCRÍTICA POSTCOLONIAL EN UNA SELECCIÓN DE LITERATURA HAWAIANA

RESUMEN. El paisaje contemporáneo de la literatura hawaiana aporta una lente para la desconstrucción del generalizado tema del paraíso asociado con las islas. Esta deconstrucción revela un Hawái postcolonial marcado por los cambios medioambientales y el desarrollo turístico que explota el mito del paraíso. Este artículo considera la literatura hawaiana contemporánea, en concreto *Moloka'i* y *Honolulu*, de Alan Brennert, y *This is Paradise,* de Kristiana Kahakauwila, para contextualizar las consecuencias de la modernidad y la explotación de las poblaciones indígenas e inmigrantes de Hawái. Estas narrativas yuxtaponen la percepción idealizada de Hawái como paraíso tropical con las duras realidades de los trabajadores de plantaciones, leprosos e indígenas marginados dentro de la industria del turismo. Este análisis subraya la disparidad entre la representación idealizada de Hawái y las difíciles condiciones a las que se enfrentan los grupos marginados. Estas narrativas sirven como instrumentos críticos para desmantelar el mito paradisíaco, definiendo la historicidad de Hawái como un espacio postcolonial.

Palabras clave: literatura estadounidense, literatura hawaiana, indigeneidad, ecocrítica postcolonial.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the post-World War II era, contemporary American literature has served as a mirror to the evolving complexities of American life. Mainly, the literature focuses on themes of identity and diversity in line with the shifting societal landscape (Deloria xv). Contemporary American literature reflects the nation's diversity, with emerging minority writers exploring immigration, multiculturalism, and social justice (Saldívar 574). Their work signals a shift towards a post-race era in American literature, which some scholars describe as a 'post-race' era. This term suggests a literary movement that transcends traditional racial boundaries, focusing instead on the complex intersections of culture in a globalized world (Rowe 2). This literature offers an avenue to explore the often-overlooked cultures and voices.

This study examines the portrayal of Native Hawaiians in contemporary American literature, focusing on their cultural heritage, the effects of colonialism, and their ongoing struggles for cultural preservation and recognition. Literature about Hawai'i critically challenges the tourist-driven narrative that reduces the islands to a mere paradise. It disrupts these oversimplified views and encourages a deeper understanding of Hawai'i's complex realities, highlighting its historicity as a postcolonial space (Rohrer 15-20).

Historically, Hawai'i has been predominantly represented through the perspectives and biases of white tourists who visited the islands. Despite its presence

in novels like Jack London's *The House of Pride* and James Jones' *From Here to Eternity,* Hawai'i is often relegated to a mere setting. These novels typically featured protagonists from the American mainland who ventured to Hawai'i. This representation originates from Mark Twain's 1860s visit to Hawai'i, documented in *Letters from Hawai'i*. Twain framed tropical Hawai'i as the exotic Other compared to the temperate American mainland. His statement exemplifies this paradigm:

> no alien land in all the world has any deep, strong charm for me but one [Hawai'i]; no other land could so longingly and so beseechingly haunt me, sleeping and waking, through half a lifetime, as that one has done. Other things leave me, but they abide; others change but remain the same. For me, its balmy airs are constantly blowing, its summer seas flashing in the sun; the pulsing of its surf beat is in my ear. (Twain 64)

This phenomenon persists in the contemporary era, where numerous romance novels use the Hawaiian Islands as the background of love stories. Lesuma identifies how "literature targeted at young adults in Hawai'i and other exotic settings constructs an idealized narrative of the islands designed for external consumption" (48). Her identification suggests that novels by white authors project a fetishized American fantasy onto Hawai'i. This approach overlooks the authentic issues faced by *Kānaka* (Hawaiian indigene) along with other ethnicities in this archipelago.

