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► **To cite this version:**

Jérémy Lemarié. Debating on Cultural Performances of Hawaiian Surfing in the 19th Century. *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 2016, Du corps à l'image. La réinvention des performances culturelles en Océanie, 142-143, pp.159-174. 10.4000/jso.7625 . halshs-02096111

**HAL Id: halshs-02096111**

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Submitted on 11 Apr 2019

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**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jso/7625>

DOI: 10.4000/jso.7625

ISSN: 1760-7256

**Publisher**

Société des océanistes

**Printed version**

Date of publication: 31 December 2016

Number of pages: 159-174

ISSN: 0300-953x

**Electronic reference**

Jérémy Lemarié, « Debating on Cultural Performances of Hawaiian Surfing in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century », *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* [Online], 142-143 | 2016, Online since 31 December 2018, connection on 05 March 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jso/7625> ; DOI : 10.4000/jso.7625

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# Debating on Cultural Performances of Hawaiian Surfing in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

Jérémy Lemarié

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- 1 The Pacific Islands region has been a challenging ground for anthropologists since Hau'ofa (1975: 287-288) pointed out the relative lack of indigenous scholars. In the contexts of globalization and decolonization, the monopoly of Western social scientists over the identification of native traditions has been a matter of debate for the last forty years. In Hawai'i, anthropologists like Roger Keesing (1989), Jocelyn Linnekin (1983) and Marshall Sahlins (1981) were targeted as reinforcing colonization by claiming that some customs were indigenous and some were not (Friedman, 1992a: 197, 1992b: 852, 1993: 746-748, 2002: 217-2018; White and Tengan, 2001: 385 ; Trask, 1991: 163 ; 1993: 127-130). These authors argued that some Pacific customs were 'invented' (Linnekin, 1983: 244) or 'reinvented' (Keesing, 1989: 22) when Hawaiian groups contested American hegemony by claiming indigenous rights ranging from recognition of Hawaiian ancestry to nationhood, in the 1970s. This issue of "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012 [1983]) has been referred to by Walker (2011: 4-7, 40-41) in the case of *he'e nalu*<sup>1</sup>, that is to say 'surfing' (Pukui and Elbert, 1986 [1957]: 63).
- 2 *He'e nalu* has been practiced by Polynesians for centuries and has reached high cultural refinement in Hawai'i (Finney, 1959: 327). It was discovered by the West in 1778, when Captain Cook and his crew anchored in Waimea, Kaua'i. As a native practice, *he'e nalu* was integrated into the political and religious taboo (*kapu*) system which stratified Hawaiian society. Permissions and bans from the *kapu* system applied to surfing, where commoners (*maka'āinana*) were prohibited from surfing with chiefs (*ali'i*) and from riding some surf breaks, like Kapuni in Waikīki (Clark, 2011: 447 ; Ellis, 1827: 280 ; He Kaa no Pikoiaakaalala!, 1865 ; Kamakau, 1991: 44). Nevertheless, *he'e nalu* was popular and indulged in by children, women and men, commoners and chiefs (Malo, 1903: 293).
- 3 Some anthropologists, sociologists and historians dealing with the history of surfing in Hawai'i claimed that *he'e nalu* almost disappeared in the 19th century. This custom would

have been ‘banned’ (Booth, 1995: 189), ‘near extinct’ (Brown, 2006: 8), ‘near extinction’ (Kanahele, 1995: 138), or ‘near death’ (Finney and Houston, 1996: 13) due to the fall of the *kapu* system in 1819 (Finney, 1960: 317) and to negative representations from Calvinist missionaries (; Kanahele, 1995: 139). However, other scholars such as Clark (2011) and Walker (2011) showed that the fall of the *kapu* system and the missionaries’ aversion for surfing were not the only reasons for this collapse. The authors argue that many other factors must be taken into account, including the introduction of new diseases that led to a dramatic population collapse (Clark, 2011: 33 ; Walker, 2011: 26). Moser (2008: 83), Laderman (2014: 10) and Lemarié (2015) further contend that economic pressures on the Pacific trades between the Americas and Asia also played a role.

- 4 Without referring to the debate on invented traditions in the Pacific, some studies reproduced the dominant discourse saying that modern surfing was revived in Waikiki with the advent of the *Outrigger Canoe Club* in 1908 and the *Hui Nalu* in 1911 (Nendel, 2009: 2435 ; Warren and Gibson, 2014: 2). But recent works (Clark, 2011 ; Manificat, 2013, 2015 ; Moser, 2008, 2010 ; Neushul and Westwick, 2013 ; Walker, 2011) showed that surfing was still perpetuated, even after the fall of the *kapu* system in November 1819 and the arrival of missionaries five months later. These studies have provided enlightening but fragmented analyses of *he’e nalu*. In this article, I summarize their work and seek to explain why anthropologists, historians and sociologists have come to contradictory findings regarding the state of *he’e nalu* in the 19th century and its revival at the dawn of the 20th century.
- 5 To address this issue, I bridge the gap between those two schools of thought by looking at interruptions and endurance of *kanaka maoli* (native Hawaiian) surfing in the 19th century, regarded as cultural performances. Here ‘cultural performances’ means ‘constructed representations of authentic culture that were to be accepted as given’ (Bruner, 2005: 4) and traditional for the purpose of reaffirming identity and highlighting fine, artistic, and aesthetic characteristics of a social group. In the case of *he’e nalu*, cultural performances occurred first among Hawaiians of various ranks and status – especially within the elites – and then between Hawaiians and Westerners.

## Methods

- 6 Walker (2011: 1-82) highlighted supporting evidence regarding the durability of *he’e nalu* by reviewing the domestic policy, traditional and colonial history of the Hawaiian Kingdom. I will add an international perspective to Walker’s view by focusing on testimonies of surfing recorded by foreigners traveling to Hawai’i in the 19th century. First, I have collected data from logs of travelers, explorers, missionaries and traders of the Pacific in the 19th century. These are referenced by DeLaVega (2004) and Moser (2008), as well as from websites like [www.surfresearch.com.au](http://www.surfresearch.com.au) by Geoff Cater, the digital magazine *Surf Blurb*. To grasp a native point of view, I have consulted newspapers written in Hawaiian from the database [www.papakilodatabase.com](http://www.papakilodatabase.com) like *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika* (The Star of the Pacific), and *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa* (The Independent Newspaper), for these being documents studied by Chapin (1996), Clark (2011) – translated from Hawaiian into English by Keao NeSmith – Silva (2004) and Walker (2011). For a broader picture, I have added French primary and secondary sources extracted by Manificat (2013) and Lemarié (2016). These documents are neglected by most English-speaking scholars, although they are

critical to our understanding of the Romanticism and Hygienicism entangled in the promotion of Hawaiian surfing as a cultural performance.

