

Original Research

## Eh... You Hawaiian? Examining Hawaii Five-0's "Hawaiian"

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**Abstract:** UCLA's 2018 Hollywood Diversity Report asserts that American film and television is the most diverse in terms of gender and racial representation than ever before (UCLA, 2018). Though this statement is true, it mainly speaks about representation in terms of quantity instead of quality. *Hawaii Five-0's* producers have hired Hawaiian language and culture experts to help ensure that terms are pronounced appropriately, and that traditional Hawaiian practices, as well as "local" culture, are displayed as accurately as possible. Though this is a step in the right direction, the show itself has major issues in terms of the representation of Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture. This paper is a critical overview of the historical and contemporary representations of the islands and its people within popular film and television, and showcases how *Hawaii Five-0* sustains and modifies some of these depictions. The goal here is to overlay and challenge the conception of being "Hawaiian" as told from a Eurocentric lens.

**Keywords:** Hawaiian identity, textual analysis, television studies, media studies, representation

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### 1. Introduction

"You know what's funny? You don't look Hawaiian... But you were born there, weren't you? (S1E1). These are the first words spoken in the 2010 re-launch of the widely popular primetime television series *Hawaii Five-0* (2010-)<sup>1</sup>. This is an interesting question to pose and is answered through the narratives of the main and recurring characters. *Hawaii Five-0*, currently in its 10th season, follows Navy Lieutenant Commander Steve McGarrett (Alex O'Loughlin) as he leads his team of Sergeant Danny "Danno" Williams (Scott Caan), former Hawai'i Police Department detective Chin Ho Kelly (Daniel Dae Kim), and newly graduated police cadet Kono Kalakaua (Grace Park) in a "no rules applies" approach to hunting down the state's worst fugitives. UCLA's 2018 Hollywood Diversity Report asserts that American film and television is the most diverse in terms of gender and racial representation than ever before (UCLA, 2018). Though this statement is true, it mainly speaks about representation in terms of quantity instead of quality. *Hawaii Five-0's* producers have hired Hawaiian language and culture experts to help ensure that terms are pronounced appropriately, and that traditional Hawaiian practices, as well as "local" culture, are displayed as accurately as possible. Though this is a step in the right direction, the show itself has major issues in terms of the representation of Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture.

Though sparse, mainstream media depictions of Hawai'i and Native Hawaiians pale in comparison to the truth by providing false depictions of wealth, lifestyle, physical characteristics, intelligence, and exaggerates Hawaiian culture as a commodity (Antinora, 2014). This paper is a critical overview of the historical and contemporary representations of the Islands and its people within popular film and television, and showcases how *Hawaii Five-0* sustains and modifies some of these depictions. The goal here is to overlay and challenge the conception of being "Hawaiian" as told from a Eurocentric lens.

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<sup>1</sup> *Hawaii Five-0* was the most popular new series of the 2010-2011 season, and averages between 10-12 million viewers each episode in all ten seasons, making it the most popular, and most wide-reaching, of any television show or film that depicts Hawaiians.

## 2. Contemporary media depictions: Hula, Mai Tais, and the Hawaiian servant

With the advent of television and other media forms, corporations utilize aloha as a guise for selling “authentic” Hawaiiana (Hawaiian culture). Today, aloha (love, respect, sharing, exchange in reciprocity) is so far removed from the Hawaiian cultural context. As Wood (1999) contends, “the Hawaiian values of generosity and love such as aloha were misappropriated to make it seem as if they are particularly suited to the visitor industry” (p. 49). Most people who have never been to Hawai‘i learn about it from movies and television constituting what Laura Mulvey (1975) calls “an advanced representational system” (p. 7). Films produce multilayered representations that seem to most to mirror reality. Influenced and inspired by media scholars who have analyzed representations of Hawaiians, and other Indigenous communities, the authors provide four troupes that they have created of contemporary Native Hawaiian depictions: (a) the primitive other; (b) the sexualized other; (c) the benevolent other; and (d) the buffoonish other.

### 2.1. *The primitive Other*

Most Indigenous people face hardship in deconstructing the narratives being told about them, sold about them, or representing them in media (Halualani, 2002). Portraying Native Hawaiians as primitive suggests that Hawaiians are on the margins of history, not belonging to the modern world. Wood’s (1999) analysis of films set in Hawai‘i between 1900-1940, contends that in every film evaluated, Hawaiians were seen as people of the past and Westerners were people of the present and the future. “Hawaiians in films, like those early modern women and children, are constructed as people who lack access to the language which defines, delimits and locates power” (Wood, 1999, p. 106). In over fifty movies filmed in Hawai‘i or pertaining to Hawai‘i between 1920 and 1939, all showcased the idea that Native Hawaiians were primitive people (Desmond, 1999). Okihiro (2008) notes, “the primal, fertile earth frees White men from the confines of modernity and allows them to shed social inhibitions such as nudity and interracial sex” (p. 45-46). Filmmakers embellish residents as primordial, fertile, and sexual. Not only are Hawaiians viewed as stuck in the past, but they are also displayed in media as savages. They are repeatedly idealized in American films as a threat to Euroamericans (Wood, 1999). In these films, a dichotomy between nature loving savages and Western city-mindedness is portrayed. In some situations, the Mainland (continental 48 states) visitor is at odds with their own identity and being lost in new exotic lands they diverge to “savage” behavior, or “go Native.”

