7. Waters of Destruction: Mythical Creatures, Boiling Pots and Tourist Encounters at Wailuku River in Hilo, Hawai'i

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Introduction

The relationships between people and the sea, or the ‘social life’ of the sea, have been extensively studied in the Pacific, yet the social lives of rivers in this region have not been given the same attention. Given the importance that rivers hold for most societies, it makes sense to ask whether rivers in the Pacific are equally as interesting and complex as the sea. Looking at large rivers on a global scale, such as the Ganges, the Amazon or the Nile—all rather striking natural features that occupy large areas within the landscape—one becomes aware of the important roles such rivers have played in world history and in the development of the societies along their banks. These rivers are roads for transportation and trade, pilgrim destinations, sources for irrigation systems and drinking water, tourist attractions and, in general, gathering places for people of different social and cultural backgrounds.

Like others in this volume (Chapters 3, 4 and 9), this chapter will focus on bodies of fresh water on a much smaller scale. Hawai‘i does not have any large-scale rivers. In fact, many of the rivers in Hawai‘i would probably be called creeks or streams in societies with large-scale rivers, or even those with mid-sized rivers that are discussed in this volume (e.g. Chapters 2 and 5). So why should we study rivers in Hawai‘i? The small scale of the rivers does not make them less important or less interesting; on the contrary, they prove to be equally as important to the local landscape, economy, culture and history as any large-scale river elsewhere. Long before Cook arrived in the islands in 1778, for instance, Hawaiians had developed irrigation systems by digging ditches (*‘auwai*) and constructing flumes that directed water from rivers and streams to their gardens and to larger crop fields such as those used in the cultivation of taro (McGregor 2006: 49–50). According to MacLennan (2007: 497) water was also involved in politics and spirituality:

Water regulation ordered much of the agricultural and political social system in the taro producing valleys of Hawai‘i. Deeply integrated in the political hierarchy and spiritual world, [water] was a foundation of life and meaning. Water was to be shared so that life was possible. It was water, rather than land, that formed one of the central cornerstones of life.

Miike (2004: 56) claims that:

Water symbolized bountifulness, because it irrigated taro, the Hawaiian staff of life. Taro *lo‘i* [a patch of wetland dedicated to growing taro] were irrigated by diverting stream water through *‘auwai* or ditches. Water was of such importance to Hawaiian agriculture that stated twice—*waiwai*—it was the word for ‘wealth’. The equal sharing of water—*kānāwai*—also represented the law: a person’s right to enjoy his privileges and conceding the same right to his fellow man.

The Great Mahele of 1848, a piece of legislation that took the first step towards privatising land in Hawai‘i, brought forth the first change in the meaning of, and access to, water resources (Chinen 1958). When the sugar industry started to boom in Hawai‘i, beginning in the 1870s with a push by Euro-Americans towards industrialising sugar production, many of the water sources were transformed from shared resources (under Hawaiian law) into resources controlled mostly by the sugar companies (MacLennan

2007: 497).¹ Today, irrigation for farmland still comes from the streams and rivers in the islands, and represents one of many important factors in the relationships between people and rivers.

Water and rivers in contemporary Hawai'i hold many meanings and are subject to multiple contestations. As Strang (2004: 1) argues in a global context:

All over the blue planet, even in the most rained-upon nations, people are engaged in conflicts over water. There are debates about who should own it, manage it, have access to it, profit from it, control it or regulate it. Nothing on earth, not even land, is more contested.

Following Strang, this chapter will examine who has or should have access to and control over a particular river in Hilo on Hawai'i Island (also referred to as the Big Island). While presenting the river's features and how the river is utilised in contemporary Hilo, I also focus on encounters between tourists and local people,² as well as encounters between the latter and the river itself. The chapter is organised in three sections: the first section describes some of the traditional meanings of water and rivers in Hawai'i; the second provides an ethnographic and historical description of the Wailuku River on Hawai'i Island; and the third section looks at social encounters along this particular river.

