

## *Traditional Hawaiian Metaphors*



### CHAPTER 2

If one is to follow Denning's example of constructing a model of indigenous divisions of space and time, then surely one must *Nānā i ke kumu*, or "look to the source,"<sup>1</sup> to the beginnings in the Kumulipo and ultimately, to Hawaiian genealogies.

The genealogies *are* the Hawaiian concept of time, and they order the space around us. Hawaiian genealogies are the histories of our people. Through them we learn of the exploits and identities of our ancestors—their great deeds and their follies, their loves and their accomplishments, and their errors and defeats. Even though the great genealogies are of the *Ali'i Nui* and not of the commoners, these *Ali'i Nui* are the collective ancestors, and their *mo'olelo* (histories) are histories of all Hawaiians, too. It is Davida Malo, a Hawaiian scholar of the 1840s, who tells us, "Commoners and chiefs were all descended from the same ancestors, Wākea and Papa."<sup>2</sup> The Hawaiian historian of the 1860s, Samuel Kamakau, in his introduction to a genealogical discussion agrees, "In this chiefly genealogy are the ancestors of the chiefs and the general populace of Hawai'i nei."<sup>3</sup> Or as some old Hawaiian wit once proclaimed, "Anyone who doesn't know he is of the great chief 'Umi, doesn't really know who his father is."<sup>4</sup>

The ancestors' deeds of courage inspire our own; their thoughts and desires become the parameters of our ambitions. They are the models after which we Hawaiians have patterned our behavior.

Genealogies are perceived by Hawaiians as an unbroken chain that

links those alive today to the primeval life forces—to the *mana* (spiritual power) that first emerged with the beginning of the world. Genealogies anchor Hawaiians to our place in the universe and give us the comforting illusion of continued existence.<sup>5</sup> The hundreds of generations recounted in Hawaiian genealogies were especially important to Hawaiians after Western contact because by the 1870s, many people, especially foreigners, cruelly predicted the complete demise of the Hawaiian race as inevitable.<sup>6</sup>

Genealogies also brought Hawaiians psychological comfort in times of acute distress. The greatest distress began in 1778, upon contact with the Western world. For one hundred years after the arrival of the first white explorer, Captain Cook, foreign diseases carried off the Hawaiian people.<sup>7</sup> From Cook's low estimate in 1779 of a population of 400,000 (compared with a modern estimate of 800,000), the Hawaiian population declined to 40,000 by the time of the overthrow of the Hawaiian government in 1893.<sup>8</sup> The death toll from Cook's time onward was certainly far greater than those lives offered in sacrifice to the war God Kū. During these years, Hawaiians saw their society falling apart as their friends and loved ones died around them.<sup>9</sup>

By the 1870s, Hawaiian religion and politics had made a very definite shift to Western models wherein genealogies seemed irrelevant. Nonetheless, Hawaiians continued to cling to our great genealogical debates as if the lineages of the *Ali'i Nui* were proof that the race still existed as a great nation. In 1873, when Kalākaua and Emma vied for election as sovereign, one of the more important topics of debate was the purity of their lineages, with each side casting aspersions on the other.<sup>10</sup> From the Western point of view, the real issue was who would make a better sovereign, with regard to the political views of the candidates. From the Hawaiian standpoint, it was genealogy that determined the quality of any proposed sovereign.

Interest in genealogies was again revived after Queen Lili'uokalani was overthrown in 1893 and Hawaiians cried out for sovereignty.<sup>11</sup> *Ka Maka'āinana* (*The Commoner*), a Hawaiian language newspaper, began publishing genealogies again in 1896; many other Hawaiian language newspapers had done so from as early as 1834. The editors' rationale was

It is said, the one who does not know the genealogy is a rustic from the back country, and the one who knows, he is a chief or a person of the court. In Europe, the man who does not know the history and lacks the genealogy of his birth place and other enlightened lands is a recognizable fool. Therefore, will the new generation of Hawai'i nei be changed to a class of backward and ignorant people? In order that this should not occur, quickly seek to understand the true history and genealogy of Hawai'i.<sup>12</sup>

The editors of *Ka Maka'āinana* confirmed what most Western historians writing about Hawai'i have ignored or failed to comprehend: Hawaiian genealogies are the history of the Hawaiian people.<sup>13</sup> *Ali'i Nui* are not merely individuals born into a ruling class; they are the totality of their genealogy, which is comprised of the character of their ancestors. This is the sum total of their identity. From the Hawaiian view, it is pointless to discuss the actions of any character in Hawaiian history without a careful examination of his or her genealogy. It would be tantamount to writing a history of England without presenting the names of the monarchs and their cohorts; without their identities the account would be unintelligible.

