Will the Real Hawaiian Please Stand?

Anthropologists and Natives in the Global Struggle for Identity

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There is a certain discourse that seems prevalent among Pacific anthropologists of late. It is very much concerned not so much with what people do, with their motives and the conditions of their action, but rather with how what they do and say ought to be classified, more specifically in terms of degrees of authenticity. This turn toward the conscious identification of others, and often of anguish about one’s own identity, is not just one of those things. But, it might be countered, we are studying it because “they” are doing it. And of course this is also true. The Pacific, like other parts of the world, is very much engaged in a vast process of self-identification.

The focus on identity is not simply an anthropological issue but an issue for those that we study as well. A coincidence? Not at all. Rather it is a sign that we are all involved in this situation. The Balkanization of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the subnational revivals of Western Europe, the ethnic battles raging in large parts of the world, and the new and old fundamentalisms, or rather politicizations, of religious identity are all occurring in parallel with the rise of Fourth World movements: movements for indigenous rights, either to protect those that exist or to establish those that have never existed, either to maintain an existence or to re-establish one. The new identity movements and their aftermath are, I have argued, part of the decline of the hierarchical structure of modern identity space, part of the decline of the hegemony of modernist identity. And the latter is a reflex of the decline of Western hegemony in the world arena, a real decentralization of linkages and the emergence, however temporary it may prove to be, of a multicentric accumulation of capital.1

Anthropologists’ reactions to this state of affairs have been of several different types. In a previous article (Friedman 1992), I attempted to characterize
Figure 3.1. The identity space of modernity as expressed in the polarities of anthropological discourse.
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these reactions in terms of a fourfold set of polarities that were homologous with the fourfold poles of modernity (figure 3.1).

I have argued that the position of the anthropologist, especially in relation to his empirical data, was one of an interlocutor, a representative of the “other” here at home. This is a relation of authority in its very nature, one in which the anthropologist is supposed to have in his possession the ethnographic and/or historical truth. This is not a question of theory and interpretation, but of fact about what really happened. The post-modern account of events is more interesting, perhaps, insofar as it may include a number of voices, but the authority of the anthropologists is still present insofar as a specific image of multivocality organizes the representation. Thus, Clifford’s in many ways excellent description of the Mashpee Indian trial (Clifford 1988), for all of its various voices, may not convey the relation of the legal system to the Mashpee claims, and it would be entirely overturned if it were discovered, in some other voice, that there was an undisputable truth about the Mashpee relation to the lands that they claim. Genre and authority are quite separate in the reality of social interaction. An “egalitarian” text is perfectly compatible with the authoritarian and hierarchical context of its display, and may thus have the same social effects. Postmodernism could never have become a source of academic mobility otherwise. This implies that the anthropologist is always in a position of potential competition with those that he studies, with regard to ethnographic truth. This potential is a structural reality, whether or not a conflict actually results.

The discourse of authenticity of “the politics of tradition” is very much an outcome of this relation. And in the Pacific it is especially strong, because in the Pacific there are today a great many native (if I may use the term) movements that are occupied with self-identification and, by extension, what anthropologists call the “creation” or “invention” of culture. But the politics of tradition are a tricky business, and it may say more about the politics of anthropology than about the politics of those that anthropologists are increasingly confronting in a new arena of self-definition. The anthropologist, and anthropology as a whole, is implicated in this larger arena, and no proper understanding of the current situation is possible without including anthropology as an object of analysis.

GLOBAL PROCESS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY

I have argued that the situation described above is a product of a crisis of fragmentation in the world system, one that is expressed in the decline of modernism and the polarization of identities in the center of the system,
as well as a combination of cultural renaissance and a cultural politics of dependence in the peripheries. But the fragmentation and engagement in such new movements is based on a strong continuity as well. It is the latter that has become the bone of contention for anthropologists whose own identity would appear to be at stake. I shall throw light on this problem by mapping out the emergence of different positions in this field of identifications.

HAWAIIAN IDENTITY AND THE CONTINUITY OF RESISTANCE

Cultural identity only emerges under conditions of contrast, most often conditions of opposition. Hawaiian resistance has a history very much longer than its current press coverage, and in that resistance, under the greatly transformed conditions of Hawaiians in the nineteenth century, we can discover a great many continuities in what might be called Hawaiian culture. The global process of integration of the islands into American hegemony led to entirely new institutional structures, but fundamental aspects of Hawaiian sociality maintained themselves, albeit in novel forms. And a number of new “traditions,” if the term must be used, emerged in this period, not as mere novelties, but as transformations and adaptations to new conditions of existence. While it is difficult to ascertain at what point Hawaiian collective identity emerged, there is evidence that its contours became increasingly clear throughout the mid-nineteenth century.

Beginning in the 1820s, there was an open opposition to missionary morality on the part of a faction of the ruling aristocracy. It must be understood that this was in a situation of opposition between two factions of the ruling elite itself. The marriage alliance between Kamehameha I and Kaʻahumanu was one between Hawaiian and Maui chiefly lines (Sahlins 1981:60–64; Valeri 1982; Ralston 1985). The latter were increasingly charged with foreign relations under the reign of Kamehameha, leading ultimately to a power imbalance in the new royal house. The split between the Maui faction and the Hawaii faction seems to have played a pivotal political role in the 1820s and 1830s. The coming of the missionaries and their alliance with the Maui group, the placing of Queen Kaʻahumanu’s close relatives in the most important positions, that is, as governors, in Hawaii and then in Oahu, after Boki, a more distant relative and opponent of the Christians, disappeared in the South Seas. It is surely no coincidence that the missionaries had their center in Lahaina and that the latter became the second capital of Hawaii.

The relation between Kaʻahumanu and Liholiho (her son Kamehameha II) extended into the next reign as Kaʻahumanu’s sister’s daughter (with
Kamehameha I) Kina'u remained regent when Kamehameha III was invested at his young age. Here, the opposition is expressed in the life of the Kamehameha III ma, a gang of young men in the entourage of the young king. Their drinking and orgiastic partying were shocking to the Calvinist missionaries. This group of men called themselves the hulumanu, “bird feathers,” which refers to the famous feathered cloaks worn by the royalty. They were renowned for their open and direct resistance to the missionary morality, and for several drives to revive ancient pastimes, such as hula, medicine, and rituals. Much of the opposition to the converted and pious members of the royalty was expressed in symbolic terms, in extravagance, public drinking, or in offensive acts. One such example is Kamehameha III burying his pet baboon in a coffin with a proper Christian ceremony (Daws 1968:92). In July 1834, the king publicly slept with his sister Nahi‘ena’ena as part of an attempt to claim the right to rule and to achieve a union as sacred as that of the high chiefs of old. The missionary faction denounced the union. A year later, Nahi‘ena’ena returned to the missionary fold in Lahaina and married a lesser chief. Her remorse was great. A son was born in 1836 but died within hours, and Nahi‘ena’ena herself died shortly thereafter.

The hulumanu seem to have disappeared by the 1850s. There were a number of prophetic-based movements of resistance throughout the nineteenth century, most of which are quite poorly documented. The Hapu cult arose in the 1840s; it was based on the worship of the adorned bones of the prophetess Kahapu‘u, known for her abilities to cure the sick, and punished by the Protestant missionaries. It was millenarian in character and predicted the end of the current world when sky and earth were to come together on a specified day. The cult, a failure in practice, was based on a central motif of Hawaiian cosmology. The joining of heaven and earth would simply reverse the process of creation.

Throughout the nineteenth century there were numerous cults that worshipped the goddess Pele, the volcano goddess of Hawaii; most of these cults celebrated the “people of the land” as against all foreigners and even ali‘i, represented as foreigners from Kahiki (home of the gods, Tahiti).

