



True to my haole nature, this paper is really all about me.

I had some notion that if I researched/deconstructed haole I could better understand it—an admittedly haole approach, but then that's what this is all about.

—Judy Rohrer

Haole Girl: Identity and White Privilege in Hawai'i

JUDY ROHRER

Introduction

This is a paper about what it means to be a white person in Hawai'i, what it means to be a haole. Hawaii's ethnically mixed population and history as an independent kingdom colonized by the United States makes being a white person here a completely different experience than anywhere else in the country. In Hawai'i, white does not blend in; it stands out. Having grown up in Hawai'i and now living here as an adult, I have struggled with my haole identity, mostly trying to figure out how to minimize, disguise, or get rid of it altogether. I have tried hard to be anything but da haole girl. Instead of continuing to try to escape, I decided to face it through research and writing.

To date there has been little analysis—scholarly or otherwise—by haoles¹ on what it is to be haole.² In fact, the works most helpful to me were that of local/Hawaiian people, including Haunani-Kay Trask, Jonathan Okamura, and Eric Yamamoto. The one exception was *The Mainland Haole: The White Experience in Hawaii*, an extensive study done by a lone white Canadian anthropologist, Elvi Whittaker (not by a haole academic from the University of Hawai'i, or even from a continental United States institution). Her analysis and interviews with haoles proved extremely helpful and, as far as I could tell, is the only data of its kind. In contrast to this, quite a lot has been written about the experience of being local and/or Hawaiian by both local and non-local people.

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subject, something white people do not talk about, much less explore and interrogate in print. To do so would mean talking about racism and white privilege, extremely uncomfortable subjects for white people. Better we find something, anything, else to focus on. The largely white male academic world³ has skirted the problem by being enthralled with studying "the other." However, this is changing slightly through the writings on whiteness by a few white academic and activist women. Those who influenced my thinking the most include Ruth Frankenberg, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Mab Segrest and Donna Haraway.

For this paper, I have gathered together the writing that I could find about being haole, supplemented it with the work of the women mentioned above, and used my own experience as a backdrop. In this way, I interrogate my haole-ness while exploring the multiple meanings of haole through the lenses of race theory, history, language, local culture, identity construction, power relations, and feminist theory. Rather than a linear journey to one final answer, this is a quest for greater understanding and awareness. And while it is primarily a personal venture, I share it hoping that it might be useful to others interested in cultural identities, the politics of whiteness, and specifically, what it means to be haole.

Locating the Self

You Have To Know Who You Are And Why You Are Here.

In one form or another this directive has reoccurred throughout my lifetime, put to me by women of color I have known/read/heard speak. I have answered it for myself in different ways; sometimes I have not had an answer.

Who am I? It makes sense that I would have different answers at different times under different circumstances. Identity is relational, contested, contingent, negotiated, produced, manipulated, multiple, socially and historically constructed. In other words, it is never just one thing. "Our cultural identities are...always in a state of becoming, a journey in which we never arrive..." (Hereniko 1994:407). Postmodern theorists encourage us to "play" with identities, putting them on and taking them off like hats or cloaks. Oppressed peoples are reclaiming and redefining their identities as sources of strength. Non-white feminist theorists have stressed the multiplicity, interconnectedness, and simultaneity of identities. I am not just a woman, but a white woman; not just a white woman, but a white lesbian; not just a white lesbian, but a white, educated, middle-class lesbian; not just a white, educated, middle-class lesbian, but a white, educated, middle-class, able-bodied lesbian. These identities are the ones about which I have spent the most time (re)constructing, thinking and educating myself. But what about haole?

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Why am I here? The second part of the directive makes the haole identity more salient for me right now. It is impossible to escape being a haole when living in Hawai'i, because local people are always implicitly or explicitly asking why I am here. It is not a given that I belong. And, as the Hawaiian sovereignty movement gets stronger, the question becomes more pointed.

I remember the exact moment I learned I was a haole.

*I had just moved to Hawai'i from California, just started second grade,
and was beside myself with anxiety.*

*I was terrified of this new place, its unfamiliar culture(s),
the almost comprehensible language everyone was speaking,
the big new school with all its spoken and unspoken rules.*

I was the only white girl in my class.

*I hadn't made any friends yet and I was waiting in the
cafeteria line for lunch feeling very alone and very conspicuous.*

*I was so insecure that I had asked my dad to drive
to school and sit in the car where I could see him
while I waited in line.*

*I was concentrating on trying to pick out our car in the parking lot
when, out-of-the-blue, the kid behind me said "fuckin' haole"
and gave me a little push.*

Perhaps I wasn't keeping up with the line and he got impatient.

Perhaps he was trying to impress his friends.

I don't remember any of that.

*But I do distinctly remember those words and the feeling of
humiliation and panic that overwhelmed me.*

*I knew "fuckin.'" I'd heard that before, and I figured anything associated
with it couldn't be good.*

*I bolted from the line, ran to the car, and
insisted that my father take me home.*

He did.

The well-known feminist axiom, "the personal is political," emphasizes the importance of theorizing from our own experience—from the realities that constitute our daily lives—rather than pretending there is some sort of universal "view from nowhere." "We learn to see, and what we see is limited by the potential of our experience" (Wendt 1987:82). I am trying to understand what I have learned to see, trying to be "somewhere." Grounded theory, theorizing that privileges personal experiences, helps us understand who we are and how we can be in this world, with all its contradictions, contingencies and variations:

Rather than feeling "cultureless," white women need to become conscious of the histories and specificities of our cultural positions, and of the political, economic, and creative fusions that form all cultures. The purpose of such an exercise is not, of course, to reinvent the dualisms and valorize whiteness so much as to develop a clearer sense of where and who we are (Frankenberg 1993:204).