Through participant observation I have subtly been made aware of the fascinating relationships and everyday interactions between people and their natural surroundings, including rivers, in contemporary Hawai'i. When reading through various anthropological writings on nature and land in Hawai'i, I have found that much of the literature emphasises property

1 See also Wilcox (1996) and Miike (2004) for more information on these topics.

2 The term 'local' is broad and often difficult to define in Hawai'i. Discussions about what it means to be local in Hilo have been continuous throughout my decade of doing research there, and I suspect for far longer than that. Every now and then, and also quite recently (during the autumn months of 2016), local and national newspapers have published feature articles, often written by people who defend their own local identities, which discuss what it means to be local, or the differences between being a local, Indigenous Hawaiian or being *haole*, another complicated term referring to people of Caucasian descent. In an article in the *Huffington Post* (Riker 2015), Ty Kawika Tengan, an associate professor of anthropology and ethnic studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, stated that 'I think [being local] means spending a significant amount of time in the islands so you're rooted in the community ... A sense of localness is one that doesn't erase Native Hawaiian history ... I see local ... as how invested they are at maintaining Hawaii as a unique place'. I will use the term 'local' in this chapter in much the same way as Tengan uses it here, not pointing towards a specific ethnic background but more towards how people relate to the community and the history of Hawai'i.

rights in land, the development of land and what the relationship between land and people was like in pre-colonial times—all of which is usually tied to a political cause or form of analysis. While these are all important issues, such approaches fail to deal with the way that the contemporary everyday relationships between people and their natural surroundings are being played out.³ Local residents, especially non-Indigenous residents, do not generally practice traditional reciprocal relationships with land and water, but they do construct intimate relationships with various features of the local environment. People in Hilo often use their natural surroundings as a playground, as exemplified by kids jumping into the river or playing in the ocean, teens and adults camping and hiking in the valleys and beaches, or even snowboarders riding through the first snow on Mauna Kea, the highest mountain in Hawai‘i. How do people move about in their environment and how are notions of agency in people and land played out? How can stories about a river give us indications of social relationships and cultural practices? As for the Wailuku River itself, it has been poorly studied by anthropologists. The most extensive publications on this river lie within the fields of geology and archaeology, and not much has been written on its social life.

Water and Rivers in Hawai‘i

Just like the people of the Gambier Islands (Mawyer, this volume), Hawaiians distinguish between salt or sea water (*kai*) and fresh water (*wai*) in their vernacular language. In Hawaiian mythology, fresh water is often associated with the deity Kāne in his capacity to bring forth water when the land is dry. According to Miike (2004: 45), the Hawaiian explanation for the origin of springs is that *wai* was female, and would gush out when Kāne, ‘the male procreative force, thrust his spear into the ground’. Salt water is often used in cleansing rituals (Beckwith 1970), so a *pī kai* is ‘a ritual sprinkling with sea water or other salted water to purify an area or person from spiritual contamination and remove *kapus* (taboos) and harmful influences’ (Pukui et al. 1972: 179). This ritual is today often performed within the *hula*⁴ tradition, and especially within *hula kahiko*

3 See McGregor (2006) for an exception to this approach.

4 *Hula* is a comprehensive tradition that involves knowledge about Hawaiian genealogies, history, cosmology, geography, ritual and ecology. The tradition is often expressed and performed through several different forms of dance, of which the two most common are *kāhiko* (‘ancient’) and *‘auana* (‘modern’).

(ancient hula), in which the *kumu hula* (mentor/master of hula) sprinkles salt water in the corners and along the walls of the *halau* (the space for *hula* training) in order for her or his students not to be corrupted by unwanted spirits while in training.

The *hi'uwai* is a ritual that has much the same purpose as the *pī kai* but requires that a person's entire body be submerged in water. According to Pukui and Elbert's Hawaiian dictionary, *hi'uwai* refers to water purification festivities held on the second night of the month of Welehu (near the end of the year). 'The people bathed and frolicked in the sea or stream after midnight, then put on their finest tapa and ornaments for feasting and games' (Pukui and Elbert 1986: 72). Jacka (this volume) refers to the cleansing attributes of water in his story about Jonah, but whereas it seems that the water in this case purified or cleansed the physical body, a *hi'uwai* is a ritual focused on purifying the spirit or the mind. This ritual is often guided by a *kahuna* (priest or spiritual mentor), and can be performed in both salt and fresh water. My friend 'Alamea'⁵ has written the following account of a *hi'uwai* as experienced during her renaming ceremony:

I was born Piilani Kawailehua (climbing to the heavens on the raindrop of a *lehua* blossom) [last named removed],⁶ named by my [paternal] grandmother Annie. In second grade, age 8, my mom had it legally changed to [first and middle name removed] (the rays of the sun entwined in the necklace of love) [last name removed]. She told me that I needed to change my name because I was having nightmares about dying. I used to dream that I was stuck in a raindrop that in essence was a drop of blood because of the tinge of the red *lehua* in the raindrop, and was dying, and I would start to ascend, wherever; heaven, paradise? I don't know but wherever you go after you die, the direction was up. This scared me when I was little and my mom too so we went and saw a *kahuna* [spiritual mentor] and he asked about my name and who named me. First he said that Piilani alone is a heavy name to carry for anyone as it is a name of royalty from the island of Maui. That is why Maui is known as Maui a Piilani (Maui of Piilani) and Big Island is known as Hawaii Moku o Keawe (Hawai'i Island of Keawe). Both Piilani and Keawe were the last rulers of both islands before Kamehameha united them. So in essence the best people to have these names are those from that family line and royalty. Second the correlation between the dream and my name was undeniable and he felt that the best way to stop the dreams was to rename me, and they needed to be stopped, because in Hawaiian culture many

5 This is a pseudonym.

6 Names have been removed in order to maintain the confidentiality of the interview participant.

times your dream is more than a dream, it can actually be an out of body experience. So, none of us wanted that and we decided to do a rebirth ritual. The process of renaming me went with me going to Ka'u with my mom to do a *hi'uwai* with the *kahuna* and her. A *hi'uwai* is a cleansing and rebirth ceremony where the person who is being reborn is dressed in a *pareo* [wrap-around skirt] and enters a river or the ocean (I was in the ocean) and is prayed over by the *kahuna* to cleanse and take away all bad *mana* and in my case the name not meant for me. I was then completely submerged under water three times (much like a baptism) and upon resurfacing the final time was reborn but unnamed. You then wait for a sign for a name. Luckily my sign came in the form of an *'iwa* [frigate] bird which was flying overhead in the sky. The sky was completely overcast and there wasn't a ray of sunlight anywhere but consequently, as we watched the bird, the clouds formed a ring called a *wana* in Hawaiian where the sun's rays shone through. I remember being cold and then when that happened just feeling so full of warmth and my mom and the *kahuna* did too and he told us that the feeling was more than just the heat and warmth from the sun but it was the feeling of love. As you can see my name has love twice in it and it represents the love we felt that day from the gods and the love a mother feels for her child and likewise. (Alamea, 6 February 2009)

While studying *hula* in Hilo in 2009, my *kumu* guided me through a *hi'uwai*, very similar to the ritual just described and also performed in the sea, in order to cleanse my soul of lingering spirits after having experienced a death within the family. Although many of the old traditions, rituals and myths connected to water are not practiced or recalled today, the ones just mentioned still have a significant relevance in the lives of contemporary Hawaiians. Water clearly still has a cleansing effect that allows Hawaiians to move away from haunted dreams and lingering spirits. However, the waters of Hawai'i are also believed to carry more ominous qualities, such as mythical creatures that can reside in and control the rivers and sea, and the Wailuku River is rumoured to be the resting place of such a creature.

Wailuku—Waters of Destruction

The Wailuku River descends from the upper reaches of Mauna Kea, Hawai'i's tallest volcano, towards the northwestern part of downtown Hilo on the Big Island and finally into Hilo Bay (see Figure 7.1). The river

is 45 km in length, is situated within the *ahupua'a* of Pueo,⁷ and is fed by many smaller streams such as Ho'okelekele, Kahoama, Pakahuahine and several others. According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS 2000), the river basin we see today was formed by at least two lava flows from Mauna Kea, the oldest being the 'Anuenue flow (10,500 years old), which formed the thick lip of Rainbow Falls, as well as most of the rounded grey boulders that can be found in another section of the river called Boiling Pots. The river channel was again filled by a *pahoehoe* flow about 3,100 years ago, which explains the mix of *a'a* and *pahoehoe* we see in the river channel today.⁸

Figure 7.1 The Wailuku River.

Source: Cartography by Jerry Jacka.

Fed by rainwater, the Wailuku River flows, old and wise, fast and slow, with agendas often hidden from the untrained eye. While it can constitute an idyllic and somewhat romantic natural scene on calm sunny days, it can transform into a raging brown monster in the rainy season, boiling with

7 According to Pukui and Elbert (1986), *abu* is a Hawaiian word for a heap, pile or collection, and *pua'a* is the word for pig. An *ahupua'a* is a land division, usually extending from the mountains or uplands to the sea, and so called because its borders were marked with heaps or piles (*abu*) of stone, with an image of a pig (*pua'a*) or an actual pig as payment of tax to the chief placed on top of the pile.

