

Survivor's Imperial Aesthetic and the American Guise of Innocence

BY

BROOK MCDONALD

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in American Studies

Department of American Studies

Sydney, Australia

October 2017

Abstract

This thesis intends to investigate the connection between the desert island setting in the reality TV show *Survivor*, imperialism, and hegemonic US ideology. It will be argued that the interconnection between these three aspects reveals a mythology of US centrality that is encoded in into this ideology, as the desert island setting is used as a space to affirm US ideals. This argument will be constructed in three stages. The first will establish the way *Survivor*'s setting can be characterised as a desert island, and the way this reveals the imperial lens of the series, and serves the purpose of affirming the ideology that mythologises the US as the centre of the world. The second establishes the way *Survivor* is specifically an anti-conquest narrative, which reveals the way the notion of global centrality is upheld by a paradox, as *Survivor* both draws on imperial techniques, while ideologically avoided the US' imperial history through a myth of naturalisation. Thirdly, through a study of the way *Survivor* engages with the rhetoric of military benevolence in the Pacific, it will be argued that the naturalised ideology of centrality that the US hegemonically upholds, is linked to a denial of empire. A history of imperial texts spanning European literature and American film and television will be used to support this argument, to reveal the pervasive and enduring nature of the ideologies this thesis engages with.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful for all those who have made this thesis possible through support and friendship. Thank you to Altin Gavranovic, for your encouragement and guidance as I found my direction. Thank you also to Rodney Taveira - I couldn't have made it to the end without your good faith and support during the ups and downs of the writing process.

To the new and old friends that have made this year a joy, thank you. Special thanks to the level 5 Fisher crew and the Tuesday trivia team – I couldn't have asked for a better group of people to struggle and laugh through this final year with. Big shout out to Flynn, for being my American Studies partner from the start, and my travel buddy and fellow *Survivor* fan this past year.

Thanks to my brother Xander for your constant good humour and thoughtfulness, and for putting up with me over the course of this thesis. Last, but not at all least – thank you to my parents, Lindy and Scotty. I'm thankful for the many nights we've spent watching reality TV together over the years that inspired this thesis; and for all your love, generosity and patience.

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Introduction: Locating *Survivor* and US Ideology

“I first heard the idea that was to become *Survivor* in 1995, while at Fox television in Los Angeles pitching Eco-Challenge. Lauren Corrao, the exec hearing the Eco pitch, told me about this game show concept in which a bunch of people starve on a desert island.”¹

- Mark Burnett, *Jump In*

Survivor (CBS, 2000-) is reality TV show that has had a ground-breaking presence in twenty-first century American and global media. The first season finale, which aired August 23 2000, broke a summer viewing record for a non-sports program, as 51 million viewers watched Richard Hatch become the first Sole Survivor.² While the most recently aired finale garnered a relatively small 8.48 viewers, the series’ thirty-fifth season began this September; the series’ longevity signals its enduring cultural significance.³ The premise of *Survivor* is that sixteen - twenty American contestants, from all around the nation, compete for a million-dollar prize by living without daily possessions, in a survival setting within an overseas location, through physical and social competition. For the first half of the game the contestants are divided into “tribes” and compete in team Reward and Immunity Challenges in each episode. The tribe that

¹ Mark Burnett, *Jump In: Even if you don’t know how to swim*, (New York, NY: Random House Inc, 2005), 83.

² Christopher J. Wright, *Tribal Warfare: Survivor and the Political Unconscious of Reality Television*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006): xxvi.

³ Rick Porter, “‘Empire’ finale and ‘Dirty Dancing’ adjust up, ‘Survivor’ reunion adjusts down: Wednesday Final Ratings,” *TV By the Numbers*, 2017, Last Accessed 5 October 2017, <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/daily-ratings/wednesday-final-ratings-may-24-2017/>.

loses the Immunity Challenge must attend “Tribal Council” which is where the social strategy aspect of the game comes into play; as each contestant of the losing tribe must vote for who they believe should leave the competition. In the second half of the game the competition becomes individual, and the eliminated contestants become the members of the “Jury” who observe subsequent Tribal Councils. On day thirty-nine, the Jury decide by vote, who of the final two or three have proved themselves to have, per the series’ motto “Outwitted, Outplayed and Outlasted” the other contestants and, therefore, most deserving of the prize money.

This thesis will focus on the way *Survivor* in the majority of its seasons creates a “desert island” aesthetic, as signalled by creator Mark Burnett’s description of the moment he got the inspiration from the series.⁴ This aesthetic has been used in a similarly culturally significant television show from the 1960s; *Gilligan’s Island* (CBS, 1964-7), which was a series about a group of American castaways who become stranded on an un-identified island in the Pacific Ocean after a storm, and their attempts to seek rescue while establishing a life on the island. Furthermore, as a motif, the desert island setting has a long history in Western texts, and Loxley identifies it as “the ultimate gesture of simplification...thus an ideological process of wish fulfilment.”⁵ One of the most canonical is *Robinson Crusoe*, a 1719 novel by Daniel Defoe about a British cast away on a desert island, which is regarded as Europe’s first colonial literary text, which signifies the

⁴Burnett, *Jump In*, 83.

⁵ Diana Loxley, *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990): 3. This thesis shall use the term ‘Western’ at points to bridge the connection that is being made in this analysis between European and American imperial traditions and text, as is common practice within scholarship. However, the problems and deficiencies this term are acknowledged. These problems are discussed in *The Empire Writes Back*, which highlights that this term was created by scholars who operated within the equally problematic First World/Third World framework in order to construct an Othered subject for analysis:

Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002): 211.

imperial associations of the trope.⁶ An investigation into the ideological underpinnings of the aesthetic will occur, as an explanation of why the desert island has been an enduring symbol in American culture will be navigated. This thesis proposes that *Survivor* exists within a history of American film and television that uses the desert island settings that is informed by an imperial framework. However, this imperial framework is implicitly encoded and resides unacknowledged. As a result, the ideological underpinnings of these texts are paradoxical; as they create a narrative of naturalised power as opposed to a history imperial action, to justify the US mythology regarding its centrality in the world.

Therefore, the primary concern of this thesis is contextualising the aesthetic and ideological components of *Survivor* within a larger narrative of hegemonic structures that dictate national myths of US self-perception within the world. As a mainstream cultural success, *Survivor* will be considered for how it is reflective of dominant American myths and culture. By analysing the qualities of the island landscape *Survivor* constructs in a majority of seasons, it will be asserted that the desert island setting and accompanying ideology overarches the series. *Survivor* will be connected to a history of texts that use the desert island setting and are underpinned by imperial themes. This will be done to tease out the way *Survivor* both participates in the imperial agenda of these earlier narratives, while participating in the mythology of American hegemony that removes itself from this agenda. This analytical approach is supported by McAlister, who argues that a more important question than what a text means, is to ask how they are placed within a larger field of texts within the world.⁷

⁶ Diana Loxley, *Problematic Shores*, 5-6.

⁷ Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and US Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001): 8.

The relationship between the way people are depicted within the landscape of *Survivor*, and the desert island aesthetic will be considered. Despite appearing as antithetical elements, the depiction of American contestants and occasionally appearing members of local populations will be analysed to help reveal how the desert island aesthetic is oriented through the framework of an anti-conquest narrative. This concept is coined by Mary Louise Pratt, and refers to texts that concurrently construct a colonial narrative, while constructing a narrative of innocence to erase the implication of the colonisers as invaders and validate their existence within the island setting as naturally and inherently assumed.⁸ As a result, this analysis will account for the extension of European colonialism tropes into an American context, while revealing the way that *Survivor* does not create an association between its imperial themes and its rhetoric regarding US centrality, as it employs a guise of naturalised innocence.

Therefore, this thesis will reveal *Survivor* as a reflection of the tension that surround the concept of the US and empire. As Kaplan highlights, American studies as a discipline has historically contained “blind spots...[regarding] the cultures of US imperialism.”⁹ Kaplan attributes this in part to the focus of postcolonial discourse on European imperialism, which has resu with the neglect of the American colonial context. The history neglected includes, the colonial US takeover of Guam, Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in 1898 through the Treaty of Paris.¹⁰ This thesis will argue that the disparity between historical events and historical memory is born from the US’ tendency towards

⁸Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992): 7.

⁹ Amy Kaplan, “Left Alone with America: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” In *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, edited by Kaplan, Amy and Pease, Donald E. 3-21, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993): 11.

¹⁰Stuart Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982): 88.

“exaggerated innocence,” which causes the reproduction of mythologies of American Exceptionalism.¹¹ As within US rhetoric there is a common denial of empire. As to acknowledge that the US has an empire, is to reveal the falsities that underpin the myth of naturalised global power that has captivated the American imagination since its own colonial foundations. This argument will culminate in an analysis of the disparities between the imperial history of the Philippines and the US, and the way the Philippines is depicted through the desert island lens by *Survivor*. The analysis will focus on the historical inclusions and exclusions that are contained in the way season locations are presented by *Survivor*, and the way that both decisions serve the same ideological purpose, which is to affirm the season’s ideology of US naturalised centrality. Subsequently, this thesis seeks to explore the paradox that exists in the foundational elements of American mythology of naturalised centrality, such as the tension between the concept of Manifest Destiny and the militant imperial history of the US in the Pacific.

This work focuses on dualities and paradoxes such as these, as the historical and geographic existence of Pacific Island nations is juxtaposed with the ideologically constructed space *Survivor* lays over them. This reflects the dichotomy of Us v. Them/Others that defines imperial logic, as highlighted by Said’s *Orientalism*.¹² This binary is associated with the period of colonialism that connection the figure of the colonisers with civilisation, and the colonised, with an uncivilised “Other,” in order to underpin colonial justifications¹³ This duality is established within *Survivor*, and the term Other will be used in this thesis as a reflection of the series’

¹¹ Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*, 1.
Kaplan, “Left Alone with America,” 17.

¹² McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 9.

¹³ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993): 7.

ideology, however, the position of this analysis is critical to the framework of Western centrality this oppositional term hinges upon.

To identify the scope of this analysis and to grant it historical specificity, some definitions are warranted. This thesis is concerned with the way *Survivor* as a text and the US historically, engages with and participates in imperialist practices. Young observes that the terms ‘colonial’ and ‘imperialism’ are often used interchangeably in postcolonial writing, despite being distinct, though at times interlinked, practices.¹⁴ This thesis asserts that the US has engaged in both colonial imperialism and cultural imperialism historically and contemporarily, and both have contributed to the existence of a US empire. Young argues that imperialism is ideologically driven, and can be defined as the assertion of power, whereas colonialism is primarily a practice.¹⁵ This distinction is supported by Parry, who argues that colonialism is “a specific...mode of imperialism’s many and mutable states.”¹⁶ Spurr asserts that imperialism has continued beyond the period of Western colonial expansion, which signifies the transition from colonial to cultural imperialism the US’ empire has made.¹⁷ These definitions signify the orientation of this thesis within the postcolonial period, which demonstrates that *Survivor*’s engagement with colonial themes exist in light of twentieth century de-colonising movements.

The imperialist practices of the US will be considered in relation to the notion of American cultural hegemony. Termed by Gramsci to refer to elements within a culture that affirm dominant power structures, cultural hegemony will be applied in this thesis to argue that the mythologies surrounding imperialism that *Survivor* displays are located within dominant national

¹⁴ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016): 15.

¹⁵ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 17.

¹⁶ Benita Parry in Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 5.

¹⁷ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 5.

ideology.¹⁸ This highlights the fact that this analysis does not claim ‘America’ to be a single entity, but signals that this is a dissection of dominant culture. Subsequently, this dissection will reveal a central irony that this work explores: cultural hegemony in practice upholds imperialism through its appraisal of US global power, while the mythology contained within the hegemony of dominant culture justifies this power through a narrative of naturalisation. This strategy of analysing texts for their imperial qualities in connection to cultural hegemony is also conducted by Rothenburg in his analysis of *National Geographic* photography.¹⁹ Rothenburg cites Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of “strategies of innocence,” to characterise the ideologies findings of his analysis.²⁰ Similarly, the naturalisation process that *Survivor* displays will be viewed for the way it creates an ideological state of innocence. This thesis will construct the argument that not only does *Survivor* employ create an ideological innocence, but that cultural hegemony itself is characterised by this innocence, as it uses mythology to create a narrative of US’ presence as a global power as naturalised.

A component of this mythology is the foundational concept of Manifest Destiny that decrees that the US is divinely ordained to expand its territory. This term was first used in 1845 by John O’Sullivan, who connected it to the notion of Providence to justify Westward Expansion across the continent.²¹ Berg, argues that “Eurocentric discourse” informs both Manifest Destiny and American Imperialism, and that these concepts are “seldom explicitly acknowledged, [but] they

¹⁸T.J Jackson Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities,” *The American Historical Review*, 90.3 (1985): 572.

¹⁹ Rothenburg, Tamar Y. *Presenting America’s World: Strategies of Innocence in National Geographic Magazine, 1888-1945*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007).

²⁰ Rothenburg, *Presenting America’s World*, 6.

²¹ Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right*, (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1995): xi.

are implicitly understood...[within] USA's implicit dominant ideology."²² This articulates the way that the American imagination has fused colonial activity with a justification of naturalised destiny from a time that predates the formation of the US as a nation. The notion of "implicit dominant ideology" is central to the argument of this analysis.²³ As while *Survivor* reflects the way that these implicit myths are explicitly coded through the aesthetic of the series, the concepts they represent remain unacknowledged in American hegemonic structures as they are "naturalized nearly to the point of invisibility."²⁴ This extension of naturalising myths that have been foundational in American culture, into a contemporary context will be evidenced, specifically in relation to US interactions with the Pacific, as revealed through *Survivor*.

To turn to the field of existing scholarship regarding *Survivor*, as a result of its cultural primacy, multiple academic investigations of the show exist. These are predominately from the early 2000s, coinciding with the peak success of the show, and the emergence of the reality TV genre. These investigations tend to focus on the way the new medium of reality TV, which *Survivor* represented at the beginning of the new millennium, interacted with internal structures of American culture. For example, Mark Burnett, creator and initial producer of *Survivor*, presented the series as a microcosm of work place politics.²⁵ However, a few articles investigate the imperial underpinnings of *Survivor*. For example, Jennifer Bowering Delisle's article, 'Surviving American Cultural Imperialism' focuses on the problematic relationship between the show and its "host cultures," and creates a scholarly precedent for situating *Survivor* in relation to a history

²² Charles Ramirez Berg, "Manifest Myth-Making Texas History in the Movies," In *The Persistence of Whiteness*. edited by Daniel Bernadi, 3 -27, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008): 9.

²³Berg, "Manifest Myth-Making Texas History in the Movies," 9.

²⁴Berg, "Manifest Myth-Making Texas History in the Movies," 25.

