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Pussy, Paradise, and Elephants. Reading the Specter of Western Tourism and Leisure through Thai and Hawaiian Literature

Abstract: "Exoticized" lands of leisure – specifically Thailand and Hawai'i – are sexualized and commodified as heteronormative destinations for Western and "First World" consumption. In this essay, I am particularly interested in the ways that local communities culturally reimagine these "porno-tropical" locations as sites to perform marginally local voices and identities while contesting perverse visions of "paradise" created by Western desires. To do so, I will contextualize and focus on two fictional pieces – *Sightseeing* (2005) by Rattawut Lapcharoensap and *This Is Paradise* (2013) by Kristiana Kahakauwila – that undertake the overlapping discourses of leisure, romance, militourism, and ideas of "paradise" as emerging sites of waste and destruction in the wake of Western tourism and consumption. Drawing upon the political nature of mess and a particular chapter from each one of these book, I aim to think about how "exoticized" lands (particularly Hawai'i and the tropical beach landscapes of Thailand) are archived by locals as vantage points for promoting social justice and ethnic responsibility. Using pieces from the fictional accounts of Lapcharoensap and Kahakauwila, I seek to compare the ways that writers queer the heteronormative approaches to lands and peoples that are gendered and sexually-racialized by the West – especially by the recreational and imperial forces of U.S. militourism. My goal is to foreground how these authors rewrite their communities back into the seemingly post-apocalyptic landscapes of paradise, confronting the ways that the "native" and local identities are superficially erased from the foreigners' touristic view. Through such a discussion, my analysis hopes to uncover how contemporary authors use literature and culture to both navigate their identities as well as dismiss, or "mess-up", the fantasies of paradise, tranquillity, and leisure created by Western desires of exotification and of the tropical "other".

Keywords: *Cultural Studies*, *Hawaiian Studies*, *Postcolonialism*, *Southeast Asian/American Studies*, *Thai Studies*, *Tourism*

> The empire degrades through monetary exchange, leaving quaint Hawaiians dressing as 'natives,' ... nothing amiss in the morass of Paradise.... For the foreigner, romances of 'Aloha,' For Hawaiians, dispossessions of empire. (Haunani-Kay Trask, "Dispossessions of Empire")[1]

> Trust me, it's paradise. This is where the hungry come to feed. For mine is a generation that circles the globe and searches for something we haven't tried before. So never refuse an invitation, never resist the unfamiliar, never fail to be polite and never outstay the welcome. Just keep your mind open and suck in the experience. And if it hurts, you know what? It's probably worth it. (*The Beach*, based on the book by Alex Garland, dir. by Danny Boyle)[2]

In the beginning of 2017, Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, was embroiled in a dispute with Hawaiian land that he purchased, a 700-acre property in Kaua'i. He filed numerous lawsuits against hundreds of Hawaiians – some of whom are dead

[1] Haunani-Kay Trask, *Night Is a Sharkskin Drum* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 35-36.

[2] *The Beach*, directed by Danny Boyle (Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2000), DVD.

and some who possibly had claim to small parcels of land on his huge estate – in order to keep locals and Native Hawaiians off his land while privatizing indigenous land. The charges, processed as "quiet title" suits, were brought about in hopes to establish Zuckerberg's legitimate claim to his purchase, "quietly" challenging those who could potentially threaten the CEO's rights to the land.

It was in 2014 when the co-founder of the world's largest social network and his wife bought land on Kaua'i because they "*fell in love* with the community and the cloudy green mountains" (italicized emphasis mine), where they wanted to "plant roots and join the community [of Kaua'i]" themselves.[3] This romanticized act of purchasing Hawaiian land affirmed the timeless value that many around the world have had with Hawai'i; a fantasy that Hawai'i is paradise with its scenic backdrops, lush foliage, sandy beaches, and deep blue oceans. Such a love affair symbolized Hawai'i as readily open to capitalist enterprise and privatization, as well as mass migration to the small island chain; however, this land grab additionally prompted long histories of American conquest and acquisition of the Hawaiian Islands, dispossessing the Native Hawaiian people at the same time.

In an article written covering Zuckerberg and his lawsuit against Hawaiians, Kapua Sproat, a law professor at the University of Hawai'i, was interviewed stating that "This is the face of neocolonialism", speaking directly to the CEO's actions as just another way that U.S. imperialism has negatively impacted the Islands, separating its people from the land that they hold sacred.[4] Dispossession and the ruthless commoditization of Hawai'i, its people, land, and culture are nothing new as they have been a part of a long lineage of western conquest of the Pacific and of places around the world. Poet and indigenous scholar Haunani-Kay Trask has even argued that "Hawaiian culture is constantly in danger of commercialization".[5] Yet with the purchase and privatization of Hawai'i and scenes of "paradise" come the erasure and silencing of its people, emphasizing colonial narratives that eroticize "virgin" spaces that are always "empty" and open for territorial appropriation.[6]

Similarly, Thailand has continuously been popularized through Western fantasies of the nation as an important hub for recreational tourism for the world, promoting an escapist oriental adventure in Southeast Asia. For instance, *Lonely Planet*, the world's leading travel guide and publishing group, has written to thousands of its followers that "Tropical Thailand offers the gentlest introduction to the Orient, combining images of the exotic – sparking temple spires, sarong-clad farmers bending over rice shoots – with high standards of hygiene ... and most of the comforts of home".[7] In this sense, tourists from around the world can vacation in Thailand and seek out its seemingly anachronistic and "oriental" nature, but, simultaneously, enjoy the modern luxuries of the West as provided by years of development and economic alignment with global capitalism and trends. This sentiment is further echoed in the epigraph that I have laid out above where Hollywood's constructions of Thailand, like *The Beach* (2000), emphasizes Thailand's paradisal and foreign landscape. The monologue spoken by the main

[3] Jon Letman and Julia Carrie Wong, "Hawaiians call Mark Zuckerberg 'the face of neocolonialism' over land lawsuits", *The Guardian*, January 23, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jan/23/mark-zuckerberg-hawaii-land-lawsuits-kauai-estate, accessed January 24 2017.