It should be emphasized that these were very oppressive times for ordinary Hawaiians, who had to pay high levels of tribute and were often pressed into abject poverty by the emergent Hawaiian-Haole elite. Sahlins details how, in the 1840s, the cattle business encroached on the subsistence of the common Hawaiian. “In the 1840s, there were cattle in their gardens: mainly foreigners’ cattle, destroying the subsistence of the Hawaiians. The people reacted by building walls of all kinds. Enclosures of gardens and houses construct the present archaeological landscape” (Sahlins 1992:148).

Walled enclosures became so much a part of the Hawaiian landscape and the Hawaiian mode of ordering space that it is often taken as traditional by
Hawaiians themselves. “Oh before, we use have much higher walls around the houses. And then one big gate of ohia (iron wood). Today the walls much lower, and most people don’t have any” (interview in Miloli’i, 1985). These structures, born of opposition, are, I shall argue, just as deeply ingrained in Hawaiian culture as anything that may have existed prior to Captain Cook. And the fact that they built such walls in the first place is not a pure act of creation.

Hawaiian resistance to the foreign takeover of their lands, and their critical insight into the nature of chiefly power, is clear throughout the nineteenth century as well.

A petition to Your Gracious Majesty, Kamehameha III, and to All Your Chiefs in Council Assembled: Is it proper for foreigners to take the oath of allegiance? [. . .] among us, the common people, there is not difference of opinion. If it is proper for foreigners to become Chiefs, and the greater part of the wealth of the nation is to become theirs; it is proper to take the oath of allegiance under them and let the nation become a nation of foreigners. But if the nation is ours, what good can result from filling the land with foreigners? What is to be the result of so many foreigners taking the oath of allegiance? [. . .] This is it, in our opinion; this kingdom will pass into their hands and that too very soon [. . .] Foreigners come on shore with cash, ready to purchase land; but we have not the means to purchase lands; the native is disabled like one who has long been afflicted with a disease upon his back. We have lived under the chiefs, thinking to do whatever they desired, but not according as we thought; hence we are not prepared to compete with foreigners. If you, the chiefs, decide immediately to sell land to foreigners, we shall immediately be overcome [. . .] If we had not been loitering around after the chiefs, thinking to accustom ourselves to that mode of life, then perhaps we should be prepared to compete with foreigners [. . .] If the introduction of foreigners into this kingdom could be deferred for ten years perhaps, and we could have places given us suitable for cultivation and pasturing cattle, by that time some of our embarrassments might be removed, and it might be proper to introduce foreigners into the kingdom. (Petition 1845)

Such protest was to no avail. The lands were divided into private titles and distributed to royalty and chiefs, and sold off to white planters. The love of the land need not be anything old or new. It is clearly deducible from a way of life of the common farmers in confrontation with its loss to large-scale foreign exploitation.

Our land has been sold to others. Our gardens have been lost. All the walls we have built for our animals have been lost. We only have our taro patches left, and some of us do not even have taro patches. . . . We are dead. We are the parents, the
children, the old men and women among us. The only thing left for us to do is to leave the land and travel wherever we can go. (Petition from people of La‘ie to the Legislative Nobles and Representatives, October 16, 1846, Legislative petition file, Hawaii State Archives, in McGregor 1989:98)

In all of this, Hawaiian identity must have become clear for Hawaiians themselves certainly by the years and decades following the overthrow of the monarchy. Besides resisting the overthrow itself, the Homa Rula party of the Hawaiians actually won territorial elections in 1900 on the slogan “Hawaii for Hawaiians.” Agitation for a Hawaiian national state continued for several decades but was effectively countered by an aggressively expanding American elite in a period of rapid integration of the islands into the U.S. economy, and by the role designated for the islands in the Pacific arena. The Hawaiians had already become a minority in their own land as a result of the catastrophic mortality rate and the massive import of Asians to work the growing plantation economy. This factor, plus the increasing militarization of the islands, increasingly marginalized Hawaiians. Yet, there were enclaves in the rural areas where Hawaiians struggled to maintain themselves, most often by building walls—this time social walls—by turning their backs to the larger world. “The economic status of the Hawaiian families, their passive resistance to the ideals of the west, and the conception of responsibility of older for younger children sponsored by the solidarity of the kin group are important causes for the frequent absences of the child from school” (Yamamura 1941:151). Harry Mitchell, famed Hawaiian herbalist and activist from the village of Keanae on Maui described this resistance as follows:


Hawaiian resistance is not a new phenomenon, but it was carried out and developed during a long period of increasing American hegemony in the islands. It was a struggle doomed to political failure. And it increasingly took the form of subaltern or passive resistance rather than open confrontation. It is the decline of that hegemony that has made the movement that began in the 1970s a more successful venture. The examination of the history of Hawaiian resistance reveals an elaborate and continuous set of frames for the interpretation of the experience of colonization. I have argued elsewhere (Friedman 1992a:204; 1992b:854) that this continuity might be related to late pre-contact
social configurations in which a consolidated chiefly elite, endogamous and warlike, is opposed to a class of commoners.

THE MASTERS OF AUTHENTICITY AND THE PROBLEM OF CULTURAL CONTINUITY

The intense interest in the question of authenticity of the museological variety is worth a study in its own right. As I am primarily interested in its consequences in Hawaii, I can only make some cursory suggestions. Firstly, as stated in the introduction, there is an apparent correlation between the decline of Western hegemony, the rise of cultural movements throughout the world system, and the shift of anthropology toward culture, identity, and authenticity. The “invention of tradition” school of thinking bears, in this respect, striking resemblance to writings on cultural globalization, hybridization, and creolization. There is, in this work, a common focus on a contrast between what may have been (in some mosaic-like world of the past) and the current world of invention, cultural confusion, and cross-breeding. The products of this approach qualify their practitioners as actors in the global arena in those cases where their identification of contemporary groups clashes with those groups’ own self-identification. In the following, I have chosen my example from Hawaii in an attempt to “deconstruct” the implicit deconstruction of other people’s constructions. I suggest that the entire approach is an expression of a retrenchment of modernism, a historical and/or ethnographic authoritarianism. The latter is not a mere question of attitudes but a necessary expression of a positioning within the global field of identification.

There are several variants of the “invention of tradition” version of cultural critique now in vogue in anthropology. The first version appeared with the publication of The Invention of Tradition by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). In the introduction to this work, the editors make an absolute distinction between lived tradition, or custom, and invented tradition: “The strength and adaptability of genuine traditions is not to be confused with the “invention of tradition.” Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:8). The approach represented in this work is one that aims to set the record straight concerning what has been assumed to be age-old tradition and what is in fact recent fabrication. The contrast between the ever-changing institutions of modernity and the stability of tradition is argued to be entirely a product of modernity itself. Tradition becomes a kind of nostalgia, a longing for that which has been lost, a longing that can only exist in a society whose principle of existence is change itself. And since this
is the true nature of modern society, all tradition can only be understood as false construal whose object is political in nature.