### 2.2. *The sexualized Other*

Hawai‘i has been labeled as a White man’s paradise in which “dark women await the embrace of heterosexual men, especially White men from the continental United States” (Okihiro, 2008, p. 60). Native Hawaiian women are presented as objects that are eager to bestow their favors. Further, no matter what gender they identify as, Hawaiians are showcased in a sexualized manner, forcing them to be looked upon from a heterosexual male perspective (Wood, 1999). A prime example of the sexualized representation of Hawaiians, especially Native Hawaiian women, is the hula girl. Desmond (1999) explores the hula girl image explaining:

Hula girl images on postcards and in photographs in this period thus ran the gamut from beautiful to alluring, to sexual, to pornographic. But they all presented a gendered and sexualized image of the Native. The Polynesian looking “hula girl” during this period as the dominant signifier of Hawai‘i – a feminized site of nature and romance. (p. 48)

The sexualization of Hawaiian women is not limited to postcards and images. A content analysis of sixty-six movies made in Hawai‘i or about Hawai‘i between 1898 and 1939 found that all films either displayed sexualized women, exotic landscapes, or both (Okihiro, 2008). The islands as a whole tend to have an implication of being exotic, mysterious, and mystical, descriptors that could be assumed as being feminine. Williamson (1986) contends, “one of the most important aspects of femininity in mass culture is not what they reveal, but what they conceal. If ‘woman’ means home, love, and sex, what ‘woman’ does not mean, in general currency, is work, class, and politics” (p. 99). The islands as a place are presented in film and media as soft and feminine—a welcoming place that is waiting and receptive

(Wood, 1999). Places that are depicted as being feminine also tend to be portrayed as weak and in need of aid by a larger, more advanced, and more powerful entity (Wood, 1999).

### 2.3. *The benevolent Other*

Tourism in Hawai'i is driven by the market philosophy of aloha, the seemingly cultural value that Hawaiians are naturally benevolent, inclusive, and generous. Reproduced in popular culture discourse and tourism promotions, the aloha of Hawai'i is staged as both a consumer guarantee and a vacation norm (Halualani, 2002). According to Trask (1999), the term "aloha and its kindred aloha spirit were fundamental marketing ploys in tourist advertisements of Hawai'i in the islands and abroad in the 1930s" (p. 162). These marketing schemes led to Hawaiians being depicted as loving and warm individuals that wear aloha attire. Hughes (2017) contends, "the 'aloha spirit' sold by the tourist industry since the 1930s has camouflaged the colonial sale of Native Hawaiian culture, land and language under the rhetoric of multicultural harmony" (p. 286).

Halualani (2002) argues that the construction of "normative benevolence" in Hawaiians known today as the aloha spirit is the driving force in commoditizing and fetishizing Hawaiian culture and people, and that:

Travel discourses and popular discourses (commercials, televisual and filmic texts, T-shirts, and souvenir items) feature the unconditional love and naturalized benevolence of Hawaiians, while excising out any reference of symbols to the earlier Hawaiian identity aspects based on war and political confrontation. (p. 193)

Focusing on the aloha spirit deepens the liberalization of being Native and reifies the representations of Hawaiians as generous and warm. This in turn, silences or strongly refutes Native Hawaiian's demands of sovereignty and land preservation (Halualani, 2002).

### 2.4. *The buffoonish Other*

Recent television and film depict Native Hawaiians as ignorant or unintelligent—as buffoonish. The romantic comedy *50 First Dates* (2004) is an excellent example. Set in O'ahu, Lucy Whitmore (Drew Barrymore), who suffers from severe short-term memory loss and amnesia, is wooed anew daily by a persistent stud and marine biologist Henry Roth (Adam Sandler). It is questioned why Hawai'i was even chosen as an environment for this plot, where it could have been set anywhere (Konzett, 2017). The reality of people's lives on O'ahu is not shown on screen, and Hawaiian culture is ridiculed by the minstrel performance of Rob Schneider as Ula, a marijuana smoking, uneducated, pidgin<sup>2</sup> talking, lazy Hawaiian. He is shown as having a protruding belly, shark scar, and glass eye, and is married to an "unattractive" Native woman to whom he has five children with. Konzett (2017) argues, "in the tradition of the plantation genre, playful and beloved Native children and adults' humor and serve the White cast" (p. 195).

Television also represents Hawaiians as being violent and immoral. Take *Dog the Bounty Hunter* (2004-2012) for example. Shot and set in Hawai'i, locals are turned in to bounty money, being seen as mere commodities. They are portrayed as being violent and dangerous people, that make wrong decisions, showcasing that the only things that Native Hawaiians know how to do are being violent and consuming drugs (Konzett, 2017). In the end of each episode, the criminal has a "coming to God" conversation with Dog, insinuating that they need the help of White people in order to change their lives, because they alone don't know how (Konzett, 2017). It is also ironic that "Dog" can be seen as an anagram of "God"—for he is seen as the "savior" at the conclusion of each episode. With media profiling Kanaka Maoli as violent and unintelligent, they cover up the socioeconomic fallout of Hawai'i's colonization, and romanticize Whites as Hawaiians' saviors (Konzett, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> Pidgin is a creole language based in part on English, spoken by many residents of Hawai'i. Although English and Hawaiian are the co-official languages of the state, Hawaiian Pidgin is used by many Hawai'i residents in everyday casual conversations.

### 3. Methodology

In conjuncture with the four troupes, the authors employed a textual analysis to evaluate the relevancy of the created categories of media representations within the episodes of *Hawaii Five-0*. Textual analysis is a flexible method that is used to analyze text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). What is considered text data can range from verbal messages, written manuscripts, or media and electronic sources. The text data that a scholar decides to analyze is dependent on what is the best means for examining a particular phenomenon (Hsieh & Wellman, 2005). The aim of a textual analysis is to acquire a condensed, broad description of a phenomenon; the outcome of an analysis should be a set of concepts to describe the phenomenon (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). As Bryman (2004) contends, a textual analysis is:

...an approach to documents that emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts...there is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognizing the significance for understanding the meaning of the context in which the item being analyzed appeared. (p. 41)

In short, a textual analysis is concerned with meanings, consequences, and context, while also taking into consideration the positionality of the researcher (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992).