²⁵ Mark Burnett in Derek Foster, "'Jump in the Pool:' The Competitive Culture of *Survivor* Fan Networks," In *Understanding Reality Television*, edited by Holmes, Sue and Jermyn, Deborah, 270-290, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006): 275.

of colonial narratives.²⁶ This thesis draws on, and extends, Delisle's argument, updating her 2003 analysis to include the subsequent seasons that have aired since, and focusing the analysis on the series' treatment of the island setting specifically. This aim is warranted, as *Survivor* scholarship has become scant in recent years, and there are very few texts that have analysed the show since 2010. This may be due to the decline in viewership in recent seasons and the way reality TV has become an established feature of the American media landscape. However, considering the longevity of the series, and the inauguration of President Donald Trump earlier this year, who received celebrity exposure on another one of Mark Burnett's reality programs, *The Apprentice*, it seems fitting to return scholarly attention to *Survivor* presently. Analytically, the *Survivor* series will be considered as a whole, while the similarities and differences amongst the seasons will also be highlighted.

The choice has been made to focus on seasons that take place on islands due to the predominance of this setting across the series, as twenty-three of the currently thirty-five seasons have been set in island locations. The island nations and archipelagos that the show features are French Polynesia, Vanuatu, Palau, the Cook Islands, Samoa, the Philippines and Fiji. Additionally, *Survivor* has visited Malaysia, Thailand and Cambodia, and while these countries are a part of mainland South-East Asia, the season's filmed in these locations featured exclusively the island regions of these countries, and therefore they have been included within the scope of this thesis.

To best identify trends and exceptions, and develop an aesthetic profile for the show that will be linked to American ideology, *Survivor*'s island seasons and their locations will be discussed both

²⁶ Jennifer B. Delisle, "Surviving American Cultural Imperialism: 'Survivor' and Traditions of Nineteenth-Century Colonial Fiction," *The Journal of American Culture*, 26.1 (2003): 54.

Additionally:

Lamont Lindstrom, "Survivor Vanuatu: Myths of Matriarchy Revisited," *The Contemporary Pacific*, 19.1 (2007): 162-174.

specifically and cumulatively. However, this thesis acknowledges the problematic way that island nations are often amalgamated by scholarship, in analyses that essentialise locations and diminish the individual identity of island nations. A critical investigation of the desert island setting *Survivor* constructs will perceive the overlap between the seasons' settings, in order to critique, as opposed to perpetuate, imperial frameworks that essentialise. This focus on a specific location is supported by Stenger, who argues that "the cinematic landscape of the beach...is crucial. Oft-overlooked yet omnipresent, it is the site where cultural myth, political economy and social relations converge."²⁷ In *Survivor* one of the defining characteristics of the island aesthetic is the coastal beach, and this analysis centres on the premise that the aesthetic of *Survivor* acts as a site of American myth and ideology. This location-specific approach has not been widely present in previous *Survivor* scholarship. Due to the limited number of seasons released when the majority was written, academics have tended to conduct broad thematic studies of the show instead, and have included *Survivor: Outback Australia* (2001) and *Survivor: Africa* (2001-2) in their analysis. Therefore, the analysis of the prevalence of the desert island setting that has emerged as *Survivor* has continued, is one of the original contributions of this thesis.

It should be noted that while Australia, which *Survivor* visited in its second season, also exists as an island nation, *Survivor: Outback Australia* will be excluded from analysis within this thesis.

The justification for this is that the focus of this thesis is the way that *Survivor* presents the desert island aesthetic, and *Survivor: Outback Australia* does not present Australia as an island setting.

The season stays within the central 'outback' of Australia and never encapsulates it in its entirety

²⁷ Josh Stenger, "Mapping the Beach: Beach Movies, Exploitation Film and Geographies of Whiteness," In *The Persistence of Whiteness*, edited by Daniel Bernadi, 28 -50, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008): 29.

or reveals the coast.²⁸ This provides an initial indication of the ideology that *Survivor* positions itself within that is to be explored in this thesis. As integral to the way island spaces are framed by Western texts, as argued by Roberts and Stephens, is the dichotomy between continental mainlands that are regarded as central and island peripheries.²⁹ The interplay of this dichotomy is a key component to the mythology that the US has a naturalised centrality in the world.

Islands have historically been evocative locations in the Western imaginary, closely tied to imperial narratives. This thesis specifically seeks to make a connection between the island aesthetic that *Survivor* employs and this narrative tradition. Specifically, this thesis is concerned with the desert island phenomenon. As Loxley argues, it is through literature that islands spaces have become mythic symbols within the Western mind, as that is where the desert island trope has taken form.³⁰ The notion of the desert island, which by definition implies an unpopulated space, is incongruent with the reality of the island spaces that have been subjected to Western colonial invasion. However, the desert island trope has frequently been utilised by texts that are underpinned by imperial themes, such as *Robinson Crusoe*. This a-historical disconnect reveals the way the trope exists primarily within a rhetorical space, justifying the investigation of *Survivor*'s setting through an ideological perspective.

Furthermore, literary scholarship that focuses on the desert island setting highlights this symbolic nature of the motif. As Richard Grove argues in the foundational environmental history text, *Green Imperialism*, island spaces throughout the history of colonialism have represented both a garden, in association with the utopic ideal of the Garden of Eden, and a laboratory, as they are

²⁸ "Stranded," *Survivor: Australian Outback*, Produced by Maria Baltazzi and Jay Bienstock, CBS, 2001.

²⁹ Brian Russel Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, "Archipelagic American Studies: Decontinentalising the Study of American Culture," In *Archipelagic American Studies*, edited by Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, 1-57, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017): 9.

³⁰ Loxley, *Problematic Shores*, 3 & 9.

perceived as microcosms for the world.³¹ This emphasises the way island spaces have been used as landscapes for idealised projections of rhetoric by the West, and it is within this framework that the representation of island nations in *Survivor* will be considered.

As a result, scholarship on islands within textual studies prominently emphasise the significance of island spaces as a symbol of the human psyche. For example, Dennis Skocz applies an Existentialist framework to *Robinson Crusoe*, and argues that the desert island spaces are a symbolic reflection of the human condition as mediated by the figure of the coloniser or castaway.³² Relevant to *Survivor*, Skocz argues that the idea of displacement and isolation from a continental home front is what stimulates this reflection.³³ The way *Survivor* uses the island setting as a place of reflection, and the way the theme of isolation primarily manifests symbolically as opposed to geographically will be explored. The abstract nature of island representation is explicitly signposted by Billig who explores the way literary island exist as “I-lands,” reflecting their introspective nature.³⁴ Furthermore, Stephanides and Bassnet who identify island spaces as “floating islands,” and conceptualise islands as unfixed sites, reinforcing a symbolic over geographic interpretation.³⁵ Kaplan highlights the way the adoption of this technique in American literature has ironically been used to argue its point of departure from European imperial tropes, as exploration is linked with the discovery of a new state of mind that creates a space divorced from “imperial politics of appropriation and civilisation.”³⁶

³¹ Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 9 & 32.

³² Skocz, “Crusoe’s Island and the Human Estate,” 367-70.

³³ Skocz, “Crusoe’s Island and the Human Estate,” 370.

³⁴ Volkmar Billig, “I-Lands: The Construction and Shipwreck of an Insular Subject in Modern Discourse,” In *Shipwreck and Island Motifs in Literature and the Arts*, edited by Juez, Brigitte and Springer, Olga. 17-31, (Tuebingen: University of Tuebingen Press, 2015): 17.

³⁵ Stephanos Stephanides and Susan Bassnett, “Islands, Literature, and Cultural Translatability.” *Poetry and Insularity*. 4 (2008): 19.

³⁶ Kaplan, “Left Alone with America,” 12.

However, as will be argued through *Survivor*, this disavowal is not due to the non-existence of US imperialism; in fact, its existence is signalled by the very fact of its concealment. As Kaplan articulates, in regard to US imperial ideology, “displacement accompanies denial.”³⁷ Overall, this scholarship reveals that texts that feature islands focus on their symbolism in the Western imaginary, as opposed to their geographic or historical qualities.

Literary scholarship such as this often uses a definition of islands that encompasses small tropical land masses often located in the Pacific or the Caribbean. This definition is limited, but prevalent in *Survivor*, as highlighted by their characterisation of Australia as not an island. However, the limited and problematic nature of this definition is infrequently disrupted by scholars who conduct textual analysis. The deficiency this creates is that island spaces are positioned within a very Western-centric framework, which is a critique that this thesis will direct towards *Survivor*. For example, Mark Rauzon, an environmental scholar uses clearly biased language in his engagement with island spaces, as he refers to the Pacific as “America’s Lake.”³⁸ While Rauzon acknowledges that “one man’s Manifest Destiny is another man’s invasion,” the rhetorical positioning of his analysis within a Manifest Destiny framework is pronounced.³⁹ Scholarship such as this justifies the connection that is being drawn between Manifest Destiny and *Survivor*’s depiction of island spaces. This perspective exemplifies the continental centre v. island periphery dynamic that marginalises island spaces. The deployment of the dichotomy of centrality and periphery is used to depict geography in relation to its ideological associations in the West. Robert Young argues that Postcolonial Studies, a dominant field in the contemporary analysis of imperial power, draws on the Marxist theories of Karl

³⁷ Kaplan, “Left Alone with America,” 13.

³⁸ Mark Rauzon, *Isle of Amnesia: The History, Geography, and restoration of America’s forgotten Pacific Islands*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2016): 3.

³⁹ Rauzon, *Isle of Amnesia*, 235.

Kautsky and Andre Gunder Frank, which characterise imperialism as relationships of dominance and exploitation between a subjective centre and a periphery.⁴⁰ Applying this specifically to “The American Experience,” Edward Said argues that the US structures the centre/periphery dichotomy around the concept of “home” in order to naturalise this perspective.⁴¹ This dichotomy foregrounds the way that *Survivor* views the island settings it interacts with, and suggests the guise of innocence that that shrouds this perspective, that this thesis will explore.

This approach is challenged by scholars. Shell does this in practice, by abstracting the term and asserting that anything can be an island, and avoiding the use of mainland as a category.⁴² Baldacchino challenges the limited perspective of islands by criticising the state of current scholarship, and arguing that a reorientation away from a Western-centred lens is needed in island studies, as the deficiencies of the current framework are due to the dominance of “white, Western, middle-aged men.”⁴³ This thesis proposes to demonstrate the necessity of Baldacchino’s call, by revealing the pervasive and problematic way islands are characterised in their relationship to America in *Survivor*. Young’s discussion of this reorientation of historical practice makes the argument that it is not necessary to forget the existence of colonial history, but to reposition the European systems of thought that are still centred on it.⁴⁴ Roberts and Stephens argue that for such a shift in discourse to occur, which they also view as important, that

⁴⁰ Karl Kautsky and Andre Gunder Frank in Young, *Postcolonialism*, 111.

⁴¹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 7.

⁴² Marc Shell, *Islandology: Geography, Rhetoric, Politics*. (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2014): 38 & 26.

⁴³ Godfrey Baldacchino, “Introducing a World of Islands,” In *A World of Islands*, Edited by Godfrey Baldacchino, 1-29, (Malta: Media Centre Publications, 2007): 2.

⁴⁴ Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990): 119.

Western thought processes need to be de-continentalised.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, a paradox of imperial expansion that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin address is that the post-colonial context of the contemporary era has stretched the concept of colonial territories and spheres of influence beyond a point where mainland centrality can be unequivocally accepted.⁴⁶

In light of this scholarly review, *Survivor* can be placed in a history of Western island texts, and particularly, American films that co-opt and extend the techniques and traditions of their European literary predecessors. This approach has been adopted by scholars concerning islands previously; for example, Wilkes frames the investigation of islands in a contemporary context around the “legacies of colonisation,” in relation to the desert island motif. The research process for this thesis included a visit to the film archives at the University of California, Los Angeles, where a range of American films and documentaries were analysed.⁴⁷ Those viewed were: *East of Borneo* (1931), *Bird of Paradise* (1932), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935), *Bali, Paradise Isle* (1938), *Kingdom of the Sea: Atomic Island* (1957), *Islands Under the Wind: Wings to Tahiti* (1958), *New Horizons: The Philippines* (1960) and *Wings to the Caribbean* (1968). These films have been valuable in demonstrating the precedent of imperial themes within American film, and how the ideological position contained within *Survivor*, that places the US as a naturalised centre, has a precedent across the twentieth century.

The tropes employed to create this ideological position are largely consistent across the films. Overall, the island space is characterised as distant and utopic, while the island inhabitants are portrayed with a lens of primitivism that typically depicts them as highly sexualised “savages.”

⁴⁵Roberts and Stephens, “Archipelagic American Studies,” 17.

⁴⁶ Ashcroft and Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 12.

The Western travellers are generally depicted either at odds with their surroundings as a binary of civilised v. uncivilised space is constructed. Simultaneously, the protagonists will often be naturalised into the environment, either by “going native” or having their whiteness become normative within the island setting. This thesis will draw on these films to contextualise the discussion of *Survivor*, and they will be called on as supporting evidence in greater detail across the chapters. However, one that is particularly representative of these tropes, and of the connection between the European and American imperial texts is *Mutiny on the Bounty*. The plot concerns Captain Bligh’s 1787 voyage to Tahiti, and the ensuing mutiny that the sailors mounted against his abusive practices, and involves a subplot of romance between one of the Lieutenant and a local Tahitian woman. The film is a historical narrative based on real events, as Captain William Bligh was a member of the British Royal Navy and the commander of the *Bounty*, where the depicted mutiny like occur.⁴⁸ Significantly, the leader of the mutiny, Lieutenant Fletcher Christian, is portrayed by American actor Clark Gable, who speaks with an American accent. As a result, this film signals the US’ participation in the imperial project of European history, and supports the argument that texts such as *Survivor* can be put in a history of broader European texts with the same undercurrent themes.

However, a clear tension is created between Lieutenant Christian and Captain Bligh. While Christian becomes visually naturalised on the shores of Tahiti, as he sheds his Lieutenant’s outfit and exists on the island bare chested; Bligh remains in his stiff, British garb and on the *Bounty*. This creates a divide between the men, that positions Bligh to the island in a historical and colonial capacity that is condemning of the British, whereas Fletcher engages with the island as it symbolises a utopic paradise separated from the world. This is emphasised by the romanticised

⁴⁸Gavin Kennedy, *Bligh*, (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co, 1978): 84.

way his character departs the *Bounty* after the mutiny has occurred, stating that, “The Pacific is filled with uncharted islands, we’ll find one and settle there for good.”⁴⁹ This foregrounds the tension that will be cited as continuing within American adaptations of the European colonial novel with *Survivor*. As established, this tension is the American identification with the ideologies of the colonial text, due to the imperial aspect of their actions and character, and yet the concurrent disavowal of their imperially constructed empire.

More specifically, *Survivor* exists in dialogue with scholarship on television studies and reality TV. TV has been defined as a purveyor of myth of society, and analysis will focus on the way the desert island setting connects to American myths.⁵⁰ In relation to the genre of reality TV, there is not presumption that the viewing audience consumes such texts as “reality.” As Bell-Jordan articulates, reality TV is the process in which reality is “sacrificed...to the continuity of much larger myths about the real.”⁵¹ However, Hill acknowledges that reality TV both invites a critical viewing mode, but simultaneously fosters an audience who employs a “shallow ethical position” while watching.⁵² *Survivor* reflects this interaction between un-reality and audience, as it is a series that is not regarded as presenting “reality,” however, the audience consumes the ideological myths it establishes largely unchallenged. Therefore, as Bernadi observes, viewers of film “perpetuate real ideologies” when engaging with the dominant values they portray, an idea

⁴⁹ *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Directed by Frank Loyd, (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp, 1935), Video Cassette, Accessed at University of California Film and Television Archive: VA9249 M

⁵⁰ Gray Cavender, “In search of community on Reality TV: ‘America’s Most Wanted’ and ‘Survivor,’” In *Understanding Reality Television*, edited by Holmes, Sue and Jermyn, Deborah, 154-173, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006): 155.