The historicity of Hawai'i as a postcolonial space reflects the enduring legacies of colonialism and the intricate interplay of power, identity, and resistance within the context of American imperialism. The 1898 annexation by the United States, after a coup orchestrated by white sugar planters overthrowing the Hawaiian monarchy, continues to marginalize Native Hawaiians. Maile (66) proposes her idea of settler colonialism as a dynamic system of power that aims to dispossess, subjugate, and marginalize Indigenous peoples and agencies. This historical context exemplifies settler colonialism as a dynamic system of power aimed at dispossessing, subjugating, and marginalizing Indigenous peoples and their agency. Scholars have framed this relationship between Hawaiian Indigenous people and American settlers within a colonizer-colonized paradigm. They argue that terms like 'Native' have been constructed by Western powers to otherize non-Western cultures, portraying them as lacking essential Western virtues (Firth 262). Trask summarizes how Native Hawaiians are marginalized through a colonizer/colonized framework:

> Hawaiians became a conquered people, their land and culture subordinated to another nation. Made to feel and survive as inferiors when their sovereignty as a nation was forcibly ended by American military power, we Hawaiians were rendered politically and economically powerless by the turn of the century. Today, our people continue to suffer the effects of American colonialism even after the alleged democratization of statehood. ("Lovely Hula Lands" 28)

Within this postcolonial space, Hawaiian literature represents the reality of Indigenous marginalization. Scholars exploring Hawaiian literature struggle with defining what qualifies as 'Hawaiian'. This debate centers on whether Hawaiian

literature should be geographically based, encompassing all works from Hawai'i, or thematic, referring to literature that touches upon Hawai'i or Hawaiian culture (Ho'omanawanui 227). The impact of U.S. territorialization has further blurred the concept of 'Hawaiian,' leading to varying terms like 'Indigenous', 'local', and 'regional' being used within literary studies to define Hawaiian literature (Luangphinith 221). As Lui (41-43) states, limiting Hawaiian literature to Native Hawaiian authors may narrow the range of contributions to this rich literary tradition. This paper aligns with Ho'omanawanui's conception of thematic Hawaiian literature, emphasizing the importance of themes and cultural references rather than rigid authorship boundaries.

This paper explores contemporary Hawaiian literature by Alan Brennert and Kristiana Kahakauwila, highlighting their diverse perspectives on the ongoing debate about Hawaiian literature. Alan Brennert, a novelist, screenwriter, and playwright, originally hails from New Jersey but relocated to California in 1973. Despite being an outsider, he has authored several novels set in Hawaii. Notably, his novel *Moloka'i* achieved national bestseller status and was selected as a One Book, One San Diego choice for 2012. It also received the Bookies Award from the Contra Costa Library for the 2006 Book Club Book of the Year. Brennert's subsequent novel, *Honolulu*, garnered First Prize in Elle Magazine's Literary Grand Prix for Fiction and was named one of the best books of 2009 by *The Washington Post*. In an interview, Brennert professes a particular affinity for Hawai'i, stating:

> Well, first and foremost, I love Hawai'i. The first time I set foot there, twenty-four years ago, I felt like I was coming home. The place and the people have drawn me back year after year, and the history of the Hawaiian people holds a particular fascination for me. ("An Interview with Alan Brennert")

Unlike the romanticized depictions by other white authors, Alan Brennert's portrayal of Hawai'i is based on research and local knowledge. His approach included extensive study, with visits to institutions like the State Archives, the Bishop Museum, the Hawai'i Historical Society, and the Honolulu Medical Library. This research provided the historical foundation for his novel *Moloka'i*, particularly in its portrayal of the leper colony in Kalaupapa. Similarly, in his work *Honolulu*, Brennert explores the dichotomy of 1930s Honolulu, where a glamorous, paradise image was exported to the American public. This paradisal imagery was juxtaposed with the struggles of Native Hawaiians and Asian immigrants facing poverty on the plantations ("An Interview with Alan Brennert").

In contrast, Kristiana Kahakauwila is a writer of mixed Hawaiian, German, and Norwegian heritage (*hapa),* which offers a unique insider perspective on contemporary life in Hawai'i. Her literature problematizes the complexities of growing up and living in modern Hawai'i within the context of tourism, development, and globalization. Several of her works, such as "Bridge Jumping" in *Bamboo Ridge: Journal of Hawai'i Literature* (2011) and "Hands" in *Off the Path: An Anthology of 21st Century American Indian and Indigenous Writers* (2015), have been featured in anthologies that celebrate Indigenous literature from America and

the Pacific. Kahakauwila's debut book, *This is Paradise* (2013), presents stories representing Hawai'i's diverse perspectives and landscapes.