[4] Letman and Wong, "Hawaiians call Mark Zuckerberg 'the face of neocolonialism' over land lawsuits".

[5] Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 90.

[6] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 30.

[7] Lonely Planet, *Thailand's Islands & Beaches* (Melbourne: Lonely Planet Publications, 1998), 9.

character erases Thai bodies and culture in the wake of Western desire to travel and feast upon the ostensibly foreign; a hunger that creates an uneven relationship between the West and the brown bodies meant to serve those who travel. The rhetoric used also implicates Thailand as a feminized and submissive counterpart to the West, linking Thailand with "sexuality" and unimaginable cravings.[8] To enjoy Thailand or the Hawaiian Islands is to quench the thirsts of travelers who want something beyond their accustomed "normal"; a paradise that is seemingly uninhabited and there for the taking, even at the expense of brown bodies and their legitimate claims over the lands.

I opened with references to both Mark Zuckerberg and Thailand because of the ways in which both Thailand and Hawai'i have come to be racialized, sexualized and territorially reimagined by the West as "anachronistic spaces": a term which, as Anne McClintock writes, refers to colonized, brown bodies and the lands that they inhabit as "archaic 'primitive[s]'" stationed in relation to modernized metropolises and Western states.[9] The reconstruction of Hawai'i and Thailand for imperial desires is meant to appease colonial powers at the expense of brown bodies and their legitimate claims over the lands. In other words, individuals, like Zuckerberg or characters in Hollywood's *The Beach*, want tranquil and exotified paradise without the nuisances of confronting brown, Native or local bodies on their own land. Such claims are further entangled with the erotics of empire, particularly when thinking about the histories of militourism in both places as well as the impact that visual culture has had in creating these sites in the Western imaginary.

In her book, *Aloha America*, Adria L. Imada writes that the erotics of empire, particularly executed by an imperial West, genders a land and its people as "a space disposed to political, military, and tourist penetration".[10] From orientalized and hypersexualized images conceived by popular culture and mass tourism, notions of both Hawai'i and Thailand – both as geopolitical places – have constantly been tied to the intimate, fulfilling sensual and paradisal dreams of an erotic and exoticized brown "Other" – a land, people, and culture written off as primitive and immoral, but simultaneously desirable to vacation to. For one, Hawai'i has continuously been a romance destination. The Islands have been aestheticized by tropical landscapes and the rapturous beauty of the seemingly available Hawaiian "paradise", promising the marketed gestures of "aloha" to those who visit while further invoking "an idea of passivity and penetrability" maintained by imperialist interests.[11] Similarly, Thailand has been depicted in popular imagination as a hedonistic and sexual playground for "First World" nations, producing skewed and licentious imaginings of the kingdom and its people. Such imagery further result in fictionalized and widespread "bad impressions of Thailand" and its citizens to the outside world.[12] These pleasures and the thrill of the unknown are both censored and perversely created in order to appease western and continental fantasies of the Islands and this Southeast Asian nation-state as a desolate and uninhabited escape.

[8] Ryan Bishop and Lillian S. Robinson, *Night Market: Sexual Cultures and the Thai Economic Miracle* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

[9] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 30.

[10] Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits Through the U.S. Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke U. P., 2012), 6.

[11] Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i and the Philippines* (Durham: Duke U. P., 2013), 7.

[12] Krittinee Nuttavuthisit, "Branding Thailand: Correcting the Negative Image of Sex Tourism", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 3.1 (2007), 23.

In this sense, "porno-tropical" perceptions – a key concept from McClintock that discusses the highly sexualized depictions of non-European lands and peoples, emphasizing "a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears" – of each place have been globally disseminated and solidified by foreign views and perceptions that are unlike the experiences and attitudes of the "local" or Native; the latter being seemingly erased from the landscape.[13] As such, my project aims to re-center the narrative of brown bodies that have been categorized as a part of the background to the erotics of empire.

[13] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 22.

Drawing upon this violent suppression of local and "Native" brown bodies, my work aims to examine through comparing the fictional pieces from Thai and Hawaiian authors the ways that particular communities unravel their expected silences in the wake of post-apocalyptic landscapes, forcing tourists to bear witness to their brown labor. I argue that the post-apocalyptic, in this sense, is a concept that can be defined as a site, a state of being, or a method, interrogating the ways that empire and global capitalism have been wreaking havoc in both Hawai'i and Thailand. As such, my attempts to investigate particular works – *Sightseeing* (2005) by Rattawut Lapcharoensap, a Thai/American author, and *This Is Paradise* (2013) by Kristiana Kahakauwila, a native Hawaiian – enables a reimagination and critique of places designated for personal consumption, enlightenment and desire for the Western world and Global North. I read the works of both Lapcharoensap and Kahakauwila as an engagement of local voices that contend with and against the overlapping discourses of leisure, romance, militourism, and ideas of "paradise" as emerging sites of heteronormative waste and destruction; places left in disarray in the wake of Western tourism and consumption. These writers' *local* re/inscriptions are a *queering* of the imperial construction of paradise as a space, a time, a place, and an imaginative anachronism. With a strong focus on a chapter from each book, I aim to think about how "exoticized" lands (particularly Hawai'i and the tropical beach landscapes of Thailand) are archived by locals as vantage points for promoting defiance and ethnic responsibility. I seek to compare the ways that these writers queer the heteronormative approaches to lands and peoples, gendered and sexually-racialized by the West. My goal is to foreground how these authors rewrite their communities back into the seemingly post-apocalyptic landscapes of paradise, confronting the ways that the "native" and local identities are superficially erased from the foreigners' touristic view. Through such a discussion, my analysis hopes to uncover how contemporary authors use literature and culture to both navigate their identities as well as dismiss, or "mess-up", the fantasies of paradise, tranquility, and leisure created by Western desires of exotification and of the tropical "Other".

