



Authenticity, Invention, Articulation: Theorizing Contemporary Hawaiian Traditions from the Outside

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Abstract

This article theorizes potential contributions of outsider analysis to the study of contemporary indigenous traditions, taking Native Hawaiian canoe voyaging and repatriation disputes as its primary examples. The argument proceeds by specifying analytical contributions of articulation theory in contrast to limitations of invention and authenticity discourses. A shared liability of the latter discourses is identified in their tendency to reify identity in ways that preclude engagement with the full range of cultural articulations constitutive of living tradition. Cultural struggle, in particular, is theorized as the aspect of identity articulation that is most explanatory of the character of tradition and least addressed by theories of invention and authenticity.

Keywords

Tradition, Articulation, Authenticity, Invention, Hawai'i, Repatriation, Hōkūle'a

"More happens under the sign of the indigenous than being born, or belonging, in a bounded land or nation." James Clifford (2007, 199).

Islands of Theory

At least since the time of Captain Cook, outsiders have related in a variety of interesting ways to Hawaiian tradition. Some, like Cook, have given more of themselves than others to the cause (Sahlins 1981). If Cook was disfigured at this intersection, so too have Hawaiian traditions sometimes been misconstrued in non-Hawaiian hands, whether through exaggeration, truncation or

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neglect. And yet there have been important moments of productive if uneven collaboration between Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian scholars.² Historically one thinks of Malo and Emerson (1951), more recently of Pukui and Elbert (1986). Still today Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian scholars engage one another with great regularity. Non-native scholars, for example, still routinely turn to Kamakau (1964) and 'I'i (1959), while some Hawaiian scholars have long held Beckwith (1970), Kelly (1983), Charlot (1985) and others in high esteem.

Despite this history of sometimes productive collaborations between Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian scholars, all is not well in Paradise. Just ask Jocelyn Linnekin, who left the Department of Anthropology at the University of Hawai'i in the wake of the "invention of tradition" disputes that erupted there. She was accused by some native scholars of suggesting that many cherished Hawaiian concepts and practices, particularly those regarding land stewardship, are a function of the political present and are thereby "inauthentic" (Trask 1991). While Linnekin no doubt pointed to the constructed nature of "tradition," I do not read her as emphasizing inauthenticity as a consequence of this (e.g., Linnekin 1983; 1991; 1992). Roger Keesing (1989) has come much closer to the latter position, but somehow his views—whether through contagion or conflation—have been elided with Linnekin's.³ In any event, Linnekin became in some Hawaiian studies circles a *persona non grata* and her fate speaks metonymically to the declining fortunes of non-Hawaiian scholarship on Hawaiian traditions.⁴ Indeed, disputes surrounding her work were but

² In this article I do not address issues of defining or labeling Hawaiian identity, which are manifold. For example, the category "Hawaiian" is framed in at least five ways in contemporary academic and political discourses. Hawaiian, as I use it here, is the most general label and is intended to signal a cultural identity, not merely a geographical one. More specific and nuanced designations include Native Hawaiian (often used in federal legal contexts), native Hawaiian (often indicates a narrower, blood quantum-based definition), Kanaka Maoli ("real people," a designation favored by some sovereignty-focused groups) and Kanaka 'Ōiwi ("people of the bone," often used in native academic and religious contexts).

³ Linnekin's views have also suffered from perceived affinities with the arguments of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), even while the spirit of her argument is in some ways closer to Wagner (1981).