Roger Silverstone, “Television Myth and Culture,” In *Media, Myths, and Narratives*, edited by James W Carey, 20-48, (California: Sage Publications, 1988), 24.

⁵¹ Katrina E. Bell-Jordan, “Black. White. And a Survivor of The Real World: Constructions of Race on Reality TV,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25.4 (2008): 6.

⁵² Annette Hill in Graeme Turner, *Ordinary People and the Media: The Demotic Turn*, (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2010): 40.

that this thesis extends to reality TV.⁵³ Andrejevic argues that reality TV does not change society as much as it reveals society to itself, and this thesis argues that *Survivor* does not create ideology, but is engaged in the process of perpetuation.⁵⁴ As Turner and Tay argue, while TV's "solid normativity," as broadcast from a TV screen has been dismantled in the contemporary context of internet streaming, the interpretation of it as a marker of national culture is still considered applicable by scholars.⁵⁵ The national character of TV is referred to by Moran as a "continual anchor in a time of change."⁵⁶ This perspective is supported by the range of scholars who affirm the notion that reality television on the whole does not deviate from hegemonic structures in its ideology.⁵⁷ This interpretation of TV as a reflection of national culture will be utilised in this analysis. The national cultural phenomenon that the first season cemented the show as justifies this claim, as indicated by the record breaking viewing ratings. Additionally, *Survivor* regularly references the nation. For example, after the finale of *Survivor: All Stars*, there was a special episode titled "America's Tribal Council," where the public voted for their

⁵³ Daniel Bernadi, "Introduction: Race and Contemporary Hollywood," In *The Persistence of Whiteness*, edited by Daniel Bernadi, xv-xxvi, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008): xvi.

⁵⁴ Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004): 41.

⁵⁵ Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay, "Introduction." In *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era*, edited by Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay, 1-7, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009) 1 & 4.

⁵⁶ Albert Moran, "Reasserting the National? Programme Formats, International Television and Domestic Culture," In *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era*, edited by Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay, 149-159, (New York: Routledge, 2009): 158.

⁵⁷ Latoya Jefferson-James, "Selective Reuptake: Perpetuating Misleading Cultural Identities in the Reality TV World," In *Real Sister: Stereotypes, Respectability, and Black Women in Reality TV*, edited by Ward, Jervette, R, 31-52, (New Jersey, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 31.

Terri Toles Patkin, "Individual and Cultural Identity in the World of Reality Television," In *Survivor Lessons: Essays on Communication and Reality TV*, edited by Matthew J. Smith and Andrew F. Wood, 11-27, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company Inc, 2003): 17.

John Fiske in Bell-Jordan, "Black. White. And a Survivor of The Real World," 3.

Daniel Marcus, "From Participatory Video to Reality TV," In *A Companion to Reality Television*, edited by Laurie Ouellette, 134-155, (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014): 141.

favourite moments within the series and other categories involving the contestants.⁵⁸

Subsequently, the way in which the *Survivor* island becomes a space to affirm American society will be discussed throughout this thesis.

Furthermore, Mark Burnett consistently draws on the notion of a microcosm to explain *Survivor*, and this signifies an overlap between the discourses on islands and reality TV. For example, Burnett refers to the show as a “metaphor for life...mirror[ing] the hours families and friends and co-workers spend together.”⁵⁹ As cited above, islands have been considered a microcosm for the world at large, and Biressi and Nunn argue that reality TV constructs microcosmic worlds that people are inserted into.⁶⁰ The microcosm framework introduces a dialogue between the content of *Survivor* and its form as a reality TV program. It signals the dual levels that the discussion of imperialism in relation to *Survivor* operates on, as the series itself is styled within the aesthetic of colonial imperialism, as will be argued, and as a product it exists as US cultural imperialism. Furthermore, the centre v. periphery dichotomy that frames Western thinking about islands bears relevance to reality TV, as Griffin argues, reality TV exists as a “mediated centre” of American culture.⁶¹ Therefore, there is an intersection between TV and national identity, which additionally justifies the framework of cultural hegemony that this analysis applies to *Survivor* in order to assert the way its rhetorical constructs are positioned in relation to American society.

⁵⁸“America’s Tribal Council,” *Survivor: All Stars*, Produced by Maira Baltazzi and Al Berman, CBS, 2004.

⁵⁹ Burnett, *Jump In*, 117.

⁶⁰ Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 9.

Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005): 98.

⁶¹ Hollis Griffin, “Manufacturing ‘Massness’: Aesthetic Form and Industry Practice in the Reality Television Contest,” In *A Companion to Reality Television*, edited by Laurie Ouellette, 155-171, (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014): 166-7.

In terms of how the space of *Survivor*'s island construct will be considered, the spatial theory of Henri Lefebvre has been drawn on. Lefebvre distinguishes between representations of space, and representational space. Representations of space are spaces conceptualised without a physical form and representational space is "space lived through its associated images and symbols," which overlays physical space, making symbolic use of objects.⁶² The island space of *Survivor* exists as a representational space and this work focuses on the way ideology is placed onto geographically real island spaces. Furthermore, as Lefebvre asserts, abstract space often sits in opposition to historical space, which parallels the distinction made by island studies scholarship, and asserts the application of the desert island setting by *Survivor* onto island nations.⁶³ As Bercovitch argues, in instances of representation, society becomes 'Society,' a position supported by Wilkes who argues that visual culture produces its own realities, which connects to Lefebvre's assertion that all space is touched by hegemony.⁶⁴ This thesis will deconstruct the ideological Society that *Survivor* presents as the centre by asserting its mythology within hegemonic structures. In order to do this the consistencies and incongruencies between the geographical space and the representational space that *Survivor* creates will be considered.

Chapter one of this thesis will assert the way in which *Survivor* constructs a desert island aesthetic, that exists within an imperial framework. The hegemonic myth of US centrality will be revealed through this investigation. Chapter two will establish with more specificity the imperial

⁶² Henri Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991): 38.

⁶³ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 49.

⁶⁴ Sacvan Bercovitch, "Problems of ideology in a time of dissensus," In *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the symbolic construction of American*, 353-376, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993): 356.

Karen Wilkes, *Whiteness, Weddings, and Tourism in the Caribbean: Paradise for Sale*, (Birmingham: Birmingham City University, 2016) 2.

Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 11.

framework that *Survivor* employs, as it will be argued that *Survivor* uses an anti-conquest narrative structure to naturalise the claim of US centrality established by the desert island aesthetic. Chapter three will use *Survivor: Philippines* as a case study to demonstrate the way that the myth of naturalised US power that the anti-conquest framework constructs sits in opposition to the history of US imperial action, and connects to the denial of a US empire in American hegemony.

Chapter I: The Imperial Lens of Survivor's Island Aesthetic

The desert island is a space that is used as a space of opposition to an absent 'mainland,' that is ideologically positioned to assert its centrality. The characteristics of a desert island space that affirm this utility will be explored in this chapter. The desert island aesthetic has had imperial associations in Western texts. As a result, the desert island is a space the homogenised (generic) island space that is encapsulated in its totality, and regarded as uncivilised and primitive. It is a space positioned as peripheral, and is considered as isolated and distanced, however, this distance is used to reinforce the notion of a Western mainland and assert its centrality. This is reflected in the way that the desert island is used as a space of reflection to look back at oneself

and society as the absent centre is ideologically laid over the space.⁶⁵ It should be noted that based on the examples of these texts, the desert island aesthetic does not actually require the absence of people on the island. In this thesis it is used as a categorisation of the way the Western perspective views a setting, as the imperial framework ideologically erases the presence of people from the setting, as this chapter shall suggest. This chapter will argue that *Survivor's* setting is constructed as a desert island space, and that this aesthetic reveals the imperial lens of the show that it operates within, evolving the scaffold established by texts such as Robinson Crusoe, integrating American mythology.

The archival texts and *Gilligan's Island*, have been used as examples to provide a framework for the desert islands aesthetic and ideology. The setting of *Gilligan's Island*, is explicitly labelled a “mysterious deserted island,” in the show, even though the episodes depict the central cast interacting with an array of visiting and local characters. This reinforces the interpretation of the desert island as an ideological, rather than an accurately descriptive category.⁶⁶ In the 1938 travelogue *Bali, Paradise Isle*, Indonesia is introduced as “Forgotten by the rest of the World,” which again emphasises the way the desert island is a mental characterisation, and suggests its location as far removed from society.⁶⁷ The physical distance is also invoked, as in *East of Borneo* an American women must travel 9,000 miles, a number she repeatedly mentions, in search of her husband.⁶⁸ The desert island's nature as an antithesis to society is explicitly stated in *Bird of Paradise*, as the male American lead declares to the island resident, who is portrayed

⁶⁵ Billig, “I-Lands,” 17.

⁶⁶ “Wrongway Feldman,” *Gilligan's Island*, Produced by Sherwood Schwartz, (CBS, 1964).

⁶⁷ *Bali, Paradise Isle*, 1938, Edited by Eugene W. Castle. Castle Films, Video Cassette, In University of California Film and Television Archive: VA1771.

⁶⁸ *East of Borneo*, Directed by George Melford, (Universal Pictures Corp, 1931), Video Cassette, Accessed at University of California Film and Television Archive: VA7444 M.

as an exoticised “native,” that “I’m going to take you back to civilisation.”⁶⁹ This evidences how these texts don’t present the desert island setting as truly deserted, as the local inhabitants become a spectacle that increases the rhetorical distance between the desert island and the Western mainland, as emphasised by the exclamation of a sailor in *Bird of Paradise*, “those people are savages!”⁷⁰ However, most of these texts position these inhabitants on the fringes of the setting, as shots of white people walking on empty beaches, and under tranquil waterfalls recur throughout both *Wings to the Caribbean* and *New Horizons: The Philippines*.⁷¹ The fact that these images reoccur across texts, and that an desert island aesthetic can be defined generally at all, is due to the way the way periphery island spaces are homogenised into one, as expressed by a sailor in *Mutiny on the Bounty*, “All islands are alike...you see one island you’ve seen them all.”⁷² Cumulatively, these texts reveal that the desert island setting is one of intrigue in the Western imagination that is cast as an empty space for ideological projection and exploration.

An opening indication of the way that *Survivor* positions its island setting within an imperial lens, that is more specifically connected to a history of colonial text, is its engagement with the centre v. periphery dichotomy that characterises Western attitudes towards islands. For example, the distance of the seasons’ locations from the US is always emphasised in the opening sequence. For example, the first line of dialogue in *Survivor: Philippines* is host Jeff Probst’s identification of the Philippines as “one of the most beautiful and remote locations in the world.”⁷³ ‘Remote’

⁶⁹ *Bird of Paradise*, Director King Vidor, (RKO Radio Pictures, 1932), Video Cassette, Accessed at University of California Film and Television Archive: VA1646 M.

⁷⁰ *Bird of Paradise*, Vidor, VA1646M.

⁷¹ *Wings to the Caribbean*, (Pan American World Airways, 1968), DVD, Accessed at University of California Film and Television Archive: M53185.

⁷² *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Loyd, VA9249 M.

⁷³ “Survivor Smacked Me in the Chops,” *Survivor: Philippines*, Produced by David Dryden, CBS, 2012.

indicates that the location is defined in terms of its distance from the US. A variation of this phrase appears in most season openings. The fact that *Survivor* hyperbolically presents multiple locations as “the most...remote locations in the world,” signals that the phrase is not used foremost to provide geographical orientation, but to signify and relegate island spaces as exotic and ideologically distanced spaces.

While positioned ideologically on the periphery of the world, *physically* the islands of *Survivor* are presented centrally and in their totality. The area of ground that the episodes cover is small, as the contestants are stationed at a beachside camp, which they only leave to visit challenge sites, reward locations, and Tribal Council. However, the island, established in full by the opening sequence, is consistently re-presented to the audience in its entirety throughout the season. This is done in two ways; transition shots, and orientation shots. Transition shots are aerial shots of the islands that create a macro reframing effect before focusing on the micro level of the beach, moving along the narrative of the episode. These shots are generalised and do not provide further insight into the location of the contestants within the island. The effect of this lack of specificity implies an interaction between the contestants, and the islands in its entirety, even though the area the production occupies on the ground is much smaller. Orientation shots are used typically before the Reward and Immunity Challenges, and are extreme overhead shots that zoom into the location of the challenge. These shots are more closely focused on a specific location, and do not depict the island in their totality. However, the distanced and elevated nature of the way these shots begin demonstrates the way they serve a similar purpose to the transitional shots; the constant act of reframing the island setting in its totality.

The frequent use of aerial shots in *Survivor* aligns the series with the way Western scholars have historically approached the island space. For example, Baldacchino identifies the need scholars feel to map islands in their totality.⁷⁴ This visual technique, serves as an example of the Monarch-Of-All-I-Survey aesthetic, which Mary Louise Pratt labels as characteristic of imperial literature.⁷⁵ Evocatively translated onto the screen in the case of *Survivor*, the use of this technique reveals that it is the desire of the series to portray islands in their totality that ironically reveals the settings' status as peripheral objects within a Western ideology. As the gaze constructs the island as finite and quantifiable, and therefore, within the bounds of possession, and Weaver-Hightower explicitly connects this monarchical gaze with the notion of ownership.⁷⁶ In addition, the Monarch-Of-All-I-Survey aesthetic is reflected through the dialogue of the contestants in *Survivor*, who frequently refer to their location as "the island," despite only occupying a small section of it.⁷⁷ This validates the use of the Pratt' framework as a guiding analysis tool in asserting the ideological underpinnings of *Survivor*'s aesthetic, and reveals the imperial lens that *Survivor*'s island setting is depicted with.

Survivor's island setting can also be identified within the desert island aesthetic due to its characterisation as a Virgin Land. This connects the island and the ideology of *Survivor* to colonial settler discourse regarding the New World, and the American Frontier. For example, Ladino argues that Probst' spiel in the opening sequence, is Turner's frontier thesis manifested, in relation to the topic of imperialism instead of democracy, as he emphasises that "Amidst the

⁷⁴ Baldacchino, "Introducing a World of Islands," 3.

⁷⁵ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 201.

⁷⁶ Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands: Castaways, Cannibals and Fantasies of Conquest*, (Minneapolis: MN, 2007): xviii.

⁷⁷ For example, Gregg Carey in "Exile Island," *Survivor: Palau*, Produced by Kate Adler, CBS, 2005.

serenity of this majestic landscape... 15 Americans...have begun the adventure of a lifetime.”⁷⁸ Further, supporting this idea, Kapell observes the association between the concept of Paradise and the American frontier myth of the Virgin Land, which *Survivor* displays.⁷⁹ The notion of the space being a New World is even explicitly invoked at points, particularly by Jeff Probst. For example, in the promotion teaser for *Survivor: Thailand* features the narration, “Once again they will have to work together to build a new world in an exotic land.”⁸⁰ This rhetoric is continued into the season, as a contestant remarks in episode ten that much of the countries sites are, “off the beaten track, that the world really doesn’t know is there.”⁸¹ Statements such as these reoccur frequently across the series, and signify that the desert island rhetoric *Survivor* exists within. Ladino uses the term “replacement” to reference the way in which the frontier myth occupies the local environment in *Survivor*, and this reflects the way the contemporary culture of the island nations are replaced with open and un-colonised space, which is presented as if it is the totality of the island.⁸² The way this Virgin Land and frontier ideology is put on *Survivor*’s island setting to render it deserted, is indicative of the intersection of European and American ideologies that have informed the series visually and thematically.

