

Local *Haole* – A Contradiction in Terms? The dilemma of being white, born and raised in Hawai'i

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Abstract

While much has been written about the uniquely Hawaiian take on the category "local" – usually in terms of resistance to colonization, the alternative or counterhegemonic – little has been written about "haole" (white), the trope that served to silhouette the "local" and has evolved in dialectical opposition to it. A term that emerged during the plantation era to represent working-class immigrant workers mostly from Asia, "local" is constructed by exclusion. It has evolved to represent solidarity against all "external forces" controlling Hawai'i from without, such as land development, tourism and the military – all readily equated with haole, the visible sign of whiteness. The prevalence of the prescription "local vs. haole" in contemporary Hawai'i begs an inquiry into other interpretations that are being suppressed. This paper explores some suppressed histories, imaginings and subconscious aspects of identity in Hawai'i through the figure of the white person whose parents – and possibly great-great-great-grandparents – were born and raised in Hawai'i.

I should start out by saying that I am neither white nor born and raised in Hawai'i. Nevertheless, I would like to look at how contemporary notions of race and class play out in the notion of the Hawai'i "Local" from the standpoint of a white person who was born and raised here, what some would call the oxymoronic figure of the "local *haole*". The reason is simple: As an Asian-American who came to Hawai'i (as many of us do) with the idea that I might finally find a place where I "fit in" – neither wholly American nor Asian – I was surprised to find I had less in common with local Asians than with the white people whose parents, grandparents and sometimes great-great-great grandparents had immigrated to the Isles and stayed.

I arrived, like any mainlander, carrying all the Western mythic baggage about paradise and new beginnings – but without the stigma of white skin. Indeed, the first shock was the strangeness of inhabiting that long-envied position of being invisible in America—blending in and being mistaken for "local"—when what I felt more than ever was white. This new discordance between identity as lived and as assigned brought home to me the constructed nature of race, so that I came to discover – at home among local Asians who often accepted me simply because my parents are Japanese – my closet "*haole* within". In short, I feel a certain *simpatico* with my local *haole* friends. In the worrisome clamor over ethnic issues in Hawai'i, no one speaks for them. They certainly do not feel in any position to

speaking for themselves. So I decided to use my privileged vantage point of newly found normative invisibility to consider what it's like to be a local *haole* – to wonder if it's anything like having an Asian face in America.

I want to make it clear that I am not talking about the elite descendants of the original missionaries, often known as *kama'aina*, who are in any case few and still keep fairly exclusive company with themselves; nor the hordes of temporary and recent arrivals, such as the military, tourists, escapists and drifters who despite their numbers are always in flux. What I am calling the local *haole* is a group for which there is no official definition or data, certainly no clearly drawn boundaries. It is not a category so much as a figure. As a sociocultural type, they are working or middle class; most grew up on the Windward side (Kailua) or outer islands (especially Maui), live in mostly-white enclaves, and quite often do not marry outside their group. In many cases they are here because some ancestor left home willingly for a life at sea – either in shipping, trading, or as drifters and castaways who left it all behind. They are distinguished from whites on the Mainland by their ambiguous position vis-à-vis the continent. Having grown up *here*, they report feeling as out of place there as any racial minority, even though they “blend in” and should belong – whereas at home in Hawai'i, through the discourse of “*haole*”, they always already do not belong. As “*haole* girl” Judy Rohrer writes of her experience growing up here, “It is impossible to escape being a *haole* when living in Hawai'i, because local people are always implicitly or explicitly asking why I am here. It is not a given that I belong” (Rohrer 1997:141).

It is often remarked that Hawai'i is a singular American exception to the invisibility of whiteness, which works as “an unmarked marker of others' differentness – whiteness not so much void or formlessness as norm”, according to Ruth Frankenberg. White has never been invisible or normative in Hawai'i. It was superior, dominant, and then it was overthrown. It is this overthrow – at first social, then political and cultural – usually not expressed as such, that represents not only a resistance to colonization and external forces, but that has been fully incorporated into the hegemonic.

Much has been written about the uniquely Hawaiian take on the category “local”, nearly always in terms of class consciousness, resistance, the alternative or counter-hegemonic. By contrast, very little has been written about “*haole*”, the trope which has helped define the Local and taken on as many new meanings. Among other reasons, this probably points to a tendency to ignore or overlook the hegemonic aspects of the Local, and how these are disrupted by the oxymoronic figure of the local *haole*.