For quite some time, I ascribed to the notion that white people are "cultureless," but this, as Frankenberg points out, just enabled me to hide, to remain invisible, to not know myself. If I truly want to "develop a clearer sense of where and who I am," I need to understand that *where I am* also has a lot to do with *who I am*. When I am in Hawai'i, I am haole. I must somehow come to terms with that identity and not pretend that haole is an abstract construct. In this regard, Donna Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges" helps:

We seek those ruled by partial sight and limited voice—not partiality for its own sake, but rather for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible. Situated knowledges are about communities, not isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular (1988:590).

What Haraway does not say, but implies, is that by situating ourselves, we begin to turn the gaze away from "the other" and on to ourselves. This is a small, yet essential, step in correcting years of theorizing on the bodies of "others." As Ruth Frankenberg (1993:18) writes in *White Women, Race Matters*: "[I]t is by intention an investigation of self rather than of other(s), since it is a study of whiteness and women undertaken by a woman who is white." Eh, dat's me, one haole girl tryin' for study haoles.⁴

It's a Race Thing

Because haole is a racial term (whether or not it is a slur will be discussed later), it is important to deconstruct its meanings within the realm of race theory. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1993:3) trace the uneven evolution of racial discourse in this country from "essentialist racism"—essential biological inequality used to justify slavery; to "color-blindness"—essential sameness under the skin propelling assimilationist and multicultural thinking; to "race cognizance"—self-articulated and celebrated difference/autonomy propelling cultural nationalist movements. This is not a smooth progression. All three discourses still operate and intersect to varying degrees.

Omi and Winant place the United States today somewhere between the "color-blindness" and "race cognizance" discourses because the strength of the idea that race is something given/natural/biological is waning. They argue that the socially constructed status of race is so pervasive today that conservatives are able to twist it and argue that race is a "false consciousness," an illusion. To counter this, Omi and Winant believe not in arguing *against* the old idea of race as "natural" or biologically determined, but *for* the "continuing significance and changing meaning of race." This can be done by creating a "process-oriented" theory of race, one that would "recognize the importance of historical context and contingency in the framing of racial categories and the social construction of racially defined experiences" (Omi & Winant 1993:6).

Understanding race to be constructed, unstable and malleable makes it no less "real" than if it were biologically determined. In their introduction to *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*, Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow support this thinking:

What we are saying is that racial difference is the product of human interests, needs, desires, strategies, capacities, forms of organization, and forms of mobilization. And that these dynamic variables which articulate themselves in the form of grounded social constructs such as identity, inequality, and so forth, are subject to change, contradiction, variability, and revision within historically specific and determinate contexts. We maintain that "race" is a social, historical and variable category (1993:xv).

In calling for a "relational and nonessentialist" approach to race—one which takes multiple and variable identities into account and does not reduce race to biology or any other simple "source"—McCarthy and Crichlow also point out that "much work needs to be done to understand and intervene in the ways in which whites are positioned and produced as 'white'... (1993:xix)." It is only a small step from here to confronting racism. Ruth Frankenberg illustrates the linkage between a "process-oriented" theory of race and an unveiling of white privilege:

[W]hiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination. Naming "whiteness" displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance. Among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility (Frankenberg 1993:6).

Historicizing the Haole

In Hawai'i, then, it is important to look beyond static definitions of haole (or, for that matter, local) toward a "process-oriented" understanding. It is significant that haole is one of the few Hawaiian words that maintains itself in everyday language, in both pidgin and standard English. This is not an accident. The continued salience of the meaning of haole has quite a bit to do with its historical and relational context.

Use of the word haole can be found in pre-contact times in the *Kumulipo*, a creation chant and in written references to a type of pig, the pua'a haole. Most scholars agree that its earliest meanings were "foreigner, foreign, introduced, of foreign origin," as it is defined in the Pukui and Elbert *Hawaiian Dictionary*. Emily Hawkins, a Hawaiian language professor at the University of Hawai'i states, "it was a word used for outsiders, or things that were not from here."⁵ One of the first references describing a white person, in this case an English captain, is found in a biography published in 1838.⁶

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*I remember using knowledge of the epistemology of haole
to try to counteract its sting.*

*When local (non-Hawaiian) kids would call me haole,
I would say, "Haole means foreigner. You're a foreigner here too."*

But it didn't matter.

*Haole had taken on new meanings through years of
colonialism and neo-colonialism.*

The kids knew I was "da haole girl."

Years later I'm coming to understand that too.

Recently there has been an upsurge in education about the colonial history of Hawai'i. Understanding haole means understanding that history of exploitation, capitalism,

destruction, and appropriation. Hawaiian Studies professor and activist Haunani-Kay Trask explains that Hawaiian history since foreign contact has been incorrectly taught as a history of *acculturation*, rather than *deculturation*:

Colonization is, above all, a process of deculturation of the native people. It is a pervasive totality which seeks "the liquidation" of a native people's "systems of reference" as well as the "collapse of its cultural patterns" (Deloria 1973; Memmi 1967; Fanon 1967:38-39). Because missionaries focused on transforming habits of thought (e.g. through their schools), styles of behavior (e.g. through their imposition of repressive sexual morality), and customs of governing (e.g. through their imposition of Western law), they were engaged in the breaking down of Hawaiian culture.... What many Westerners call *acculturation* to their "civilized" ways is really *deculturation*.... (Trask 1984:116).

The colonization of Hawai'i is not a thing of the past. It can be seen everywhere today: shopping malls; campaigns for standard English; the continued deterioration of the health and socio-economic status of Hawaiians; the tourist traps of Waikiki; and the pervasive commercialization of Hawaiian culture. The sovereignty movement can be credited with forcing us to confront this reality and making it clear that haoles are the original colonizers.