⁴ A less dramatic but nonetheless poignant instance of this phenomenon is seen in the changing reception of Marshall Sahlins' work (e.g., 1985; 1995). While still highly regarded by many scholars, native and otherwise, some feel that he took one step over the line in purporting to know "how natives think," a position vociferously attacked by Gannanath Obeyesekere (1992) and since enjoined many others. The reaction to Sahlins' work on Captain Cook's fate is somewhat unfortunate insofar as critics have often overlooked his contemporaneous work on indigenism (e.g., 1992). Sahlins' former colleague, Valerio Valeri, has received a similar treatment, if less publicly so, with his magnum opus (1985) receiving little positive attention in Hawaiian scholarship. Lilikalā Kame'eleihiwa, for example, does not cite Valeri in her already classic study,

one manifestation of larger unrest in the study of contemporary indigenities in Hawai'i and Oceania.⁵ At the same time, a considerably positive reshaping of scholarship has occurred as many Native Hawaiian scholars have come to prominence, including Haunani-Kay Trask, Jonathan Osorio, and Lilikalā Kame'eleihiwa. Another generation is quick on their heels, including Noenoe Silva, Kehaulani Kauanui, and Ty Kāwika Tengan.

Articulating Traditions

In view of recent academic disputes over identity and authenticity, and with Pacific and Hawaiian scholarship in such good native hands, I ask: What can non-native scholars in the present bring to the study of Hawaiian traditions and to indigenous traditions in other contexts?⁶ Generally, we might practice modes of analysis that participate neither in discourses of essentialism nor in discourses of invention, at least not in simplistic senses. One path here has been charted by James Clifford (2001) and others, with specific appeal to theories of articulation drawn from Stuart Hall (e.g., 1986).⁷ In Hall's formulation, "articulation" theories emphasize the emergent and contingent character of identity constructions without denying the historical and cultural substrata and sediments that underlie them. Hall writes that articulation is best understood as a "hinging" of elements, a "form of connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions" (1996, 141). As expressed by Clifford with reference to specifically Pacific settings, such theories take seriously displacement and emplacement, diasporas and rootedness, and, in a language made familiar to scholars of religion by Thomas Tweed (2006), crossing and dwelling. In Clifford's words,

[t]he contrast between colonial fixity and postcolonial mobility, between indigenous roots and diasporic routes, can't be allowed to harden into an opposition or a before-after scenario in which cosmopolitan equals modern. When reckoning with traveling natives, if I can call them that, in the Pacific, this sort of categorization breaks down. We are left with a spectrum of attachments to land

Native Land and Foreign Desires (1992). However, Valeri is briefly acknowledged in Noenoe Silva's recent *Aloha Betrayed* (2004).

⁵ See, e.g., Hanson (1989); Jolly and Thomas (1992); and Parmentier (1996). This situation has had interesting parallels in North America, particularly within religious studies. See Gill (1987; 1994; 1997) and Jocks (1997).

⁶ For important historical, conceptual, and political background to this question, particularly with reference to the relationship of anthropology and cultural studies in Hawai'i, see White and Tengan (2001).

⁷ One might also look to the important work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) in this regard.

and place—articulated, old and new traditions of indigenous dwelling and traveling (2001, 477).⁸

Arguing elsewhere for the continuing relevance of “tradition” as an analytical category, Clifford adds: “[r]eopening the lived problematic of tradition is crucial to understanding this predicament: a messy world in which fundamentalisms, ethnic chauvinisms, and tourist displays flourish alongside First Nations revivals and the mobilization of local communities against environmental devastation or invasive development” (2004, 157). Continuing, he argues, the “language of ‘articulation’ . . . gets at the practical deconstructive, and reconstructive, activities of indigenous traditionalisms better than the demystifying discourse of ‘invention’” (2004, 158).

I find Clifford’s points compelling and productive insofar as they enable timely research and may reopen conversations with native theorists and audiences.⁹ Reopening such conversations is important at a variety of levels, not the least of which is methodological. As will become clear, the theoretical relevance of the outsider’s positions that I argue for demands engagement with the nuances of “local knowledge,” though not quite in the sense intended by an earlier anthropology. While Geertz (1983) and other theorists of local knowledge included history and process in their analyses, they did so in a way that nonetheless posited “culture” in fairly monolithic terms and regarded “tradition” as the preservation of culture through time by means of continuity. Sahlins (1985) and others have modified this position by theorizing historical change far more deliberately in order to account for structural change as well as continuity—indeed, Sahlins provides many rich examples of change as continuity. While not denying the insights of either position, my aim is to insist on a more radically processual and dialogical view of culture and tradition wherein these are understood to be continually constituted in the present (Lincoln 1989).

