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Postcolonial Travel Writing of 1850's Hawai'i:
A Reading of O. A. Bushnell's *Ka'a'awa*

KRISTIAWAN INDRIYANTO
Universitas Prima Indonesia, Indonesia

YENITA BR SEMBIRING
Universitas Prima Indonesia, Indonesia

JAMALUDDIN NASUTION
Universitas Prima Indonesia, Indonesia

Abstract

This article reads O. A. Bushnell's *Ka'a'awa* as postcolonial travel writing grounded in the historicity of 1850's Hawai'i. The novel presents the polyvocal perspective of both Nihoa, an Indigenous Hawaiian, and Bristol, a *haole* (white) outsider. Through this subjective account, the novel problematizes how travel shapes knowledge and cultural memory. Nihoa's narrative emphasizes Indigenous traditions and sacred spaces, while Bristol's journey reflects a transformation from colonial prejudice to an understanding of *Aloha 'Āina* (love of the land). A recurring theme is the juxtaposition between Hawai'i's picturesque landscape and the desolation of death and disease, challenging how space is represented. The narrative encourages readers to engage with the cultural and historical complexities of Hawai'i in the 1850s. It also posits the lasting impact of colonialism and the importance of preserving Indigenous voices and knowledge.

Keywords: Ethnic American literature, Hawaiian literature, Indigeneity, postcolonial travel writing, space in literature

1 Introduction

Writing and travel have been intertwined for millennia, with travel narratives emerging as long as people have journeyed and shared stories of their experiences. The Western literary canon is rich with examples of travel, both literal and symbolic, from the biblical Exodus and the punishment of Cain to classical epics like the Greek epic poem *The Argonautica* and Virgil's *Aeneid* (Hulme and Youngs 4-5; Burgess 2). These foundational texts establish a reference framework for modern travel writers. Writing had become essential to traveling by the sixteenth century, with documentation integrated into exploration. Western travel writing gradually evolved from these early traditions into a tool for cultural exchange and, more problematically, colonial authority. Historically, scholars have focused primarily on the early modern period, studying British and European explorers, missionaries, soldiers, and politicians documenting their journeys (Das and Youngs 13). Recently, the field has broadened to include writers from outside or on the margins of the Western canon. As a result, it has become a growing area of literary studies, focusing on the circulation of knowledge across regions and the diverse forms of cross-cultural interaction and exchange.

Postcolonial travel writing emerged from formerly colonized regions as a challenge to traditional Western travel narratives. Following the publication of *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002), the genre expanded to incorporate previously marginalized voices. Authors like Jamaica Kincaid and Amitav Ghosh reframe travel through lenses of identity, displacement, and memory, exploring colonialism's lasting impact. Since then, Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund posit that postcolonial travel writing is not merely oppositional or a "writing back" but offers perspectives extending beyond the boundaries of European knowledge production (3). Though with varying political orientations, the genre critically examines travel's role in knowledge formation. While often deconstructing colonial perspectives and highlighting Indigenous agency, postcolonial travel writing remains diverse in its approaches. Quan Wang demonstrates this complexity by critiquing V. S. Naipaul's *The Masque of Africa*, revealing how his claimed neutrality masks Western bias and elite sources that perpetuate colonial views of South

Africa (427). Postcolonial travel writing deconstructs these narratives, highlighting how colonized peoples have resisted and redefined the identities imposed upon them. In this context, travel becomes a physical journey and a means of reclaiming history and asserting cultural agency. As Edwards notes, such writing creates “revisionist and subversive narratives that challenge colonial discourses” (19).

Postcolonial travel writing, in particular, offers alternative ways of representing journeys that resist the politics of empire. Oswald Andrew (O. A.) Bushnell, the first recipient of the Hawai'i Award for Literature in 1974, employs his background as a microbiology and medical history professor to write historical novels that challenge colonial narratives about Hawai'i. Though descended from Portuguese and other European immigrants, Bushnell develops a revisionist approach to Hawaiian history, using his literary style to reframe pivotal colonial encounters through a critical lens. His novels – including *The Return of Lono* (1956), which reimagines Captain Cook's arrival, *Moloka'i* (1963) and *Ka'a'awa* (1972), which document the devastating impact of foreign influence and the diseases introduced by the colonizers – foreground Indigenous perspectives by highlighting the marginalization of *Kānaka*/Native Hawaiians. Bushnell is recognized as one of the writers who effectively represents the marginalization of Native Hawaiians under American domination (Young 463).

