

Ep. 110 | Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen & Long Live the Tribe of Fatherless Girls

[00:00:11] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here with Sachi Argabright. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim the bookshelf and read the world. Today, we're talking about our discussion picks, HAWAII'S STORY BY HAWAII'S QUEEN and LONG LIVE THE TRIBE OF FATHERLESS GIRLS.

[00:00:29] **Sachi** You can find the complete transcript of this episode on our website, readingwomenpodcast.com. And don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss a single episode.

[00:00:39] **Kendra** Well, welcome back, listeners, to our theme on Pacific Islander and Pasifika authors.

[00:00:47] **Sachi** Yay!

[00:00:47] **Kendra** And before we jump into that and our exciting discussion picks, we want to tell you a little bit about our Patreon. So RuthAnn, who's one of our contributing editors, does a lot of behind-the-scenes work as far as team communication and organizing newsletter content. And she also works on our Patreon newsletter, and she writes that every month. So she expands on different ideas. And she has photos of her dog, Ted, who is a Westie and adorable. And he has this whole, like, old man vibe that I adore. And so there's so many great things in our Patreon newsletter. Also with our Patreon, you also have weekly updates called Fur Baby Friday. You have these special Patreon episodes. We have a book club, a quarterly book club. And, of course, this newsletter and all sorts of different goodies, discount codes. You learn about what's coming up next. And you get the themes ahead of time. It's a whole lovely community that we really enjoy working on. All right. So that's our Patreon. So now on to our discussion picks. Sachi, you have our first one.

[00:01:57] **Sachi** So my discussion pick for today is HAWAII'S STORY BY HAWAII'S QUEEN by Lili'uokalani. And this was recently republished by Mint Editions. And for those of you who might have missed our last episode or want a quick refresher, a really fast synopsis of the story is it is the memoir of Hawaii's last queen and sovereign leader before Hawaii was annexed to the United States. And so this memoir discusses major life events of Lili'uokalani's life, including her eventual imprisonment and overthrow of rule by a coalition of American businessmen. And Hawaii's annexation to the US occurred the same year that this book was published.

[00:02:50] **Sachi** And one of the things that I consistently throughout my reading experience was kind of two different sides while I was reading. So the first was just awe and fascination about Lili'uokalani's life and Hawaiian culture and how I was able to read it like firsthand from her own accounts, in her own words, about this beautiful land and people and culture. And it was so just wonderful to read all of this in her own words. At the same time, certain passages really brought me to anger and frustration sometimes because you also are reading the firsthand account of how Americans stole this land and, you know, her people right from under her. And she couldn't really do anything about it, you know, after a certain point in time. So you hear this kind of pain and desperation in the words that she uses, especially towards the end of the book, where she's really pleading for the US not to go through with annexation, which we now know they later did that same year that this was published. And ultimately what she feared came true.

[00:04:14] **Sachi** And so it was, for me, there's a lot of highs and lows, especially as an American individual and reading about what our country had done. 1898 is not that long ago. It's less than 150 years. And so I feel like when we talk about colonization or occupying different territories, we think it was forever ago, right? It was so long ago. But it really wasn't. So it was this very much push and pull that I experienced. Kendra, did you experience something similar while reading this book?

[00:04:52] **Kendra** Yeah, I have not read much on the history of Hawaii much at all. And so reading her account and talking about like what happened politically in the kingdom before the annexation of Hawaii and the lead up of American's multiple attempts to try to gain, you know, more and more power and eventually success in that. . . . It was just an illustration of how terrible colonialism is and how, you know, America really needs to own up for that. And just also learning so much about her life and her experience. And, you know, she was very gracious in explaining her culture because she was assuming, I believe, her reader would be white because she was trying to plead with the United States not to annex Hawaii, et cetera, et cetera. And so, yeah, she was just really interesting to hear more about how their . . . the rules of succession, which was really interesting to read about and how that worked out. And how, you know, oftentimes ruling families will adopt a child from a different family, and it kind of creates bonds within their community. And it was just really fascinating in a lot of ways, that way too.

[00:06:05] **Sachi** Right, even down to things outside of the sovereign kind of rule and the different ways that they had led the country. Like she even talks a lot about music because she was a musician herself. And I thought the way that she describes music in Hawaii as really being passed amongst each other versus written down. . . . And how someone could come up with a melody or a tune, and, you know, it just travels kind of like by word of mouth very quickly. And, you know, all of a sudden, it's kind of like, just like, oh, I heard this on the radio. And now everybody hears it. It's like, oh, yeah, everybody knows the song right now because we've all kind of passed it to each other. And even if they were to write things down, like the way that they think about notes and bars and all this stuff is just so different than how we, from a Western point of view, would think about "music" and how it's composed.