8 Lava flows are divided into two main categories in the Hawaiian language—*a'a* and *pahoehoe*. An *a'a* flow is dark brown or black in colour and has sharp rock formations, while a *pahoehoe* flow is smoother and looks grey when placed next to an *a'a* flow in the landscape. These categories are used internationally within fields such as geology and volcanology.

fury as it thunders down towards Hilo Bay. According to the geological survey (USGS 2000), the river carries an average of 1 million cubic metres of water from its upper reaches all the way down to the Singing Bridge,⁹ and in very rainy periods or during intense storms the discharge can be more than 20 times greater. It also transports up to 10 tonnes of suspended sediment into Hilo Bay. Because of the Hilo breakwater, which was built to protect the town from winter storms in 1929, the sediments remain trapped within the bay, prompting the rumour that its infamous brown murky waters are infested with reef and tiger sharks. Some of the water carried by the Wailuku River is turned into power for Big Island residents by several hydro-power stations located in the lower reaches of the river. The Hawaiian Electric Company (HELCO) built its first hydro-power station at Pū'ūeo in 1910 and a second station at Waiau in 1920. In 1993, the Wailuku River Hydroelectric Power Company plant, located just below the junction of the Wailuku River and the Kalohewahewa/Ho'okelekele and Kahoama streams, began commercial operation, providing additional power to HELCO. The hydro-power stations in the Wailuku River are a part of a larger effort to develop technology for renewable energy in the Hawaiian Islands. Even though the Wailuku River is a small river, not big enough or suitable for damming to create a more controlled level of power production, it plays an important part in the larger effort to 'go greener' in Hawai'i; thus, for some Hawaiians, it represents a green power alternative responsive to wider global warming and climate change debates.

In addition to serving as a source for power in Hawai'i, the Wailuku River also serves as a major tourist attraction in Hilo, especially at Rainbow Falls (called Waianuenue in Hawaiian), a beautiful waterfall shaped in the form of a wishbone falling into a pool of water in front of a big cave, at the Boiling Pots, a cluster of deep pools that 'boil' when the river is carrying large quantities of water, and at Pe'epe'e Falls, a waterfall situated a little higher up the river from Boiling Pots (Figure 7.2).

9 The Singing Bridge is the last human-made construction associated with the Wailuku River before it flows into Hilo Bay. It is situated right on the shore line as one exits Hilo town on Bayfront Highway, and was given its name because it 'sings' when one drives over its metal grid base.

Figure 7.2 Waianuenue/Rainbow Falls.

Source: Photograph by the author.

Rainbow Falls and Boiling Pots have had viewpoint constructions added to their flanks, with parking lots, restrooms, easy-access ramps and security fences. Most tour operators in Hilo take their tourists by coach to see Rainbow Falls, and several take them up to Boiling Pots as well. Several helicopter tour companies offer tours of the upper reaches of the river that cannot easily be accessed by any other means of transportation, and from the air tourists can see the river's many upper waterfalls as well as trails leading through the Hilo Forest Reserve. At Rainbow Falls, visitors can see a large cave situated right behind the falls and, according to legend—as told by Mary Kawena Pukui—this cave was once the home of the demigod Maui's mother, Hina:

Hina, mother of Maui, lives in a cave by the Wailuku River in Hilo on Hawaii where she beats bark cloth. While Maui is away at Aleha-ka-la (now called Hale-a-ka-la) snaring the sun, Lono-kaheo (some say Kuna the eel) comes to woo her and when she refuses him he almost drowns her. She calls to Maui for help and he throws about Lono-kaheo the snares with which he has overcome the sun and turns him into a rock which stands there today. The stone image of Hina could in the old days be seen with water dripping from its breasts, but a landslide has covered it. (Beckwith 1970: 232)