In order to apprehend such real-time dynamics, my view is that scholars of contemporary traditions should strive for a methodology that includes remaining in conversation with the people one studies and in touch with the media through which they engage one another. At the same time, however, I will argue for outsider scholarship that enables insights from its position of difference, its position of standing outside of traditions and debates surround-

⁸ For uses of articulation theory in other cultural contexts, see, for example, Li (2000) on Indonesia and Johnson (2005) regarding American Indian contexts.

⁹ For example, on the theme of dwelling and habitation, see Ty Kāwika Tengan’s work (2008) on revitalization of the *Hale Mua*, the men’s eating house, which was central to the *aikapu* before 1819 and which is being reconstituted today as a site for ritual practice that emphasizes male responsibility in the face of changing cultural conditions. On the theme of diasporic communities and communications, see Kauanui (1998).

ing them. Motivating my argument in favor of an approach that is at once methodologically “near” and yet theoretically “distant” is, on the one hand, a frustration with the way much theoretical scholarship today stands at a rather profound remove from that which it purports to study and, on the other hand, a dawning recognition of the discursively fluid ways traditions are reshaped at a range of contextual levels, right down to the family circle (the *‘ohana*, as Hawaiians would say). My point, however, is not that we should fixate on atomistic, non-comparative studies. Far from it; I aspire to theoretical generalizations that become possible precisely from a position that remains distant enough to see how competing truth claims together constitute tradition even while understanding that each individual voice is necessarily partial, political, and otherwise interested.

For example, my research in Hawai‘i has made clear to me the ways tradition is constituted in and through moments of struggle. In some moments of struggle, various Native Hawaiian groups have worked together to announce claims against external challenges of various sorts. Frequently, however, Native Hawaiian groups struggle with one another over the terms of their traditions in contexts as diverse as sovereignty debates, repatriation disputes, and the revival of open-ocean sailing. These struggles are not merely political, though they are hardly immune from politics and questions regarding authority and power. A discursively focused articulation theory enables us to see that they are cultural in the strongest, most generative sense.¹⁰ When contesting one another over the terms of their traditions—proper ritual protocol, for example—Hawaiians are actively constituting culture and tradition.¹¹ Against “proximate others” Hawaiians define themselves, seldom monolithically, almost never homogeneously, but in a shared vocabulary nonetheless.¹² Theories of articulation are attentive to how a plurality of voices sometimes harmonize and sometimes argue, how diverse speakers link various tropes and images from more or less common sources to announce competing claims. In Clifford’s words, “articulation as I understand it evokes a deeper sense of the ‘political’—productive processes of consensus, exclusion, alliance, and antagonism that are inherent in the transformative life of all societies” (2001, 473). Precisely

¹⁰ For a development of this argument in the repatriation context, see Johnson (forthcoming).

¹¹ An instructive comparative example of this dynamic is found in the recent work of Thomas Buckley, an anthropologist of American Indian religious traditions. Regarding practitioners’ disputes surrounding the Yurok Jump Dance he writes, “what is going on in the constant debates over what is and is not appropriate to the dances is not a historical aberration encountered in a culture ‘going all to pieces,’ as Kroeber had it; it is central to the process of world renewal [the stated goal of the dances], and always has been” (2002, 273).

¹² On proximate others, see J.Z. Smith (2004).

through directing attention away from “truth” (that one position is normative or authentic while others are wrong or inauthentic) and steering attention to truth claiming (processes of persuasion and self-fashioning, whether individual or collective), articulation theories widen the scope of cultural analyses to help us see the generative rather than merely partisan sides of foment. Here I turn to an example, the renowned canoe Hōkūle‘a.

