

Unsettling Ethnography: Tales of an 'Ōiwi in the Anthropological Slot

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When I entered the anthropology graduate program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) in 1998, I was dismayed to find that I was forced to justify my positionality as both an 'Ōiwi (Indigenous Hawaiian) and an anthropologist. In Hawai'i, as in other parts of the Pacific and the world where the former objects of ethnography were now speaking back, Native scholars had identified anthropology as the single most colonialist field in the academy (for discussion, see Carucci and Dominy this issue). Those I met were shocked that I was in anthropology and told me that it was 'an evil white discipline' that was 'racist towards Hawaiians' (see also van Meijl this issue; Goldsmith this issue, for correlates in Aotearoa New Zealand). The fact that the Department of Anthropology had never awarded a doctorate to either a Native Hawaiian or a Pacific Islander seemed to support these assertions.

In this paper, I outline some of my experiences as an 'Ōiwi in the 'anthropological slot'. Carucci and Dominy (this issue) rightly note that indigenous peoples view this space as one of savagery and representational violence. I reflect on the ways I have confronted the strained and slotted relationship between anthropologists and native peoples (Karlsson 2003; Trouillot 1999), as someone whose own identity and *kuleana* ('rights and responsibilities') have been formed at the intersection of indigeneity and anthropology. Through personal *mo'olelo* (narrative accounts), I also show how critical ethnographic practice may simultaneously bespeak *and* contest the larger historical and political conditions that frame it. For anthropologists who claim a native identity, as well as others who collaborate as allies with indigenous causes, this may be felt more keenly because of the multiplicity of obligations, responsibilities and audiences they are held accountable to, especially given the stakes riding upon their work (Field 1999; Jacobs-Huey 2002). These issues have become increasingly important for all ethnographers to reckon with, as distinctions between insider/outsider, home/away and engaged/disengaged have become difficult to maintain, especially in the Pacific.

I argue here for greater attention to the 'unsettled conditions' of modern anthropology, in which the traditional models and motivations for doing

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ethnography have been called into question (White and Tengan 2001, 382). Goldsmith (this issue) defines ethnography as a 'systematically recorded, curiosity-driven process of engagement with others in a common time and space'; as I show below, genealogy and *kuleana* are perhaps even more salient driving factors for indigenous ethnographers. I concur with Goldsmith's assessment that *critical* ethnography 'entails taking both process and product into realms beyond the purely descriptive' by engaging in analyses of injustice and inequality. He notes that the capacity of ethnography 'to disrupt taken-for-granted understandings' makes it an especially useful tool for critiquing all ethnographic sites and participants. For me, these sites include the university, professional associations, the community of 'Ōiwi scholars and the Hawaiian men's group I work with. As my own experiences show, the practice of unsettling ethnography allows critical ethnographers to take responsibility more fully for the work and the relationships that are co-created with their interlocutors.

On Becoming an 'Ōiwi Anthropologist

My initial encounters with other Hawaiians at the UHM prompted me to conduct a different sort of critical 'native ethnography': that of my academic home. As Clifford (1997, 82) has pointed out, the university itself may represent a distinct type of field site for indigenous and other students whose travels to and dwellings in place require the same critical analytics deployed in any other fieldwork setting: a genealogical understanding of the knowledge practices and customs in which one must engage while tacking between different cultural spaces; a heightened reflexivity and attention to intersubjective exchanges and transformations; and the courage to critique the structures of domination that obstruct social justice.

The UHM has long been the site of protracted community struggle and engagement for activist and community-based scholars (see Tengan 2001). Although my initial 'homework' in the Department of Anthropology did not uncover the type of overtly racist discourses or ideologies I had been warned about, I did find that the disciplinary models and practices carried out in the department (as with other areas in the Pacific) have historically worked to erect and maintain boundaries between outsider-anthropologist and insider-native (White and Tengan 2001, 389, 397).

In attempting to address the situation, 'Ōiwi graduate students brought together anthropologists and Hawaiian intellectuals to take part in public forums on 'Issues that Matter' and 'Overcoming Colonial Violence'. We also developed and twice co-taught a class on 'Indigenous Anthropology' (see Tengan 2001). The class explored the contingencies of carrying out 'homework' as a critical confrontation of the processes that shape us as subjects and form our sensibilities of the 'home' that we embody (our *habitus*) and 'return' to as shifting spatial and cultural locations (Clifford 1997, 84–86; K. Teaiwa 2004, 216; Visweswaran 1994). In conjunction with the forums and classes, we organised community-based service learning projects, in

which we sought to highlight the role that anthropology might have in supporting different community initiatives on the island of O‘ahu.

