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defining tradition: variations on the Hawaiian identity

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In this paper I argue that tradition is a conscious model of past lifeways that people use in the construction of their identity. The inheritance of an authentic tradition and the naïveté of the folk are illusory. The use of a defining tradition exemplifies the objectification (Cohn 1980:217) and the invention (Wagner 1975) of a symbolic construct. As a self-conscious category, tradition is inevitably “invented.” Neither nationalists nor rural “folk,” of course, “invent” tradition out of whole cloth; rather, they constantly imbue it with dynamic content and interpretation (Wagner 1975:8–9). Tradition is not a coherent body of customs, lying “out there” to be discovered, but an a priori model that shapes individual and group experience and is, in turn, shaped by it. Tradition thus shares with other cultural categories the “intrinsic double aspect” that Geertz (1966:8) identifies: a quality of reflexivity, of continual self-modification or “dialectical invention” (Wagner 1975:79).¹

A shared cultural heritage is a basic ingredient in both objective and subjective definitions of ethnicity (Barth 1969:13; Cohen 1978:385). But the selection of what constitutes tradition is always made in the present; the content of the past is modified and redefined according to a modern significance (Eisenstadt 1973:23). In nationalist movements, tradition becomes a rallying cry and a political symbol. Cultural revivalists search for an authentic heritage as the basis for ethnic distinctiveness; as they rediscover a culture they also create it. Both Linton (1943:231) and Wallace (1956) emphasized the characteristics of selection and “deliberate conscious effort” in the construction of nativistic cultural models. As Linton (1943:231) wrote, “What really happens in all nativistic movements is that certain current or remembered elements of a culture are selected for emphasis and given symbolic value.”

I examine the present state of Hawaiian tradition in two seemingly disparate manifestations: the somewhat eclectic version espoused by the essentially urban-based native Hawaiian cultural revival and the presumably “more authentic” lifestyle of native Hawaiians in a rural taro-growing community. The former variant is a more obvious exam-

Both anthropologists and ethnic nationalists use the concept of tradition to define a cultural identity. While both view the rural community as representative of an authentic inheritance, the attempts by nationalists to discover this heritage usually produce cultural creations. The Hawaiian cultural revival advances an eclectic version of tradition, modeled partly on the lifestyle of rural Hawaiians. This paper argues that tradition is inevitably invented because it enters into the construction of social identity. Even for the rural “folk,” tradition is self-conscious and changing. [tradition, ethnicity, nationalism, symbolic anthropology, Polynesia, Hawaii]

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ple of invention, of a tradition molded and reformulated according to the demands of ethnic politics. But the culture of the "people on the land" is not necessarily pristine and unselfconscious. Country dwellers, too, are aware of the significance of their heritage. They also construe their identity in terms of a conscious and continuously redefined model of tradition.

"traditional" Hawaii

Tradition includes elements from the past, but this "past" is equivocal: it does not correspond to the experience of any particular generation. For Hawaii, "traditional" properly refers to the precontact era, before Cook's arrival in 1778. Yet our best descriptions of the aboriginal society come from 19th-century Hawaiians, writing after 50 years of visitation by foreign sailors, merchants, missionaries, ambassadors, and military advisors. Native writers, converts to Christianity, felt obliged to denigrate many of their ancient practices as examples of heathenism. The journalist Kamakau (1961, 1964, 1976) described the lifeways of "the people of old" in the Hawaiian newspaper *Ku'oko'a*² between 1866 and 1871, 50 years after Hawaiians had overthrown their aboriginal religion in the so-called cultural revolution of 1819. Handy and Pukui's (1972) reconstruction of traditional Hawaiian society is based on material gathered from elderly informants in the remote district of Kau, on the island of Hawaii. This evidence reflects the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as the informants' own interpretations of past lifeways.

Tradition is fluid; its content is redefined by each generation and its timelessness may be situationally constructed. From an informant's point of view, "traditional" may mean times long past or what one's mother did. Many modern Hawaiians believe that isolated rural villages exemplify the traditional way of life. But the present and the past, space and time, are collapsed in this perception. An old Hawaiian woman once told me that the ancients grew pineapples in the uplands of Maui, a statement that can be interpreted as ignorance of history in the Western sense or as a presumption that what exists today at some distance is what was in the past. Ethnographers share this premise when they look to remote locales for insight into "authentic" aboriginal culture (Cohn 1980:203-204; Handy and Pukui 1972).