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The term haole was born of, and cannot be divested from, this legacy.

Placing haole within the historical, political context of the islands makes the term's relational qualities clear. The terms local and haole have developed, to varying degrees, in relation to each other. Jonathan Okamura's epistemology of local traces haole as its primary negative reference point:

Throughout the historical process of accommodation, the principal cleavage in Hawaii society has been between the dominant Haoles and the subject Hawaiians and immigrant groups. The collective subordination of the latter groups first fostered a closer degree of social relations among them and the awareness of their common subject status. Later, the specific term "local" was used to distinguish Hawaiians and the immigrant groups in general terms as people from Hawaii in distinction to whites from the mainland. At present, the current meaning of local...has arisen as a consequence of the threat to Hawaii posed by the increasing numbers of mainland Haoles, Asian and Pacific immigrants, and tourist industry developers. Thus, it has been the presence of either dominant or outsider groups in opposition to the people of Hawaii that has given salience and meaning to the notion of local throughout its development (1980:135).

Okamura may be overstating the case by placing so much emphasis on "outsider groups" as the determining factor in the production of local identity. For my purpose, what is important is that identities are relational, and that historically, the "presence of either dominant or outsider groups" necessitated their naming and their observation. The oppressed have always had to know more about those who oppress them than the oppressor has known about those they oppress. Audre Lorde articulated this concept:

For in order to survive, those of us for whom oppression is as American as apple pie have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection (1990:281).

It has been important for me to pay attention to the ways local people identify haoleness in behavior or culture because, to a certain extent—as a process-oriented theory of race would contend—haole is as haole does:

The Mainland Haole has come to be perceived—not because of what he is, but because of what he is doing collectively—as a threat to the local people's self-determination (Yamamoto 1979:108).

Haoleness has as much to do with place as with race, with culture as with biology. Consequently there is a peculiar *haoleness* about non-white ethnics from the mainland. Before the annexation of Hawaii, American blacks were referred to as *haole eleele* (Lind 1969:110), literally translated as black foreigners (Whittaker 1986:176).

Haole is about place and culture.

*We used to have parties in elementary school
all the time it seemed—beginning of the year,
Halloween, Christmas,
birthdays, May Day, end of the year.*

*The most important part of the parties was the food.
Everyone would sign up to bring something.*

*Kids brought noodles, mochi, Chinese pretzels,
teri chicken, fried rice, pickled mango, etc.
I didn't know what half the stuff was.*

I was so afraid whatever I brought wouldn't be right.

*(Besides, my parents had this "natural" thing about
"no sugar, no white flour, only carob"
so I couldn't even make "normal" haole stuff
like chocolate chip cookies or brownies.)*

*I wanted to be safe,
didn't want to stick out as the "stupid haole."*

*I developed a strategy:
I made sure I was always one of the first to sign up...
and I always chose napkins.*

One way I learned about how we "act haole" was by paying attention to the stereotypes and ethnic jokes which often provide a window into cultural relations. Whittaker writes:

The importance of stereotypes is that in societies with heterogeneity and gaping social distances, in plural worlds like Hawaii, they facilitate interaction, they award stigma or praise according to the dictates of the current moral order. They have a simplicity which serves as a superficial sensemaking device.

The Caucasians sense the weight of the stereotypes which operate against them. They are loud, arrogant, and dripping with money.... Several jokes portray the Caucasians' insensitivity to non-whites, their ignorance, and their uncritical view of their own behavior (1986:176).

Even if haoles were none of these things—which unfortunately we are—this is the prevalent image of us, and therefore a factor in our interactions. Interestingly, Whittaker (1986:179) notes that most of the haoles she interviewed did not participate in ethnic jokes because they felt the jokes marked a certain "intimacy" with local people that they did not feel they had. Not participating, however, could also be seen as showing an attitude of superiority—tinkin' you too good.

Whittaker (1986:176) records a joke I have heard before that exemplifies the haole stereotype: A Japanese guy and a haole guy are at the graveyard. The haole guy puts flowers on his wife's grave. The Japanese guy puts a bowl of rice on a grave. The haole says, "When do you think she's going to come up and eat the rice?" The Japanese guy responds, "As soon as your wife comes up to smell her flowers!"

It is significant that while Whittaker and I have written this joke in standard English, it would most likely be told in pidgin. Pidgin can be thought of as a language of resistance and community that enables local people to come together, to share and build a lifestyle distinct from haole culture and domination. Much has been written about local culture and pidgin. What is important here is that pidgin is *lingua franca* among local people (Okamura 1980:124) and something most haoles refuse to comprehend.

The prevalent view among haoles is that pidgin is "broken English"—that it is "incorrect," a sign of low intelligence. Children are punished for speaking pidgin in the schools of Hawai'i. What is being denied is the understanding that pidgin is a language in its own right, officially known as Hawai'i Creole English (HCE). Pidgin has its own rules, words, sentence structures and vocabulary. Like Black English/Ebonics, HCE was born out of a need for a language of resistance allowing communication among ethnically diverse slaves/workers, whether they be on southern cotton or Hawaiian sugar plantations. These languages continue to act as rare spaces within, yet not controlled by, the dominant culture. It is in the best interest of those benefiting from the status quo to undermine and repress HCE and Ebonics because without language, resistance is much more difficult. This is the power at work behind the preservation of the myth of "broken English":

All too frequently Caucasians tend to see pidgin as inaccurate, as demonstrating only partial competence in the English language. Few of them have the perspectives recently developed with regard to black language, namely that its nuances and multiple meanings make it as sophisticated as straight American English (Whittaker 1986:176).