Hōkūle‘a

Let us begin with imagery supplied by the historian and anthropologist Greg Dening, who, like Clifford and Tweed, has theorized crossing and dwelling. With reference to Polynesia, its myriad beaches and the people who traverse them, he writes:

All over Polynesia the native peoples suffused their religion and culture with a fascination for images and metaphors of mediation and transition. Birds and canoes featured strongly in their symbols. Birds and canoes were in between—in between land and sky, between land and sea. They were natural instruments or vehicles of the divine. Gods were in birds, and mythical heroes traveled to their islands in canoes. . . . Polynesians wanted the signs of their sacraments to show some passing between. That was their realism (Dening 1992, 233).¹³

This realism, as Dening would have it, has made a remarkable comeback in recent decades. That sailing voyages were foundational to the Hawaiian past is beyond dispute—no canoes, no Hawaiians. Scientists and oral traditions agree on this point. It also goes unchallenged that open-ocean sailing ceased in the islands sometime before the arrival of Cook in 1778. What is very much in dispute, however, is the degree to which Hawaiians and other Polynesians possessed the knowledge, skills, and tools to have achieved intentional roundtrip voyages between archipelagoes as distant as Hawai‘i and Tahiti.¹⁴ By the 1950s and 1960s some non-native scholars began to favor theories of one-way expeditions and unintentional drifting to explain the populating of Polynesia (see, e.g., Sharp 1960). By the 1970s other scholars, Ben Finney chief among them, were working against this view to theorize Polynesian settlement in entirely more intentional terms (Finney 1979; 1991; 1994). But resources for this project were somewhat scarce—beyond an oral tradition replete with accounts of voyaging, Hawaiian material culture and the study of it yielded little for

¹³ See Dening (1998, 101-118; 2004, 176-183) for his ambivalent assessment of neo-traditional canoeing, particularly with regard to the didactic quality of “reenactments.”

¹⁴ For literature on these issues generally, see Goetzfridt (1992).

Finney and others to work with to support their hypothesis. They decided to go an experimental route, putting together canoes based on various scattered sources and doing the same in assembling the basics of recovered navigational knowledge. They also looked to existing vessels and knowledge in remote parts of the Pacific, particularly Micronesia (Linnekin 1983; Lewis 1994). From this process of science-cum-bricolage, experimental neo-voyaging was born.

Soon various Native Hawaiians became involved in this pro-creative process, including artist Herb Kāne, who helped design sails and other details for various canoes (Finney 1979). The now famous canoe Hōkūle‘a resulted from this work and it has made numerous open-ocean voyages over the past thirty years, including trips to the far reaches of Polynesian and, in 2007, to Japan. In the process, Hōkūle‘a has become one of the most visible sites of contemporary Hawaiian cultural identity (Kyselka 1987; Finney 1991). From its beginnings in an anthropologist’s sketches and grant proposals, it has been adopted by Hawaiians in symbolic and practical ways. Today Hōkūle‘a sails with a Hawaiian captain and a largely Hawaiian crew, and its voyages share Hawaiian cultural knowledge and pride.¹⁵

Hōkūle‘a has figured prominently in several repatriation contexts, in both symbolic and practical ways. Representative of the former, repatriation activist Kunani Nihipali writes: “Like the Hokule‘a, a contemporary sailing vessel dedicated to utilizing and expanding understanding of traditional celestial navigation methods, we of *Hui Mālama I Nā Kūpuna ‘O Hawai‘i Nei* have channeled the energy of our *kūpuna* (ancestors) to do their part to help us, to calm the seas, to navigate us on this safe return of rebuilding our nation’s foundation *stone by stone, bone by bone*” (2002, 44). Exemplifying the practical implementation of this vision, Hōkūle‘a was employed to return repatriated *iwi* (bones) to Nihoa and Necker Island in the remote Northwest Hawaiian islands (Ayau and Tengan 2002). Also related to repatriation matters, the famous captain of Hōkūle‘a, Nainoa Thompson, was appointed on the basis of his cultural credentials by a federal judge to oversee a protracted *ho‘oponopono* (alternative dispute resolution) session in the notorious Kawaihae caves conflict