[00:07:01] **Sachi** And so, yeah, she's really generous about, you know, talking about her culture and really trying to appeal to these—you know, I agree—probably white people or Americans who are reading this book. I thought that was a great kind of fascinating aspect and also just really becomes a knife in the heart when it comes to the horrible colonialism and the kind of overthrown power that she became because of the United States

[00:07:37] **Kendra** I think, you know, she does a great job of pointing out that, you know, Hawaii's not perfect. But it is important that they have autonomy and different things. And she describes so much joy of her culture. And like you said, the music. . . . Also she travels to the United States and then over to the United Kingdom. And she just expresses so much delight at visiting so many new cultures and experiencing that. And she's very gracious about Queen Victoria. And like all the stuff that was just really interesting to read from her perspective, because, I mean, it's been a long time since I read a personal account, you know, a nonfiction account from someone from this time period as well. So I was like, oh, right. Queen Victoria was alive at the time.

[00:08:30] **Sachi** Right? Yeah, I felt the same. One of the bullets that I have here is like, it was just wild to hear someone talk about figures like Grover Cleveland and Queen

Victoria, who seem, you know, again, like just like very far back in time. When it's like, oh, no, like that was actually not that long ago. And she met these people and had kind of firsthand experiences with them. And I learned just a lot about Grover Cleveland, which, you know, if you're an American, you hardly ever hear about Grover Cleveland ever. And I had no idea that he was such an ally to the Hawaiian people and that he blocked annexation when he was in office. And it was when McKinley came into office that shortly after they went through and he, you know, he approved annexation. Like, I did not realize all of those dynamics between those two presidents and, you know, Lili'uokalani. So it was just really very interesting to see that firsthand account of some of these figures that just seem like, you know, footnotes in a textbook sometimes.

[00:09:41] **Sachi** It also, you know, there's a time where she she lives, I think, for six months in Washington, DC. And the world definitely kind of seemed like "smaller" back then. Like she gets a seat to President McKinley's inauguration, like the day or something. Like. . . . They're like, "Oh, I wish I could have given you more seats if we had more notice." And it's just like, that would not happen right now. Like. It might be because she was like a world leader—that's probably part of it—and was very well connected through her marriage. But it did seem just like a lot easier to do things that would be unimaginable today. So it's very unique to be able to read something like this where the time place is so different. But then you also know some of these figures, such as, you know, like Grover Cleveland, President McKinley, Queen Victoria, like all these different things that really puts in perspective that time and place in the late 1800s that, you know, I certainly don't explore that era as much as I probably should. So this is a great way to do that.

[00:10:49] **Kendra** I think it's such a great historical document. And of course, this is the history nerd coming out in me. I think that she's . . . her voice is . . . you can . . . you can hear it. Like, she has a distinct writing voice. And maybe this is because I've only really read novels from this time period for the most part, that it was just such a delight to read a memoir like this, which I think at the time probably would not have been called the word "memoir." But that's essentially what it is. It's an autobiography of her life and her experience. And you just felt like, oh, this is . . . this is delightful. I get to read about this time period. But of course, you know, it's also very, very sad because she's writing this, you know, having been removed as ruler of Hawaii at this point. And you kind of . . . you know that going in from the beginning. And so she explains why she wants to write this book and this story. And then she starts from her childhood and explains, like, how she was raised and, you know, basically sharing the love of Hawaii with her readers.

[00:11:55] **Sachi** Right. Yeah. She really highlights that aspect of her childhood and the culture and all that she loves about the land. And it then shifts to the political intrigue and the coups. And like this really, in my mind, a very powerful type of plea to the American people not to go through with annexation. And so the passage that hit me the most when I was reading this. . . . You know, this book again was . . . ended up being published in 1898, so this is long before, you know, World War Two, which some have noted—and what I kind of view—as like the tipping point for the US being this global superpower, right? So this is much before that.

[00:12:48] **Sachi** There's quote towards the end of the book that I thought was very telling. Lili'uokalani just has this very, in my mind, astute prediction. I'll read the quote here. It reads, "There is little question but that the United States could become a successful rival of the Europeans in the race for conquest, and could create a vast military and naval power, if such is its ambition. But is such an ambition laudable? Is such a departure from its established principles patriotic or politic?" And this kind of hit me like a ton of bricks

because it's so true. Like America broke off from the British people and then ultimately became this giant military force and colonizer just like them. And it does kind of negate some of the antithesis of what our country was "founded on."