The process of carrying out a qualitative textual analysis follows a sequential model and puts forward three distinct analytical procedures, which may be carried out either independently or in combination, depending on the research goals (Mayring, 2002). These three elements are: summary, explication, and structuring. Using summary as an analytical approach attempts to reduce the material in such a way that preserves the essential content through abstraction, while also succinctly describing the example without overexpansion (Mayring, 2002). To accomplish this, the text is paraphrased, generalized or abstracted, and reduced. Explication involves explaining, clarifying, and annotating the specific material that represent common themes throughout that text (Mayring, 2002). From a deductive approach, the researcher examines particular events that connect to each other. Then, they explicate or make sense of their findings. Structuring corresponds to the procedures used in classical textual analysis and is viewed as the most crucial step. The goal of this step is to filter out a particular structure from the material being examined. As a popular network, and syndicated, television show, expanding over 200 episodes and reaching over ten million viewers worldwide, this is the first project known to analyze a contemporary television show that contains a plethora of representations of what it means to be "Hawaiian" (IMDbPro, 2019).

Being that this series encompasses over 200 episodes, viewing every episode would be unrealistic. For our sample, we systematically selected episodes among the first seven seasons of *Hawaii Five-0*. We implemented a sampling process that is similar to Stamps' (2017) study. Among each season of *Hawaii Five-0* that this study focuses on, the first and last episodes were chosen for analysis. Apart from the first and last episodes, we also chose an additional three episodes at random from each season. For example, season one of *Hawaii Five-0* has a total of 24 episodes. For analysis, episode one and twenty-four were chosen, as these are the first and last episodes of season one; then, at random, we chose episodes two, eight, and seventeen, within season one, to include in our sample. This process was repeated across the first seven seasons of *Hawaii Five-0*. With a total of 143 episodes aired across all seven seasons of *Hawaii Five-0*, our sample consists of thirty-five aired episodes. In conducting our textual analysis, each episode in our sample was viewed twice. The first viewing being a preliminary soak, or summary step, and allowed us to get a general sense of the overall plot, storylines, and the interaction between characters. Afterward, a second viewing, the explication step, was then conducted on the same episodes in our sample to conduct a more in-depth textual analysis, taking into account the conversations between each character, its relation to the overall plotlines, and the general progression of the discourse. Within this step the four troupes of "othering" aforementioned comprised the four codes in our codebook.<sup>3</sup> For example, if a character's body and/or physical beauty is showcased as the focus and/or is incorporated into the dialogue of the scene, and/or used as an allure, then the author's coded this as belonging to the sexualized other code. To ensure

<sup>3</sup> Though Season 10 is currently airing on CBS, at the time of analysis only seasons 1-7 were analyzed since it featured the original cast members and it was available to view multiple times via Netflix.

intercoder reliability the authors coded the first season together. Authors also utilized memoing while coding the proceeding seasons to help justify their explication process. Based on this method, the following two research questions were investigated:

#### *Research question 1*

In what ways does *Hawaii Five-0*, maintain or evolve the hegemonic stereotypes of the Hawaiian, based on the four troupes of “othering” Hawaiians, via the characters, scenes, background imagery, diegetic and non-diegetic sound/music, and texts?

#### *Research question 2*

In what ways does *Hawaii Five-0*, counter or subvert hegemonic stereotypes of the Hawaiian, based on the four troupes of “othering” Hawaiians, via the characters, scenes, background imagery, diegetic and non-diegetic sound/music, and texts?

### **4. Hawaii Five-0’s “Hawaiian”**

Throughout the numerous explications of the episodes of *Hawaii Five-0*, multiple iterations of the hegemonic historical and contemporary depictions of Hawaiians can be observed, especially in all main and recurring characters that are “Hawaiian”<sup>4</sup> in the show. Through the characters of Chin Ho Kelly, Kono Kalakaua, and Kamekona Tupuola (Taylor Wily) three of the four troupes were found, and a composite of the “Hawaiian” is seen as being: immoral, sexualized, and unintelligent.

#### *4.1. Native Hawaiians as immoral: Chin Ho Kelly*

*Hawaii Five-0* reinforces the narrative of the “immoral” Native Hawaiian juxtaposed to the policing from a White “moral” authority figure. Violence being the focal point here, while race being the division. The logic here is that a White “savior” uses their privileged violence to correct “corrupted and violent radicals.” This justified violence by one race over others is rooted in Hawaiian history. The Massie-Kahahawai case in the early 1930s is an example of brutality that was used against Native Hawaiians and locals. A wife of a Navy officer, Thalia Massie, accused “some Hawaiian boys” of kidnapping and raping her in Waikiki, a popular tourist location in O’ahu, Hawai’i (Rosa, 2014). Although she could not remember the exact descriptions of the men who assaulted her, nor provide consistent statements, five young local men, two of which were Native Hawaiian, were accused of the alleged crime (Rosa, 2014). Following a mistrial, Horace Ida, one of the accused men, was kidnapped and beaten by Navy men before escaping. Worse yet, Thomas Massie (husband of Thalia), Grace Fortescue (mother of Thalia) and two fellow Navy personnel officers killed Joseph Kahahawai, one of the Native Hawaiian men accused. For the latter incident, all four were later convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to ten years in prison. However, the Governor reduced their sentence to one hour in his office (Rosa, 2014). This historical incident indicates that violence against “aggressive” locals is warranted, and when violence has to be used the perpetrators are the victims. This event parallels with Chin Ho’s storyline within the fictional *Hawaii Five-0*. Thus, reality is then mirrored from historical to the fictional, blurring the lines between the two.

We first meet Chin Ho Kelly (Daniel Dae Kim) in the pilot episode (S1E1). Chin is a local boy from Hawai’i, thus figuratively representing Native Hawaiians in the series. Chin was at one point a police officer with the Honolulu Police Department (HPD), but was released from the department when he was accused of being a dirty cop. Due to the respect that Chin had for the now deceased John McGarrett (William Sadler), Steve McGarrett’s father, he joins a special taskforce based in Hawai’i that McGarrett is leading, the Five-0 team. The Governor of Hawai’i gave Steve this leadership position so that he could clean the streets of O’ahu. Right off the bat, Chin is posed as being corrupt, and is considered to be an outcast of the police department and of the community,

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<sup>4</sup> Though Season 10 is currently airing on CBS, at the time of analysis only seasons 1-7 were analyzed since it featured the original cast members and it was available to view multiple times via Netflix.

while Steve is shown to be the moral compass and saving grace for Chin specifically, but for Hawai'i and its people as a whole. Thus, Haole Pono<sup>5</sup>, or showcasing the mantra of divine leadership of the superior White man, is clearly evident here.