For another example, modern Hawaiians embrace "slack-key" guitar and ukelele playing as a quintessential Hawaiian activity, an indispensable accompaniment to every party and luau feast, just as *lomi lomi*³ salmon is a requisite dish for a "genuine" Hawaiian celebration. "Slack-key" is an adaptation of introduced musical styles, and the ukelele is attributed to late-19th-century Portuguese immigrants (Emerson 1909:251). "*Lomi*" salmon is made from the red flesh of the imported salmon, massaged between the fingers and mixed with tomatoes, green onions, and crushed ice; both vegetables are foreign introductions, and the use of ice is relatively recent. *Lomi* salmon and the luau are, however, historically related to precontact practices. Kamakau's descriptions of pre-Christian rituals reveal that one of the conventional offerings to the gods was the *kumu*, a red fish. Other dishes on the modern luau menu, such as *kālua* pig, roasted in an underground oven, and *kūlolo*, a taro-coconut pudding, were also standard ceremonial offerings in the Hawaiian religion. In aboriginal society, red was a high color, and these were ritually high foods (Kamakau 1964:13, 96-98; Malo 1951:87-88, 151-153, 157-158). But these historical correspondences are generations removed from the contemporary model of Hawaiian tradition held by nationalists or rural villagers. The historical lineage of customs may be significant to academics, but it is often irrelevant to the meaning of tradition in the present. Neither

ukelele playing nor preparing *lomi* salmon is an aboriginal practice, but today both are regarded as very traditional and definitively Hawaiian.

In the estimation of Hawaiians, as well as other islanders, the traditional Hawaiian lifestyle is represented by small rural communities that survive on Maui, on Niihau, in eastern Molokai, and in Kona on the island of Hawaii. There are a handful of such settlements remaining in remote areas of the islands. The residents are descended from the *maka'āinana* (the common people); they identify themselves as farmers and fishers, and as *kama'āina* (old-timers, "children of the land").

From 1974 to 1975, I did fieldwork in the village of Keanae, on the island of Maui, where Hawaiians still grow taro on land inherited from their ancestors. Keanae is unique in the islands because of the time depth of the present population. In 1957 the village was designated the "most Hawaiian community in the Islands" (Lueras 1975). Unlike other Hawaiian communities described in the literature (Gallimore and Howard 1968; Howard 1974), Keanae is an ancient settlement area and one of the few places where Hawaiians have retained ownership of their lands. Actually, almost no one in Keanae survives solely on traditional subsistence activities. Male householders have full-time salaried jobs and grow taro for the market. Rice has supplanted poi (made from boiled taro corms, ground or pounded into a paste and mixed with water) as the most commonly served staple. Elderly residents depend on pensions, social security, or public assistance. But for Hawaiians, Keanae represents life "in the old style," as much as that lifestyle exists anywhere in the islands today (for a more detailed discussion of Keanae's relationship to the past, see Linnekin 1980).

Villagers use the terms "inside" and "outside" to express the dichotomy between life in the rural heartland and the foreign world of towns and cities where most Hawaiians live today. Keanae lies on the windward coast of Maui, about a two-hour drive over a narrow, bumpy road from the nearest sizable town. When you go toward Keanae, you are going inside; when you go toward the town of Kahului, you are going outside. Hana, an old Hawaiian community at the far eastern end of Maui, is "all the way inside." Inside and outside are also metaphors for contrasting spheres of social relations. Outside is a world dominated by haoles (white people) and Orientals, a hot, dry world of canefields and tourist hotels. Inside is the domain of friends and "family," a cool, wet region where Hawaiians are still predominant. The land around Keanae, called "the country," is composed of a lush rain forest that was a considerable barrier to inward travel in former times. Today, the approximate boundary of the country is marked by the end of the improved highway from central Maui and a descent into the first of innumerable ravines that cut the windward side. For Hawaiians, the shade of that first gulch symbolizes a return to a close-knit set of relationships and an environment where Hawaiians naturally belong.