It's worth looking at the moment out of which “Local” emerged: the shared experience of oppression on the plantations. In a series of sugar strikes in the 1930s and 1940s, “Local” came to represent a growing awareness of working-class solidarity on the part of all plantation groups – Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean and others – against the *haole* group that had displaced the Hawaiians and seized economic and political control (Okamura 1994, 1980). With the rapid increase in land development starting in the 1960s, the term started to take on salience as a stance of resistance against “external forces” threatening a valued, unique way of life, and the “attempt of local people to retain or to regain control of the social, economic, and political future of Hawai'i from various outsiders who are believed to be leading Hawai'i irreversibly in a direction it should not go” (Okamura 1980:137).

Like other such constructions, “Local” works by exclusion. Anthropologist John Kirkpatrick wrote in 1987 that it “brings together the Hawaii-born in opposition to Haoles” and “tends not to apply to any Haole, immigrant or Hawaii-born” (Kirkpatrick 1987a:304). Until recently, *haoles* could not, by definition, be “Local”, because the identity was constructed out of that dialectic. “Haole” was thus constructed out of one and the same movement. As Richard Slotkin writes,

In societies that are still in the process of achieving a sense of identity, the establishment of a normative, characteristic image of the group’s character is a psychological necessity; and the simplest means of defining or expressing the sense of such a norm is by rejecting some other group whose character is deemed to be the opposite. (Slotkin 1973)

Thus, local apologists who insist the term “*haole*” is neutral and has no pejorative connotations, as well as whites who reject it as “inaccurate”, deny its historical origins. “Haoles . . . form a distinctive ethnic group or ‘nationality’ in Hawai’i’s ethnosociology. Moreover, Haoles are not simply one group among many. They are cast as marginal to much of Hawaii’s social life” (Kirkpatrick 1987a, p.3).

From about the mid-1960s, the discourse of “local vs haole” began to subsume – together with the history of colonization, impositions of Christian (Western) values, theft of land, overthrow of the monarchy, and indentured servitude on the plantations – contemporary loss of control through rapid urban development and the attendant competition for jobs, land and resources, and other restraints of a tourist-based economy. Through the discourse of “Local vs. *haole*”, oppressions currently felt and culturally remembered are linked with the Other, the West – and thus readily equated to the visible sign of whiteness, the resented military, tourists, malihini and kama’aina alike.

“Just as the haole, or foreigner, is the quintessence of all that pressed in on the Hawaiian way of life in the nineteenth century, so the mainland haole is the quintessence of all that is pressing in on the Islands in the twentieth. Thus the present-day white migrant . . . is the visible reminder of converging imposition” (Whittaker, 1986:142) who finds himself “heir to a string of surprising descriptions – privileged, arrogant, stupid, lazy, rich, and exploitative” (xxx).

The prevalence of this standard interpretation – the dominant – begs an inquiry into what other interpretations are being suppressed. For it is clear that the bulk of *haoles* who make Hawai’i a permanent home, who choose to remain and raise children here, are neither extraordinarily wealthy nor privileged; as a group, they report striving to fit in and aspire helplessly to local status – especially as the children enter school. The narrative that equates all *haoles* in one fell swoop with a colonial past, capitalism, racism, militarism and globalization “manages to provide a past for today’s non-Haole ethnic groups, ignoring old divisions among and within them” and “flagrantly omits any mention of how and why most of Hawaii’s Haole residents came to be in the state: after all, few are descended from missionaries or plantation owners” (Kirkpatrick 1987a:4). The local *haole* whose financial means and knowledge of the outside world is as limited as any other local’s does not participate in “whiteness”, that position currently understood as “not a culture but precisely the absence of culture . . . the empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn’t and whom one can hold back” (Roediger 1994:13).

Moreover, equating “*haole*” with “external forces” overlooks certain historical realities, such as how the group holding political power since the mid-1950s – the descendants of older immigrant Chinese and Japanese – have themselves become ascendant by courting external forces. It is worth remembering that even the impetus for working-class solidarity on the plantations – the genesis of “Local” – came from the Mainland in the form of organizers from the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the Communist Party.

Much of postwar development has, in fact, been ushered in by just those older Asian immigrant groups that are increasingly laying claim to “Local” status. Beginning with the Democratic revolution of 1954, which sought to overturn colonialism and set a new economic course for Hawaii, Democratic governors from Jack Burns to John Waihee and Ben Cayetano have executed this in the form of attracting capital from outside.

The 1954 Democratic revolution had as its central task the transformation of Hawai’i from a plantation to a “modern” society. This was done in the context of the global and national environment . . . Of necessity, restructuring of the economy had to rely on outside forces for infusion of capital. U.S. capital seized the opportunity . . . and essentially allied itself with the new kids on the political block. Together, they were able to deliver the “new Hawai’i”. (Aoude 1993:220)

Land was the main resource Hawai’i had to offer. Capital could be persuaded to invest only where it could see “a quick and high return on investment with minimum risk. That has meant tourism and real estate development” (*ibid.*:221).