Invented traditions designated the construction of pasts for political purposes in the present, the most obvious examples coming from nationalist movements. Its banner, for many, was the demonstration that the Scottish kilt was a late invention foisted upon the Scots by the English. Trevor-Roper’s argument (1983) was based on juxtaposition rather than historical process. While acknowledging the existence of an earlier plain garment of a slightly different form, he went on to show that Scottish nationalism coupled to the textile industry produced something altogether new. But in all of this, it is difficult to ascertain what it meant for the participants at the time, and how the Scots perceived the relation between their identity and the kilt. And Trevor-Roper’s own description of the process of “invention” turns out, on closer inspection, to be a transformation of the prior “belted plaid,” which could be worn in a way that resembled the “modern” kilt, the primary difference being that the former was a single cloth wrapped around the body in such a way as to include both a top and a bottom, whereas the latter was a new and industry-produced version of the bottom or skirt alone. The differentiation of colors and patterns by clans rather than by rank is also a crucial change, and the elaboration of the latter is clearly related to the vagaries of Scottish national identity. But the weaving of identities with histories is not so much a question of invention pure and simple. It is, rather, a question of transformation and recontextualization. This important essay epitomizes the central problem involved in the invention paradigm.

The integration of the Scottish Highlands into the expanding British industrial empire transformed that region and created new contexts of identification that gave rise to the kilt as we know it today. But the historical process involved demonstrates a fundamental continuity as well, which enables us to translate invention as cultural transformation. This historical process is curiously absent from the general theoretical discussion. The latter is not simply an oversight, but a product of the terminology or, perhaps, the conceptual frame itself, which is based on discontinuity and a contrast between the artificial traditional and the real traditional. No amount of recanting and modification can escape the logic of that framework, which is that of “tradition” as opposed to the lived existence of traditional society, that is, tradition objectified. After all, not only kilts, but the entire structure of “Western culture” is very much a product of the invention of the classical world in the Renaissance. It established a historical continuity and even a genealogy going back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. The invention of tradition is an old and perhaps quintessential European tradition (Sahlins 1993).

This approach was also recently applied by an anthropologist to Hawaiians in the throes of a developing cultural movement. The transformations of this
approach are worth analyzing, as they are the product of a direct confrontation with a political reality that cannot simply be reduced to the “politics of culture.” In the following, the confrontation between cultural rebirth and anthropological identity crisis are portrayed as aspects of the global fragmentation referred to in the introduction. This is, I shall argue, a question of structure and not of personality.

In 1983, anthropologist J. Linnekin published an article on Hawaiian tradition titled “Defining Tradition: Variations on the Hawaiian Identity,” which appeared in the very respectable journal *American Ethnologist* (1983). The ostensible purpose of this article was to demonstrate in a straightforward descriptive manner the ways in which the recent cultural movement in Hawaii has created tradition in creating its own identity. The argument presented in the introduction is plausible enough. Tradition is the use of past “lifeways in the construction of present identity.” This argument already had a tradition of its own among anthropologists, sociologists, and even historians (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Shils 1971). Culture, in this view, is a product continually undergoing transformation (Geertz 1966; Wagner 1975). In relation to the specifics of nationalist and nativist movements, Linnekin draws on Linton and Eisenstadt, who explain that such movements build their identities out of certain chosen elements from the present and past that are combined in a specific, consciously manipulated way. This, of course, implies that the cultural creations of such movements are not “authentic” and that they can often be contrasted to the supposedly real traditional culture of remote, rural areas. But even here, as Linnekin shows, the local societies have been so transformed as to be ineligible for the title of authenticity (1983:243–44). It is true that Linnekin has claimed that authenticity itself is a misnomer here, and I shall return to this question shortly.

All of this is a perfectly reasonable argument. Such a summary statement, however, says little about the mechanisms of creation or transformation involved in the process of building traditions. One might have hoped that the concrete analysis that follows the programmatic introduction would have shed some light on such mechanisms. But we are instead treated to a list of examples that merely indicate the difference between so-called modern Hawaiian traditions and what is from this point forward referred to as *aboriginal* culture, defined as Hawaii before the arrival of Captain Cook.

The main focus of Linnekin’s article is the emergent Hawaiian movement, but there are a number of well-known examples of ethnographica that appear to require demystification. The slack-key guitar and ukulele, both of which are imported, the mixed Portuguese-Hawaiian music that is played on them, *lomilomi* salmon as a modernized party version of an original ritual dish—all are modern creations of tradition that differ considerably from the originals.
The egalitarian ideology associated with the word *ohana*, which is used often in the movement to characterize traditional Hawaii, is in many ways the opposite of the aboriginal hierarchical model of social relations. In sum: “The historical correspondences are generations removed from contemporary models of Hawaiian tradition held by nationalists or rural villagers” (Linnekin 1983:242).

Following this, two principal examples are taken as targets for Linnekin’s exercise in analyzing the fabrication of tradition, both associated with the Hawaiian cultural movement, a movement that harbors, in fact, a broad spectrum of ideologies, but that is here reduced to a monolith. The first of these is the much publicized voyage of the Hawaiian canoe, the *Hokulea*, to Tahiti in 1976. This voyage was one of the activities that symbolically marked the start of the Hawaiian revival. A number of disputes concerning the purpose of the voyage, the navigation techniques to be employed, and so forth gave rise to differing interpretations of the importance of the *Hokulea*. The boat itself, a double canoe, was designed by a Hawaiian-born mainland resident, Herb Kane, who returned to Hawaii and has been active in the Hawaiian movement for some years. The expedition is characterized as follows: “A series of ironies marked the canoe’s construction and launching. The *Hokulea*’s designer, Herb Kane, is half-Hawaiian, but was reared and educated in the Midwest...a successful commercial artist [who]...only returned to Hawaii in 1972....Yet again, ethnicity has little to do with the ‘facts’ of ‘parentage’” (Linnekin 1983:245).

Blunders are cited that are apparently meant to disqualify the entire expedition. Since there was no Hawaiian capable of long-distance navigation, a Micronesian had to be recruited. Mistakes were made in everything, from the drinking of *kava*, the intoxicating ritual drink of western Polynesia borrowed for the occasion by Hawaiians, to incorrect preservation of food. The apparently inauthentic concept of *ohana* was invoked by rebellious “urban” Hawaiian crew members, who intended to take the canoe to the politically hot island of Kaho’olawe against the wishes of their own “pure” rural Hawaiian captain.

The second “nationalist symbol” (Linnekin 1983:244), and clearly the most important, is the island of Kaho’olawe. This island, off the coast of Maui, has been a bombing zone for the U.S. military since World War II, where allied members of the Pacific Rim (RIMPAC) have periodically been invited to test their equipment. Hawaiians have fought for many years to regain the island and the “Protect Kaho’olawe Ohana” (PKO), which has been the core of Hawaiian “nationalism,” has, through its “accesses” to the island, found it to be a source of religious and political identity. The island has been a symbol of the rape of Hawaiian lands, its desolate landscape riddled with shells and devoured by the thousands of goats that are its only inhabitants. While the island does host a
number of ancient temples and sacred places, Linnekin is quick to point out that it has never been much of anything: infertile without water, and a penal colony in the nineteenth century. In other words, its present symbolic importance is incongruous with its insignificant past, yet another example of the creation of tradition, apparently out of the blue in this case.

What are we to make of this? The anthropologist would seem to have attempted to demonstrate that the contemporary constructions of Hawaiian tradition are indeed modern creations suited to the political goals and cultural needs of contemporary elites.

In accordance with Eisenstadt, the urban nationalist version of tradition is viewed as the product of political manipulation. But even the rural version of tradition is regarded as a modern fabrication. All that Hawaiians today think of as traditionally Hawaiian is in reality no more “authentic” than any other aspect of modern existence: “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 Hawaiianess and accorded a significance without precedent in aboriginal Hawaiian society” (Linnekin 1983:243).

The entire argument here consists in the exemplification of the original thesis. It might be said that I have misunderstood these arguments, but it seems quite clear that the demonstration of the lack of fit between the symbolism and practices of today’s Hawaiians and their own “aboriginal” culture is both inconsistent with the original argument and indicative of a competitive relation between the anthropologist and the people that serve as her object.