Lono-kaheo is a lizard-like creature that Hawaiians call a *mo'ō*, a creature that can live in and control both salt and fresh water in the Hawaiian Islands. The living legend of the *mo'ō* of Wailuku River claims that Lono-kaheo had its final resting place deep down in the dark pools of Boiling Pots, where it waits patiently to grab hold of and drag its next victim down into hidden lava tubes. Wailuku literally means 'waters of destruction'; while there is no doubt in the minds of the people of Hilo that Wailuku can be dangerous, it is still continually disturbed by reckless visitors and challenged to uphold its reputation of being a wrathful river that consumes its victims at will. Young Hilo residents swim in the river, especially at Boiling Pots, where they dare each other to jump from pot to pot down the river trail, even when the river is rough. According to local knowledge, someone dies here almost on a yearly basis, swallowed by currents caused by underground lava tubes in the deep pools, trapping the victims in pockets of water under the surface with no chance of getting out. According to Clark (2001), residents on Reeds Island, located downstream from Rainbow Falls, made several efforts to restrict access to the river after a long run of drownings of very young local swimmers in the mid to late 1990s. It was not possible to enforce these restrictions, however, since many of the popular spots where young people swim, such as 'the slides', 'the ropes' and 'South America', can be accessed through private properties that run all the way down to the water's edge. When fire service rescue divers were asked about how many people drown in the river, they said that no one has the exact numbers, but they would estimate it to be about one life claimed per year. 'Swimmers in distress in the Wailuku seldom survive', said Kala Mossman, who had been a rescue man for 10 years and had 17 years of scuba diving experience. That's because the 'currents are so strong, and the swimmers often are young or inexperienced' (Clark 2001).

After a period of heavy rain in early April 2014, I decided to go up the river to Boiling Pots to see if there would be anyone swimming there, and sure enough I found a group of local teenage boys diving into the boiling brown water and daring each other to make acrobatic jumps from the cliffs. One of them was standing on the riverbank watching his friends jump, and I went up to him to ask him why he was not jumping into the river with his friends. He said that he would never jump in, and stated: 'Nah, they're crazy, it's really dangerous when it's like this! People die here you know'. I asked him why he thought his friends would jump in and whether they did not know it was dangerous, and he said: 'Oh, they know, they just don't care!' I asked: 'Do you worry about them when they jump

in the river when it's like this?' 'No,' he said, 'they just wanna have fun you know, it's all just fun'. 'So is it more fun to come here and swim when it's kinda dangerous then?', I asked. 'It is for them! I would never, I'm not allowed by my mom. But I wouldn't do it anyways, it's crazy, haha!' The boys let me hang out with them for a while, as I took pictures of their daring dives and expressed my concern for their well-being, before they moved towards Pe'epe'e Falls further up the river (Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3 Local boy dives into a 'boiling pot' in Wailuku River.

Source: Photograph by the author.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Iselle, which hit Hawai'i Island on 7 August 2014, the Boiling Pots and Rainbow Falls areas of Wailuku River State Park were closed to the public, and guarded by security personnel, in order to keep people at a safe distance from the river, which at this point carried enormous quantities of water. Curious about what the river would look like after the hurricane, I went up to a section above Boiling Pots where two bridges cross the river. While approaching the bridges, I noticed cars parked alongside the road; when reaching the first bridge I realised I was not the only curious person who had set out to see the aftermath of the storm. Hilo residents had gathered on the bridge where they looked in awe upon the gushing brown water speeding down towards Hilo Bay and shared stories of what had happened to them during the storm (Figure 7.4). Everyone was making comments about how powerful the river was and that it would be 'no good swimming in it right now'.

Figure 7.4 People gather at Wailuku River after Hurricane Iselle.

Source: Photograph by the author.

While living in Hilo as an international exchange student for a year in 2007, I went swimming in Wailuku River at least once a week so long as the river was quiet. At this stage, I had not yet heard about the dangers and hidden agendas of this river. Sometimes we would bring masks and snorkels to explore the subsurface world of the river, revealing truly beautiful features such as large rock formations, archways and small caves formed by the lava flows that created the river base thousands of years ago. It is not difficult to understand why people are willing to partake in risky behaviour to experience the serenity and cooling effects of the river. However, as soon as I started doing *hula* in 2009, I stopped swimming in the river as my *kumu* preferred that I keep away from it.

Located just upstream from Rainbow Falls is the Hilo hospital, and after its construction the river has been said to be transporting toxic waste down to Hilo Bay. My *kumu* always said that if I absolutely could not stay away from the river, I should ‘at least go swim above the hospital because of the waste’. ‘And to think’, she continued, ‘what kind of toxic influence the *mo’o* is under, affecting its judgment in the acquiring of new victims. No, better you stay out altogether.’ The belief that the water flowing in the reaches below the hospital is contaminated with disease, or filthy with toxic waste, is not necessarily rooted in the reality of the hospital’s

waste management, but there is a common belief that the location of the hospital has made the river's lower reaches unclean.¹⁰ In addition to the contamination from the hospital, rivers and water in Hawai'i can often contain leptospirosis, a bacterial disease often transferred to humans via water containing urine from infected animals. People in Hilo are aware of this disease and claim that the Wailuku River contains both leptospirosis and *E. coli*. They would not drink from any river in the islands without purifying it with a filter or tablets first, and they say that you can never know what is happening upstream: 'A dead pig may be lying in the river up there'.