Being Haole in Hawai'i

Hawai'i is perhaps the only place in the United States where the "invisible center" (the white, male, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied "norm" that maintains its power by hiding it, and which beckons to all of us, regardless of how many of these categories we may or may not fill) is forced into partial visibility. Perhaps that is because knowledge of the violence that it took, and continues to take, to create that "center" is so close to the

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surface here. I believe it has to do with the relatively short period of time that has passed since the overthrow,⁷ the increasing mobilization of Hawaiian activism, the "minority" status of haoles,⁸ and the high degree of cross-cultural interaction. In Hawai'i you get called on your haoleness; you are confronted with your race—an especially unpleasant experience for those who have denied it all their lives:

The Caucasians seem to be saying through their objections that they dislike having ethnicity become their most identifying feature...For the first time in their lives many of them face their own ethnicity. Previously it had been quite irrelevant. Now, however, ethnic recognition determines interaction (Whittaker 1986:153).

Whittaker's observation about white people not liking to have to face their ethnicity/privilege resonates with my experience. However, I do not agree that ethnicity

is "irrelevant" elsewhere; quite the contrary, it makes an enormous difference almost everywhere. It is merely that on the continent (or what some Hawaiian nationalists refer to as "america"⁹ to distinguish it from Hawai'i), that "the difference" of white supremacy/privilege is well camouflaged by centuries of institutional racism and the mythologies of american individualism and democracy (i.e., the system is set up to benefit white people without white people having to admit it). This is not the case in Hawai'i:

The [white] migrants of today...encounter already established positions, with the result that for the first time in their lives, a sense of their unconscious and unavoidable involvement in history and politics, in economics and power, became apparent (Whittaker 1986:142).

Being called out of our "racelessness" into a culture where we are asked to question many of our assumptions, beliefs, and values is completely unsettling. I am not suggesting that white privilege does not operate in Hawai'i, just that there are more openings, more spaces, for it to be exposed and questioned. Our world gets shifted without our consent in ways we dislike, and our cultivated ignorance about Hawai'i leaves us unprepared for this shift:

Caucasians arrive in Hawaii with a legacy of ideas and attend to the world accordingly. Spun from such beginnings their expectations about the people of

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Hawaii are predetermined... Particularly poignant for them...is that they find themselves at a disadvantage. In their eyes they are victims of what they can only view as violations of what they thought was an indisputable moral code (Whittaker 1986:143-44).

It is important to note that part of our "legacy of ideas" is the notion that "the world is an open place, responsive to Americans and their values...." (Greenblatt 1993:112). Much has been written about the particular character this idea has taken in relation to the places and peoples of the Pacific. The haole image of Hawai'i is "fantasy island," full of friendly, helpful, exotic, naive "natives." Haunani-Kay Trask writes that for the haole, "Hawai'i is the image of escape from the rawness and violence of American life. Hawai'i...is the fragrance and feel of soft kindness" (Trask 1993:180). It is precisely because haoles come with these expectations that we are so shocked, disappointed, and incensed when not everyone smiles, spreading arms and legs, catering to our desires.

Useful here is a metaphor by Louise Kubo, a lecturer in the UHM Women's Studies Program, about trying to interrogate the invisible center, island style. She says what we have is a donut—transparent white people in the middle pushing out and defining the margins of people of color. What is suggested here—and what makes haoles so uncomfortable—is a *malasada*, a donut with the center filled in. In the emerging Hawai'i paradigm, white people are no longer invisible, no longer central, no longer controlling because what makes a *malasada* a *malasada* is precisely the absence of an "invisible center" or donut hole.¹⁰

Is Haole Derogatory?

This brings us to the reoccurring debate about whether or not haole is a derogatory term. For years, some haoles in Hawai'i have insisted that it is and have tried to will it out of circulation. Three recent manifestations of this debate illustrate the arguments: the 1990 Joey Carter—Haunani-Kay Trask exchange; a recent *Honolulu Advertiser* feature; and a February 1995 ruling by the Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission.

Joey Carter—Haunani-Kay Trask Exchange

In 1990, Joey Carter, a University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) haole undergraduate from the continental United States, wrote a commentary piece for the *Ka Leo*, the UHM student newspaper, in which he expressed his outrage at what he called "Caucasian bashing" (Carter 1990). Haunani-Kay Trask, a Hawaiian Studies professor and activist, responded by saying he obviously did not understand the history of the islands or institutional racism, and perhaps he should just go home (Trask 1990). Debate raged surrounding this exchange, most of it about whether Trask's response could be construed as "harassment." To the extent that the focus was confined to Trask as a "harasser," Carter was able to maintain his image as "victim," and the larger issues of racism and colonialism were buried. The content of their exchange highlights many of the issues I am addressing.

Carter's piece is a good example of haole defensiveness. New to the islands, Carter did not like being a haole and let people know it. He sarcastically wrote, "My haole brothers

and I are arrogant, selfish, aggressive, insensitive, Godless, well-off, rednecked or skinheaded. We consider ourselves superior to everyone else on the planet—because we're white, right?" He asserted how this is not the case by offering the "helpful acts" he and other white people have performed for "a variety of races." Carter placed himself squarely in the center of the conservative backlash against affirmative action stating: "Racism is not an exclusively white endeavor." He added, references like "haole-dominated society" and "puppet-haole governments" are racist. Coming from Louisiana he equated the use of haole with the use of "nigger" (I will return to this analogy later). Carter ends by saying, "So, am I a 'haole?' Are you a 'local?' Are you a 'black?' Are you an 'Oriental?' We can classify ourselves however we choose to—but it still won't be us. We're so silly sometimes. I am who I am; you are who you are." In one fell swoop Carter dismissed all cultural/ethnic identities as "silly." Thus, american individualism triumphs. We are all simply "who we are"—individuals—flat, cardboard cut-outs with no history, no context, no relationships to power, no nothing.