We are reminded of Chin's "wrongdoing" in future episodes. For example, Chin is blackmailed from a fellow dirty cop, Frank Delano (William Baldwin). After agreeing to sign Frank out of Halawa Correctional Facility in exchange for his cousin's release from kidnappers, Chin learns that Frank's team of men has also kidnapped his wife, Malia (Reiko Aylesworth). In shock, Chin asks Frank why he is being targeted. Frank replies "Everybody knows you are a dirty cop... but instead of having your life ruined like the rest of us, ...you get your badge back" (S2E23). Although he tries to be the "good guy" in an effort to save his cousin, this exchange implies that Chin is still a dirty cop. Further demonstrating this is when Chin is being questioned by Internal Affairs (IA) about the murder of his father in season four. IA points out that Chin has a "history of covering for family members who break the law" and references Chin's uncle who stole drug money from a police evidence locker. IA also questions Chin's involvement in squashing a car thief case years ago for Gabriel Waincroft, the brother of his girlfriend, now wife (S4E13). Here again we see that Chin is implicated to be corrupt, supporting the stereotype of the Hawaiian as immoral. This creates the impression that locals are not to be trusted, even ones that are police officers. These examples, reflected over the series, produce an image of a broken system rooted in an immoral local culture (Konzett, 2017). The premise here is to fix this erratic behavior through the morally correct, militarized White violence, or Haole Pono. No one exudes this characteristic more, than the main character of the series, Lieutenant Navy Commander Steve McGarrett.

We are introduced to McGarret in the pilot episode while he conducts a prison transport in South Korea (S1E1). As the opening scene progresses, Steve's father is killed in his home in Hawai'i. Though Steve grew up in Hawai'i, he is not a Native Hawaiian by blood. Throughout the series, it becomes clear that Steve's leadership style is not "by the book". He uses force and violent behavior to get what he wants. In addition, no one tells him what to do, not even the Governor, but he has the authority to tell others what to do. He does whatever he thinks is right and uses any means necessary to do so. Essentially, he is everyone else's moral compass, as he literally and figuratively leads the team. For example, in the beginning of the series, Steve throws an uncooperative suspect off the roof of a tall building and holds him by his feet (S1E2). Fellow task member Danny (Scott Cann) reacts negatively to Steve's forceful and illegal behavior:

Danny: *...You cannot hang a guy off a roof!*

Steve: (talking to the suspect) *All I have to say is that you came at me with a gun. We struggled. You fell.*

The example suggests that the law does not apply to Steve. His Haole Pono thinking overrides any consideration for humane treatment of locals, even if his actions may cause harm.

It is not surprising that Steve has used explosives in a public area. Steve and Danny decide to investigate and question "Big Lono" who owns Lono's Pawn Shop in Kalihi. "Big Lono" was not cooperative in opening the security door, stating that there needs to be a warrant. Consequently, Steve took matters into his own hands. He walks outside, grabs a grenade from the car, pulls the pin and places it on the locked security door, resulting in blowing up the store thereby "unlocking" the door. Even though the local merchant knew his rights, Steve disregards it (S1E17). This establishes a disparity in power and protection under the law, suggesting that it is acceptable to violate the rights of local community members. This is a sharp contrast to Chin, who represents Native Hawaiians, circumvention of the law is characterized as rule breaking (even years later), and Steve is glorified for his law-breaking behavior with no consequences.

Despite his penchant for violence and law-breaking, Steve is portrayed as a savior to his team. Without him, the Five-0 team would not be rescued from dangerous situations. A striking example of this occurs when Steve saves Chin and Kono from being killed. Feeling defensive, Steve makes a bet with Chin (and Kono) that he (and Danny) could get back to work faster by using an alternative highway he recommends despite its long route. Chin disagrees and states that he could get to work

<sup>5</sup> The term *Haole Pono* does not exist in the literature on Hawai'i and is coined by the authors.

quicker with the roads he suggests and emphasizes that he is familiar with these roads because “I used to ride those trails on my dirt bike, when I was a kid”. Steve wins the car race but is concerned when Chin and Kono fail to show up at work. We learn that Chin and Kono get lost, abducted, and held hostage by two sibling criminals. Chin and Kono are told to lineup with their backs turned. Pointing their guns, the brothers take their aim. Just in time, Steve and Danny arrive and instantly kill the brothers by shooting them in the back, saving the two Five-0 team members (S6E13). Without his instincts, Chin and Kono would not have survived the ordeal. Thus, it is clear that the White man saves the Hawaiians. In addition, Chin and Kono’s “familiarity” with the land is transformed to ignorance, resulting in their need to be saved. This aligns with prior texts depictions of Hawaiians as in need of saving by Western knowledge and strength, as seen in the aforementioned example of Duane “Dog” Chapman.

Steve’s regard for not following the rules could be interpreted as comical. For example, when Danny did not want to purchase an expensive Christmas tree, Steve drives up to Kuliouou Forest Reserve and cuts down a tree with a chainsaw. Danny explains to Steve that it is unlawful to cut a tree down in a protected area. This does not matter to Steve, as we see the tree strapped to the roof of the car as they drive away. While conducting his own detective work, fellow HPD officer Pua Kai (Shawn Anthony Tomsen), determines that Danny has the tree in his possession, and notifies Danny that he will be fined for cutting the tree (S5E9). This scene normalizes Steve’s irrational behavior, suggesting that it is acceptable for him to do whatever he wants, without being held responsible or accountable for his actions. Therefore, he is untouchable. This example also shows that Steve’s rule-breaking behavior should not be taken seriously, especially since he is not reprimanded. His controlling dominance coated in comical relief prioritizes him as central, and Hawaiians on the outskirts as the other. Steve’s “no holds bar” acts of violence, aggression, intimidation, and force is always justified and warranted. He is portrayed as a courageous cop who is doing whatever necessary to bring the immoral to justice. In contrast to Hawaiian characters, whose law-breaking behavior is criminalized, his “maverick” decisions are glorified as heroic traits that is rooted in justice and virtue.