Long-time residents of Keanae consider themselves fortunate to have access to "fish and poi," the traditional staples, even though country life means hard work and relative isolation. Hawaiians living outside often express regret at their alienation from the way of life that Keanae symbolizes. Many say that they would live inside if they were not constrained by economic circumstances. Undoubtedly, such sentiments are partly an idealization of the past and the Hawaiian identity, but communities such as Keanae do represent an integral cultural identity. When Hawaiians come inside, they feel that they are returning to a world that has something "real Hawaiian" about it—and there is some truth to that estimation.

Although Keanae is culturally a native Hawaiian village, this autochthonous, traditional identity does not depend on a large proportion of Hawaiian ancestry. Historically, Hawaiians have a high rate of outmarriage, and only one Keanae family is reputed to be

“pure” Hawaiian. During the 19th century, many Chinese men married into Keanae families when they completed their terms of plantation labor. Most residents admit to being Chinese-Hawaiian, with occasional Filipino, Japanese, and haole admixtures. Keanae villagers customarily call almost anyone with part-Hawaiian ancestry “Hawaiian” if they are friends or kin, if they are country dwellers, or if they act Hawaiian. Some of the individuals who behave most Hawaiian are in fact *hapa-haole*, meaning “half-white.” They are accepted as Hawaiian because they are kinsmen or close friends and because they fulfill the Hawaiian expectations of those relationships. One such *hapa-haole* woman speaks Hawaiian more fluently and more often than villagers with a much greater share of Hawaiian ancestry. She is a master fisherwoman and a repository of Hawaiian folklore, always expressing proper awe for the guardian gods and the spirits of the dead. Most importantly, she actively engages in reciprocal social relations with Keanae people, exchanging favors, food, and visits. To the extent that this individual cultivates her Hawaiian identity, she exemplifies the imitation of tradition: a deliberate self-definition according to a model of Hawaiinness.

Keanae villagers have chosen a life that they recognize as traditional in some sense. The fact that they choose to live “in the old style” implies a model of what that “style” means. When villagers represent their lifestyle to outsiders, such as haole visitors, they speak of “fish and poi,” and they link their identity to the practice of exchange-in-kind: “In Keanae, you give, don’t sell.” Tradition is both lived and invented, as rural Hawaiians conform to their own and others’ expectations of what that tradition comprises. The people on the land have a model of Hawaiinness—but it is a changing model. For these country dwellers, tradition has become somewhat objectified by external criteria. Hawaiian children are taught their own culture in the form of “Hawaiiana” at Keanae School, where pageants regularly feature performances of chanting and the hula. One village woman has become a specialist in “traditional” arts, learned partly from family members and partly from elderly neighbors, and honed by attendance at “Hawaiiana” workshops in the city. Villagers wax sentimental over a life based on “fish and poi,” but in reality no one lives solely on subsistence goods.

nationalist symbols: voyaging canoes and the ‘Āina

Native Hawaiians perceive themselves, rather accurately, as the least powerful group in island society, both politically and economically. Compared to other island groups, Hawaiians are disproportionately represented on public assistance rolls and in juvenile courts (Howard 1974:x). An island aphorism states that the Japanese have the politics, the Chinese have the money, the haoles have the land, and the Hawaiians, in the words of a popular song (Magoon 1975), “get plenty not too much of nutting.” Whether it is because of their material success or because of their self-perception, Hawaii’s other ethnics have not mobilized into specifically nationalist movements. Royce (1982:48) notes that ethnic nationalism is often most successful “among indigenous groups who use their first-on-the-scene status as an ideological weapon as well as a claim to territory.” The political models for Hawaiian nationalism are not Hawaii’s other ethnic groups, but other colonized and dispossessed peoples: Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, Micronesians (see, e.g., Protect Kaho’olawe ‘Ohana 1981:17).

Hawaiian nationalism began as an urban movement, primarily attracting young part-Hawaiians who did not know the Hawaiian language and whose families were long separated from the land and rural Hawaiian lifestyle. As is common in nationalist movements, intellectuals (Eisenstadt 1972:18; Shils 1972:29–30) spearheaded the cause of

cultural renaissance and the awakening of Hawaiian ethnic consciousness. In the late 1960s, the University of Hawaii became the center for the resurgence of interest in Hawaiian culture. A Hawaiian studies program was started, and courses in the Hawaiian language and "Hawaiiana" became popular all over the islands. The category "Hawaiiana" comprises an interesting selection of performing arts: chanting, weaving feather leis, and dancing the hula are taught, rather than such quotidian skills as taro gardening, poi making, or fishing. The more militant arm of the cultural revival adopted the land (*āina*) as a focal symbol and demanded reparations—the return of land to native Hawaiians. Seeking to rediscover their culture, the nationalists modeled their notions of tradition partly on their ideas about the rural community and partly on early accounts of Hawaiian society—most of these written by foreigners. The resulting version of Hawaiian culture does not correspond to a specific time period. In the cultural revival, isolated facts have been transformed into symbols of Hawaiianness and accorded a significance without precedent in aboriginal Hawaiian society.