The unprecedented awarding of doctorates to ‘Ōiwi in the department (Kēhaunani Cachola-Abad in archaeology in 2000, and Lynette Cruz and me in cultural anthropology in 2003) represented significant breakthroughs and added momentum to our efforts to bridge the divide between anthropology and the Hawaiian community. In 2003, I was hired as an assistant professor in a joint appointment between the Departments of Anthropology and Ethnic Studies, the first time a Hawaiian (or Pacific Islander, or non-white male for that matter) has held a faculty position in anthropology at the UHM. Lynette Cruz became the first Hawaiian anthropologist at Hawai‘i Pacific University (HPU) when she took an assistant professorship in 2003.²

The spring of 2005 was something of a watershed semester. Lahela Perry, a UHM archaeology graduate student, and I taught the indigenous anthropology course and expanded our service learning sites. Also, the newly formed Ho‘okulāiwi Institute for Native Hawaiian and Indigenous Research and Scholarship took important steps towards the publication of its own journal³ and the establishment of institutional relationships with indigenous research units in Aotearoa New Zealand and North America.

The 2005 meeting of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) held on Kaua‘i in February occasioned new ferment in Native Pacific anthropological activity. Tevita O. Ka‘ili (a Tongan PhD candidate in anthropology at the University of Washington) and I co-organised a session on ‘Indigenous Anthropology in/of Oceania’, and at least half of the 40-plus participants were Pacific Islanders. Oceanians also played a variety of active roles: as local hosts, session organisers, participants, distinguished lecturer, presenter of an original film, artists and performers of visual culture.⁴ This conference was only the most recent addition to a genealogy of Native Pacific gatherings in academic meeting houses, partial recitations of which have been given by others (Diaz and Kauanui 2001, 321–23; Kauanui 2005, 133–38; T. Teaiwa 2001).

There is still much to do, though: the number of Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students and instructors in anthropology at the UHM (or anywhere else) has yet to reach a critical mass; concerted efforts at the administrative level to recruit and retain such individuals are lacking; and many Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders still maintain an image of ‘anthropology in the savage slot’ (Carucci and Dominy this issue; Lederman this issue), which often equates to anthropology in the ‘colonial, White, middle-class, male’ slot. Sean Nāleimaile, a graduate student in the MA program in archaeology, informed me that a Hawaiian educator and cultural worker told him in 2003: ‘The words “Hawaiian” and “anthropology” do not belong in the same sentence’.

As in previous offerings of the Indigenous Anthropology class, the focus on the ethical and political implications of anthropological work and the heightened level of critical reflexivity that we encouraged often led students to an intensive re-examination

of their own senses of belonging and their understandings of anthropology and indigenous peoples. Moreover, the questions of how, or even whether, to define indigeneity or indigenous anthropology were never settled. Much of the difficulty lay in the nature of the shifting notions of place and identity in critical anthropology, and the reappraisal of the proper relationship of anthropologists to their fields of study.

Similarly disparate assessments of the viability or desirability of an indigenous anthropology in/of Oceania were raised at the ASAO meeting. Some Pacific Islander participants also pointed to what they saw as a familiar relegation of Islanders to the 'culture, arts, and rituals slot'. Given the historical experiences of Pacific Islander marginalisation in academic meeting spaces more generally (Kauanui 2005; T. Teaiwa 2001; White and Tengan 2001, 383, 402), it was no surprise that indigenous critique was quickly registered (though to the Association's credit, the board members and officers I know have earnestly striven to change this situation). More surprising, perhaps, were the manifest distinctions that arose between Pacific Islanders. The dynamics of race, gender, class, generation, genealogy, island origin, language and tradition that played out between Islanders was worthy of its own article, highlighting Katerina Teaiwa's (2004, 231) call to attend to the 'connections and differences (or the production of connections and differences) between and within' Pacific peoples and places (see also T. Teaiwa 2001).

Attention to these issues is especially critical for fieldworkers who encounter patterns of anthropological unsettlement 'on the ground'. When ethnography is conducted in a community engaged in struggles over land, identity and history, struggle characterises all facets of the ethnographic project (Petersen this issue; see also van Meijl and Goldsmith for examples in Aotearoa New Zealand).