[00:13:46] **Sachi** And I know personally as an American, a lot of these things like the situation with Hawaii, like a lot of the occupation of many islands that the US has, it's not really discussed at all or analyzed or really challenged at all. You know, when I was growing up and in school and even now as an adult, I hardly ever see it really discussed or challenged in the news or anything like that. And it's just awful. Like it just makes. . . . As an American reading this, like, it was really devastating to read the end of this book and just realize, wow, you know, our country really, really did this horrible thing to this ruler and these people that did not. . . . absolutely did not want this. It's not like, hey, we swooped in as a, you know, a white savior or whatever and helped these people, and now it's great. It's like, no, they didn't want this. And they were fine without us. And it just makes you feel awful. And it was, again, that like push and pull of like, I'm so glad I read this and I learned this. But it also just makes me in the pit of my stomach, you know, feel so awful. And I know that this is one of many stories that is a really dark mark on our country's history.

[00:15:09] **Kendra** And it really—even though this was written, you know, 120 some years ago—it's a reminder that colonialism is ongoing and continues to be that way. And, you know, reading this along with some of our more contemporary reads for this month, you can just see that effect over the course of time. And it was interesting, you know, Hawaii was made a state in '59. And it was just really, you know, her talking about wanting to maintain their independence and preserving their culture and how important that was. And you know the future of Hawaii while you're reading this document. And she doesn't know that future. And we do. And so that's something like as a reader, you're, like, very conscious of. But she does really share that love and centering Hawaii and their story and their, I don't know, the process of growing up and being part of this culture. And she kind of really brings you into that, like we said, in such a generous and gracious way that I think is pretty unique.

[00:16:18] **Sachi** Yeah. Because she didn't have to write that book.

[00:16:20] **Kendra** No.

[00:16:20] **Sachi** She didn't have to pretty much educate and teach all of these Americans as to why her country should hold value. It should be, hey, we. . . . you know. . . . we don't want you here. And so, you know, goodbye! Instead of like, your people overthrew me, imprisoned me, and took away my leadership that was—you know, in her words, obviously, I'm not 100 percent sure, you know, what the population felt—but like what seemed to be, you know, very happy with the sovereign rule. And then sets out and says, "I'm going to write this book. I'm going to tell my story. I'm going to share my beautiful culture and kind of bring out this plea for them not to go through with this" when she absolutely didn't have to. After they treated her awfully, to put all this love and care into this piece of literature is. . . . it's so sad to me. And but, you know, again, I'm glad that it's out there. And I'm glad we have an opportunity to read this so we understand our history and understand what happened, knowing what we know now. But it's absolutely from a place that was, you know, probably not even needed or warranted, but she did it anyways. She loves her country so much, her land.

[00:17:40] **Kendra** You know, it's important to note that there have been a lot of historians who've written on this document. And there has been some fact checking, you know, that

you should . . . you probably want to be aware of when you're reading this book that historians have done. And, you know, obviously Hawaii was not perfect at the time. And so she probably has like rose-colored glasses a little bit in certain areas, particularly being a privileged person of a ruling class. But the point still stands, you know, that she makes in the book that, you know, they were independent; they should have remained independent.

[00:18:13] **Kendra** And also they were generally pretty kind to the Americans who came and were there. She married this white American guy. And so obviously they were pretty friendly with each other. And it's like a huge betrayal. And she communicates that betrayal, particularly since she has also loved America through loving her husband and some of her friends and different things. And she goes into those details. You could just see her life and follow her life from the different people who took the throne before her and what that process was like and how it's generally been done. And she also talks about, you know, visiting different islands. And she has this reverence and respect for each of the individual islands and their own uniqueness, I guess, which is a beautiful thing to read as well.

[00:18:59] **Sachi** Overall, I think we both really enjoyed this work. And I'm so glad that we were able to discuss it in more detail and highlight it. And I really encourage everyone to pick this up. The physical copy that we're promoting is the recent release from Mint Editions. But there's also an audiobook for this. So for those who are audiobook lovers like myself and Kendra, that is another really great way for you to read this book. And some of the pronunciations from Emily Woo Zeller—who we love, so don't give me wrong; she's great—pronunciation is probably not the most accurate on the audiobook. But you still obviously get the great content and the message. But I do want to put that caveat there for the audiobook because that's not 100 percent probably accurate. This is a title that . . . I think that what I'm trying to get at is that it is a little more accessible, and it's something that you can get in multiple forms. And I really encourage people to pick it up, even though, like I know there's some folks who are like, "Oh, I'm really not into classics." Like, I'm not really either. But I really still enjoyed this and got so much kind of appreciation after reading it that I definitely think it's worth reading even if it's outside of your genre. So that was our first discussion pick, HAWAII'S STORY BY HAWAII'S QUEEN by Lili'uokalani. And the recent re-publication is from Mint Editions.