This paper highlights how the depiction of Hawai'i in the works of Alan Brennert and Kristiana Kahakauwila challenges and deconstructs the paradisal image often associated with the islands, ultimately presenting Hawai'i as a postcolonial space. This argument aligns with Kamada's exploration of how the authors' subjectivity is closely intertwined with the place's natural and traumatic histories (3). Hawai'i as depicted in the narratives of both authors is intricately woven with the traumatic legacy of colonialism and marginalization.

This paper centers on two critical aspects of how Hawai'i is represented in selected works. First, it examines how Hawai'i's transformation into a tourist destination reflects the commercialization and exploitation of its landscapes and cultural identity. Second, it delineates the traumatic experiences faced by various characters, including exiled lepers in Moloka'i, Korean immigrants, and Native Hawaiians. The paper aims to reveal colonialism's historical and ongoing impacts on Hawai'i by applying postcolonial ecocriticism as the framework. This approach reveals how the paradise myth obscures these groups' struggles and displacements.

2. CHARTING POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM

Postcolonial ecocriticism represents an intersection of ecological criticism and postcolonial studies. This subfield emerged in the early 2000s, with key works such as *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environments* (2010) by Huggan and Tiffin and *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literature of the Environment* (2011) by DeLoughrey and Handley. Mapping postcolonial ecocriticism, Huggan and Tiffin (17) assert that this perspective constitutes a political critique. This ideological position is connected to the fact that both postcolonial studies and ecocriticism are critical theories with advocacy at their core. While postcolonialism examines colonialism's ethical and political impacts, ecocriticism emerged from ecological awareness in the mid-1960s, as expressed by Cilano and DeLoughrey (62). As an intersection of these two foundational theories, postcolonial ecocriticism positions itself as a politically nuanced form of literary criticism. Furthermore, Mukherjee (144) suggests that postcolonial studies should focus on environmental issues like clean water access and land dispossession, while ecocriticism should take a historical perspective on environmental concerns. It can be asserted that postcolonial ecocriticism adds a historical dimension to ecocritical readings by focusing on the impacts of colonialism.

Postcolonial ecocriticism reading on Hawaiian literature scrutinizes the physical transformation of the landscape for tourism. This criticism highlights the historical marginalization of ethnic minorities in the archipelago, revealing the complex interplay of ecological and postcolonial issues. The aspects construe how the representation of Hawai'i in these novels is positioned as a postcolonial space (DeLoughrey and Handley 7-9). Development is crucial in shaping modern tourism

in Hawai'i, replacing traditional relationships focused on sustainability and reciprocity with Western anthropocentric values. Consequently, social and cultural identities are influenced by the tourism industry's dominant values. These values align with the global Western paradigm, as Escobar highlights:

> development was–and continued to be for the most part–a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of progress. (44)

The heavy dependence on the Western development model results in the marginalization of locals from their traditional environmental connections and leads to lasting changes in the local ecology. The narratives portray this transformation through the physical alteration of the Waikiki area, now dominated by hotels and tourist resorts.

Within the postcolonial ecocriticism framework, the marginalization of ethnic minorities legitimized the existence of a "colonizing conceptual structure" (Plumwood, "Decolonizing Relationships with Nature" 51) which defines the non-West as the Other. This framework reinforces Western colonial discourse and perpetuates hierarchical structures in the relations between the colonizers and the colonized. The process of Othering that ensues is underpinned by a dichotomy, with the dominant group positioned at the center and marginalized communities on the periphery (Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthrocentrism" 134). As previously explored, most Western literature about Hawai'i projects a fetishized fantasy focusing on exoticism and romance while ignoring marginalized people's issues. This framework places Western perspectives at the center and relegates Indigenous peoples to the periphery. As a result, both nature and non-Western societies are viewed as interchangeable and expendable in the colonial narrative. Critiquing these hierarchical relations and Othering in postcolonial ecocriticism requires critical reevaluation. The analysis of the representation of marginalized groups will be explored in the subsequent sections.