This raises the question of why *Survivor* is compelled to look back to this period of frontier expansion. Renato Rosaldo analyses the concept of “imperial nostalgia,” the phenomenon of

⁷⁸ Jennifer K. Ladino, *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature*, (Charlottesville, VA : University of Virginia Press, 2012): 189.

⁷⁹ Matthew Wilhelm Kapell, *Exploring the Next Frontier: Vietnam, NASA, Star Trek and Utopia in 1960s and 70s American Myth and History*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016):10.

⁸⁰ “Survivor: Marquesas Reunion,” *Survivor: Marquesas*, Produced by Benjamin Beatie and Bruce Beresford-Redman, CBS, 2006.

⁸¹ “While the Cats are Away,” *Survivor: Thailand*, Produced by Maria Baltazzi and Adam Briles, CBS, 2002.

⁸² Ladino, *Reclaiming Nostalgia*, 189.

being captivated by a vision of the imperial past.⁸³ This concept has been applied to *Survivor* by multiple scholars. Andrejevic has argued that *Survivor* acts as a nostalgic turn away from modernity to embrace a frontier ideology, and Delisle argues that the series creates a nostalgic moment of anachronistic history, where “the colonial moment is figured not as one of violence and conquest, but of adventure, excitement and a communion with nature.”⁸⁴ Ladino further asserts that a sense of American nostalgia comes from the close of the internal frontier that occurred in 1890.⁸⁵ This emphasises the imperial lens that *Survivor* uses, and the way US ideology presents the past in a sentimentalised way. Furthermore, Cantor gives an explanation for why this imperial nostalgia may exist in a 21st Century reality TV show such as *Survivor*, he argues that post 9/11 Americans have become increasingly disillusioned with the state of the world, causing a nostalgia for a time of stability.⁸⁶ Interestingly, season four was intended to be filmed in the Middle East, as Burnett explains in his book *Jump In*.⁸⁷ Production had begun, but due to 9/11 and the ensuing political instability between the US and the region, the Marquesas Islands in French Polynesia were chosen instead.⁸⁸ *Survivor: Marquesas* is the most overtly patriotic season. One contestant brings an American flag as his luxury item, which becomes an integral part of the shelter his tribe builds. Visually this bolsters the colonial undertones of the series, and the way the contestants physically take refuge under the flag symbolises that despite the physical distance from the US; the home front is physically represented as an anchor of stability amongst a landscape that is characterised as a distant unknown. This season is not only

⁸³ Renato Rosaldo in David Brody, *Visualising American Empire: Orientalism and Imperialism in the Philippines*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2010): 170.

⁸⁴ Delisle, “Surviving American Cultural Imperialism, 45.

⁸⁵ Ladino, *Reclaiming Nostalgia*, 10.

⁸⁶ Paul A. Cantor, *Gilligan Unbound: Pop Culture in the Age of Globalisation*, (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001): 30.

⁸⁷ Burnett, *Jump In*, 131.

⁸⁸ Burnett, *Jump In*, 137.

the most overtly patriotic, but served as the first return to an island setting, thus marking the beginning of the desert island trope becoming one of the most identifiable visual elements of *Survivor*. This supports the argument that the utility of the desert island aesthetic produced with an imperial lens, is the affirmation of the perceived mainland centre, which is the US in *Survivor*.

Survivor constructs a desert island aesthetic through created absence, as it effectively erases the inhabited portions of the island to create a deserted Paradise. David Spurr identifies negation as a technique of imperial texts, observing that colonial activity often occurs in blank space.⁸⁹ For example, Lindstrom observes the close proximity of the *Survivor: Vanuatu* contestant camps to tourist villas.⁹⁰ In addition, Exile Island, which was a feature of *Survivor: Fiji*, can be rented from privateislandsonline.com, is described as being “just a short boat ride from the nearest town of Labasa which is the largest town in...the second largest Fiji island of Vanau Levu.”⁹¹ The site says that the island is officially named Sausau, but that it is most known as Exile Island due to its role on *Survivor*.⁹² This reveals how the series’ ideological constructions have ironically impacted upon the physical geography in some instances, despite the inaccuracy of the construct. Furthermore, not only does *Survivor* erase the existence of local populations through omitting them from their shooting areas, they also physically change and erase structures to make to room for filming, creating the desert island state. This is documented by Delisle, who discusses the way local residents were moved from their beachside houses that were demolished and used as

⁸⁹ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 94.

⁹⁰ Lindstrom, “Survivor Vanuatu: Myths of Matriarchy Revisited,” 163.

⁹¹ “Exile Island,” *Private Islands Inc*, 2007, Last accessed 7 October 2017, <https://www.privateislandsonline.com/south-pacific/fiji/exile-island>.

⁹² “Exile Island,” *Private Islands Inc*, 2007, Last Accessed 7 October 2017, <https://www.privateislandsonline.com/south-pacific/fiji/exile-island>.

the contestants' camps during *Survivor: Marquesas*.⁹³ The physical erasure of structures in order to uphold an ideological desert island categorisation reflects an actioning of the colonial perspective that is imbued in *Survivor's*, and signals a dialogue between colonial themes and cultural forms of imperialism.

A significant absence in *Survivor*, that the isolation of the desert island emphasises, is the US homeland. As the desert island aesthetic is used to affirm US centrality, this absence is addressed in multiple ways; as the island is used as a blank space to project the US into, at an individual and national level, and as the seasons culminate in the return to the US. To first consider the projection of the absent US on an individual level, island spaces in *Survivor* are used as spaces of self-reflection for the American contestants. This asserts that the desert island becomes a canvas for Americans to engage with themselves and elements of their society. As previously mentioned, this utility of the desert island is discussed by Billig, in his discussion of the potential to symbolically read island spaces as the image of the individual 'I', as indicated by *Robinson Crusoe*.⁹⁴ A common character arc is undertaking a journey of self-discovery while on the island. This is emblematic of imperial texts, as Spurr observes the way the Non-Western world is often used as a backdrop for the inner journeys of protagonists.⁹⁵ Many sound bites of contestants reveal the way the island represents individual and American selfhood in *Survivor*, one contestant observes, "It's not about surviving the island, it's about surviving yourself."⁹⁶

⁹³ Delisle, "Surviving American Cultural Imperialism," 53.

"We didn't want to move, but there was strong pressure" is a quote from Daniel, who local resident whose house was bulldozed. In Kathleen C. Riley, Kathleen, "Commentary: Surviving "Survivor" in the Marquesas," *Anthropology News*, 43.5, (2002): 6.

⁹⁴ Billig, "I-Lands," 17.

⁹⁵ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 142.

⁹⁶ Kelly Wiglesworth in "Crack in the Alliance," *Survivor: Borneo*, Produced by Maria Baltazzi and Jay Bienstock, CBS, 2000.

Furthermore, This idea can be connected to the nature of reality TV more broadly, as the island space that *Survivor* engages with has been identified as an imagined construction, using Lefebvre's spatial theory to frame the setting. Lefebvre argues that when the mirror is imaginary, the effect of the reflection is real, which links to Biressi and Nunn's assertion that reality TV is a place of self-realisation.⁹⁷ Overall, *Survivor* reveals the way the desert islands gets orientated within as US-centred view, as the setting becomes the plane for the Americans' self-exploration.

The presence of America as a nation, appears within the island space occurs primarily through the Reward Challenges. For example, the most anticipated and emotional rewards of the seasons are family visits and letters from home. These are challenges where the winning contestants can either receive a letter or video communication from home, or have their loved one stay for the afternoon or overnight on the island. These challenges always elicit strong emotional responses from the contestants, as family and the home front are transported. While the correspondence rewards have been paper letters since *Survivor: Amazon*, in the earlier seasons they used to receive videos or online chats with family members. This added an additional visual element, as a TV or computer station would be set up in the middle of the desert island setting. This emphasises the dichotomy between island and homeland that *Survivor* establishes as strong juxtaposition is created between the piece of technology and the natural backdrop of the plants, which reinforces the centre v. periphery and therefore imperial lens of the series. This strengthens the narrative of US as a beacon of civilisation and the island's deserted primitivism. Furthermore, by creating the "return" to the US as a reward, the show upholds the continental US as the object of desire despite the way the island setting is established as Paradise. In this way,

⁹⁷ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 182.

Biressi and Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation*, 99.

Reality TV has been established as a medium of microcosms, and in aesthetic; as the island serves as a vessel for a microcosmic American community and a space to reflect back on the US.⁹⁸ Therefore, the utility of the desert island aesthetic that *Survivor* creates is to create a patriotic longing for the United States.

The third way *Survivor* uses the desert island to assert the centre v. periphery rhetorical framework is through the return to the US that occurs at the end of each season. The live finale and reunion episodes where the winner is announced are filmed within the US, either in Los Angeles or New York City. They function as a return to “civilisation” which Weaver-Hightower highlights as she characterises *Survivor* as ultimately rejecting the island setting, as the reward lies in the return to home.⁹⁹ The choice to film in the CBS studios in Los Angeles could be viewed as indicative of LA’s centrality within the American television industry. However, the additional choice of New York as the location for multiple season finales highlights an important aspect of the centre v. periphery dichotomy constructed by imperial discourse. This is due to the relevance of the metropolis in framing Western mainlands as global centres, as Said highlights.¹⁰⁰ The way that New York City, as a metropolis, acts as a point of safe return within a *Survivor* finale, is most prominent in that of *Survivor: Marquesas*. As the only finale to be filmed outdoors, the episode has a view of the surrounding Manhattan sky scrapers and the episode opens with a montage of Jeff arriving in New York City via a helicopter that flies prominently past the Statue of Liberty. This visual creates a strong association between the return from the Marquesas Islands in French Polynesia with the reaffirmation of American values, as the Statues

⁹⁸ Biressi and Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation*, 98.

⁹⁹ Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands*, 217.

¹⁰⁰ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 8.

of Liberty is an emblem of American freedom. This is coupled with a return to the familiar as Jeff Probst, the host, proceeds to hail a taxi and asks to be driven to Central Park. The execution of an activity that is both characteristic of metropolitan living and a mundane daily task signals the way the mainland metropolis is treated with a specificity that eclipses the generalised island aesthetic, which reveals *Survivor*'s engagement with imperial ideologies. Furthermore, during this episode, Probst closes out the night by saying, "We want to thank NYC, the greatest city there ever was, and we'd like to thank you all for supporting it."¹⁰¹ This statement affirms the rhetoric of what Roberts and Stephens labels as "Continental Exceptionalism."¹⁰² This evidences the ideology of American centrality that this thesis argues *Survivor* participates in.

However, the *Survivor: Marquesas* finale also complicates the relationship between the island spaces and the US mainland that has been ideologically established. Introducing New York City, Jeff Probst states that, "We went from literally the most remote island in the world, to without a doubt the greatest island in the world [Manhattan]."¹⁰³ This remark maintains a juxtaposition between the island setting of the season and Manhattan through the familiar descriptors of "remote," and also "great," to uphold the imperial conception of space. In addition, a connection is made by defining them both as islands, which implies that the distance between the landmasses that are ideologically upheld as distinct throughout the show have points of convergence and collapse. This exception is evident in the aesthetic of the live finales throughout the series' run. Usually filmed in an enclosed studio or theatre which contrasts drastically to the spacious tropical island aesthetic, the stage of the finale is typically styled as a replica of Tribal

¹⁰¹ "Survivor: Marquesas Reunion," CBS, 2006.

¹⁰² Roberts and Stephens, "Archipelagic American Studies," 9.

¹⁰³ Roberts and Stephens, "Archipelagic American Studies," 9.

Council, which is typically styled to blend into the island setting. This stylistic continuity functions as a paradox. It collapses the distance between the island and the mainland while, at the same time, emphasising the way that ‘the island’ setting as it is presented by the show is the product of CBS set designers. Tribal Council is the location where the show’s tribal motif emerges under the guise of authenticity, and it is where the show’s most salient metaphor “that fire represents life,” is visualised, as the contestants participation in the game is symbolised by a lit torch.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the recreation of the set at the live finale on American soil creates a collapse of the distance between island setting and the US that *Survivor* develops, while maintaining a centre v. periphery dynamic between the island and “civilisation.”

Furthermore, the Tribal Council set which is placed upon the island landscape, even as the set dressers want to make it as pre-existing. It emphasises the way that the “tribal” character that the show assigns to the island setting is constructed, and that the juxtaposition between island culture and the US that is emphasised through the recreation of the Council on the finale stage, and sustained throughout the rhetoric of the show, is largely a fabrication. The way these artistic choices are informed by a colonial lens is clear through the Tribal Council set of *Survivor: Cook Islands*. Held within the set of a shipwreck, Tribal Council serves as a clear connection to the British colonial explorers’ Captain James Cook’s visit to the area in 1777, as part of his third Pacific Voyage.¹⁰⁵ The association invoked between his colonial journey and tribal council is an explicit engagement with an imperial gaze. This indicates that despite the tradition of the US asserting its difference from its previous monarchs, the British, *Survivor* co-opts European colonial history in this instance.

¹⁰⁴ “The Marooning,” *Survivor Borneo*, Produced by Maria Baltazzi and Jay Bienstock, CBS, 2000.

¹⁰⁵ Dan O’Sullivan, *In Search of Captain Cook: Exploring the Man Through his Own Words*, (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): 130.

The use of a broader Western history at points to foreground the US's centrality in relation to the island setting, is revealed by these visual choices, as the American contestants sit in this simulacrum of colonialism. This reveals the show's orientation within an imperial framework, as displayed through the desert island aesthetic. The way *Survivor* builds upon the desert island aesthetic that has been commonly used in imperially framed, Western texts, has become of the most identifiable visual elements of the series. *Survivor*'s desert island setting is highly constructed, as the nations the series films within are not deserted at all, which emphasises the way the desert islands occupy space primarily within the American imaginary and are the visualisation of ideology. This has been evidenced through the way the setting has been used to project the hegemonic notion of US global centrality.