Gendering Tourism and the Nation-State: Thailand and Hawai'i

The "modern" Thai nation was constructed to ensure its national autonomy and participation in the global sphere; however, a key part of this national project was dependent on the gendered and sexualized ways in which this modernization played out. As the labor market began to expand in the more industrialized capital of Bangkok, many rural Thais, particularly women, migrated to the city to find both cultural and economic opportunities not afforded to them in the provinces. Since many of these women were young, poor, and uneducated, they were vulnerable to poor working conditions and subject to different kinds of gendered exploitation. From Bangkok retail, urban nightlife, to the Go-Go bars, Thai (female) sexuality became fundamental to the ways that global market systems shaped intimate identities and their relationships to the nation-state and the world. Attempts to modernize in the global economy thus drastically drew upon the "intimate realms of daily life", producing a feminized view of Thainess and its gendered association within modern capitalism.[14]

To understand the impact of tourism on Thailand is to undertake the origins of Thailand's hospitality and tourism industry which stemmed from the nation's support for U.S. policy in South Viet Nam, providing bases for U.S. armed forces. During this time, a number of major air bases were constructed in the beginning of 1961, and the inflow of U.S. military spending was equivalent to 4% of gross national product (GNP) or around 26% of exports in 1965–72.[15] As the U.S. military utilized Thailand for tactical reasons during the War, feminized and gendered views of Thainess became simultaneously exacerbated in 1967 when the Thai government struck a deal with the United States to provide rest and recreation (R&R) services to American servicemen during the Viet Nam War. The "R&R Treaty" codified an alliance between Thailand and the U.S. ensuring American servicemen were given access to sexual services during the Viet Nam War by the endorsement of U.S. sex colonialism in Thailand.[16] Entangled with the treaty was a problematic promotion that many Thai women were employed to serve as temporary "breaks" from the daily psychological and physical struggles of war to which, as some scholars have pointed out, generated sex work as a kind of diplomatic relationship between two countries.[17] When the Viet Nam War ended, civilian sex tourist replaced American soldiers, cementing sex work as a key part of Thai livelihood. With encouragement from the World Bank, 1970s tourism in Thailand capitalized on the already existing "entertainment"[18] and service sectors, including sex tourism became one of Thailand's booming industries.[19] Today sex and prostitution are seen as part of the cultural fabric of Thailand as well as the ways that the Thai nation-state and its people have become feminized in the shadow of Western patriarchy.[20] This sexualization further paved the way for Thailand to become gendered and commodified as "paradise" or the "promised land" for foreigners, expatriates, and travelers worldwide.[21]

Equally, the image of Hawai'i and its people has been cultivated as intimately "soft" and "kind".[22] Haunani-Kay Trask writes that "Above all, Hawai'i is 'she,' the

[14] Ara Wilson, *Intimate Economies of Bangkok: Tomboys, Tycoons, and Avon Ladies in the Global City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 8.

[15] Porphant Ouyyanont, "The Vietnam War and Tourism in Bangkok's Development, 1960–70", *Southeast Asian Studies*, 39.2 (September 2001), 157–187.

[16] Elizabeth Rho-Ng, "The Conscription of Asian Sex Slaves: Causes and Effects of U.S. Military Sex Colonialism in Thailand and the Call to Expand U.S. Asylum Law", *Asian Law Journal, Inc.*, 7 (2000), 109.

[17] See Katharine H.S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia U. P., 1997); and Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

[18] When discussing sexualized forms of entertainment in Thailand, an interesting fact to note, as author Scot Barmé notes in his book *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand*, is that one of the "sex show" – a kind of erotic entertainment often assumed to have developed in relation to the Viet Nam War and R&R – emerged as a staple in Bangkok nightlife in the early 1920s.

[19] Jacqueline Sánchez Taylor, "Sex Tourism and Inequalities", in Stroma Cole and Nigel Morgan, eds., *Tourism and Inequality: Problems and Prospects* (Wallingford: CABI, 2010), 49.

[20] Nuttavuthisit, "Branding Thailand", 24.

[21] Chris Pirazzi and Vitida Vasant, *Thailand Fever: A Road Map for Thai-Western Relationships* (Bangkok: Paiboon Poomsan Publishing, 2004), 220-22.

[22] Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 137.

Western image of the Native 'female' in her magical allure.... This fictional Hawai'i comes out of the depths of Western sexual sickness that demands a dark, sin-free Native for instant gratification between imperialist wars.... Tourists flock to my Native land for escape, but they are escaping into a state of mind while participating in the destruction of a host people in a Native place".[23] These sensual images have been conjured up by American and Western imperialism as well as the ongoing dominance of corporate tourism in Hawai'i as the lands, the culture, and the people have been unabashedly marketed as an island destination for escape, fantasy, and intimacy.

[23] Ibid.

Much of the hypersexual and gendered nature associated with the Hawaiian people, their culture and lands have been produced by ongoing histories of Western depictions of the indigenous community as sensual, uncontained, and licentious. Many stereotypes were associated with women as they and, by association, their culture were seen as excessively sexual and unrestrained, seemingly established by misinterpreted views of hula performances, polyamorous relationships, and a disregard of the rigid constructions of domesticity.[24] Backward depictions of the Islands of Hawai'i and its people would be further propelled in popular literature when American writers, such as Mark Twain, relegated Hawaiians and their lands to "the sphere of the erotic and the dying past".[25] Twain's opinions of the Hawaiian Islands would be joined by other writers and propelled as performance pieces at the World's Fair when hula and young Hawaiian women served as analogues to the Islands as well as serving the interests of eroticism of empire.[26] Such savage and primordial portrayals of Hawai'i would be long lasting as American imperialism and capitalist interests in the form of commercialized tourism would exploit the Native people as "artifacts to the First World".[27]

[24] Amy Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empiree: In the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U. P., 2002), 67.