3. REIMAGINING HAWAI'I: DECONSTRUCTING PARADISE THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

This analysis examines how Hawaiian literature by Native Hawaiians and outsiders deconstructs the trope of Hawai'i as paradise through the intersection of environmental and postcolonial themes. Cilano and Deloughrey (87) emphasize the concept of "aesthetics committed to politics," how environmental issues in colonized regions are tied to the socio-historical changes caused by colonialism. Writers' literary works serve as advocacy by blending imagination and reality in colonized settings. This approach catalyzes social movements and reflects the political aspirations of marginalized communities (Indriyanto, "Beyond the Pastoral" 30). This perspective critiques apolitical white environmental literature for focusing on the human-nature relationship while ignoring racial disparities (Guha 80).

This analysis examines three distinct Hawaiian literature works from the 2000s, differentiating them by the ethnic backgrounds of the authors and their respective authorial positions. The novels *Moloka'i* (2004), *Honolulu* (2009), and *This is Paradise* (2013) deconstruct the idealized image of the archipelago and position their narratives in the historical context of marginalization. Alan Brennert's *Moloka'i* dramatizes the forced exile of lepers to the remote island, highlighting their living conditions and inadequate infrastructure. In *Honolulu*, Brennert portrays Korean immigrants who arrived in Hawai'i seeking a better life but faced racial discrimination among minority plantation workers. Lastly, *This is Paradise* portrays Hawaiian natives as being marginalized in their homeland, as Honolulu's urban development prioritizes visiting tourists' amenities over the needs of the local population. These novels critique paradisal imagery by highlighting Hawai'i's postcolonial realities and addressing ecological and social issues.

Deloughrey emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the historical and racial violence embedded in the environment. This recognition is crucial for understanding how literature represents the geographic elements of these locales (22). Hawaiian literature represents place through the lens of colonial history, showing how nature has been transformed by Western exploitation. In both *Moloka'i* (2004) and *Honolulu* (2009), Brennert represents the transformation of nature, particularly the beaches of Honolulu into tourist destinations. Through narratives spanning decades, Brennert portrays the pristine state of Honolulu in the late 19th century, the emergence of tourism in the early 1900s, and the post-World War II tourism boom. In *Moloka'i*, Brennert represents the historical narrative of the Kalaupapa leper colony through the life of Rachel, who was diagnosed with leprosy at the age of seven and exiled to Molokai. The novel spans several decades, chronicling Rachel's isolation on the island and her eventual return to Honolulu in the 1950s. Through Rachel's eyes, Brennert contrasts the old and new Honolulu, using her reflections on the loss of Old Honolulu, once adorned with the exotic beauty of tropical trees, to capture the city's dramatic transformation:

> Old Honolulu as it was then, as it would never be again. To a visitor, it must have seemed a lush garden of fanciful hybrids: a Florentine-style palace shaded by banyan and monkeypod trees; wooden storefronts flourishing on dusty streets, cuttings from America's Old West; tall New England church steeples blooming above the palm and coconut groves. (Brennert, *Moloka'i* 5)

Brennert captures Honolulu's transformation from a quaint, tree-lined town into a bustling modern city shaped by tourism. Removing trees, recreating swamps, and altering coastlines epitomize the rapid changes that alienate Rachel from her once-familiar hometown.