A well-publicized event in the Hawaiian cultural revival was the voyage of the double-hulled canoe *Hokule'a* from Hawaii to Tahiti in 1976. A National Geographic documentary and Ben Finney's (1979) recent account relate the project's difficulties. For Finney, the man who originally conceived the project, the *Hokule'a's* voyage was primarily an experiment designed to disprove the accidental-voyaging theory of Polynesian settlement. The goal was to sail a double canoe, authentically constructed and outfitted, over the traditional route between Hawaii and Tahiti, using no Western navigational aids. But this aim became overshadowed by the cause of cultural renaissance.

A series of ironies marked the canoe's construction and launching. The *Hokule'a's* designer, Herb Kane, is half-Hawaiian, but was reared and educated in the Midwest. He became a successful commercial artist for advertising firms in Chicago and only returned to Hawaii in 1972 (Finney 1979:21). Yet again, ethnicity has little to do with "facts" of parentage. Hawaiian nationalists quite consciously stress their part-Hawaiian ancestry over the Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and haole, even when the Hawaiian fraction is in the minority. Kane (1976:475) writes poetically of his "home valley of Waipio, on the island of Hawaii," thus linking himself to an important ancient settlement area and, like Keanae, a "traditional" place where taro is still grown. It was Kane who initially decided that the *Hokule'a's* journey was to be a mission of cultural revival for Hawaiians. Kane actively publicized the symbolic significance of the canoe and its voyage. In a magazine article addressed to young Hawaiians, he proclaims the *Hokule'a* to be "the spaceship of your ancestors." The voyaging canoe, he declares, is "the central artifact of Polynesian culture" (Finney 1979:29).

Arguments ensued over the authenticity of the *Hokule'a's* construction; the purists in the dispute were the haole academicians. The Hawaiian crewmen, although fiercely anti-haole, felt that modern improvements would not tarnish the canoe's significance for their cause. The *Hokule'a* was launched at a beach park not far from Honolulu, with an elaborate ceremony that attempted to recreate the Hawaiian canoe-launching ritual. The rites for this event had been carefully studied, and high-ranking anthropologists from the Bernice P. Bishop Museum were in attendance. A master chanter recited ancient verses appropriate to the occasion. The crew consumed a meal of ritual foods and threw the remainder into the sea as an offering. One of the participants wore a full-head gourd mask copied from engravings done by Englishman John Webber, the artist who sailed with Captain Cook in 1779 (Kane 1976:472). Such a mask was never described by any other observer and was apparently unique to the island of Hawaii. No native accounts tell of the mask's function or meaning. In Kane's article for *National Geographic*, Webber's engravings are shown beside photographs of young people paddling small outrigger canoes to portray this activity as a

link with the past; the search for tradition goes on in engravings from Captain Cook's voyages.

After the *Hokule'a's* first interisland cruise, another ceremony took place, including Hawaiian prayers and a *kava* ceremony modeled on the *kava* ritual of Samoa (Finney 1979:31). Hawaiians drank the intoxicating 'awa,⁴ but they did not perform a sumptuary ritual in consuming it, as did Fijians and Samoans. As the *Hokule'a* inspired other canoe-building ventures, however, the *kava* circle became incorporated into launching rites as part of their "tradition." Kane's (1976:482–483) article portrays such a ritual, using a large Fijian or Samoan *kava* bowl, with a caption beginning, "In rites unpracticed for generations. . . ."