[25] Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 68.

[26] Imada, *Aloha America*, 67.

[27] Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 17.

Today's Hawai'i is a territorially incorporated and militarized extension of the United States where, as Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez pointedly emphasizes, *the imperial encounter* between both places was and continues to be an inevitable meeting of civilized people with the apparent savages of the world; a meeting that destroyed and altered the land, its people, and cultures by Western powers, further cultivating tourism while adhering to the interests of global capitalism.[28] Consequently, mass and commercial tourism in Hawai'i have become a bedrock in the fiftieth state where it is a multibillion-dollar industry, being the largest contributor to the state's gross domestic product and representing 21 percent of its entire economy.[29] The historically constructed fantasy of the Islands as a feminized and tender "Other" still exists as cultural markers, bodies, and terminologies, like "aloha", have been employed in a constant peddling of all things Hawaiian; an economic transaction that distorts its very meaning.[30] This illusion of "paradise" is thus continually sold to the foreign traveler as an excuse to visit the archipelago, promoting a corporatized and imperial concoction of market capitalism. Furthermore, though statistics show that commercial tourism benefits the Islands in many ways, the reality is also that it is destructive, displacing many poor individuals, including

[28] Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise*, 12.

[29] Reid Wilson, "Hawaii's $14 billion tourism industry back to pre-recession levels", *The Washington Post*, September 27, 2013. Web https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2013/09/27/hawaiis-14-billion-tourism-industry-back-to-pre-recession-levels/?utm_term=.633e6c61a266.

[30] Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise*, 38.

oppressed Native Hawaiian people. Mass tourism to Hawai'i serves the state's population unequally and, moreover, its promotion and development worldwide has been controlled and directed by the wealth and power of those aiming to make money.[31]

As a marketed paradisal landscape, Hawai'i has been a temporary escape for millions around the world; yet, due to global capitalism's impact on the Islands as well as international investments, numerous Native Hawaiian and indigenous communities living there are faced with tense socioeconomic, political, and cultural troubles. Trask writes that "tourism is a new form of exploitation.... Native Hawaiian people suffer the most; their culture has been increasingly threatened; their beaches and even their sacred sites have been taken over or intruded upon in order to build tourists resorts and related developments".[32] Additionally, and increasingly in recent years, homelessness and housing issues in Hawai'i have further become heartbreakingly real issue for the Islands. As new hotels are constructed and luxury condominiums and high-rises proliferate amidst the tropical landscape, thousands of individuals remain homeless and housing prices are far out of reach for many local families; so much so, that in 2015, governor David Y. Ige called for the state's homelessness issue a "state of emergency".[33] As such, the picturesque landscape of a Hawaiian paradise is fraught with social, economic, political, and cultural disparities that benefit a few, and are off the backs of the most exposed and vulnerable.

[31] Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 246.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Adam Nagourney, "Aloha and Welcome to Paradise. Unless You're Homeless", *The New York Times*, June 3, 2016. Web https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/04/us/hawaii-homeless-criminal-law-sitting-ban.html?_r=0, accessed January 4 2017.

Messy Archives: Uncovering the Burdens of Things and Brown Lives

As I have tried to illustrate above, Hawai'i and Thailand have been archived as uncontainable, "porno-tropical" lands and cultures for heteronormatively Western desires and play; however, if we were to examine fictional works as counter-narratives to such portrayals, we can see the ways that particular voices lend hand to reconceptualizing histories of these spaces as racialized and sexually charged. In this sense, I draw upon Martin Manalansan's concept of the "mess" as a way to ultimately queer heteronormative structures of power and leisure within both sites, reorienting the ways in which we see particular spaces, cultures, and peoples as imagined by imperial forces of Western – but, in particular, American – colonization.[34] The use of Manalansan's idea of "messing up" the archive redeploys culture and memory, refocusing our attentions to "the mundane, banal, and ordinariness of ... experience and its mercurial often intractable qualities".[35] In this sense, the fictional works of Lapcharoensap and Kahakauwila offer the readers a glimpse into the everyday lives of locals and "Natives" whose racialized labor is used to clean up the disorder of the post-apocalyptic landscapes left by foreign and Western tourism in Hawai'i and Thailand.

[34] Martin F. Manalansan IV, "Mess, Migration, and Queer Lives", in Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici, eds., *Queering Archives: Historical Unwavelings* (Durham, NC: Duke U. P., 2014), 94.

[35] Ibid., 98.

I am interested in the ways in which some works of literature penned by both

Hawaiian and Thai authors engage the queer act of "messing up" heteronormative, Western desires and fantasies. Drawing upon this, this essay comparatively looks at two chapters that speak to themes emphasizing the quotidian, intimate and sometimes ephemeral spaces of brown labor and brown bodies, honoring the everyday work of locals and those clearly erased from the tourists' view. These moments disrupt the fantasy and calm spectacle of paradise that the Western world and white touristic gaze prefers to see. These messy moments, thus, refocus the complexities of racialized work by focusing on brown labor, agency, and autonomous desire.

Writing Dangerously: Kahakauwila's *This Is Paradise* and Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing*

Kristiana Kahakauwila's *This Is Paradise* is a rich collection of Hawaiian short stories that speak to grand narratives – class and labor, sex, love, loneliness, as well as family and belonging – in the context of the Native Hawaiian, indigenous, and diasporic experience. For example, her title chapter, "This is Paradise", follows the lives of women across the Pacific who are employed as housekeepers for various hotels in Waikīkī and their experiences with tourists from around the world who come to search for an exotic getaway. Their collective narrative is both intimate and voyeuristic as they confide in one another as well as the reader of their experiences working in the service industry in addition to their relationships to travelers vacationing on the Islands. These women speak of the ways that Hawai'i is evolving to meet the needs of global and market capitalism, referring to the ongoing impacts of development and militourism on the Islands. They speak of their dreams of their children, the hopes that they have for the future, their camaraderie, as well as enjoyment of each other's company – especially in a scene at a bar. The story is highly conversational as it is personal in terms of the ways that these women speak of their relationships to one another, to the guests of the hotel, as mothers, and as diasporic subjects of the Pacific.

