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Kū, Lono, and the Voices That Contend for Them: Interpreting Identity and Divinity in Hoʻomana Hawaiʻi

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Research Article

Keywords:

Posted Date: September 17th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-10796823/v1

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Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

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Abstract

In January 1779, Hawaiians are reported to have received Captain James Cook as Lono, a god said to return each year from a distant homeland. Scholars have argued for decades over what actually happened there and what Hawaiians believed while it was happening. This article sets that historical question aside and asks a different one: what would it mean for a claim like "Cook is Lono" to be true at all? Taking the existing readings of Valerio Valeri, Marshall Sahlins, and Gananath Obeyesekere at face value, alongside Hawaiian scholars including Haunani-Kay Trask, Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa, and George Kanahele, the article follows out what each interpretation implies about divine identity, then tests these implications against each other. Before turning to Cook, the article uncovers the same puzzle already inside Hawaiian tradition, apart from any European visitor: the war god Kū appears in dozens of manifestations, and nothing in the existing scholarship explains what makes them one god rather than several sharing a name. Cook's case turns out to be this same puzzle with much higher stakes, no longer about a god's own forms but about whether a stranger could become one. The result unsettles a question usually treated as settled beforehand: whether Hawaiian religion counts as polytheistic, henotheistic, or something closer to an underlying monism. The article ends by asking whether that question was ever really prior, or whether the answer depends on working through cases like Cook's first.

1. Introduction

This article is about an aspect of the akua (divinity, god) within Hoʻomana Hawaiʻi, or Hawaiian religion.[1] The term akua is applied to a wide range of entities. For instance, the Hawaiian dictionary defines akua as "god, goddess, spirit, ghost, devil, image, idol, corpse," and notes that even a living person of sufficiently high rank could be called akua (Pukui and Elbert 1986). A further entry, ʻaumakua, arguably names a specific kind

[1] From hoʻomana, literally "to cause to have mana," built on mana, supernatural or divine power; calling it "religion" here is a liberty, and the word should be read as a placeholder rather than a settled translation. Divinity and the lowercase god are placeholders for akua on the same terms; God is avoided deliberately, since capitalizing it would settle, in the first sentence, a question the rest of the article treats as genuinely open.

of akua that holds the roles of family or personal gods, deified ancestors who might take the form of sharks, owls, hawks, octopuses, rocks, clouds, or plants, among many other things (Pukui and Elbert 1986).[2] Whether all of these count as gods in anything like the sense familiar from the more widely known world traditions, or whether akua marks out a different kind of category altogether, is an open question. That question is not answered here in general terms. Instead, we look at an aspect of the concept of akua through a single case involving identity.

In January 1779, Captain James Cook and his ships anchored at Kealakekua Bay, on the west coast of the island of Hawai‘i, the largest and southernmost island in the Hawaiian island chain. Several sources report that Cook was received according to protocols connected to Lono, one of the four major Hawaiian akua (Valeri 1985, 109). Cook left the bay a few days later, but his ship suffered damage and he returned. Shortly after his return, he was killed. Contestedly, some considered him to be Lono on both his visits, and he continued to be honoured as such even after his death.

Scholars still disagree about what actually occurred in the sequence of events involving Cook. They also disagree about what Hawaiians believed about him while it was happening (Sahlins 1985; Obeyesekere 1992; Sahlins 1995). Settling that disagreement is not our goal.[3] Instead, we look to the disagreement as a means to show how different voices, and the clash of Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian cultures, interpret

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[2] Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary: Hawaiian-English, English-Hawaiian*, entry for "'aumakua," sense 1, in full: "Family or personal gods, deified ancestors who might assume the shape of sharks..., owls..., hawks..., ‘elepaio, ‘iwi, mudhens, octopuses, eels, mice, rats, dogs, caterpillars, rocks, cowries, clouds, or plants," citing Beckwith (1970, 124-143, 559), and Pukui, Haertig, and Lee (1979, 38). The entry's own etymology traces ‘aumakua to ‘au, "group," plus makua, "parent," not to akua, despite the visual resemblance between the two words; the claim in the body text that ‘aumakua names a kind of akua is this article’s own inference from reading this entry alongside the "akua" entry, not a connection the dictionary states outright. The abbreviation "Nānā" in the dictionary's own citation is assumed to mean Pukui, Haertig.

[3] Readers who want an overview of the debate, rather than a position on it, can turn to Howe's review of the controversy (Howe 1996, 108–18).

the concept of akua differently. The philosophical work is to look at the implications of each interpretation specifically through the example of Cook, an unusual case that tests the limits of ordinary readings of divine identity, especially since Cook arrived from entirely outside the tradition rather than emerging as an ordinary claimant from within it. Several scholars have proposed different readings of the claim that Cook was, in some sense, Lono. Each reading rests on a different idea about what it would mean for a Hawaiian akua to apply to or be identified with an ordinary person in this way, especially a foreigner from Europe with no Hawaiian genealogy of his own. Read side by side, these readings offer a small set of options for what it can mean to predicate a divine name of something, whether human, animal, or otherwise. The readings are positions held in the existing literature. And all of them were developed to explain the same set of events.

The comparison we make serves a philosophical purpose, and does not depend on settling which reading is historically correct, that is, on establishing what actually happened at Kealakekua Bay. The purpose is to ask what a claim such as “Cook is Lono" can mean. It is also to ask what each possible meaning implies about what an akua is. Some philosophers of religion have asked a related question about how divine names and titles refer to their object. Here, that same question is asked of Hawaiian religion, using the Lono and Cook case as a starting point rather than a general theory of reference.

The method here is not to begin from a theory of divinity and ask whether Cook satisfies it. Instead, it is to take the readings already offered by serious scholars of Hawai‘i at face value, as genuine attempts to say what actually happened, and to follow out what each implies once its own claims are taken seriously and set against the others. Three of these scholars, Valerio Valeri, Marshall Sahlins, and Gananath Obeyesekere,

write from outside the Hawaiian tradition, working through archival and ethnographic method to reconstruct what Hawaiians in 1779 might have believed. Four more, Haunani-Kay Trask, Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa, George Kanahele, and Mary Kawena Pukui together with her collaborators, write from within it, and do not always agree with each other any more than the first three do. The article works through some background on Hawaiian religion and its sources, the akua system and where Kū and Lono sit within it, and the contested evidence surrounding Cook himself. It then turns to Kū's own case for identity with his different forms first, independent of Cook entirely. Only after that does it turn to Cook, as the harder test of the same question. The outsider readings are assessed before the insider ones, but not because they deserve priority. The insider positions are better understood once the terms of the existing debate are already established. The implications of all this, taken together, become clear only once all seven readings have actually been considered.

2. Hoʻomana Hawaiʻi in Context: Sources, History, and the Forms of the Divine

Before Cook's arrival, Hawaiian society was organized around the aliʻi, a graded hierarchy of chiefs whose rank carried sacred as well as political weight. A class of priests, the kahuna, supported this structure, maintaining temples known as heiau and carrying out the rites owed to the akua (Valeri 1985; Kirch 2010). This structure was held in place by the kapu system, a set of sacred restrictions governing behavior between genders, between chiefs and commoners, and around sacred places and objects. Kapu marked out what counted as sacred and dangerous, and breaking it could in principle carry severe penalties, including death (Malo 1951, 84).

European contact began in January 1778, when Cook's expedition first landed at Kauaʻi and Niʻihau, introducing venereal disease among Hawaiians according to the ships' own officers (Daws 1968, 1, 6–7). Cook returned to the islands in January 1779, anchoring at Kealakekua Bay, and was killed there the following month. Growing European and American trade over the following decades steadily eroded the kapu system's authority (Daws 1968, 56), until it formally ended in November 1819, when Liholiho, recently succeeded to his father Kamehameha I's rule, publicly broke the kapu against men and women eating together, an event known as the ʻAi Noa, or free eating (Daws 1968, 55–57). American Protestant missionaries arrived the following year (Daws 1968; Kuykendall 1938, 70).