> The green crown of Diamond Head greeted her like an old friend, but it was a friend quickly lost amid strangers. The city of Honolulu, once a sprinkling of low buildings dwarfed by groves of coconut palms, had erupted far above the treeline and expanded in every direction—even makai, seaward. It seemed to Rachel that the lush garden of her childhood had been pruned of much of its foliage, the

> greenery now merely garlanding block after block of concrete and asphalt. The marshes and duck ponds of Waikiki had been drained. Hotels dotted the familiar crescent of Waikiki Beach. (Brennert, *Moloka'i* 374)

Brennert's narrative serves as a symbolic representation of the shifting natural functions and the physical transformation of the landscape, aligned with the Western anthropocentric paradigm. As the manifestation of anthropocentric thought, this form of ecological imperialism systematically exploits and reshapes the peripheries' local ecosystems for the center's economic welfare (Oppermann 181). This recurring theme continues in another of Brennert's novels, *Honolulu* (2009). Brennert represents the physical changes around Waikiki Beach, one of Hawai'i's popular tourist destinations. The area, once consisting of swamps, rice farming land, and fish ponds, is portrayed as changing, with water channels diverting water to make it suitable for tourism (Feeser and Chan 8-10). Brennert's narrative highlights how the ecological transformation is justified through Western capitalist belief in exploiting nature for the benefit of the white population:

> But there was money to be made from that necklace, and in 1921, dredging began on a canal to divert the three ancient streams emptying into the floodplain. The result was a new, dry Waikiki, where homes both large and small, garden apartments, hotels, and a variety of concessions-even an amusement park-now replaced the old farms and marshes. (*Honolulu* 260)

The anthropocentric mindset driven by a capitalist outlook articulates how Waikiki has profoundly transformed over the past century, evolving from a relatively natural shoreline to a heavily urbanized beachfront area (Wiegel 3). This transformation erased the role this place performed by the *Kānaka*, ecologically and politically. Historically, *Waikīkī* was important during King Kamehameha I's reign as a place to manage the increasing trade activities with the influx of ships (Haley 55-56). Today, the landscape is dominated by massive mega-resorts catering to a wide range of visitors, often overlooking its historical and ecological significance.

In *This is Paradise* (2013), Kahakauwila contextualizes unique perspectives on tourism's influence on Hawai'i residents. She depicts the marginalization of the *Kānaka* in the tourism industry, where ownership and profits primarily benefit the white individuals who control the hotels and other infrastructure (Darowski 1-13). Kahakauwila's narrative underscores the systemic exploitation of Hawai'i's natural beauty while leaving the local population largely unaffected by the increased capital. The central point of the story is told through first-person plural we narration in which the protagonists, the local working-class women of Waikiki, are collectively grouped into the women of housekeeping (Indriyanto, "Deconstructing Paradise" 37). This perspective allows for a more nuanced, localized understanding of tourism in Hawai'i:

> Today we have been cleaning rooms for five hours, since six in the morning. Tucking the bottom sheets at least eight times and disinfecting the sinks and bathtubs. We pause in the hallway. We don't have time to rest, but we do anyway, just for a moment. (Kahakauwila 14)

Kahakauwila critiques the ongoing exploitation of her native heritage for tourism, epitomized by the commercialization of the "aloha spirit" or "aloha culture" (Sasaki 643). This concept reduces Native Hawaiians' ancestral traditions to mere marketing slogans adorned with exotic Polynesian sensuality and hospitality imagery. Kahakauwila emphasizes how the word *aloha* loses its depth, becoming a superficial greeting for tourists. In Hawaiian culture, *aloha* embodies a deep sense of familial and ancestral love rooted in the connection between people and the land (Trask, *From a Native Daughter* 54). In the tourism industry, this concept is reduced to a token gesture, with Waikiki's housekeeping staff required to use the word in every phone call.

> The hotel is strict about a significant number of our activities. They have rules on how to store the carts, what time to punch in, what time to punch out, how to answer the phone (always start with "Aloha"), how to arrange the pillows on the bed, how to report suspicious activity. (Kahakauwila 13)

Kahakauwila's portrayal offers a glimpse into the lives of the *Kānaka* within the tourism industry. Despite the industry capitalizing on the exotic appeal of their homeland, Native Hawaiians have limited opportunities for meaningful career advancement. As a result, many are relegated to roles like housekeepers, hula dancers, and beach boys, focusing on their exotic appeal. Williams and Gonzales analyze this as the commodification of Native Hawaiians, reducing them to symbolic figures serving the tourism industry (690).

