

Jocelyn Linnekin, *Children of the Land: Exchange and Status in a Hawaiian Community*. New Brunswick, N. J. : Rutgers University Press, 1984. Pp. xvi, 264, index. \$27.00.

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Despite some fine cultural studies of contemporary Polynesians, most of which have a psychological bent (see, for example, Howard 1974; Kirkpatrick 1983; and Levy 1973), the treatment of specifically *contemporary* Polynesians has generally been a blind spot in anthropology. The reasons for such an aporia, despite anthropology's classic and continuing concerns with Polynesia as a culture area, are not difficult to discover. Polynesia before European contact had been one of the quintessential sources of human exotic otherness, which anthropology mined in establishing itself as a distinctive Western field of knowledge. The establishment of anthropology was accompanied by the pressing function of salvage – either reconstructing past cultures or recording those in the process of disappearing. Unlike the post-European contact situation of Africa or much of Melanesia, that of Polynesia was, again, quintessen-

tially understood by anthropologists as one of virtual cultural destruction and loss. The repeated discovery around the globe by modern fieldworkers of the subtle resiliency of “authentic” indigenous cultures amid conditions of massive social change has been a much more difficult ethnographic story to tell for twentieth-century Polynesia, and accounts have been left largely to historians, geographers, and development-oriented social scientists. This anthropological inability to “see” indigenous cultural distinctiveness in the postcontact situation of Polynesia is an early instance of a now more general problem: understanding cultural diversity in a world system that by the late twentieth century has forced anthropologists to rethink some of the grounding assumptions and practices that inform ongoing ethnographic research by the fieldwork method.

Indeed, the neglected study of modern Polynesia has heightened significance precisely because it has long been a troublesome case for contemplating the distinctiveness of cultures whose public forms and expressions have become severely attenuated, masked, and ironic to those (“natives” as well as anthropologists) who behold them. The obvious challenge for anthropology, then, is to revise its operating assumptions and research practices to grasp more sensitively the contemporary conditions of the kinds of cultures that have long been its distinctive object.

In the case of Jocelyn Linnekin’s ethnography, the issue is what makes contemporary Hawaiians Hawaiian. Much more so than the peoples of western Polynesia (e.g., Samoans and Tongans), contemporary eastern Polynesians have been neglected subjects of anthropology. Among scholars a certain qualified and compromised assimilation under considerable indigenous control characterizes postcontact western Polynesia, whereas virtual destruction or obliteration of native cultures is the salient image of eastern Polynesia. This judgment is remarkably premature, however rooted it is in Polynesian anthropology, to anyone who has spent time in Hawaii (or for that matter, Tahiti, the Marquesas, and other groups of eastern Polynesia). Yet, these societies certainly cannot be described in precisely the same terms used by reconstructionist accounts of them. Nor can the classic concepts developed by anthropological theory in the general study of oceanic societies (e.g., the moral economy of exchange systems pioneered by Mauss and Lévi-Strauss) be applied without irony to the presumed remnant, compromised, or devastated “natives” of late-twentieth-century Polynesia. In what terms, then, might the contemporary ethnography of Polynesians be developed, given the challenge that present conditions of global social

change pose to the grounding assumptions of anthropological research practice?

Linnekin's understanding of this problem is sophisticated, but her resolution of it is not. The fashionable key phrase that indicates an alternative approach to conventional cultural analysis is "the invention of culture or tradition" (see, for example, Wagner 1981; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Such an approach challenges claims that any particular model of a culture is authoritative, authentic, or integral. Further, it is sensitive to the ironic conditions of cultural processes (as well as to the problems of representing them objectively) and appreciates the multiple ideological uses and interpretations of cultural practices that anthropologists have tended to understand as essential, as "by and for themselves." The most intimate and seemingly persistent expressions of culture are products of changing historical and politicized contexts, and indeed are thoroughly understood as such by native peoples in their own forms of discourse. (One of the favored demonstrations of such an "invention of culture" approach is to undermine the notion of cultural authenticity by replacing the appearance of timeless, essential tradition by an account of the latter's recent, usually complex origins in historical events.) In short, diverse cultural systems in the modern era of capitalism and Western expansion must be understood as thoroughly contested from within as well as from without.

The implication is that people are constantly debating and struggling to define their culture, and are not at ease or at home in it. Latter-day Hawaiians are indeed children of the land, and many of their concerns are recognizably pan-Polynesian, as Linnekin demonstrates. But their contemporary problems of self-definition and daily life are those of ethnicity – just as they are for the many other non-Polynesian groups that inhabit the islands. Any consideration of what it is to be Hawaiian today cannot escape the very special conditions of plurality and modernity in which the familiar and shared concerns of Polynesian forms of life are sustained, but not without debate and uncertainty even among those who most purely practice a "traditional" way of life like the people of Keanae whom Linnekin studied.