This history creates a problem for anyone trying to describe what Hawaiians believed before this break in kapu. Nearly everything known about the akua, and about Hawaiian religious practice more generally, comes from a small number of nineteenth century Hawaiian authors, principally David Malo, Samuel Kamakau, and Kepelino Keauokalani, along with Abraham Fornander's later compilation of oral tradition (Malo 1951; Kamakau 1961; Kepelino 1932; Fornander 1878–85). Malo, Kamakau, and Kepelino were native Hawaiians educated at mission schools, and all three wrote after the kapu system had already ended, in a context shaped directly by their education. Fornander's own background was different: Swedish-born and educated, he later arrived in Hawaiʻi and compiled his collection of oral tradition working from Hawaiian sources rather than his own mission schooling. Despite these authors' backgrounds, their accounts should not be overly minimised, since they remain the closest thing available to a publicly accessible native record. But it does mean that every claim in this article about classical Hawaiian belief has already passed through a layer of retrospective organization made by writers with their own commitments and audiences

in mind. Modern Native Hawaiian scholarship has also examined this same disruption from within, rather than only from outside.

One further question can be raised now, which will be addressed later. Scholars describing Hawaiian religion have tried to apply several different models to it. The most common default is polytheism, a system of many akua treated as broadly independent of one another. Some readings lean closer to henotheism, in which one akua is effectively singled out above the rest. Valeri, for instance, describes Kū as encompassing all the properties of the male gods, and John Charlot observes that this, combined with the marginal role Valeri assigns to goddesses, comes close to a henotheistic position, although Valeri does not develop the point himself (Charlot 1987, 142; Valeri 1985, 12–13). Other readings suggest something closer to monism. Valeri describes Po, the primordial night of the Kumulipo creation chant, as "the closest approximation to a generalized notion of the divine" (Valeri 1985, 35). His reasoning here is more careful than a simple assertion of oneness. Po is defined in the dictionary as "the realm of the gods," already plural (Pukui and Elbert 1986). Valeri argues that its generalized, undifferentiated character is not opposed to multiplicity but contains it "in potentia," so that particular gods such as Kū and Lono can, at specific ritual moments, "assume this generalized aspect," momentarily representing the whole of the divine (Valeri 1985, 215–16). Valeri describes this as a kind of *coincidentia oppositorum*, coincidence of opposites, a term from Western mystical philosophy, most associated with Nicholas of Cusa, for the way properties that would be distinct or contradictory in ordinary, finite things turn out to coincide in the infinite or the divine. Applied here without much argument for the fit, this is an unacknowledged import of the same kind Charlot criticizes elsewhere in the book, even though Charlot does not flag this particular passage. A further, independent source complicates the picture even more: Beckwith's

own account of Po describes not an undifferentiated potential but a populated hierarchy of ranked gods.[4] Which of these readings fits best, or whether none of them do, is not something to settle here by stipulation alone. The readings developed in section five instead offer a way of testing the question against a single concrete case.

3. The Akua System, and Locating Kū and Lono Within It

In the introduction, akua was defined generally, although it is often translated as god or deity. Within this broad category, one grouping recurs constantly across our sources. Kāne, Kū, Lono, and Kanaloa are conventionally treated as the four great akua, standing above the rest of the pantheon (Valeri 1985, 109). However, this grouping should not be taken as a simple, unquestioned fact about the tradition. John Charlot argues that Valeri's scholarship, an example where this four-god schema is posited, rests on nineteenth century systematizing sources, Kamakau in particular, as well as on an idea that was already conventional among scholars by the time Valeri wrote (Charlot 1987, 124–25). The Hawaiian phrase behind the grouping, ke kōkoʻohā o ke akua, is translated by Valeri as "the association of four gods," and by Charlot, more pointedly, as "the quaternity of the god" (Valeri 1985, 13; Charlot 1987, 125). Charlot argues this reflects a broader pattern of nineteenth century, Bible influenced attempts to rationalize

[4] Beckwith's independent study of the Kumulipo creation chant gives a fuller picture of Po (the primordial night Valeri treats as the closest Hawaiian approximation to monism) from a Hawaiian source rather than from Valeri's own more abstract language. She reports Joseph Kukahi's 1902 account of Po as a populous realm with its own internal hierarchy, head gods, governors, an executioner, messengers, and guards, "down to the lower grades of gods who are commoners among the gods" (Beckwith 1951, 156–57). This sits in some tension with Valeri's own claim that Po's undifferentiated character contains multiplicity only "in *potentia*," actualized at specific ritual moments (Valeri 1985, 215–16): an undifferentiated potential actualized only occasionally is not obviously the same kind of thing as a permanent bureaucracy of governors, an executioner, and commoner-gods. Whether this is one picture described at two levels of abstraction, or two pictures genuinely pulling apart, is a further reason (on top of Valeri's own unearned import of the term *coincidentia oppositorum*) not to settle too quickly on "monism" as the right label for Po.

Hawaiian belief on the model of the Christian Trinity, and points out that the chant Valeri cites as evidence lists groups of gods by number showing both four and five, with no special weight given to either.

Valeri's own reasoning shows the same tendency at work. Citing Beckwith's observation that little is known about Kanaloa apart from Kāne, and noting that the Kumulipo calls the two gods twin brothers, Valeri argues that Kanaloa represents the "negative or 'sinister' aspect of Kāne," concluding that "the quadripartition of the gods is a superficial phenomenon that conceals a tripartition on a deeper level" (Valeri 1985, 13, 18). He is not unaware of the risk: in the same discussion he notes that "in some cases the trinitary organization of the gods is due to Christian influence," citing Kepelino, and proceeds to use the tripartition anyway (Valeri 1985, 18). Charlot's caution is worth following here. The quaternity is a claim to be examined, not a fact to build on, and any argument that leans on "the four great akua" as a fixed, native category needs to accept that the category may already carry a layer of nineteenth century systematizing built into it.

With that caution in place, Kū and Lono can still be given working profiles, since the broad associations attached to each akua recur throughout the sources. However, their internal organization is disputed. Kū is associated with war, with male activity generally, and with the luakini heiau, typically the largest of the Hawaiian temple types in terms of scale that is reserved for the king. Malo confirms this connection directly. A king who worshipped according to the rite of Kū built a luakini, requiring human sacrifice, while a king who worshipped according to the rite of Lono built a different kind of heiau, a mapele, at which only pigs were offered (Malo 1951, 159–60). Modern archaeology reaches the same conclusion independently. Kirch describes luakini as "the main war temples reserved for the king and dedicated to Kū," whose dedication

"required multiple human sacrifices" (Kirch 2010, 59). Valeri's own language captures the martial side of Kū just as directly. Discussing Kūkaʻilimoku, one of Kū's forms, Valeri writes of the "imposition" of this "god of force" over Lono, whom he calls "the god of the festival" (Valeri 1985, 222).[5]

Lono, by contrast, is associated with peace, with agriculture and fertility, and with the Makahiki, the season of harvest, tribute, and sport. Valeri reads the Makahiki's foundation myth as representing "the marriage of heaven and earth," with Lonomakua, one of Lono's forms, identified as a heavenly god uniting with the feminine earth. Elsewhere he describes Lonomakua as "the father or producer of cultivated plants" (Valeri 1985, 214–16; Charlot 1987, 133).

