Paradise Fashioned: Introducing a New Concept

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This paper introduces Paradise Fashioned, a framework for analyzing the use of tropically-themed clothing to facilitate the militarization and colonialism of the Pacific Islands. We argue that foreign entities utilized bright and resort-like clothing to “camouflage” their goals by making their actions appear in line with local customs. Our framework is based on four elements: (1) Require western-style dress to gain benefits; (2) Link local clothing to militourism; (3) Dress military personnel in local clothing; and (4) Integrate military and colonial images to local clothing. These four components are used to organize and analyze a case study of the role of aloha wear in the colonialism and militarism of the Hawaiian Islands.

Case Study: Aloha Wear

Aloha wear is a category of clothing noted for its tropical prints and vivid colors and produced or designed in Hawai‘i. Items in this category include Hawaiian dresses (e.g., mu‘umu‘u or billowy dresses, and holokū or dresses with a train), the aloha (or Hawaiian) shirt, as well as western-styled clothing, such as fitted dresses, jackets, and pants, constructed with tropically-themed fabrics. With its bright colors and bold, usually floral patterns, aloha wear is one of the most recognizable items associated with Hawai‘i. Originally developed for the tourist market (Morgado, 2003), from the late 20th to early 21st centuries the aloha shirt (and later aloha wear) became ubiquitous in tourist-oriented locales like Waikīkī. The aloha shirt also extends beyond the tourist scene and plays an integral role in the everyday landscape for Native Hawaiians and local island residents, whose preferences for design differ from tourists (blinded). We recognize that residents of, and tourists to, Hawai‘i also likely have different preferences in their selection of other items of dress categorized as aloha wear.

(1) *Require western-style dress to gain benefits:* Western forms of dress were introduced to the Hawaiian Islands in 1778 upon Captain Cook’s arrival, but when the missionaries arrived in 1820, they used clothing as a means to “civilize” the natives; Hawaiians needed to dress according to western notions of modesty to attend schools and churches they set-up. As western styles became incorporated into Hawaiian wardrobes by cultural authentication (Arthur, 1997) they eventually became the basis of Aloha wear (Bradley & Reilly, 2012). Thus, western-type clothing was intimately linked to western education and religious practices.

(2): *Link local clothing to militourism:* The concept of militourism, or the facilitation of a tourist industry by military forces that are concealed by the tourism industry (Teaiwa, 2001), enables colonial efforts. The US military’s efforts to “blend in” are observed in its selling aloha wear through military outposts such as the NEX. During the Cold War, the US Armed Forces began

contracting with local aloha wear garment manufacturers such as Malihini Sportswear, to sell their Aloha shirts at military installations across the Pacific (Sasaki, 2016). This practice continues today with contracts awarded to numerous manufacturers selling aloha wear at different price points.

(3) *Dress military personnel in local clothing:* The US military developed a set of guidelines, known as *aloha crip*, for personnel designating appropriate aloha wear that can be worn while at work. Guidelines included appropriate design motifs (cultural or floral) in Polynesian, tropical, or traditional styles ("Wearing of Aloha Attire," 2002, 2013). The rules were established as early as 1990 and have been updated periodically, identifying acceptable and unacceptable items. For example, rubber slippers, or flip-flops, are not permitted, and while this can be attributed to safety issues, the idea that they are "not professional" aligns with western matters of taste and appearance.

(4) *Integrate military and colonial images with island clothing:* In addition to the tropical and Polynesian prints used to create aloha wear, today aloha wear with militarized images is offered for sale; for example, local brands sold through Pearl Harbor and other tourist-laden venues, include aloha shirts commemorating WWII with the US flag, soldiers, military airplanes and naval ships, and the Arizona Memorial. For example, one aloha shirt design commemorates the 100th Infantry Battalion, composed of American-born, second-generation Japanese soldiers, rendering the soldiers in cartoon-like figures.

Conclusion

As material and symbolic embodiment of a relaxed "island lifestyle," aloha wear is part of a system of codes that sell paradise to the world (Buck, 1993). As an embodiment of militourism, aloha wear has historically been deployed to promote visions of a multicultural US empire while simultaneously rendering invisible Hawai'i's position as the most militarized state in the union (Teaiwa, 2001). Through both its marketing and pattern design, aloha wear has been used to cast Native Hawaiians as relics of the past. As a site of performance, aloha wear functions as a contested site of meaning and memory, concealing and calling out histories of racial hierarchy, white supremacy, and militarization. This served to assuage white America's race-based anxiety over the incorporation of Hawai'i's Indigenous and multiracial population into the Union. Using the Paradise Fashioned framework we were able to analyze how aloha wear aligns with a "Western paradisal discourse" and often embodies the US's attempt to re-narrate the histories of genocide, white supremacy, and ongoing militarized occupation in Hawai'i.

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