[00:20:37] **Sachi** And Kendra, what is your discussion pick that you would like to highlight today?

[00:20:43] **Kendra** So our second discussion pick is LONG LIVE THE TRIBE OF FATHERLESS GIRLS by T Kira Madden. And this is out from Bloomsbury. And this is a memoir about T Kira's life living in Boca Raton, Florida, as the child of a Jewish man and a Chinese native Hawaiian woman. And so she started. . . . Her mom started out as her dad's mistress. And eventually they did get married. But it really created a tumultuous childhood. And then you kind of go into this, and you as the, you know, adult reader realize that, you know, her parents are struggling with addiction. And there's lots of different things going on that she as a child finds normal. That's the only existence that she's known. But it still has a huge effect on her. And so this memoir is written in kind of like a linked essay collection sort of style. And it is pretty linear in that. There's a section at the back that we'll talk about here in a second that is like . . . goes back into her mom's childhood. But for the most part, this book is, you know, pretty straightforward in its timeline. And so I just really love the way that T Kira writes her prose. It's phenomenal. I just . . . the word choice is great. There's so much '90s and early 2000s nostalgia in this book. And I listened to the audiobook, which she reads herself, which I reread it for this episode via audio. And I had

read it print previously. And so each reading, I found something new in it, which is always a sign for me of a great book.

[00:22:24] **Sachi** Absolutely. It's always great when you can get some extra nuggets, reading it multiple times.

[00:22:32] **Kendra** Yes, definitely. And so I wanted to talk about a couple of my favorite sections and kind of discuss those a little bit. The first time I ever read T Kira's writing was when one of the chapters in this book was published in Guernica. And it's called "The Feels of Love."

[00:22:50] **Kendra** Just as a heads up, the next section is going to include a trigger warning for sexual assault. So I will put some time stamps in the show notes of where section one starts, where we discuss this specific chapter, and then where time stamp two starts, which is the second section that we're going to be discussing so that if you are sensitive to that, you can make the choices best for you. But I just wanted to let you all know. And that will again be in the show notes.

[00:23:17] **Kendra** So, yes, the first section that we'll be discussing is "The Feels of Love," which is that original essay that appeared in Guernica. And that's also the chapter title in the book. And it's about how T Kira was sexually assaulted when she was twelve. She describes this, that these very much older guys have done this to her. And so she gives this perspective on what, you know, happens to her in that moment. And she writes the entire chapter in second person, which is a way to distance herself from that story. But it's also her older self talking to her younger self about the situation because the older self knows what's going on and is being contacted by this guy. That "you" section just really becomes very impactful when you realize that this is something that T Kira was doing not only for her present self, but her past self—that that little girl deserved justice in that way.

[00:24:19] **Kendra** And T Kira often tells a story how Chanel Miller showed up at one of her book signings. And, you know, Chanel Miller mentioned that she'd been sexually assaulted and T Kira was like, "You should write your story!" And she was, of course. And so, you know, they've done, I think, either events together or talks or social media posts or something together about this. And being both biracial or multiracial women of color are . . . it's an important conversation that they're having. And just having these perspectives, I think, is something that we need to talk more about. And this, you know, this book came out shortly after the #MeToo movement kind of got underway in . . . was it 2018? And so this came out in 2019. So there's a lot in just that one chapter of this book, which is, wow.

[00:25:17] **Sachi** Right. And it's really important to highlight because of that representation and that example of T Kira really encouraging Chanel to tell her story as well. And you know, if you haven't read Chanel Miller's book, KNOW MY NAME, definitely read it. It's an incredible . . . an incredible read. But it is. . . . It is really emotionally taxing. I remember still vividly reading that and having to—even though I loved the book, it's so engrossing—and reading that chapter and just having to pause and just kind of put down the book for a second and like really process her words in that chapter because it is very, very difficult to read. But I do applaud her, and I'm sure it was extremely emotionally taxing for her to write that piece or write that chapter. But I think it is important for us to tell these stories instead of stuffing it down, bottling up, and making everyone feel like they're alone. The rate at which BIPOC or people of color are sexually assaulted, it is higher. And it should really be discussed. And I really commend her and applaud her for including that in this book, because it was probably extremely difficult to do so.