Kū and Lono are not simply two akua who happen to have different personalities. Their opposition organizes the ritual calendar itself. The Hawaiian lunar calendar was divided into two parts, four months sacred to Lono, called the Makahiki, and a longer stretch of eight months in which the main temple rituals of Kū were practiced (Kirch 2010, 60–61). The Makahiki season, governed by Lono, gives way at its close to a ritual return to Kū's more violent order, when the kapu on warfare lifts and rulers are free to resume battle against one another. In the kāli'i ceremony, a spear is thrown at the king and misses, after which another man touches him with a second spear. Valeri, following Frazer, reads this spear as staging the king's "execution" (Valeri 1985, 211–12, 225–26, 285). Soon afterward, in what Valeri calls "a sham battle between the king's warriors and Lonomakua's defenders," the images used in the

[5] Valeri adds an important historical caveat to his own reading of Kūkaʻilimoku's dominance over Lono at Hikiau: this particular imposition, Kūkaʻilimoku intruding on a tribute rite that properly belonged to Lono's festival, may reflect a change introduced by Kamehameha specifically, a "conflict between political and cosmological motivations" tied to his reign (Valeri 1985, 222), rather than an ancient or timeless feature of Hawaiian ritual. If so, the martial dominance over Lono may be a product of a particular king's politics rather than a permanent fact about how Kū and Lono were always related.

Makahiki rites are brought into the king's temple and "dismantled for storage," and Kū's order resumes (Valeri 1985, 211–12, 225–26, 285). Charlot disputes Valeri's specific reading of this sequence as a death and rebirth of the god, arguing there is little textual evidence for it (Charlot 1987, 133–34). But the more basic structural point is not really in question between the two scholars. Kū and Lono function as opposed poles governing two halves of the ritual year, one martial and one given over to peace and cultivation, and the transition between them is itself the occasion for ritual.

Kū is not a single, undivided figure even within his own domain. Hawaiian akua characteristically have kino lau, literally "many bodies," a system in which one god is understood to have multiple distinct forms (Charlot 1987, 126). Several of these are documented for Kū. Malo's own catalog of the deities worshipped by chiefs, names Kū, Lono, Kāne, and Kanaloa together, then continues directly into a further string of Kū names, including Kūnuiākea and Kūkaʻilimoku among several others (Malo 1951, 83). Kūkaʻilimoku, whose name Beckwith glosses as "Ku snatcher of land," was already introduced above as the "god of force" (Beckwith 1940, 15). Valeri glosses the same name slightly differently, as "Ku island-snatcher"; it is Kū's war form specifically, the manifestation invoked in battle (Valeri 1985, 13, 222). This form had its own dedicated class of temple, the Hale o Kāʻili ("house of Kāʻili"), distinct from a luakini dedicated to Kū more generally. Kamehameha's great temple at Puʻukoholā, built in 1791, was of this kind (Kirch 2010, 59).

Kūnuiākea, glossed by Beckwith as "Ku the supreme one" and by Valeri as "Ku of the vast expanse," is a further, separate form (Beckwith 1940, 15; Valeri 1985, 13). Valeri gives an unusually vivid account of the relation between this form and Kūkaʻilimoku. Describing a ritual in which an image of Kūkaʻilimoku is brought into contact with another image, he writes of "the turning of Kūkaʻilimoku ... into Kūnuiākea

... the immobile god who represents the permanence of the encompassment." This transformation is completed by sacrificing a pig young enough for a single priest to lift and throw to the ground. On Valeri's reading, sacrificing a victim this young is what brings about the akua's rebirth in this new form (Valeri 1985, 313). Elsewhere Kū appears as Kūʻilioloa, "Long Dog," an animal form that Charlot notes can equally well be read as belonging to Kāne, as Kāneʻilio (Charlot 1987, 142, note 33).

Malo's text raises the same identity question in an even sharper form elsewhere. In a separate list of deities worshipped by commoners according to occupation, he records several more names built on the same Kū element, including Kūhuluhulumanu for bird catchers, Kūkaoo for farmers, Kūʻula, or Kūʻulakai, glossed by Beckwith as "Ku of the abundance of the sea," and patrons for canoe builders. Valeri glosses the Kūʻula name very differently, as "Ku the red one" (Malo 1951, 82; Beckwith 1940, 15; Valeri 1985, 13).[6] Malo records the chiefly and occupational lists separately, without saying how, or whether, the two relate, and does not resolve the question himself. Kirch's reconstruction of the Hawaiian temple system treats Kūʻula's fishing shrines, called koʻa, as one of four major functional categories of heiau, standing alongside shrines to Kāne, Lono's agricultural temples, and Kū's own luakini (Kirch 2010, 58). This is a classification by function, what each heiau was used for, not a claim about divine identity, so Kirch does not address the question either. Two scholars do address it directly, and they agree with each other rather than disagree. Beckwith states plainly that the occupational Kū names, including Kūʻula, "are to be regarded as sub-ordinate

[6] Beckwith and Valeri's translations of these Kū names do not always agree. Kūkaʻilimoku, for instance, is "Ku snatcher of land" for Beckwith but "Ku island-snatcher" for Valeri; Kūʻula is "Ku of the abundance of the sea" for Beckwith but "Ku the red one" for Valeri, a genuine divergence in meaning rather than a mere difference of phrasing. Neither scholar explains the other's reading, and this article does not attempt to adjudicate between them; the disagreements are noted as a reminder that these glosses, used throughout, are interpretive choices.

gods under whose name special families worshiped the god Ku, who is to be thought of as presiding over them all" (Beckwith 1940, 14). Valeri's own list of Kū's particularizations reaches a similar result in practice, placing Kūʻula alongside Kūkaʻilimoku and Kūnuiākea without distinction (Valeri 1985, 13). Neither writer offers much argument for this conclusion, so much as states or assumes it. Given how readily both reach for a unifying reading, this agreement may say as much about a shared scholarly habit of resolving multiplicity into one presiding figure (the same habit already noted earlier in this section in the discussion of the four great gods) as it says about the Hawaiian content itself.

None of these forms is simply interchangeable with any other. Kūkaʻilimoku governs war. Kūnuiākea belongs to one particular ritual moment. Kū'ilioloa belongs to an entirely different animal register, and can apparently even shade into a form of Kāne instead. And yet all of them share the name Kū. What actually makes Kūkaʻilimoku and Kū'ilioloa instances of one god, rather than two different gods that happen to share a name, is not obvious from the sources. Valeri does attempt an answer. He treats a shared human form as the common thread running underneath a god's other kino lau, literally "many bodies." This is precisely the move Charlot disputes at length, since many akua, on Charlot's accounting, have only animal or elemental forms reported for them, with no human form ever recorded at all (Charlot 1987, 126–27). Either way, the underlying puzzle survives. Hawaiian religion should already answer some version of the question of what makes something count as the same god internally for Kū alone, and well before Cook ever arrives on Hawaiian shores. The akua system was already handling multiplicity of this kind on its own terms. It is against that background that Cook's arrival, and what Hawaiians are reported to have made of it, can now be addressed.

4. The Contested Evidence: Cook and the Makahiki

Cook's expedition returned to Hawaiian waters in November 1778, sailing along the coasts of Maui and then Hawai‘i island for several weeks before anchoring at Kealakekua Bay on January 17, 1779. This period fell within, or very close to, the Makahiki, the season sacred to Lono described in the previous section. Cook's own course around the island, a nearly complete clockwise circuit before he finally came ashore, closely resembled the route taken each year by the procession that carried the Makahiki images from district to district (Daws 1968, 26; Sahlins 1989, 405).

The reception at Kealakekua is described, from the European side, as unusually formal. Sahlins reconstructs the scene from the ships' logs: attendants bearing ceremonial staffs went ahead of Cook, calling out Lono's name, and the Hawaiians he passed either fell to the ground in reverence or bolted from the scene. Cook was then brought to Hikiau, a heiau associated with Lono, where the ceremony that followed is described in Lieutenant James King's own journal as "a sort of religious adoration" (Sahlins 1985, 123). Samuel Kamakau's account, written decades later, states plainly that Hawaiians called Cook Lono, "after the god Lono who had gone away promising to return" (Kamakau 1961, 93). Kamakau also describes the reception as something shared well beyond the priests and chiefs who conducted it, with people reportedly rejoicing at what they took to be the return of an ancestral akua (Kamakau 1961, 98).