¹⁵ Hawaiians, of course, are not alone in their revival of ocean travel. Examples among other indigenous people include the Maori of New Zealand, numerous other Polynesian and Micronesian peoples, the Bugis of Indonesia, the Chumash of California, and a variety of Northwest Coast tribes. The degree to which ocean voyaging—whether coastal or trans-oceanic—remained active in these various cultures is highly variable. Consistent across them, however, is the contemporary significance imputed to and enacted through the ocean travel. Among other messages, this movement to and across the seas conveys a poignant anti-colonial message, emphasizing the capacity of various indigenous modernities to master the oceans, thereby responding to Western conceit communicated through still-regnant narratives of exploration and discovery.

that pitted fourteen Native Hawaiian organizations and the Bishop Museum against one another concerning the fate of numerous ancient ritual objects (Barayuga 2006).¹⁶ Hōkūle‘a has also been pivotal in the symbolic reclaiming of Kaho‘olawe, an island long used by the Navy for bombing practice, which is now a principal site of contemporary Native Hawaiian ritual practice and which is frequently visited by the canoe.¹⁷

Hōkūle‘a has captured the popular imagination as well, and has been featured on the cover of in-flight magazines and on ubiquitous t-shirts.¹⁸ So successful has it been that Hōkūle‘a has attained celebrity status—reporters and photographers follow in its wake and various state, national and even international messages have been attached to its presence and travels. During Hōkūle‘a’s 2007 voyage to Japan, for example, daily reports on its progress could be found in both major Hawaiian papers, the *Honolulu Advertiser* and the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. In Japan the crew was presented with a “peace bell” on behalf of the Japanese government, and talks are currently underway for Hōkūle‘a to sail with sponsorship of the United Nations.¹⁹ This has occasioned a variety of responses within the Hawaiian community. For example, at a sovereignty meeting attended by a number of Hawaiian activists during the summer of 2007, I witnessed one activist challenge a crew member over the fact that the captain of Hōkūle‘a did not allow it to be used in an anti-military protest while in Japan. The activist joked that Hōkūle‘a should be rechristened as the U.S.S. Hawai‘i.

Partly as a result of these successes and partly in reaction to them, various groups have proposed and developed their own canoes, sometimes with support of Hōkūle‘a’s parent organization, the Polynesian Voyaging Society, and sometimes not. The point I want to draw attention to is that these newer canoes have been envisioned in terms of their putative authenticity vis-à-vis Hōkūle‘a. In the case of Hawai‘iloa this has been expressed through material registers—while Hōkūle‘a has fiberglass hulls, Hawai‘iloa has wood ones (Finney 2003).²⁰ In the case of Hōkūalaka‘i another tack has been taken—here

¹⁶ It should be noted in this context that at the center of this dispute is a canoe-as-casket that entombs the remains of large male, who one group has recently asserted genealogical claims upon, stating that he is their royal ancestor. See Johnson (n.d.).

¹⁷ On Kaho‘olawe, see Blackford (2004).

¹⁸ Hōkūle‘a figured prominently on the cover of *Spirit of Aloha: The Magazine of Aloha Airlines* for its July/August 2004 issue.

¹⁹ This information comes from an interview with a crew member on 28 July 2007 in Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

²⁰ However, despite protracted efforts, the canoe’s builders could not locate adequate Hawaiian timber for the purpose and Alaskan fir instead. While carved with tremendous care, Hawai‘iloa did not sail well (Finney 2003) and its hulls have split. As of the summer of 2007, Hawai‘iloa sits disassembled and under repair at a Honolulu boatyard.