The populist, working-class Palaka Power movement that formed the power base of Governor John Waihee continued in this tradition, courting Japanese investment worth \$11 billion between 1986 and 1990, accounting for virtually all economic growth in the state in the period (*Star-Bulletin* November 24, 1991, A1) – an irony for a group that rode to power on “local” symbolism. “As governor, John Waihee appeared to move far from [Palaka Power] commitments. He was commonly perceived . . . as having sold out to specific commercial interests and . . . to have been a relentless promoter of Japanese investment at the further expense of what remained ‘local’ in Hawaii” (Pratt and Smith 2000:62). The “revolutionary” Democrats had, in fact, followed in the tradition of the first, Republican governor of Hawai’i after statehood, William Quinn. “Both Burns and Quinn were instrumental in soliciting mainland capital to come over to Hawai’i. Both were successful in their quest” (Aoude 1993:227).

Their ventures enriched many on the islands in the boom years – but not all. In studies conducted in 1970, 1980, and 1990 on the socioeconomic status of Hawai’i ethnic groups, Jonathan Okamura found no significant change in the ranking of the major groups, and especially no upward mobility of any disadvantaged group. Since 1970, Native Hawaiians and Filipinos have occupied the bottom tier of jobs and family income; the Chinese, Japanese and Caucasians the top (Okamura 1998). “No land legislation that the Democrats have sponsored has really benefited the Native Hawaiians. In fact, it could be argued that the Native Hawaiians had once more been trampled in the Democrats’ haste to ‘arrive’” (Aoude 1993:224).

As the Chinese and especially Japanese communities have gained in wealth and power relative to other immigrant groups, a tension has arisen in the identity “Local” that corresponds to their increased attempts to stake a claim to locality. In

their working-class origins and cross-generational attachment to their island home, are not local *haoles* in fact more local?

There has been a growing awareness in recent years of the contradictions between the working-class origins of “Local” – still operative in tongue-in-cheek litmus tests such as “You are barefoot in most of your elementary school pictures”; “Your only suit is a bathing suit”; “You have a sister, cousin, aunty or mom named ‘Honey Girl’ [and] someone in the family named ‘Boy,’ ‘Tita,’ ‘Bradah’ . . .” (*Honolulu Advertiser* August 4, 1996) – and local Asian wealth and privilege. For, as Raymond Williams notes of the hegemonic practice of selective tradition: “It is at the vital points of connection, where a version of the past is used to ratify the present and to indicate directions for the future, that a selective tradition is at once powerful and vulnerable” (Williams 1977:116).

The alternative *Honolulu Weekly* recently lambasted the state’s lopsided ethnic representation in the legislature and in key appointed positions, noting that Hawaiians, Filipinos and even *haoles* are drastically under-represented for their numbers, a situation it blames on the “Democratic machine” under Governor Geoge Ariyoshi, who was “first, last and always” for the “older immigrant descendents” (Chinese and Japanese). Collins and Stauffer note that throughout the 1990s, half the House and two-thirds of the Senate have been “OIDs”; today 80 percent of Senate leaders and more than 60 percent of House leaders are from those two groups, as are 75 percent of key staff. The Hawai’i literary journal *Bamboo Ridge*, known for bringing “Local” literature to a national audience, recently came under fire by critics who say its local literature – often plantation-era tales of Asian immigrants to Hawaii – isn’t local at all. It’s neocolonial, at least to the extent that anyone who is not Hawaiian is “usurping the space” which belongs to Hawaiians (Chock 1996:17). “In effect, some are calling the Local vs. Haole paradigm a mask behind which all non-white Locals can hide if sides are to be taken . . .,” (ibid).

In a sign of contemporary fissures in the “Local”, Chris Leong found so many ambiguities in his exhaustive exploration of how Island residents interpret “Local” identity that he concluded there is no single definition, that the term is relative, gradational and shifts meaning with the speaker and situation, and finally that it is a marker of belonging that must be agreed upon by others. Pressed to make concrete distinctions, almost everyone he interviewed concluded that “Local” is above all an “attitude”.

Reading over some of Leong’s fascinating interviews and transcripts of conversations about “Local” with groups ranging from middle-aged kama’aina women to local Hawaiian men living in the projects to high school students on the Big Island provides a kind of record of past, current and tentative new meanings – or what Raymond Williams might identify as the residual, dominant and emergent. One noticeable shift is that nearly everyone Leong spoke with agreed that *haoles* can be Local – “a drastic shift from when the term was first used” (Leong 1997:214). As a result, “*haole*” too has taken on connotations that begin to drive a wedge between Caucasian ethnicity and whiteness. Anyone can be “haolified” – as I have discovered – who adopts what appears to be a superior attitude that threatens the “Local” way of life, such as use of standard English in situations where others are using pidgin (Kirkpatrick 1987a:307). “Haoliness has as much to do with place as race, with culture as biology. Consequently there is a peculiar haoliness about non-white ethnics from the mainland” (Rohrer 1997:146).