Since no Hawaiians could be found with experience in deep-water canoeing, a Micronesian master navigator was recruited for the trip to Tahiti. The leaders of the project signed on young part-Hawaiian crew members, mostly from Honolulu, whose experience at sea was limited to paddling surfboards and outrigger canoes. Originally, the crew was to subsist on traditional Polynesian foods: fish, pounded taro root, dried bananas, sweet potatoes, and breadfruit, but the volunteers in charge of preparation neglected to use the proper food-preparation methods, and much of the food rotted soon into the voyage. The rebellious Hawaiian crewmen were not enthusiastic about that degree of authenticity.

The crewmen of the *Hokule'a* claimed that egalitarianism—no one giving orders—was "the Hawaiian way." They raised the concept of 'ohana in their protests against ranked authority. 'Ohana is a term for extended family (see Handy and Pukui 1972:40ff.), but it appears only rarely in texts and archival materials from the mid-19th century. The Hawaiian protest movement has adopted the term 'ohana to describe an idealized version of the traditional family unit, characterized by cooperation, internal harmony, and aloha. The word has become a symbol of traditional native solidarity and has been incorporated into the names of such protest groups as the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana. Traditional Hawaiian society, however, was hierarchical, not only in the ranking of chiefs, and of chiefs over commoners, but within the family. Hierarchical relations were embodied in the different kinship terms for senior and junior siblings of the same sex. Senior and junior duties and obligations—and rivalry—are historically intrinsic to the Hawaiian system of relationships.

The attitude of the *Hokule'a's* crew epitomizes the alienation of urban Hawaiians. Individually, and as a group, crew members clashed continuously with the canoe's captain, himself a pure Hawaiian from rural Niihau. Niihau is a privately owned island where casual visitors are forbidden and Hawaiians grow up speaking native Hawaiian as their first language; but the captain's Hawaiian credentials did not impress the crew. They wanted to take the canoe to Kahoolawe, the uninhabited island used for naval bombing practice, thus linking the *Hokule'a* to another focus of Hawaiian nationalism.

Kahoolawe has been the subject of Hawaiian protests for several years. Hawaiian nationalists claim that it is sacred ground and the U.S. Navy is destroying the graves of Hawaiian ancestors. There have been occupations of the island, arrests, and the accidental deaths of two young men in the waters offshore. Kahoolawe is an effective rallying point for the Hawaiian protest movement, but not because it was traditionally more sacred than any other ancient settlement area and not because Hawaiians now living regard their actual ancestors as being buried there. Kahoolawe has acquired a new meaning for Hawaiians as a political and cultural symbol of protest, which is entirely distinct from its historical significance as a tabooed land. The bombing of the island is a graphic example of disregard manifest by white colonists for native lands and culture; in this sense, Kahoolawe is an apt focus for Hawaiian protests. The movement's slogan is "aloha 'āina" (love of the land). Kahoolawe symbolizes "'āina abuse," a phrase that evokes the transformation of taro patches into canefields and of cool, forested ancient settlements into burning tracts of con-

dominiums. Kahoolawe has become the archetype of the idealized Hawaiian land, even though, using historical data, many other Hawaiian lands could be regarded as more deserving of that status.

Colson (1968:202), among many others, points out that cultural nationalists often invoke a mythic past to legitimize and promote solidarity in the present. Hawaiian nationalists have chosen from the body of Hawaiian oral traditions the myths best suited to rationalize the modern significance of Kahoolawe. The 'Ohana defines Kahoolawe's "ancient name," Kohe Malamalama o Kanaloa, as the "vagina" and "light of knowledge" of Kanaloa, a major Hawaiian deity. Elaborating on the significance of this name for the movement, the nationalists add their own interpretation of its meaning: "Rebirth of a Hawai'i *Lāhui* (Hawai'i nation). . . . Knowledge and guidance for the rebirth of the Hawai'i *Lāhui*" (Ritte and Sawyer 1978:54). Kohemalamalama is mentioned as an ancient name for Kahoolawe in the Fornander Collection, the most voluminous anthology of Hawaiian oral traditions (Fornander 1916-19, V:514). The passage continues: "It was a very sacred land at that time, no chiefs or common people went there."⁵ The word translated as "sacred" is *kapu*, but the Hawaiian concept of *kapu* is more complex than the English "sacred." The opposition of *kapu* and *noa* ("free" or "common") embodies the separation of the common and the divine (Handy 1927:43). Before the abolition of the Hawaiian religion, men and women had separate dwellings; the men's house was *kapu*, the women's *noa*. *Kapu* does mean sacred in the sense of "high," and it is associated with divinity; it also means "forbidden" and "prohibited," in the sense of "taboo" (Barrère 1959:180). The Hawaiian chiefs could place *kapus*, or prohibitions, on crops, lands, and even species of fish, to reserve the products for themselves. "In the ancient days there were many *kapus*," wrote Kamakau (1964:9), "and they were in the hands of chiefs." The gloss for *kapus* in this passage is "privileges." In the Fornander passage, it is unclear whether Kahoolawe is associated with the divine or is merely off limits.