Not every European witness treated the identification the same way. Lt. King and the surgeon William Samwell both recorded that Hawaiians expected Cook's eventual return even after his death. William Bligh, who served on the same voyage, dismissed this report as one of King's exaggerations (Sahlins 1989, 377). Even within the ship's

own logs and journals, there is no single settled account, only several, not always in agreement.

This points to a more general feature of the evidence. What is known about Cook's reception passes through three distinct kinds of source, and none of them can simply be read as a transcript of what happened. The first is the ship's logs and officers' journals, numerous and often detailed, but written by outsiders unfamiliar with Hawaiian ritual language, and prone, as just shown, to disagreement with one another. The second is nineteenth century Hawaiian authored history, principally Malo and Kamakau, the same evidentiary problem already raised in section two, bearing here on a specific event rather than on classical belief in general. The third is twentieth century anthropological reconstruction, which combines the first two but does not agree on how much weight the Hawaiian authored histories deserve. Some scholars read them as preserving a genuine older tradition; others argue that the Makahiki's grandeur was itself a later elaboration, reshaped to serve later political interests.[7]

Cook left Kealakekua on February 4. A few days later a storm damaged the *Resolution*'s foremast, forcing the ships back to the same bay on February 11. Gavan Daws describes the mood on this second arrival as markedly different from the first: the bay was quiet rather than crowded, and relations deteriorated over the following days until Cook was killed on February 14. Daws, writing independently of the anthropological debate that followed, read the killing as a conflict between the priests of

[7] This dispute was carried out directly between Bergendorff, Hasager, and Henriques on one side and Sahlins on the other. Bergendorff, Hasager, and Henriques argue the Makahiki's grandeur was a later elaboration, possibly dating to Kamehameha's reign, and that the Cook-Lono narrative was reshaped afterward to serve the interests of a post-conquest aristocracy, noting that Malo (the source through whom most of this history survives) was himself said to belong to that aristocracy (Bergendorff, Hasager, and Henriques 1988, esp. 396–406, 403). Sahlins responds directly, defending the Hawaiian sources' reliability (Sahlins 1989, 371).

Lono and the "devotees of Ku" that was tied to the seasonal close of the Makahiki (Daws 1968, 16–29, esp. 27).

Even the anthropological layer requires interpretive choices of its own. Sahlins defends the connection between Cook and the Makahiki against critics who deny that the Makahiki took the form later Hawaiian sources describe, arguing from further evidence, such as patterns of fish trading recorded in the ships' logs, for a specific reconstruction of how that year's calendar aligned with Cook's arrival (Sahlins 1989, 403–5, 408–9). Which of these evidentiary layers should be trusted most, and how literally the ritual language recorded in each one should be read, again is not settled here. A different question needs answering first, and it does not depend on any of these layers being reliable. Before asking what eighteenth century Hawaiians made of Cook, it is worth asking what being called Kū already requires of any of Kū's own manifestations, with no European visitor anywhere in the picture.

5. The Kū Question: What Makes a Manifestation the Same God

Kūkaʻilimoku, Kūnuiākea, Kūʻula, and Kūʻilioloa are all called Kū, and what makes them one god rather than several sharing a name remains up for debate. One attempted answer, that a shared human form runs underneath the different kino lau, exists in the literature, along with an objection to it (Valeri 1985; Charlot 1987). Neither has been tested closely enough to say whether it actually works. That test is owed before Cook is allowed to complicate the picture further, since whatever the answer turns out to be, it has to hold for Kū alone, with no European visitor clouding it.

At least four kinds of answer are available in principle, independent of which one the Hawaiian content ends up supporting. (a) Something might run beneath the

different forms and unite them, a shared content that the various kino lau merely instantiate. (b) One form might simply outrank the rest, so that some single manifestation counts as the real Kū while the others are subordinate to it. (c) The forms might share nothing beyond a name and a family resemblance, with no further fact making them one god rather than several that happen to be called by the same word. (d) Or no single ranking might hold across every context, so that the form that counts as central shifts with the frame in which Kū is being discussed. Only (a) and (b) have a defender. (c) is closer to a default position, what would remain if the first two do not hold up. (d) surfaces almost by accident, in a concession Valeri makes against his own preferred answer.

Valeri gives the fullest account of (a). Kamapuaʻa, he argues, is grouped with pigs, a kukui leaf shaped like a pig's snout and ears, dark rain clouds, and a foul-smelling fish not because these things share any biological kinship but because each evokes some human property, virility or appetite or aggression, that the god himself embodies. From this example he draws a general principle, that the "genus" of all the species included in one god "belongs not to the natural world but to the human, social world" (Valeri 1985, 11). Applied to Kū, the principle yields a specific claim. Kū's "fundamental human signified is the class constituted by activities pertaining to and performed by human male [sic]," namely war, fishing, and the building of canoes, images, and temples (Valeri 1985, 11). The dog, the hawk, and the game fish count among Kū's kino lau because each evokes the warrior. Birds prized for their plumage count because their feathers adorn a warrior's helmet. The color red counts because it evokes blood spilled in war and in fishing (Valeri 1985, 12). On this account, a natural form can never be a member of the god the way that a species is a member of a genus. It is a symbol, chosen because it evokes some fact about human male activity that Kū is taken to embody, and the

different kino lau count as one god because each points back to that same embodied content.

This theory earns some credit simply for having a mechanism. Evoked properties tracking a shared human content is a real proposal, not a bare assertion that the forms are somehow unified. But the mechanism has to do this work for every member of Kū's own list, and on that test it runs into trouble at least once, and inside the very content that states it. Charlot observes that the animal form ʻIlioloa, "Long Dog," is claimed just as readily for Kāne, as Kāneʻilio, as it is for Kū, as Kūʻilioloa (Charlot 1987, 142). If a natural form's meaning were fixed by which human properties a particular god embodies, the identical form should not float freely between two different gods. A defender of Valeri might reply that the theory was only ever meant to cover the well documented particularizations, not every kino lau that is reported anywhere in the literature. That reply does not help here. Kūʻilioloa is exactly such a documented particularization, sitting inside Kū's own list rather than at its margins. Charlot's broader point, that Hawaiian sources report a number of akua with no human form recorded for them at all, only generalizes a problem already present in Kū's own case (Charlot 1987, 126–27).

Answer (b) fares no better, though for a different reason. It is not refuted so much as never argued for, and Valeri's own text goes further, marking the question as unsettled rather than resolving the issue. Beckwith, a folklorist, states that the occupational Kū names, Kūʻula among them, "are to be regarded as sub-ordinate gods under whose name special families worshiped the god Ku, who is to be thought of as presiding over them all" (Beckwith 1940, 14). Valeri's own list of particularizations reaches the same practical result, treating Kūʻula alongside Kūkaʻilimoku and Kūnuiākea without distinction, as though one of the three were simply first among the rest (Valeri

1985, 13). Neither writer gives a reason for the ranking beyond stating it. Valeri comes closer to admitting as much himself a page later. The particularized forms of a major god, he writes, "have different values and thus are hierarchized," but "the relationship between major and minor gods is presented in a somewhat confused and contradictory manner in the literature" (Valeri 1985, 13–14). And he does not resolve between the incompatible models he finds there, one treating the relationship as a matter of seniority among siblings, the other as a matter of origin, beyond a narrow technical correction of terminology (Valeri 1985, 13–14).[8] Section three already noted that this same reflex, resolving multiplicity into one presiding figure, produced the unargued grouping of four great gods. The presiding claim regarding Kū reads as another instance of the same habit, and Valeri's own admission that the underlying mechanism is disputed makes it harder, not easier, to treat the claim as settled.