Trask's response did not mince words. First she said, if Carter is white, then he is haole. And as a haole, he is a privileged member of american society, whether he acknowledges it or not. She asserted that Carter's is a "typically white American problem: he wants to pretend that he is outside American history, a history which has made white power and white supremacy the governing norm..." She went on to historicize his presence in Hawai'i, and previously Louisiana, as "a luxury provided him through centuries of white conquest that visited genocide on American Indians, slavery on Africans, peonage on Asians, and dispossession of Native Hawaiians." She noted that racism is a system of power in which one racial group dominates and exploits another. "People of color in America don't have enough power to dominate and exploit white people."

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Joey Carter, like so many americans, wished desperately to place himself within the decontextualized, dehistoricized, homogenized, world of white liberal theory—what Omi and Winant identify as "colorblindness." In that cheery world he would not be blamed for the past or what white folks may be currently doing because he would be an "individual." But, being in a culture where some people did not hesitate to call him on his location, he was trying to wiggle free.

"Haole: Is it a Dirty Word?"

On February 5, 1995, the *Honolulu Advertiser's* Sunday Island Lifestyle section was devoted to the feature, "Haole: Is it a Dirty Word?" After interviewing some island residents, the journalist found that most said haole is "at least tinged with contempt" (Viotti 1995). This is not surprising to those of us who have lived here or know something about the historical or present-day context in which the word is used. What is interesting is who said what, and how.

—Kanalū Young, Hawaiian studies assistant professor: Hawaiians have the right to use their own language. Colonialism has left haole with a hint of resentment. "Anyone can be haole, just presume you're superior before you know that in fact."

Young, a Hawaiian, claims the word as part of his culture and names colonialism as responsible for any negative connotations.

— Cliff Richards, white boy from Pālolo: "It's an immersion into a culture that becomes your own. You rise above being a haole and become a 'local haole.'"

— Harold Mooneyham, white boy who grew up in Pālama: "sometimes haoles piss ME off when they act like haoles!" "You can use it innocently enough, but its basic connotation isn't neutral."

These two haole boys, who grew up in the context of local culture, point out that there are ways to not act so haole, to "rise above" that behavior. Once you have done that, *others* may consider you a "local haole," which means that you understand enough about local culture that you no longer act "so haole."

— Warren Nishimoto, University of Hawaii Oral History Project: "We're not just talking about skin color here, we're talking world view. We're talking the haoles having the nice homes, nice parties. The immigrants had nothing."

Nishimoto, a local Japanese researcher, like Kanalu Young, places the word within its historical context by referencing the plantation system. Young, Richards, Mooneyham and Nishimoto all indicate an understanding of haole far more complex than simply a synonym for white. Haole is attitude, behavior, culture, class, history. This complexity was lost on the following interviewees.

— Mark Pinkosh, of "Haole Boy"/Starving Artists fame: "It refers to people with white skin in Hawaii. It's an indicator that you're part of the tribe, the people of Hawaii."

— Noel Kent, University of Hawai'i Ethnic Studies professor who teaches a "Caucasians in Hawaii" class: Caucasians think of haole as a harmless ID tag. "What I try to emphasize is instead of this black-white dualism, good-local-bad-haole, we're all very complex people, with tremendous capacity for the morally good and the morally terrible. You have to look at each individual."

These two white men try to put a multicultural gloss on haole. They decontextualize the term by trying to make it completely benign—"a harmless ID tag," a name for "one of the tribe."

— Jim Curran, white professional: "Is the word needed anymore?" He only uses "nice" Hawaiian words like "pau" and "mahalo." "You go to California, there are a lot of ethnic groups. Nobody seems to need the word haole there."

Here is yet another white man who understands that the term is not generally positive or even neutral, and he therefore wants to banish it from speech. The statement about how haole is not used in California shows Curran's complete ignorance of the contextual nature of racial categories. While people may have no use for haole in East Los Angeles, they certainly do for "gringo" and "white-motha-fucka."

Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission

On February 12, 1995, just seven days after the "Haole: Is it a Dirty Word?" feature, the Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission ruled that haole used by itself is not derogatory, but that embellishments can make it a racial slur (e.g., the famous "fuckin' haole"). This was the HCRC's first case involving haole as a slur.

The same day the following editorial appeared in the *Honolulu Advertiser*:

Of course it isn't [derogatory]. And it's a shame things had to come to this point. The Hawaiian language is a rich (and steadily growing) part of our special Island culture. Its use should be a matter of pride, not contention (February 12, 1995:B2).

This statement by the *Advertiser* seems naive on the heels of an article in which most of the interviewees had admitted to at least some "hint of contempt" in the term haole, and many spoke to its multiple meanings. Of course haole is not always derogatory or a racial slur, but to gloss over its negative connotations is to disappear the genealogy of the word and truncate its meaning. Instead of promoting a full understanding of haole and pidgin, the *Advertiser* stifled discussion by limiting examination of language (notably Hawaiian and not pidgin) use to a "matter of pride."

Responding to Being Haole

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I have explored the historical, relational, socio-political construction of the term haole. In this section I will explore some of the more common ways haoles deal with our haoleness. All of these forms of response are interrelated, overlapping and variable. Some of us cycle through all of them (and more), others fluctuate between a few of them, some get stuck in one. The way we respond to being haole, however, is also determined by *what kind of haole* we are; in other words, what we bring to haole by way of socio-economic status, political ideology, past experiences, and so on. For example, Julie Wuthnow, a former University of Hawai'i Women's Studies lecturer, describes four kinds of haoles: the liberal individualist type; the elite class and "*kama'āina*"; the military; and those who are not soldiers, don't have lots of money, and are beginning to question liberal ideology (Wuthnow 1995:48). I mainly fall into this fourth category, although I also admit spending time hiding in liberal thinking.