Chapter II: The Colonising/Colonised Bodies and *Survivor*'s Anti-Conquest Narrative

The desert island as a setting demonstrates the way that *Survivor* engages with the imperial framework present in US ideology that places the US as a mainland centre. However, it does not illuminate the way this centrality is justified by ideology. This chapter will argue that structures of cultural hegemony assert that the US' centrality in the world is naturally occurring. *Survivor* reflects this assertion, through the way it populates the desert island aesthetic in a way that constructs the narrative as an anti-conquest narrative. Mary Louise Pratt has identified the sub-genre of the "anti-conquest narrative" within colonial travel texts. These are narratives where "European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony."¹⁰⁶ The tropes of the anti-conquest narrative as identified by Pratt are the uninhabited land, the passive and un-interrogated role of the coloniser as Naturalist, the savage and/or domesticated nature of the colonised, and the role of the environment as an active agent.¹⁰⁷ Rothenberg highlights how the anti-conquest framework valuably demonstrates the way

¹⁰⁶ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 51, 52, 53 & 60.

texts claim innocence within the “larger imperial project” while simultaneously constructed “complicity” with that project.¹⁰⁸

This chapter will further investigate the particularities of the imperial lens that it has been established that *Survivor* is constructed within, through refining this lens to the anti-conquest narrative. The naturalised characterisation of contestants and an American presence within the island setting will be revealed to demonstrate that this narrative framework reflects the naturalised myth within American hegemony that explains their presence as a global power. As will be demonstrated through an analysis of the way the American contestants and local residents are portrayed interacting with the island setting and each other. This will further support a reading of *Survivor* as co-opting European colonial traditions, and extend Pratt’s anti-conquest categorisation to consider the American subject. Additionally, *Gilligan’s Island* will be used as a point of comparison throughout this chapter, to once again contextualise *Survivor* within a history of imperial texts.

The identity of the coloniser and the colonised are opposing but inextricably linked parties within colonial texts. As Spurr argues, the coloniser’s power in imperial texts is nothing without the presence of the colonised.¹⁰⁹ The American contestants embody both roles at different points in *Survivor*, one of the paradoxes that reveals how the series participates in both the innocence and complicity Rothenburg associates with the anti-conquest narrative.¹¹⁰ *Survivor* claims imperial innocence through naturalising the contestants within the landscape of the island, and the constructed image of local culture the series presents. While not directly related to the desert island aesthetic, this process of naturalising American imperialism has a history within American

¹⁰⁸ Rothenburg, *Presenting America’s World*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 11.

¹¹⁰ Rothenburg, *Presenting America’s World*, 7.

film, in connection to the ideology of Manifest Destiny, that this thesis is arguing *Survivor* sits within. As Berg argues, Western films of the mid twentieth century, employed the Manifest Destiny myth to “rationalize – and sanitize – the history of the USA’s North American imperialism...[into a] guilt-free narrative that conformed to core American beliefs.”¹¹¹ This period coincides with the popularity of the beach movie, that Stenger argues mapped the beach “specifically as a white landscape,” in an American context.¹¹² *Gilligan’s Island*, produced within the timeframe of Stenger’s analysis, further supports the association of the beach with the dominant white culture and hegemony that Berg outlined, as emphasised by the title *Gilligan’s Island*, that signals a white claim of ownership over the beach setting and the island as a whole. This history acts as a bridge that translates the principles of the anti-conquest narrative into an American context, and emphasises that the characteristics being observed within these shows are reflective of American hegemony. Therefore, *Survivor*’s continuation of the Manifest Destiny myth, through the way the desert island aesthetic utilises frontier ideology and argues that the US is globally central, paradoxically asserts the position of the American contestants as both observing and appropriating the culture of the colonised subjects, who are the locals who are portrayed through a lens of primitivism. Therefore, the American contestants act as both the coloniser through naturalisation and the colonised through appropriation. This duality will be explored in this chapter and, additionally, how the producers of the show create and mediate this dynamic; as it will be argued that *Survivor* as a product of US cultural imperialism operates also in an anti-conquest nature, creating a guise of innocence.

¹¹¹ Berg, “Manifest Myth-Making Texas History in the Movies,” 3.

¹¹² Stenger, “Mapping the Beach: Beach Movies, Exploitation Film and Geographies of Whiteness,” 35.

Survivor is framed as a colonial narrative, as the contestants enact a colonising role in the first episode of each season. The contestants are typically introduced to the audience on board a large boat off the coast of the island. In *Survivor: Cook Islands*, the large boat that the contestants arrive on with Probst is a replica of an eighteenth-century colonial ship. This creates a parallel between the arrival of the contestants, and Captain Cook's 1777 arrival to the island.¹¹³ As a result, the characterisation of the contestants as colonisers is established. Once instructed to leave the boat by host Jeff Probst, the contestants jump overboard and paddle themselves, as tribes, on what are often bamboo rafts, to the shore of the island. Pratt comments in her analysis of colonial travel writings that when the Western figure is left bereft of the commodities that are indicative of their homeland, the myth of inherent Eurocentric power is most poignantly assumed. In this instance the protagonist becomes an image of a "naked, essential, inherently powerful white man."¹¹⁴ While the contestants of *Survivor* are not all white men, during the arrival scene and their subsequent time on the island, the contestants similarly come to represent a hegemonic US mythology of the inherent power of Americans. They arrive at the shore of the island without possessions from home, and with only a few tools for survival, such as a machete, some rope, and on occasion a chicken or two. Despite this, the contestants paddle into shore as triumphant non-diegetic music plays, and begin to assert control over the landscape that has been colonially envisioned as a terra nullius Paradise.

Paradoxically, the bamboo raft is also the first visual cue that *Survivor* seeks to naturalise the contestants with the natural environment of the island, colonisers with a dimension of innocence through an anti-conquest framework. To use one of Pratt's terms for the anti-conquest

¹¹³ O'Sullivan, *In Search of Captain Cook*, " 130.

¹¹⁴ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 82.

protagonist, the contestants act in a pastiche role of colonial invader and “naturalist.”¹¹⁵ As the boat, an emblem of colonialism, is typically juxtaposed in the opening sequence by the bamboo rafts that the contestants must paddle to shore on. Bamboo is a material that is more suited to the aesthetic of the island, rather than onboard a colonial ship. This hysteron proteron asserts the contestants as commanding the natural resources of the island before their arrival, asserting their control as pseudo-colonial invaders, while also naturalising the mode of their arrival.

The contestants’ characterisation as a naturalised colonial authority is further asserted once they reach the shore of the island. On the beach they quickly begin to set up their camp, their pseudo-colony, through clearing the area and gathering resources for a fire and shelter. Each tribe’s camp is marked by a large flag, a symbol of colonial ownership that says both the name of the season and the name of the occupying tribe. The names given to each tribe is usually a local word that has been appropriated by the show. For example, in *Survivor: Cook Islands*, the Aitutaki tribe, shortened to “Aitu” is named after a local island, as evidenced by the reward in episode ten, where some contestants visited a local village and were greeted by a man the show identifies as the Chief who brought “the sounds of the drums from the Hills of Aitu,” to greet the contestants.¹¹⁶ Shell argues that there is a strong association between the process of naming and the claim of ownership within imperial processes, which describes the colonial authority encoded in the selection of tribe names on *Survivor*.¹¹⁷ This is exemplified by the tribe names that follow the Merge.¹¹⁸ For example, in *Survivor: Cook Islands*, the merged team name is Aitutonga, which is a combination of Aitutaki and Raratonga, two original tribe names, and island locations

¹¹⁵ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 52.

¹¹⁶ “People That You Like Want to See You Suffer,” *Survivor: Cook Islands*, Produced by David Dryden, CBS, 2006.

¹¹⁷ Shell, *Islandology*, 7.

¹¹⁸ The merge is when the tribes dissolve into one and the individual competition segment begins.

in the area. The series' comfortability with butchering these local names signals the imperial hubris that the contestants embody as colonial figures. Ultimately, by giving a tribe a name from the local culture, especially one that has been manipulated, emphasises the way the contestants act as naturalised colonisers, as ownership is asserted while a connection to local culture is drawn.

The second way in which *Survivor* asserts itself as a colonial narrative is through the depiction of the local population as the colonised other in a way that is consistent with colonial tropes. Pratt argues that the island inhabitants in such texts are portrayed as savages, as they are removed from the economy and depicted with a domestic sphere, carefree and happy.¹¹⁹ These characteristics are frequently invoked in imperial films and reflect what Delisle argues is a perspective of "primitivism and othering."¹²⁰ For example, in *Bird of Paradise*, one of the first observations that is made by the Americans of the Polynesian community they come across, as women swim up to their boat to greet their arrival is; "Usually always you'll find the natives carefree and happy."¹²¹ Cannibalism is a common threat that is used in desert island narratives, and represents a generic but exoticised foreign Other.¹²² Cannibals are invisible threat in the first season of *Gilligan's Island*, who the cast do not encounter, but the contestants speak of the possibility of them being on the island, highlighting the primitive lens with which the space is characterised.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 53.

¹²⁰ Delisle, "Surviving American Cultural Imperialism," 48.

¹²¹ *Bird of Paradise*, Vidor, VA1646 M.

¹²² Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands*, 91.

¹²³ "Birds Gotta Fly, Fish Gotta Talk," *Gilligan's Island*, Produced by Sherwood Shwartz, CBS, 1964.

In relation to *Survivor*, Delisle argues that the constructed primitive other of the series is depicted generally as an indication of the series' framing within cultural hegemony.¹²⁴ As Bresnahan and Carmen argue, representations do not often form, but instead activate stereotypes, which supports the choice to view *Survivor*'s depiction of the cultural other as a continuation of the tropes of other imperial texts.¹²⁵ Multiple seasons include an Immunity Challenge where Probst narrates a story from local lore or history to the contestants, who then must complete an obstacle course where they answer questions about the story. These stories are usually about (supposed) ancient chiefs or warriors from the local area. This creates a spectacle of horror, and applies a lens of primitivism to these local cultures, by drawing on topics such as cannibalism, as film history has revealed that 'native' and 'cannibal' are synonymous within an imperial framework.¹²⁶ This validates the assertion that *Survivor* employs the imperial lens of primitivism, and, therefore, emphasises the way the local population become the colonised figures in *Survivor*'s narrative.

This primitive characterisation of island 'natives' also figures into the tropes of the anti-conquest narrative, and furthers the colonisers naturalisation, as revealed by reward scenes in *Survivor*. As Pratt argues that anti-conquest narratives use the domestic and carefree depiction of these communities, to make them receptive to the presence of Western travellers.¹²⁷ Within this narrative structure, the ensuing interactions that occur between the coloniser and the colonised are depicted as reciprocal, as the power imbalance between the invaders and the invaded is

¹²⁴ Delisle, "Surviving American Cultural Imperialism," 48.

¹²⁵ Mary J. Bresnahan and Carmen Lee, "Activating Racial Stereotypes on 'Survivor: Cook Islands,'" *Howard Journal of Communications*, 22.1 (2011): 4.

¹²⁶ "We'll Make You Pay," *Survivor Palau*, Produced by David Dryden, CBS, 2005.

¹²⁷ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 53.

erased.¹²⁸ This reinforces the idea of Western passivity and innocence within their colonial actions. Typically at least once a season a reward will involve the winners of the Reward Challenge visiting a local community to participate in what is presented as a traditional feast and celebration. The contestants are always greeted with a warm welcome, and in some instances, are lauded as heroes, as in episode ten of *Survivor: Cook Islands* where the assumed local chief meets them by praising the contestants as he remarks that “On my shoulder, I will honour you.”¹²⁹ This reflects Murray’s assertion that *Survivor* “implicitly valorises” cultural imperialism, while simultaneously emphasising the colonial hierarchy imposed on the relationship between the contestants and the locals.¹³⁰ Notably, the communities that are depicted are never the more metropolitan regions of the islands. Instead, these communities are always presented as isolated and pre-industrial. This reflects the lens of primitivism through which they are regarded. As Dubrofsky and Hardy argue, within the reality TV genre, white subjects are not framed as being emblematic of white culture on the whole.¹³¹ However, in *Survivor*, the presentation of primitivism becomes indicative of all the local culture is, which reduces them to a rhetorical device, there to provide the colonisers with a shield of innocence as they happily receive the American foreigners. Evidence of post-industrial, twenty-first century society in the countries visited is overwhelmingly kept invisible by *Survivor*. This emphasises imperial lens of *Survivor*, and the role of the local population as the colonised in its anti-conquest framework.

¹²⁸ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 82.

¹²⁹ “People That You Like Want to See You Suffer,” *Survivor: Cook Islands*, 2006.

¹³⁰ Keat Murray in Lamont Lindstrom, “Survivor Vanuatu: Myths of Matriarchy Revisited,” *The Contemporary Pacific*, 19.1 (2007): 162.

¹³¹ Rachel Dubrofsky and Antoine Hardy in Emily M. Drew, “Pretending to Be ‘Postracial:’ The Spectacularization of Race in Reality TV’s ‘Survivor,’” *Television & New Media*, 12.4 (2011): 332.

However, *Survivor* not only portrays the contestant's colonial role through a lens of innocence, but it constructs its anti-conquest narrative by subverting their status as coloniser. One way this is done is through the series' depiction of the contestants as castaways. This characterisation is signified by the title of the very first episode that aired on May 31 2000, "The Marooning."¹³² Furthermore, the opening credits of *Survivor: Cook Islands* flashes the phrase "20 castaways" across the screen at the beginning, and incorporates footage of this colonial landing process into the montage that establishes the season's contestants and location.¹³³ This formula is repeated across many of the series' opening credits, and reveals the way the contestants are reframed within the castaway identity each episode. The role of castaway negates the active and aggressive role of coloniser through the implication that as castaway, the contestants are not in control of their situation and their presence on the island. Similarly, *Gilligan's Island's* closing credits reminds the audience each episode that, "Now, this is the tale of our castaways," despite the possessive colonial undertones that are implied by the name of the show itself.¹³⁴ However, there is a distinction between the castaway status employed by the two series, as in *Gilligan's Island*, the character's castaway status is genuine, as the S.S Minnow became ship wrecked due to a storm, while in *Survivor*, the contestants assume the cast away title willingly. As a reality TV show, the contestants who go on *Survivor* go through a casting process. Therefore, the status of castaway is not meant to be literally believed by the audience, but instead provides a marker for how the contestants should be ideologically viewed by the audience; as the process of invasion is written as circumstances that were beyond the contestants' control.

¹³² "The Marooning," *Survivor Borneo*, 2000.

¹³³ "I Can Forgive Her, But I Don't Have to Because She Screwed with My Chicken," *Survivor: Cook Islands*, Produced by David Dryden, CBS, 2006.

¹³⁴ "Marooned," *Gilligan's Islands*, Produced by Sherwood Schwartz, CBS, 1964.

Therefore, while the constructed nature of the castaway status is not hidden by *Survivor*, the illusion is visually sustained through the contestants' appearance. Since *Survivor*'s eighth season, contestants have only been able to take the clothes they are wearing during the "marooning" with them to the island. This artificially creates the illusion of unprepared abandonment that a real castaway would experience. As the contestants reside on the island for up to 39 days, the clothes they wear become increasingly discoloured and worn and their overall appearance becomes unkempt by the typical standard of Hollywood, as body hair grows out and physical frames appear malnourished. This increases the spectacle of the survival aspect of the series, and has strengthened the castaway charade *Survivor* constructs, that makes the contestants fit into the island; as a strategy of naturalisation.

Subsequently, the contestants' bodies become sites of ideology that characterise the anti-conquest narrative. Pratt argues that in such texts, the protagonist appears as a "seeing-man" that becomes placed on the periphery of his own colonial actions.¹³⁵ This creates an imperial gaze that is positioned as passive.¹³⁶ This gaze is still commanding as it directs which subjects come into its attention, and its interpretation is "uncontested."¹³⁷ However, it does not exert active agency over what occurs within its line of vision, as natural forces such as the weather act upon the seeing-man and appear to dictate the drama of the narrative.¹³⁸ This is an additional guise of innocence that absolves the colonial figure of accountability within the imperial lens, and is one that *Survivor* employs frequently through the contestants. For example, the unpredictable and aggressive weather that the island locations experience at times are placed in the foreground of *Survivor* with relish. The previously analysed *Survivor: Philippines* opening sequence

¹³⁵ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7.