One of the more interesting sources of tension that emerges in Leong's interviews is the crisis posed by the Native Hawaiian movement, and attempts to incorporate it – with some difficulty – in the discourse of “Local vs *haole*”. Hardly anyone Leong interviewed or who has written on the topic in recent years will deny that Hawaiians are the most local, by anyone's definition (Leong 1997:56) – that they can claim this identity without contest (Wooden 1995:110; Okamura 1994:171). And yet the Native Hawaiian does not share in the plantation experience seen as the defining moment of “Local”; in fact, Wooden notes that one way Caucasians maintained their dominance was “continued ties with the Hawaiian royalty [which] served as an alliance which maintained the separation between these two groups and the immigrant ethnic groups (24). The Native Hawaiian movement in fact seized on the moment of “Local vs *haole*” discourse as resistance to “external forces” to assert the emergent, truly counterhegemonic idea that ancestral claims to land form the standard for Hawaiian sovereignty (Trask 1993:121).

Immigrants to Hawai'i, including both *haole* (white) and Asians, cannot truly understand this cultural value of *malama 'aina* even when they feel some affection for Hawai'i. Two thousands years of practicing a careful husbandry of the land and regarding it as a mother can never be and should never be claimed by recent arrivals to any Native shores. Such a claim amounts to an arrogation of Native status. (Trask 1993:248)

“Aina”

The emphasis on land – the discourse of *aina* – complicates the position of many local Asians, who have been here no longer than *haoles* and are often a good deal wealthier and more well-traveled – less “Local” – and increasingly visible in traditionally segregated white schools such as Punahou. “As Darrell Lum, local writer and co-editor of Bamboo Ridge wonders, ‘If local is based on a plantation, working-class heritage, how do modern, middle-class professionals claim that as their own?’ (Lum 1996).

Thus we see a redoubling of emphasis on the *haole* as the enemy: since the oppressive plantation owner is clearly a descendant of the oppressive missionary, and part of the legacy of white colonialism worldwide, Hawaiians and Asians can be spoken of as sharing this history of being forced into conformity with American values – a “shared sense of pain” (Adv October 22, 2000, Burris), an idea bound up in “Local vs *haole*”.

Several [“Locals” interviewed] recalled a personal history of bitterness, resentment, and anger towards people who looked down on them. It was mentioned that condescending attitudes toward native Hawaiians began the day foreigners arrived on their shores. Immigrant groups coming from simple backgrounds also experienced the patronizing attitudes from superior white people. [Descendants] of the native Hawaiians and Asian immigrants voiced that they still experience these types of feelings today . . . (Leong 1997:220)

Although bitterness and anger over “condescending attitudes” is shared by working-class people everywhere, “Local vs *haole*” attempts to tie it to the discourse of *aina*: Suffering on the plantation, and through the discriminatory injustices of World War II, gives Asians and especially Japanese a certain claim to

having suffered for, and died on, this ground – having “ancestors” buried here. Thus Obon festivities – which honor the ancestors – are given much more prominence in Hawaii than New Year’s, which is not the case in Japan. Newspapers are jammed with continuous reminders of *nisei* bravery in World War II and the privations of working on the plantation – a sign of how tenuous this association with the modern-day Local is becoming.

Haoles are also situated as “opposite” Hawaiians through an emphasis on what Elvi Whittaker calls one of the two defining nature myths of the West: “man against nature” (10) – as represented by the figure of the missionary and then the planter who introduced the idea of land as property and treated it as a source of profit. “*Haole*” is here diametrically opposed to “*aloha aina*”, one of the defining principles of localism as constructed (Okamura 1980:121; Kirkpatrick 1987a:309).

From the earliest writings about the Hawaiian people to the most recent, everyone agrees that Hawaiians have a value system that clashes with Western values . . . Hawaiians value relationships: family, group cooperation, and harmony with nature. This conflicts with individualism, competition, and the manipulation and control of nature that are usually associated with Western behavior. (Leong 1997:9)

This reading of “*aina*” makes the *haole* always already a trespasser – and the more so the longer his family has been on Hawaiian soil.