Steve represents White militarized justice who is never in the wrong. In contrast, Chin, representing Native Hawaiians, is considered immoral and a “dirty cop” who is never in the right. Past literature indicates that Hawaiians were historically depicted as savage and immoral. For example, upon the arrival of Western ships, besides being generous, Hawaiians are constructed within archives as having a dangerous and violent propensity for Western economic goods. They were depicted as Natives that “would kill just to have the new, shiny trinkets” (Halualani, 2002, pp. 27). As Trask (1999) puts it, Eurocentric writings on Hawaiians displayed them as thieves and savages who regularly practiced infanticide and who, in contrast to the civilized Whites, preferred lewd dancing to doing work. As McClintock (2015) asserts, representing Native’s fetish for all things Western also shows the power dynamics between the two groups, displaying the idea that Western ideas and goods were superior to the Indigenous world.

Another major point is that Steve’s behavior is accepted through the use of comedy. Humor is a powerful rhetorical device and can be used to clarify social norms and enforce dominant cultural views (Ladenburg, 2015). It can work towards preserving the status quo or towards challenging it (Sharpe & Hynes, 2016). In the case of *Hawaii Five-0*, the former is used. The use of comedy can have a normative impact on issues that have been questioned before. It has the ability to turn the serious to the nonchalant. As we have seen, Steve’s actions, which would normally be seen as unethical and lawbreaking, becomes accepted as normal and unquestioned through the use of comedy.

#### 4.2. Native Hawaiians as sexualized: Kono Kalakaua

Kono Kalakaua<sup>6</sup> (Grace Park) is the most consistent female character in the series. She is portrayed as a local girl from Hawai‘i and is the primary representation of female Native Hawaiians. Kono is

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the character of Kono Kalakaua was a male character in the original run of *Hawaii Five-0*. Deciding to portray Kono as a female in this reboot may warrant future discussion, especially since Kono can be translated as “inviting or enticing”, and Kalakaua translates as “the day of battle.” Kono could possibly be the full stereotypical “Hawaiian” – Benevolent, sexualized, and violent.

featured as the exotic other in the series. As Chin's cousin, she is characterized as an attractive surfer girl that can hold her own. A soon to be graduate of the HPD academy, Chin brings Steve and Danny to meet her at a beach. While watching her surf, Kono and a male tourist collide while surfing the same wave. Feeling disrespected, Kono gets out of the water, shoves her surfboard in the sand, walks up to the tourist and says, "ho, bra" then punches him. This first impression of Kono reinforces the tourist gaze of what others think of Hawaiians, implying that Hawaiians—including women—solve their problems through aggression, even when it comes to trivial matters (Konzett, 2017). It also upholds her tough-girl image, but we are quickly introduced to her femininity and sexuality following this exchange. As Kono greets Steve and Danny with a handshake, Danny prolongs his handshake with Kono. Noticing this, Chin tells Danny, "That's good, brah." Right away, Kono is sexually objectified as the first thing Danny notices about her is her physical attraction. She is dichotomized between being a brute and a sexual object. This conversation takes place while the male characters are fully clothed and Kono is dressed in her bikini, which further speaks to the tourist gaze conceptualization of her character. However, this is not the only instance Kono is seen "displaying" her body in front of others.

Later in the pilot episode, Steve asks Kono to go undercover thereby officially joining the task force (S1E1). While undercover, Kono meets Sang Min (Will Yun Lee) who is part of a local Chinese gang that runs a human smuggling ring. Posing as a Chinese immigrant, Kono asks Sang Min for help in bringing in her relatives who would like to live in Hawai'i. Suspecting that Kono may be an undercover cop wearing a wire, Sang Min demands Kono to take off her clothes. This undressing takes place in front of everyone, including the rest of the Five-0 team, who are watching the events unfold via video surveillance. Kono follows through with his demand and strips down to her underwear. Sang Min circles around her, inspects her body, and even asks her to turn around to see her backside. Once he realizes that Kono does not have a wire on her, he takes a picture of her anyway and sends it to a friend of his for identity verification. A text comes back stating, "She's a cop." Steve and the rest of the Five-0 storms in and saves Kono while capturing Sang Min. This scene clearly depicts Kono as a less powerful and vulnerable individual who is sexually objectified, and then rescued by the majority male task force.<sup>7</sup> She is forced to put on a show as she stripes, becoming an exoticized object of not just the male gaze (see Mulvey, 1975), but also the foreigners' gaze as this television show broadcasts worldwide (Wood, 1999).

Chin also contributes to this "distraction as physical attraction" concept. As the Five-0 team share their "Valentine's Day gone wrong" stories with each other, Chin shares his. Chin explains that after having dinner, he and girlfriend Inspector Abby Dunn (Julie Benz) were to spend a romantic evening at the Kohala hotel. However, she abruptly leaves their hotel room, leaving Chin confused. He runs after her with nothing but a towel wrapped around his waist. Once learning that he is locked out of his room, Chin walks into a busy hotel lobby, heading to the front desk, still holding on to the towel. Just then, he encounters HPD sergeant, Duke Lukela (Dennis Chun) who introduces his wife to Chin. During this scene, the camera shot focuses on Chin's towel and pans up to show his muscular body (S6E14). By focusing on Chin's body throughout the scene, in public view of the tourists in the hotel lobby, he ironically and literally becomes an object for the "tourist gaze." Kono and Chin are made into exotic commodities to gaze at and are used as distractions from the real world. Tourists come to Hawai'i for vacation; thus, the Hawaiian people, environment, and culture serve as diversions and an escape from their everyday life (Antinora, 2014; Trask, 1999; Wood, 1999).