- 7 In the first part of this paper, I review the power relations revolving around surfing before contact with the West and I show how Hawaiian cultural performances emphasized spiritual strength and body aesthetics. In the second part, I demonstrate why previous studies have regarded missionaries as responsible for the collapse of *he'e nalu*, and I clarify some inaccurate statements about the revival of surfing. The third part focusses on cultural performances and on the accounts that suggest that *he'e nalu* was continuously engaged in by a part of the Hawaiian monarchy. Finally, I draw on the Romantic and Hygienist perceptions of Hawaiian bodies to discuss the maintenance of *he'e nalu* in Kealahou Bay, Lahaina, Hilo and Waikīkī.

## *He'e nalu* and power relations in ancient Hawai'i

- 8 Surfing in Hawai'i was enjoyed year-round and practiced by all. But not everyone was equal regarding the surfboards used. Surfboards (*papa he'e nalu*) were prestigious and their wood, height, width, and weight reflected the rank of its possessor. *Paipo* and *alaia* boards were mostly ridden by commoners. *Alaia* could go up to 9 feet tall and were made of *koa* (*Acacia koa*), *ulu* or breadfruit (*Artocarpus incisa*). *Olo* boards ranged from 12 to 18 feet tall. They were crafted from *wiliwili* and strictly dedicated to the enjoyment of chiefs, highlighting their extraordinary skills (Clark, 2011: 24, Finney, 1959: 332-334). Temporary or permanent chiefs' monopoly over surf breaks also occurred, especially when some *ali'i nui* gathered for a surfing day (Clark, 2011: 256).
- 9 While genealogy of a high rank was the first common denominator to claim chieftainship, usurpation among chiefs was commonplace. To centralize power, chiefs 'combine[d] religious and political status' (Friedman, 2008: 294), monopolized trades, thus leading to warfare between competing chiefdoms. When conquest was at bay during the Makahiki, many cultural performances and specific religious observance would take place and involved feasting, playing and betting. In surf competitions, betting prestige-goods ranged from simple tapa cloth to fine outrigger canoes, personal freedom and life (Finney, 1959: 338 ; Kuykendall, 1965 [1938]: 11). Surfing games in which chiefs competed were important because showing spiritual force, knowledge of the ocean, physical engagement and beauty were essential parts of backing chiefly power (Kuykendall, 1965 [1938]: 29).
- 10 Like Kings in Medieval Europe, body size in Hawai'i denoted wealth and health and meant to impress (Vigarello, 2013: 1 ; Sahlins, 1995). To increase the size of their bodies, *ali'i* used all means, such as eating large quantities of food and building powerful muscles. For example, King Kihapi'ilani increased his charismatic authority by crossing the rough 8.4 miles of the Pailolo Channel from Waialua on Maui to Ka'anapali on Moloka'i with a *Olo* surfboard instead of a canoe (Clark, 2011: 374 ; Manu, 1884: 3).
- 11 Jealousy of one chief over another's impressive body, surfing skills and *mana* abounds in Hawaiian legends (e.g. Kamakau, 1870b). One of them tells that Naihe (death 1831) – spouse of Kapi'olani – was a famous chief of the Ka'u district in the Big Island for his charisma and surfing abilities (Walker, 2011: 174 ; Pukui, 1949: 255-256 ; Pukui and Korn, 1973: 36-38). The Ka'u district was noted for its « intolerance of aristocrats » (Friedman, 1992a: 200) and chiefs often had to reassess their legitimacy. Some felt threatened by

Naihe's charisma and they defied him in a surfing contest. During the event, they conspired against him, but Naihe eventually won the contest (Pukui, 1946: 256). His surf chant (*mele he'e nalu*) is an example of cultural performances that took place among elites, like canoe sailing, boxing, throwing javelins and foot racing.

- 12 Thus cultural performances in Hawai'i were not only training for sustaining physical strength and a big body but also means for the *ali'i* to reinforce charisma, authority and *mana* (Kirch and Sahlins, 1992: 80 ; Sahlins, 1995: 53).