¹³⁶ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7.

¹³⁷ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7.

¹³⁸ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 60

emphasised that, “furious storms can arrive without waning.”¹³⁹ The threat of such storms constantly looms over the daily lives of the contestants who live exposed to the elements in their makeshift bamboo shelters and rely on an open fire for all their cooking. The passive position of the contestants in the face of the weather is emphasised by a confessional from one contestant who observes, “I am worried that the rain may prove, once again, that we are ultimately not in control.”¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, during *Survivor: Millennials v. Gen X* (2016), the contestants were evacuated as tropical Cyclone Zena hit Fiji. The inclusion of this evacuation into the narrative of the season reflects the way the series casts the weather as an active aggressor, and the contestants as passive. The promotional commercial for the episode had the narration, “But when Mother Nature strikes, she never loses,” with quickly edited shots of the contestants evacuating by boat in high winds and choppy waters.¹⁴¹ This commercial personifies the weather, and emphasises the contestants’ vulnerability in the face of it, and places the contestants on the periphery as recipients instead of instigators of the action to deflect the categorisation as colonial aggressors. Even in less severe circumstances, *Survivor* capitalises on the moments when it can depict the contestants’ bodies as vulnerable within the elements. For example, when a storm hits, the strategic game that drives the narrative arc of each episode, slows to a halt as the contestants silently huddle in their shelter. Despite this inaction, the editors do not omit or rush past these periods of idleness, even though they threaten the idyllic image of Paradise that defines the desert island aesthetic the series uses. Instead, *Survivor* lingers on the physical effects the weather has on the contestants’ bodies, and creates montages of shivering shoulders, wet strands

¹³⁹“Survivor Smacked Me in the Chops,” *Survivor: Philippines*, 2012.

¹⁴⁰“Create a Little Chaos,” *Survivor: Philippines*, Produced by David Dryden, CBS, 2012.

¹⁴¹“Survivor: Millennials vs. Gen X – evacuation ad,” Youtube Video, Posted by Jeff Pitman, 15 September 2016, Last Accessed 9 October 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjTcyJE6yYw>.

of hair, water logged feet and despondent expressions. In particular it is due to the constructed castaway status of the contestants' limited wardrobe that the contestants are unable to change into weather appropriate clothes during the storm or into dry clothes once it has passed. This further highlights how the rhetorical guise of innocence that the castaway narrative creates has an effect on the contestants physically, which shows the way the contestants opening role as coloniser becomes subverted.

The way the island is positioned as an antagonistic force the contestants must survive is also inverted by *Survivor*, as the contestants' physical transformation can also be viewed as the way they are naturalised within the island space. Within a colonial framework, the contestants can be characterised in a similar way to the colonised body, as the American's role is subverted further. As the contestants' physical bodies become emaciated by the conditions of the island, they also become exoticised, as Hargraves identifies the way the tanned body becomes exoticised and orientalised in reality TV.¹⁴² Exoticisation is a prominent feature of the stereotyped portrayal of a colonised other, and is linked to the colonial trope of eroticisation that Spurr identifies.¹⁴³ This inversion is representative of the "go native" trope that is documented in colonial texts.¹⁴⁴

As the contestants "go native" as their physically transform throughout the season, their role reversal into the colonised subject, is evidenced by the sexualised lens with which contestants' island-claimed bodies are treated. For example, the term "island hot," is used frequently within the online *Survivor* fan community, on sites such as Reddit, during discussions of which

¹⁴² Hunter Hargraves, "Tan TV: Reality Television's Postracial Delusion," In *A Companion to Reality Television*, edited by Laurie Ouellette, 155-171, (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014): 295.

¹⁴³ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 170.

¹⁴⁴ Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands*, 49.

contestants look most attractive once they are acclimatised with the island setting.¹⁴⁵ Colonised by the gaze of the audience, the contestants' new naturalised island identity and appearance is regarded with the same sexualised mystique that early colonial texts had for the idea of "going native." The identification of this contestant transformation with the trope of "going native" and becoming the colonised subject is strengthened by an analysis of the tribal motif that pervades *Survivor*'s aesthetic. This is the most replete visual motif that production creates, as it dominates all props, challenge set dressing, and is intertwined with the contestants' appearance. For example, the most coveted item once the individual competition stage begins is the Individual Immunity Necklace, which guarantees the wearer immunity from eviction at the following Tribal Council, which Andrejevic compares to "a generic Hollywood pastiche of a tribal mask."¹⁴⁶ This appearance of this necklace changes each season, and is meant to reflect the location is filmed within. However, it is clear from the words of creator Mark Burnett, as he describes his vision for the show in his book *Jump in* with repeated reference to the "primitive" nature of the settings they filmed within that overarches the locations, that cultural authenticity is not a priority of the series.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, the tribal motif that reappears each season consists of a stereotypical pastiche of elements that are deemed recognisably "tribal" by Western thought such as skulls, feathers, and bones. This once again emphasises that *Survivor* constructs a stereotypical and generalised island culture, with little care for specificity or authenticity, as the utility of the aesthetic is upholding the US as a beacon of civilisation through comparison.

However, this aesthetic does not require the contestants to meaningfully forfeit the rhetoric of American power that *Survivor* establishes. As Foster argues, the process of naturalisation in

¹⁴⁵"Survivor: Search Results – Island Hot," Reddit, 2017, Last Accessed 9 October 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/survivor/search?q=island+hot&restrict_sr=on.

¹⁴⁶Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, 197.

¹⁴⁷ Burnett, *Jump In*, 90, 95, 106.

these instances of subversion still upholds a “master narrative” of white spaces and dominance.¹⁴⁸ In this way, the trope of “going native” erases the figure of the coloniser visually, while, in the case of *Survivor*, maintaining the mythology surrounding US’ centre as naturalised. David Spurr outlines the trope of debasement that is present in imperial discourse, through which the “abjection of the savage,” is used as a justifier for colonial presence and actions.¹⁴⁹ As Vrooman argues, *Survivor* is the desire and the repulsion for the Other, as in *Survivor* the contestants’ bodies in their colonised form are shown to be sites of abjection to themselves.¹⁵⁰ For example, when the contestants arrive at Ponderosa, a local villa where the contestants go after they are voted out, one of the first things they are filmed doing is looking at themselves in the mirror. The contestants’ reaction to their appearance is often that of shock and disgust. One contestant in *Survivor: Philippines* exclaimed, “I look like a caveman” on seeing himself again, emphasising the naturalised lens of primitivism that the contestants take on.¹⁵¹ Subsequently, they hastily shave their over grown hair to return to their “normal” state, a process that is documented by the Ponderosa videos that are released by CBS online. As such Ponderosa marks a return to society for the contestants. However, the foray into the exotic unknown can never be permanent due to the ultimate and inherent difference of the “civilised” Western individuals to the island surrounding, a mythology to which imperial texts cling to. This reveals the utility of the contestants’ adoption of a colonised aesthetic, as their naturalised transformation into the peripheral is used to affirm US centrality.

¹⁴⁸ Gwendolyn A. Foster, *Performing Whiteness*, (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2003): 2.

¹⁴⁹ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 77-80.

¹⁵⁰ Vrooman, Steven S, “Self-help for Savages: The “Other” *Survivor*, Primitivism, and the Construction of American Identity,” In *Survivor Lessons: Essays on Communication and Reality TV*, edited by Matthew J. Smith and Andrew F. Wood, 153-82, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company Inc, 2003): 197.

¹⁵¹ “Survivor Philippines Ponderosa Jeff Pt 1.” Youtube. Posted by Nevim Dal. 8 November 2012. Last Accessed 5 October 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eTXS7Q_EfI.

The concept of the colonisers becoming the colonised in the construction of *Survivor*'s anti-conquest narrative culminates in the moments where the contestants take on the form of what is presented as the dress and accessories of the local island culture. This occurs on multiple occasions throughout the series, such as when the contestants adorn war paint to attend a challenge, masquerading as tribal warriors.¹⁵² These moments are part of the unspecific tribal motif of the show and are not a direct appropriation of any specific local culture, though the same authenticity that the show places on its tribal aesthetic is placed on these moments. For example, on multiple occasions Probst identifies the tribal motif that the contestants adorn themselves with, as "traditional."¹⁵³ At the same time, it reflects a use of "appropriation as participation," as the contestants embody the tribal motif in an act to become the colonised subject and naturalise their presence on the island.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, as an outlier, in episode sixteen of *Survivor: All Stars*, Probst explains that the body paint and jewellery the final two contestants adorn as a "rite of passage" is the same as that worn by a "fierce local Indian tribe."¹⁵⁵ The act of dressing like an "Indian" has a precedent within American history, and this moment is akin to the practice of white Americans dressing up as Native American "Indians." This phenomenon is discussed by Philip J. Deloria in his text *Playing Indian*. He cites D.H Lawrence's notion that Americans define themselves by what they are not, as he argues that events such as summer camps in the early twentieth century, white children would dress up as Native Americans to get the "Indian" experience of nature while ultimately affirming their

¹⁵² Such as in "Survivor Smacked Me in the Chops," *Survivor: Philippines*, 2012.

¹⁵³ "Survivor: Marquesas Reunion," *Survivor: Marquesas*, 2006.

¹⁵⁴ Maurice, Alice, "From New Deal to No Deal: Blackface Minstrelsy, Bamboozled, and Reality Television," In *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy*, edited Johson, Stephen, 191-222, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012): 218.

¹⁵⁵ "The Sole Surviving All-Star," *Survivor: All Stars*, Produced by Maria Baltazzi and Adam Briles, CBS, 2004.

patriotism.¹⁵⁶ Richard Drinnon connects the internal American expansion that included the massacre of Native Americans to the imperialism frontier of the US overseas, therefore, when the contestants “go native” and embody the colonised subject, this spectacle always has the end result of affirming America as the normative culture.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, mimicry is a technique that Bhabha associates with the subjugation of periphery communities, and this reinforces the idea that actions of contestants on the island serve the purpose of reaffirming the hegemonic structures of the US.¹⁵⁸ This reinforces the idea that *Survivor* uses the island setting as a canvas to affirm American stability and identity, showing how US power is naturalised through the anti-conquest narrative the contestants participate in.

Within the discussion of the way the contestants’ bodies become the colonised subject, attention should be given to the second way in which they embody this role; under the gaze of the show’s producer’s. Therefore, the production team behind the scenes most genuinely embodies a colonising agent. As while the contestants are the on-screen representation of the show’s colonial ideology, the parameters and circumstance of their actions, as of the local residents who are featured, are directed by the decisions of the CBS production team, and presented to the audience at the discretion of the editors. Spurr identifies surveillance as a theme of imperial texts, and writes that the surveyed are denied control of the gaze.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, while the contestants execute a colonial gaze within the narrative of the season, when *Survivor* is considered as a cultural product, the contestants ultimately having little autonomy to direct their actions, as Spurr articulates that even when the gaze is sympathetic of the surveyor, the circumstances imply

¹⁵⁶ Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998): 96.

¹⁵⁷ Richard Drinnon In Kaplan, “Left Alone with America,” 17.

¹⁵⁸ Homi K. Bhabha Ashcroft and Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 175.

¹⁵⁹ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 13.

control.¹⁶⁰ Further, Kaplan distinguishes between “look” and “gaze” and argues that look implies a relation, whereas gaze refers to a one-way subjective process.¹⁶¹ Therefore, the contestants can most accurately be described as executing an imperial look as proscribed by the imperial gaze of the producers.

The commodified colonisation of the contestants is emphasised by an analysis of the way the colonial lens of the production team interacts with the framework of imperial masculinity that pervades colonial texts. As Kramer cites, colonial state building is the process of reconstructing masculinity.¹⁶² Kaplan argues, that the male and imperial gaze are intertwined.¹⁶³ This reflects the heteronormative lens mainstream media and reality TV has, and the way that imperial undertones exist within a gendered analysis of American culture at large. This bias is emphasised by the way that *Survivor*'s production team objectify female contestants within their gaze, as they become a subject to be fetishised and colonised. For example, during the reunion shows, where a recurring subject of discussion is the swimming costumes of female contestants. For example, in the *Survivor: Thailand* reunion show, a slow-motion montage of one contestant running in their bikini is played, followed by Probst asking her what her strategy going in was to deal with being the “*Survivor* hot girl.”¹⁶⁴ This attitude underlies the series, as evidenced by the way the episodes are edited to frequently feature shots of women in bikinis lying on the beach. This reflects the imperial technique of eroticisation, where the colonised bodies are sexually

¹⁶⁰ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 13.

¹⁶¹ E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997): xvi.

¹⁶² Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire and the United States and The Philippines*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 23.

¹⁶³ Kaplan, *Looking for the Other*, 65.

¹⁶⁴“Survivor: Thailand Reunion,” *Survivor: Thailand*, Produced by Craig Armstrong and Al Berman, CBS, 2002.

objectified.¹⁶⁵ This is a prevalent trope across imperial texts, for example, scenes of women dancing are a common occurrence, and in *Bali Paradise Isle*, the narrator describes such women as, “live, bronzed bodies in motion, of which a sculptor might dream.”¹⁶⁶ This highly objectifying language links to the way that ultimately all contestants are objectified within the gaze of the production team however, as reality TV contestants are exploitable commodities. This highlights the dual levels of colonisation that occurs between the on-screen narrative and off-screen industry systems on *Survivor*, and reflects that while the contestants problematically perform as the colonised other within the island setting, this identity can be more accurately ascribed as their role when *Survivor* form as a media product is considered.

This interplay is symbolised by Jeff Probst, the only figure in *Survivor* who traverses the barrier between off-screen production team and on-screen anti-conquest narrative, who is influential in establishing the upholding the shows’ implicit and explicit ideology. Probst’s wardrobe has evolved over the years, but is defined by khaki shorts, a button-up walking shirt, a shell necklace and a cowboy hat, or more recently a *Survivor* branded logo hat. Probst’ clothes signify his role as adventure guide of the colonial expedition and the cowboy hat signals a reinvention of the traditional British aesthetic and his American identity, making him symbolic of the series’ ideological position. Probst mediates the contestants’ and viewers’ interactions with the island, as his narration moves the action of the season along. He plays the role of judge, scientist and historian, as he interprets the world of the constructed island for the contestants. Significantly, any cultural knowledge the show communicates about the area or local history does not come from the voice of local communities, even when they are featured on screen, but from Probst.

¹⁶⁵ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 170.

¹⁶⁶ *Bali, Paradise Isle*, Castle, VA1771.

For example, this is most evident in episode one of *Vanuatu* as the contestants partake in a local ritual to welcome the contestants to the area. Probst explains the events to the contestants, the men are to climb to the top of a poll to try and reach a “spiritual stone,” while the women watch. Probst remarks to the contestants, “At times you may find it beautiful, at times you may be repulsed, and at times you may be frightened.”¹⁶⁷ This emphasises the way Probst not only provides exposition to the contestants and the viewing audience to understand the scene presented, but he mediates their emotional response as well.