Ethnography in Struggle

'Eh, what you wrote about Punia?'⁵ I heard he was pretty upset!' It was early spring 2002, and a small group of us in the Hale Mua ('Men's House') had just finished our afternoon workout when one of the other members stunned me with his query. Taking on the model of the men's house of the precolonial religio-political system of separate eating, the Hale Mua (literally, 'front/first house') was an organisation founded on Maui (later expanded to O'ahu) to provide Hawaiian men with a cultural foundation through ritual, martial arts and other practices. The setting of this foundation created a space for Hawaiian men to engage in the work of community and identity formation, much of which occurred through the ritual sharing of stories.

I had just shared my own story, or one version of it, by circulating a rough draft of my dissertation within the group (Tengan 2003). Though I had been in the Hale Mua since 1997, I did not decide to research and write about it until 1999. I had no desire to take on the added level of outsidership that would inevitably come by inhabiting the 'anthropological slot', nor did I want to jeopardise my relations with others in the group. Indeed, confessions by native anthropologists of 'failures' in the field/at home

have been all too common (Jacobs-Huey 2002, 796–97; K. Teaiwa 2004; Visweswaran 1994).

Nonetheless, I decided to take these risks because I felt that it was important to write about the struggles of Hawaiian men to understand and establish a sense of place in modern-day Hawai'i. I took as my central guiding tenet an ethos and methodology of empowerment, and I sought to put it into practice by involving the men of the Hale Mua in all aspects of the ethnographic process. I first asked the group for permission to conduct research, explaining my own interests and also seeking feedback and direction on what outcomes and final products they would like to see in order for the work to hold any value to them (see also Feinberg this issue; Petersen this issue). Most welcomed the idea of having our history recorded, and some suggested a documentary or a 'coffee table' book. In the end, my need to finish my dissertation took precedence over the other possible projects, though plans for other projects remain.

I shared my work also with Hawaiian feminist scholars such as Noenoe Silva and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui. Their insights forced me to reckon with my inability, and often unwillingness, to tackle issues pertaining to Hawaiian men's patriarchy and sexism. At the same time, I offered them my own take on the dynamics of gender relations in the Hawaiian context. At times our discussions became quite heated, as was the case with one unsettling email exchange between Kauanui and myself. Such interactions revealed the desperate need for critical dialogue on 'Ōiwi gender (and sexuality) to occur within our communities, as well as the fact that an extremely important and critical audience I would be addressing was the community of 'Ōiwi scholars, intellectuals and activists.

All the same, I felt most accountable to my primary audience of the Hale Mua. I tried to involve them in every stage of the research, and I presented my work to them through emails, drafts in hard copy, informal and formal talk, and PowerPoint presentations *before* I submitted it to any outside audience. In this situation, I found it difficult to incorporate fully the feminist perspectives of Kauanui and Silva, because I knew that many of the men in the group would take serious issue with the sorts of analyses that might emerge. Nonetheless, I did try to highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of applying this analytic frame to the Hale Mua (Tengan 2003, 9–10, 58–61).

Because most of the feedback I received was positive, I was lulled into a false sense of security. Then about a month after I had distributed my draft to the Mua for comment, I found out 'through the grapevine' that Punia took issue with my writing. When we finally met, he told me he was humiliated by the way I had depicted him as a clown. In the Mua, he was a constant source of mirth and laughter, as he was quick to crack a joke or act the comic. I had also understood that there was a greater purpose to his routine, and I had attempted to convey some of that by invoking the tradition of Polynesian clowning as political commentary and social leveller (Hereniko 1994). However, in his eyes my representations made him look nothing more than a fool. He told me that he was ready to come over and put on the 'pads'

(that we use for sparring) because I had ridiculed him in my ‘fourth-grade book report’ that the whole world was going to read. My representation of him was an act of violence, one that articulated with a longer genealogy of violence that he had struggled to overcome throughout his life, in school, community and family. It was also one he was prepared to return with violence. Our educational and class backgrounds and differences, which the Hale Mua concept was meant to overcome, suddenly appeared in high relief and forced me to recognise a major blind spot.

We spoke for hours into the night, and I gained a new appreciation not only of his importance to the group but also of the importance of honest dialogue in critical ethnographic work. It hurt to hear the things that Punia told me, just as it must have hurt him to read what I had written. All the while there had been a *hihia* (‘problem, entanglement’) growing between us, which I had not felt but others had. We worked things out and grew from it, in large part because I had left myself open and accountable to those whom I lived and worked with. For me, it highlighted the centrality of *kuleana* (‘rights and responsibilities’) in critical ethnography.