## Why have Missionaries been made the scapegoat for the collapse of *he'e nalu*?

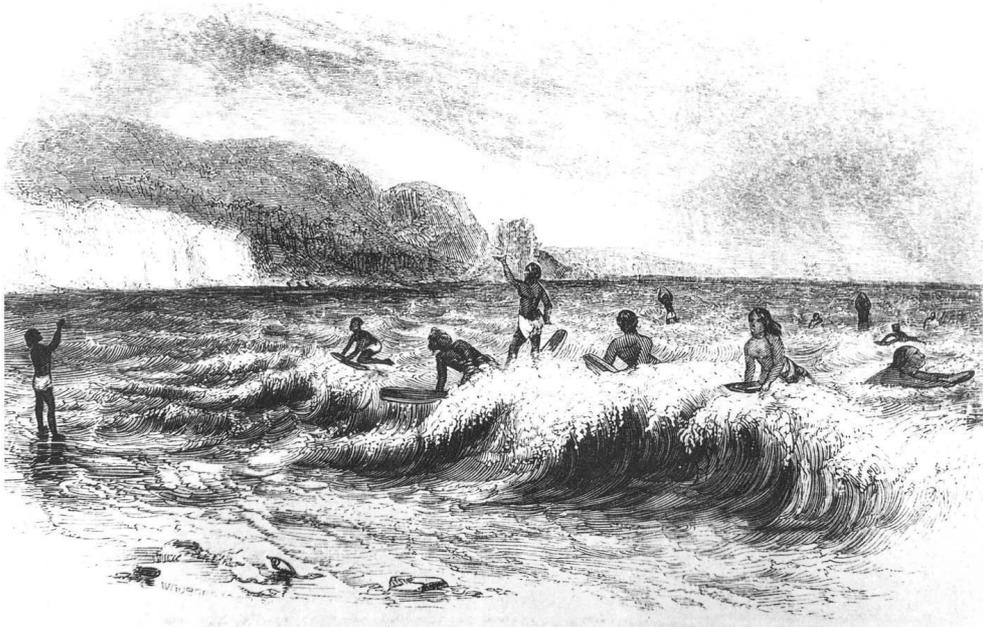
- 13 Changes in Hawaiian political structure, economy and customs occurred more rapidly after contact with the West. The development of a new Hawaiian society was based on the introduction of a market economy through long-distance trades, the advent of Western military power, the unification of the islands by Kamehameha I in 1810, the fall of the system in November 1819 and the coming of missionaries in March 1820. The most radical change was the demise of indigenous people, when the native Hawaiians went from about 400,000 to 40,000 between 1778 and the 1890s (Finney and Houston, 1996: 50). This collapse has many causes, especially during the contact period (1778-1810) and the sandalwood era (1812-1830). The shift from subsistence to market economy for supplying services to sailors and providing sandalwood for foreign demand killed many *Kanaka Maoli* due to intensive working conditions. But the argument that Missionaries were accountable for the decline of surfing and native cultural performances has pervaded academia at the expense of other explanations, for instance the accidental introduction of new diseases such as smallpox and measles (DeLa Vega, 2004: 9 ; Moser, 2008: 52 ; Walker, 2011: 26).
- 14 Admittedly, this discourse traces back to the 1820s, when some pastors argued that Hawaiians would favor surfing and gambling over working and attending school (Chamberlain, 1824: 25 ; Na Owlawahie, 1838: 70). For instance, a letter from the newspaper *Ka Nonanona* (The Ant) asked the Royal Governor of O'ahu, Mataio Kekūānāoa, to forbid *he'e nalu* from the district of Waianae (Clark, 2011: 18, 126 ; Na Paaluhi, 1842: 81). The contradiction between attending schools and going surfing is often exemplified in Kaua'i, when unused surfboards turned into primary material to manufacture tables and seats (Gulick, 1929 [1829]: 809). Promiscuity and romance between the sexes sometimes associated with cultural performance of *he'e nalu* for seducing a partner (Clark, 2011: 45-49) were also negatively perceived. For example, Joiner Lyman (1970: 63-64), spouse of missionary David Belden Lyman, condemned sexual intercourse that might occur during and after surfing.
- 15 Pacific traders were the most aggressive in condemning missionaries (Kuykendall, 1965 [1938]: 91 ; Moser, 2008: 52 ; Walker, 2011: 182). Ministers Hiram Bingham at Honolulu and William Richards at Lahaina in particular were criticized because they encouraged Queen Ka'ahumanu – who held that Christianity reinforced her political power – to forbid some traditions and regulate liquor imports into the ports of Honolulu and Lahaina in 1824 (Kuykendall, 1965 [1938]: 122). Naval officers who condemned pastors included the French Abel Auber Dupetit-Thouars (1840: 367), Auguste Duhaut-Cilly (1835: 290-291) and the American Charles Wilkes (Wilkes, 1849 [1844]: 46-47). Likewise, French travelers like

the diplomat Adolphe Barrot (1839: 291) and the botanist Charles Gaudichaud-Beaupré (1851: 195-196) complained about Methodists preventing women from going aboard foreign vessels because of their purported lascivious behavior.

- 16 Sailors and traders of the Pacific were not the only Westerners incriminating missionaries: Hygienists took their share when they noticed poor physical conditions among Hawaiians. Corbin (1994 [1988]: 66-70) shows that Hygienists – understood as surgeons and doctors concerned about clinical observations and morality in Western Europe and in the United States – regarded surf bathing as a major curative practice. At first, bathing in Europe was encouraged in cold seas to invigorate and stimulate blood flow. Then the sanitary features of the hot seas gained recognition for preventing illness and surf bathing spread toward the Pacific, where Reverend Henry Theodore Cheever (1851: 68) posited that such practice has no equivalent to restore fitness:

“The missionaries at these Islands, and foreigners generally, are greatly at fault in that they do not avail themselves more of this easy and unequalled means of retaining health, or of restoring it when enfeebled. Bathing in fresh water, in a close bath-house, is not to be compared to it as an invigorating and remedial agent; and it is unwise, not to say criminal, in such a climate, to neglect so natural a way of preserving health, as washing and swimming in the sea.” (Cheever, 1856: 68)

Engraving 1. – Hawaiian sport of surf playing



(© HENRY CHEEVER, A.S. BARNES & CO, 1856, NEW YORK)

- 17 Further, the “surf-bathing” (Vacher, 2012) enthusiast Auguste Duhaut-Cilly (1999: 216), captain of the French vessel *Héros*, blamed evangelists for attempting to forbid sea-bathing in 1828. This would have taken away a major sanitizing custom, since Hawaiians bathed in the ocean several times a day (Ellis, 1783: 152-153 ; Péron, 1824: 155 ; Thiercelin, 1866: 305). As a result, one can understand why missionaries were blamed by scholars to be at fault for forbidding surfing. Ministers were thought to fight indigenous customs like *he’e nalu* because the latter had kept *Kanaka maoli* away from main acculturation and evangelization centers such as schools, churches and farms. Within the civilizing process

(Elias, 2000 [1939]), missionaries expected the natives to behave according to the tenets of the bourgeoisie and the Protestant ethic (Weber, 2001 [1930]).

