Packaging Paradise: Consuming Hawaiian Music

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In music, a body of undulating songs have been more effective causes for vacationing Americans choosing Hawaii than all the illustrated brochures of the travel agencies. (from Hawaii in Hi-Fi, RCA).

Music was an important marketing strategy in the campaign to assimilate Hawaii into the United States, incorporating a cultural tradition of the exotic 'Other' into Western culture through an icon of modern recording technology—the hi-fi stereo record. "Hawaiian music"/a genre that enjoyed great popularity from early in the century into the 1970s—provided a method of familiarizing U.S. mainlanders with this distant chain of islands and served as a central element in the tourist industry's campaign to attract visitors to Hawaii (Kanahele 1979). The marketing of Hawaiian popular music—through radio shows and record albums—aided the transformation of Hawaii from primitive paradise into the 50th State.

Hawaiiremains an important tourist destination, strategic military outpost, and "tropical paradise". The records, songs, and album covers under scrutiny are still available, smartly repackaged as 'exotica' in CD stores worldwide (Taylor 1997). Record albums helped construct an image of Hawaii that is still very much a part of how Hawaii—and other exotic island resorts—is viewed by consumers (Costa 1998; Williamson 1986). Indeed, a Hawaiian vacation is the ultimate American consumer product—allowing anyone who can afford a ticket to participate in the colonial project through a re-creation of discovering Hawaii (Borgerson and Schroeder 1997). In this paper, album covers and liner notes provide sites for an analysis of the representation of Hawaii in popular culture around the time it entered the Union in 1959.

We turn our critical gaze onto a collection of consumer artifacts. About one hundred fifty Hawaiian LPs provide a wealth of data/invoking a range of issues around consumption, objectification, and representation—we combine ethical analysis with content analysis in discussing sexist and racist representations typical of colonial discourses (e.g., Clifford 1988; Drinnon 1997). We focus on the representation of Hawaii as feminine, exotic and primitive, a discourse produced through the use of models, poses, and conventions from art history and advertising design. Hawaiian records-cover art, liner notes and song lyrics—reflect a dominant cultural view of the exotic other (Tatar 1987). Moreover, the Hawaii represented on these albums is the Hawaii that exists for most of us. Thus seemingly innocuous consumer artifacts create and maintain a discourse that reveals affects and antecedents of colonialism.

This paper joins recent efforts that show how consumer culture works in a broader context to influence the construction of the world through representation and marketing images. Mundane objects such as record album covers are exemplars of the enormous societal force of marketing-constructed representation. Through a critical analysis of Hawaiian record album design, liner notes, and song lyrics we expose colonial imperialism fueled by marketing strategy.

Colonial Paradise

We are concerned with how Hawaii—a state, an ethnic identity, a race, and a cultural form—is constructed through representation and appropriation of indigenous culture by the dominant culture. Representation often requires political, economic, and ideological choices made by those in power. Hawaiian records reflect the dominant cultural view and provide a compelling example of how representation by dominant groups enable a coloniser process of objectification and imperialism (e.g., Clifford 1988; Drinnon 1997; Eisenman 1997; Said 1993). We see (and hear) the ideology of the colonizer through the representation of the colonized. Ethical issues arise when representations of subordinate groups enable the erasure of identity and domination of that group (Kaplan and Pease 1993).

Hawaii's assimilation into the United States is a classic case of imperialism, here defined as: "one of a number of oppressive relations that
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The indigenous peoples of Hawaii have a rich culture. However, we are 

The musical history gleaned from the albums tells a story of propaganda, produced to influence the way the people, the consumers, see the product, Hawaii, marketed as paradise, tourist destination, and honeymoon resort (cf. Diller and Scofidio 1994). Indeed, “Hawaii” exists in the minds of many primarily through Hawaii’s marketed image. Hawaii, island paradise, simultaneously exotic and familiar, is more real than the group of islands in the South Pacific so named (cf. Sahlin 1981).

For centuries Hawaiian land provided all needed resources. Later, through commercial agriculture, the land continued to provide the bulk of Hawaii’s monetary income. Most recently, the land has been transformed into a conceptual resource economically the most valuable. Collectively this may be viewed as an ambient resource, that special combination of elements such as warm, sensuous and nondebilitating climate; exciting coastal and mountain scenery; warm clear ocean water; and one of the most interesting cosmopolitan populations in the world” (1982, p. 28).