[00:26:46] **Kendra** Yeah. And like she mentions in the book, you know, she's not the only girl that these older guys had done this to. And the importance of. . . . They found each other later . . . and the importance of that and telling each other their stories and finding that support and connection there. And so I think she takes you along this journey. But again, it's like this second person about her young self, and then she also has her older self. Like they're two different people, like the before and the after. And that was incredibly impactful as well.

[00:27:28] **Sachi** Yeah, that's very true. I think a lot of us could probably like to reflect back and think about what would I tell our younger self. And if you could look back and give yourself guidance or understanding as to what's happening because it is obviously super confusing as a child. And I think sometimes all of us probably experienced some aspect of childhood where you think, you know, what you're experiencing is "normal." It's absolutely not. You feel that in this book, whether it is this chapter or even aspects of how her family dynamics were, how she was raised. I think it's important to kind of reflect back and go through that kind of second-person exercise. And I think it's really very, very unique aspect of this book that I'm glad that she explored.

[00:28:22] **Kendra** The second section or chapter I wanted to mention was this section called "Kuleana," which this entire section focuses more on T Kira's mom's past and the past of her family. And there is a big spoiler that I'm going to dance around a lot while we talk about this. So I apologize in advance. The word "kuleana" is about a particular idea. And she talks about that there's "a place in the afterworld in which all of one's ancestors are waiting. I always like this legend best, the idea of this place, where all family ties remain solid, intact, where nothing on Earth ever mattered. It is the place in which all family members are reunited, and I like to imagine that everyone shows up young, healthy, so much bright life in the face." She goes on to say later on that page, "Once the family is reunited, each spirit is encouraged to visit their own idea of home. Home can be in the depths of the sea, in the treetops. And a spirit might use their grandmother's lap in her rocking chair, the sour smell of malasadas. Ancient legend describes it as a place of your greatest responsibility. Others define it as returning to one's rightful place or one's greatest duty. The Hawaiian word for this is 'kuleana.'" And so when she's writing about writing this memoir, she is talking to her cousin Sarah about, you know, is it worth it to go through all of this? And her cousin says, "Your kuleana," she says, "This is your kuleana to tell it." And you think about. . . . We just talked about in a previous chapter about "The Feels of Love." Right? And how that word connects to a feeling of home, but also responsibility. And in this section, "Kuleana," there is this whole discovery of her mom's past and some things that she didn't know about her mom's past and that connection to her native Hawaiian roots. But also with this memoir as a whole, she is finding home in a way that is incredibly important for her as a person.

[00:30:37] **Sachi** I really liked this aspect of the book as well because I think, at least for myself there, you know, throughout my life there was this kind of sometimes embarrassment for being part Asian because you're constantly being made fun of on the playground and all these different things. You know, racism. In general, right? So there was this turning point that I had in my life where I really started to embrace my half-Japanese heritage or that part of myself and really started reconnecting with my mother in a more meaningful way and my understanding of Japanese culture, trying to learn more about the language and food and things like that. You know, it happened gradually over time.

[00:31:32] **Sachi** But I'm sure there was a moment that, you know, shifted that aspect of my life. And you can kind of feel that in this chapter as well, at least I did, of kind of that aha moment of reconnection and embracing a certain aspect of yourself. I feel like, especially being at least biracial myself, like sometimes you feel like you are treading water in two different, you know, spaces. And you are kind of drifting one way and drifting the other. And sometimes you're trying to paddle to one side and leaving behind the other. And when you find that harmony between the two and you connect those two aspects on each side of the coin of that turning point, it's really special. And I liked that she highlighted that reconnection to her native Hawaiian roots in this chapter because it reminded me of a time in my life that I went through something similar.

[00:32:32] **Kendra** She does a beautiful job of that and of expressing how growing up she felt like she lived in so many in-between places. She was never enough of one thing or another. And she finds a way to express that in such a beautiful and just well-written way. And, you know, her act of connecting with her family history is incredible. There's so much that happens in her life that, you know, really, truth is stranger than fiction. And I really have appreciated the way that she wrote her story. And, you know, there is more, obviously, to her story because this was published several years ago and was written even before that. And so watching her continue to connect with her native Hawaiian roots and also being Chinese has been really great. And I think that's something a lot of people, like you said, will be able to relate to reading this book.

[00:33:41] **Kendra** And she also does a lot of great cooking on her Instagram, as a side note, if you would like to see her cooking a lot of food. And she also been pointing out, you know, we need to support Asian grocery stores of all different kinds right now with everything going on and anti-Asian violence and, you know, anti-Asian business hatred and racism that's happening right now. And so I really appreciate that, too, because I think that's a great way to encourage people to support businesses is, you know, here, go make this. And, you know, put your money where your mouth is.