## The revival of surfing and the creation of the first surf clubs

- 18 In focusing on missionaries, some studies overlooked travel literature written by traders, sailors and early tourists of the Pacific describing *he'e nalu* as a cultural performance. For instance, it is hardly documented that a description of staged surfing appears in the log of the British *Sophia Cracroft*, where the future King David Kalākaua organized a horse ride and a surf exhibition in Kailua on the Big Island in 1861 (Korn, 1958: 69-70, 73 ; Moser, 2008: 122). Incomplete review of primary materials occurs frequently and this issue has been discussed in the case of surf-bathing and surfing in Australia (Booth, 2005: 32-33, Osmond, 2011). There, many credit the Hawaiian Duke Kahanamoku for introducing surfing in Australia (e.g. Walker, 2011: 32), while Osmond (2011) reviewed Australian newspapers and showed that a few individuals surfed Sydney with imported surfboards from Hawai'i before Duke's popular performances in the late 1914 and early 1915.
- 19 As for Waikīkī, it is believed the revitalization of surfing occurred with the opening of the *Outrigger Canoe Club* in 1908 and with the advent of the *Hui Nalu* in 1911 – the latter being founded in reaction to the segregate and selective nature of the former (Davis, 2015: 29-30; Walker 2011: 61-62). But tourists learnt canoe surfing before thanks to the *Hui Pākākā Nalu* created in 1897 (Clark, 2011: 70). This surf club, where canoe rides were offered for dollar per hour, might have been the first in the world. Earlier, Hawaiian John Ahia (1893) received \$10 a day for surfing cultural performances in San Diego in front of the La Jolla Park Hotel – a property of Johnson Hamilton, owner of the Hawaiian Hotel in Honolulu.
- 20 A decade after these events, prospective members of the *Hui Nalu* catered surf lessons and tours for tourists of the *Moana Hotel* (Moana Hotel, 1906: 14; Timmons, 1989: 27; Walker, 2011: 62). This business stimulated the development of tourism and gave birth to a profession: beachboy (Timmons, 1989). Beachboys, who were Hawaiians mostly, provided tours, massages, canoe rides, surfing lessons and much more (Walker, 2011: 58). At the time, Alexander Hume Ford, a journalist and businessman from South Carolina, cofounded the *Outrigger Canoe Club* in Waikīkī a prestigious organization, mostly including 'Haole' (Ford, 1911: 146)<sup>2</sup>, political leaders and businessmen from Honolulu (Walker 2011: 61). Walker rightly identified Sanford Dole, president of the Republic of Hawai'i and Lorrin Thurston, owner of the *Honolulu Advertiser* and the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, as a member of the club, along with J. P. Cook of the Big Five oligopoly.
- 21 However, Alexander Hume Ford did not initiate the club alone: more than 100 people created this institution (Del Piano & Tregaskis, 2007: 223). The aforementioned politicians and businessmen were not only members but also charter members, along with many others like George Carter, second governor of Hawai'i, Lucius Pinkham, fourth governor of Hawai'i and Harold and William Castle of the Big Five. In 1907, Ford had also asked Jack London (DeLa Vega, 2004: 47-48 ; Smith, 2003, Walker, 2011: 60) to write a laudatory article on surfing. The article, initially entitled 'Riding the South Sea Surf' (London, 1907), that will be later reprinted several times.

## Demystifying the surfing revival

- 22 Some studies have argued that the *Outrigger Canoe Club* revived surfing in Waikīki under the sole willingness of Alexander Hume Ford, inasmuch that he exaggerated his role in revitalizing surfing. While this institution helped the international recognition of surfing, Ford's contribution overshadowed the popularity of *he'e nalu*. Ford published many articles claiming that he and other self-described *Kama'āina* (Walker, 2011: 61; Wood, 1999: 37-60) spearheaded for reviving and reinventing this former Hawaiian custom (e.g. Ford, 1908a, 1908b, 1909a, 1909b, 1911, 1912)<sup>3</sup>. In the early 1900s, these *Kama'āina* were annexationists who thought of themselves as heirs of the authentic Hawaiian culture because they lived in the archipelago for most of their life. They promoted annexation as a genuine act of love, and integrated some native Hawaiian traditions into their folklore such as dancing the *hula*, and surfing (Walker, 2011: 62).
- 23 Ford embraced this trend and strived to make everyone believe he revived surfing through intensive promotion, thus creating the myth that *he'e nalu* was a tradition forgiven by the Hawaiians and reinvented by the *Kama'āina* (Walker, 2011: 65-66). For instance, he invited the Edison Company in 1906 and Pathé Frères in 1910 to shoot the first films of surfing as a new 'white sport' (Manificat, 2015: 91 ; Warshaw, 2010: 43). As Ford claimed:
- “Here [in Waikīki] the sport of surfriding is kept alive, not by natives, but by white men and boys who have learned the sport within recent years” (Ford, 1912: 277)
- 24 Another reason why scholars concluded that surfing has been revived lies in their primary sources, which were written in English mostly. I presented this issue to Ben Finney since he was the first anthropologist to publish a book on the history of Hawaiian surfing (Finney and Houston, 1996). While reviewing why he thought surfing almost disappeared, I asked him if he had ever considered learning Hawaiian to unveil unexplored data – although he had become fluent in Tahitian in order to conduct research with the Polynesia Voyaging Society. Finney replied:
- “I did, but believe it or not, the chair of our department said: ‘no’. He had a false impression on things. He thought that nobody spoke Hawaiian and that nobody knew much about it. He thought there were no sources on it and that it was not worth it. I regret not having done it because that would have been a lot easier to find out about Hawaiian surfing.” (Finney, taped interview, May 11, 2014)
- 25 As a matter of fact, anthropology was reluctant to study Hawaiian prior to its revitalization in the 1970s, because this language was viewed as fixed, limited and unworthy of investigation (White and Tengan, 2001: 392). For instance, studies on Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in the 1950s were undertaken by the Pacific Islands Studies Program created in 1950. Young anthropologists like Ben Finney were forced to work on English-language sources, thus reproducing a discourse based on former colonial interests.