The Hawaiian record album formed an important stage of the construction of Hawaii as a conceptual resource. As land ownership—or song rights. Here, imperialism requires unequal power relations expansion. Hawaii is not only a popular vacation land; but also a product. Marketing in this sense is like propaganda, produced to influence the way people perceive Hawaii. The liner notes openly acknowledge Hawaii as a commodification of spirituality through trademarks and copyrights serves to colonize native belief systems, and:

The Hawaiian turn to popular culture is crucial to understanding Hawaii as a conceptual resource, just as pineapple, sugar and battleships played important roles at earlier stages. Reflected in such record album titles as “Island Paradise,” ”The Lure of Paradise,” and “Hawaiian Paradise,” Hawaii has been represented as paradise on earth. Western Judeo-Christian culture gives paradise two central meanings: the garden of Eden and heaven. Record album covers emphasize the former, featuring the women of paradise clad in “native cloth,” peering out from palm fronds, frolicking in the ocean tide.

Music serves as an aural image of Hawaii, and the album covers serve to resonate with vacationers, business interests, and honeymooners. Music provides a window on the music business, and the introduction of radio broadcast and later stereophonic hi-fi recordings. Music serves as an aural image of Hawaii, and the album covers serve to re-inscribe the visual image of Hawaii.

The musical history gleaned from the albums tells a story of propaganda to support statehood and capitalist economic and colonizing cultural expansion. Hawaii is there for us to discover (Cook 1996). Hawaii is ours. Hawaii is a cultural resource for us to develop. Moreover, imperialism requires unequal power relations CHawaiians are seen as primitive, pre-literate, happy, unconscious with pressing matters such as land ownership— or song rights. Here, representation is about erasure of the Other by erasing the identity, skill, and legitimacy of native authors, composers, and musicians. The discourse implies that it took Western ingenuity to make the Hawaiian music a force in the marketCMuch as Western cookbook authors transform native food into commodities. The liner notes openly acknowledge Hawaii as a culture-resource another reason why Hawaii is important to the U.S.”Hawaii is not only a popular vacation land; but also an important commercial possession of the United States.” (Hawaiian Rhythm, Spinning Records).

We do not mean to imply that some Hawaiians were not receptive to the influence of the colonizers, or that the music that we know today is or is not “authentic.” For, as many a liner note attests, the cultural production of music “is to a great extent dependent on the strangers who began coming to her shores scores of years ago: the gracefulness of Polynesian life, the art of Japan, the incredible bent for work of the Chinese, the rigid intellectual force of the New Englanders, and the governmental heritage of the English.” (from the Hawaii Calls Story). However, to suggest that Western influence made Hawaiian music better is problematic. In any case, the marriage of recording technology and so-called primitive music was a potent force in creating “Hawaiian” music and identity.

Lyrical Longings

The motions of the hula dancer were used to tell stories, just as in other lands the scratching of a pen on paper was used. Just how close a relationship the hula bears to great literature has never been determined. Just let me tell you this,” remarked one delighted U.S. sailor, watching a group of beautiful hula dancers, “it beats reading books!”

(from More Hawaii in Hi-Fi, RCA).

The song title “Texas Has a Hula Sister Now” is one of our favorites (see Table 2). The confluence of statehood, womanhood, and kinship is spectacularly suggestive, and deserves unpacking. Texas, of course, was a state—the lone star state, a big, brawny, braggart of a state. Hawaii is called a Hula sister/tematizing this distant, rather small exotic new state. By linking Hula with sister the songwriter captures much Cultural analyst Judith Williamson asserts: “It is crucial to study ‘mass culture’ and its specific texts, but not in order to understand ‘the masses’; the ideology of difference is not, in fact, different from the ideologies that imprison us all” (1985, p.116). The turn to popular culture is important here, to show that seemingly innocuous and “fun” cultural artifacts serve to divert attention from the colonizing process that obscures and suburbs native cultural traditions, and erases indigenous peoples. As educational theorist Henry Giroux argues, popular culture provides “sites that are often ignored...where the struggle over knowledge, power, and authority translates itself into a broader battle over the meaning of pleasure, self-formation, and national identity” (1994, p. x).