In her narrative, Kahakauwila emphasizes Honolulu's alignment with tourism and the American military presence. By portraying *Kānaka* characters working as housekeepers, she critiques the normalized connection between militarization and tourism in Hawai'i. This connection is often perceived as an inherent aspect of life in the islands, as Ireland (xvi) explains, where the American military presence is regarded as a provider of security and order. This intersection of military and tourism leads to venues in Honolulu, including clubs, discos, and bars frequented by tourists and the American military. Her narrative highlights demographic disparities in Honolulu, where residents are marginalized in a city focused on American tourists and the military presence at Pearl Harbor.

> but where else can we go for a strip of bars and clubs? For our friends' band, and the other young locals we will see? Why do we have to share it with all these tourists, military, and college kids. (Kahakauwila 20)

This section examines how selected Hawaiian literature reflects the reality of the Hawaiian archipelago, particularly regarding environmental transformation and tourist-oriented development rooted in the paradisal myth. As a top global tourist destination, Hawai'i's natural charm and exoticism are marketed to attract visitors. Additionally, tourism has co-opted Native Hawaiian culture, including the ethical value of *aloha* to craft a distinctive identity while marginalizing the Indigenous population (Mandelman 174).

4. CONTEMPORARY HAWAIIAN LITERATURE'S PORTRAYAL OF THE OTHERS

In this section, we delineate contemporary Hawaiian literature's portrayal of marginalized Others, specifically exploring the impact of modernity, the stigmatization of leprosy, and the experiences of Asian immigrants. It starts with Alan Brennert's *Moloka'i,* set in late-nineteenth-century Hawai'i, examining the consequences of modernity, including the spread of leprosy and its associated stigma. Continuing, the reading on Brennert's *Honolulu* contrasted the idyllic perception of Hawaii with the reality of labor on sugarcane plantations, narrated from the perspective of a Korean immigrant. Lastly, Kristiana Kahakauwila's argument in *This is Paradise* focuses on the intricate dynamics between native Hawaiians and tourists in a rapidly changing environment. These literary works contextualize the narratives of Hawaii's marginalized populations, viewed as the Other.

Brennert's novel *Moloka'i* unfolds against the historicity of late-nineteenth-century Hawai'i, a period marked by the introduction of modernity and its profound impact on the archipelago. During this era, leprosy emerged as a notable consequence of Hawai'i's transformation. Leprosy was first identified in Hawai'i around the 1850s, coinciding with the rise of the sugar industry and the influx of Asian laborers, particularly from China (Herman 330). Chinese immigrants who came to work in sugarcane plantations were linked to the spread of leprosy, earning it the local nickname *Mai Pake* or Disease from China. The disease's physical disabilities and its perceived contagious nature, along with biblical references, intensified the stigmatization of lepers in Hawai'i. This circumstance led to the enactment of An Act to Prevent the Spread of Leprosy in the 1860s under King Kamehameha V. The act authorized the segregation of leprosy patients and the establishment of an isolation settlement (Kuykendall 73). Consequently, this policy resulted in the exile of lepers to the remote island of Moloka'i, the setting of Brennert's novel of the same name.

The issue of alienation and the societal stigma associated with leprosy is a recurring theme in contemporary Hawaiian literature. *Moloka'i* portrays the discrimination faced by Rachel's family due to leprosy–the fear of the disease as highly contagious leads to their social exclusion and forced relocation. Brennert's narrative illustrates their isolation from their community through their separation from their immediate environment:

> The following Sunday in church. It was as though the family was surrounded by a bubble of air that pushed away anyone who strayed too close: friends and neighbors of long standing greeted them at a comfortable distance, smiling hello but always somehow on their way elsewhere. "That family's dirty." As though their home were a filthy breeding ground for leprosy germs. (*Moloka'i* 51-52)