## Hawaiian royalty supported *he'e nalu*

- 26 The idea of Hawaiians writing down surfing traditions for the purpose of resisting American hegemony traces back to the 1990s, when activists and scholars studied Hawaiian sovereignty movements among surfing groups such as *Save Our Surf* (Kelly, 1994,

- 1996) and the *Hui o He'e nalu* (Walker 2005, 2011). Prior to Kelly and Walker, anthropologists such as Friedman (1993), Kirch and Sahlins (1992), and Linnekin (1983; 1991) had addressed this issue. One learns that Hawaiian customs were periodically banned by some *ali'i* in the 1820s, turning the *hula* and *he'e nalu* into “significant mode[s] of political opposition” (Kirch and Sahlins, 1992: 73).
- 27 First, surfing was part of a chief's life. According to John Papa 'Ī'i (1963: 133, 135, 158), Kamehameha I, his second wife Queen Ka'ahumanu, and his son Liholiho were skillful surfers and bodysurfers. Then, *he'e nalu* had been used for resistance in the 1820s and 1830s, when Kamehameha III created a secret order called *hulumanu* (Daws, 1974 [1968], 91-94 ; Friedman, 2002: 210). The king and his court engaged in excessive drinking, ostentatious parties and in reviving native customs such as traditional medicine, the *hula* and *he'e nalu* (Chapin, 1996: 33 ; Friedman, 1993: 741).
- 28 Another means to redefine Hawaiian culture against the colonial intentions of foreign Nations was printing. While Calvinists spearheaded education to Christianized *Kanaka Maoli*, Au and Kaomea (2014 [2009]), Silva (2004: 73) and Walker (2011: 181) showed that reading and writing (*palapala*) were critical for safeguarding the indigenous folklore. This began when oral history, in the form of *mele* and *mo'olelo* was recorded by missionaries trained Hawaiian scholars, both in the nationalist press like *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika* (Silva 2004: 55) and *Ke Au Okoa* (Kamakau, 1970a ; 1970b), as well as in the establishment press like *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa* (e.g. 'Ī'i, 1870).
- 29 Inspired by the work of Silva (2004) and Trask (1993), Walker (2011: 29) claimed that surfing accounts in these newspapers acted as resistance against American colonialism. Admittedly, surfing songs – *mele he'e nalu* (Pukui and Korn, 1973: 36-41) – were another step to foster the vivacity of Hawaiian culture, because they enriched this custom with affirmations of power, love affairs (Beckwith, 1970: 194 ; ) and alliances (Kalākaua, 1888: 227-246 ; Walker, 2001: 18-21).
- 30 While written accounts of *mele he'e nalu* were almost non-existent between the 1830s and 1850s due to missionaries' monopoly over printing, the Hawaiian monarchy released the first government newspaper *Ka Hae Hawai'i* ('The Hawaiian Flag') between 1856 and 1861 (Silva, 2004: 59-63). Subsequently *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika* ('The Star of the Pacific') became the first newspaper defying the missionaries' simplistic and distorted representations of Hawaiian culture. For example, for months the newspaper published the complex story of the surfing goddess Hī'iakaikaoliopoele (Kapihenui, 1862 ; Noglemeier, 2013 ; Walker, 2011, 17-19).
- 31 Other significant cultural manifestations occurred with Kamehameha V (reign, 1863-1872), who praised indigenous customs such as *he'e nalu*, the *hula* and traditional rituals (Kuykendall, 1953: 125). Then King David Kalākaua (reign, 1874-1891) tapped into traditional history and genealogical chants to revive some symbols of the Hawaiian culture. Thanks to the support of other royal relatives, such as his spouse Queen Kapi'olani, Queen Lili'uokalani, Princess Victoria Ka'iulani, and Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole, David Kalākaua was regarded as the *Merrie Monarch* for his love of music and *hula* (Silva, 2004: 87-122 ; Walker, 2011: 50, 103). As a young colonel already, he organized staged surfing exhibitions for tourists (Korn, 1958: 69-70, 73 ; Moser, 2008: 112), and later orchestrated cultural performances of chants *hula kui* and genealogy recitals ( *mele inoa*) during his enthronization ceremony in the 'Iolani Palace in 1883 (Kuykendall, 1953: 262-264).

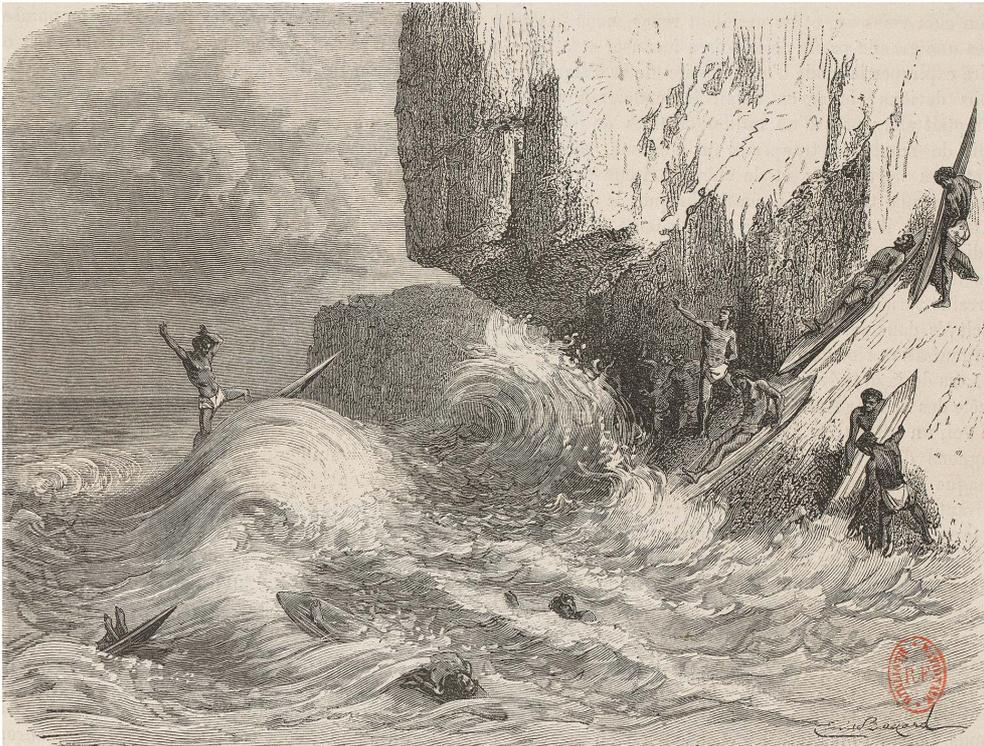
32 A few years before, Kalākaua sponsored tourism and supported James Williams for the publication of *Tourist's guide for the Hawaiian Islands* in 1882 and the promotional newspaper *Paradise of the Pacific*, where one can read accounts of surfing. Kalākaua also had a secret society called *Hale Nauā*, “whose most prominent feature was the recitations of genealogies by each of the chiefs as a means of demonstrating shared lineage and ancestors” (Osorio, 2002: 284). Sciences and artistic performances were part of this encompassing revitalization. Surfing performances were planned both in 1877 for the opening of the first park Kapi‘olani and in 1886 for Kalākaua’s fiftieth birthday. On this later occasion, he made a priest recite the chant of his surfing uncle Naihe (Kalākaua, 2001 [1886]: 20-41), and in 1888 he released the story of the female surfer Kelea from Maui (Kalākaua, 1888: 227-246). Finally, one must mention the three Hawaiian Princes David Kawānanakoa, Edward Abnel Keli‘iahonui and Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana‘ole, surfing Santa Cruz in 1885 as a conscious cultural display of some unique features of the Hawaiian culture in California (Walker, 2011: 5, 30, 67, 174).

