

WISH YOU WERE HERE: AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HAOLE WOMAN WHO DROPPED IN ON THE LOCAL GUY IN WAIKĪKĪ

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We were in the line-up when I saw you paddle for the wave as if you owned it.

You didn't see the local guy already coming down the line. You weren't watching. As you were about to head over the lip and crash into him on the face, he placed his left hand out to grip the rail of your board—something you rented—to prevent a collision. He did this in a single sweeping motion without once losing his footing, a graceful aversion, and continued on gliding left. He finished his ride, coolly stepping up onto the nose, balancing there in a precarious position.

This is when you decided to yell at him. He was paddling back toward the break as you verbally hammered him with hostilities. On and on with the you-didn't-have-to-s and next-time-just-say-something-s. About how he should've handled that situation, apparently, the situation where you skidded against protocol. Maybe after being served drinks by the beach all day you had trouble being dealt a 'no.' You called over your husband for reinforcements. He started shouting over the surf too, taking aim at how exceptional the local was in his own element.

— *You were flying! You could've taken her head off!!*

The local guy tried to reason with you, saying he followed his

instinct, that it happened really fast and, for him, you were the one who came out of nowhere. He thought you might be more offended if he had initially raised his voice to give you fair warning. Not to mention you didn't see him, so what if you couldn't hear him? After all, you could barely hear him now.

As I watched this exchange unfold, I learned a lot of things about us from you and yours that I hadn't always known: We are better to be complacent and docile. We're here for your entertainment. We have to defend our defenses. Even when we have the right, as ridiculous as it sounds, we need to move out of your way. We have an inclination for beheadings.

The clash over manners and surf etiquette that occasionally bubble up in the water will leave most present unfazed. Disagreements in the water over whose wave is whose are essentially disagreements over territory, and this is nothing especially new or even all that exciting. They happen. What cut through most sharply—the phrase that made me take a more serious notice—is when you scoffed your sarcastic accusation with the egregious authority of “someone just visiting from California,” and, rather loudly so as to make yourself heard by everyone at the break:

— ***So much for the Aloha spirit...***

Those words lurked beneath everyone just off Waikīkī, where tourism has stretched a screen over Hawai'i as a destination so easy-going and serviceable that even local people removed from this main economic engine have been folded in. Supposedly everyone here owes you your commercial.

I floated there, suddenly feeling involved just by having heard you. But Hawai'i the place does not only exist on the sandy stretch of beach back to your hotel, past the Do Not Disturb sign that hangs on your door, into your room and onto your freshly made bed... And Hawai'i's people don't exist to make

your escape palatable. In that moment I wish I could've guided you to this gallery to meet some of them. I want you to process the impressions, experiences, and energies through which they engage what you call paradise (and for a period much longer than your sunset surf session). They'd thoughtfully tear up your narrative about who and how one belongs here in the tropics.

A word of advice should you decide to visit Hawai'i again and drop in on someone's wave:

Next time, just look.