Ancestral identity is revealed in the names that Hawaiians carry, for the names of our ancestors continue as our names also. They belong to us alone and should someone outside of the family use our names, it would be a theft of our *mana*. Names of the *Ali'i Nui* are repeated for successive generations to enhance and share the honor of the original ancestor.<sup>14</sup> In this process, the name collects its own *mana* and endows the successor who carries it. It is said that the name molds the character of the child. So the great Māui chiefess Ka'ahumanu was named for her maternal uncle Kahekilinu'i'ahumanu (the great thundering bird feathers), who as a warlike *Mō'i* of Māui in the 1790s had gathered under his control all the islands from Māui to Ni'ihau.<sup>15</sup> Because of her name, Ka'ahumanu carried the recollection of her uncle's *mana* from her very birth. The accomplishments of her lifetime were attributed to the *mana* of her name, and further enhanced Kahekili's lineage, adding to the collective identity.

The editors of the newspaper *Ka Maka'āinana* had a political purpose for publishing genealogies, for genealogies are a means of glorifying

one's ancestors and one's past. If the ancestors are glorious, so too are the descendants, especially when compared to the Americans who had overthrown the Queen. Since the lineages of Hawaiian Chiefs could be traced back for nine hundred generations and more, American genealogies were practically non-existent, or at least very shallow by comparison.<sup>16</sup> If genealogies could act as psychological reinforcement, they were just what *Ka Lāhui Hawai'i* (the Hawaiian nation) needed when the kingdom was lost. In addition, genealogies were the lists from which new *Ali'i Nui* could be found, and new leadership was desperately needed at the time.

All Native scholars have agreed that *Ali'i* are Chiefs because they know their genealogies. Malo supposes that as all people have descended from the *Ali'i*, *maka'āinana* must be those descendants who wandered off into the back country and were forgotten by the other *Ali'i*.<sup>17</sup> "Wandering into the back country" is synonymous with acting like a *kua'āina* (lit., back-country or country bumpkin) and not like an *Ali'i*. Perhaps the answer to the mystery of *maka'āinana* origins lies in the refusal of some *Ali'i* to act like Chiefs by ignoring religious doctrine, disregarding their *kapu*, or forming lasting relationships with *maka'āinana* women, leading to their subsequent banishment from the "royal lineage" club.

In any case, genealogies are more than *mo'okū'auhau*, or lists of who begot whom. They are also a mnemonic device by which the *mo'olelo*, or the exploits of the *Ali'i*, are recalled. As the lists of names are chanted, the adventures of each *Ali'i* are remembered, and these, in turn, form the body of tradition by which their descendants pattern their Chiefly behavior. In times past, when a problem arose, the *Ali'i*, usually in council, would send for a *kākā'ōlelo*, an antiquarian and genealogist, who would consider the issue and recount all the pertinent *mo'olelo*.<sup>18</sup> Then the *Mō'i* would know which decision had brought his ancestors success; this would be the path to follow.

It is interesting to note that in Hawaiian, the past is referred to as *Ka wā mamua*, or "the time in front or before." Whereas the future, when thought of at all, is *Ka wā mahope*, or "the time which comes after or behind." It is as if the Hawaiian stands firmly in the present, with his back to the future, and his eyes fixed upon the past, seeking historical answers for present-day dilemmas. Such an orientation is to the Hawaiian an

eminently practical one, for the future is always unknown, whereas the past is rich in glory and knowledge. It also bestows upon us a natural propensity for the study of history.

#### WĀKEA AND PAPA: THE BEGINNING OF HAWAIIAN TIME

One of the more fundamental patterns for *Ali'i Nui* behavior was established in the epic tradition of Wākea and Papa, the sky-father and earth-mother, who by the 'Ōpūkahanua lineage were half-brother and half-sister. These two were said to be the parents of islands, Hawai'i and Māui (and later Kaua'i, Ni'ihau, Lehua, and Ka'ula), as well as the ancestors of *Ka Lāhui Hawai'i*.<sup>19</sup> According to tradition, their first human offspring was a daughter, Ho'ohōkūkalani (to generate stars in the sky), who matured into a great beauty. A desire for his daughter welled up in Wākea, but he hoped to gratify his desire without his sister and *wahine* (woman, or wife) knowing of it.

It is the *kahuna*, or priest, who provided Wākea with a religious solution. This solution has come to be known as the '*Aikapu* (sacred eating). The '*Aikapu* is a religion in which males and females are separated in the act of eating, males being *la'a* or "sacred," and females *haumia* or "defiling," by virtue of menstruation. Since, in this context, eating is for men a religious ceremony or sacrifice to the male *Akua* Lono, it must be done apart from anything defiling, especially women. (Female *mana*, however, was only *haumia* to the male *Akua*, and not to the female *Akua* whom women worshipped freely.) Thus, men must prepare the food in separate ovens, one for the men, another for the women, and must build separate eating houses for each. Under '*Aikapu*, certain foods, because of their male symbolism, also are forbidden to women, including pig, coconuts, bananas, and some red fish.