[00:34:17] **Sachi** Yeah, absolutely. That's how I, you know, frequent my Asian grocery store too just by trying a lot of different recipes, not only Japanese recipes, but a lot of other recipes from Asian countries as well. And it's . . . you can only get those ingredients at the Asian market usually. And it's a great way to support the Asian people within the community or local area that you live in.

[00:34:45] **Kendra** Yes. So I will link T Kira's Instagram down below. So definitely go check out this memoir and just savor it. It's so beautiful. Whether you read it in print or audio, you'll find something beautiful in it. So that as LONG LIVE THE TRIBE OF FATHERLESS GIRLS by T Kira Madden. And that's out from Bloomsbury.

[00:35:09] **Kendra** So for our next segment, we have something very special for you. I think we've only done this once before. But we asked one of our discussion pick authors to come on and to recommend some books. As one of the picks was originally published in the late 1800s, I think the obvious answer is that today we have T Kira Madden with us. And she is going to share a couple of books by native Hawaiian authors that she has really connected with. And it was really delightful to be able to talk to T Kira about these books. So without further ado, here are her recommendations.

[00:35:48] **T Kira** Hi, my name is T Kira Mahealani Madden. I am a Chinese, Jewish, Kānaka Maoli, Hapa Haole writer. The first book I've chosen today is the story collection THIS IS PARADISE by Kristiana Kahakauwila. THIS IS PARADISE is a story collection

from many different points of view. And it explores contemporary Hawaii. THIS IS PARADISE is one of those books where I often say that if you have a book that feels destined for you in some way, for me, that is . . . that is the ultimate. That is the ultimate desire for me as a reader and as a writer in my life, when a book finds you or a writer finds you at the perfect moment in your life. And that was this book for me.

[00:36:39] **T Kira** I went away to Hedgebrook a few years back, a writer's residency off of the state of Washington. And when I was there, I guess . . . I think Kristiana Kahakauwila had just left the residency or had left in the months prior. So she had left this book there, as we . . . as we do. If you have a book, you can often leave a copy. And it just found me in the library one day. And at that specific moment in my life, when I was thinking about my heritage and reconnection, as I was writing LONG LIVE THE TRIBE OF FATHERLESS GIRLS and writing the Hawaii section of my book, this book was just right there in the library of someone who had just left. And it felt like just the perfect . . . the perfect moment to find that voice and to find this person. I've never met her. I've never spoken to this author. I hope one day I will. I felt when I read these stories as if I had permission as a Hapa Haole person, as kānaka Maoli person who was born and raised in the mainland, that I could write about the islands, that I could write about my family. And in fact, it is a responsibility or as Hawaiians would say, my kuleana to do so. Yeah, that's why I chose this book.

[00:38:05] **T Kira** And I know from learning a little bit about Kristiana's life, she was born in California. She's also a diasporic kānaka Maoli person and a Hapa person. I think she has Norwegian and German blood as well. And I know she went to Princeton and then Michigan. And she, like me, found herself in institutions that were mostly centered on the white American experience, not the Pacific experience. And she has pointed out in a lecture you can find online that even when we look at a map, when we learn the map of the world, it's always focused on the Atlantic and North America. And it's not until you pivot that map and actually look at the expanse of the Pacific that you realize this really is kind of the greatest, richest nation in the world. And, our . . . the Pacific islands are just literally severed in half. And so learning from her, not only from these stories and the stories she collected here and the points of view she collected here across the islands and the archipelago, but also listening to her talk about her discovery of her Pacific roots and finding her own permissions and her own identity through reading Pacific writers across the diaspora allowed me to feel like it's not too late to find those stories of my own and to allow myself those same permissions.

[00:39:32] **T Kira** I know, Kristiana . . . the writer is interested in this concept of mo'olelo, which I wrote this down. It covers secession, language, speech, storytelling, journal, legend, yarn research, and the secession of a talk. And I think that that idea of storytelling tapestry seems to fit this book perfectly. It feels like such a chorus. And I think that's something that is . . . that both of my books actually have in common. But this discourse of character, not just from a single narrator, but from the housekeepers of the island and the Hawaiian businesswomen and the surfers of the island and the locals. And just really we're reversing or subverting that gaze that we're used to, the colonial gaze on the islands and the people of Hawaii. And that's what makes this so special. From page one, we're introduced to this subverted gaze. And I think for me, this book just holds you from page one, paragraph one. The book is THIS IS PARADISE: STORIES by Kristiana Kahakauwila.