And yet, as I noted, the bulk of *haoles* who have made Hawai’i their home for generations descended from people in shipping, trading, or drifters and escapist guided by a vision of “leaving it all behind” and beginning again in “paradise”. This is the other complementary western myth Whittaker describes as utopia, “the promised land”. “The image of paradise where islands in the South Seas are imbued with the myth and lore of centuries . . . [relief from] the evils of . . . industrial carnage, encroachment on time and space, violation of culturally mediated notions of beauty” (xxix).

Far from seeking an “outpost of white culture in the Pacific”, these men were drawn by the promise of “a sort of Lockean tabula rasa, a rebirth . . . something the European world had always cherished as a result of its fixation with Genesis and beginnings: to ‘begin again’” (Whittaker 1986:29). Hundreds of sailors a year jumped ship at Honolulu Harbor on discovering that they had docked at a “sailor’s paradise”, including 1,041 men in 1860 alone, dispatched “to idle in grog shops and brothels, to sign on to another crew at a later time, to set themselves up in their own shipboard occupations . . . or to establish a small business enterprise” (*ibid.*:27).

That is why the ocean remains such a central figure to the *haole* who grew up in this culture: as trespassers on their homeland, the only “place” they can take refuge is the waters. The waters are their home because they came by sea. And so we find *haole* communities near major harbors, where social life centers around yacht clubs and boating – Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii Kai, Kahala.

The Kaneohe Bay Yacht Club

Belly-up to the bar or tracing the spoils of the latest sailboat race or fishing trip – often in a rough, lilting pidgin – one finds a mix of wealthy kama’aina, retired

military, and a core contingent of "Locals", including the generation now beginning families, brought in by their parents. Many make their living in trades connected to the sea, and own boats not because they are wealthy, but because their income consists of fishing, repairing boats, running tours – and because a nautical bent runs in the family. Those who were born and raised on the Windward side leave only reluctantly. "Town" is spoken of in distant tones, as if it were still a trip of days, as if they all lived in a time before automobiles, before the Sin, when white people still existed in harmony with the Hawaiians. Before they were *haole*.

It is, as a friend described it, "a refuge" – one that feels in contemporary Hawai'i increasingly like the past. Here, locals are free to lapse into pidgin; there is hardly an Asian or Polynesian face around. Localism, which constructs "*haole*" at that moment of theft/rape/colonization, denies the local *haole* any route out of history, into a future free of guilt. He can only travel back, to a time before the breach, to the magic of that original encounter.

Arrival by ship: the magic moment

How much of the culture we now consider of the islands – whether under the rubric "Local" or "Hawaiian" – is the bastard child of that first encounter, which, whatever the motivations on each side, began pure and equal, like a first meeting of lovers? Echoes of it resound in the local *haole* subconscious: sensuality, indolence and aesthetics, "a triad of indulgences promised as alternatives to the combined restrictions of Christianity and industrialization" (Whittaker 1986:19) all come together in the image of the sailing ship pulling into harbor, and the Hawaiian girls swimming out naked to meet them. And far from resisting the white intruders, the *ali'i* developed such a fascination with Christianity that the regent Kaahumanu ordered the destruction of sacred icons and an end to the *kapu* system, a sort of deliverance from the gods.

That moment has been overshadowed by the ruptures that came after. The Hawaiian sovereignty movement has equated Captain Cook's arrival with the overthrow as one and the same defining moment – the beginning of the fight for justice – much as the genesis of betrayal is traced to the first moments of courtship in divorce court. Yet there remain signs around us of a time when the cultures were happily married: apparent oxymorons like Christian hula or Hawaiian quilting – residual in the sense of a repository of what has had to be suppressed but could not be eliminated in the struggle to adapt to modernity.

We know the *haole* established himself on the Islands with the Hawaiians' agreement and that the two groups ruled together for the better part of a century, but that is a dangerous memory that threatens both "Local" and the sovereignty movement. Today it must all be seen as a welcome that was exploited. For to maintain that the Hawaiian was deceived makes the Hawaiian into a naive primitive – on a par with the disparaged Indians who traded Manhattan Island for trinkets. Thus the discourse of "*aloha*" – part of the packaging of "Local" – rewrites the encounter as a clash of cultures, a misunderstanding that must continue to be written on the *haole*:

The unusual "open class" nature of the Hawaiian society gave the Caucasians . . . access to resources which would eventually enable them to shape the direction

and growth of the Hawaiian economic system as well as alter the balance of power to their advantage . . . Because this change in elites from Hawaiian to Caucasian evolved within the existing social structure . . . and not by a combative force of power by the Caucasians . . . this transition saw the maintenance of a society that kept a distinctive “Hawaiian” style and tone. (Wooden 1995:20)

Student papers collected by former University of Hawaii sociologist Wayne Wooden in the period 1975–1994 on being “Local” often point to segregated *haole* communities as proof that *haole* culture lacks the values of “*aloha*”: “This lack of integration on the part of the haoles makes the local seem inferior. We are not. We try to show them the Aloha culture but the bulk of them remain apart. In order to protect our island from becoming a cement jungle, the answer seems to be to keep the haole out” (Wooden 1995:131).