How is a mass audience to be made familiar with a concept employed for gain in a capitalist economy? Through information, images and a barrage of appeals brought to us via marketing, Hawaii has been developed into a conceptual resource. Marketing images and representations of this conceptual Hawaii created the discourse that informs how many of us still experience and think about Hawaii. Bryan Farrell writes in his book Hawaii: the Legend that Sells.
of the fascination of Hawaii. Hula was constructed and consumed as an exotic, alluring dance. Sister, of course, is a close familial relation. A Hula sister identifies as a being that is at once similar and different, representing poles of mimesis and alterity (Tausig 1993). At once exotic and familiar, distant yet belonging, Hawaii stirs up issues of attraction and taboo. In the representation of Hawaii, there is a powerful conflation of paradise, female, and exotic with ownership, statehood, and familiarity (sisterhood).

The hula is a royal and spiritual prerogative, historically practiced by both men and women (Kanahele 1979). The hula, a term that describes a dance, a communicative practice, a system of authority and hierarchy and a discipline, taught in special schools, is now most closely associated with females dancing for male titillation. Thus, the Hawaiian cultural and sacred tradition of the Hula is represented as an erotic pleasure for the male colonial gaze (see Schroeder 1998). The hula became a necessary site on the tourists’ “to do” list, and the tourist industry provided hula “shows” in a spectacle of representation: “These free Kodak Hula shows are staged especially for picture takers, in colorful Hawaiian surroundings, framed by the blue Pacific ocean” (from Kodak Hula Show). The hula dancer represents the female-primitive, different, unidentified, exotic “who may have the ice-blue eyes of the Scandinavian, the warm coloring of the Tahitian, the femininity of the Japanese and Chinese all apparent in the ancestry.” (Island Paradise, Webley Edwards Presents, Capitol). Body movement in dancing as a form of story-telling and epic is opposed to the literature of a written culture. Hawaiian narrative present in Hula is perceived by the Anglo male as sexy dancing, erotic or exotic dancing for sexual stimulation and all Hawaiian ‘literature’ is reduced to the realm of pornography.

The colonial gaze-underestimating and miscomprehending an entire cultural practice-demonstrated its blindness to other ways of living, other systems of meaning. To apply Western standards to the music of the Hawaiian people was ignorant at best. For example, the chant was the key component of much of the pre-1900 music of the islands: “to the Hawaiian mind the chant was of great importance. Without it there was no dance.” (Kanahele 1979). The chant transmitted and preserved oral histories. The chant, summarily dismissed as mere ‘rhythm’, is an organizing feature of Hawaiian music-the music that did exist “before the white man”.

### Constructing Hawaiian Representation: Theoretical Background

#### Consuming Hawaii

We have focused on Hawaiian music as part of a marketing strategy designed to sell Hawaii. We have applied a critical perspective toward Hawaiian record album design, liner notes, and song lyrics from around the time Hawaii became a state in 1959. A large part of our project has been to analyze and discuss the genre of Hawaiian record albums-currently enjoying a huge renaissance as “exotica” and “bachelor pad” music-which represent an important site in the construction of our image of Hawaiian paradise and the exotic other. The U.S. was hit with a big Hawaiian craze in the 50s and 60s and nostalgic forces are bringing it back.

How did people get the images they have today of Hawaii? Through marketed representations-which we are the first to admit are often beautiful, compelling, and provocative. Marketing-in the service of governments, cultural institutions, or business-is as much a creator of discourse as it is an appropriator of already existing discourse. Costa argues that by understanding the history and function of paradise in the West, we can understand the way Hawaii has been marketed as a tourist paradise. Exposure to what she terms “paradiall discourse” is received through marketed representations of gender (male/female), race (black/white/ somewhere in-between), the histories of religion (saved/dammed and other cultural institutions that make use of hierarchically ordered dichotomies, including Us/Them (Costa 1998). Certain knowledge gains domination over other knowledge through the power of representation. However, the relationship between knowledge and representation is not unidimensional. Representation not only reflects knowledge; representation creates knowledge (cf. Schroeder 1998). The purposes for which representation creates knowledge raise ethical questions. We point to marketing’s active role in the creation and construction of Hawaii discourse as it moved from colonized agricultural gern of U.S. big business to the 50th State. Marketing did not merely utilize a pre-existing discourse, but worked to create and then sell that discourse through the use of a carefully designed and brightly colored (and we know early use of color photography was in advertising) campaign of “exotic” Hawaiian scenes—the flora, fauna and females of Hawaii.

Hawaii discourse does not just exist “out there.” Marketing created and is constantly in the process of recreating Hawaii discourse. Marketing is designed to sell elaborately positioned products-including geographical locations and cultures. Hawaii is a conceptual resource, and marketing has sold us the concept.

Aloha!

### Provocative Hawaiian Music Lyrics

#### References


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