[00:40:44] **T Kira** The second book I've chosen today is SHARK DIALOGUES, a novel by Kiana Davenport. SHARK DIALOGUES is an epic novel. It spans a century. It begins in, I

think, 1834. And it is related to THIS IS PARADISE, truly a tapestry of perspective, mythology, family story, a journey through manmade destruction as well as natural destruction and disaster. And it weaves together several stories. It's actually a very difficult book to describe because of how much is going on. But I can tell you it is epic and beyond anything else, beyond the story of the island and the story of this family, beyond the central figure of Pono in the book with her four mixed race hapa granddaughters is the most lush and beautiful language I think I've ever read. The language is its own character. It's a mix of pidgin. It's it has high lyricism. It has the most beautiful descriptions and point of view shifts, even mid-sentence and mid-paragraph and run-on sentence. I think it's stylistically just so ambitious and so gorgeously done and unlike anything I've ever read before. But it's so hard to describe the language of this book without hearing it and how each sound is its own story.

[00:42:19] **T Kira** So in the very beginning, chapter one, we get this run-on sentence. "Pono loved the spectacle. 'Paniolo the only men left with true Hawaiian mana.'" And then this run-on, "Those summers would always be mingled in Jess's memory with horse-sweat man-sweat stench of furious bulls manure and fear shave-ice wet hay pineapple-spears a circus-smell excitement expectation as they approached the grounds flying dust of bullrings catching in her eyes aureoling fence posts the bands the paniolo turning everything into a dream and clowns warming up the crowds and hula girls and bands then paniolo riding out resplendent on their mounts waving to the crowds to her then disappearing minutes later exploding back into the ring bareback on wild broncos Jess screaming huddling on wooden grandstand benches in the asylum of Pono's wings horrified as blood splattered azure plush of embroidered cowboy shirts and bright pink and purple chaps and golden muscular Hawaiian stomachs slashed open guts like blue oysters raw sea urchins spilling out so that rodeos and Puerto Rican kachi-kachi bands smell of blood rawhide and saddles rinsed into heavy smell of sugarcane and sweet gardenia smell of 'Kona snow' white blossoms of the coffee trees in her grandmother's fields. Her youth." And I think that is such an example of just the ecstatic . . . ecstatic like expansiveness and beauty of every word just sidesteps your expectations of what language can do and where language can go. The use of color in both of these books, the use of rhythm and meter where you least expect it, and just this spiraling, lush description of not only landscape, but of feeling makes it so special.

[00:44:21] **T Kira** SHARK DIALOGUES is a book that runs in many Hawaiian families. Many people read this book. And it was passed down to me when I was in maybe middle or high school. The book was published in 1994. And I tried to read this when I was maybe fifteen years old. And I think just most of it went over my head. I didn't feel . . . I didn't feel as deeply connected to my family and my kuleana as I do now, of understanding the history. I mean, this is a big . . . it's a big, epic, dense book. The language is very lush. It's a dense book. But I tried. I did my best because it was passed down to me from my great grandmother, and I've always loved to read. But I think I let most of it wash over me. I don't think I was ready for that book in the same way I talked about with THIS IS PARADISE, how it was exactly the moment of readiness that I found it. I don't think I was ready at fifteen years old to read SHARK DIALOGUES.

[00:45:23] **T Kira** But now, opening it recently, I was thinking. . . . I was invited to read for an AAPI reading night, and I have this on my shelf. And I thought, I should revisit SHARK DIALOGUES. It's time. And I was. . . . I opened it. And I just . . . I couldn't believe what I was reading. I couldn't believe the language, the prose, the stories that immediately just had me. I mean, I was very literally crying at the table at the sheer beauty of it and the sheer feeling of home and my family. My great grandmother who gave me this book is no

longer with us. And it felt like, wow, I need to spend time with this now as an adult and as a writer and as a reader who's not only interested in plot the way I may have been when I was fifteen, but interested in style, interested in dialect, interested in the pidgin that's so elegantly used in this book. And so I'm giving it another try, starting it again.

[00:46:28] **T Kira** And I'm really excited to revisit a new book. I think every time we read and reread a book, we can have a completely new experience with it. And that's maybe the best part. If you're up for the challenge of reading an epic, maybe six hundred page book, please read it with me. Tell me what you think. Share passages with me. It's one of those books you will want to read aloud to anyone nearby and say, "Can you believe the construction of this sentence or this passage?" There's a description of fish. I think the fish are mating in the water. And then when the fish jump out of the water, when they leap out of the water, there is an interruption—because I'm really interested in sentence and paragraph construction—there's an interruption of the image that literally says, "which became a young boy's memory." Like, moments become memories mid-moment, if that makes sense. The management of time, perspective, and the way Davenport does it in the language feels like a magic trick. And Hawaiian mythology is so beautifully woven into this book as well.