language is the literal discourse of authenticity, with Hawaiian being the lingua franca aboard the canoe and language training its principal mission. The canoe was built in 2000 in conjunction with 'Aha Pūnana Leo, an educational organization central to the remarkable revitalization of Hawaiian language in recent decades.²¹ Reflecting a commitment to native communities, Hōkūalaka'i's home port is Hilo, far from the tourism and cosmopolitan centers of the islands.²² Unlike Hōkūle'a, the canoe of crossings, both Hawai'iloa and Hōkūalaka'i are distinctly local in their support and ambitions, dwelling within the islands and serving Hawaiian communities directly. Despite these differences in mission and audience, it should be underscored that the canoeing community is tight-knit—though, of course, not without intrigue and tension—and that the canoes often sail together. For example, in September of 2007, Hōkūle'a and Hōkūalaka'i sailed in tandem from Honolulu to Kaua'i in order to conduct a memorial service for a renowned sailor.²³ This simple act of tandem sailing is suggestive of the ways the model of crossing and dwelling should not harden into an analytical binary of ontological absolutes. Rather, it is instructive to view such tropes as mutually constitutive modalities that together announce and enact the constant navigation of Hawaiians between localized sensibilities and globalized immediacies.²⁴

My point in this brief discussion of contemporary ocean sailing has been to begin suggesting ways we might regard Hōkūle'a and its sister canoes as living tradition. If we resist being drawn into authenticity debates, we preserve an analytical site from which to listen for the multiple but undeniable articulations of Hawaiianness expressed through these vessels of culture. These canoes work together to prompt discussions about—even arguments over—the boundaries, meanings, and responsibilities of being and representing Hawaiians.

²¹ For more on Hōkūalaka'i and 'Aha Pūnana Leo, see www.ahapunaleo.org/eng/programs/hokualakai.html.

²² Makali'i, based out of Kawaihae, is another Hawai'i Island *wa'a* (canoe) that deserves mention in this context. Makali'i stands in the lineage of Hōkūle'a but, like Hōkūalaka'i, its crew members emphasize Hawaiian language and ritual protocol. Kainani Kahaunaele, a crew member, language teacher, and singer, was recently interviewed for a Hawaiian language television news program. She drew attention to the social function of the canoe, saying, "The interdependence critical to a thriving community on the land is paralleled on the canoe. If we focus on these lessons, where people understand the value and need for collective cooperation, we as a people can truly make positive strides forward." See "Keeping Open Ocean Voyaging Alive: The Makaii (sic)" at <http://kgmb9.com/main/content/view/5818/173/>.

²³ I visited Hōkūle'a and Hōkūalaka'i in July of 2007 and discussed recent voyages with crew members of both.

²⁴ For suggestive theoretical work on the contemporary experience of native peoples whose lives and politics traverse local and international domains, see, e.g., Niezen (2003) and Clifford (2007).

Two Sides of a Faulty Coin: Invention and Authenticity

One problem with “invention of tradition” language, as we have seen, is that it can offend through its cavalier and sometimes dismissive regard for putative continuities, seeing these as a function of rhetorical gesture rather than empirical fact. Invention language is also analytically problematic for the way it can contrastively establish implied authenticities—with all that is at stake in these politically, a point I return to below. These facets of invention language are not productive when considering phenomena like contemporary Hawaiian canoes. Equally unproductive here are classical and some indigenous theories of tradition that rely upon claims of manifest cultural continuity for their coherence. If invention theories offend, at least they call it like they see it. How do theories of tradition predicated on putative continuity speak to phenomena they categorically cannot see, like canoes birthed in anthropological workshops? Invention in this plainest of senses presents a fairly large stumbling block and leaves simple continuity theories in the analytical dark.²⁵

Articulation theories shed some provisional light by viewing radical historical ruptures and the creative management of them as ordinary human affairs. Picking up pieces and crafting identities is, in this view, the stuff of getting through another cultural day.²⁶ But surely, it might be suggested, such processual thinking shortchanges the “realness” of traditional pasts through viewing them as conglomerations of ad hoc presents now passed. This is a fair critique and one that Clifford (2007), for example, has worked to address. This is discernable in his shift from reveling in postmodern disjunctures to seeking out meaningful connectivities across times and places. However, even with renewed attention to the “contents” of tradition, articulation theories avoid essentializing history as much as possible—the past may well be a foreign country but, at least in Hawai‘i, it is not a frozen one.