While Linnekin's introduction, conclusion, and many of her insights are imbued with the spirit of the approach characterized above, the execution of her research and analysis is dominated by certain longstanding conventions of anthropological practice that block her, finally, from delivering a systematic work addressing the issues in the way she poses them. Most fundamentally (and conventionally), she locates herself in a research site where "they still do it," so to speak – a village that

is self-consciously and emblematically recognized by Hawaiians (both residents and those who live elsewhere) as a place in which the “traditional” way of life is lived authentically. While anthropologists of Polynesia have habitually located themselves in such sites to avoid the exigencies of contemporary conditions, one might argue that they are exceptional, awkward, and difficult research locations for those, like Linnekin, who want to understand and confront Hawaiian culture fully in its contemporary context. Not that Hawaiian practices are any less contested or ideologically manipulated within Keanae, but here, at least, the ironies of the invented conditions of tradition are likely to be subtle and masked. The danger, then, of locating in the conventional sort of fieldsite is that the ethnographer might take the practice of Hawaiian way of life pretty much at face value. While this monograph is rich in insight and in marginal asides about the way tradition is invented, it largely succumbs to this danger. a

I believe Linnekin’s crucial error was to accept as an objective distinction of her own ethnographic analysis the prominent inside-outside distinction made by Keanae residents to bound their “authentic” cultural world from that of the larger plural society in which they must also participate. Outside is the world of money; inside is the world of tradition, kinship, the taro patch, gift exchange, and the like. In fact, contemporary ethnicity in most places is so constructed in the ideological and highly self-conscious task of laying and maintaining boundaries of difference. Yet, the ethnographer often finds that the inside is penetrated in all sorts of ways that make sustaining a traditional way of life precarious and even duplicitous. It may be different in Keanae, but Linnekin does not show why or how, because she absorbs the inside-outside distinction as an unproblematic distinction in her own analysis. She grafts her conventional distanced perspective as ethnographer onto local ideology and commitments.

In her analysis of life on the inside of Keanae, Linnekin provides straightforward, largely sociological treatment of the community in terms that establish the similarities between rural indigenous life in Hawaii and elsewhere in contemporary Polynesia – the nature of kin relations, the thematic importance of exchange, the salience of adoption, the work centered around the cultivation of root crops (with the heightened symbolic importance of taro in Keanae). For a work that wants to get at the processes by which tradition is invented, there is little attention to or exposure of local discourse. The ethnographer summarizes the attitudes of her subjects and deals mainly with social relations in terms that are fairly generic for the anthropological literature on Polynesian societies. Thus, while what she has to say fits well and very rela-

interestingly into the existing literature on Polynesia (with the biases have noted above), it is very difficult for her to break new ground, to get at the contested conditions of tradition in contemporary Keanae.

There is much interesting material in this book on historic land distribution in Hawaii, on the rise of “big men” in recent times, and on the salience of egalitarian norms in Keanae (which would seem to contradict the theme of pervasive hierarchy in social relations by which anthropologists have traditionally characterized Hawaii) – all sources for potentially demonstrating the ironic nature of “inside” traditional practices in Keanae. But such material is not integrated and brought to bear in a systematic way on the predicaments of being *kama‘āina* today. In a sense, the residents of Keanae stand as the “orthodox” of a largely assimilated Hawaiian culture, and while there is great intensity of pride in this, which Linnekin captures well, there also must be considerable costs and ambivalence in bearing such symbolic weight, dimensions of Keanae life that Linnekin elides.

Finally, and perhaps wisely, Linnekin seems to temper her rhetoric with a recognition of the politically sensitive context in which any anthropological writing must be done on contemporary Hawaiians, people, like Native Americans, trying to deal with a historic legacy of domination while renewing themselves in a plural, mass society in which many groups seem to be attempting the same thing. A thoroughly critical, though respectful, perspective on one’s subjects in such a highly sensitive atmosphere does not necessarily gain admirers. In any case, Linnekin’s rhetoric conveys the conventional attitude of empathy and admiring sympathy usually displayed by ethnographers, and, in my reading, she exhibits a strongly felt identity with them and their ability to adapt to changes. The problem is that this posture is difficult to reconcile with the full implications of an invention of culture approach that probes deception, demystification of “tradition,” and cultural struggle. Thus the conventional self-presentation of the ethnographer in standard accounts, whose posture of empathy verges on according fundamental authenticity to the daily life of subjects, is likely to change considerably as this approach is experimented with. Because Linnekin stays well within existing conventions of standard accounts she does not face this problem.

In sum, then, this is an uneven book, but not for lack of quality in the fieldwork or the conception. The grounding issues are stated in a very interesting and sophisticated manner, and the analysis, within its conventions, is of very high quality. The unevenness is that the approach outlined and the analysis pursued are mismatched. The result is a concluding chapter that equivocates on the crucial issues of the levels at

which tradition can be expressed under contemporary conditions, and whether there can ever be a referent to which the label cultural authenticity can be applied. And if there cannot be, then what sort of sympathetic and morally positive perspectives on culture can anthropologists continue to hold? For example, in her conclusion (p. 241) Linnekin states, "This interpretation does not invalidate the reality, or even the authenticity, of modern Hawaiian tradition. The point is simply that such authenticity is always contextualized, always defined in the present." This is clearly "having it both ways," and Linnekin can do so because her analysis is not really set up to make a strong argument about the invention of "tradition" in contemporary Keanae. Yet one wants something stronger by way of conclusion from an ethnography written in this spirit. Tradition is an idea that Linnekin initially presents in quotation marks, so to speak, and one expects the work to explore why and how under contemporary conditions this figurative punctuation (marking irony) is sustained by Hawaiians. Yet, remarkably, Linnekin's work, for the reasons discussed, ends pretty much by removing the quotation marks from the notion of tradition.

### REFERENCES

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