The emotional response Probst elicits clearly sits within an imperial lens, as Spurr discusses the way that repulsion, fear but also admiration are all feelings associated with the Other in imperial texts.¹⁶⁸ In this way, Probst can be identified as an archetype within imperial tropes. He is the embodiment of the colonial lens of *Survivor* as established within this thesis. As has been previously mentioned, Probst opens each season, as the opening sequences typically begin with an extreme close up on him and then pull out to reveal that he was standing on a volcano or a mountain peak. While these scenes are carefully crafted, as has been revealed in behind the scenes videos, where a helicopter and safety advisor is waiting just out of view, these shots are created to position Probst as the only human, elevated at the height of the island, overseeing all.¹⁶⁹ This asserts his position as the omnipotent colonial figure, as he wields control as a producer and also represents the colonial protagonist that reflects the production teams’ imperial ideology. Furthermore, Patkin argues that Probst represents the audience.¹⁷⁰ This implicates the audience in the masculine, imperial gaze of *Survivor*. This is consistent with the dichotomy

¹⁶⁷ “They Came At Us With Spears,” *Survivor: Vanuatu*, Produced by Maria Baltazzi, CBS, 2004.

¹⁶⁸ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 77, 170.

¹⁶⁹ “Survivor Caramoan Season 26 – The Open,” YouTube Video, Posted by “TheFricky19,” 6 March 2013, Last Accessed 9 October 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3DRZzIxCSA>.

¹⁷⁰ Patkin, “Individual and Cultural Identity in the World of Reality Television,” 23.

Marcus identifies within reality TV, which is that viewers often watch from a lens of demonising the contestants but supporting the cultural processes of the show.¹⁷¹ This highlights that while audiences watch from a viewing lens of exaggerated judgement, as Marcus argues, they are not meant to turn on the structure of the show itself.¹⁷² In this way Probst represents the point of contact for the transfer of dominant ideology between the production and the viewing audience. The nature of this dominant ideology will be explored in the following chapter.

A significance can be drawn from the fact that a reality TV show, that is the product of an industry that is culturally imperialistic, constructs a narrative that uses an imperial framework that is informed by a rhetoric of US centrality, but subsequently presents this centrality through techniques of naturalisation. This suggest a rhetoric of innocence, that is used to naturalise both the colonial practices of the West in the past, and the imperial practices of the US in the present, as has been shown through an analysis of *Survivor* as an anti-conquest narrative. This allows for the production of *Survivor* seasons to continue without an interrogation of the series' interaction with the countries it visits within the Pacific. This thesis will next account for this tendency to naturalise the myth of US centrality, in the subsequent contextualisation of *Survivor: Philippines*.

¹⁷¹ Marcus, "From Participatory Video to Reality TV," 147

¹⁷² Marcus, "From Participatory Video to Reality TV," 147.

Chapter III: The Erasure of US Empire and *Survivor: Philippines*

Thus far, this analysis of *Survivor* has asserted that the series employs a colonial lens that co-opts the techniques of European colonial texts, and adopts the dichotomy of mainland centrality and island periphery in its construction of island spaces. As a result, *Survivor* creates a desert island representational space that reflects the rhetoric of US centrality and hegemony (that is uninterrogated). This is emphasised by *Survivor*'s adherence to the structure of the anti-conquest narrative, which naturalises the presence of Americans within the Pacific region. The ideology of the US as a naturalised centre of global power is inconsistent with the imperial framework of US hegemony and the historical record of their imperial actions. However, this chapter will argue that this ideology is pervasive and linked to the hegemonic denial of US empire.

This will be evidenced through an analysis of *Survivor: Philippines*' exclusion of the historical narrative of US colonial invasion of the country, as well the patriotic lens applied to the military presence when it is included throughout the series. The paradox of US hegemonic denial of Empire, despite their imperial history and character will be demonstrated, as the mythology of naturalised power will be linked to US anxieties about empire. To first contextualise the way the US military presence in the Philippines, and the Pacific at large, and to provide an example of the way it has been depicted in film. The history of the US' interaction with the Philippines justifies the characterisation of the US as historically having a colonial empire, as Welch Jr.

writes, “The Philippine- American War was a colonial war.”¹⁷³ As in 1898 colonial control was assumed over the Philippines by the US, after the Spanish – American war. Scholarly accounts such as Miller describe the actions of President McKinley as a “reluctant imperialist,” and had initially felt that only a port should be acquired.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the Philippine-American War followed in 1899-1902, as the US where the US fought to maintain the colonial control over the Philippines, in a battle that was mythologised as quelling an “insurrection.”¹⁷⁵

In films situated within hegemonic ideology, the portrayal of US military within the Pacific, utilises the desert island aesthetic and its ideology. For example, *Kingdom of the Sea: Atomic Island*, is a 1957 American documentary that describes the process of atomic weapon testing in the Bikini Atoll, in the Marshall Islands. The film opens with the statement “These are the South Sea islands, these are those beautiful islands we read about in books,” which similarly to *Survivor* signals that the space being presented, is presented within an imperial framework.¹⁷⁶ The film does not shy away from acknowledging the destruction caused by the US to this region through the nuclear testing, and it even depicts the moment in 1946 when there was the “unpleasant task” of telling the local Polynesian inhabitants that they had to leave the Bikini area or risk destruction. However, the film upholds a rhetoric of benevolence as *Survivor* does, as the testing is presented with admiration and as a divinely justified endeavour. The film refers to the notion that everything done was a plan, as if part of a God ordained Manifest Destiny for the US, as the atomic scientists are characterised as “divinely inspired...seeking Utopia.” In this way, the

¹⁷³Richard E. Welch Jr., *Response to Imperialism*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979): Xiii.

¹⁷⁴ Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*, 14.

¹⁷⁵ Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*, 266.

¹⁷⁶ *Kingdom of the Sea: Atomic Island*, Directed by Ed Leftwich. (Emperor Productions, 1957) Video Cassette, Accessed at University of California Film and Television Archive: VA11638.

rhetoric of American centrality that has been discussed in this chapter, is extended further to make the American scientists and their actions in the Pacific in the image of gods themselves.

Therefore, the destruction of the nuclear tests is justified through the rhetoric of benevolent utility as the scientist, “looks ahead, hoping he will be able to create Utopia [and]...bring about peace and the brotherhood of man...across all Earth.” This documentary explicitly articulates the theme of Manifest destiny that *Survivor* draws on, while neutralising the violence of the act of nuclear weapons testing. This is most apparent when a bomb is shown detonating. The explosion of light it emits, is referred to as a “man-made sunrise.” Furthermore, the documentary features military personnel as well, and shows them swimming and enjoying leisure time, as lively music and jovial narration accompany the scene. Despite the half a century separating it and the creation of *Survivor*, the aesthetic and rhetoric similarities abound, and this chapter will make the argument that *Survivor* contains the same rhetoric of military benevolence. Elizabeth M. Deloughrey argues that the myth of a “geographical and biological isolate” created the conditions that enabled these island tests conducted.¹⁷⁷ This myth of islands being peripheral places of isolation outlined is well documented in island scholarship, as this thesis has outlined, and is also intrinsic to the way *Survivor* characterises island spaces, as a clear link between American ideology and *Survivor* can be identified.

Furthermore, Deloughrey references the use of wide establishing aerial shots in films such as *Kingdom of the Sea* that were created to sell the atomic-age to Americans, and presents it as a trope that is the combination of military strategy, colonial mapping processes, and post-war

¹⁷⁷ Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, “The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific,” *Cultural Geographies*, 20.2 (2012): 168.

ordering of global power structures.¹⁷⁸ This extends the scope of the Monarch-Of-All-I-Survey trope termed by Pratt that has been evidenced as prevalent in *Survivor*.¹⁷⁹ By connecting this trope to military rhetoric, and bringing it into a twentieth century context, this emphasises the way that the desert island trope of *Survivor*, is also informed by the military history of the US in the Pacific. DeLoughrey additionally positions the nuclear testing period in dialogue with the long-standing trend of Western colonisers viewing islands as laboratories.¹⁸⁰ In this way, the aesthetic and ideological parallels between *Kingdom of the Sea* and *Survivor* emphasises the way the Pacific landscapes that *Survivor* presents as idyllic are charged with a history of forgotten violence. In addition, it strengthens the argument that the series can be viewed within a chronology of American imperial ideology and visual style. This forgotten violence can be connected to Greg Denning arguments regarding the silence of the beach, arguing that “Silence, is the active presence of absent things.”¹⁸¹ In *Survivor* this space is occupied by the rhetoric of American entitlement and benevolence, but the shadow of US military aggression in the region lingers, as will be demonstrated in this chapter.

This argument will be constructed with the understanding that the US is an empire, and that the colonial annexation of the Philippines by the US, and the actions of the Philippine-American war is an example of US military aggression in the Pacific. These are positions that are supported by scholarship but are topics of contestation. To first justify the assertion of the US empire, Said has argued that imperialism is the way that empire is maintained, and that empire can be both formal and informal, and range from political sovereignty to cultural dependence.¹⁸² This is supported

¹⁷⁸ DeLoughrey, “The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific,” 173

¹⁷⁹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 201.

¹⁸⁰ DeLoughrey, “The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific,” 172.

¹⁸¹ Dennings “Writing, Rewriting the Beach: An Essay,” 146.

¹⁸² Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 8.

by Fojas' understanding of the US' empire as existing as a changing but enduring entity across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Fojas characterises the US' empire as one of "military prowess, colonial acquisition and political benevolence" at the time of the US takeover of the Philippines, and one that is contemporarily maintained predominately through popular culture and the global economy, constituting a form of cultural dependence and informal empire to which Said referred.¹⁸³ Fojas' view of US empire is helpful in the way that it does not completely separate the two forms of empire that Said identifies from each other. Furthermore, Fojas emphasises the way both colonial and cultural empires co-exist within a chronology of US imperial activity, which has shifted its focus from possession to influence.¹⁸⁴ This model is particularly useful for *Survivor* because this thesis focuses on the way the series is a continuation of earlier forms of colonial imperialism, while the show itself exists as cultural imperialism. Additionally, Fojas uses the term "imperial entertainment" to refer to the way that the rise of cinema coincided with US military expansion at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁸⁵ This term can be adapted in application to *Survivor* as it engages thematically with the history of its formal empire while as a reality TV show exists as a participant in the US' informal empire. Furthermore, reality TV as a whole is a prime medium to understand the way the US empire has changed but maintained over the twentieth century. As McMurria argues, reality television connects US military aggression to commercialisation, and embodies the capitalistic and exploitative aspects of the global economy, which is where McMurria locates US imperialism.¹⁸⁶ Lefebvre describes the process of capitalism occupying contemporary global space through such

¹⁸³ Camilla Fojas, *Islands of Empire: Pop Culture and U.S. Power*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014): 3 & 4.

¹⁸⁴ Fojas, *Islands of Empire*, 26.

¹⁸⁵ Fojas, *Islands of Empire*, 3.

¹⁸⁶ John McMurria, "Global TV Realities: International Markets, Geopolitics, and the Transcultural Contexts of Reality TV," In *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, edited by Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, 179-203, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009): 196.

systems of the global economy, as the process of the space being “colonised.”¹⁸⁷ Therefore, there is a link between how *Survivor* operates as a cultural product and a representational space, and the colonial vocabulary Lefebvre uses to describe processes of cultural imperialism, signals the way these scholars consider empire as a varied continuum that the US sits within.

Despite this, and in favour of the narrative of naturalised centrality, the existence of an American empire is often ignored or rejected by scholars and within discourses of cultural hegemony. Ferguson articulates that the US does not like the idea of Empire because they would rather “consume than conquer.”¹⁸⁸ The notion of consuming rather than conquering reflects the discursive work of the anti-conquest narrative, and signals the way the narrative of *Survivor* is aligned with anti-empire sentiment. As William states, “Most historians will admit...that the US once had an empire. Then they promptly insist that it was given away.”¹⁸⁹ This shows an evolution in the attitudes towards empire, but a rejection of acknowledging cultural imperialism as an extended form of US empire, as Kaplan argues, from World War II, the US defined itself as a world power in contrast to the regimes of the Nazis and the Soviet Union that were perceived as imperialist “evil empires.”¹⁹⁰ McAlister argues that during the period preceding World War II, the US framed itself in opposition to imperialism by supporting anticolonial movements in the Middle East by conducting military operations that were deemed to be shows of “benevolent supremacy.”¹⁹¹ Furthermore, the way US rhetoric engages in anti-empire thought is paradoxical. As the internalised belief that the US has the natural right to expand, as informed by Manifest Destiny, causes Americans to believe that they don’t have an empire to begin with,

¹⁸⁷ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 125.

¹⁸⁸ Niall Ferguson in Fojas, *Islands of Empire*, 12.

¹⁸⁹ William Appleman Williams Kaplan, “Left Alone with America,” 3.

¹⁹⁰ Kaplan, “Left Alone with America,” 12.

¹⁹¹ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 40.

as Said argues.¹⁹² However, this mythology is employed to refute the existence of the empire they possess. This rhetoric is reflected in *Survivor* through the tension that exists between the shows adoption of colonial tropes, and the techniques of naturalisation discussed above which render the colonial themes present but unacknowledged.

Evidencing the perspective of this scholarship within American ideology, the Philippines is a site of US denial of empire and the rhetoric of military benevolence. Brody argues that it was the possession of the Philippines that marked a shift in the way the US viewed the Pacific, as it became viewed as a place that could be controlled as an empire, as opposed to existing as Oriental Fantasy.¹⁹³ In support of this argument, the events of history clearly reveals that the US has took deliberate military steps to acquire territory from the Spanish and the from the Filipinos themselves, qualifying them as an empire. However, the history of the US involvement in the Philippines is regarded by traditional scholarship and cultural memory with a guise of innocence. The colonial annexation of the Philippines is considered an act of US benevolence, and as mentioned the Philippine-American war is justified as necessary to quell, what scholarship that perpetuates this myth, terms was an insurrection.¹⁹⁴ While Brody argues that the potential for empire in the Pacific was known by the US, publicly a different narrative was constructed. The decision to annexe the Philippines was won by one vote, and Stratford argues that the decision was won by the argument to use Manila's location to further realise the US' Manifest Destiny, as part of the nations "geographical imaginary."¹⁹⁵ By invoking this mythology, it supports the introductory assertion that the US' global self-perception has a longstanding affinity with the

¹⁹² Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 7.

¹⁹³ Brody, *Visualising American Empire*, 59.

¹⁹⁴ Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*, 266.

¹⁹⁵ Elaine Stratford, "Imagining the Archipelago," In *Archipelagic American Studies*, edited by Brain Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, 74-94, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017): 82.

concept of Manifest Destiny, and also reveals the way that even at a policy level rhetoric was excusing the US' military actions, and distancing itself from the term empire. Additionally, use of the term "geographical imaginary" creates a parallel between the way the US has approached spaces militarily and through culture, as it has been asserted that *Survivor* depicts islands as imaginary sites.