Shifting attention from things to processes might be analytically sound, but it entails traversing sensitive political ground. To reiterate a point in order to draw it out, such analysis entails resisting discourses of authenticity. As Clifford writes, “in articulation theory the whole question of authenticity is secondary, and the process of social and cultural persistence is political all the way back. It is assumed that cultural forms will always be made, unmade, and remade. Communities can and must reconfigure themselves, drawing selectively on remembered pasts” (2001, 478).²⁷ More recently, Clifford notes how scholars “struggle

²⁵ For recent and wide-ranging treatments of “tradition,” see Engler and Grieve (2005) and Phillips and Schochet (2004).

²⁶ Cf. McCutcheon (2003) on this point with reference to religious discourse.

²⁷ For more on “authenticity,” see, e.g., Gable and Handler (1996) and Penny (2006).

for languages to represent the layered, faceted realities of the ‘indigenous’ today, without imposing reductive, backward-looking criteria of authenticity. What’s at stake in this representational struggle is an adequate *realism* in our ways of thinking comparatively about a range of old and emergent histories” (2007, 214).

While analytically productive, this formulation is also only slightly removed from language Jocelyn Linnekin employed twenty years ago—namely, that tradition is a process of interpretation. Linnekin’s chosen idiom prevented more than it enabled in terms of serious discussion between native and non-native scholars.²⁸ Linnekin, taking Hōkūle‘a as one of her examples, explicitly theorized “tradition” as a function of change and interpretation in a much-cited essay written with Richard Handler (1984). They argued, “we can no longer speak of tradition in terms of the approximate identity of some objective thing that changes while remaining the same. Instead, we must understand tradition as a symbolic process that both presupposes past symbolisms and creatively reinterprets them. In other words, tradition is not a bounded entity made up of bounded constituent parts, but a process of interpretation, attributing meaning in the present through making reference to the past” (287). They concluded:

traditions are neither genuine nor spurious, for if genuine refers to the pristine and immutable heritage of the past, then all genuine traditions are spurious. But if, as we have argued, tradition is always defined in the present, then all spurious traditions are genuine. Genuine and spurious—terms that have been used to distinguish objective reality from hocus-pocus—are inappropriate when applied to social phenomena, which never exist apart from our interpretations of them (288).

To be sure, Clifford’s language of articulation is more nuanced and moves away from “invention,” but Linnekin (1992) had at least gestured in a similar direction—too little too late, perhaps. Consider this reflection on the matter from Ben Finney, the “father” of Hōkūle‘a: “The response made in the name of culture theory—that authenticity is a non-issue since traditions are invented in all cultures anyway—compounded the original insult. Arguing that traditions are neither genuine nor spurious but simply socially constructed, in effect, denies the possibility of expressing a cultural identity based on a remembered past” (2003, 59).

While I appreciate Finney’s concerns, he hasn’t adequately represented the gravity of the predicament, nor its potential richness. If we pluralize “identities” and “pasts” in his formulation, then the denial he suggests is not so clear. Namely, recognizing the polyphony of cultural dialogics entails regarding tradition as

²⁸ Simply put, Linnekin’s emphasis on tradition took shape at the same historical moment (1980s) when Native Hawaiian scholars, activists, and religious leaders were becoming increasingly vocal and visible in asserting connection to the past. The latter, therefore, found Linnekin’s language at counter-purposes to their goals. See Tobin (1994).