This theme is constant throughout the series. Going undercover once again, Kono is seen dressed in a form fitting floor length red dress. Danny tells Kono (S7E2):

Danny: *You're up.*

Kono: *Wish me luck.*

Danny: *You don't need luck, not looking like that.*

This exchange implies that not only is Kono sexually attractive, but that her only contribution and usefulness to the Five-0 team is her physical beauty as the exotic other. The scene continues as Kono grabs two glasses of champagne and walks over to the suspect in question who happens to be

<sup>7</sup> Though an equally important issue, gender representation is not the purpose of this textual analysis and would not be justly covered if added in this paper. This topic merits its own paper, in which the authors intend on pursuing in the future.



surrounded by several women. The suspect notices Kono and asks her to dance. They playfully interact on the dancefloor, promoting the perceived sexual chemistry between the two. Kono gets down to business and tells him to meet her on the patio. He agrees and walks outside but is met with the rest of the Five-0 team for questioning. Thus, Kono's sexuality serves as a means to retrieve information.

The series also shows how Kono is the object of affection for recurring characters in the series, with emphasis on the word "object." Gerad Hirsch (Willie Garson) is the owner of a crime scene cleaning business and is infatuated with Kono. In one episode, Steve instructs Kono to provide protective custody for Hirsch (S6E23). While at Hirsch's apartment, Kono finds a painting of herself hanging above Hirsch's bed, making her feel uncomfortable. Hirsch also cooks her a fancy meal, plays a "Kono mix" of music, and calls her honey, all emphasizing his fetish for the exotic and erotic. This storyline shows the extent to which Kono continues to be sexually and culturally objectified and that these interactions are acceptable and funny.

Again, we see comedy used here to normalize and downplay the seriousness of these issues. It becomes the accepted status quo to an audience watching this. Specifically, the painting is similar to a locker style pin up or even a brochure of what Hawai'i has to offer in terms of exoticness and Native Hawaiians. Thus, to satisfy the tourists who come looking for their authentic "Hawaiian" experience, Kono, as well as Chin, represent what Trask (1999) contends as fetishized prey for the Western tourists' gaze. This finding aligns with research previously mentioned. By displaying and discussing the body in provocative ways, they offer limited contributions to the team. .

#### 4.3. Native Hawaiians as benevolent and buffoonish: Kamekona Tupuola

Kamekona Tupuola (Taylor Wily) is introduced to the *Hawaii Five-0* series in the pilot episode (S1E1). Kamekona is obese, dark skinned, and speaks a recognized language of Hawai'i—Pidgin—a "foreign language" to those unfamiliar with Hawai'i and local culture. Thus, he could be interpreted as the most literal representation of Native Hawaiians in the series. As the primary recurring character from the beginning of the show, Kamekona is regularly seen in short snippets in almost every episode. A reformed drug dealer, now informant to the Five-0 team, Kamekona balances his businesses and entrepreneurial exploits, while also providing assistance to the Five-0 team whenever needed. Kamekona is primarily depicted as the benevolent and ignorant Hawaiian who embraces the aloha spirit of love, compassion, and generosity. As such, Kamekona represents the "authentic" Native Hawaiian—one who is helpful and hospitable to the White race, without challenging their ideals (Halualani, 2002). While this is another dimension of the tourist gaze, he is there to serve tourists who are looking for a "Hawaiian experience."

In search of information pertaining to the murder of Steve's father, Chin brings Steve and Danny to meet Kamekona at his business, Waiola Shave Ice. After exchanging greetings, Chin asks Kamekona for a name. However, Kamekona, an entrepreneur of sorts, wants to not only get paid for that information but also use Steve and Danny to promote his business (S1E1):

Steve: *How much kala, bulleh?* (Holding money in his hands)

Kamekona: *You speak bird, huh?* (Referring to the Pidgin language)

Steve: *Yeah, I grew up here.*

Kamekona: *It don't matter, you still look haole to me.* (Looking at the money Steve gave to him) *This one feels a little bit lonely, bro.* (Steve gives him more money after Chin gives a nod of approval) *Cool. One more thing I need you two fine White gentlemen to do.*

(Steve and Danny are next seen wearing Waiola Shave Ice shirts and holding shave ice in their hands while standing in the parking lot.)

This first impression of Kamekona speaks to how he regards race, pointedly, his distrust of Steve and Danny because they are White. In fact, it does not matter that Steve grew up in Hawai'i, Kamekona still considers Steve an outsider. This promotes the idea that Hawaiians hold negative views of others, especially those who are not Native Hawaiian. This distrust for those who look foreign may stem from settler colonization of Hawai'i (Trask, 1999). Due to the numerous wrongs done to the Hawaiian people from mainly White foreigners, Hawaiians may try to distance themselves from outsiders (Trask, 1999).

Still, Kamekona is willing to use them to promote his business, showcasing the idea that he is manipulative and a strategist for self-preservation.

Given his hospitality and aloha spirit, it is not surprising that Kamekona helps the team with whatever they need. As a benevolent and ignorant individual, he makes sacrifices for them. For example, when Steve is in a sudden need of a gun, he knows exactly where to get it—Kamekona—and proceeds to race to his house. Kamekona gives in and takes Steve into his backyard to an abandoned ice cream truck, where an array of guns and ammo are stored. Steve helps himself to an abundance of weapons (S1E24). The sacrifice that he makes for the team speaks to how Westerners may interpret Native Hawaiian behavior as a willingness to serve the White man (Halualani, 2002; Trask, 1999).