In *Moloka'i,* leprosy is portrayed as a disease that physically separates families and severs the profound connection between individuals and their homeland in Hawai'i. In other words, it disrupts the fundamental concept of *'ohana* (family) and *'aina* (the land) (Gugelyk and Bloombaum 43). Trask argues that in Hawaiian genealogy, *Papahanaumoku* (earth mother) and *Wakea* (sky father) created the islands. From

these islands came the taro, our progenitor, and from the taro, our chiefs and people (Trask, *From a Native Daughter* 59). Exile, in this context, is viewed as the dissolution of a leper's *'ohana*, breaking the vital link between them, their land, and the gods (Inglis 9). As Amundson and Ruddle-Miyamoto note, "without one's *'ohana* and *'aina*, one was without oneself" (22). Brennert dramatizes the severance of familial ties from both *'ohana* and *'aina* through the following quote:

> Or had they died with yesterday's eve, at the time of their parting from families and friends? It seemed that that had been the actual death for them, for this morning, there were no tears. This morning, confronted with this finality, they had abandoned hope: and hopeless, they stood now, side by side at the rail, a little company of the dead, waiting for the last link with the world to be broken. (*Moloka'i* 52)

In *Honolulu*, Brennert portrays another representation of marginalized Others, the Asian immigrants, to further deconstruct Hawaii as a paradise trope. This portrayal highlights the differing experiences of Hawaii's multi-ethnic community. *Honolulu* presents a viewpoint through a Korean woman who comes to Hawaii hoping to improve her life compared to the circumstances in her Japanese-colonized homeland. Instead, she endured the harshness of plantation labor and the patriarchal Korean labor community until she escaped the plantation and established herself in Honolulu. Through her background, Brennert contextualizes many immigrants' visions of Hawai'i as a tropical paradise promising opportunity to improve their fortunes:

> 'What sort of a place is this Hawai'i?" I asked. "Oh, a beautiful land," Mrs. Kim said with enthusiasm. "A tropical paradise, where food grows so abundantly that if one is hungry, all one needs to do is reach up and pick something off a tree to eat! Money is scarcely needed to live so that it can be returned to one's family in Korea. (*Honolulu* 45)

In *Honolulu*, the narrative unveils the disparity between the idyllic vision of Hawaii as a paradisal archipelago and the challenges immigrants face. Jin, an immigrant from Korea, encounters the reality of laboring on a sugarcane plantation on the O'ahu island. The laborers were subjected to unforgiving labor in Hawaii's tropical climate. Brennert's narrative emphasizes the realities of sugarcane plantation labor, depicting the conditions faced by workers who toil under the scorching sun in the tropical climate. This portrayal highlights the gap between Hawai'i's idealized image and the labor endured by many immigrants like Jin:

> It was also blazingly hot in the open fields, mitigated only somewhat by the calm trade winds. Our wide-brimmed hats made of what the Hawaiians called lauhala, pandanus leaves more than adequately shaded our faces but did nothing to discourage the wasps and mosquitoes that unfailingly found our few inches of exposed flesh or the caterpillars that wriggled up our legs and into our boots. (Brennert, *Honolulu* 83)

The quote highlights that Hawai'i, which is experienced by immigrants and minorities, is far from the paradise often imagined. On the contrary, Hawai'i is an

archipelago where marginalized ethnic labor suffers under the hierarchical plantation society. Female laborers, especially of marginalized ethnic groups, frequently find themselves in subordinate positions. Gender heavily influences labor and resource allocation in plantation societies, often relegating female laborers, especially from marginalized backgrounds, to subordinate roles (Bastos 27).

Unlike many stories by white authors that romanticize Hawaii's landscape, Brennert depicts the reality of plantation labor. In this setting, most workers are immigrants or Native Hawaiians. The diverse workforce allowed colonial powers to enforce divisive policies, such as unequal pay by ethnicity, resulting in strikes and severe oppression (Okamura 23). Brennert reflects on this phenomenon in his narrative, noting that the sugar industry sought to pit one racial group against another, as they did on the plantation by paying different salaries to different nationalities (*Honolulu* 83). This portrayal exposes the exploitation and divisions faced by marginalized groups, further challenging the paradise myth of Hawai'i.

