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October 22, 1997

On Deep Cultures and Colonization:

A Hawai`i Case Study

**There are cultural codes in the collective sub-conscious of all societies which defines what is right and wrong, what is moral and natural, what forms of behavior is appropriate in given circumstances. They derive from the myths and legends, from the deep national memories, from the environmental conditions, from the internal conflicts and from a multitude of other processes which take place over long periods of time in a society. These codes are not necessarily written or form a constitutive document or are in some other way expressive statements. These cultural codes are generally unspoken. But they are so ingrained in a society that they become the driving force of the society. You can oftentimes see them in the routines and habits of people, in the fears and pleasures of a people, in their dreams and expectations and the systems of reasoning**.

**These cultural codes have been given various names, cosmology, cosmo vision, the deep culture of a people.**

What happens when a people who have existed upon such a deep culture comes into contact with another people? Such contacts can result in very little change or it can result in a total upheaval of the society. Many factors play a role in the effects of such contacts. One of the factors is the level at which contact and change comes about. Another is the quality of the contact. Still another is the reception or resistance to the contact.

Let me suggest a social framework of at least 4 tiers upon which a society can organize. We begin where we find at the foundation of a society its deep culture. Sitting immediately upon that deep culture is an economic system which operates as an expression of that deep culture. At this second tier, we may also find a strong (or weak) environmental and human rights system. A political system develops which protects the second tier system(s) and a military system above that, protecting, of course, the political system.

Societal contacts can be made at any one or at a combination of these levels of the framework. There can be contact based on religious proselytizing, on trade and cultural/intellectual exchange, on formal political interaction, and/or on military contact and attempts at conquest. These contacts may affect changes in one or more tiers of the societal framework for a period of time, but unless they make fundamental change at the level of the deep culture, the society will find a continual pull toward those systems which express the existing deep-culture of the place.

In the Hawai`i experience, we find a society which had developed a strong deep culture

upon which a particular economic, political and military structure formed. On-going contact with Europeans came about in 1778 by the visits of Captain James Cook of the British admiralty. Those initial contacts were largely based upon trade until 1820.

Hawai`i, meanwhile, was undergoing an upheaval in its political order, with chiefs fighting for territory and power over one another. Those internal political upheavals were by and large settled by 1820 resulting in a consolidated political system governing Hawai`i.

Immediately thereafter, Hawai`i underwent a widespread, formal upheaval of its religion instigated through edits from the government to step away from the traditional religious observances. A short war broke out between the forces of the traditional religion and those of the government wanting to break the underpinnings of the older religion. The government won those battles but the long-term effect is that the Hawai`i society had been left split at that level for decades to come. The effects are still being felt today with many people still aligning with the traditional deep culture but not necessarily practicing the form of the religion.

Christian missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions arrived from Boston, Massachusetts, amid this religious turmoil. This timely arrival provided those conditions resulting in their direct influence in the religious order of the society. The missionaries were able to fill a void created by the new government’s actions, but the fundamental beliefs left by the traditional religion still had a foothold in the broad society.

Missionaries also played a significant role in the widespread formal education system as well as the political reformation of the society. From a society which had no writing system (aside from the traditional petroglyphs) in merely ten years after missionary arrival, a writing system had been introduced and the bulk of the Hawaiian population was literate.

Another decade later, beginning in 1839, a Hawaiian Magna Charta was instituted, observing the fundamental rights of all human beings and the equality of all, chiefs and commoners, before the law. This was followed immediately by a written constitution beginning a political system of human rights and a constitutional representative form of government with a monarch at the helm. Hawai`i developed a pattern of international relations engaging in trade and intellectual commerce and exchanging formal political recognition and diplomats with nations throughout the world. Hawai`i soon became the most literate nation in the world. It had 99 diplomatic and consular posts around the world and was a member of one of the first international governmental organizations, the Universal Postal Union. Its international status as an independent and sovereign state was recognized world-wide.