### Gathering new evidence with the Romantics

- 33 Studying sources in the Hawaiian languages on travelers to the South Seas brought me to cast doubt on the demise of surfing. Unlike the *hula* that was legally prohibited in 1859 (Silva, 2000: 29), there is no legislative record showing that *he‘e nalu* had ever been prohibited. In fact, some missionaries highlighted that surfing was alive and appreciated (Walker, 2011: 27). For instance, Samuel Hill, who toured Hawai‘i between December 1848 and May 1849, explains that *he‘e nalu* was still indulged in the great Lahaina Harbor on Maui and in the village of Keauheha.
- 34 There are numerous testimonies of indigenous surfing in the 19th century, notably from American, British and French Romantics. Romantic writers in the late 18th and the early 19th century in Europe and the United States glorified nature, emotion and the rewards of aesthetic experiences. They offered a new gaze on the ocean, which dramatized sea bathing as an act of courage for struggling with the element. Even though they often adopted a colonialist point of view in the Pacific, they wrote laudatory pieces praising Hawaiians gliding on waves. Their accounts were famous in travel literature for promoting Hawaiians as the greatest swimmers and surfers in the world. In highlighting the aesthetic and skillful nature of Hawaiians riding waves, these travel accounts and novels recorded the vivacity of surfing through several lexical fields.
- 35 Within the Industrial Revolution theme, natives would surf at a ‘railway speed’ (Campbell, 1881 [1878]: 414), shooting like an ‘express train’ (Nordhoff, 1874: 52 ; Twain, 1913 [1871]: 258), or like an ‘arrow’ (Barrot, 1839: 296; Duhaut-Cilly, 1835: 274), at a rate of at least twenty miles an hour (Wise, 1850: 353). In the lexical field of animal, gliding Hawaiians were compared to ‘swift-winged bird[s]’ (Caton, 1880: 244), ‘race-horse[s]’ (Wise, 1850: 352) and ‘ducks’ (; Nordhoff, 1874: 52). Looking at natives cruising on the water, Romantic writers portrayed them as ‘fishes’ (Chaney, 1888: 175 ; Nordhoff, 1874: 52) and ‘dolphins’ (Nordhoff, 1874: 52). Nautical metaphors and references to hybrid creatures of the Greek and Roman mythology aimed at understanding the symbiotic relationships with the ocean cultivated by the Hawaiians.<sup>4</sup> Navigators coined their own favorite expression to point out the fitness of Hawaiian bodies and their relationships to decency. Naked female natives were depicted as ‘nymphs’ (Campbell, 1881 [1878]: 414), ‘nereids’ (Thiercelin, 1866: 307), ‘naiads’ (Barrot, 1839: 291) and ‘mermaids’ (Colton,

1852: 353). Naked males were painted as ‘mairmen’, ‘porpoises’, ‘tritons’ and ‘Mercuries’ (Stoddard, 1873: 262-263) for their golden skin and mastery of Neptune’s elements. Like gods, these Pacific Islanders had “enormous biceps and proud, impudent heads set on broad shoulders” (Stoddard, 1873: 262). At the periphery of the human race, cultivating their sense of public modesty, Hawaiians were ‘surperhumans’ (Hill, 1856: 202) and expert divers.

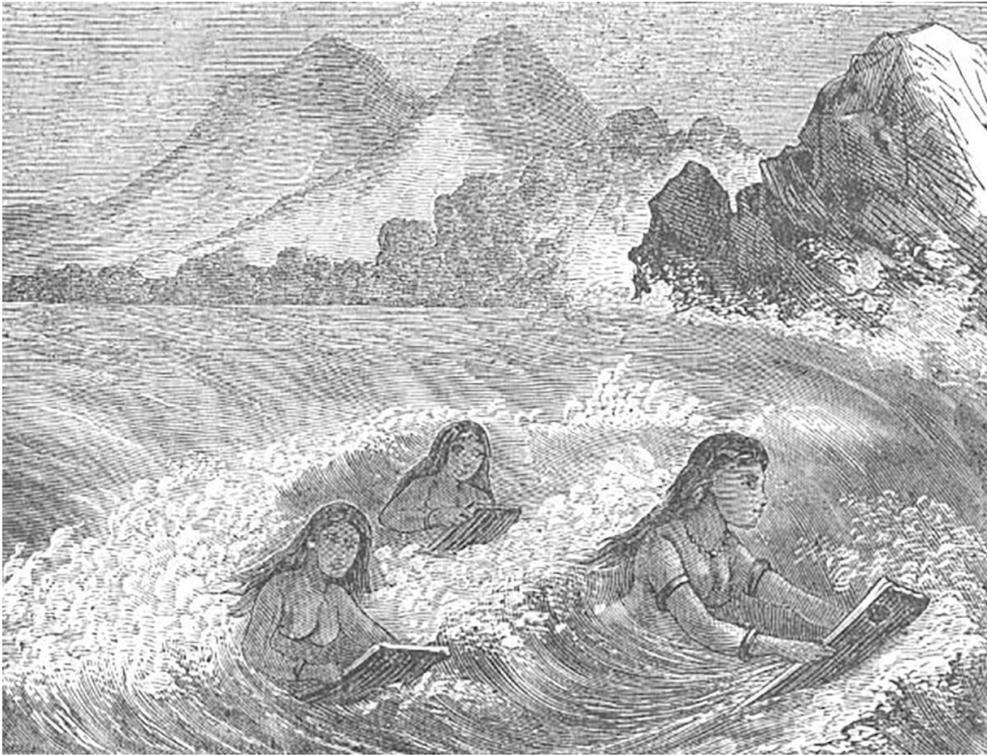
**Engraving 2. – Jeux hawaiiens [sic]. – Drawing by Émile Bayard from a sketch sent by the author [Charles de Varigny]**