**OBJECTIVE CULTURE AND MODERN FABRICATION**

I suggested earlier that there is plenty of evidence for a continuity of cultural forms in transformation, as well as a fundamentally authentic relation between the producers of cultural forms and their conditions of existence. Building walls, reviving the *hula*, and the current Hawaiian movement are not, in this view, inventions, but transformations of culture. Invention implies discontinuity and pays little regard to the cultural conditions of cultural creativity. What is invention to the outsider may be necessity for the insider. And if such is the case, the outsider is lacking in insight. Let us consider the examples chosen to demonstrate the inventiveness of modern Hawaiian tradition.

*Kaho‘olawe*: It might be argued that the little target island of Kaho‘olawe owes its importance to nationalist politics, so that claims of sacredness for the island are politically motivated. While not denying this obvious point, it does not warrant belittling any significance that the island might have. The origin myths, characterized by the usurpation of power by a commoner or
the treachery of a younger brother against his elder brother, cannot be taken as evidence of the island’s unimportance (Linnekin 1983:247), since such themes are so common as to be dominant in Hawaiian mythology. The insignificance of the island, perhaps the case for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is not the case for the more remote past if the archaeological finds of dense prehistoric occupation of the island are anything to go by. It would appear, in fact, that there are far more sites than one might expect from nineteenth- and twentieth-century descriptions of the desolation and population of the island. There is, finally, the legend of Kealaikahiki (Ke ala i kahiki), a point on the southwest side of the island that is supposed to have served as a landing and launching place for canoes to and from Hawaii: “the pathway to Tahiti.” It might be and has been argued that this is no more than a myth (Beckwith 1970) resurrected for political purposes. After all, any similarity between the mythical category Kahiki—the Hawaiian equivalent of heaven—and the real place called Tahiti is purely coincidental. Thus, when a Hawaiian elder (kupuna) maintains that there is indeed a navigational connection between Kealaikahiki and the Society Islands, it is not to be taken seriously as anything more than an invention of tradition selected for current political circumstances (Hayes 1977). Homer Hayes, often considered a conservative elder, owner of a guard service in Honolulu and a very well-read self-taught historian, might entertain ideas like this that are not academically acceptable, but archaeological finds, as well as the recent use made of the “pathway to Tahiti,” suggest that the Hawaiians have perhaps a more interesting fund of oral traditions and historical lore than we are willing to give them credit for. It would appear that Linnekin maintains that history ought to be left to the experts. Standard material provided by European visitors and missionary-trained Hawaiians decades after the collapse of the so-called “aboriginal” regime are perhaps not the whole truth about how it was.

*Hokulea*: It is claimed that rowdy part-Hawaiians attempted to take the double canoe *Hokulea* to Kaho‘olawe for mere political-ideological reasons. This is not the whole story. The rebellious crew had intended to take the canoe down the “traditional” “pathway to Tahiti.” In fact, the year following the historic crossing to Tahiti, another voyage was made via Kaho‘olawe that proved to be at least as logical a route as the “scientific” original. While not wishing to belabor the point, it ought to be quite apparent that this little island off the Maui coast, so much in dispute, is not merely a figment of modern Hawaiian nationalism, although it certainly plays a central role in the forging of a new Hawaiian identity. There were, of course, conflicts of interest between the academic experiment and the Hawaiian forging of identity, but the fact that Hawaiian voyaging was shown to be a feasible reality rather than a myth is surely an important result (Finney 1991). The *Hokulea* has now voyaged over
large parts of the Pacific, demonstrating that movements were within the range of control of the ancient Polynesians.

My argument here is that while current circumstances may indeed have a great influence on those sectors of a body of tradition that become the focus of contemporary identity, there is a great deal more complexity in the continuity through transformation that generates that body than Linnekin is willing to recognize. Kaho‘olawe is not just an old island that people have concocted a lot of fantasies about because the navy has dropped bombs on it for thirty years. Nor is the “pathway to Tahiti” just a good story with lots of political potential.

The stress on the “ironies” of the Hokulea, the contrast between ethnicity and the “facts of parentage,” and the zeal of part-Hawaiians as opposed to pure Hawaiians are difficult to interpret as mere objective description, since such language implies that these mongrel moderns have somehow got it wrong. This in its turn implies that there is something right, defined here as “aboriginal.”

Cultural Values: Three related concepts are central to the Hawaiian movement: ohana (extended family) with its implication of equality and reciprocity; a generally anti-hierarchical attitude, at least with respect to post-contact aristocracy; and aloha ʻaina (love of the land). It might seem reasonable to suppose that these values are not those of “aboriginal” Hawaii, certainly not in the form they have today, but there is good reason to believe that there is a significant continuity here with the last century. That Linnekin does not think this worth consideration would seem to belie her preoccupation with proving the nonauthenticity or nonaboriginality of these values. It is, of course, quite probable that very many of the modern “traditional” Hawaiian values are products of the violent transformation of the sociocultural order that occurred throughout the past century. Thus, it is quite possible that the ohana principle, as well as an entire community structure, emerged in the wake of an absentee aristocracy, an encroaching plantation economy and a colonial market system that left a dwindling commoner population with a minute portion of their former productive lands. While it is true that some politically motivated Hawaiians have publicly described ancient Hawaii as an egalitarian utopia, very few actually subscribe, or find it necessary to subscribe, to such a belief. Attitudes toward the aliʻi (aristocrats), both ancient and modern, vary considerably among those engaged in the movement. There are those who maintain quite simply that the aristocrats sold them out, and they understand aristocratic principles to be directly opposed to those of ohana. There are also those who maintain that ancient aristocracy was based on a kind of noble generosity that became corrupted in the contact period when the great King Kamehameha acted as unknowing midwife to the birth of a class society. In all cases, a distinction is
apparently made between a notion approaching that of tribal aristocracy and the more modern definition of a political upper class. Thus, while the concept of *ohana* might in some sense be compatible with a “primitive” aristocracy, it is absolutely antipathetic to modern forms of class dominance. *Aloha ʻaina* might conceivably be a nineteenth-century product of an oppressed population in the process of losing its land to an encroaching plantation economy and a new social structure, destructive not just of an ancient chiefly system but of the commoner remains of that society. Linnekin’s informants’ equation of inside = cool, wet, taro, Hawaiian versus outside = hot, dry, cane, *haole* (white) (1983:243) appears to express a cultural closure indicative of local resistance. In fact, very many of the above cultural “patterns” bear a striking resemblance to Wolf’s closed corporate community (1957), or at least a form of sociality emergent from cultural opposition to the establishment of a dominant colonial sector, not just of production, but of life in general. But it is one thing to assert the strategy of closedness that I suggest, and to conflate this with some notion of invention, implying, again, historical discontinuity. On the contrary, it might be argued that much of the strategic practice involved in the *ohana* is part of an older, or at least an available, strategy of closure in relation to a chiefly elite that had become dependent upon Europe and had become increasingly oppressive.