Particularly worthy of critical attention, in Kahakauwila's opening chapter, are the highly intimate moments that she captures in relation to the women, their labor, and others around them. For example, one instance is shown when the laboring women discuss the daily chores of working in the hotel industry and the kinds of things left behind by tourists. One character internally ponders,

> We, the women of Housekeeping, get left other things, too, but by accident. The Japanese leave behind useful items: tubes of sunscreen, beach floaties, snorkel gear, unopened boxes of cereal, half-filled bottles of American whiskey, brand-new packets of travel tissues decorated with Choco-Cat and Hello Kitty, which our youngest girls love....
> What mainland Americans leave behind makes us blush: used condoms under the bed, a turquoise bra with thick cups like soup bowls, pornographic

> magazines. We find a single blue sandal, a hairbrush tangled with yellow hair, a vibrating toothbrush, a stuffed bear with a missing arm and glass eyes. Such intimate pieces to forget.[36]

[36] Kristiana Kahakawwila, *This is Paradise: Stories* (New York: Hogarth, 2013), 11.

This moment emphasizes the imperial memorabilia left behind in the wake of tourism and recreational travel. Though objects such as travel tissues, floaties, sunscreen, unused alcohol, used condoms, and other miscellaneous items are written off as mundane and unimportant, there is something to be noted about the wasteful remnants of imperial pleasure left behind in the wake of leisurely travel. In other words, important about this moment in relation to the discarded items are the kinds of intimately imperial marks that tourists, as extensions of Western empire, leave behind in a land that is never theirs to inhabit. Though spoken of in different contexts, such discarded objects eerily remind us of what Isabelle Pelaud spoke of as "'transnational debris' – the discarded, disconnected, and dysfunctional 'unchosens' – that emerge from the brutal dislocations produced by war, colonization, and globalization and that inhabit life's social margins".[37] The objects left behind remind workers of the presence of imperial subjects and those who superficially hold an air of privilege and affluence in terms of their ability to travel and vacation. How is it possible to look at such mundane ephemera as colonial waste, reminding communities who are left to "clean up" of the ways that recreational tourism promotes colonial leisure and a disregard of the destination? The ways in which communities, like the women of Housekeeping, collect and muddle through the discarded belongings of travelers and those ambivalent to brown labor are the ways in which said bodies confront the recreational legacy and carelessness brought upon by global capitalism and travel as well as the desires to stake claims in the world through tourism.

[37] Yen Lê Espiritu, "Thirty Years AfterWARd: The Endings That Are Not Over", *Amerasia Journal* , 31.2 (2005), xviii.

Similarly, Rattawut Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing*, like Kahakauwila's book, envisions Thainess and the Thai nation-state in the wake of European, American, and foreign visions of Thai "porno-tropicality". For example, "Farangs", Lapcharoensap's prizewinning opening chapter in a collection of short stories, revolves around a Thai teenager who, throughout the entire story, pines for the affections of an American girl already attached to a highly boisterous boyfriend; however, some of the more interesting moments of the chapter involve conversations with the main character and his jaded Thai mother, the owner of a motel in Thailand. For instance, the chapter begins with the teenager and his mother discussing the different kinds of clientele that come to their beach resort during the various seasons. He notes:

> Ma says, 'Pussy and elephants. That's all these people want.' She always says this in August, at the season's peak, when she's tired of farangs running all over the Island, tired of finding used condoms in the motel's rooms, tired of guest complaining to her in five languages. She turns to me and says, 'You give them history, temples, pagodas, traditional dance, floating markets, seafood curry,

> tapioca desserts, silk-weaving cooperatives, but all they really want is to ride some hulking gray beast like a bunch of wildmen and to pant over girls and to lie there half-dead getting skin cancer on the beach during the time in between.[38]

[38] Rattawut Lapcharoensap, *Sightseeing: Stories* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 2.

Like Kahakauwila's "This is Paradise", "Farangs" opens by discussing the intimate point of collision where tourists, the local Thai labor force, and orientalized fantasies of what Thailand offers or represents intersect. From imperial waste and memorabilia to images of Thailand that are easily consumed through tour book definitions, the mother's poignant remark, stating that what all tourists want from Thailand are "Pussy and elephants", is a direct critique of the ways that the Thai kingdom has come to exemplify a hedonistic playground or a "sexual Disneyland to the world"[39] to predominantly Western and "First World" countries, portraying a seemingly "lush" and wild landscape as promoted by nationally-sanctioned projects – like the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).[40] So it is of no surprise that Thailand has become and continues to be a beacon for global tourism where the industry is one of the nation's "major revenue earners".[41]

[39] Elizabeth Rho-Ng, "The Conscription of Asian Sex Slaves", 103.

[40] ASEANUP, "Promoting Tourism in Amazing Thailand", https://aseanup.com/promoting-tourism-amazing-thailand/, accessed 10 June 2017.

[41] Lonely Planet, *Thailand's Islands & Beaches*, "Tourism & the Environment", 20.