Bushnell's third novel, *Ka'a'awa*, set in the 1850s, can be viewed as both a historical and a travel narrative – a genre of literature that focuses on the connection between the travelers and the spaces they explore (Pratt 13). In *And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of Hawai'i*, Stephen H. Sumida states that of all Bushnell's novels, *Ka'a'awa* is the richest in Hawaiian legend and lore (235). The story follows Hiram Nihoa, a curious Hawaiian known as *nīele* (nosy), who embarks on a horseback journey around O'ahu on a mission from King Kamehameha III. Along the way, Nihoa encounters Saul Bristol, a reclusive and melancholic New Englander living on a ranch on O'ahu's windward shore. On his travels, Nihoa witnesses firsthand the impact of Western influence in Hawai'i, including deforestation and the spread of disease (Day 59). By contrast, Bristol's account centers on introspection and the gradual unraveling of his colonial assumptions. His journey becomes a personal

transformation as he abandons prior prejudices and gradually recognizes the *mana* (spiritual power) from the valley's sacred mountain peaks. Supported by Nihoa's wit and humor, Bristol gradually regains faith in himself and trust in others.

Consequently, as a historical and spatial narrative set in 1850s Hawai'i, *Ka'a'awa* functions as postcolonial travel writing. This article examines two key perspectives within the novel: that of Hiram Nihoa, representing Indigenous experience, and of Saul Bristol, whose viewpoint is shaped by colonial paradigms. As Erin James argues, "spatial representation is continually shaped by subjective perspective," which influences how space is depicted and understood (8). Through Nihoa's travels around O'ahu, the novel juxtaposes Hawai'i's picturesque landscapes against the devastation, disease, and death brought by Western contact – a contrast of the sublime and macabre that highlights the complexities of postcolonial space (Indriyanto 206). Bristol's journey, meanwhile, charts a transformation from Eurocentric thinking toward an appreciation of Hawaiian Indigenous culture as he witnesses both spiritual connections to the land and the epidemics ravaging Ka'a'awa Valley. Bushnell's approach challenges the romanticized representations of Hawai'i by visiting white authors, exemplified by Mark Twain's declaration in *Letters from Hawai'i* that "no alien land in all the world has any deep strong charm for me but one [Hawai'i]" (75). Bushnell critiques the apolitical imperial travel narrative, focusing on self-discovery and the desolation caused by colonial encounters.

The analysis is structured as follows. The first section delineates Nihoa's account as an example of postcolonial travel writing. His account engages with the historical and cultural complexities of colonialism's effects on native societies. Nihoa's narrative contextualizes the picturesque landscape of Hawai'i and his reverence through sacred spaces and traditional practices in the form of chants and songs. This voyage is juxtaposed with the traumatic memory of 1850s Hawai'i, a land ravaged by death and disease. The second section traces Bristol's transformative path from colonial prejudice toward cultural integration. As Bristol experiences the sublime Ka'a'awa Valley, he abandons his presumed superiority and embraces Indigenous knowledge.

It is essential to situate a reading of *Ka 'a'awa* within the broader historical context of 1850s Hawai'i. During this time, only a few decades after the first Europeans arrived, the islands were already undergoing significant changes. Though total American domination was still years away, Western influence and colonial encounters steadily reshaped Hawai'i (Haley 20-22; Alameida 24). The islands, once a sovereign kingdom under native rule, were being altered by foreign economic interests and Christian missionary activity. As Inglis (*Disease and Displacement*) contextualizes,

after four decades of interaction with foreign explorers, merchants, traders, and settlers, *Kānaka* had experienced a great deal of change. The population had been severely reduced through conflict, foreign infectious diseases, out-migration, and exploitation of the sandalwood trade. Hawaiian society's social, economic, and cultural facets were all significantly influenced. Another factor in the spread of disease was the cultural changes taking place in the islands after the arrival of foreigners, which shattered their isolated existence. (20)

Western systems, such as land privatization introduced through the *Great Mahele* of 1848, further reshaped Hawai'i's traditional structure. This policy divided the lands of the Kingdom of Hawai'i according to the Western model of land ownership and private property rights (Kuykendall 178-79; Banner 275-78). Externally, the Western powers, particularly the U.S. and Britain, sought to control Hawai'i's strategic location and resources. Traditional Hawaiian culture began to erode as foreign diseases devastated the native population. Between 1848 and 1849, Hawai'i experienced one of the most devastating epidemics in the islands' history, claiming an estimated 10,000 lives – more than one-tenth of the population (Schmitt and Nordyke 8).