We have here the basis of an argument that current Hawaiian cultural models are, in the first instance, derived from nineteenth-century structures, which in their turn did not simply fall from the sky. If such is the case, then there is indeed a cultural continuity represented in the modern reconstruction of Hawaiian identity. The *kupuna* (elders) do have, objectively speaking, the important role assigned to them by younger members of the *ohana* movement and even by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

**ANTHROPOLOGY VERSUS THE CREATION OF CULTURE**

Let us try, at this point, to sort out the problem. On the one hand, we are presented with a general assumption that all culture is the product of continuous transformation. On the other hand, we are treated to an attempted demonstration of the inauthenticity of the “traditions” of the Hawaiian movement on the grounds that they do not correspond to an aboriginal baseline. No other argument is made use of. No attempt is made to discover the roots of modern tradition in some other period than that of first European contact. The logic of the argument would seem to be as follows. If tradition is indeed the product of contemporary circumstances, and not a relatively fixed fund of cultural repertoires of knowledge, values, and symbolism, then the only way in which a proper
evaluation of authenticity can be determined is by the establishment of another constant, in this case, aboriginal culture, Hawaiian culture as represented in the interpretations of anthropologists and historians. This is accompanied by an attitude that does not appear to be a misinterpretation on my part, expressed in Linnekin’s list of ironies, and in her several references to the way in which Hawaiians “wax poetic” or “wax sentimental” over one or another aspect of their tradition, all of which—we anthropologists know—amounts to no more than contemporary artifice.

If tradition is a “conscious model of past lifeways that people use in the construction of their identity” and if “the inheritance of an authentic tradition and the naïveté of the folk are illusory” (Linnekin 1983:241), then strictly speaking, no comparison between the folk model and real aboriginal culture is possible. Aboriginal Hawaiian society of the late eighteenth century is itself a transformation of earlier Hawaiian sociocultural organization. There is no reason to assume that paramounts always had the same kind of power, that human sacrifice and warrior chiefs were part of a constant cultural scheme, that the kumu (red) fish was always the “conventional offering”—in short, that there was no historical transformation before the arrival of Captain Cook.

What is irritating here, for Hawaiians at least (Trask 1993:161–78), is the clash between a theoretical approach that would understand tradition as by definition inauthentic and a description that at the same time harbors an implicit critique of a social movement on the basis of this apparently universal inauthenticity. If the Hawaiian social movement creates tradition in a way that is logically equivalent to the way that an anthropologically defined aboriginal society invented tradition, then there is no cause for a language stressing the ironies and incongruence of just this particular tradition, unless one assumes that all tradition is somehow false and mystifying. If, after all, the subject of the discussion is supposed to be the invention of tradition, why are we not offered either a description or an analysis of such invention instead of a rather simple exercise in demystification?

My own position here is that while it is indeed the case that tradition is constantly undergoing transformation as long as it participates in a dynamic social process, there is also a significant continuity in the transformation itself. And where absolute discontinuity exists, it can be overcome by the act of creating a social identity based not so much on history books as on the transformed cultural strands that link generations. As such, the word “authenticity” is totally inapplicable, quite simply because it implies, contrary to anthropological assumptions, that the aboriginal culture is somehow a fixed entity nearer to something essentially Hawaiian, which in turn implies that such a Hawaiian “essence” once existed. While we cannot ascertain exactly what Linnekin’s intentions are here, the use of such language has clear connotations.
At issue are not the pronouncements of one anthropologist, but the structure of the entire ethnographic enterprise and the definition of the anthropologist's identity. Anthropological knowledge, defined as the privileged understanding of otherness by means of fieldwork, is the basis of our self-definition. The ideological or cosmological space within which anthropology developed is by very definition the space of our civilization; modernity as opposed to tradition and the primitive state, the developmental paradigm, whether in the form of evolutionism or primitivism or relativism. It is founded on the translation of space into time, the conversion of the peoples of the margins of civilizational expansion into stages that preceded our present state of development (Friedman 1983). It is in this sense that ethnography has for years been a kind of imaginary time travel. Even in the guise of extreme cultural relativism, the fantasy of discovering another world entirely different and separate from our own is the hallmark of the anthropological imagination.

Authenticity for the anthropologist consists essentially in his/her relation to “his/her” people. It is the authenticity cherished by the art collector and the antique dealer. If professional identity depends on such notions as aboriginal, pristine, original culture, or primitive enclave, connoting an isolation from the pollution of industrial capitalist civilization, and if anthropological discourse consists of the analysis or interpretation of cultures, then a Hawaiian movement whose membership drinks Coke, watches videos, and at the same time is engaged in the reconstruction of its own cultural identity is a potential threat. It is not oversimplifying to recall that the traditional reactions to such a “polluted” object are either to bury oneself in the archival past, to ferret out “authentic” cultural patterns from today’s inauthentic natives, or to give up the traditional anthropological identity and go over to a more sociological anthropology of industrial, colonial, or postcolonial life forms. In all but the last solution, where the anthropologist maintains his identity as the master of otherness, there is a built-in assumption that whatever is out there now, there is some illusive past inhabited by the pure forms that we only catch glimpses of in the present. If one is ready to criticize the search for the authentic in the patchwork of the present on the grounds that tradition is always a contemporary illusion of the past, then there is always the possibility of reconstructing a model of the pristine that once existed, the aboriginal purity that can be contrasted with the mere tradition. Thus, aboriginal culture is fixed in time in the same way it used to be (and still is) fixed in geographical space. My people “out there” become my people “back then”: tradition is freed for political manipulation by would-be natives, while aboriginal culture remains safely in the monopolistic hands of the anthropologist.

Much of the exoticism of the primitive enclave has evaporated in an understanding that such cultures were themselves the products of transformative
integration into the expanding European world system and even of previous global systems. In fact, the critique of tradition that inspired Linnekin is very much a reflex of an increasing historical understanding of our own civilization (Ekholm and Friedman 1985; Wolf 1982). But this new insight has incited many an anthropologist to rescue the object by traveling back in time to a securely ethnographic past. In this way, true culture becomes a thing of the past, the native a contemporary of Captain Cook.

When anthropologists interpret the cultures themselves, they risk losing control over their ethnographic reality. It is only by attempting to understand how traditions are created and transformed that we can transcend an authority that is entirely dependent on a power situation in which we speak for the other.

After the onslaught of the “natives,” some anthropologists have seen fit to retreat somewhat. Linnekin has begun to flirt with a post-modernist position, claiming that there is no true or “real past” or “tradition.” She adopts, in principle, a “constructionist” view of all tradition: “all traditions are invented in the sense that they are symbolically constituted. Authenticity—the genuine/spurious distinction—is therefore a red herring” (Linnekin 1992:255). In this way, Linnekin is able to differentiate herself from those whom she calls objectivists (Keesing 1989; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Babadzan 1988). And yet, she notes that Keesing is ambivalent insofar as he assumes that there is no substantial difference between kastom and “genuine” culture. I have argued elsewhere (1992b) that Keesing maintains a thoroughly consistent position that is based on a modernist engagement, and while one may disagree with the strategy of total demystification that this implies, it benefits from a consistency that is not evident in other, more insecure anthropologists. Linnekin manages, for example, to state a case that might appear to be directly opposed to the kind of “cultural critique” of Hawaiianess reported earlier when she claims the following:

The objectivist criticism suggests that many anthropologists find it difficult to relinquish their authority to define culture and “genuine” tradition. Defending scholarly narrative authority in the postcolonial Pacific seems a contentious and ultimately self-defeating enterprise, however, because foreign academics clearly no longer monopolize the business of representing indigenous culture. (Linnekin 1992:257–58)

Is this a welcome change or a structural adjustment to a changing balance of the power to represent? Some, of course, might question the assumption that Hawaii is “post” colonial. And the ethnographic authority that is criticized in the above quotation repeatedly surfaces as more concrete issues of the “truth” of Hawaiian values, objects, and representations return to center stage. There are “significant ambiguities and conflicts in public perceptions of pre-European
Hawai‘i... statements about ancient Hawai‘i are rife in local media... and these apparently untrustworthy representations are taught to schoolchildren (God help them) by none other than *kupuna* (elders) hired by the Department of Education.” Furthermore, “there is little public recognition or discussion of the contradictions between these portrayals and their different implications” (Linnekin 1992:258). The very language of this description of “the situation” contains the same kind of critique as in the earlier work. They, “the locals,” the Hawaiians, are confused by their various representations and by the media.