Reminders of Hawaiian loss of sovereignty keep alive the sense of injustice, and thus the right to power, of the current reigning group (read “Local”) and help defuse tension over competing claims to land – one based on native sovereignty, the other on economic development. When the Hawaiian movement buys into the discourse of “Local vs *haole*”, it denies a long history of Hawaiian–*haole* cooperation and overlooks the fact that their fellow “Locals” in the Democratic Party have not yielded Hawaiians much in the way of righting injustice.

For it is the Native Hawaiian community, especially, whose lands are threatened by urban development. “In most every instance,” Wooden found, “the areas that have been developed for tourist expansion have been the areas located on the drier sides of the islands . . . [N]ewer developments . . . are often being built in the same areas as those of the ancient Hawaiian communities” (1995:15). As the state grapples with “ways to disentangle its economic development strategies from the net of Hawaiian land rights” (Aoude 1993:226), emphasizing issues such as rent from ceded lands and a political solution to sovereignty through state-controlled entities helps to divide those who share certain class concerns, regardless of ancestry.

Okamura points to one of these: as agricultural land is freed up from sugar production, how will it be used? Sugar companies, now multinational corporations, are in the business of real estate and development. They also control water rights. Will “Local” concerns about stemming the tide of “*haole*” influence address what Aoude calls the “potentially dangerous . . . points of intersection among the environmental concerns, Native Hawaiian rights and the general problem of housing and low-quality jobs”? (1993:231).

Local vs global

“*Haole*”, as a discourse, defends the reality of whiteness, positioning localism as a necessary defense against its overpowering hegemony. But is it whiteness that is “leading Hawaii in a direction it should not go”? What gets glossed over in the rhetoric over localism is one that the common man understands: living on an island, “the most isolated land mass on Earth”, Hawai’i has never really had a choice about development – or at least not the choice as presented. The *haole* oligarchy itself came to power not through the innate power of whiteness, but by its ability to link Hawaii interests to “external forces”. Globalization has always been an inevitability.

Localism, while it serves a need as a marker of legitimacy in Hawai'i, also by definition stands opposed to upward mobility. Its badges and codes of belonging, such as speaking pidgin, tend to preclude fluency in the wider world. Wooden noted of his college students that lower-middle-class respectability was often the highest goal for most of them: "Such a goal not only reduces social stress and familial disengagement, but it allows local people the opportunity to disassociate themselves from more urban (and mainland) ways" (1995:33). For many local people, he found, "the inability or unwillingness to compete within the more competitive value system spells defeat in terms of high social status" (34).

It is here that class differences break to the surface. For the upwardly mobile, tensions developing in the discourse of "Local" are answered increasingly by relegating "Local" to the realm of culture and attitudes – "enjoy different types of ethnic foods"; "dress casually when have the opportunity"; "enjoy simple things in life"; "thoughtful/considerate/courteous"; "aloha spirit" (Leong 1997:72) – as a repository of residual desires, so that one can have aspirations in the wider world and still be "Local" if one adopts the right attitude. Four middle-class local Japanese men in their thirties and forties told Leong:

If you were to conceive of yourself as a worldly sophisticated person, you wouldn't be "local". You kind of have to think of yourself as a simple person, as a naive person. If you lose that mind-set then you lose that identity . . . It's not that you don't carry a cellular phone or play the stock market. I don't think that has anything to do with what we're saying . . . Could you be sophisticated and be a "local"? There are a lot of sophisticated "locals". But, if you go around thinking that you're sophisticated, it's almost like saying "local haole". You're "local", but you're really not "local". (Leong 1997:72)

For the "most" local, by contrast – the dark-skinned, pidgin-speaking, working-class people who answer to the archetype – localism cannot be reduced to a choice or an attitude. Rather than a stance of resistance, localism becomes a liability, as the ideology of "Local vs *haole*" increasingly is experienced as local vs global.

The travel agency

A maze of desks aflutter with paper and computer terminals hums with the industry of a room full of Asian women wired simultaneously into phone and computer, processing simultaneous global links that speak to the Asian obsession with wireless communication, bodiless rapport. Raised slightly above the din, a manuki neko doll and pyramid of oranges at the altar recall that all this coming and going generates and implies wealth. The images on the travel brochures make a commodity of locations, a kind of ownership: this is what we can sell you . . . we who participate in dominion through consumption.