A further passage in Valeri's text illustrates the same general caution from a different, adjacent puzzle, though it should not be mistaken for direct evidence about Kū's own kino lau. In one place, introducing Kū's pairing with the goddess Hina, he writes that "Ku is said to preside over all male spirits (gods), Hina over the females," and concludes that in this pairing Kū "encompasses all the properties of the masculine gods" (Valeri 1985, 12). A few lines later, in the same chapter, he places Kū as one member of a tetrad of four equal major gods, alongside Kāne, Kanaloa, and Lono, where "his attributes are more limited in number" (Valeri 1985, 13). This is a question about Kū's rank relative to the other three major gods, not about the rank of Kūʻula,

[8] The two incompatible models Valeri finds in the Hawaiian sources for how a major god relates to its subordinate forms: one treats the major god as an eldest brother who reigns over the rest while younger siblings rule their own separate domains; the other, Kamakau's model, treats subordinate gods as produced by a splitting off from the major god, a relation of origin rather than of ongoing rank. Valeri's own correction of Kamakau's terminology addresses only a technical point of vocabulary, not this deeper disagreement about origin versus rank.

Kūkaʻilimoku, or Kūnuiākea, and it should not be read as settling that separate question. But Valeri draws a general lesson from it that does carry over. Hawaiian gods, he writes, cannot be defined "in and for themselves," only "with respect to the context in which they are situated at a given moment" (Valeri 1985, 13). He then tries to hold his own two claims together, arguing that Kū's presiding role in the first context is what earns him first place in the second, so that his "two classificatory positions interconnect." The reconciliation does not obviously succeed. The presiding claim rests on a single quoted line about gender, not on anything specific to the tetrad; and using it to explain a second, equally unproven ranking does not amount to independent confirmation of either one.

What this adjacent case shows, whatever one makes of Valeri's own attempt to tie its two halves together, is that even the scholar most committed to a coherent hierarchy cannot state Kū's rank one level up, among the four major gods, without first naming a context, and that the rank changes once the context does. That is answer (d), and it is worth being honest about how it is reached here. It is not proven for Kū's own kino lau directly. It is suggested by an adjacent case one level up, where the identical author cannot hold a fixed hierarchy across two nearby pages, combined with his own admission, in the passage on particularized forms above, that the literature does not agree on how a major god relates to his own subordinate forms in the first place. Taken together, these considerations lower our confidence in answer (b) without fully establishing answer (d) either.

What survives, once the strongest version of (a) fails on its own terms and (b) turns out to rest on assertion, sits closer to (c) and (d) than to either of the first two. These are not the same claim. (c) holds that Kū's forms share little beyond a name and a family resemblance, so no further fact is required. (d) holds that no single ranking holds

across every context, though the clearest evidence for it so far is Valeri's own inconsistency about Kū's rank among the four major gods, this being an adjacent case rather than direct evidence about the rank of Kūʻula, Kūkaʻilimoku, and Kūnuiākea specifically. Whether the same context-dependence holds one level down, among Kū's own kino lau, is exactly what remains undecided. Nothing here settles a choice between (c) and (d). Both remain compatible with everything examined above, and neither has been argued for directly so much as arrived at once the first two are cleared away. That is not a small finding. It shows that the puzzle already exists, prior to Cook and independent of him, within the single name of a god. The next question is whether Cook's case differs from this one, or whether it is the identical puzzle carrying far higher stakes.

6. Cook as Test Case

When his ship anchored at Kealakekua Bay on 17 January 1779, a priest wrapped Cook in red tapa cloth (bark cloth) while aboard and made an offering of a pig. Ashore, a herald went ahead of him crying Lono's name, and the people fell prostrate as he passed. At Hikiau, a heiau associated with Lono, Koaʻa the priest and Lt. King held Cook's arms outstretched while further offerings were made. Sahlins reads this posture as more than a welcome. Cook, he writes, "became the image of Lono, a duplicate of the crosspiece icon... which is the appearance of the god" (Sahlins 1985, 105). In the previous section, we asked what makes Kūkaʻilimoku, Kūnuiākea, Kūʻula, and Kūʻilioloa manifestations of one god. Cook's case asks the identical question with a person standing where a wooden image usually stands, and with the consequences of the answer far more serious.

Before the rival readings of this question can be compared, a prior objection has to be settled. Obeyesekere denies that the ceremony at Hikiau was a deification at all, though his account does not claim that nothing happened; it offers a specific alternative (Obeyesekere 1992, 48–59). Kalaniʻōpuʻu, the ruling chief, was at the time fighting an unsuccessful war against Kahekili of the neighboring island Maui. Kahekili's priest, Kaleopuʻupuʻu, who had descended from a lineage of foreign priests, had ostensibly turned the tide against Kalaniʻōpuʻu. Cook's crew, foreign and pale in complexion in a way that resembled the same mythic lineage, gave Kalaniʻōpuʻu a practical reason to install Cook with high honors, in hope of British help, the same pattern Cook had already met among the Tahitians, Tongans, and Maori (Obeyesekere 1992, 74–87).[9]

On Obeyesekere's reading, the rites at Hikiau installed Cook as a chief, not a god. Drawing on the scholar Te Rangi Hiroa, known also as Peter Buck, Obeyesekere argues that genuine deification in Hawaiian custom was a postmortem honor for chiefs, never something conferred on the living (Obeyesekere 1992, 74–75). The arms held outstretched, on this account, were simply the ordinary Hawaiian posture of prayer: Cook was being made to pray to the Hawaiian gods through the priests speaking on his behalf, not fashioned into a living copy of Lono's image (Obeyesekere 1992, 83–85).

Obeyesekere's own content supplies the strongest independent case for his reading. Cook was not the only person at Kealakekua called Lono. The high priest's son,

[9] Valeri disputes Obeyesekere's claim that Kalaniʻōpuʻu installed Cook with high honors in hope of British military help against Kahekili, calling it "based on no evidence whatsoever" and arguing that Cook's other officers would likely have recorded a request for military aid in their own journals, as they did on comparable occasions (Valeri 1994, 131). Obeyesekere's own published response treats this less as a factual error than a disagreement about method: direct evidence for internal Hawaiian political motives is rarely available at all, so the historian has to reason from indirect evidence, such as the wider Polynesian pattern of chiefs soliciting Cook's military help, or Kauaʻi chiefs later asking the same of his successor Clerke. Valeri's own scholarship, Obeyesekere adds, argues from indirect evidence just as extensively, so that discounting this kind of inference would leave most of Valeri's own book equally worthless by the same standard (Obeyesekere 1994, 152–53). Whether this counts as legitimate historical inference or as the same unearned common sense each side accuses the other of using is one methodological dispute running through this whole debate, not a claim that has been settled on either side.

known to the British as Omiah, held the same title and received comparable deference, including prostration by commoners; yet nobody, ancient or modern, has concluded that Omiah was the god in person (Obeyesekere 1992, 91–94). If a title without full identity was already available for one living Hawaiian, extending the same title to a second, foreign one, did not by itself require any special hypothesis about Cook's divinity, though why a foreigner received the title at all is a separate question. Obeyesekere's own reading of the evidence has itself been challenged on more than one point, however, including whether the raised arms were really an ordinary prayer posture and whether the Omiah evidence has been read too generously, and the two readings of the same eyewitness accounts have not been fully reconciled.[10]

The Omiah case does something else, though, beyond supporting Obeyesekere's own argument. It reproduces, inside his preferred alternative, the identical problem the previous section raised about Kū. A god's name was applied to a living man, Omiah, who was honored, in Obeyesekere's own account, "almost to adoration," and nobody concluded he simply was that god (Obeyesekere 1992, 91–94). That is a naming relation without full identity, of precisely the kind Kūʻula or Kūkaʻilimoku already raised for a nonhuman case. Granting Obeyesekere's account in full, then, does not remove the problem. It relocates it. Even if Cook was never taken for Lono in any strong sense, the

[10] Obeyesekere's reading of Cook via the Omiah parallel has two specific weak points, quite apart from whether the parallel itself is apt. First, his claim that the raised arms were an ordinary prayer posture has to be weighed against Sahlins's specific case that the posture reproduces the shape of the crosspiece image itself, an iconographic detail rather than a generic religious gesture. Second, Nicholas Thomas raises a difficulty with how the Omiah evidence itself is used: Obeyesekere suggests that acclamation and chanting of "Lono," recorded during a boxing match Cook and Omiah both attended, may actually have been intended for Omiah, but Thomas finds this unsupported, since the source cited, the ship's surgeon John Law, if anything suggests the reverse, and the only positive evidence offered, that Omiah was "a personage of great rank and power," is too generic to establish which man was being venerated (Thomas 1994, 119). Thomas concludes there is "no definite reason for preferring Omiah rather than Cook," and notes this is exactly the kind of motivated reading Obeyesekere elsewhere accuses Sahlins of practicing. This complicates one specific reading of one contested scene, not Obeyesekere's broader point that Omiah held the Lono title without being considered the god: that Omiah held the title on other, better attested occasions is not what Thomas disputes, only whether he was the one being venerated in this particular boxing-match moment.

fact that "Lono" could still be truthfully said of a living man who was not the god, raises the same question in a new instance, and so an answer is owed for Omiah as much as for Cook.