The *kahuna* suggested that the new '*Aikapu* religion should also require that four nights of each lunar month be set aside for special worship of the four major male *Akua*, Kū, Lono, Kāne, and Kanaloa. On these nights it was *kapu* for men to sleep with their *wahine*. Moreover, they should be at the *heiau* (temple) services on these nights. When Papa was informed of the priest's new regulations, tradition tells us she accepted them without question.

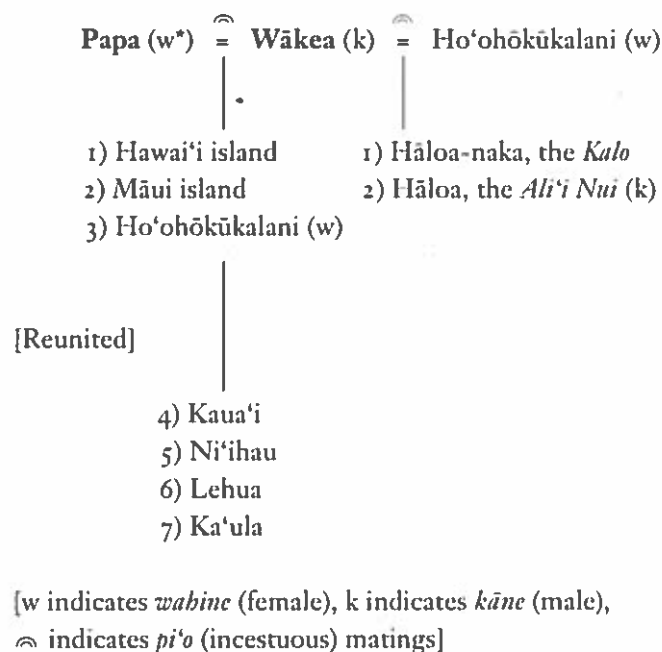


Figure 1. Lineage of Papa and Wākea

On one of these *kapu* nights, Wākea was able to be alone with his daughter, Ho'ohōkūkalani, and he seduced her. Being a faithful daughter, Ho'ohōkūkalani told her mother what had occurred. After a dreadful row, Papa left Wākea in anger and took other lovers, although they were eventually reconciled and she would bear him other islands.

The first child of Wākea and Ho'ohōkūkalani was an unformed foetus, born prematurely; they named him Hāloa-naka (quivering long stalk). They buried Hāloa-naka in the earth, and from that spot grew the first *kalo* plant. The second child, named Hāloa in honor of his elder brother, was the first Hawaiian *Ali'i Nui* and became the ancestor of all the Hawaiian people. Thus the *kalo* plant, which was the main staple of the people of old, is also the elder brother of the Hawaiian race, and as such deserves great respect.<sup>20</sup>

What, then, are the lessons, or historical metaphors, that arise from the *mo'olelo* of Wākea?

The first lesson is of man's familial relationship to the Land, that is, to the islands of Hawai'i and Māui, and to the *kalo* Hāloa-naka, who are the elder siblings of the Hawaiian Chiefs and people (see figure 1). This relationship is reflected in the Hawaiian tradition of *Mālama 'Āina*, "caring for the Land." The second lesson of *Aikapu* is separation of the sacred male element from the dangerous female, thus creating order in the world. The *Kabuna Nui*'s suggestion of *Aikapu* also allows the Chief to fulfill his desires. The third and final lesson revolves around the *mana* (divine power) that emanates from *Ni'auipi'o* mating (Chiefly incest). These are the three traditional patterns from which all of Hawaiian society flows and the metaphor around which it is organized.

#### MĀLAMA 'ĀINA: CARING FOR THE LAND

In traditional Hawaiian society, as in the rest of Polynesia, it is the duty of younger siblings and junior lineages to love, honor, and serve their elders. This is the pattern that defines the Hawaiian relationship to the *'Āina* and the *kalo* that together feed *Ka Lāhui Hawai'i*. Thus, the "modern" concepts of *aloha 'Āina*, or love of the Land, and *Mālama 'Āina*, or serving and caring for the Land, stem from the traditional model established at the time of Wākea. The Hawaiian does not desire to conquer his elder female sibling, the *'Āina*, but to take care of her, to cultivate her properly, and to make her beautiful with neat gardens and careful husbandry.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, throughout Polynesia, it is the reciprocal duty of the elder siblings to *hānai* (feed) the younger ones, as well as to love and *ho'omalu* (protect) them. The relationship is thereby further defined: it is the *'Āina*, the *kalo*, and the *Ali'i Nui* who are to feed, clothe, and shelter their younger brothers and sisters, the Hawaiian people. So long as younger Hawaiians love, serve, and honor their elders, the elders will continue to do the same for them, as well as to provide for all their physical needs. Clearly, by this equation, it is the duty of Hawaiians to *Mālama 'Āina*, and, as a result of this proper behavior, the *'Āina* will *mālama* Hawaiians. In Hawaiian, this perfect harmony is known as *pono*, which is often translated in English as "righteous," but actually denotes a universe in perfect harmony.