In spite of Wailuku's beauty and serenity on warm and sunny days, as well as its roles in the state economy as a tourist attraction and a source of renewable energy, it is the danger of the river that is mostly portrayed when people tell stories about it. A certain darkness rests over this river, and this is felt by most local residents because many have lost family members or friends to the Wailuku *mo'o*.

Tourism and Social Encounters in Wailuku River State Park

The rivers of Hawai'i are popular destinations for people visiting the islands. The picturesque waterfalls in these rivers are heavily romanticised by the tourist industry, and are experienced as highly exotic and sometimes even magical by visitors. Tourists come to Hawai'i searching for the perfect waterfall that dives into a refreshing freshwater pool, surrounded by lush vegetation and beautiful flowers—a perfect scene for romance or adventurous cliff-diving activities. However, their dream of paradise is often shattered when the local population or their tour guide warns them about dangerous currents, sharp subsurface rocks and what a pounding 50-metre-high waterfall will do to your head if you stand under it. Every year tourists run into problems while exploring areas outside resorts, and they often need assistance from lifeguards or search and rescue teams.

10 As Jacka writes (this volume): 'I never saw a Porgeran drink from a river. People are unsure of what others upstream may have done to or in the water.'

First-time visitors to Hawai'i on packaged tours often arrive at Honolulu airport, are greeted with *leis*¹¹ and music by dark-skinned young people, and are bused to lavish hotels for a week of fun in the sun. They learn about something called the '*aloha* spirit' while on bus tours and absorb the friendliness of the Islands by observing smiling faces and receiving courteous, seemingly deferential treatment. All too many live in this plastic bubble, unaware that there is a complex society behind what may appear to be a gentle facade. (Haas 1998: 3)

While many areas in the Hawaiian Islands are very tourist friendly, other areas are considered off-limits to tourists. One example would be the Waianae coast on Oahu, which is rumoured to be the home of a community very hostile to tourists and newcomers. While taking a holiday with an Indigenous Hawaiian family in Waianae in 2009, I was made aware by neighbours and friends of the family that I was the only *haole* within a radius of several miles, and the neighbourhood rarely had visitors who were not local. I was told that I would not have been welcomed had I not been introduced to the community by their good neighbour. The *Honolulu Star Bulletin* published a story in 2004 about how the real estate market in Hawai'i has encouraged more continental Americans to buy properties in Waianae, and how these newcomers believe that the anti-*haole* image is a largely urban myth perpetuated by residents to protect the area. Larry Dingus, newcomer, resident and landowner in Waianae, was quoted as saying: 'I think there's a lot of self-interest in that image They don't want it to be "Californicated". It's a perception I'm happy to help keep alive' (Martin 2004). This concern about 'Californication' springs from an upsurge in the movement of people from California to Hawai'i, and is not limited to the Waianae area. I have often been made aware of this concern by residents in and around Hilo, especially in relation to places that are considered quintessentially Hawaiian, and these are often places that have great historical and mythical importance.

The complexity of relationships between people of different social backgrounds is not limited to that between residents and tourists in Hawai'i. The island group has been subjected to a continuous flow of migrants from different parts of the world, which first peaked with the sugar boom in the 1870s, when migrant workers were imported from Europe, Asia and the Pacific to work on the sugar plantations. Today,

11 A *lei* is an ornament worn around the head or about the neck. It can be made from flowers, leaves, shells, nuts, beads or feathers.

descendants with mixed ancestry from these migrants often identify as some form of 'local', often with a more specific twist to the term such as 'local Filipino', 'local Portuguese' or 'local Japanese'. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, people of Caucasian decent are usually referred to as *haole* and, even if they were born in the islands, it is difficult for them to identify as local. However, the term 'local *haole*' is used by some, and seems to be increasingly accepted as the debate on what it means to be local continues in Hawai'i. Other large social groups include the Japanese, Chinese, Micronesians and Indigenous or native Hawaiians known as Kanaka Maoli.¹² Relationships between these social groups often involve the negotiation of identity and sometimes give rise to tension, and they are part of the 'complex society' that Haas (1998) argues tourists do not experience. Even so, the concerns about a changing Hawai'i mentioned earlier may sometimes lead to uncomfortable encounters between residents and tourists.