To continue into the mire, we are informed that “the nature of hierarchy in Hawaiian society is particularly an area of ambiguity.” Some say tyranny, others community and generosity. The author maintains a “just right” position. “The vision I present in my own class on pre-European Hawai‘i is somewhere in-between but leans toward the Edenic” (Linnekin 1992:258). Hawaiians, in my experience, have been perfectly capable of debating the issue of chiefly power without the intervention of anthropology, not least because this is not a truly anthropological issue. Linnekin does point out that different views of chiefly power are entertained by different segments of the Hawaiian population, but she says nothing about the tradition of representation involved in these different views. The ambivalence is not a mere question of modern political debate, but is in evidence in most of the oral traditions and myths of chieftaincy that can be found in the historical materials. And Linnekin’s own position in all of this struggle for the “true” Hawaii is that of the self-identified “professor such as myself” who, aware of the true situation while possessing “ultimate narrative authority,” understands, wisely, that it is “folly to claim definitive standing for a particular representation.” And yet this folly that is so vociferously denied in the name of responsible scholarship seems to peacefully coexist with statements such as the following:

If a student asks me to confirm that this (Hawaiian gourd helmet) was part of the ancient Hawaiian warrior’s garb, I cannot comply, just as I cannot honestly concur with a vision of the ancient society as a counter cultural egalitarian Eden along the lines of a ca. 1968 commune. Similarly, I cannot attest (contrary to t-shirt representations) that helmeted Hawaiian warriors used sword-and-sorcery bows and arrows, had muscles like body builders taking steroids, or kept packs of pit-bull dogs (despite the caption on one shirt representing such activity as TRADITION). But I can and do use these t-shirt motifs to discuss symbols, meanings, messages, and the contemporary construction of culture. I relate this selection of symbols from the past and the present (a combination that sells) to history and politics: to the Hawaiian cultural and political renaissance, to the struggle for sovereignty, which has gained increasing credibility among members of all ethnic groups in Hawai‘i, to assertions of personal and political strength by young Hawaiian men particularly (Linnekin 1992:259).
In the same textual breath we are told that there is no longer any such thing as authenticity, that all traditions are constructed, and yet that it is possible to compare modern Hawaiian constructions with those of the past in order to ascertain their “truth” value as truly traditional, that is, ancient or not. The staying power of this particular form of academic identity is extraordinary. It is perhaps even reinforced by the objective decline in ethnographic authority, a modernist over-reaction.

THE CONTINUITY OF AN ACADEMIC TRADITION

Let me suggest that there is an underlying consistency and continuity in the approach adopted by Linnekin, in spite of the fact that she has several times claimed that no claims can be made for scholarly authenticity in the understanding of traditions. It has been continuously and vociferously stressed that all tradition is invented and constantly undergoing change. This is not new, of course, and was pointed out in the earliest articles (Linnekin 1983; Handler and Linnekin 1984). The problem here is the logic of the categories. If all tradition is constantly changing, then why use the word tradition at all? If not everything changes, where is the continuity? Bodies of explicit knowledge are one thing, but implicit understandings, the organization of experience, and other, less tangible phenomena have traditionally been the stuff of the analysis of tradition and culture. They are not merely handed down, nor invented, since they constitute the context of explicit knowledge. Thus, the distinctions between pristine and genuine collapse, but the notion of tradition also becomes irrelevant. This has rarely been a problem for anthropologists because they have not been concerned with authenticating or disauthenticating the activity and representations of the people they study.

Handler and Linnekin also claim to have said something similar in insisting that all tradition is symbolically constituted. “The origin of cultural practices is largely irrelevant to the experience of tradition; authenticity is always defined in the present. It is not pastness or givenness that defines something as traditional. Rather, the latter is an arbitrary symbolic designation; an assigned meaning rather than an objective quality” (Handler and Linnekin 1984:286).

They go to some lengths to criticize what they call the “naturalistic paradigm” of tradition, even where that paradigm assumes that tradition may embody continuous changes. This is because it assumes that there is something out there irrespective of the way it is symbolically constructed. They do sense that there is continuity in tradition, but they discuss it in terms of reference, that is, tradition builders or attributors refer to the past from the present in constructing their models, but even this continuity is constructed. This is so, I
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presume, because in a definition of tradition as a posited model, the very act of positing is by definition discontinuous with all previous acts of positing. But, I have argued, the continuity is not at the level of posited models, but of the experiential substrate that it draws upon. “Ongoing cultural representations refer to or take account of prior representations, and in this sense the present has continuity with the past. But this continuity of reference is constructed in the present” (Handler and Linnekin 1984:286).

Identity is not about the constructs themselves, but about the way in which they are embedded in social reality. It is embeddedness that accounts for the success of what might appear to be newly invented models. It is this that would appear to inform the descriptions offered of other people’s identification. “In Quebec, patrimonial traditions, self-consciously constructed by both indigenous and foreign observers, have become an integral component of the sense of national identity that Quebecois entertain about themselves” (Handler and Linnekin 1984:287, emphasis added).

Is this a mere slip of the pen or is it meant that Quebecois entertain a sense of identity about themselves that exists against a background of a more grounded reality? The insinuation is clear, whatever the cause of the expression. Similarly, Hawaiian country-dwellers are said to have taken on “new traditional signification to previously unmarked practices” (Handler and Linnekin 1984:287). In all of this, one cannot deny that the language used to describe what others are doing consists of a contrast between something more and something less real, accurate, or authentic, in spite of all disclaimers. The continuity is evident in the repetitive practice of describing other traditions as inventions in opposition to a truer version of the past. The examples here ought to suffice to demonstrate this point. The discontinuity lies in the self-representation of an approach in which all versions are inauthentic.

In a recent discussion of Hanson’s (1989) more blatant “deconstruction” of Maori tradition, Linnekin, while praising the content of this very controversial article, admits, as she has several times recently, that there are problems of communication with “natives”:

The tender point appears to be the analytic deconstruction of authenticity when applied to cultural representations asserted by indigenous peoples. This potential political vulnerability is, I suggest, an unintended consequence of the cultural invention argument, but one that anthropologists must confront nonetheless.” (Linnekin 1991b: 446)

Hanson, apparently more receptive to the implicit contradictions of the notion of tradition, was perfectly open to admitting that invention “when applied to culture and tradition is a systematically misleading expression that should
not be perpetuated” (Hanson 1991:451). But Linnekin, following through on the logic of the invention paradigm, uses the terms “tender point” and “political vulnerability.” If one believes that all tradition, in the sense of models of past lifeways, is a mere symbolic construction, then one can either struggle for a demystification of all tradition in the name of objective reality, or go entirely anti-modernist by insisting that since all symbolic constructions of reality are equivalent, no comparisons or contrasts can be made. Keesing (1989; 1991), as I have mentioned earlier, adopted in a fairly consistent way the first position, whereas Linnekin would appear to assert the first in theory and the second in practice. Others, such as Jolly (1992) and Thomas (1992a), have also found themselves in ambivalent positions, but have not clearly identified the problem. Of course, study of the “inversion” of tradition, where and if such occurs, might transcend the invention problem by analyzing concretely motivated practices in their social contexts, but then this would not be reducible to the problem of discontinuity, not any more than the structuralist analysis of mythology. But in his analysis of Fijian culture, Thomas also appears to have engaged in precisely such a discourse of discontinuity (Thomas 1992b; Sahlins 1993:5). The invention of tradition approach has all the continuity of a tradition, not as a corpus of knowledge, but as an anthropological habitus, a set of predispositions to describe the world in terms of a constant system of categories.