The Fornander text may not be the source for the nationalists' claim that Kahoolawe is sacred ground. The island is certainly "sacred" today to many Hawaiians, so that for the Kahoolawe movement the island's "real" history is largely irrelevant. But the example of folklore serves to illustrate the use of tradition for a modern purpose: myths of the past are revised and transformed into the rationalizing myths of the present. There are other legends about Kahoolawe, but none is very flattering. The myth of the island's origin (Fornander 1916-19 IV:4-5) relates that Kahoolawe was born "a foundling," a "person of low class" ("*hanau Kahoolawe, he lopa*"). The Pukui and Elbert (1971:195) dictionary defines *lōpā* as "shiftless; poor tenant farmer." In another legend, Kahoolawe is the scene of a younger brother's treachery against his elder brother Kalaepuni, the high chief of Hawaii. This tale depicts the island as being without vegetable food ("*ai*") and fresh water (Fornander 1916-19, V:200-202).

Malo (1951:206) writes that Kahoolawe was all *kula* (unirrigated land). Potatoes, yams, and sugarcane were grown, "but no taro." From about 1820 on, the island was used as a penal colony.⁶ An early missionary's letter mentions that the governor of Maui intended to "banish to a desolate island in the neighborhood" those who would not obey the laws of the scriptures (Chamberlain 1824). The chiefess Kaahumanu⁷ proclaimed Kahoolawe a penal colony in 1827 (Kamakau 1961:288; Kuykendall 1968:125-126). Adulterers and chronic offenders of the law against prostitution were to be "banished to Kahoolawe." In the early 1840s, the island was made a men's prison for those who had committed "such crimes as rebellion, theft, divorce, breaking marriage vows, murder, and prostitution" (Kamakau 1961:356). Kamakau portrayed the island as a barren and inhospitable place: the prisoners "suffered with hunger and some died of starvation and some few in the sea." By the late 1850s, Kahoolawe was overrun by goats and for a time was also used as a sheep

ranch (Thrum 1903:117–122). In 1918 Kahoolawe was leased as a cattle ranch until confiscated for use as a bombing target during World II (Ritte and Sawyer 1978:113).

One goal of the Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana is “to perpetuate the historical, cultural, spiritual and social significance” of the island (Ritte and Sawyer 1978:2). But, again, it is not the “facts” of Kahoolawe’s not-so-glorious past that have imbued the island with this significance. During their occupations of Kahoolawe, the young members of the ʻOhana achieved a mystical communion with “the *āina*.” They wax poetic in their diaries over their experiences and their hopes for Kahoolawe’s future:

They learned and now share with us *aloha ʻāina*—how they gave to Kahoʻolawe and how she gave to them in return her *mālama* (“care”), her *aloha*, and her *āina* (Ritte and Sawyer 1978:2).

We love her dearly. . . . We have partaken of her blessings from the land and sea, and have survived well. . . . Kahoʻolawe will become a great island—the greatest Hawaiʻi island for our *keiki* (“children”) and *moʻopuna* (“grandchildren”) (Ritte and Sawyer 1978:45).

In their search for an authentic tradition, Hawaiian nationalists look to the rural lifestyle, use it, and idealize it to create a new version of Hawaiian culture. But in their self-conscious adherence to a model of Hawaiianness, the nationalists tend to circumscribe and delimit the range of behavior that conforms to that model (Eisenstadt 1973:22–23). The definition of “acting Hawaiian” takes on a new rigidity; it becomes obligatory, rather than customary, for all older women to be called “aunty” and all older men “uncle,” as demonstrated in the ʻOhana’s published account (Ritte and Sawyer 1978). The Hawaiian identity is thus objectified, made into an emblematic icon to be sculpted and consciously emulated.