Since Rainbow Falls and Boiling Pots are popular hangout spots frequented by young Hilo residents, as well as being popular sites for tourists, the Wailuku River represents a good example of a Hawaiian place for encounters between the local population and tourists. Sometimes these encounters can be rather tense, and the parties involved can be left with negative experiences. For instance, the *Honolulu Star Advertiser* reported on 6 February 2013 that a 49-year-old male visitor from China became separated from a larger tour group, and was then assaulted and robbed of his belongings near the restroom area at Rainbow Falls (Anon. 2013). While Rainbow Falls State Park seems—and usually is—a safe and serene place to visit, occasionally there are incidents like this that could threaten tourists' desire to make the effort to come and see it.

I witnessed another example of a negative encounter between visitors and the local population when doing fieldwork in Hilo in 2009. I was in Rainbow Falls State Park to look for banyan leaves for making *lei* for my *hula* class. Alongside the waterfall and the river is a path that leads down

12 The (problematic) contemporary legal definition of 'native Hawaiian' states that: '[a] Native Hawaiian [is] a descendant with at least one-half blood quantum of individuals inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands prior to 1778' (Kauanui 2008: 2). This definition originates from the *Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1921*, but is now surrounded by additional complications (Kauanui 2008; Kelley 2008; Torgersen 2010). The struggle for Indigenous Hawaiian rights has been going on since the early 1970s, with conflicts over land use and resources, culture, education and social benefits (Kanahele 1979; Linnekin 1983; Trask 1987, 1999, 2000; Kame'eleihiwa 1992; Friedman 1993; Silva 2004; Kauanui 2008; Kelley 2008; Tengan 2008; Torgersen 2010).

to a large banyan tree. In front of the waterfall is a paved viewpoint that stretches down to a parking lot for cars and buses, with restroom facilities at the back of the lot. The largest bus companies and tour operators on the island offer tours to see the waterfall and surrounding areas, and on this particular day a group of older tourists had made their way up to the park. While walking back down the path to the parking lot, I heard the squealing of car tyres and saw a car speeding through it, barely missing the elderly people making their way across the parking lot towards the viewpoint. A local girl was hanging out of the window of the car screaming, with the utmost power of her voice, 'Fucking haoles! Go back to where you fucking came from! We hate you and don't want you here! Fuck you haoles!' Obviously in rage, the local girl expressed in words and action what many locals feel about tourists, and her protest was likely rooted in frustration over their constant presence at Rainbow Falls.

However, such encounters of tension, and in this case even rage, between locals and tourists are not the norm. Most encounters are friendly and welcoming on both sides, evident in the good reputation the people of 'the Aloha State' hold both nationally and internationally. Nevertheless, when tourists move outside the typical tourist zones, they sometimes encounter local and Indigenous Hawaiians who are not so eager to have them around. One of the reasons encounters can have a very complicated back story is the interdependent relationship between residents and tourists, since the island economy, including everything from large resorts to small local businesses, is so dependent on a certain level of tourism activity, and the tourists themselves are dependent on the residents working within the industry.

Because of this interdependent relationship with tourists, locals and Indigenous Hawaiians have developed a certain expertise in impression management (Goffman 1959), and either as individuals or groups have adapted to lives in which they practice behavioural alteration in order to deal with the more than 8 million tourists who visit the islands every year (HTA 2012). This even exceeds the typical performativity found in most tourist/local encounters, where the tourist industry worker performs a role suited to the encounter. This sort of performance exists so long as the performer repeats the acts that signify it, as the social relationships are continually made out of practices, rather than prescriptively structured (Sahlins 1985: xii). Moving beyond the classical performances of tour guides or resort bartenders, for example, Hawaiians have cleverly developed methods of performance and impression management that

keep tourists away from certain areas, or at the very least encourage them to interact more respectfully at places that hold special meaning within Hawaiian culture. The stories of the *mo'o* in Wailuku River are told in order to keep people away from the river, both because of the danger that it poses but also, I would suggest, to control the movement of people in and around the river.