One of the ways haoles try to escape from haole is by finding more "neutral" labels for ourselves. Some, like Joey Carter, want to be "Caucasian." In fact, Elvi Whittaker uses "Caucasian" instead of haole throughout her book and refers to ethnicity, not race (as in previous quotations). But this *is* a "race thing," and "Caucasian" is not the same as "haole." "Caucasian" is a sterile, statistical, academic abstraction that says nothing about Hawai'i or being a white person here. It enables us to avoid situating ourselves. Another label that Carter and others have tried to make stick is "individual"—as in the oft-heard liberal line, "we're all just individuals." There is no surer way to flatten or gloss over history and power relations.

When I was young I tried not to be haole.

*I would tell my local friends that I was
"Greek, Mexican, Swiss-German, Swedish."*

They would look at me like I didn't know what I was talking about.

*I could be all those things, but it didn't matter much to them,
I was still haole—that meant something.*

I finally gave up.

There are haoles who call themselves *kama'āina*. Sons and daughters of the original haole elite first appropriated this label—the descendants of missionaries, plantation owners, and traders (Kirkpatrick n.d.:786). Some haoles adopt the label right away, while others feel one needs to have lived in the islands a certain length of time before claiming *kama'āina* status. Many Hawaiians believe haoles should never claim this status, regardless of length of residence, because it means "children of the land" and was never meant to be a substitute for "haole." Appropriation is one of the most insidious forms of colonialization:

Today in Hawai'i, as in the 19th century, the largest landowners are missionary-descended corporations known as the Big Five. They have called themselves *kama'āina*, as many other non-natives have, for over 100 years. Of course, we Hawaiians understand all too well that they *would like* to have native status to legitimize their colonial presence on our lands. But I do not know a single native Hawaiian who recognizes them (or any other non-natives) as children of the land. In other words, they may refer to themselves as *kama'āina*, but we do not (Trask 1985:786).

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Like many things Hawaiian, the word has been commercialized. Now there are "*kama'āina*" airline deals and hotel rates everywhere. In these contexts, the term is used to mean those who live in Hawai'i, whether they are local or haole."¹¹

*Kama'āina is complicated for me because it points
to the way class intersects with haole.*

My family was anything but "elite."

*We were hippies driving beat-up cars, camping on the beach,
living hand to mouth, "experiencing" paradise.*

*I was teased at school for my "puka pants," "stink bag lunch,"
and long-haired younger brother.*

I was teased not just as a haole, but as a hippie.

*And yet, after several years of living here my parents
called themselves "kama'āina."*

I guess they were appropriating and leveling the word at the same time.

One of the common first responses to being called haole is to counter it with allegations of unfair prejudice or "reverse racism." Joey Carter is not an anomaly in making this charge. Whittaker (1986:154) found that "Caucasians discover they do not merely inherit their mainland position. Previous privileges are often denied them. They compare their position to blacks on the mainland..." As we have seen, some go so far as to equate being called haole to being called "nigger" even though the two reside on very different planes—naming by the oppressed and naming by the oppressor. Making these kinds of comparisons denies the power of structural racism that Trask tried to explain to Carter.

The charge of "reverse racism" works together with one of the two theories Whittaker identifies as ways haoles explain their treatment. This is what she calls the "historical theory," wherein prejudice against haoles is based on the immoral acts of discoverers, missionaries, business people, annexationists of the past, making it unjust to blame today's haoles. "By neutralizing historical responsibility and by nullifying the ethnic connection, the *real* reason is placed on matters that are known to be inappropriate to present-day Hawaii" (1986:184).

The other theory Whittaker dubs the "deserved prejudice theory." Haoles who ascribe to this thinking believe haole arrogance, greed, and ignorance provoke prejudice against them. We have seen this in the previous statements of "local haoles." This way of thinking can also be used to invoke and then negotiate guilt. "By admitting and even embracing guilt, another ethic is relied upon, namely that admission of guilt is itself a kind of absolution. One should not continue to punish those who have already admitted their guilt and are punishing themselves" (Whittaker 1986:188). Acting out of guilt is a typical first response to admitting racism, yet the invocation of guilt is not constructive; it does not change anything. "Ashamed, contradictory white subjects are not absolved of their responsibility to build effective alternatives to structural racism" (Gorman 1993:84).

Another response to being haole, especially for those who have been here for awhile, is to ignore its meaning. Similar to trying to find a more "neutral" label, people try to neutralize haole itself. The earlier statements from Mark Pinkosh and Noel Kent in the *Advertiser* feature are good examples. This excerpt from a piece in the *Advertiser* entitled "Culture Shock turns to Joy" relies heavily on the myth of multiculturalism and evidences thinking along the lines of Whittaker's "historical theory":

Coming to Hawaii was not like moving to another state. It was more like living in a different country. We went from a WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) area to a place where we are a minority. Our daughter Kristi was the only blonde in her school....all these strange people were so different from everyone I knew.... These last few years, we have been to Buddhist temple, celebrated Chinese New Year and Japanese girls' and boys' days. We have attended a baby's first luau. We have enjoyed learning and being part of this wonderful racial stew called Hawaii. I realize there are people who will distrust and fear me because of the color of my skin. I only wish those people would take the time to know me before they judge me.... Open minds and open hearts can open many doors [Emphasis supplied] (Miller 1993:A4).

The discourse about Hawai'i as a "wonderful racial stew" is a highly salient, deeply entrenched one. It is reconstructed daily by our politicians, newspaper monopoly,

commercial advertising, tourist industry, and educational system. As the hegemonic narrative, it serves the elite of Hawai'i because it glosses over the violence of power imbalances and the historical domination of indigenous people and immigrants. It turns haole into "one of the tribe." Jonathan Okamura makes this clear in reference to local culture:

[B]lending, sharing, and mixing are essentially vague and misleading terms that do not describe nor facilitate the analysis of the complex social processes that were involved in the emergence of local culture and society....the view that local culture is derived from a sharing of diverse cultures seems to ignore the imposing of American institutions on Hawaiians and the immigrant plantation groups through armed revolution and the penal sanctions of the contract labor system (1980:123).