And so we turn to the readings that attempt to answer that question directly: Valeri's, developed across two texts nine years apart, and Sahlins's, which turns out to rest on more than one claim.

7. Valeri and Sahlins: The Rival Readings Compared

Valeri offers one such answer, developed for Kū in section five but extended by Valeri himself to Cook specifically. Discussing the Hawaiian verb hoʻomana, "to worship" (a word that can also be used as a noun, "religion," as in the title), which he glosses literally as "to cause one to be mana," Valeri's earlier work cites the record that Kalaniʻōpuʻu "worshiped" Cook. He identifies this directly as "the worship of Cook as a manifestation of the god Lono" (Valeri 1985, 103). From this case and a parallel one, both in which a chief "worshiped... like they worshiped a god," he draws a general conclusion. Worship of this kind, he argues, "means more than 'ascribing mana' because, by virtue of this ascription, something more is added to the mana ascribed to the god or man-god: authority... over the ascribers. In other words, the act of recognition is also an act of creation." The reason, on his account, is that "the god is a concept, a type, a rule for human action" and therefore "cannot be efficacious without human action, which in turn implies human recognition of the god's status. In this sense the god's mana, and indeed his very existence, depends on man's hoʻomana" (Valeri 1985, 103–4).

This comes close to a genuinely performative account, on which recognizing Cook as Lono did not track a preexisting fact so much as help bring one about. But

Valeri's own supporting examples do not all carry the same weight. A fishing ground "made mana before the god," and a priest who "worships the god on his knees" while "simply making an invocation," both concern sustaining a god's already existing efficacy, not conferring identity on a person who was not previously that god (Valeri 1985, 103). Only the Cook example bears on identity conferral directly, and yet Valeri moves from the thinner evidence to the stronger conclusion within one paragraph. Sustaining a god already granted to exist, and installing someone as that god in the first place, are not the same claim, though his argument needs both to be true.

Valeri's 1994 review of Obeyesekere's book develops this considerably further. He argues there was "nothing preordained about Cook's identity" and that the rites at Hikiau were "an attempt to orient and fix this identity in a direction favorable to the Hawaiians" (Valeri 1994, 126). He also proposes a specific anatomy of the ritual that neither Sahlins nor Obeyesekere gives alone. The first stage, performed in the upper temple before an image of Kū in his form as Kūnuiākea, granted Cook "a prerogative of the king himself," resembling how a Hawaiian ruler dedicated sacrifice to claim rule; on this stage, Valeri writes, "Obeyesekere is right" that the rite installed Cook as a chief. The second stage, in the lower temple, resembles only the hanaipu, "in which the image of Lono as god of the Makahiki festival was consecrated by the feeding of his bearer"; here, "it is Sahlins who is right." The whole ritual corresponds to nothing otherwise documented, and is "most probably an ad hoc creation that combines the crucial rite in the cult of Ku with the crucial rite in the cult of Lono" (Valeri 1994, 129), improvised because Cook arrived directly in the Lono season without passing through the Kū-associated stage a Hawaiian ruler would ordinarily pass through first. Sahlins and Obeyesekere are not simply rivals to choose between. Each is right about half the same improvised rite.

Valeri's review also develops an account of Hawaiian naming not available in his previous work. Hawaiians, he argues, held "an ontological connection between names, and especially proper names, and their referents and associations," so that being named after a god meant genuinely participating in what that name evoked, not merely being labeled by it. On this view the contrast between akua, god, and kanaka, human, was itself "a relative one," part of what Valeri calls the Hawaiian "language game," rather than the absolute, mutually exclusive categories a non-Hawaiian reader might import into the case without noticing. This is why, he concludes, there is "no necessary contradiction between the view that Cook was Lono the chief and the view that he was Lono the god. A contradiction only arises when a non-Hawaiian view of 'divinity'... is introduced in the situation" (Valeri 1994, 125–26). Obeyesekere, in his own published response, reads Valeri's claim that nothing was preordained as agreement with his own position against Sahlins, though the two still differ on what follows from it. On what happened to Cook after death, Obeyesekere's own restatement is more affirming than a bare denial: he agrees Cook was deified "in conformity with Hawaiian custom," while insisting no single scenario for what that meant is available (Obeyesekere 1994, 154–55).

Sahlins's own reading does not reduce to a single claim either. The embodiment already quoted, arms arranged to duplicate the crosspiece image, recurs later in the same chapter in a stronger form. Arriving at Kealakekua on the day the Makahiki image traditionally completes its own circuit, "Cook became the icon of that icon" (Sahlins 1985, 121). This is a more mechanical claim than saying Cook occupied an office: his body was arranged into a physical copy of a particular religious object. A separate strand of Sahlins's argument works at a higher level of generality. In his book's final chapter, he treats "Cook is a god" as one instance of an entirely ordinary process, no

different in kind from recognizing a bird as a hawk. "We know the world as logical instances of cultural classes," he writes. "Captain Cook is a god" (Sahlins 1985, 145–46). This second claim is considerably weaker than the first. It says nothing about why gods in particular should depend on recognition, only that classification of any kind proceeds this way, which leaves the specific puzzle of divine identity exactly where it was.

A further strand of Sahlins's text offers a genuine Hawaiian language foundation for something like a performative reading, independent of Valeri's own recognition-based argument discussed above. The word for the ritual that restores the king's rule at the close of the Makahiki, kaliʻi, carries two senses at once: "Kaliʻi means 'to strike the king', and 'to act, or to be made, the king'. All these things happen at once" (Sahlins 1985, 118). The fusion of act and status in a single Hawaiian word is a fact about the language, not an interpretation laid on top of it. Its use for Cook, however, is only by analogy, since Sahlins states it about the king's own installation, and the analogy's application to Cook's specific case is contested from more than one direction, with the same ceremony read as staged combat, as the death of a different god, or as a blessing rather than a fight at all.[11]

Yet another strand of Sahlins's text should be brought alongside all of this rather than passed over as a rhetorical qualification. He denies that Hawaiian opinion on Cook was uniform in the first place. "We need not suppose that all Hawaiians were convinced that Captain Cook was Lono," he writes, "or, more precisely, that his being Lono meant

[11] In applying kaliʻi's dual meaning specifically to Cook's case, three scholars read the underlying ceremony differently. Sahlins reads the whole cycle as staging an opposition between Lono and Kū, with Kalaniʻōpuʻu standing for Kū against Cook's Lono. Obeyesekere, examining the same ritual as reported by Kamakau, finds no such combat: what kaliʻi enacts, on his reading, is Kū's own death, not Lono's, so that if Cook's killing made him a Hawaiian deity by the ritual's own logic, it should have made him Kū rather than Lono (Obeyesekere 1992, 257; Hanlon 1994, 105). Kameʻeleihiwa offers a third reading distinct from both: kaliʻi means to "touch the chief," and describes not a combat but Lono blessing the returning king, who is deliberately not pierced by the shower of spears, only tapped with one wrapped in white tapa, the color associated with Lono; "he is protected by Lono" (Kameʻeleihiwa 1994, 114). All three readings work from the same primary source, Kamakau's account of the ceremony.

the same to everyone" (Sahlins 1985, 121). The Lono priests at Kealakekua, on his account, fully reified the identification; Kalaniʻōpuʻu and his warrior chiefs held a more ambivalent, rivalrous relation to the same figure. If this is right, no single reading was ever available to give, since there may not have been one settled fact for Hawaiians themselves to hold in common. This challenges how each of the three readings has actually been argued, not what their underlying theories might allow in principle: Valeri, Sahlins's own classification theory, and Obeyesekere have each written as though one determinate thing happened to Cook, waiting only to be correctly described.