I draw upon this brief moment between Lapcharoensap's main character and his mother because of what she divulges to her son: a portrait of Thais who are jaded and exhausted by the constant bombardment of tourism in the kingdom. She paints a picture that reprimands tourists for not wanting an "authentic" Thai experience, but, more so, the illusions of an Oriental spectacle promoted in the popular imaginary. The mother's main point is that tourists do not seek out Thailand for Thailand, but, for instance, the popularized display shown in contemporary media – such as Hollywood's interpretation of the Southeast Asian nation. As such, the desire for such a distilled and highly produced image of Thailand is sought and more aligned with an orientalized promise of adventure, forbidden pleasures, and sexual desires free from moral constraint. Such images relate to Hollywood's "Asia" which, as scholar Gina Marchetti explains, is a "romance with Asia [that] tends to be a flirtation with the exotic rather than an attempt at any genuine intercultural understanding".[42]

[42] Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1.

The mother's sentiment relaying that what all the tourists long for from Thailand are elephant rides, women, and beaches is equally defined by the commentary with which Rattawut Lapcharoensap opens "Farangs". He writes that the main character and his mother count down the days and note the different seasons by citing the various kinds of experiences that they have with passing tourists of all ethnicities and races. Lapcharoensap notes that in June:

> the Germans come to the Island – football cleats, big T-shirts, thick tongues – speaking like spitting. July: the Italians, the French, the British, the Americans.... Americans are the fattest, the stingiest of the bunch. They may pretend to like pad thai [sp] or grilled prawns or the occasional curry, but twice a week they need their culinary comforts, their hamburgers and their pizzas. They're also the worst drunks. Never get too close to a drunk American. August brings the

> Japanese. Stay close to them. Never underestimate the power of the yen. Everything's cheap with imperial monies in hand and they're too polite to bargain. By the end of August, when the monsoon starts to blow, they're all consorting, slapping each other's backs, slipping each other drugs, sleeping with each other, sipping their liquor under the pink lights of the Island's bars. By September they've all deserted, leaving the Island to the Aussies and the Chinese, who are so omnipresent one need not mention them at all.[43]

[43] Lapcharoensap, *Sightseeing*, 1-2.

Thailand, according to the author and his characters, has further become and is cemented as a hedonistic playground for the outside world. There is a disregard to the sensitivity and authenticity of the place, a silencing of the local community and culture when the tourists come to visit. The ways in which the experiences of the global tourists are seemingly honored and their tastes, such as in food, are made accessible in a foreign land writes how local identities and cultures are muted and hybridized to structures of foreign power and capital. Silencing thus becomes a form of imperial translation and native cultures become palatable or easily indulged by foreign interests. In her discussion on the discourses of seduction and silencing, Lynn Thiesmeyer writes that the acts of silencing "takes several forms, among them censorship, distortion, displacement, disinterest, and death".[44] Though her article discusses the discourses of silencing in regards to sex work and sexploitation of the Asian female body, we can discern similarities as Thailand is gendered as female, constructed to appease the heteronormative and patriarchal desires of the West. Thus, the acts of privileging "more comfortable" wants and enjoying the local scenery in the ways that it is made easily digestible are acts of censorship, distortion, and silencing to appease the desires of the tourist in Thailand. These acts further implicate such destinations as feminized and "open for business" as seemingly patriarchal nations and, by extension, their citizens trek across oceans and time zones to partake in the degradation and superficial nature of touristic travel.

[44] Lynn Thiesmeyer, "The West's 'Comfort Women' and the Discourses of Seduction", in Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Larry E. Smith, and Wimal Dissanayake, eds., *Transnational Asia Pacific: Gender, Culture, and the Public Sphere* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 70.

Yet, the fact that Lapcharoensap and his characters note such disregards and excess redefines the kinds of boundaries between tourists and brown labor. The Thai bodies that the author writes about thus exist beyond the packaged deal of travel and leisure purchased by those who come to vacation in exotic beach getaways. The ways that Rattawut Lapcharoensap's characters bookmark the excessive and ostensibly animalistic and uncivilized behaviors of tourists reorganize the gaze from the vacationer to the local and the working-class labor in the Global South. There is subversive agency in the ways that Lapcharoensap and his protagonists make note of what the Thai culture and landscape can offer as opposed to what travelers truly want and crave. Their notable and reprimanding perceptions of visitors who come to vacation and create an apocalyptic landscape through their participations in a fantasy paradise demonstrate the kind of mess that Manalansan describes as marshalling new techniques to "funking up and mobilizing new understandings of stories, values, objects, and space/time

arrangements".[45] The experience of the tourist or visitor is not the privileged one, but instead, and more importantly, on the foreground is the voice and the agency of those meant to retreat into the background as hired help and labor.

Another key motif that has emerged in both fictional pieces is the way that global communities, particularly the West, see both Thailand and the Hawaiian Islands as sites dedicated to accommodating foreign interests, desires, and bodies. For instance, Hawai'i has been continuously marketed as the land of "aloha", a term of reciprocal love and generosity, whereas the value of the term and ideology has been cheapened and misconstrued to appease mass tourism. In Kahakauwila's book, the women of Housekeeping are described in one scene as enjoying a night out at one of the local bars in Waikīkī. They spend their moments drinking and gossiping while surveying the crowd, socializing with local folks they know. A sports game is on, but, as the women mention to themselves, such a game is "always on" as it doubles for the bar being a sexualized harvesting ground for both locals and tourists.[46]

Amidst it all, the women of Housekeeping direct their gaze to one tourist in particular: Susan, a "haole" girl from the continent.[47] The women describe Susan as barely twenty-one, wearing a tank-top with a neon orange skirt. As she bends over, the top of her pink thong shows, exposing itself to the women and all of those at the bar. The women note that Susan is in a hurry; she is in a rush to pair herself off with one of the available men at the establishment as to enjoy her night in "paradise" and its promises of escapism through physical desire.