Following this initial assistance to the team, we continue to see Kamekona in future episodes thinking of ways to expand his business, but his efforts are not taken seriously and is often used for comic relief. One such case occurs when he decides to provide helicopter tours, despite not having a helicopter in his possession. Although he needs to purchase it, he does not feel confident in his racial identity and Native language to secure a deal with the salesperson. Thus, Kamekona asks Danny to talk to the salesperson, Freddy Schumaker (David Rees Snell), and negotiate a price point of \$170,000. Kamekona feels that Danny could get that price because “haoles speak the same language.” As Kamekona sets up the earpiece for Danny, Danny reluctantly agrees to participate (S3S11):

Kamekona: *...the seller's a White guy and you haoles speak all the same language.*

Danny: *You mean English?*

Kamekona: *Yeah.*

(Danny walks into the sales lot.)

Kamekona: (speaking into the microphone connected to Danny's earpiece) *Salesman at six o'clock.*

Freddy: *Aloha! Name's Freddy Schumaker. My friends call me "Fast Freddy," 'cause I got a need for speed, if you know what I mean.*

(Danny and Freddy continue to talk)

Kamekona: *Ask him about the rodah.*

Danny: *What about the "rodah?"*

Freddy: *Rodah Oh, the rotor!*

Danny: *Yeah.*

Freddy: *The rotor. This here is your standard semi-rigid main rotor with, uh, three blades, Danny. What else can I tell you 'bout?*

Kamekona: *Ask him if there's any transmitting problems with the cyclic pitch input.*

Danny: *Any, uh how's it turn? Does it turn good?*

Kamekona: *No, don't ask him that, brah!*

(Freddy continues to talk to Danny; Kamekona talks to Danny via earpiece)

Danny: *All right, look, I'm gonna level with you. My friend sent me in here because he wanted to make a deal. He was afraid you were gonna rip him off.*

(Danny and Freddie continue to talk)

Freddy: *Well, that's too bad. You'll have to tell your friend tough luck. And that's a shame, too, Oh, man, because he must be pretty desperate to send a guy in who doesn't know a damn thing about helicopters.*

Danny: *Yeah, yeah, it's true. I don't know anything about helicopters. But being a law enforcement officer, see, I do know a thing or two about tax evasion. So what do you say, uh, make it an even 170 and I will forget that the whole "dropping the price for cash" conversation ever happened. What do you think?*

Freddy: *Deal.*

Danny: *Deal.*

This exchange reinforces the stereotype that Hawaiians are not intelligent (nor confident) and are in need of help from a White man to engage in a dialogue with another White man. Without the help from Danny, Kamekona is not able to get the discount that is needed to purchase the helicopter, echoing the Haole Pono philosophy. Thus, he is not “good enough” to be engaged in important conversations. Kamekona is seen as powerless in his ability to effectively communicate with a White salesperson—a man that could ultimately decide the fate of his business expansion. Specifically, Kamekona is corrected from “rodah” to “rotor” which suggests that there is a “correct” way to say

things—and it is not Pidgin, although it is a recognized language in Hawai‘i. Further, Danny knows nothing about helicopters. Yet, he uses his police authority and law knowledge to secure the deal, implying that despite Kamekona’s expertise in helicopters, he does not have that kind of leverage himself and that the only way he can succeed is to ask for favors and guidance from high powered White persons. This example is an extension to Steve’s narrative in the series, in that the White man saves the Native Hawaiians—repeatedly.

Kamekona is portrayed as compassionate, but his generosity and thoughtfulness are used with humor that emphasizes his ignorance. Much of the focus within these scenes are placed on how ridiculous and impractical Kamekona’s behavior and actions are. For example, now that he purchased a helicopter, Kamekona wants the Five-0 team to be his first customers and offers them gift certificates for free helicopter rides as Christmas presents. When questioned by the team, Kamekona calls having a lack of a pilot’s license a “technicality” (S3E11).

This scene suggests that Kamekona’s actions are not to be taken seriously, which supports the benevolence yet ignorant narrative. Interestingly, Kamekona does not seem to mind being the object of the tourist gaze or used as a commodity. His smiling face is the logo of his business ventures and is featured on the side of his shrimp food truck and on merchandise such as T-shirts. Kamekona wants his logo (i.e. face) on everything.

The series reinforces the tourist gaze of a benevolent yet ignorant Hawaiian. Kamekona is displayed as being caring and generous, yet ignorant, forcing him in a double-bind. Foreigners would want the generosity of their hosts, but by pointing out Hawaiians’ “stupidity”, oppression is reinforced, teaching them that they cannot achieve anything without the saving grace of the White person (Konzett, 2017). Kamekona is stuck. He is to be benevolent yet know his place through ignorance. He is to serve, but not be served. In particular, Kamekona reflects the hospitality culture of tourism, as Native Hawaiians are expected to be hospitable to visitors (Antinora, 2014). Sustaining that they are ignorant, the Hawaiian is to be seen through the tourist gaze, but not heard as they are not “qualified” to have a voice.

Past literature supports this troupe. Since contact with the first explorers to Hawai‘i, Western accounts of Hawaiians have written that Hawaiians are soft and inviting—as having a condition of benevolence. Earliest ship log accounts by Captain Cook and Captain James King (1785) described the implicit connection of benevolent “Hawaiinness” to its natural surroundings:

The civilities of this society were not, however confined to mere ceremony and parade. Our party on shore received from them, every day, a constant supply of hogs and vegetables, and several canoes loaded with provisions were sent to the ships with the same punctuality. No return was ever demanded... Three things made them our fast friends. Their own good natured benevolence disposition, gentle treatment on our part, and the dread of our firearms. (Cook & King, 1785, pp. 57)

This sense of “Hawaiinness at heart” is what Halualani (2002) calls “normative benevolence,” a cultural value that is inherent in the Hawaiian tradition. Halualani (2002) further contends, historically representing Hawaiians as naturally benevolent and willing to share everything, such as their land and culture, justifies the notion that non-Hawaiians can have a share of Hawai‘i.

What is also notable is how comedy is used to downplay racism and sexism, in turn normalizing them. “What makes humor especially interesting is that it tends to operate at this less than conscious level,” and is used so nonchalantly that audiences adopt messages with humor without critically appraising them (Shapre & Hynes, 2016, p. 89). The depiction of Kamekona’s comedic ignorance upholds his inferiority to Western thought.