On January 16, 1893 United States troops invaded Hawai`i and participated in establishing a puppet government for the explicit purpose of ceding Hawai`i to the United States of America. After four years of investigation and debate within Hawai`i and the United States, including an admission by the U.S. President that an invasion did occur, the U.S. Congress (in the turmoil of the Spanish American War) voted to annex Hawai`i as an American territory in 1898. This act violated the U.S. Constitution requiring treaties to be approved by 2/3rd of those present in the U.S. Senate. It failed to consult with the people of Hawai`i who, there is no doubt, were overwhelmingly against the annexation.

In 1900, the U.S. government restructured the Hawai`i political system along the lines of a colonial/military outpost and governed Hawai`i in this manner. It held direct control over all military forces, over the political, including the judicial, system, and overall trade with foreign countries. In 1959, it placed the question of Statehood before the Americans in Hawai`i who voted in favor. The Congress switched Hawai`i political relationship from a Territory to a State of the U.S. union. (See separate article on Hawaiian Statehood.)

Given this brief review of Hawai`i’s history of foreign contact, especially a colonial contact with the U.S.A., let us return to the analysis of the societal framework, the deep culture of Hawai`i. We have seen Hawai`i’s deep culture established over generations of existence, by 1820, undergoing major impact through the religious edit of the government, the unification of the government structure, the formation of new economies, and the expansion of the awareness of the international community. All of this were occurring in a general environment of self-determination by which indigenous leadership, in the final analysis, determined the national policy until 1893.

The U.S. invasion in 1893 was a military act which resulted in a reversal of that indigenous led constitutional monarchy. It also brought about an American controlled economy, political structures and relationships, heavy militarization, as well as unfettered immigration from the United States and other areas which the U.S. choose to permit. The U.S. also dictated education, media, and finance.

Today, what we find is a jumbled flow of two distinct deep cultures within the Hawai`i society. The more recent American deep culture is prominent in the formal and the traditional Hawaiian, in the informal, systems of community life. The first contains strong elements of:

**Domination** - especially reflected in the formal economic, education, judicial and security systems. Ingrained within this element is the idea of expansion, an ever-enlarging territory, market, or field of conquest as being a natural order of things.

**Individualism** - protected in the legal system, elevated in the expression of history and dominant Western philosophies. Ingrained within this element is the idea of singularity, a continual parceling apart, fragmenting of things, concepts, persons from people.

**Exclusion** - often accomplished by the depersonalization of the “other.” One favorite technique is by referring to others as non-human entities, “gooks” and “commies” for example instead of men, women and children, the “market” instead of human consumers, the “evil empire” instead of the people of the other nation.

The acronym DIE (Domination, Individualism, and Exclusion) is an easy reminder of the elements of that deep culture stream. It is prevalent in the formal economic, education, judicial, security and political systems of the Hawai`i society today.

The second stream contains elements of:

**`Olu`olu** - compatible, agreeable, creating relationships of comfort, of inter-relating with a high degree of respect and trust, even alongside one's competitor, of finding contentment with what one has, of staying within one’s kuleana, territory or property.

**Lokahi -** collective effort, many working together for a common goal which gives a foundation for looking at the wide implications of small things,

**Aloha** - a propensity toward inclusion of other people and different philosophies, a searching out for the humanity within others and trying to urge that humanity to the surface of inter-relationships.

This "OLA." is generally attributed to the underlying Hawaiian culture and the multiplicity of added cultures to Hawai`i. It is entrenched in the informal economy of sharing and caring, of non-formal education, of traditional healing, of alternate dispute resolution systems and community organizing. In the Hawaiian (and other Polynesian) language, it means both health and life.