Becoming Haole in Hawai'i

I have explored some of the historical and relational contexts for haole. I have identified some ways haoles "act haole." We are arrogant, loud, shamelessly ignorant of Hawaiian history and local culture. We try to adopt other labels, charge unfair discrimination, seek absolution through guilt, and evoke pretty multicultural images of a dehistoricized "paradise." Wuthnow nicely sums up what it is to be haole:

We trip, collide, and never, ever allow ourselves to be ignored. On a micro-scale this means that we are rude and aggressive drivers, that we talk too loudly and too often, and that we probably let our dogs pee in other people's yards. On a macro-scale it means we continue to colonize and exploit the Hawaiian Islands as developers, tourists, and as academics, and also that we willfully refuse to acknowledge the consequences of our past and present actions (Wuthnow 1995:46).

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We cannot escape being haole; we have been too well-trained and the term carries too much meaning and history. Haole is not a positive identity for most white people in Hawai'i, not something we claim with pride, but something ascribed to us by a history, a culture and a language we may know little about. Our feelings about the term range from ambivalence to anger. In fact, some of us spend a good deal of energy ignoring or denying our haoleness. It is difficult for us to know how to choose to be/become haole. At this time, what I am searching for are ways to be not *so* haole, ways to reconstruct my haole identity. If identities are really manipulated, negotiable, and produced, then I want to become a different haole without denying the historical and contemporary context that shapes the term. I remind myself that while Hawai'i *is* very multicultural, the history behind that ethnic mix has built today's structures of unequal power and domination:

The central issue, then, is not one of merely acknowledging difference; rather the more fundamental question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged. Difference seen as benign variation (diversity), for instance, bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious empty pluralism (Mohanty 1993:72).

Part of becoming a new haole then is acknowledging that my haole difference is not simply "benign variation." Instead, it carries a history, a power, a privilege to which local

people react. Once acknowledged, it is hard to know what to do with this without falling into the pattern Whittaker identifies as absolutism through guilt. There are times I find myself deploring haoles and haoleness so vehemently I have to question my motives. I could easily be one of the most anti-haole haoles. But so what?

What has helped me in figuring out where to go from here is feminist writing which attempts to question, unveil and deconstruct whiteness. On a certain level, haole can be thought of as a name for white privilege situated in Hawai'i. Describing white privilege, describing haole, on a personal level makes me newly accountable:

A "white" skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end, these problems. To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denial surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects.... It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all (McIntosh 1988:18).

*I am only beginning to admit that I did not earn my education on my own,
that my haole/white privilege played a significant role.*

*I got into Punahou² on a scholarship my junior year in high school.
I went from graduation directly to Bryn Mawr College, an elite
women's college in Pennsylvania, again on financial aid.*

*I satisfied myself that I was not like the rich white kids
that made up the majority populations
at these schools.*

They got in because of their money, I got in because I was "smart."

I had earned it.

*The myth of meritocracy has a strong hold. While it may have been
that I was "smart," it's also worth unpacking this term a little.*



First of all, what is meant by "smart?"

*Doing well on standardized tests, having good grades,
and being able to express yourself "well" in speech and writing?*

Why was I "smart"?

*It was something that teachers, as well as my parents,
had reinforced in me for years.*

Expectations breed results.

*So what were the expectations for the local kids in my classes?
How were they penalized for speaking and thinking in pidgin?*



Finally, these schools are competitive.

Why me?

*Could part of it be that the white administrators (and they are
almost all white, and male) were so eager to have "one of their own,"
and appear generous at the same time, that they jumped at
the chance to admit a poor, "smart" haole girl.*

*And then there's the further question of who doesn't apply and why.
The barriers of access to, knowledge of, and resources to
carry out the application process, keep many equally "deserving"
candidates from applying at all.*

*This is where my parents' education and privileged knowledge
of these systems comes in.*

*So, can I really say that I alone "earned" my education?
That white/haole privilege had nothing to do with it?*

*I could, and it might make me feel better,
but it wouldn't be the full truth.*

*Sometimes it seems so much easier just to live in our bubbles.
To remain ignorant of our power/privilege.*

*To believe the liberal myths about
the self-determination of each individual and
the justice of our democracy.*

So why not continue to live in a haole/white bubble? Because I want to be able to answer those damn questions of *who I am and why I'm here*. I cannot do that floating out in the biosphere. I need to situate myself to develop better understandings of the world. I remind myself that becoming a different haole is not a simple theoretical or intellectual endeavor. Wuthnow (1995:49) describes why she considers herself a "recovering haole" in search of a "Haoles Anonymous" meeting: "Haoleness runs deep...it inhabits not only the intellect of those of us who are haole, but our bodies and imaginaries as well... At best, the subject who has achieved ideal haoleness can only be in recovery from colonization; the craving for home will always be there."

I like the idea of being/becoming a "recovering haole." It is a subprocess of being a "recovering racist," a concept from anti-racism work. As a white person, I can never fully "recover" from being haole or racist, because these identities are so strongly constructed in our culture, in our beings. What I can do is work to acknowledge the privilege I have and act out of this self-awareness by becoming more accountable and responsible. This

process of recovery is vital to my becoming a more whole person—vital, in fact, to my survival. I remind myself of Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde, and many other women of color who insist:

You have to comprehend how racism distorts and lessens your own lives as white women—that racism affects your chances for survival, too, and that it is very definitely your issue (Smith 1982:49).

Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle, together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For Black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival (Lorde 1990:287).

What has helped, and continues to help me understand this is my lesbian identity. I know that unless all systems of oppression are challenged, I will never be free as a lesbian, and therefore never be free, period. Scratching the surface of the interconnected and contradicted nature of oppression, I realize that the multiplicity of our identities is one key to overcoming systems of domination. For, I have never been just a haole, but always a haole girl, and now a haole dyke. Wearing the hats of both oppressor and oppressed, I must confront my haole/white privilege and the racist structures that maintain it if I am to insure my survival as a dyke—my survival. I remind myself, I am not protected. I remind myself of the difference between being called a "fuckin' dyke" and a "fuckin' haole." None of this is easy, and I am still better at "talking the talk" than "walking the walk"—a disturbing consequence of academia.

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I am inspired by other white lesbians struggling to keep from sliding into white guilt, struggling to learn to harness their white privilege in service of dismantling racism. They model "recovering racist/haole" as an actively political role, not a self-absorbed or self-contained one. Mab Segrest, a southern white lesbian anti-racist organizer, writes:

I knew my role was working with other white people, and self-hatred was a bad place from which to start. Could I find ways to share and appreciate other cultures without mimicking or appropriating them, without denying my continuing white privilege? Sooner or later, would the contradictions loosen? (1994:80)

It seems so hard for white people to appreciate another culture without appropriating it. Perhaps it is because we have a hard time really knowing who we are. A passage from white lesbian writer, poet, and activist Minnie Bruce Pratt's fine essay, "Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart," keeps resurfacing:

By the amount of effort it takes me to walk these few blocks being conscious as I can of myself in relation to history, to race, to culture, to gender, I reckon the rigid boundaries set around my experience, how I have been "protected." In this city where I am no longer of the majority by color or culture, I tell myself every day: In this *world* you aren't the superior race or culture, and never were, whatever you were raised to think: and are you getting ready to be *in* this world? (1984:13).

Although Pratt is talking about her experience walking in black sections of Washington D. C., I identify the words both with being white in general and being haole specifically. She eloquently identifies the difficult process of continually locating herself, of always asking the questions of who she is and why she is there, of situating her knowledge, of acknowledging her privilege.

When I think about applying this level of awareness to being/becoming haole, it is overwhelming. Where I really get stuck is trying to figure out the "why am I here" part. Hawai'i is my home, but what does it mean to be at home on stolen land? Maybe I stay because I know that almost anywhere I go I will be on stolen ground. I could run away from being haole, but I am always white. Am I "ready to be in this world?" I am not sure. I try. I do know one thing—malasadas mo' betta.

Notes

1. Guest editors' note: The correct Hawaiian grammar for the plural of haole is also "haole," but popular Hawaiian Creole English usage is "haoles."
2. The two popular culture pieces I found, the Starving Artists' "Haole Boy" play and Walt Novak's novel, *The Haole Substitute*, offer little toward interrogating haole. The play seems more concerned with applying a multicultural gloss to Hawai'i. Novak simply reinforces his haoleness by using it to capitalize on an untapped audience—young white men, especially surfers, who live in or have visited Hawai'i.
3. In U. S. colleges and universities, 60% of full-time faculty are white men and further, 78% of all full-time professors are white men. These figures are based on data for 1991-92 from the U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission of the U. S. Department of Education. At UH Mānoa, only 30% of the full-time faculty are women. Of these women, 63% are white even though only 33% of the population of Hawai'i is white. These figures are based on data for June 1995 from the UH Personnel Office.
4. Throughout this paper I occasionally use pidgin, or more accurately, Hawaiian Creole English (HCE). While I am self-conscious about the potential for appropriation, I feel my use of it in this paper is fitting. I want to recognize and support the legitimacy of pidgin. Haoleness and pidgin are integrally related. When I am called on my whiteness in Hawai'i it is done in pidgin. The term haole derives its meaning from a language based in a particular culture and history. Because I grew up in close contact with that culture, when I think about being haole, some things I think, I think in pidgin.
5. As quoted in Vicki Viotti (1995:F8).
6. *Ibid.*
7. In 1893 the Hawaiian monarchy was overthrown by a group of elite haole businessmen backed by the U. S. military. They imprisoned Queen Lili'uokalani in her own palace and pushed forward the wheels of annexation. Despite the fact that the overthrow was clearly an act violating international law that horrified many, including President Cleveland, the strong sugar interests and their expansionist allies got their way and Hawai'i was annexed in 1898. In 1993 President Clinton signed an official apology admitting that the U. S. acted illegally by participating in the overthrow. Some activists are using the apology as a springboard from which to demand Hawaiian sovereignty.

8. It is important to be clear about haole "minority" status. My meaning here is that of growing up as one of the few haoles in a plantation town. Because haoles have the largest in-migration of any group, we are now 33% of the state's population, the largest single group. But about a third of this figure is comprised of military-related transient persons. When I was young, Japanese Americans were the largest group, but since then haoles have long since surpassed them. We cleverly maintain the notion of our minority status by comparing our population to Asian/Pacific Islanders lumped together.
9. I am adopting the convention of writing about "america" in the lower case as a sign of political protest.
10. A malasada is a Portuguese donut, a relatively round ball of sweet dough deep-fried and rolled in sugar. Louise Kubo articulated the malasada concept in a cultural identities class at the University of Hawai'i, Pacific Island Studies 690, August 28, 1995. See also Kubo (1997).
11. This is but one example of colonization by the tourist industry. By encouraging everyone living in the islands to adopt kama'āina status in order to achieve economic benefits, the meaning of the word is co-opted to benefit capitalism.
12. One of the most prestigious private schools in Hawai'i. Started by missionary families in the mid-1800s to separately educate their own children, it remains disproportionately white.

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