## 5. Conclusion

By way of main characters Chin Ho Kelly, Kono Kalakaua, and Kamekona Tupuola, a composite of the “Hawaiian” is represented as being immoral, sexualized, benevolent, and ignorant. This depiction of the Hawaiian follows the trajectory of historical and contemporary portrayals of Hawaiians in the literature. This highlights the consequences that hegemonic stereotypes have within popular media, and difficulties that accompany challenging the status quo.

Since Westerners first encounter with Hawaiians, they have consistently depicted Hawaiians historically and contemporarily as benevolent, primitive, sexualized, unintelligent, savages—the quintessential “other”. As Said (1978) notes, through the notion of orientalism a dichotomy is formed between the West and the rest of the world. Orientalism operates in the service of the West’s hegemony over everyone else primarily by producing their counterparts discursively as the West’s inferior “other”, a maneuver which strengthens and constructs the West’s self-image as superior. It does this principally by distinguishing the identities of the West and the “other” through a dichotomizing system of representation via stereotyping (Said, 1978). Stereotypes aim at making rigid the sense of difference between the European and Indigenous parts of the world. As a consequence, Hawai‘i is characteristically produced in Orientalist discourse as voiceless, sensual, female, despotic, irrational and backward. By contrast, the West is represented as masculine, democratic, rational, moral, dynamic and progressive (Said, 1978).

The portrayal of Native Hawaiians as a multicultural hegemony from a Western mindset redefines what it means to be Hawaiian. This leaves the Native Hawaiian identity somewhat disoriented. Western constructed narratives, which continue to be told about Hawai‘i is prevalent in the eyes of mainland U.S. citizens, as well as for global audiences. Representations of exotic Indigenous cultures in media are usually used to promote tourism (Antinora, 2014; Trask, 1999). These depictions have advanced from colonial times when ethnic images often reflected a submissive or deferential “other” (Parker, 2016). Hall (1997a) explains that the representation of an “other” is established by a process in which the context of meaning is found not only in one image but also in how one image is read against or in connection with other images. The repetition of images gains textuality, accumulating meaning by playing off each other (Hall, 1997b). Stereotyping is often fixed by those in a position of power as a way to differentiate between what the dominant group regards as normal according to their own views and what might be excluded as the other (Hall, 1997b). Stereotypes may also be developed by what is ignored, trivialized, or left out of the mass media, a theoretical approach labeled symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978).

Understanding media and its influences on multiple facets of humanity (identity, ideology, economics, etc.) is complex, but media is almost inherently inescapable—it is always-already meshed into our lives (Slack, 2012). With reliance of technologies in aiding even in the tiniest of daily tasks, media studies is ever more relevant. Though this project is a step in the right direction, multiple other steps need to be taken. Analyzing texts is but one form of examining representations, identity, and identity formation. Other facets such as the political economy of Hawai‘i that supports such representations via tourism should be considered, as well as Hollywood industries that produce these artifacts. Measuring audience reception toward acceptance of media depictions of Hawaiians in the series, as well as in similar texts, would help to gain insight in the strength of media portrayals on the perception of reality.

This project analyzes episodes until season 7, because the audience sees the departure of Kono and Chin Ho, two majors characters who identify as Hawaiian in the show, but future research would benefit from expanding to the most recent season, especially since new characters that also identify as Hawaiian, such as Tani Rey (Meaghan Rath), are introduced. On the topic of Kono, Chin Ho, and Tani Rey, though they are “Hawaiian” in the series, their corresponding real-life actor and actresses are not, posing the question of their “passability”. Future work should examine how the Hawaiian-face acting, and the ideas of passing play into the reception of what it means to be Hawaiian.

In terms of the *Hawaii Five-0* series in general, comparing storylines and characters to its 1968-1980 predecessor might prove to be useful. Paying specific attention to the intertextuality, transferability, and translation between each series in terms of what stayed the same and what was revised in the newer series might lend some insight into the changing ideas surrounding Hawaiian identity. On September 24, 2018 the first episode of the reboot of *Magnum P.I.* premiered nationwide on CBS, and is now in their second season, totaling 24 episodes in the series thus far. *Magnum P.I.* and *Hawaii Five-0* encompass the same universe, or story world, making *Magnum P.I.* a potential expansion into analyzing Hawaiian representations.

While examining the show, especially in the case of Kono, the interplay between race and gender dynamics were apparent. Though not the scope of this paper, a successive project could hone-in on this particular matter. As race is not a monolith and is influenced from the various multilayering of intersectional identities, a focus on gender, race, sexuality, and class could potentially provide richer information about the inner workings of understanding identity and identity formation.

As a refraction of society, texts help to maintain the status quo. Loomba (2015) argues:

Imperial relations may have been established initially by guns, guile and disease, but they were maintained in their interpolative phase largely by textuality, both institutionally... and informally. Colonialism, then, is a formation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse it interpolates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation. (p. 103)

If the text is then a venue of representation, as a means of decolonization, reclaiming control of Hawaiian identity and subverting stereotypes by identified Hawaiians is a means of embracing non-Eurocentric perspectives. Perhaps to answer this need, scholarship pertaining to textual analysis of Hawaiians should follow what Kawelu (2015) suggests:

Embracing more of a Kanaka Maoli system of knowing, allowing for change and a multiplicity of approaches... engaging issues surrounding the practice of research, addressing research topics of interest to Kanaka Maoli, incorporating Kanaka Maoli voices into the discipline, and taking this one step further by encouraging Kanaka Maoli to enter the field. (p. 17)

As a result of globalization, learning about the authentic Native Hawaiian identity is possible, but only after filtering through a plethora of Western constructed narratives. Native Hawaiians are not exoticized others waiting to entertain tourists. They are strong, resilient, and increasingly taking charge of their own history and identities.

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