always “under construction” and therefore does not deny remembered pasts but rather attempts to acknowledge their various articulations. But if we leave Finney’s point in the singular—“a cultural identity based on a remembered past”—then we need to consider the consequences of such claims in light of his prior assertion regarding the genuine or spurious qualities of tradition. Unfortunately, this linkage is the condition of possibility for actionable politics in our society: courts, dominant publics, and consumers alike expect clear connections between singular representations and claims to authenticity.²⁹ And so we must take seriously strategic essentialisms and well as less tactical versions of the same, for much is at stake (see, e.g., Herzfeld 1997). But to what degree should this political recognition influence scholarly practice and explanation? This question becomes all the more urgent when we take seriously the binary divide that discourses of authenticity often enable and demand: contrastive expression vis-à-vis cultural forms deemed “inauthentic.” As many scholars have argued (e.g., Deloria 1998), this dynamic functions in the exotic imaginary by elevating ideologically and aesthetically pleasing representations of a people to the status of genuine, with obvious costs to members of the community who are not regarded as fulfilling the same. Of equal analytic interest is the fact that this dynamic is also active within social groups, whether families, tribes, or nations. As has been described by Eva Garrouette (2002, 66-67) among others, some Native Americans, for example, have long histories of factionalism whereby various sub-groups claim to be the true representatives of a tradition while, from the same perspective, others within the larger group are labeled impostors or otherwise designated illegitimate. Such dynamics and the claims to authenticity that sustain them have profound and quickly compounding political consequences and create considerable difficulties for scholars seeking to understand local traditions. In a peculiar way, then, emphasis upon authenticity can have the same results as emphasis upon invention. In the case of the former, what appears to be a politically pro-native turn is, under some conditions, a turning away from forms of tradition-making that don’t receive normative endorsement from various publics, native and other. If traditions are made in real time through many articulations, then lifting one voice above the crowd—the true, normative voice of tradition—has a profound silencing effect.

Perhaps I have overstated my argument. Surely Hawaiians are not lining up behind the various canoes I have described to pronounce the Hawaiianness of one at the cost of the others. Indeed, despite some micro-politics and struggles, that is not the case. I suggest that here we see a largely harmonious if polyrhythmic articulation of tradition. But my primary research focus—repatriation issues—reveals another modality of articulated tradition, one that

²⁹ On this theme, see, for example, Povinelli (2002).

is considerably more cacophonous and shrill (Johnson 2007; cf. Friesen 2001, 157-165; Fine-Dare 2005). In several ongoing disputes, more than ten competing Hawaiian groups have been at loggerheads, several claiming authentic Hawaiianness and the authority this confers as their exclusive domain. Native scholars from multiple disciplines have been marshaled to the various camps, which has amplified rather than eased both rhetoric and divisiveness.³⁰ And yet, for all of the acrimony that such settings precipitate, I suggest that tradition here is being constituted in a variety of compelling ways. The cultural “truth” of these moments is found in the struggles themselves, the commitments they demand, the learning and speaking they inspire, and the shared resources they contest and draw upon. This view of culture in-and-as contestation is not, however, widely shared outside of a limited academic sphere. Much weightier conclusions about the past and future of Hawaiian bones, objects, and identities are being rendered by courts, museums and other non-native entities based upon assessments of the authenticity of specific native claims over and against others. It is here that the politics of both invention and authenticity become alarming. As I hope to have made clear, both rhetorical tendencies—however opposite they may appear—reify some identities while causing others to be ignored or maligned, missing thereby the very processes of struggle between identity articulations that constitute living sites of cultural production. Discourses of invention and authenticity both engage in what we might call the fallacy of false metonymy: one part, one voice is taken to represent the whole. If culture were a soliloquy, this might make sense.

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³⁰ These include Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa and Jonathan Osorio, both historians, Kehau Abad, an archeologist, and Rubellite Johnson, a Hawaiian language expert. This is not, however, to suggest that these scholars are unable to critically reflect on such issues. In the summer of 2007, for example, I had an engaging theoretical discussion about Hawaiian repatriation with Ty Kāwika Tengan, a Kanaka ‘Ōiwī anthropologist who has written on the subject of repatriation from an activist and practitioner perspective (Ayau and Tengan 2002). From my side, preserving analytical distance is an “ideal type,” but not one always maintained. In more than ten years of studying repatriation I have gone on record twice, very briefly, to express my opinions, once to challenge the Bishop Museum’s assertion of Native Hawaiian Organization status (Johnson 2007, 137), and once with regard to a conflict of interests between the Chicago Field Museum and the NAGPRA Review Committee regarding a repatriation claim made by the White Mountain Apache Tribe (NAGPRA Review Committee 2006).

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