Hawaiian mythology and cosmology are often used in stories told to tourists about certain places. On Hawai'i Island, tourists are told stories about the fire goddess Pele, and how her temperament should not be tested. They are told to act respectfully when entering and staying in areas that are most specifically considered to be Pele's land, or else she will punish them in one way or another. Another story, told especially to hikers and campers, concerns the Night Walkers, an army of the ghosts of Hawaiian warriors who march to old battlegrounds or spiritual places at sunrise and sunset. If you encounter the Night Walkers you must lie down with your face towards the ground to show them respect, or else, so the story goes, you will die.

Hviding (1998) argues that the people of Marovo Lagoon in Solomon Islands also practice impression management when they use their dark past as headhunters, as well as the dangers of their natural environment, in an instrumental way in order to uphold a form of spatial discipline and control the movement of the tourists they encounter. Just as people in Hilo would tell tourists stories about the Wailuku *mo'o* and Pele's unforgiving temperament, people of Marovo take their tourists on hikes into the jungle to see shrines containing actual human skulls from the headhunting period, or take them up murky rivers while telling scary stories of big man-eating crocodiles.

Hviding gives an account of a group of entrepreneurs (or adventure tourists) who came to Marovo to set up a kayaking business, but were caught off guard by the complex land tenure system in the lagoon, as well as by the constant presence of villagers, which shattered their illusion of 'that secluded spot [in which they] could lounge about undisturbed' (Hviding 1998: 1). As they paddled about the lagoon, looking for places to camp and places to enjoy the fruits of the land and sea, with a fresh memory of village stories about shark-infested waters and man-eating crocodiles, rain, wind and darkness caught up with them. While fearing the rough waters and what they could potentially be hiding, and after punching a hole through their kayak on the coral reef, the group started

to panic, yet still managed to find a site where they 'silently set up camp' for the night and waited for the morning sun to rise. As soon as morning came, they headed straight for the nearest resort where they could enjoy good food, warm showers and comfortable beds.

For the anthropologist with years of experience from Marovo Lagoon and close enough knowledge of people and place to be able to trace the movements and interactions recounted, the kayakers' story turns into a tale of uncertain encounters in which the much-praised pristine nature and friendly people of Marovo are attributed with dark secrets and adventure tourism becomes a demanding enterprise and potentially gruelling experience for the tourist. Sharks and crocodiles hungry for human flesh appear to lurk behind the increasingly shattered facade of a Paradise full of gusty winds and sharp coral waiting to rip the bottom out of any flimsy craft passing overhead. (Hviding 1998: 41)

The tourists came looking for Paradise, but ended up in what Hviding calls a 'fearsome Heart of Darkness'. Paradise could only be restored by escaping the scary unknown and entering a more comfortably constructed kind of paradise that represented something entirely different from the adventurous ecotourism the group had set out to experience.

In the Hawaiian case, scary stories about the *mo'o* living in the hidden caves and lava tubes in the Wailuku River turn a beautiful natural feature of the landscape into something ominous, thus keeping the hordes of tourists out of the river and away from a favourite spot that Hilo locals prefer to enjoy in seclusion. However mythical, the agency attributed to the *mo'o* structures the reality of the river, gives it a kind of agency beyond human control, and thus constitutes a kind of 'mythical reality' (Sahlins 1981).

Conclusion

I started this chapter by questioning why we should study rivers in the Pacific, or more specifically in Hawai'i. While briefly looking into the meaning and importance of water, this chapter has mainly focused on the role of the Wailuku River in contemporary Hilo society. With its powerful reputation as a destructive river, it is attributed agency by its visitors and considered to live a life of its own. Studying this river can give us insights into relationships between the residents of Hilo and their natural environment, as well as their relationships to the myths of

old Hawai'i. The social life of this river involves relationships on different levels, since it is not only a source of 'clean power' for Big Island residents and irrigation for its surrounding farmland, but also the basis for a Big Island tourist industry. Particular sections of the river are also primary locations for encounters between the local population and visitors to Hilo, as they are popular spots for both tourist groups and local youth. The encounters exemplified in this chapter tell us that the relationships between the locals and the visitors can sometimes involve tension, even rage, and are often complicated because of their interdependency. While making room for the tourist industry, Hilo residents have also cleverly developed a way of enforcing a form of spatial discipline along the Wailuku River by telling stories about the river's cunning agency in order to gain some control over the movement of visitors. The local population can thus enjoy the river in some measure of seclusion, even while the *mo'o* patiently lies waiting for its next victim in the river's dark boiling pots.

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