(© Émile Bayard, Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1973, Paris)

- 36 Standing erect on top of cliffs before diving into fresh-water pools, they “poised upon the rocky pedestals, like the Medicean Venus [and jumped like] salmon” (Wise, 1850: 344).
- 37 This metaphorical field highlights the hybrid features of the Sandwich Islanders, between human and fish, and has fed the myth of the ‘Amphibia’ (Ellis, 1827: 278 ;Stoddard, 1873: 261). Mark Twain went further when, in 1866, he tried surfing in Honaunau on the Big Island, claiming that “none but natives ever master the art of surf-bathing thoroughly” (Twain, 1913 [1871]: 258). He thereby depicted the Hawaiians as noble savages (Desmond, 1999: 57), and set the finest performance for tourists to achieve authenticity: gliding on a wave, a practice they had read about and anticipated in traveling literature.

## Engraving 3. – Surf Bathing – Success



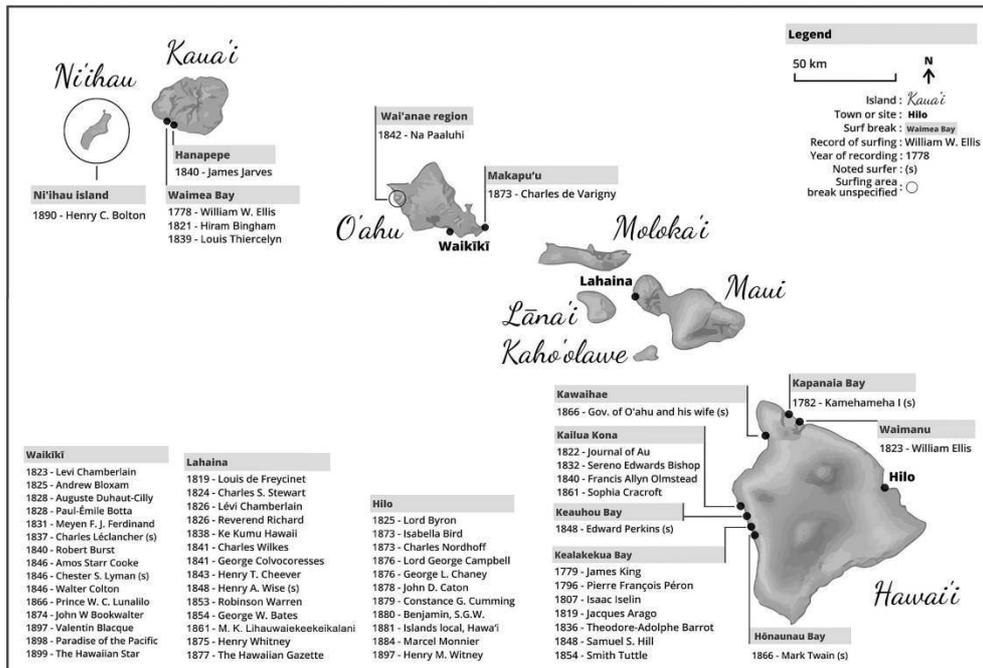
(© MARK TWAIN, AMERICAN PUBLISHING CO., 1872, HARTFORD)

## Discussion

- 38 In gathering the aforementioned sources with others I have collected in English, French and Hawaiian, I shall offer a detailed, but still fragmented picture of the state of *he'e nalu* in the 19th century<sup>5</sup>. In any instance, testimonies dealing with the collapse or with the vivacity of surfing indicate durability of this tradition inasmuch as they recorded native cultural performances. These records can be catalogued in map 1 below.

Map 1. – Euroamericans and Hawaiian testimonies of *he'e nalu* in Hawai'i (1778-1899)

Carte 1 : Témoignages Euro-américains et hawaïens du *he'e nalu* à Hawaï (1778-1899), © Jérémy Lemarié.



(© JÉRÉMY LEMARIÉ)

- 39 While Moser (2008: 108, 2010: 200) rightly argues that *he'e nalu* persisted in the outlying regions of the archipelago, the above map shows extensive testimonies located near urban, economic and administrative centers, matching high population density and surfing activity (Finney and Houston, 1966: 29-31). During the discovery era (1778-1810), Kealahou Bay on the Big Island was a major population center and a main provisioning stop for fur traders. Expeditions like those of Vancouver (1791) and Péron (1824) provided evidence of surfing in these locations. As the market economy infiltrated the islands, Western traders came in great numbers during the sandalwood period (1812-1830) and the whaling era (1830-1860). Some of them recorded their journey and magnified significant cultural performances of *he'e nalu* in Lahaina and Waikiki.
- 40 Display of *he'e nalu* became prominent in Lahaina from the 1810s to the 1840s, as the city was the residence place of the royalty, a missionary center and the first harbor of the Pacific because of its low tax rates. Later, the development of Honolulu as an administrative and legislative center from the 1840s explains why testimonies of *he'e nalu* dwindled in Lahaina and increased in Waikiki. Long before the touristic appeal of Waikiki, coconut groves and high surf consistency made this place a secondary residence for the *ali'i* (Clark, 2011: 128, 446 ; Kamakau, 1991: 44). As Honolulu became the new capital city of the islands from the 1850s and onwards, Waikiki stimulated early tourism in Hawai'i, and was compared to Brighton in the United Kingdom (Campbell, 1881 [1878]: 389).
- 41 However, early tourists came in greater number in Hilo from the 1850s, with the opening of a steamship line between San Francisco and Hawai'i (Kuykendall, 1953: 11-12). While the overall population of the archipelago was declining, the one of Hilo, Honolulu and Lahaina increased steadily. Hilo became a major economic node with the development of sugar cane and coffee cultivation between the 1850s and 1860s (Kuykendall, 1953: 143).