The depopulation caused by disease and the resulting ecological destruction illustrate Hawai'i's status as both a postcolonial space and a “contact zone” in Mary Louise Pratt's (9) terms. As foreign settlers introduced diseases that decimated the native population, Hawai'i became a site of intense cultural and ecological exchange, often marked by unequal power dynamics. In this contact zone, where Western and Indigenous cultures collided, traditional Hawaiian land management practices were displaced. Riley Moore Moffat and Gary L. Fitzpatrick

consider the *Mahele* to set the stage for a variety of alterations in the social, political, economic and physical landscapes of Hawai'i (11). The introduction of invasive species further contributed to widespread ecological degradation:

Along with non-Hawaiians and their portmanteau biota, contact brought new cultural and economic invasions. Cook and those who followed him arrived in Hawai'i with an established notion of what a place like Hawai'i should be like. Further, the foreigners who arrived at the islands were not indifferent to the islands. They saw the islands as something to be used, just as they saw other places and their resources. These cultural and economic invasions operated with ecological invasion to destabilize Hawaiian society and alter the archipelago's environment. (Kessler 48-49)

As previously stated, travel writing plays a crucial role in shaping knowledge and readers' perceptions, serving as a means through which literature maps out places, cultures, and historical contexts. In Bushnell's *Ka'a'awa*, the act of travel primarily unfolds through Nihoa's recollections of his journeys around O'ahu, a narrative device to orient readers to the landscape, culture, and societal changes of 1850s Hawai'i. This approach reflects the idea that literature acts as a form of mapping, providing readers with descriptions of places and creating an imaginative space for them to explore (Tally Jr. 2). These reference points help readers navigate and develop a deeper understanding of the world, whether in historical or modern contexts. Narratives can create immersive experiences, allowing readers to imaginatively relocate to new, often unfamiliar worlds and perspectives (Ryan 33). This process fosters readers' engagement with different times and places. The following analysis traces how these perspectives – embodied by Nihoa and Bristol – construct a layered representation of Hawai'i as a postcolonial space.

2 Nihoa's Narrative: Indigenous Perspectives in Postcolonial Travel Writing

In *Ka'a'awa*, Bushnell reveals how journeys shape knowledge and understanding within colonized spaces. Rather than focusing on movement, the novel explores how places and peoples are conceptualized,

encountered, and ultimately reimagined through the traveler's perspective. Through Nihoa's Indigenous voice, readers experience cultural mapping and historical witnessing as he traverses O'ahu in 1850's Hawai'i. Nihoa's first-person narrative captures the island's picturesque landscapes, living traditions, and *wahi pana* (sacred sites). His viewpoint illustrates the inseparability of culture and nature in Hawaiian worldviews. Yet his journey simultaneously chronicles the devastation brought by colonial presence – notably the foreign diseases that decimated native communities.

As Nihoa journeys across O'ahu, he provides commentary on the plight faced by the Hawaiians due to Westernization and epidemics. Travel outside Honolulu during that era was challenging, involving harsh terrain and being limited to horses or mules for transportation. Donald D Kilolani Mitchell notes, "the footpaths connecting the villages were narrow trails, following the shore where possible" (167). Hawaiians traditionally traveled by canoe, and it was only with the arrival of Western missionaries that trails developed into narrow roads paved with flat stones. Although Nihoa is an experienced traveler, he has not journeyed on O'ahu for ten years, which makes him unaware of the current situation. This approach extends Nihoa's subjective experience to the readers who mentally map his journey as the narrative unfolds. In line with postcolonial travel writing, this Indigenous account critically engages with the historical and cultural complexities of colonialism's effects on native societies.