In regard to the Philippine-American war, the position of the US as the aggressor, and the events of military violence are omitted from perspectives of history that align with the rhetoric of US benevolence and innocence. Kramer observes that the war has been "obliterated in [national] memory," and argues that the narrative of benevolence that was associated with the Philippines was not due to long-held American values but because of the critique that arose in the media about US brutality during the conflict.¹⁹⁶ This rewriting of history with a guise of innocence began at the time. As Senator Albert Beveridge, in a 1900 speech to the Senate, that clearly employs the centre v. periphery imperial framework, that "It has been charged that our conduct of the war has been cruel, it has been the reverse....Senators must remember we are not dealing with Americans of Europeans. We are dealing with Orientals."¹⁹⁷ This is supported by Miller who argues that the war is a site of political shame, and therefore a sense of amnesia covers the war.¹⁹⁸ While a viable argument, considering the evidence of the way US colonial takeover of the Philippines was mediated through a rhetorical lens of as Manifest Destiny, it can be argued that longstanding values of American ideology are also part of this historical amnesia. This mythology underwrites the US' military aggression in the Pacific and this contributes to the

¹⁹⁶ Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 32.

¹⁹⁷ Joshua Polster, *Stages of Engagement: U.S Theatre and Performance 1898-1949*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016): 30.

¹⁹⁸ Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*, 253.

perspective that denies US empire, as the actions that oppose a myth of a naturalised presence are suppressed.

The myth of military benevolence is reflected in the US' colonial architecture in the Philippines. McKenna's text *American Imperial Pastoral* argues that the way the US constructed the city of Baguio, which was deemed a "government reservation," is evidence of benevolent assimilation in practice.¹⁹⁹ Further, McKenna argues that in Baguio's literal "architecture of imperialism" was created within the ideological image of imperialist literature.²⁰⁰ This signifies an intersection between constructs of the US during colonisation, and the constructs of *Survivor*, as both are informed by the same history of Western imperial rhetoric. McKenna identifies the way the US constructed an "anti-colonial empire."²⁰¹ The visual creation of an "imperial pastoral" aesthetic is what McKenna focuses on, as she argued that Americans desired to develop the Philippines within the image of a garden escape, in connection to the metaphor of romance associated with the countryside in the American imagination, in order to naturalise their presence in the Philippines.²⁰² This rhetoric is reflected in *New Horizons: The Philippines* as Baguio is described as a "fascinating side trip," creating a distance between it and its military origins during US colonial administration.²⁰³ This reveals an irony, as through imperial construction, the US has tried to erase the presence of imperial action. This is similar to the way *Survivor*'s desert island aesthetic, that is used as the canvas for its colonial narration, is also the rhetorical backdrop for an unchallenged, naturalised American presence in the Philippines and an erasure of the region's

¹⁹⁹ Rebecca Tinio McKenna, *American Imperial Pastoral*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017): 6.

²⁰⁰ McKenna, *American Imperial Pastoral*, 3.

²⁰¹ McKenna, *American Imperial Pastoral*, 16.

²⁰² McKenna, *American Imperial Pastoral*, 12 & 15.

²⁰³ *New Horizons: The Philippines*, Directed by Harry Coleman. (Pan American World Airways, 1960). Video Cassette. Accessed at University of California Film and Television Archive: VA14520.

history. The connection between the ideological construction of the US' colonial takeover of the Philippines, and the creation of the island setting in *Survivor*, demonstrates a link between the constructs of the US' formal empire and cultural empire. This highlights how both forms engage in a narrative of cultural hegemony that has spanned US history, and been linked to a denial of empire.

Survivor participates in this narrative of benevolence, however, through both the inclusion and exclusion of military history and presence across the seasons. This is not surprising considering the narrative of "benevolent partnership" has defined the "New World Order" that was President George H. W Bush's veiled imperialism in the Middle East.²⁰⁴ Overall the series adheres to the rhetoric of US military benevolence in the Pacific and the world more broadly and resists viewing the US as an active agent of aggression. Beginning with the moments of inclusion, there are three ways that *Survivor* inserts a military presence into the seasons. The first is by referencing military history as a contextual backdrop, the second is the way challenges take on a military theme, and the third is the character archetype of the veteran.

A season that clearly juxtaposes with *Survivor: Philippines* due to the way it is explicitly contextualised within local military history is *Survivor: Palau*. During the *Survivor: Vanuatu* reunion show, a teaser for *Palau* was aired, which established the Western Pacific island nation as "A place that some have called the 8th natural wonder of the world," with little trace of human existence, beyond the wreckages that exist there from the world wars.²⁰⁵ In 1944, Peleliu, an island within Palau that was being used as a transit base by the Japanese military, the US military invaded the island and took it from Japan, as the local Palaun residents were forced to evacuate

²⁰⁴ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 2.

²⁰⁵ "Survivor: Vanuatu Reunion," *Survivor: Vanuatu*, Produced by Tom Boles, CBS, 2004.

and not return until 1946.²⁰⁶ Consistent with the desert island aesthetic, the emphasis on nature and the erasure of local people and culture is indicative of the series' imperial vision. However, the integration of military history into this promotion shows that the representational space of the island does not have to be completely separated from historical context in order to create the rhetorical desert island space. This paradoxical combination of historical acknowledgment and erasure of contemporary occupation are combined in the intro sequence of *Survivor: Palau* as Probst declares, "This paradise has an infamous history" as Palau embodies "man's explosive past, and nature's power to reclaim."²⁰⁷ This history gets absorbed into the generalised narrative of appropriation and pastiche that the series' props serve. For example, rusted weapons line the walk way that leads up to Tribal Council. Furthermore, tree mail, the correspondence that the contestants receive from the producers informing them of the day's events, arrives in episode two in a military tin and instructs the contestants that they have to learn Morse code for the day's challenge.²⁰⁸ Significant to the deployment of US rhetoric of innocence, the violence of war are never directly recreated or alluded to, and such references to history rarely reach specificity.

This segues into the way that the contestants participate in military-themed challenges that take the form of re-enactments and drills. These challenges often occur at a location that Probst identifies as significant to the region's military history, and require the contestants to participate with this historical context through a challenge set that has been constructed to resemble a military set up. For example, in *Survivor: Borneo* the episode six reward challenge is set in an area identified as a World War II "hotspot," and the contestants must navigate themselves

²⁰⁶ Stephen C. Murrery, *The Battle over Peleliu: Islander, Japanese, and American Memories of War*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2016): 73.

²⁰⁷"This Has Never Happened Before," *Survivor: Palau*, Produced by Kate Adler, CBS, 2005.

²⁰⁸"Love is in the Air, Rats Are Everywhere," *Survivor: Palau*, Produced by Kate Adler, CBS, 2005.

through a deserted army bunker with torches or find military paraphernalia such as helmets and knives, to claim the reward of canned goods.²⁰⁹ However, again, it is notable that the specifics of the military activity of this region is never elaborated on beyond a general mention of a war. This reveals the way the military history is invoked only to activate the sense patriotism for the US military. This is reflected in the way that the American contestants become pseudo-soldiers as they participate in these challenges. This role is extended in episode six of *Survivor: Borneo* in the Immunity Challenge. US Special Force Officers arrive at the beach to deliver instructions for the challenge, which requires the contestants to navigate obstacles course made from bamboo poles, as soldiers dressed in khaki run alongside them. Similar to the use of bamboo rafts during the contestant marooning in order to naturalise the colonial narrative amongst the landscape, the idea of making a military obstacle course on the islands using materials found on the island naturalises their presence. As the special force officers assist the contestants they embody a benign resourcefulness, and their presence is regarded with a great sense of patriotism.

Instances such as these that non-violently signal US military presence uphold a narrative of heroism and benevolence, that is not just connected to historical context, but invokes a contemporary sense of patriotism for US forces. This is emphasised by the character archetype of the veteran. While not all contestants are prominently identified by their occupations, veterans are constantly identified as such. For example, Caleb Reynolds from *Survivor: Kaoh Rong*, and *Survivor: Games Changers* is an Iraq veteran, as is frequently referenced within the show and during *Survivor: Game Changers* he wore a cap that had “Iraqi Freedom Veteran” embroidered on it. Furthermore, in the season currently airing *Survivor: Heroes, Healers and Hustlers*, the tribes are tenuously divided based on how society perceives them. In the pre-season cast

²⁰⁹“Udder Revenge,” *Survivor: Borneo*, Produced by Maria Baltazzi and Jay Bienstock, CBS, 2000.

assessment, Jeff Probst discusses contestant Ben Driebergen who is a US marine and on the hero tribe. “Ben is the personification of a hero. He protected the United States at war,” Probst remarks.²¹⁰ This shows the patriotic lens that the show actively positions contestants within. Evidence shows that viewers engage with this lens as well, as the first veteran contestant, Rudy Boesch, a Navy Seal, garnered audience favour, and at the reunion of *Survivor: Borneo* it was revealed that 45% of polled viewers would have voted for him to win.²¹¹ As the veterans are involved in the naturalisation process of the contestants that was described in chapter two, their presence on the island both echoes the history of the US’ formal empire within the Pacific, while replacing military violence with a rhetoric of peaceful patriotism.

Considering the presence of military themes and personnel within different seasons, the absence of a military presence in *Survivor: Philippines* is notable considering the history between the two nations. Overall, the season adheres to the desert island aesthetic that overarches the series. To return once again to the opening sequence of *Survivor: Philippines*, Probst’s narration makes clear that the island nation is contextualised only as a remote place, characterised by its animals and ferocious weather cycles.²¹² The duality of Palau’s identification as a place of exoticism and World War II history, is absent in *Survivor*’s characterisation of the Philippines, and the region is given no specificity as a nation. This allows *Survivor* to rewrite the moment of the US’ colonial contact with the location within the schema of their pseudo colonial history. This occurs in episode nine, when three contestants visit a village to deliver school supplies, acting as “Survivor

²¹⁰“Survivor: Heroes, Healers & Hustlers – Jeff Probst’s Cataway Assessment,” Youtube Video, Posted by “Idol Thoughts,” 13 September 2017, Last Accessed 10 October 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mX6FfZq62Pg>.

²¹¹“Survivor: The Reunion,” *Survivor: Borneo*, Produced by Maria Baltazzi and Jay Bienstock, CBS, 2000.

²¹²“Survivor Smacked Me in the Chops,” *Survivor: Philippines*, 2012.

ambassadors.”²¹³ On arriving at the village they are greeted by local children. One contestant identifies the village in a confessional as a “lovely native village,” and another remarks that “it seems to be the happiest community I’ve ever walked into,” which reiterates the trope of the carefree local “native.”²¹⁴ This positions the scene within the mode of benevolent first contact of the anti-conquest narrative that *Survivor* is. When this scene, and the season as a whole, is watched with a knowledge of the historical realities of the US’ history with the Philippines, the historical omissions that are made, seems as apparent as the rhetorical inclusions that are made. These exclusions serve the same ideological purpose as the military and historical inclusions in other seasons, which is to maintain a myth of American centrality and benevolence. This introduces a further dimension to the desert island trope to be considered, as it reveals that it creates a new malleable frontier for the production team to colonise with the contestants, and for viewers to colonise with their consumption of the series. This directly masks the historical reality of violence that has occurred in the Philippines and the Pacific region at large, and is indicative of the US disavowal of empire. Paradoxically, *Survivor*’s lack of explicit acknowledgement of its existence as an empire uncovers a national anxiety about the loss of this empire. This is asserted by Weaver-Hightower, who argues that the main fear present in *Survivor* is not losing oneself to the island, as was the case in early colonial literature, but the fear of losing centrality.²¹⁵ Therefore, the mythology of cultural hegemony decrees that US power is innately granted, rather than gained through calculated military decisions.

²¹³“Little Miss Perfect,” *Survivor Philippines*, Produced by David Dryden, CBS, 2012.

²¹⁴“Little Miss Perfect,” *Survivor Philippines*, 2012.

²¹⁵ As the worst thing that can happen to the contestants is that they be exiled from the activity of the game.

Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands*, 217.

Conclusion: Locating US Ideology Through *Survivor*

Reality TV exists as a reflection of the dominant cultural values of the society it represents, thus this thesis has investigated *Survivor*'s construction of the island setting and its relation to US ideology.²¹⁶ It has been argued in this work that *Survivor* depicts a desert island aesthetic in engagement with an imperial framework that is used to reinforce US centrality. This argument has focused on the way this framework relates to a contemporary American context, but been connected to the imperial framework present in European colonial literature that is also observed in American film and TV history. *Survivor*'s employment of this imperial framework has been argued as paradoxical; as the series communicates an ideology of naturalised US power that draws on foundational American concepts such as Manifest Destiny, in conjunction with anti-conquest narrative tropes, in order to render its imperial history invisible. The case study of *Survivor: Philippines* highlighted the paradox of imperial invisibility, and argued that it is ideologically intertwined with *Survivor*'s imperial aesthetic, and linked to the denial of empire in hegemonic ideology.

Throughout this analysis, the exploration of the association between island spaces in the US imaginary and the imperial framework of mainland centrality v. island periphery has been integral. This demonstrates how pervasive imperial ideology is in the US, despite being suppressed by naturalised mythology that is more preferably invoked. In scholarship there is a call for a reorientation of discourse away from the influence of these mythologies, through challenging the continental bias of scholarship and dismantling the centre v. periphery

²¹⁶Jefferson-James, "Selective Reuptake: Perpetuating Misleading Cultural Identities in the Reality TV World," 31.

Patkin, "Individual and Cultural Identity in the World of Reality Television," 17.

Fiske in Bell-Jordan, "Black. White. And a Survivor of The Real World," 3.

Marcus, "From Participatory Video to Reality TV," 141.

dynamic.²¹⁷ This thesis has located and explored the disconnect between imagined spaces of US mythology and geographical and historical realities of the world and the US' relation to it. In this way, *Survivor* provides textual support for the case in favour of reorienting discourse regarding islands, US empire and imperialism.

In summary, *Survivor* creates a representational island space that asserts the myth of American centrality through anachronistic and problematic portrayals of the countries it films within.

Therefore, *Survivor* both signals, and reinforces the prevalence of myth in the way Americans perceive themselves globally. Ultimately, the myth of universal centrality that the US purports can no longer easily exist unquestioned, as argued by Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, due to the globalised nature of the twenty-first century.²¹⁸ However, the myth that the US has a naturalised position of power in the world through the ordinance of Manifest Destiny has not been dismantled despite this strain places on it. As ironically, to forfeit this empire-denying mythology, and acknowledge the US' empire within cultural hegemony, would force Americans to admit that their global position is not inherent or natural. The possibility of losing this empire would have to become a consideration of American ideology, and the loss of centrality that would accompany this is what Weaver-Hightower argues that the US fears the most.²¹⁹ The trope of naturalisation that *Survivor* heavily employs eases these fears. *Survivor's* host, Jeff Probst, represents the production forces of mainstream American media who perpetuate structures of American cultural hegemony. At the end of each episode, Jeff Probst snuffs the torch of the eliminated contestant and tells them that, "The tribe has spoken." This thesis makes clear that it

²¹⁷ Baldacchino, "Introducing a World of Islands," 17.

Roberts and Stephens, "Archipelagic American Studies" 17.

²¹⁸ Ashcroft and Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 12.

²¹⁹ Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands: Castaways, Cannibals and Fantasies of Conquest*, 217.

is the mythology of US hegemony that is really speaking in *Survivor*; ensuring that the myth of US naturalised centrality is not risked, but upheld explicitly.

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