No single reading has stood without reasonable challenge. Obeyesekere's account survives the immediate skeptical challenge only by relocating the naming puzzle to Omiah rather than removing it. Valeri's 1985 argument moves from evidence that mostly shows a god's efficacy being sustained to a stronger conclusion about identity being conferred, but his 1994 review develops a genuinely richer position: a two-stage ritual synthesis that grants something to both Sahlins and Obeyesekere rather than choosing between them, and a theory of Hawaiian naming as real participation rather than mere labeling. Sahlins's content turns out to contain at least three distinguishable claims: an embodiment mechanism, a general theory of classification, and a Hawaiian language foundation for performative status. That third claim rests on the kaliʻi evidence, which itself now carries three competing readings: Sahlins's own, Obeyesekere's, and a further, Native Hawaiian reading from Kameʻeleihiwa, together with Sahlins's own admission that Hawaiian opinion was not uniform to begin with. What began as a choice between two answers has become a comparison among several, none of them uncontested, and one of them, the plurality itself, arguably undercutting the terms in which the whole comparison has been

conducted. We now turn to Native Hawaiian scholarship more broadly to ask whether those terms were adequate to the question in the first place.

8. Hawaiian Voices

The last two sections assessed Cook's case using tools built by Valeri, Sahlins, and Obeyesekere, three scholars of real skill, none of them Hawaiian. Every one of their tools was built from outside the tradition it was describing. We turn now to Hawaiian scholars working from inside it, not to add another opinion to an already crowded room, but to ask whether the puzzle looks different, or gets solved, from where they stand.

Haunani-Kay Trask does not raise this question gently. Writing about the historians and anthropologists who study Hawai'i, she names two of them directly. Sahlins, she writes, "asserts that Hawaiians practiced infanticide but offers as evidence only doubtful missionary hearsay." Valeri "argues that Hawaiian land tenure was feudal, but his only evidence is alleged linguistic similarities between Hawaiian and European terms, hardly a sound evidentiary base" (Trask 1999, 129–130). These are the same two scholars whose readings occupied most of section seven. Her complaint is not simply that outsiders study Hawaiians. It is sharper that that. It is that "a different standard of proof operates when Natives are involved" (Trask 1999, 129). Claims about Hawaiians, on her account, get accepted on evidence that claims by Hawaiians about their own culture never would.

This should give us pause, not because Valeri and Sahlins are being named, but because the charge, if true, bears directly on how their claims were tested two sections ago. Where a claim rested on indirect evidence, an inference from pattern rather than a

document, was it accepted because the inference was sound, or because it came from an established scholar writing about people who were not in the room to answer back? We do not think sections six and seven made that mistake outright; both weighed Valeri and Sahlins against each other and against Obeyesekere's own direct challenges, not against a presumption of authority.

Lilikalā Kameʻeleihiwa's *Native Land and Foreign Desires* gives the clearest test case. Her account of pre-contact Hawaiian society runs throughout on genealogy, moʻokūʻauhau (the descent line connecting a person to ancestors and, through them, to the gods). But she draws a distinction that matters more than genealogy alone. Divinity in the strict sense comes not from descent as such but from niʻaupiʻo, a specific and highly restricted practice of mating among the very highest-ranking aliʻi, close kin included, which concentrated mana to the point that the resulting offspring counted as akua on earth in their own right. Genealogy gives identity and belonging. Niʻaupiʻo, a much narrower thing, gives divinity.

This distinction has real consequences for Cook. He has no Hawaiian descent line at all, so whatever route made him Lono, it cannot have been niʻaupiʻo; that route is closed to a foreign visitor by definition, and no ceremony or length of residence could open it. If niʻaupiʻo were the only route to being akua, the puzzle from the last two sections would already be answered, and answered in Obeyesekere's favor: chiefly rank at most, no divinity. But Kameʻeleihiwa does not describe Cook this way. She writes, in passing rather than as an extended argument, that "Cook was first perceived as kinolau of the Akua Lono" (Kameʻeleihiwa 1992, 67). Kino lau, "many bodies," is the same term already used in section five for Kū's own manifestations, a dog, a hawk, a color, each a natural or circumstantial vehicle for a god's evoked qualities rather than a blood relation to him. Kino lau does not require descent. It requires fitting the part.

Read this way, the puzzle left unresolved in sections six and seven gets a real answer, and not a fourth guess added to the pile. Section five found Valeri's own mechanism, that a god's kino lau are chosen because their qualities evoke something the god is understood to embody, failing for Kū: the dog form Kūʻilioloa carried no evident connection to war, and the same dog form was claimed for Kāne besides. The mechanism did not individuate. For Lono, the mechanism may finally do its job. Lono, on every account discussed so far, Kameʻeleihiwa's as much as Valeri's, is a foreign god. His own myth includes departure to and return from Kahiki, a mythological homeland whose name is related to Tahiti. His province is peace, fertility, wealth, and the harvest season. A pale foreign visitor, arriving with unfamiliar wealth precisely in the season given over to Lono, evokes exactly the properties the theory needs him to evoke, in a way no single kino lau of Kū's ever cleanly did. Valeri's theory of evoked properties was not wrong in general. It was tested on the wrong god.

This is not a claim invented to make Cook's case fit. Foreignness fitting a god's evoked qualities, or a foreign arrival finding a genealogical place, was not an exception built for Cook alone. It was already how the tradition worked, an example being the story concerning Kū arriving from Tahiti.[12]

Not every Hawaiian source agrees on what this meant once Cook died. Pukui, Haertig, and Lee's *Nānā i ke Kumu* gives a first-person Hawaiian reconstruction of the events at Kealakekua, moving from certainty, "Lono, gone so long ago to Kahiki, had returned!", through accumulating doubt to open disavowal: "This was no god. Only a

[12] Two examples from before Cook's arrival show foreignness and genealogical accommodation already built into the tradition. Kū's own war form has a foreign origin story of its own: the god Kūkaʻilimoku is said to have been brought from Tahiti by the priest Paʻao (Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1979, 212). And there was already a recognized genealogical place for a pale foreign arrival: tradition holds that thirteenth century castaways on Maui, remembered as sacred albinos, included one, Nele-i-ka-i, who married into a chiefly line and became ancestor to a recognized lineage of light-skinned Hawaiians (Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1979, 291, quoting Fornander).

man" (Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1979, 209). Yet after his death, Cook's hands were kept and salted rather than treated the way a chief's remains ordinarily were, and his remains, bones, more generally, were reverenced even by people who had already concluded he was mortal (Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1979, 211). This looks less like one settled belief than two unsettled ones held at once, grief and disavowal together. We do not think this competes with the kino lau reading above; granting a kino lau relationship does not obligate anyone to keep believing it once the god's promised qualities, peace and provision, fail to appear.

A second point, independent of the Cook case, deepens something the previous section only gestured toward. Valeri argued, from his own 1994 review, that Hawaiian naming created an ontological connection between a name and what it named, so that being called Lono meant genuinely participating in Lono's nature, not merely being labeled by it. He never fully explained how naming could do this.