Critical Ethnography, Indigenous Identity and *Kuleana*

Through my community and my family, I speak, write and act as an ‘Ōiwi, an Indigenous Hawaiian. The term, ‘Ōiwi, means ‘of the bone’, a reminder that we embody the ancestral connections between land/place, gods/spirits and people/community that are manifest when we bury our *iwi* (bones) back into our *kulāiwi* (bone plains, homelands). Taking up this identity involves the *kuleana* (responsibility, right, claim, authority) to ‘*ho‘ōla i nā iwi*’ (to care for one’s ancestors or, literally, to ‘make the bones live’) (Ayau and Tengan 2002). *Kuleana* also chooses us rather than the other way around, and it comes as a gift from our *kūpuna* (ancestors both living and deceased).

Before I went to college, my grandmother gave me her personal copy of the classic Salvage ethnography, *The Polynesian family system of Ka-‘u, Hawai‘i* (Handy and Pukui 1972). On its first page was an inscription that read: ‘Ty—Please save this book for our family’. Although I did not intend to fulfill that *kuleana* by actually *becoming* an ethnographer, that is what happened. As a critical ‘Ōiwi anthropologist, I now strive to critique those institutional and discursive structures that work to undermine and extinguish those sources of *mana* (spiritual power and efficacy) and identity that ‘Ōiwi draw upon to empower and define themselves. I also try to tell *mo‘olelo* (narrative accounts) of my people in ways that shed light upon our ability to traverse the borders of insider/outsider, indigenous/foreign, colonised/decolonised, global/local and modern/traditional. This orientation is especially salient because, in the Hawaiian community today, ‘otherness’ is found as much on the ‘inside’ as it is on the outside. I trace my own genealogical lineages to Hawaiian, Okinawan, Portuguese and German ancestors, and my dwellings in place have occurred in Germany, Colorado, Georgia, O‘ahu, New Hampshire and Maui. Differences of class and gender further complicate those of race and place, yet Punia, Kauanui and I still stake

autochthonous claims to being Hawaiian. The indigenous is thus as inherently situational, hybrid, syncretic and articulated as it is grounded in genealogy and land. This very diversity of experience and positionality is a strength when it is understood as broadening and enlarging the space of indigeneity, rather than completely erasing it (Clifford 2001; Diaz and Kauanui 2001).

Some critics have pointed to this dynamic as evidence of the impossibility of indigenous/native anthropology, especially concerning claims of representational or epistemological authority (Clifford 1997, 79–81; Narayan 1993). Virginia Dominguez (2000, 364) argues that validating ‘rescue projects’—those that give voice to ‘insider’ or minoritised scholars motivated by a politics of correction—solely on the basis that they are done by insiders ultimately ‘limits all of us to the production of knowledge about only very narrowly defined communities of which we might unquestionably be a part’. Instead, she argues that rescue projects are worthwhile endeavours if they are validated not on the sole criterion of ‘identity’, but, rather, on the presence of a genuine love, respect and affection for those whose lives and communities are being researched (Dominguez 2000, 365).

I agree with Dominguez, but add that identity cannot be ignored completely, for it then threatens to erase indigeneity and its unique claims. Critical ethnography should be informed not only by a politics of love but also by *kuleana*. Those working with peoples, such as Māori and Ōiwi, who struggle against settler colonialism must conduct ethnography as a process of unsettling those conditions that maintain and reproduce settler ideologies and denials of indigenous *kuleana* to place.⁶ We must acknowledge and respect those who guide us and remake us in the ethnographic genealogies of which we have become a part. For indigenous anthropologists, this may even mean directing our ‘rescue’ efforts towards the practice of ethnography itself. Such has been a further implication of my grandmother’s charge to ‘save this book for the family’: to salvage ethnography as a critical practice. For all stages of the ‘process and product’ of critical ethnography, *kuleana* also entails the responsibility and willingness to be unsettled ourselves by our ethnographic partners in all contexts of teaching, researching, sharing and writing.

Other anthropologists have recently called into question the ability of anyone to claim a position that is truly ‘indigenous’ or ‘native’ without promoting essentialisms that lead to unjust social and intellectual strife (Beteille 1998; Kuper 2003). Wittingly or not, such criticisms often support the agendas of nation-states and transnational corporations that continue to violate the human rights of indigenous peoples (Kenrick and Lewis 2004). This, in turn, marks a disturbing unwillingness on the part of some anthropologists to engage critically with the social and political contexts from which their work emerges and into which it circulates back, a situation that calls into question the very nature of the anthropological enterprise and the responsibilities of anthropologists working in indigenous communities.