Native Hawaiians in rural communities have become increasingly involved in the urban-based Hawaiian nationalist movement. A young man from Keanae was one of the Kahoolawe martyrs, lost at sea in an attempt to rescue members of the ʻOhana who were occupying the island. The boy’s father is a Hawaiian who, at the time of my fieldwork, lived his traditions. He is a fisherman and a taro farmer, a composer, a slack-key guitarist, and a singer. He claims to know the location of his ancestors’ burial caves at Keanae and is a fund of oral history about Hawaiian migrations. His professed ambition is to retire early from construction work and live in the country, fishing and farming. He is aware that he possesses rare and privileged knowledge and that he serves as a link in the transmission of such traditions to anthropologists as well as to his own children. In the ʻOhana’s book (Ritte and Sawyer 1978:xix), he eulogizes his son as “brought up cultivating taro and passion fruit.” He identifies his family as “direct descendants of Kekaulike, a Maui *aliʻi* [“chief”]”—an uncharacteristic claim that illustrates self-definition for the benefit of outsiders. In Keanae, neighborly relationships are normatively egalitarian, and anyone claiming to have “*aliʻi* blood” risks ostracism and scorn. Since his son’s death, the Keanae man has become active in the Kahoolawe movement as a living symbol and a taproot to tradition. As an “uncle” to the ʻOhana, his presence at meetings lends credibility to the movement’s link with the past.

A recent issue of the newsletter *Aloha ʻĀina* (Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana 1981) relates several instances of alliance with other ethnic nationalist movements. The editors link the goals of *Aloha ʻĀina* to the struggles of Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Pacific Islanders. A Puerto Rican group, the Crusade to Rescue Vieques, directly parallels the Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana. The island of Vieques has also been subjected to bombing by the U.S. Navy. At the First International Sovereignty Conference in San Juan, a meeting for “all indigenous native people from U.S. possessions, territories and trusteeships,” Hawaiian delegates noted similarities between prehistoric Puerto Rican stone carvings and native Hawaiian petroglyphs (Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana 1981:17).

I have delineated two ways by which the Hawaiian identity is fashioned through the use of tradition—the nationalist and the rural—ways that mutually influence each other. Eisenstadt (1973:21) argues that in the modern setting, “tradition” alone does not determine the content of “traditional” symbols. The *Hokule’a’s* significance is not given from aboriginal Hawaiian culture; the voyaging canoe has no intrinsic meaning as a “central artifact.” Conceivably, other artifacts might have served just as well as focal symbols. Symbols of collective identity are particularly prone to “re-constitution or re-construction” (Eisenstadt 1973:21), precisely because they are selected for emphasis. Their value for the present far overshadows their “given” cultural valuation (e.g., Handler 1979, 1982).

With the dominant society’s categorization of native Hawaiians as an ethnic group, and with the rise of Hawaiian nationalism, Keanae villagers have become increasingly aware of the political import of their identity. In the ensuing “conversation of images,” to use Singer’s (1972:12) felicitous phrase, there has been a conjunction of the symbols used to define Hawaiianness. The nationalists espouse “aloha *āina*,” and some of the people on the land lend their knowledge of “authentic” tradition to the cause. The young men who occupied Kahoolawe subsisted as much as possible on gathered foods, thus living an image of Hawaiians as people who make their livelihood from the land and the sea. This image has not been true of most Hawaiians since the latter half of the 19th century. Today’s country dwellers are wage laborers who grow and market taro to supplement their salaries. Yet Keanae villagers see themselves as living a “traditional” life, and according to the modern meaning of Hawaiian tradition, they do. For both urban nationalists and the rural folk, tradition is objectified and thus invented. As experts in authenticity, anthropologists, too, may be enlisted in the process of defining tradition. But the hostility between the *Hokule’a’s* Hawaiian crew and the haole sponsors demonstrates that anthropologists and nationalists usually pursue different versions of the “real” tradition.