Of course, one would have to look long and hard to find a pure DIE or OLA in the general community. These deep cultures continually mix, clash, and cooperate within individuals, families, situations, and systems. They add to the schizophrenia and to the compatibility of the society which makes Hawai`i so incomprehensible for some and so delightful to others. These deep cultures are more than interesting anthropological points of inquiry. They have very serious implications to our society. They form the foundation upon which we build our relationships with one another, how we interact with our environment, our attitudes to time, justice, sharing and caring, family, medicine, . . . They are guiding forces to our individual and collective futures.

Here’s a simplified example of the practice of DIE and OLA deep cultures. Two young men come into a large source of cash and decide to buy a car for each of them. One goes out and buys a two seat, two door, convertible sports car to “go cruising” with a friend on date nights. The other buys a van so he can take the whole family around the island, to the “games” or just to “go holo holo” (visiting without a specific destination). Those choices are expressions of deep culture.

Consider the implications. Hawai`i's environmental policy can be used as a study. If those who make decisions over such a policy follow a DIE cultural concept, the environment will be treated from a "domination, fragmentation" approach - man has the right, (some argue, even the responsibility) - to conquer, dominate, and subdue the environment. The value of the forests is to be measured only in terms of its utility to the human population. Likewise, the ocean, the streams, the sky, the plants and animals, the winds, etc. Alterations to the natural elements are accomplished without any second thought: the first and only one being the "advantage” of man above all else.

An OLA concept would approach the environment from a kinship and a unification approach. The `aina and the kai, the land and the ocean, would be treated as ohana, family. The cutting down of plants or the fishing in the ocean may or may not incorporate ceremony, but in the doing, there is certainly a sense of reverence, of operating within and of performing a special, sacred task. The operator of a machine uses it and applies it to the environment by creating within him/herself a relationship. He feels the mood and the spirit of the tractor, he can tell when he is pushing it too hard, or not enough. He feels the contours of the earth and the spirit within those contours. He may not be able to explain it, but those feelings are there deep inside.

“Progress”, the unfolding of events to achieve or maintain one’s sense of “Pono” - balance, righteousness, good order- for one who comes from DIE is far different from one from OLA. How one defines economics, for example, reflects one’s definition of progress. Some define it by measuring the Gross National Product, the Gross Domestic Product, rates of savings, capital accumulation, construction starts, tax revenues, and the latest tourist numbers. Others define it instead by the social investments in education, health and welfare, if the people are healthy and have a good feeling about themselves, the degree to which poetry, dance and art flourish, the time available for people to family, etc. Yet, when followers of opposite concepts clash publicly, when protesters picket the cutting down of forests, wanting to save the owls rather than build a freeway, they are deemed “anti-progress” by DIE institutions. The case, of course, is simply that progress is defined by different values.

Returning to our societal framework, we saw at the foundation, the deep culture(s). Upon that, we have an economic and/or an environmental, and/or a human rights tier. Economics, therefore, can become intertwined with environmental and human rights considerations, but it is itself, also affected by the deep culture of the society. In turn, politics, the third tier, is heavily influenced by economic, environmental and human rights systems. National Security develops to protect the political entity which sits upon the earlier tier. Each tier being touched and touching the other.

The Hawai`i case is not materially different from many other peoples’ experience with colonization. If we are to truly control our own future, if we are to have real self-determination, if we are to fully appreciate our public policies and private behavior patterns, we must be aware of these streams of deep cultures within our society, where they come from and how they continue to impact us. We need to teach ourselves to be more observant, to recognize within our own selves that we are playing out our deep culture patterns accumulated over the years, and are passing them to others we influence, especially the children. In this way we become clear of why we think and live the ways we do, of our options for the future, and we are able to be more deliberate in directing our paths to be taken as we unfold into our futures.

Aloha `aina.

Poka Laenui

This paper originally written for the Institute for Zen Studies, May 1997 and subsequently expanded for the current publication. Contributors to the ideas come from many sources including Archbishop Tanouye Tenshin, Puanani Burgess, Pilahi Paki, `Imiola Young, Pualani Hopkins, Professor Johan Galtung, and of course, members of the Hawai`i society.