In Kristiana Kahakauwila's novel, *This is Paradise*, a distinct portrayal of marginalized individuals in Hawai'i emerges. The novel focuses on the lives of Native Hawaiians and explores their complex interactions with tourists. Kahakauwila's story reveals how Native Hawaiians struggle with the impact of tourism and the challenges of cultural assimilation. Kahakauwila highlights the clash between traditional Hawaiian culture and the homogenizing forces of globalization, as seen below:

> We look into the hotel, and we can almost understand why here, in Waikīkī, the world appears perfect. The hotel lobbies are brimming with flower arrangements and sticky with the scent of ginger, and the people are beautiful. Tan and healthy, with muscles carved from koa wood and cheeks the color of strawberry guava. These people—our people—look fresh as cut fruit, ready to be caressed and admired. These are people to be trusted. (7)

The narrative shifts from an outsider's perspective to focus on locals in the tourist industry, using we narration to emphasize commonality with the Indigenous people, critiquing their subservient role. These excerpts illustrate the tendency to homogenize and stereotype Native Hawaiians as exotic Others. Kahakauwila's narration provides a satirical and critical commentary on the stereotypical perception of Hawaiian people, often reduced to their physical appearance. Through the eyes of a *Kānaka* housekeeper, the portrayal of Hawaii as an exotic paradise contrasts with the locals' symbolic roles as trusted figures in the tourism industry.

The novel's title, *This is Paradise,* is ironic. The female narrator observes how the paradise once owned by Native Hawaiians is now exploited and controlled by white capitalists for their enrichment. Meanwhile, the local population engaged in the tourist industry finds it increasingly challenging to keep up with the soaring prices. As noted by the narrator, the escalating cost of land ultimately compels Hawaiians to leave the vicinity of Waikiki and seek alternative places to live:

> With two kids, they'll outgrow the tiny cottage in no time, but they'll never be able to afford their place. We also wonder about Laura's resort design, worried that

> another development will push housing prices further upward, making it harder still for our people to remain on their land. "And what about water usage?" Esther demands. (Kahakauwila 14-15)

Tourism entices affluent visitors with South Seas allure while masking the Indigenous struggle behind a facade of paradise. *This is Paradise* exposes hidden racial inequality and tension beneath the paradisal imagery. Using first-person plural narration, the story challenges and subverts the dominant tourist narrative, providing a more authentic insider perspective.

The rapid development of Hawai'i continues to drive the demand for new tourist facilities, including hotels, resorts, villas, and various amenities. In the latest 2022 survey, Hawai'i successfully attracted over 9.2 million visitors (Ide et al. 2). This pattern is linked to neocolonial discourse, exploiting Indigenous people as cheap labor in the tourist industry. They work for minimal wages while playing the role of subservient natives (Khan 4-6). Native Hawaiians and other residents often find themselves in low-paying service jobs catering to tourists. *Kānaka* culture is commodified to fulfill visitors' fantasies of an exotic paradise, even though the paradise no longer belongs to the Native Hawaiians.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, contemporary Hawaiian literature deconstructs the paradise trope by examining the historicity of Hawai'i as a postcolonial space. It reveals the complexities of environmental transformation and tourist-driven development. Hawai'i's popularity as a tourist destination has led to the commercialization of its natural beauty. The tourism industry also exploits Native Hawaiian culture, especially the concept of *aloha,* to create a manufactured identity.

The analysis explores the marginalization of ethnic minorities in Hawai'i, portrayed as the Other. Alan Brennert's *Moloka'i* contextualizes the consequences of modernity and the stigmatization of leprosy. His narration highlights the isolation and disintegration of familial/environmental ties based on *'ohana* and *'aina*. Furthermore, reading of Brennert's *Honolulu* and Kristiana Kahakauwila's *This is Paradise* contrasts the idealized perception of Hawaii as a tropical paradise with the circumstances faced by immigrants and Indigenous people. These works reveal the disparities between paradise myths and actual experiences grounded in the historicity of Hawai'i. In conclusion, contemporary Hawaiian literature unravels the complexities and contradictions of this postcolonial space. The narratives reimagine and redefines Hawaii while deconstructing the paradisal trope.

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