One central feature of postcolonial narratives, as Dina El Dessouky suggests, is the recognition of Indigenous discourses of place and ecology, such as *Aloha 'Āina* (256). *Aloha 'Āina*, or love of the land, is a central theme in Hawaiian literature, and *Ka'a'awa* follows this tradition. In his narrative, Nihoa appreciates the natural landscape, reflecting Hawaiian culture's close bond between land and people (Kimura 178). As he travels, Nihoa honors place names like *Ka'a'awa* and *Ka 'Oī'o* through traditional chants and rituals, showing respect for the *akua* (gods) which reside in these sacred valleys:

"Beautiful is *Ka'a'awa*, beautiful beyond compare," I sang out as we came to the point of *Ka 'Oī'o*, the place that marks the end of *Ko'olaupoko* and the beginning of *Ko'olauloa*.

Always it has been the custom, since descendants of Hawai'i -loa first came to live on O'ahu, for men to stop at Ka 'O'i'o, there to honor their mightiest God and to praise the lovely valley wherein he abides during his visits to this island. And have always I kept this custom since first I learned of it from my grandfather and the retainers who accompanied us from Kahana to Honolulu. (Bushnell 209)

Through the naming of places, *Kānaka* acknowledges the living world around them, with cultural practices interwoven into these place names. Each name carries a history, a memory, or a spiritual significance, reflecting the interconnectedness between the land, people, and traditions (Handy et al. 18). Understanding a place, its name, and the reason for its designation is crucial to grasping its role and importance in Native Hawaiian society (McGregor 5). The importance of place names is exemplified in the following quote, where references to Nu'uānu, Lanihuli, and Konahuanui immerse the reader in O'ahu's distinctive geography:

Toward midday, Lono and Kane tired of their sport, the clouds disappeared, and the sun shone in splendor upon Nu'uānu. On either side, in all the little ravines that score the proud cliffs of Lanihuli on the left, of Konahuanui on the right, waterfalls poured down, hundreds of them, like the ribbon of soft white kapa adorning the green pali. But almost above us, on the flank of Lanihuli, the flowing water could not fall; up it went, up into the air, blown by strong winds rushing through the pass of Nu'uānu. (Bushnell 75)

As readers unravel their mental image of Nihoa's narration, they imaginatively map the island's landscape, as if physically, following his journey across O'ahu. This description invites readers to imagine themselves traveling across O'ahu, as it evokes a sense of movement and immersion. Phrases like "flowing water," "waterfalls poured down," and "blown by the strong winds" emphasize the dynamic nature of the landscape. Readers' mental map is not static but evolves as Nihoa moves from one vantage point to another. These sensory details guide readers through the physical landscape and highlight the connection between place and memory in Hawaiian culture. The mention of place names and references to Hawaiian gods like Lono and Kane underscores their spiritual and cultural significance for *Kānaka*.

Postcolonial travel writing explores journeys through cultures and landscapes marked by the aftermath of colonialism. It reflects the trauma experienced by individuals and societies, offering insight into historical events and how they are remembered over time. In *Ka'a'awa*, the narrative reveals this through the juxtaposition of Hawai'i's picturesque landscape with the devastation caused by colonialism, such as diseases resulting in death. This contrast positions Hawai'i as a contact zone, where the effects of colonial encounters reshape both the land and its people. Upon witnessing the desolate situation of the countryside, Nihoa solemnly narrates how the once-thriving villages have been abandoned, their people devastated by disease and death:

The countryside through which we rode was a land of desolation. This lovely fertile district, where so many people once lived, was almost emptied. Where are all the people gone, I wondered, until I remembered the graveyard, crowded to its walls with the dead of Kane'ohe, covered from end to end with strawflowers, those ugly dry blossoms that even as they are opening feel dead to the touch. Many houses were rotting away; others had long since fallen in upon their foundations of rocks and stamped earth. Cooking fires marking the abodes of the living were few and spaced far apart. (Bushnell 111)

Nihoa's lamentation encapsulates the sense of loss and devastation due to disease and depopulation. This evocative passage confronts readers with the irreversible damage to the land and its native people, marking the landscape as a site of collective trauma. As Inglis (*Kōkua, Mana, and Mālama 'āina*) explains, these epidemics reduced the Hawaiian population and severely disrupted the economy and society (217). The rotting and collapsed houses further emphasize the erosion of community and culture, as the physical decay mirrors the disintegration of social structures. The desolate event is narrated as follows:

This shore of Kualoa, with its sandy beaches and shallow reefs and the vast open sea beyond, with its splendid prospect of O'ahu's mountains, from Kanehoalani above to the cliffs to Waimanalo thirty miles away, was once the home of many people. But now, few of Kualoa's families survive. The spirits of the dead have gone to sleep the long sleep of Niolopua; their houses on this earth have been blown away by the winds. Now it was empty, this land, drained of life and hope. (Bushnell 195)

Robert Clarke argues that the postcolonial perspective involves an encounter with the past, which is perhaps nowhere more compelling than in travel writing (49). Nihoa's solemn recounting of the epidemic mediates the trauma through the lens of memory, forcing the reader to confront history as lived experience. The bodies buried in Kane'ohe evoke the physical devastation brought by colonial epidemic in 1850's Hawai'i. As Made Oktavia Vidiyanti et al. note, "the body plays an important role in the postcolonial text" (83), and here, these bodies mark the intersection of violence, history, and memory. For the reader, Nihoa's narrative is a journey through these layered spaces of trauma, where history is remembered and re-experienced through the land itself.

Western colonial perspectives have often shaped traditional travel writing, portraying new lands and peoples through an outsider's gaze. These narratives typically exoticized Indigenous cultures or depicted them as inferior, justifying colonial expansion and exploitation. By contrast, postcolonial travel writing subverts these narratives by centering Indigenous voices and their perspectives on land and history. Nihoa's voice in *Ka'a'awa* exemplifies this paradigm shift. His narration portrays *āina* (the land) as a lived space with cultural, spiritual, and historical significance. Nihoa's narration reclaims the Hawaiian landscape from the colonial gaze, offering readers an understanding of the land through the lens of Indigenous knowledge. Moreover, this Indigenous account also serves as an act of resistance against colonial erasure. His detailed retellings of the land's significance and the traumas brought by colonial encounters preserve a history that colonial narratives often attempt to erase. This portrayal of the landscape aligns with Roy Usamu Kamada's opinion:

Postcolonial writers lack the luxury of an ahistorical landscape. The landscape that they write about is necessarily politicized; their subjectivity is intimately implicated in both the natural history as well as the traumatic history of the place; they confront and engage to varying degrees the history of their postcolonial geographies, the history of diaspora, of slavery, of the capitalist commodification of the landscape, and the devastating consequences this history has on the individual. (3)

Nihoa's account illustrates how postcolonial travel writing intertwines with the history of postcolonial landscapes. Bushnell complicates the genre further by introducing a second protagonist, Saul Bristol. Unlike Nihoa's Indigenous perspective, Bristol writes from a *haole*/foreign viewpoint aligned with the Anglophone theme of self-discovery. As the narrative progresses, Bristol transitions from an outsider with an imperial gaze to an insider, a local grounded in the traumatic history of 1850's Hawai'i. This argument forms the basis of the second subsection.

3 Subverting the Colonial Lens: Bristol's Transformative Travel Writing

The deuteragonist of *Ka'a'awa*, Saul Bristol, delineates an Anglo-American perspective that contrasts with and complements Nihoa's Indigenous account. Bristol is introduced as a reclusive and unsociable figure, known to the locals by the moniker of "angry haole" and the "Ogre of Ka'a'awa" (Bushnell 44). As the narrative progresses, more of his tragic past is uncovered – Bristol was shipwrecked off the coast of Honolulu, an event that claimed the life of his lover, Melissa. This devastating loss left him emotionally scarred and transformed him into a bitter, vengeful man. His trauma fostered resentment toward life, the island, its people, and God, whom he holds responsible for his suffering. This narration is shaped by personal grief, disrupting one's relationship with the self and the surrounding world.

As the owner of the first Western-style farm on the Ka'a'awa coast, Bristol initially expresses frustration with the local *Kānaka*, whom he perceives as incompetent. His attitude reflects the process of Othering, a term in post-colonial theory that refers to how one culture depicts another as not only different but also inferior (Ashcroft, *Afterword* 230). As Carl Thompson explains, this is a common feature of travel writing, where foreign cultures are often represented as lesser than the writer's own (15). Bristol's views align with stereotypes of Hawaiians that were created and perpetuated by outsiders, portraying them as lazy or unintelligent:

Those dumb brutes were still huddled inside their stinking, sopping grass huts, surrounded by seas of mud. . . . A dirtier, lazier, more shiftless lot of savages I have never known. Their emotions lie too close to the surface. The slightest fright will make 'em scream; the merest pleasure will make 'em shout. But, because of that same shallowness of feeling, the slightest trouble is too much trouble: they will do nothing that requires exertion, and they would rather die than work. . . . When will I learn to give up my efforts to teach them the rudiments of civilization? (Bushnell 197)

This passage highlights the colonial mindset as narrated by Bristol. Believing he is “teaching them the rudiments of civilization,” he becomes increasingly frustrated by what he perceives as the incompetence of the islanders. His attitude reflects the colonial belief in the superiority of Western practices, with Bristol positioning himself as a civilizer who must correct the flaws of the native population. He views his three-year stay in Ka’a’awa surrounded by *Kānakas*, as a threat to himself. The narration describes how “for too long I have been mute, thoughtless, little more than an animal. Little better than the *Kānakas* among whom I live, and whom I condemn for their brutishness” (Bushnell 242). His statements reinforce the colonial discourse’s derogation of the indigene as inferior or the Other.

In many travel narratives, travel becomes a personal growth and self-discovery metaphor. Elizabeth Gilbert’s memoir, *Eat, Pray, Love* reframes travel as gendered therapy, subverting masculine adventure tales through emotional vulnerability in Italy, India, and Indonesia (Mikkonen 290 ; Darmawan et al. 2-3). The protagonist’s journey through unfamiliar places often mirrors an internal exploration of their beliefs, values, and identity. New landscapes and experiences challenge their assumptions, leading them to question who they are and where they belong. This celebratory approach to the natural world, as Pippa Marland (839) posits, emphasizes the educative value of wild nature and the intense, personal connection individuals can form with the landscape. In his narration, Bristol embarks on a transformative journey on the sublime landscape around Ka’a’awa valley, where he comes to appreciate the immense *mana* inherent in the land:

I fled by instinct to the only place where I could find peace.
At first, I ran – up the winding path that skirts the swampy land where
the natives cultivate taro and mosquitoes, up the slight hill that, like a

glacier's moraine (in this island that has never known the cold weight of glaciers), lifts the floor of Ka'a'awa's valley above the reach of the sea.
And then, as I gained the top of the hill and came out upon the valley's plain, oh, the beauty of it made me cry out in wonder! (Bushnell 255)

In this passage, Bristol's retreat into nature embodies Romantic and Transcendentalist ideals, echoing Henry David Thoreau's belief that the wilderness serves as a sanctuary for spiritual renewal. His ascents of the hill mirror the Romantic quest for understanding through nature, culminating in a sublime moment when the valley's beauty overwhelms him (Phillips et al. 17–18; Crane 538). This experience emphasizes the belief that nature offers both peace and a transformative connection to the self, not just in the American wilderness but also on the Hawaiian island of O'ahu. This Anglo-American discourse is complemented by the Hawaiian concept of *mana*. Native Hawaiians view natural formations such as caves, volcanic craters, and frozen lava to possess powerful *mana*, making them sacred or hallowed (Becket and Singer 27–29). As Bristol explores the landscapes, he admires their beauty and starts understanding their spiritual significance, aligning himself with *Aloha Āina*:

Today, this *mana* was indeed very significant. For reasons I may never understand and scarcely can comprehend now, as soberly I try to remember how I spent the rest of this strange day, I was compelled to approach him (the mountain). Today, at last. I saw them in all their glory. The blazing sun, not yet at the meridian, limned in gold the near-side of each soaring peak, each plunging cliff, each rock and tree and blade of grass, and edged in deepest black the shadows they cast. Cold and green and black was the land, strong against the dazzling blue of the sky. (Bushnell 255-56)

Similar to Nihoa's narration, which reflects themes of postcolonial travel writing, Bristol's moment of self-discovery and reorientation is underscored by a lamentation for the desolation he witnesses. This portrayal highlights the complexity of postcolonial spaces in which both the landscape and the society have been altered by colonialism. As Bristol gazes from the vantage point of high above, the natural world juxtaposes with the remnants of a once-thriving community, now destroyed by disease and colonial forces:

From that vantage, where once chiefs and priests must have gazed out upon fertile fields and hundreds of happy people, today I saw only desolation. The people are gone, dead and vanished into the earth, and among the smothering weeds, only the stone platforms upon which once their houses rose, only a few sagging, rotting grass huts, remain to show that this was a thriving community. (Bushnell 257)

The passage reflects a broader postcolonial critique on how colonization disrupts and erases Indigenous cultures (Ashcroft et al. 82). Colonialism physically alters the land, leaving only traces of what once existed. The contrast between past and present emphasizes themes of memory and loss. This recurring motif in postcolonial travel writing portrays the traveler not only as an observer of natural beauty but also as one who confronts the historical trauma interwoven into the landscape. Although influenced by Romantic and Transcendental perspectives, Bristol's immersion in the Hawaiian landscape is rooted in the historical context of 1850's Hawai'i. His experience reflects a personal or spiritual connection to nature and an awareness of the island's colonial history and the devastation that has shaped its present.

Bristol's transformation in *Ka'a'awa* reflects a decolonizing shift in his perspective, moving from a colonial mindset of superiority to a recognition of and participation in Indigenous knowledge and culture. Bristol's condescending stance shifts during an influenza outbreak in Ka'a'awa. This village has become a site where the isolated Hawaiian population, lacking immunity to Western diseases, faces a devastating epidemic. Bristol steps in to help, distributing medicine and beginning to immerse himself in the local culture. His previous colonial viewpoint is challenged as he learns the Hawaiian language and traditions. Bristol realizes how "the arts and languages of Indigenous people both support and are founded upon a specific relation to the natural world" (Mohs 496). This moment marks Bristol's shift away from colonial discourse, as he begins to understand the interwoven aspect between the land and culture in Hawaiian society.

Bushnell's polyvocal narration concludes with the reconciliation of the two protagonists as they move away from prior prejudice and work together for the benefit of the Ka'a'awa village. Reflecting on how to save dying people when neither of them is a physician, they realize that neglect

and the absence of leadership have left the community vulnerable. The necessity of *haoles* and *Kānaka* to work together is expressed through Bristol's statement, "‘he two of us together,’ I emphasized, ‘can do much more good than either alone. And, best of all, we could start right away, right here, at Ka’a’awa’" (Bushnell 454). Their plan starts with establishing a training school in Ka’a’awa to provide young boys with knowledge and practical skills. These include new land cultivating methods and learning about haole laws, such as property rights:

So began our training school at Ka’a’awa. Although the idea behind it was not very original, even in Hawai’i, it was a different school from anything I’ve ever heard of. At Hiram’s suggestion, we named it *Ke Eahou*, The New Life. I thought this an appropriate name for a good cause, one which would represent our purpose to everyone: students, parents, government officials, missionaries, friends as well as foes. (Bushnell 455)

The training school incorporates both English – taught by Bristol and Nihoa as the language of the future – and Hawaiian, which preserves the land's cultural heritage. By focusing on legends, chants, prayers, and history, the curriculum reinforces Native Hawaiians' connection to their place, as Nihoa eloquently articulates early in *Ka’a’awa*. The founders' journeys around O’ahu generate the knowledge that makes Ke Eahou School possible, highlighting travel's crucial role in knowledge formation. Bushnell extends this educational journey to his readers, inviting them to engage with Hawai’i's complex cultural landscape during the turbulent 1850s. The novel concludes on a hopeful note, recognizing the traumatic history of past events while looking optimistically toward a better future.

Conclusion

Bushnell's *Ka’a’awa* positions postcolonial travel writing as a site of contestation between Indigenous and colonial paradigms. Through the parallel journeys of Nihoa and Bristol, the novel exposes the lasting impacts of colonial disruption on Hawaiian society. Nihoa's narrative, anchored in ancestral knowledge and sacred connections to place, preserves the Indigenous perspective despite devastating disease and foreign encroachment. Bristol, meanwhile, transforms Eurocentric

superiority to embracing *Aloha 'Āina* (love of the land), illustrating a decolonizing journey. Significantly, Bushnell maintains Nihoa's distinct Indigenous identity throughout the narrative rather than allowing it to be subsumed by Bristol's initially Western viewpoint. Their intersecting stories redefine travel from an act of imperial imposition into one of cross-cultural dialogue. Through these dialectics, Bushnell examines how travel shapes knowledge and reveals colonialism's complex impact on Hawai'i's terrain and its people.

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