As Susan sizes up the room and takes in all that is in front of her, the women of Housekeeping begin to drink and the bar manager, being one of their friends, lines up shots of alcohol for the women – including one for this young woman from the "mainland". Susan hurriedly gulps down the shot and thanks both the women and the bar manager for their hospitality. "Thanks for sharing", she says. However, Lani, one of the women, annoyingly retorts "She not one of us, her", loud enough for Susan to hear.[48] Rejected and possibly confused, the young girl from the continent leaves, whispering annoyingly to her brother, "'*Everyone talks about aloha here, but it's like Hawaiians are all pissed off. They live in paradise. What is there to be mad about*'" (emphasis mine)?[49] This young girl's reproach stuns the women as they look at each other, the heat of anger and annoyance rising to their faces. In their minds they reply that "[their] families are barely affording a life here, the land is being eaten away by developers, the old sugar companies still control water rights. *Not only does paradise no longer belong to us*, but we have to watch foreigners destroy it. *We have plenty of aloha for someone who appreciates it. We have none for a girl like this*" (emphasis mine).[50]

This highly intimate moment is of interest as it plays up to the fantasies and misconceptions of the term "aloha" and Hawaiian culture, simultaneously engaging discussions of who owns language and culture and who is able to define it – especially in terms of indigenous and Native communities. Haunani-Kay Trask

[45] Manalansan, "Mess, Migration, and Queer Lives", 99.

[46] Kahakauwila, *This Is Paradise*, 18.

[47] Like "farang", the Hawaiian term "haole" denotes a person who is not Native Hawaiian; a foreigner or white person.

[48] Kahakauwila, *This Is Paradise*, 22.

[49] Ibid., 22-23.

[50] Kahakawwila, *This Is Paradise*, 23.

writes, "Because of colonization, the question of *who* defines *what* is Native, and even *who* is defined as Native has been taken away from Native peoples by Western-trained scholars, government officials, and other technicians. This theft in itself testifies to the pervasive power of colonialism ... and [the] sometime vicious denials by the dominant culture".[51] Susan's declaration that "aloha" should be a given when visiting the Hawaiian Islands is a blatant disregard of the histories of colonization and cultural theft that continues to impact the Hawaiian people, their indigenous cultures and languages. In saying that "Everyone talks about aloha here", Susan and those who claim to know the nature of the term open up the borders of definition beyond Hawaiian ownership of the language and its meanings; language thus becomes porous and is impacted by anyone who desires to wield it. The term is cheapened and constructed by dominant discourses as a subversive act that "aloha-giving innocents" should give freely by acting out particular performative codes of conduct.[52] If locals and Native communities do not perform said depictions of Hawaiian openness and hospitality, benevolent signs of obedience and civilization, what is left are the antiquarian images of Hawai'i and its people as excessive, uncontainable, and primitive.

[51] Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 43.

[52] Noelani Arista and Judy Kertész, "Aloha Denied", *The Hawaiian Independent*, February 25, 2014, Web http://hawaiiindependent.net/story/aloha-denied, accessed February 3, 2017.

These westernized ideas of "aloha", images of Hawai'i as "an eternal paradise", in addition to the assumed savage and primitive nature of "Hawaiianness" only lend hand to the romantic ideal facilitated by years of American occupation and imperial commercialization. In this sense, the U.S. is defined as an overbearing male protectorate in relation to a feminized and all-giving Hawai'i. Such a relationship builds upon the idea that "Hawaiianness" is ornamental to the West, providing only entertainment and leisure to neocolonial projects and interests. Susan, in denouncing the fact that she was not treated with the expected "aloha" by local brown bodies, reaffirms her role as a white woman of privilege and power, extending U.S. imperial agency and domesticity across its continental borders.

Comparatively, Rattawut Lapcharoensap's opening chapter, "Farangs", delicately crafts a moment where the main character attempts to woo his love interest, Lizzie, the American tourist, with a day of riding aging elephants in a Thai forest. As they approach "MR. MONGKHON'S JUNGLE SAFARI", Lapcharoensap's protagonist and Lizzie are confronted by the establishment's owner, Uncle Mongkhon, who, in Thai, reprimands Lizzie for wearing only a bikini to his business. He yells to the Thai teenager, "Tell that girl to put on some clothes. You know damn well I don't let bikinis ride. This is a respectable establishment".[53] Mongkhon goes on to say,

[53] Lapcharoensap, *Sightseeing*, 11.

> "Need I remind you, boy, that the elephant is our national symbol? Sometimes I think your stubborn farang half keeps you from understanding this. You should be ashamed of yourself. I would tell your ma if it wouldn't break her heart....
>
> 'What if I went to [Lizzie's] country and rode a bald eagle in my underwear, huh?' he continued, pointing at Lizzie. 'How would she like it? Ask her, will

you?'"[53]

The young teen tries to pacify the owner by telling Lizzie that Uncle Mongkhon is making a big deal out of nothing, and that it really is not a problem at all. Mongkhon, as a person still attempting to sell elephant rides to tourists, interjects and directly says to Lizzie, "Not a big problem, madam. Just a small one".[54] Lapcharoensap's central character, in hopes to appease both Uncle and Lizzie's mild embarrassment, removes his own shirt so that his female companion can cover herself as they continue on with the ride.

[54] Ibid.

The moment and exchange are quick and seemingly trivial; however, if we carefully untether the scene, what can be clearly discussed are the ways in which tourism directs how locals and their communities adhere to foreign and touristic needs. The scene is striking as it depicts the kinds of power dynamics engaged in lands written by the West as key spots for leisure. More precisely, while Lizzie is reprimanded for wearing a bikini while attempting to ride a revered creature in Thailand, she is also somewhat pardoned by Uncle, critical of the girl's appearance and the exposure of her body; through the slight ease on his critique, he symbolically emphasizes Thailand's personified image of "land of the smiles" and its supposed openness towards foreigners. Despite the fact that it is a major feature for the character and, by extension, Thailand that people – whether Thai or not – are to be appropriately clothed and behaved while in the presence of a highly regarded animal, Uncle Mongkhon softens his critique when comforting Lizzie about her semi-bare body. This calls to our attention the seemingly superimposed idea and sociocultural constructed notion of Thais adhering to the concept of "saving face" and having "náam jai", kindness or thoughtfulness, towards one another and, through nationally-sanctioned projects and projections, towards visitors. In *Thailand Fever*, a complexly problematic "how-to" book about understanding Thai and Western relationships, the co-authors write that "Thais place great value on [an] orderly society and maintaining a peaceful face to society – relatively more than Westerners do. Avoiding confrontation and maintaining face sometimes even take priority over telling the truth, which they rarely do in Western cultures".[55] Such rhetoric emphasizes a perception of Thais' overarching desire to be non-confrontational, avoiding any forms of tension or disrespect towards others even at the risk of sacrificing and muddling their own longings.