Contributors to this special issue have added to the dialogue on these issues. van Meijl and Goldsmith have both pointed to the ‘dangers’ of doing critical ethnographic work in Māori and Pacific Islander communities in Aotearoa New

Zealand. There, as in Hawai'i, the dynamics of settler colonialism frame all efforts to investigate, write, teach, interpret, sell, practise, claim, create and protect 'culture'. When anthropologists (whether foreign, local or native) valorise a mode of 'outsider, detached, separate' ethnography, indigenous scholars and activists read their agendas as conflicting and antagonistic (White and Tengan 2001, 395–96).

van Meijl argues that anthropologists should maintain their autonomy by taking on the identity of the ambivalent and lonely trickster who mediates between involvement and detachment. His formulation of this thesis arises from his own unsettling experience of being criticised by his 'informants'. van Meijl's response troubles me, for it shirks important responsibilities that come with the privileges of doing fieldwork in communities that expect honesty, openness, reciprocity and commitment. It also presumes an *ability* to detach, a luxury indigenous and local anthropologists such as Goldsmith cannot always claim. Such will soon be the case for most anthropologists, as the distance between home and away is increasingly negated by rapid developments in transportation, communication and the Internet (Clifford 1997, 52–91).

van Meijl also raises the issue of autonomy. This rests on a problematic investment in individuality that represents an act of violence when it ignores the role of 'others' in the construction of anthropological 'selves' and then refuses to take responsibility for the power-laden inequalities created by the process (Abu-Lughod 1991, 142–43). While being an indigenous anthropologist does not absolve me of these problems, it compels me to reckon with them, and also to find ways by which ethnographic power can and should be subverted by the true tricksters of our ethnographies.

Conclusions: Ethnography Unsettled

In concluding our meditations on the morphing nature of anthropology and cultural studies in Hawai'i and the Pacific, Geoffrey White and I remarked that terms such as 'fieldwork', 'anthropology' and 'indigenous culture' are no longer fixed, and that, despite all the policing that has taken place, 'borders remain unstable and contested ... Yet these same unsettled conditions may also offer a way out of the disabling generalizations that have become commonplace in programmatic statements about the contested borders of anthropology' (White and Tengan 2001, 404). I have demonstrated that once we embrace the process of unsettling ethnography through recognition of *kuleana*, we move towards a more critical way of conceptualising our world.

I end with a final lesson Punia taught me in our critical ethnographic exchange. He asked me if I had prayed when writing my dissertation. I was caught off guard, for, though I wrote about our ceremonies and rituals, I had not enacted them in my writing. He said that, if I were to make the offerings and prayers we used, my writing would have the *mana* of all the other men and of all my *kūpuna* (ancestors). He also pointed out that, in focusing solely on the journeys of men coming to the Mua to

heal or find themselves, I had failed to recognise that they also came to heal others and to give of their *mana* selflessly.

This led me to reconsider not only their contributions to the Mua but also the innumerable ways they shaped and co-produced the ethnographic project, as well as the fact that they produced different kinds of ethnographic knowledge to which I was not privy. This was made possible only because I accepted *kuleana* for my actions. Had I been more concerned with protecting my autonomy, I would have closed off the avenues of communication that enabled Punia's critique to reach me through the other men in the first place. Such were the teachings of my trickster, whom I had misrecognised as a clown but then learned from as mentor and friend (see also Iseke-Barnes 2003, 222–23). So, too, might all critical ethnographers learn when they conduct ethnography responsibly.

Notes

- [1] *Acknowledgments*: I would like to thank Geoffrey White, Rena Lederman, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Larry Carucci, Michèle Dominy, LeeRay Costa, Lahela Perry, Katerina Teaiwa, Tevita O. Ka'ili, Michael Graves and an anonymous reviewer for their comments and suggestions.
- [2] A number of Hawaiians situated in other institutions and departments have also critically engaged with ethnographic practices and representations: Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman (University of Michigan), Jeffrey Kamakahi (St John's University), J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (Wesleyan University), Leilani Holmes (Grossmont College), Rona Halualani (San Jose State University) and Elizabeth Kapu'uwaitani Lindsey Buyers (LLB Productions).
- [3] See the special issue on indigenous education in *Educational Perspectives* (Vol. 37, No. 1, edited by Margaret Maaka) available at: <http://www.hawaii.edu/edper/pages/vol37n1.html> (accessed 5 June 2005).
- [4] See the ASAO website at: <http://www.soc.hawaii.edu/asao/pacific/hawaiki.html> (accessed 5 June 2005).
- [5] Punia is an anonym.
- [6] I question Carucci and Dominy's (this issue) inclusion of Japanese-American Yamanaka's work as part of Hawai'i's 'indigenous literary tradition', especially as her settler moves have been critiqued elsewhere (Fujikane 2000).

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