[00:47:44] **T Kira** And I'm just so excited. And I feel so grateful to return to this book and just have such a new perspective and new appreciation for what she's built here, which, in just a few pages, I think if you gave this book a shot, you would see exactly what I'm talking about, exactly the kind of language that I'm talking about. Even on the book right here, it says, "compares with Toni Morrison." And I think there's that same care for lyricism and sonics that it just feels like music, music to the veins, I think. *SHARK DIALOGUES*, a novel by Kiana Davenport.

[00:48:21] **T Kira** As you so beautifully articulated already in the podcast, Pacific Island voices are so often missed in these lists. They're not as widely accessible. It's true. But it's not that Pacific Islander people have not been writing. It's that their stories may have not been platformed in traditional ways before now. So it feels like an honor and a privilege to read these stories and the poems of these writers. I think there's a misconception that maybe those of the Pacific or Indigenous people only have oral storytelling. That's just one part of our storytelling. There is certainly written storytelling as well. And these books are here. So it feels like a responsibility to me to read not only in a de-colonial way of these islands and of these peoples, but also the sheer, again, language beyond the story, the language, the reverence of the natural world, the reverence of the Pacific and the people who inhabit these islands in the largest nation in the world. As Epeli Hau'ofa would say. I guess I just feel that Pacific Islander writers have been largely overlooked, not only by mainlanders, but I mean myself as a hapa haole writer. I've always looked in other directions for what had been considered high literature when really the literature was right in front of me all along.

[00:50:01] **Kendra** So many thanks T Kira for recommending those books to us. I don't know about you, but I have already ordered them. And they have arrived. And I'm very excited about reading them. But those are our discussion picks. So, Sachi, do you have any further reading or resources for us?

[00:50:22] **Sachi** Yeah. So the other book that I wanted to give a kind of shout out to for this month's theme is *REDEFINING REALNESS* by Janet Mock. And I'm sure many people have heard of Janet Mock. She is an advocate for the trans community. And this is her first book, her memoir. And she is a mixed-race individual. And part of her heritage is

that she is native Hawaiian on her mother's side. And she was born in Honolulu and spent part of her childhood in Hawaii. I think it's a great book to highlight for many different reasons. And this is one of the first books that I read a memoir first-hand nonfiction account from a trans woman. And it was extremely powerful and very moving for me. So I really wanted to highlight that today, as well as the blog post I mentioned at our last episode from We Need Diverse Books titled, "Resources for Pacific Islander Heritage Month," which has a lot of different lists and compilation of different titles, as well as links to various Pasifika authors and publishers. And so I wanted to plug that one again for those who are looking for further reading based off this theme because the books that we picked are just the tip of the iceberg. Kendra, what is your further reading?

[00:51:59] **Kendra** So I'm actually going to recommend a blog post from The Quiet Pond. So you may know of that because one of our contributing editors, Joce, is a co-blogger there. One of her co-bloggers wrote a post called, "Book Recommendations: Happy Asian Pacific Heritage Month! Books by Maori and Pasifika Authors." And this covers a lot of Pacific Islander and Pasifika authors for you to check out and also just gives you resources in general, which is pretty great. This list includes FRANGIPANI, which we talked about last episode, but also BLACK MARKS ON THE WHITE PAGE, which is something Jaclyn featured, I think, during our anthology month. I can't really remember. But it is one of Jaclyn's recent favorites. So definitely go check out that blog post, which I will link down in the show along with everything else we've mentioned today. So you can go check those out.

[00:52:55] **Kendra** Well, that's it for our theme on Pasifika and Pacific Islander Authors. Always feel free to shoot us recommendations at hello@readingwomenpodcast.com. Or just DM us on social media. That works too. But in the meantime, Sachi, where can people find you about the internet?

[00:53:12] **Sachi** You can find me mainly on Instagram (@sachireads).

[00:53:17] **Kendra** And everyone can find me (@kdwinchester). And that's our show. Many thanks to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. This episode was produced and edited by me, Kendra Winchester, with music by Miki Saito and Isaac Greene.

[00:53:35] **Sachi** Join us next time when Kendra and Jaclyn talk about books with protagonists over fifty. In the meantime, you can find Reading Women on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). Thanks for listening.