[55] Pirazzi and Vasant, *Thailand Fever*, 84.

As written in *Sightseeing* and further emphasized in supplemental texts like *Thailand Fever*, the idea of saving face or "náam jai", although traditionally useful and very real in defining Thai personhood, have thus become hegemonic strategies established by the state and society to control Thai citizens; this strategy further imparts to the world the perverse mentality that Thailand is all accommodating and hospitable. Such motions of Thai openness and willingness to make sacrifices while extending hospitality to friends and strangers only accentuate the inequality between Thais and others, further promoting that, in the end, Thais believe that all

things are acceptable. This idea is eerily similar to the evolved and perverse uses of the Hawai'i's "aloha" as something to be "demanded or commanded" by the foreigner as a spectacle of brown servitude or domestication.[56] The fact that these cultural feelings and local practices have been used to foster a fantasy of brown subjugation within the contexts of Thai and Hawaiian tourism emphasizes not necessarily a disposition to participate, but, more violently, the colonial theft and imperial misuse of local traditions and beliefs.

[56] Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 141.

Additionally, Lizzie wearing a bikini is symbolically loaded in its relationship to the scene as a whole. Thailand is very open and liberal in some respects; however, in the intersections of gender and decency, nudity and exposure in the nation-state are highly frowned upon as the kingdom is still quite conservative and guided by a royalist elite and "paternal rule".[57] Although it is problematic to compare codes of conduct and modesty between nations, the fact that Uncle Mongkhon disapproves of Lizzie wearing a bikini underlines the ways that women are sexualized and even demonized, thus making reductive gender equality in Thailand. Lizzie's bikini highlights the portrayal by Thailand, in some cases, of the West as "'sex mad' (*ba sek*), and Westerns in Bangkok find themselves stereotyped as libertines guided by an anachronistic 1960s philosophy of 'free sex.'"[58] The conflation of Lizzie with this stereotype produces differing modes of exploitation and gender inequity in regards to how gender and sexuality are policed or believed to be performed in and for the nation-state. In *Thailand Fever*, the coauthors, an American and a Thai woman, both observe that women – especially Thai women – are held to a different standard in terms of public and private spheres. They say that "[The Thai woman] is heavily pressured in society to look and act modest and chaste. To be seen as a 'good' woman, she dresses conservatively and acts politely and deferentially".[59] While such forms of regulatory control on gender performance and identity are problematic and, at times, seen as oppressive, Lapcharoensap's deliberate interest in underlining Lizzie, her bikini, and Uncle Mongkhon's reaction speak to the kinds of gender constructions created both in Thailand as well as the differing attitudes at play within Thai gender discourse.

[57] Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 235.

[58] Peter A. Jackson and Nerida M. Cook, *Genders & Sexualities in Modern Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), 19.

[59] Pirazzi and Vasant, *Thailand Fever*, 116.

Bearing Witness: Fiction as Writing One's Own Literary Tradition and History

The purpose of comparing these two fictional accounts is not to rehash Manichean discourses incurred in the aftermath of tourism, but, rather, to privilege the gaze of local communities in the stir of Western tourism's post-apocalyptic landscape. For mainstream tourism to work, it needs, amongst many things, the perverse gaze of the tourist to frame and continually look upon a people, their nation, and their culture under a disassociated guise. The fantasy constructed through this torrid veil is one that equally romanticizes people of color and their lands while Orientalizing them as non-Western and unable to fit into modernist views of what is deemed to be "normal". Correspondingly, this essay thus attempted to examine two specific

fictional accounts written from individuals located in particular regions and communities. Their works came out of racialized histories that critically engaged long histories of imperial tourism and participation upon the land, further investing in local and brown voices that offer counter-narratives to dominant discourse.

In privileging the fictional and diasporic works of Lapcharoensap and Kahakauwila, I return to the concept of "porno-tropicality" by thinking about its radical potentiality. I find myself contemplating upon a radical porno-tropical framework almost in a *surrealist* vein, a surrealism based on those who are most exploited and on the verge of extermination by the machinery of empire yet creatively embark upon the persistence they have to keep writing and creating against it. To this effect, Lapcharoensap and Kahakauwila's works are urgent and necessary as they offer us a glimpse into the exaggerated ways that communities of color around the world continue to suffer at the hands of global capitalism and mass tourism, as well as racialized and sexualized forms of representation as defined by imperial powers. Their works disobey Western and global assumptions of place and history, dangerously confronting paternal, heteronormative and predominantly White structures of power and representation. As such, these authors enact a sensuous pleasure; a porno-tropicality of the local and the "Native" that exceeds the imperial gaze and the colonizer's view. Their work subverts the gaze by reinscribing themselves into these, sometimes, fragmented spaces. Placing emphasis on literature created by diasporic brown writers offers us a nuanced look at the ways that individuals are using art and creative writing to process both their positionalities in the world as well as their ethnic communities. Creating stories to contend with dominant neocolonial discourse is thus a way of fostering a critical historiography while embarking upon a form of storytelling that, as Trinh T. Minh-ha poetically suggests, enacts a "chain of guardianship and of transmission – in other words, of creation".[60]

[60] Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Indianapolis: Indiana U. P., 1989), 149.