**STILL DIGGING**

The problem here resides in the notion of culture and tradition itself, or at least in the particular way that it has been utilized: as models of past lifeways, as representations, images, that is, as products, most often conscious products. In such terms, tradition is an externalized object that can, of course, be manipulated by people just like ourselves with, perhaps, other goals, such as national autonomy, but goals nonetheless that are entirely within our realm of experience and understanding. But this way of representing culture or “selected” aspects of culture (or tradition) is the expression of a strategic formulation of reality, one in which there are people whose experiences are just like ours, organized as individual subjects, and whose culture consists in objects or objectified texts, recipes, and rituals. In this sense, anything different that appears is necessarily an invention. The hula is reinvented, the ohana, aloha `aina, the Hawaiian language, all are either inventions or reinventions produced in the present for the purpose of gaining political power. The objects of culture are, as such, instruments in a purely instrumental strategy; means to a political end. This is surely consistent if applied to the whole of world history, but as I
have tried to show, this is not the case in Hawaii. And even if it were applied consistently, it would miss some essential questions.

Most importantly, it eliminates the possibility of what has been referred to as cultural continuity. And I maintain that with an artifact-based notion of what culture is all about, the question of continuity cannot even be properly addressed as a social phenomenon. This is because continuity, and therefore transformation of cultural form, is not comprehensible in terms of the forms themselves, but must be rooted in the motivations and strategies, the intentionalties of social subjects in time and space. No comparison of the traditional religion of the Congo kingdom with present-day Christian healing cults can be undertaken at the level of the particular symbols, names of spirits, and organization of rituals involved. The similarity is located in the commonality of experience, in the constitution of selfhood in relation to cosmic forces, and in the strategies generated by this constitution. In such terms, one can grasp the assimilation of Christian paraphernalia, texts, interpretations, and symbols into the Congolese world. Without this, Congolese Christianity is a creolized import, an invention, discontinuous with the past except for a number of elements imported or maintained (depending on the interpretation) from the old religion.

Hawaiian activists might agree completely with the invention view of tradition if it was seen as transformation. In a critique of Linnekin, H. Trask attacks precisely the contradiction in Linnekin between, on the one hand, a definition of tradition as fluid, and, on the other hand, as, “pre-contact era” (Linnekin 1983:242) which “insists on hard-edged bifurcations of reality: pre-Western culture vs. post-Western culture” (Trask 1993:167).

But what constitutes “tradition” to a people is ever-changing. Culture is not static, nor is it frozen in objectified moments in time. Without doubt, Hawaiians were transformed drastically and irreparably after contact, but remnants of earlier lifeways, including values and symbols, have persisted. . . . Thus, Hawaiians assert a “traditional” relationship to the land, not for political ends, as Linnekin argues, but because they continue to believe in the cultural value of caring for the land. That land use is now contested makes such a belief political. This distinction is crucial because the Hawaiian cultural motivation reveals the persistence of traditional values, the very thing Linnekin claims Hawaiians have “invented.” (Trask 1993:168)

The argument is not overdrawn. While Linnekin attempts to eliminate the question of authenticity, her discussion is very much embedded in just such a frame of reference. Otherwise, the origin of Hawaiian cultural items would not be an issue. Hawaiians have seen their political and social structures trashed over a relatively short period of time, and their modes of representation debased
and forbidden. Today, in new, yet I would argue systemically predictable circumstances, they have begun to reassert themselves with astounding success. This assertion is a social action and not a rearrangement of the bits and pieces of a museum collection. Anthropologists, as actors on the global stage struggling for their monopoly over other people’s self-definition, are pitting the museum against historical process.

ACADEMIC VERSUS EXISTENTIAL AUTHENTICITY

Our much-referred-to notion of authenticity means different things to the anthropologist and to the individual engaged in the forging of a cultural identity. For the former, it is a question of originality or even of aboriginality. For the latter, it is a question of identity itself, a relation between the individual subject and the culture. Authenticity in this case refers to the state of integrity of the members of an identifying group. Inauthenticity would thus consist in the relative alienation from the cultural model, a lack of engagement, a social distance with respect to the values and categories embodied in a tradition or program of action. In our multi-ethnic capitalist civilization, the question of authenticity is epitomized in Sartre’s discussion of Jewish identity, in which both assimilationism and liberal humanism are rebuked after the catastrophe of the Second World War. “The authentic Jew abandons the myth of the universal man; he knows himself and wills himself into history as a historic and damned creature; he ceases to run away from himself and to be ashamed of his own kind. He understands that society is bad” (Sartre 1948:42).

This notion of authenticity is not a new issue in anthropology. Many years ago, Sapir (1924) distinguished between what he then referred to as spurious and genuine culture. He used the expression, “inherently harmonious, balanced, self-satisfactory” (1924:410), which is certainly vague enough, but a number of other qualifications enable us to ultimately arrive at a clearer understanding of Sapir’s essential goals. While we are told that genuineness is achievable in any society, whether primitive or civilized, it is emphasized that there is, in fact, an inverse relation between civilization and the possibility of establishing a genuine culture. A genuine culture is one whose categories form a coherent cosmological structure for the subject, so that individual acts and objects retain meaning within a larger scheme of things. Genuineness also assumes a specifiable relation between the individual and culture in such a way that the subject is not external but internal to the former. Sapir employs the example of the artist to illustrate the authenticity of the genuine cultural act, one in which the realization of a culturally informed project and the content of the project are one, so that the subject is not separated from either his cultural
scheme or its implementation, as is the case in spurious culture, where the relation between the individual subject and the objects of culture are reified and externalized with respect to the life of the subject. Genuine culture is internal because the subject experiences it as himself. This is related to Sapir’s insistence on “the sense of mastery instinctively sought by each individual soul” (1924:425), which in the case of spurious culture appears as the loss of control over reality that in other representations appears as alienation. This sense of mastery, needless to say, is quite different from that of the culture expert. With respect to the question of tradition, Sapir has this to say:

No greater test of the genuineness of both individual and communal culture can be applied than the attitude adopted toward the past, its institutions, its treasures of art and thought. The genuinely cultured individual or society does not contemptuously reject the past. They honor the works of the past, but not because they are gems of historical chance, not because, being out of our reach, they must need be looked at through the enshrining glass of museum cases. These works of the past still excite our heartfelt interest and sympathy because, and only in so far as, they may be recognized as the expression of a human spirit warmly akin, despite all differences of outward garb, to our own. This is very nearly equivalent to saying that the past is of cultural interest only when it is still the present or may yet become the future. Paradoxical as it may seem, the historical spirit has always been something of an anticultural force, has always acted in some measure as an unwitting deterrent of the cultural utilization of the past (Sapir 1924:422).

Sapir goes further, however, in arguing that the conditions of emergence of genuine culture are much enhanced in small-scale or primitive societies. “An oft-noted peculiarity of the development of culture is the fact that it reaches its greatest heights in comparatively small, autonomous groups. In fact, it is doubtful if a genuine culture ever properly belongs to more than such a restricted group, a group between the members of which there can be said to be something like direct intensive spiritual contact” (Sapir 1924:426).