George Kanahele's *Kū Kanaka, Stand Tall* and Pukui, Haertig, and Lee's *Nānā i ke Kumu* both independently supply that mechanism, and push it further than Valeri did. Kanahele's own account of Hawaiian theology holds that the gods were made: "man created the gods in his own image," out of mana, the force Hawaiians took to underlie everything, and given form and personality by the people who worshipped them (Kanahele 1986, 73). The consequence he draws is brutal: gods that stop being worshipped stop existing. He documents actual instances of Hawaiians discarding gods that had failed them, and closes the point with a Maori saying he clearly thinks holds for Hawaiians too: "When men no longer believe in us, we are dead" (Kanahele 1986, 80). Valeri asserts that a god's existence depends on recognition; Kanahele shows the same mechanism actually at work, not merely asserted.

Pukui, Haertig, and Lee locate the same logic in naming specifically, quite apart from any theory about gods. A Hawaiian name, they write, was not a label attached to an already-existing person; "the name itself had mana... [and] could play a part in shaping the character, personality, even the fate and fortunes, of the bearer" (Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1979, 290). A name causing misfortune could be ritually cut off, ʻoki, and replaced. And naming could substitute one identity for another directly: a widower might ask a new wife to take his deceased wife's name, so that the name itself carried the relationship forward (Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1979, 290). If a name can do this for an ordinary Hawaiian marriage, extending the same logic to a title like Lono, held first by a god, then by a living priest's son named Omiah, then apparently by Cook, is not a stretch. It is the same mechanism working at a larger scale.

These three Native Hawaiian scholars are not one voice replacing another. Trask names Sahlins as an example of the evidentiary carelessness she is diagnosing; Kameʻeleihiwa, her own dedicatee, credits Sahlins attention to language and myth as a genuine improvement in Pacific history, and says she has "incorporated [his] suggestions" into her own work (Kameʻeleihiwa 1992, 8). And where Kameʻeleihiwa describes Cook as a kino lau, Kanahele calls him "the reincarnated deity Lono" (Kanahele 1986, 25), a literal return rather than a parallel manifestation. Two Hawaiian scholars, two different registers, on what looks like the same accepted fact.

Sections six and seven asked what makes it true, if it is true at all, that Cook was Lono, using tools built from outside the tradition being asked about. None of those tools fully succeeded. Kameʻeleihiwa's kino lau reading answers the question Valeri's own theory could not resolve on its own terms, using a mechanism already needed for Kū before Cook ever entered the argument. Kanahele's and Pukui, Haertig, and Lee's accounts of naming and belief give Valeri's own performative insight a foundation he

asserted but never supplied. A framework built from inside the phenomenon fits it better than several careful attempts to describe it from outside.

9. Concluding Thoughts

Sections six and seven gave us three outside readings of Cook's case: Sahlins's claim that Cook's body was arranged to duplicate an existing icon, Obeyesekere's claim that the rites installed him as a chief and no more, and Valeri's claim that being recognized as Lono helped bring that status about. Section eight set three Hawaiian mechanisms alongside them: kino lau, a natural or circumstantial vehicle fitting an already-established god's evoked qualities; niʻaupiʻo, the concentration of mana through highest-ranking mating that constitutes divinity outright; and the mana carried by a name itself, which carries weight on the person named rather than a simply labeling.

When we read these six readings side by side, rather than as competitors, they sort into three kinds, not one. Sahlins and kino lau both ask whether something fits an already-existing god: a question of classification. Obeyesekere and niʻaupiʻo both ask what actually makes a being divine in the first place: a question of constitution. Valeri and the naming material both ask whether an act of recognition can itself confer or sustain a status: a question of performance. These are three different questions, and "was Cook a god" asks all three at once without distinguishing them. And the careful readings throughout this article never quite settled this. Each reading answered one question correctly enough to seem right, and incompletely enough, on its own, to seem wrong.

Once the three questions are separated, most of what looked like disagreement in this paper stops looking that way. Something can fit a god's evoked qualities, on the

classification question, with no question of constitution or performance arising at all: this is the dog, the hawk, the color red that answer for Kū without anyone needing to ask whether the hawk thereby has a name in its own right. A being can be constituted divine, on the niʻaupiʻo question, by birth, with no further act of naming required to make it true. And a name can do real work, on the performance question, that neither classification nor constitution touches: Omiah's title made him Lono in some operative sense throughout the argument in section six, without his ever needing to fit Lono's evoked qualities or share Lono's constituting descent. Cook is the hard case not because Hawaiian thought was confused about him. He is the hard case because his situation forced apart three dimensions that, for an ordinary case, already agree. Cook fits Lono's evoked qualities. He cannot be constituted as Lono through a descent he does not have. Yet people addressed him by Lono's name regardless. Three separate mechanisms are being asked to answer for one man at once, when they were never built to run together.

This alters how we should understand the question raised and set aside in section two: whether Hawaiian religion is a species of polytheism, henotheism, or something closer to an underlying monism expressed through many names. In section two we already found reason to distrust the fit of each label taken on its own; Valeri's own gloss on Po, the primordial night of the Kumulipo, as a *coincidentia oppositorum* was identified as an unearned import, a term borrowed from a different tradition and never argued for as the right description of the Hawaiian content. What follows here goes further than that specific worry. The polytheism, henotheism, and monism question assumes a single, stable thing, an akua, that can then be counted, and the count then classified as one, many, or one-underlying-many. But if what we have discovered holds, akua status is not a single stable thing to count. It is the name given to whatever combination, on a given occasion, happens to be in play when fitting a god's evoked

qualities, sharing in a constituting relation, and being addressed by a working name. Kū's own case, addressed in section five without any reference to Cook, already showed this on a smaller scale: no single mechanism made his many kino lau one god, and the honest answer sat closer to family resemblance and shifting context than to any fixed hierarchy. This is not the same as (d), or context-relativity, presented among the options in section 5, though the resemblance is close enough to be worth addressing directly. (d) relativizes a single question, Kū's rank, to context, so that one dimension gets a different answer depending on which comparison is in view. What is being proposed here is not that kind of shift. Fit, constitution, and performance are not one question answered differently by frame; they are different kinds of claim that can hold or fail at once, about the same being, with different truth values simultaneously, exactly as Cook's own case showed above. It does not shift with each change of frame.

Asking whether such a system is polytheistic, henotheistic, or monist is asking a question built for the wrong kind of thing. All three categories assume that "how many gods" has one correct answer, waiting to be found once enough evidence is in. But if akua status is a bundle of separable achievements rather than a fixed status, the count changes depending on which achievement is being counted. Counted by shared name, Kū is one. Counted by constituting descent, no single being is ever simply Kū, since niʻaupiʻo, the mana-concentrating mating practice discussed in the last section, constitutes each aliʻi's own divinity separately, occasion by occasion. Counted by evoked qualities, the number runs as large as the list of things that can fit the part. None of these counts is wrong. They are counting different things, and the polytheism-versus-monism question has no room for that answer, since it was built on the assumption that there is exactly one thing being counted in the first place.

This suggests something more general than a fact about Hawai‘i. The English word "god" can be taken as a count noun. It invites the question of how many there are, and that invitation was already there in the first sentence of this article, in asking what an aspect of the akua could be. A count noun asks to be counted, but not everything real is well described by a count noun in the first place. What this case suggests is that akua may name not a kind of entity, countable the way chairs or persons are countable, but a kind of achievement, reachable by more than one route, holding to different degrees, and capable of being true of the same being in one respect and false of it in another at the same time. If that is right, the identity question this article opened with already carried a false assumption: that being an akua is a status a thing either has or lacks, rather than a set of relations a thing can stand in, more or less, from more than one direction at once. Cook was not a hard case because the Hawaiians who received him were unsure what they believed. He was a hard case because he was the occasion on which three ordinarily inseparable relations came apart, and in coming apart, showed that they had been three all along.

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This study is a theoretical and textual analysis and did not involve human participants, animals, or primary data collection. Ethics approval is therefore not applicable.