Nationalism fosters a reflexive consciousness of tradition; but so does an internal differentiation of society into urban and rural, educated and uneducated (e.g., Redfield 1956). Contact with foreigners—including anthropologists—may have the same effect of enhancing self-awareness (Redfield 1953:114; Wagner 1975:7). Singer’s (1972:12) phrase, “conversations of images,” portrays the evolving categorical differentiation. Keanae Hawaiians are continually inventing their own model of the “folk”—of country life, of the inside as opposed to the outside. This is not a new development. Villages such as Keanae had a “traditional” identity long before the birth of Hawaiian nationalism.⁸ Hawaiian commoners were specifically “people on the land” (*maka āinana*), as opposed to the chiefs, whose origins were foreign (Sahlins 1981:29–30) and who were “wanderers” without fixed residence (Kamakau 1961:376). By the early 19th century, considerable differences had arisen between the lifestyle of the port towns and that of the rural *kua āina* (“back land”). Definitions of *kua āina* (Andrews 1865:296; Pukui and Elbert 1971:155) specifically cite the categorical opposition between city and country. The Andrews (1865:296) dictionary gives the secondary meanings “ignorant, uninstructed people . . . the back-woods people.” The tourist influx of the past 30 years has also done much to enhance Keanae self-awareness. The village is designated as a point of interest by the Hawaii Visitors Bureau and is noted as an attraction on tourist maps. An official marker (depicting a stylized Hawaiian chief in a red and yellow cape) used to stand alongside the highway overlooking Keanae, with the legend “Hawaiian village.” One Keanae resident sports a long white beard. Neighbors joke that he grew it so that the tourists would take his picture. The jest is perceptive; when a Honolulu reporter (Lueras 1975) did a story on Keanae as “the Hawaii that used to be,” the man with the generous beard appeared in a quarter-page photograph on the first page.

The construction of ethnicity, always based in part on a model of the past, is perhaps the most obvious illustration of the fact that we create ourselves through our social categories. The invention of tradition is not restricted to nationalists and intellectuals, who characteristically manipulate symbols of collective identity (Eisenstadt 1972:18), but is an intrinsic part of social differentiation. A defining tradition is one basis of perceived “otherness,” whether the opposing categories are commoners and chiefs or anthropologists and historians.⁹ Cultural categories such as tradition have reflexive character; they are invented as they are lived and thought about. People’s consciousness of them as *categories* affects their content. In nationalist movements, tradition is formulated as it is used for political ends. But the rural folk are also engaged in an invention of tradition as they live, and live up to, a model of culture. For Keanae villagers, tradition is a self-transmission of conscious inheritance and a model for behavior; they construe their contemporary lives as “traditional,” and the content of tradition is modified in the constitutive process.

notes

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¹ For a discussion of cultural reproduction and transformation in Hawaii from a structuralist point of view, see Sahlins (1981).

² For Hawaiian words, I use diacritics in accordance with the Pukui and Elbert (1971) dictionary. Glosses supplied in parentheses are also taken from Pukui and Elbert (1971).

³ “To rub, press, squeeze, crush . . .” (Pukui and Elbert 1971:195). *Lomilomi* also refers to the Hawaiian art of massage.

⁴ This is *Piper methysticum*, a shrub related to pepper and indigenous to the Pacific Islands; an intoxicating drink is made from the root (Neal 1965:291–292).

⁵ The Hawaiian text is: “*he kapu loa no hoi kela aina ia wa, aohe alii, aohe makaainana e hele malaila*” (Fornander 1916–19 V:515).

⁶ I am most grateful to Dorothy B. Barrère for providing this information and for sharing with me her references on the early history of Kahoolawe.

⁷ Kaahumanu, the widow of Kamehameha I, effectively shared the rule of the kingdom in the reign of Kamehameha II and during the early years of the reign of Kamehameha III (see Kuykendall 1968:63–65).

⁸ Writings from the 19th century describe the region as backward and inaccessible. Missionary letters continually complain of backsliding and the persistence of pagan practices in the Koolau district, which included Keanae. One report (Bishop 1861) described the region as “peculiarly *naaupo* [“ignorant, unenlightened.”]” But travel writers of an earlier era (e.g., Ayres 1910; Hardy 1895) seem to have been as fascinated with the remote and picturesque Hana coast as the journalists of today. My impression is that in the last 30 or 40 years journalistic and travel accounts have shifted from describing the village as “picturesque” to calling it specifically “traditional.” “Backward” and “traditional” are different ways of describing the same quality; in the modern period, “traditional” has become a positive attribute.

⁹ Academic disciplines, too, have defining traditions (Cohn 1980; Eisenstadt 1977).

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⁹ **History and Anthropology: The State of Play**

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