Hawaiians, despite their identification with ocean travel, have for the last 800 years always had to be staking a claim on the physical geography (Leong 1997:7). The Japanese don't, because their sovereignty is political and economic. The Asian's dominion is the air, not only locally but globally: air travel, transnational mobility. Nomadic, diasporic and wealthy. Currently residing on one or another island – Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia – we are nonetheless still crossing the ocean with our cell phones and relatives overseas, calling card plans and computer jobs and easy navigation of different cuisines. For as tenuous as his

ties may be to people and places outside Hawaii, the local Asian shares in this strand of cultural kinship overseas: aspirational, capitalistic, nomadic, the emergent modern. The Asian is at home in the future.

In her work on the Chinese diaspora, Aihwa Ong writes of the emerging notion of “flexible citizenship”: “the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions” (Ong 1999:6). Globalization, which might threaten the economy and cultural identity of a former colonial power such as England, has in Asia “been the key dynamics in shaping cultural practices, the formation of identity, and shifts in state strategies” (*ibid.*:17). Thus aspiring transnational Chinese

celebrate flexibility and mobility, which give rise to such figures as the multiple-passport holder; the multicultural manager with “flexible capital”; . . . and so on . . . [U]nder transnationality the new links between flexibility and the logics of displacement, on the one hand, and capital accumulation, on the other, have given new valence to such strategies . . . Flexibility, migration, and relocations . . . have become practices to strive for rather than stability. (Ong 1999:19)

Asians, by virtue of a history of diaspora, are simply not as “local” as their *haole* or Hawaiian counterparts, even if “the only places you’ve ever been on the mainland are Vegas and Disneyland (20 times)” (*Advertiser*, August 4, 1996). As Ong puts it, the “alternative notions of citizenship” implied by Asian investor-immigrants’ strategies of accumulation and relocation “suggest that citizenship benefits, even for the entrenched white middle class, have become more precarious in a world of circulating multinational subjects. Ultimately, the new Asian rich make whiteness a more problematic concept in the era of globalization” (Ong 1999:109).

Heirs to a celebrated tiger/dragon economic status worldwide, Asians are no longer assigned a place. Their adjustment to Japan or California is on a different order than that of the island-born *haole* who goes to the mainland. For while a Caucasian appearance might open the doors to jobs or privilege, “*haole*” as an identity is not the same as white. Whiteness is not a culture; it is a position the local *haole* does not know how to take. And localism is a position they are often still not allowed to take.

(see conclusion following references)

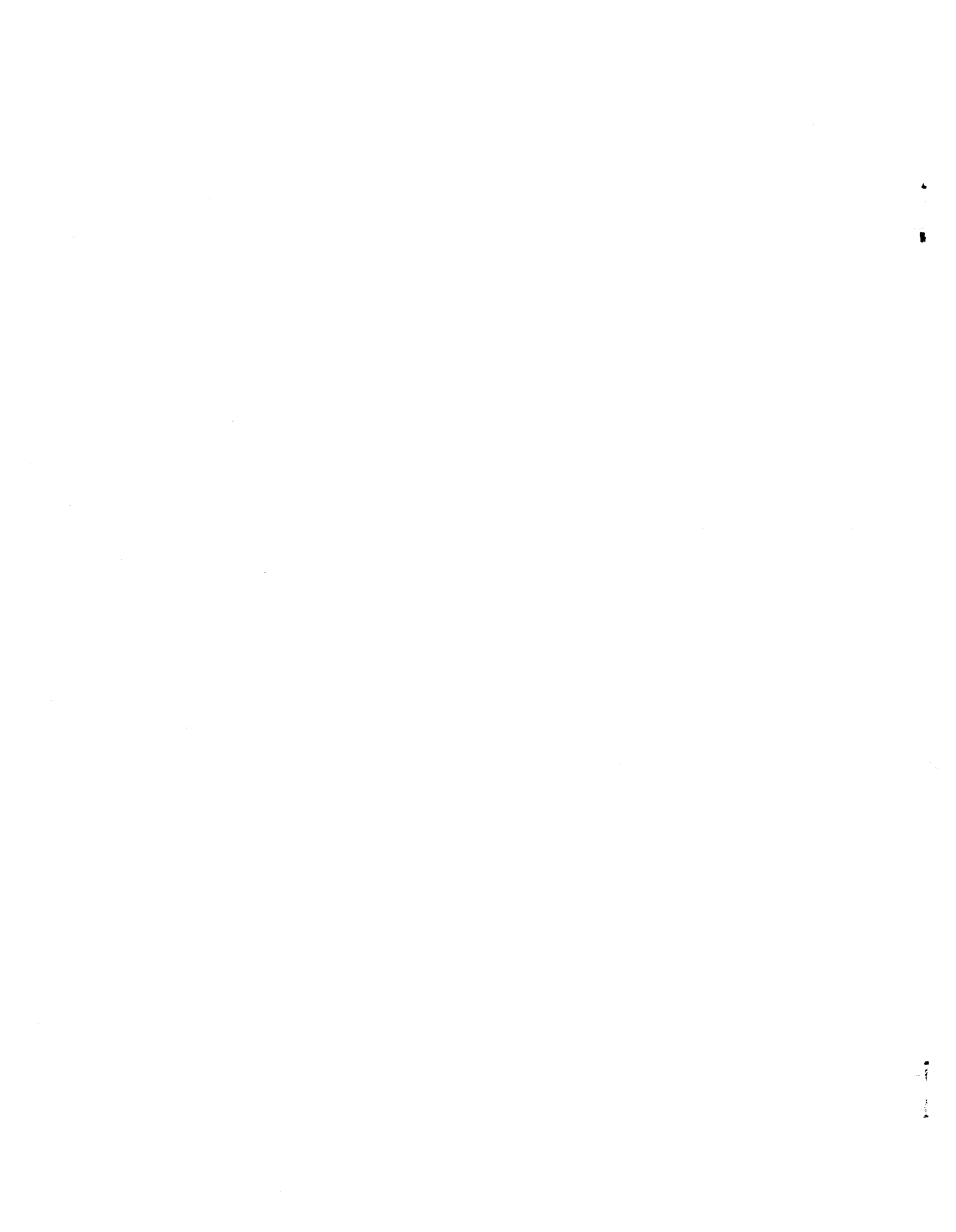
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[this concluding section was inadvertently omitted from the journal article!]