42 Along with agriculture, tourism was also a promising sector. Hilo was a major stop over for travelers visiting the nearby volcano Kīlauea, the Waipio Valley and the Rainbow Falls of the Wailuku River (Kuykendall, 1967: 110-114 ; Whitney, 1875: 68). Tourism generated revenues and surfing interest started growing among travelers, resulting in an increasing number of records of cultural performances in Hilo in the 1870s and 1880s. For example, Lord George Campbell paid fifty cents to observe two natives surfing in August 1875 (Campbell, 1881 [1878]: 413-414). The following year, a surfing exhibition was staged by Governor John Owen Dominis to enhance tourism Dominis hired a dozen surfers to show off their skills during the event, while others were climbing up coconut trees to quench the thirst of travelers (Chaney, 1880: 175-178). Eventually, *he'e nalu* stopped in Hilo when a breakwater was built in 1908, and when Waikīkī emerged as the center of the Hawaiian tourism industry from the 1890s and onwards.

## Conclusion

- 43 Even though some observers of 19th century Hawai'i noticed a collapse of native cultural performances (e.g. Bingham, 1848 ; Emerson, 1892), I have demonstrated that *he'e nalu* triggered enthusiasm among the Hawaiians and the Westerners. After reviewing the political significance of Hawaiian surfing prior to its discovery by the West, I have shown that sailors and traders of the Pacific held ministers responsible for the decline of surfing, echoing they generally despised missionaries' involvement in Hawaiian affairs.
- 44 I have also argued that the dominant discourse dealing with the collapse of surfing has been strengthened by self-described *Kama'āina* and tourism promoters like Alexander Hume Ford in the early 20th century. This movement misled some scholars to believe in the near death of *he'e nalu*. But a recent school of thought working on Hawaiian and French sources has unveiled an unknown part of Hawaiian history (Clark, 2011 ; Lemarié 2015, 2016 ; Manificat, 2013, 2015 ; Moser, 2008, 2010 ; Neushul and Westwick, 2013 ; Walker, 2011).
- 45 My investigation of some Hawaiian newspapers, log of traders and sailors, as well as diaries of Hygienists and Romantic writers, have shown that testimonies of *he'e nalu* – including the ones conceived as display of Hawaiian traditions – are critical to reassess the history of Hawaiian surfing in the 19th century. Romanticism and Hygienicism were clearly entangled in the encounter between *he'e nalu* and European observers, and brought to the West a renewed gaze upon Hawaiian culture. In the meantime, native Hawaiians resisted Western hegemony through writing, publishing and performing traditional practices, highlighting cultural endurance of ancestral customs.
- 46 To sum up, I have shed light on *he'e nalu* emerging as modern surfing thanks to a variety of factors including *Haoles* admiring and adopting some Hawaiian customs, like surf bathing and surfing, and *Kanaka Maoli* embracing alien concepts such as reading and writing. *He'e nalu* endured colonization thanks to a long metamorphosis of the Hawaiian society, ending with new political and economic structures. Eventually, the economy of the Hawaiian monarchy and Caucasian businessmen, which relied on the three major Pacific trades, shifted to the tourism industry – besides agriculture – as a main economic sector that galvanized surfing and other Hawaiian cultural performances as unavoidable attractions.

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## NOTES

1. The terms *he'e nalu* and *Hawai'i* have been written in their native form with the 'okina. The 'okina is an upside down apostrophe (') and corresponds to a phonetic glottal stop. This hiatus sets a strong difference between two words that seemed equivalent. For instance the noun *kai* (ocean) differs from the verb *ka'i* (to lead).
2. *Haole* means non-native, that is to say foreign-born. This term mostly refers to Westerners.
3. According to Ford (1909b: 528), to be a *Kama'āina* requires seven years of residence in Hawai'i.
4. This discourse echoes the gaze of French sailors on board the *Étoile* and the *Boudeuse* during the trip of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville in 1768, Tahiti (Haas, 2014).
5. Numerous data remain unexplored. A complete analysis of this topic would require to explore all Hawaiian newspapers, in addition to logs and diaries of explorers, missionaries, sailors, traders and visitors to Hawai'i, all nationality included (American, British, Chinese, Danish, French, German, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, etc.).

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## ABSTRACTS

Several years after the debate on the invention of traditions in the Pacific, this article highlights some work that reproduces or deconstructs inaccurate statements dealing with Hawaiian cultural performances. Through the case study of *he'e nalu* (Hawaiian surfing) in the 19th century, this analysis explains why anthropologists and historians have come to contradictory findings regarding its decline. Early works dealing with diaries of missionaries and sailors have argued for the near extinction of surfing, whereas a new school of thought tapping into Hawaiian sources and French literature has pinpointed its vivacity. To clarify controversy, this study examines American, British, French and Hawaiian primary sources and sheds light on the state of *he'e nalu* and its cultural performances in the 19th century.

Plusieurs années après le débat sur l'invention des traditions dans le Pacifique, cet article présente certains travaux qui reproduisent ou déconstruisent des idées reçues à propos des performances culturelles hawaïennes. Sur la base de l'étude de cas du *he'e nalu* (surf hawaïen) au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, cette analyse explique pourquoi les anthropologues et historiens sont parvenus à des résultats contradictoires. Les premiers travaux traitant des journaux de missionnaires et de marins plaidèrent en faveur la quasi-extinction du surf, tandis qu'un récent courant de pensée mobilisant des sources hawaïennes et la littérature française a identifié sa vivacité. Pour clarifier cette controverse, cette étude examine des sources primaires américaines, britanniques, françaises et hawaïennes afin de faire la lumière sur l'état du *he'e nalu* et de ses performances culturelles au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** colonisation, Hawaï, surf, tradition

**Keywords:** colonization, Hawai'i, surfing, tradition

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