There is no need to romanticize the small-group aspect of the discussion of genuine culture. Sapir made a point that can be understood in quite neutral terms, that cultural production in interpersonal relations has less of a tendency to become objectified. The small-group aspect, easily dismissed as bearing “romantic overtones” (Handler and Linnekin 1984:287), might better be understood in terms of Sartre’s notion of existential authenticity or perhaps more importantly in terms of Alberoni’s work on the “nascent state” phase of social movements in which individual and group projects become identical (Alberoni 1984). Sapir’s comments on “genuine” tradition should shed some light on our discussion of Linnekin’s treatment of the Hawaiian movement. As Linnekin clearly sides with the “historical spirit” against culture, she must judge the
content of Hawaiian identity in terms of its supposed historical accuracy and not in terms of those positive (in the sense of active) features that are responsible for its creation and force of attraction.

Existential authenticity is the core of cultural continuity. Hopelessly romantic for some, but I would stress that this has nothing whatsoever to do with *gemeinschaft*. Rather, it refers to that area of social life wherein we find the shared experiences that enable models of reality to achieve an effective degree of resonance among their practitioners. The Hawaiian movement draws upon such sources in the reconstruction of its traditions. It does so in the present, of course. The latter point is obvious enough. The past does not impose itself upon the present (Friedman 1992) but is rather invoked and is, as such, creatively refigured in the present. If there are discontinuities, as measured from the outside, as with the introduction of Christian icons and beliefs, of modern interpretations of ancient myths, these must be understood in the terms of their integration and not in terms of simple contrast to “our” vision of “their” past. Otherwise, spaghetti is a hopelessly creolized and confused invention-import from China to Italy. Even in Boasian terms, the origin of inventions and imports is trivial in comparison with the way in which they are integrated into cultural schemes. It might well be that the construction of tradition is an anthropological construction of other peoples’ activities that might better be construed in different terms. Perhaps it is our fantasy, for all our ridiculing of the “good old days,” and not theirs.

GLOBAL PROCESS: THE PRACTICE OF IDENTITY AND CULTURAL CONTINUITY

The substrate of cultural creativity is the “experience space,” as Mannheim called it, which is the source of desire and the specificity of intentionality in the process of elaboration of meaning in the world. The Hawaiian movement and the formation of *Ka Lahui Hawai‘i* (The Nation or Gathering of Hawaii) are not products of intellectual machinations. They are rooted in a very long-term and culturally specific struggle of Hawaiians against colonial subjugation, a struggle that has taken a number of different forms, most of which have been unsuccessful, during 150 years of American expansion in the Pacific. The Hawaiian movement is part of a large-scale shift of hegemony in the global system, one that has led to a decline in a self-evident modernism and a search for roots in the Western centers, including today’s crisis-ridden Japan. I have argued elsewhere (Friedman 1988) that roots, ethnicity, the Fourth World movement, and the postmodern fracture of Western identity are all aspects of the same global process. For some, this would apparently imply a discontinuity
in modern cultural creativity, one that accompanies much of the invention school’s pronouncements. It is true that culture is being evoked in acts of political liberation, as it always has been. But this fact, superficial as it is, has been used to categorize willy-nilly the errors of the natives who ought to know better than to dabble in an area dominated by experts. Marshall Sahlins has made the point in no uncertain terms:

Western intellectuals have been too often disposed to write off the meanings as trivial, on grounds that the claims to cultural continuity are spurious. In the going academic view the so-called revival is a typical “invention of tradition”—though no slight is intended to Maori or Hawaiian folks, since all traditions are “invented” in and for the purposes of the present. (Sahlins 1993:4)

Sahlins goes on to argue forcefully for an understanding of the continuity of culture in the modern world. In the terms set out here, the problem resides in a confusion between the world system and culture. The world system is not a system of culture. Globalization is, of course, one of the processes that occurs in such systems, but localization, Balkanization, and world war are all equally aspects of global process, not by cultural diffusion but by global interaction. Cultural revivals in Hawaii and elsewhere are possible because of a resonance between local existences and the cultural forms proposed by such movements. While certain kinds of cultural continuities are comprehensible in purely structural terms, as when politically powerful kings are historically transformed into Frazerian castrated divine kings in African history, other continuities cannot be understood in terms of the logic of the structures themselves and their transformational potential. Instead, it is necessary to grasp such continuities in terms of a certain stability of socially organized experience, the constitution of specific subjects or selves that tend to react to the world in similar terms, or with the same terms of reference.

I cannot but agree here with Sahlins when he emphasizes that people may devise “their own categories, logics, understandings” which “may be totally improvised, something never seen or imagined before, not just a knee-jerk repetition of ancient custom” (Sahlins 1993:18), so that “cultural continuity . . . appears . . . as the mode of cultural change,” the innovations following “logically . . . from the people’s own principles of existence” (Sahlins 1993:19). And if cultural change is not to be equated with “changing clothes,” we must consider that while cultural invention is motivated, the motivations themselves are not invented (Strauss and Quinn 1992:295).

Hawaiian cultural identity is a product of active construction today. And it may even be based on elements from disparate sources, for example, kava ceremonies from western Polynesia. But the import of elements is nothing new
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in the history of the world. Boas and his students, as I suggested earlier, were less concerned with what they saw as the universal fact that cultural forms were largely imported than with the more fundamental fact of their configuration and integration. The latter was the essence of cultural specificity, not the former. The engagement of Hawaiians in the forging of a viable future, a meaningful world, is precisely the kind of practice that Sapir would have designated “genuine.” The disauthentification of such praxis by certain anthropologists is an attempt to maintain a modernist identity in a world going ethnic and cultural. This is a choice made within an increasingly polarized modern identity space. It is not an act executed in a rarefied space of authoritative truth and objectivity.

NOTES

1. There is, in all of this, a strong tendency to a shift in accumulation to eastern Asia, especially to China and Southeast Asia. Multicentricity might be a phase in such a shift, but given the general speed-up of rates of accumulation and the ease with which capital can move from place to place, it is likely that hegemonies in the world system are to be increasingly short lived, if they manage to form at all.

2. I have referred to this in terms of Fourth World and Third World strategies, respectively. The latter seeks its identity in the center, the former in its own past or cultural specificity (Friedman 1988, 1992).

3. Here too, the invention school would say, “but we have always claimed that imports, as all discontinuities, are a general phenomenon.” But then there ought to be no need to contrast the authentic and the invented. As I have said, there is a glaring contradiction here between theoretical claims and practice.

REFERENCES

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Chapter 3

In the literature on modern society, on world systems, and on contemporary culture, the term complexity often appears. We confess that we think this term lacking in significant content, especially for the understanding of the contemporary world, as it is founded on a superficial and quite ideological dichotomization between the assumed face-to-face simplicity of traditional society versus the extensive division of labor, the market, and social differentiation of modern societies. We have no intention of entering into a discussion of a word that is best left to common usage. Instead we shall relate it to the context that we find relevant for this analysis. In cultural terms, global systems are obviously complex. In such systems the local is produced in an articulation with broader processes. The local is encompassed and constituted within the global, which is not to say that it is a mere product of external forces. On the contrary, we have insisted on the articulation between the local and global as central to the generation of specific social realities.

The question of complexity, on the other hand, is more closely related to perspective itself. A position based on social distance, the bird’s-eye view of the cosmopolitan, especially the cosmopolitan self-identified as culture expert. This complexity is part of the experience of the traveler encountering a myriad of cultural differences jumbled together with ketchup, McDonald’s, and MTV. The natives in this very naive view are not what they used to be, and there is a tendency to think of them as Baudrillardian simulacra, hybrids, moderns toying with the ideas of their identities. But this is indeed the self-identity of the cosmopolitan culture critic, and not of those whom he observes. We argue that while all social systems are complex, everyday life tends to reduce this complexity to schemes of meaning and action that are significantly simplified.