WHO SPEAKS?

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was.” ... It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.... The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers....: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. ... Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious. (Benjamin, 255)

History, says the theorist Walter Benjamin, is written by the victors, and it is the victors who lay claim to the spoils of culture. An example presented itself to me recently in a graduate seminar at the University of Hawai‘i. An artist presented a collaborative cultural project that took a critical look at Waikiki, the islands’ oft-maligned tourist mecca, presenting an alternative perspective on its high-rise hotels, condominiums, designer boutiques, restaurants, and attractions by pointing out the original, Hawaiian uses of the former swamp land and tracing its subsequent changes of ownership through various haole landlords.

The implied criticism of one of the most recognizable symbols of modern-day Hawai‘i by a haole from the mainland clearly upset many of the “locals” among the 15 students, including two local haoles (as was reportedly the case among other local audiences). None of the locals, however, would speak. Those who did respond to the project, Caucasian students from the Mainland, sympathized with the native Hawaiians who had lost their land to colonization. The few critics pointed out the potentially divisive nature of the project, its tendency to reify identity based on race, implicating haoles — whether tourists or fifth-generation island residents — with the colonizers, and the oppressed with Hawaiians, overlooking divisions within these groups and the complex identifications of Hawai‘i “locals” with the tourist infrastructure that drives the islands’ economy. The artist, who had lived on the islands just two years at the time of the project, confessed to being puzzled by the deeply subjective reactions of many local residents to criticism of Waikiki.

Indeed, such polarization on the topic of tourism and land development — common on the university campus, in the media, in the state legislature, and throughout contemporary Hawai‘i — is often shockingly emotional to outsiders. Walter Benjamin writes of the continuing power of historical narratives:

[A]ll rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them.... Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural

treasures.... There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. (256)

It is because history, read as identity, continues to define us in the present that dominant readings of the past also determine the future, eclipsing the possibility of revisioning the past in an imaginative act of remembrance. "Victors" are such because they continue to seize the spoils, writ culture. Resistance to this narrative — seen in the struggle for identity read on the faces of my classmates, and heard later through their rage — remains repressed in many forums in Hawai'i by the dominant discourse of "local vs. haole," even and especially now that "native Hawaiian" is thrown into the mix.

Polarization along these lines — whereby mainland Caucasians who reject identification with the haole side of the equation, and cannot claim a "local" identity, therefore side with the movement for Hawaiian sovereignty — serves power by continuing to frame the issue in terms easily reduced to race, class, and ethnicity. Such strategies do nothing to alter material conditions, serving instead to rob those who have chosen Hawai'i as a home — for whatever length of time, whatever our investments — of a sense of possibility and agency.

What are the costs of development? What does it mean to live in both Hawai'i and America? What choices do we face as a community? What visions do we have for the future? The "local haole," like the Asian in America, is arguably as much a child of local history as any group that stakes such a claim on essentialist grounds. Encouraged to speak from the conflict at the center of their identity, they would, I believe, have much to tell us about the islands' future.