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Peter R. Mills/Hawai'i's Russian Adventure: A New Look at Old History

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I

INTRODUCTION TO INDOCTRINATION

Along the Kaumuali'i Highway, on the west side of Kaua'i Island, a sign announces the presence of a "Russian fort" (fig. 1). Tourists with quick reflexes have just enough time to brake sharply and turn into a small parking area for the site, which is officially named Russian Fort Elisabeth State Historical Park. Though most visitors probably don't realize it, they have already begun to undergo a subtle process of indoctrination.

Near the parking area, another placard bears the inscription "Russian Fort Elisabeth," in both English and Russian, and gives a brief account of Russia's interest in Kaua'i in the early 1800s. In the distance, the crumbling stone walls of a massive structure look like a pile of debris left from a long-forgotten highway project. The walls more often than not are covered with dry, thorny weeds; the sun beats down, shade is sparse, and dark red dust colors everything—stones, tree trunks, and the quintessential white socks and shoes of most tourists. It is easy to understand why few visitors stay for more than a minute or two, and why still fewer follow the dusty trail leading into the structure.

Although the signs inform people the site is "Russian," and even locals refer to the site as the "Russian fort," Hawaiians had much to do with building this fort and used it long after the Russians had departed from Hawai'i. Because it has been labeled as Russian, its Hawaiian history largely has been ignored. Even the park's appearance, weedy and unkempt, reinforces the idea that its history is insignificant to Hawai'i. Fort Elisabeth seems nothing more than a cumbersome, obscure relic of nineteenth-century Western expansionism.

Compare this image with the Hawaiian heiau (ritual temple) of



Figure 1. Russian fort highway sign (Peter Mills)

Poli‘ahu in Wailua, Kaua‘i, where, amid a small grove of coconut palms and a manicured lawn, State Park signs inform visitors that Poli‘ahu is sacred and ask visitors to remain outside the walls. To many modern Hawaiians, as well as social scientists, Poli‘ahu heiau represents something purely Hawaiian. It was created in a tradition predating Western contact, and even though Hawaiians abolished their kapu (taboo) system in 1819, burning *ki‘i* (idols) and desecrating their heiau, many such sites are once again recognized as sacred and integral to modern Hawaiian cultural revitalization.

The Russian fort has no such status. Instead, it seems like a defiled place, tainted by haole (foreign) greed and delusions of grandeur, worthy of contempt, and now barely recognized as a footnote of bygone Russian schemes.

Many people are surprised to learn that Russians were influential in Hawaiian history. In short, after some Russian naval visits, a trading outfit known as the Russian-American Company (RAC) sent Georg Anton Schäffer to the Hawaiian Islands in the years 1816 and 1817 to recover goods from a company ship, the *Bering*, which had wrecked on the shores of Waimea in 1815. During this venture, Schäffer and the paramount chief of Kaua‘i, Kaumuali‘i, formed an alliance. Fort Elisabeth was one of the products of this brief alliance. The relationship between Schäffer and Kau-

muali'i deteriorated in 1817, and the RAC left Kaua'i, never again to play a prominent role in Hawaiian politics.

To anyone who has been fully indoctrinated through texts on nineteenth-century Hawai'i, all of this is old history. Glynn Barratt, a prominent historian interested in the Russians who went to Hawai'i, described Fort Elisabeth's history as "well-tilled."¹ One fiction writer even capitalized on Cold War hysteria by using Fort Elisabeth as a stage for his nineteenth-century American protagonist to save Hawai'i from Russian imperialism.²

Most scholarly narratives take a traditional world-systems perspective.³ They focus on Russians in the Pacific fur trade and the concomitant geopolitical developments of the era. These accounts begin with the first Russian naval expedition to the Hawaiian Islands, in 1804, led by Ivan Krusenstern and Iurii Lisianskii on the vessels *Nadezhda* and *Neva*, respectively.⁴ With the emphasis on Russian history, Russians become the principal actors, while Hawaiians are relegated to the role of supernumeraries. In other words, Hawaiians become people without voices marching across stage—more a part of the setting than a part of the plot.

One of the most comprehensive publications concerning Fort Elisabeth is Richard Pierce's *Russia's Hawaiian Adventure, 1815–1817*, published in 1965. As Pierce's title suggests, his historical viewpoint centers on the Russians (they are the ones having an adventure). In a 1973 follow-up article, Russian historian Nikolai Bolkhovitinov goes so far as to state the following:

*Is there a need for returning once again to a study of this subject? Would this not simply be a repetition of facts already known, and do any sort of disputable problems remain in general? Even a brief examination of the historiography would show that we cannot harbor any special hopes of disclosing principally new documents and facts.*⁵

As a graduate student in anthropology at Berkeley in the early 1990s, I knew I had ample theoretical ground to disagree with Bolkhovitinov. Though Berkeley is no longer the radically progressive campus it once was, I was nonetheless taught to question authority. Postmodernism, critical theory, deconstruction, and epistemology were some of the big buzzwords in the department, and within that intellectual environment, I could not fail to notice that historical narratives of "Russia's Hawaiian adventure" oozed with Western biases. No one had taken the time to grasp these events from the perspective of nineteenth-century Kaua'i islanders. I saw two im-

mediate opportunities for challenging Bolkhovitinov's stance: first, I would broaden the historical context, particularly the Hawaiian ethnohistory, considering Hawaiians as active members of the historical stage; second, I would consider the site itself as a potential source of information about Hawai'i's past. Consequently, over the summers of 1993 and 1994, I directed two seasons of archaeological research at the park to see what history (and prehistory) had left behind.

I challenge the reader to consider how facts regarding Russia's Hawaiian adventure have been generated, and to take a brief look at the Russian-American Company as an aspect of the world system. My purpose is to connect Fort Elisabeth to a model describing culture contact and culture change within a global system while remaining sensitive to Hawaiian perspectives and influences in that system. Ultimately, this provides a foundation for the reinterpretation of a Russian fort. The following chapter completes part I, with a presentation and critique of the "old history" surrounding Russia's Hawaiian adventure.

Part II of the text places what I call "Hawai'i's Russian adventure" within the context of Hawaiian cultural history (replete with the "principally new documents and facts" dismissed by Bolkhovitinov). Chapters 3, 4, and 5 cover Hawaiian ethnohistory before, during, and after the adventure. Chapter 6 summarizes more new information generated by archaeological research at Fort Elisabeth, and chapter 7 offers concluding remarks about understanding culture change, the world system, and historical anthropology in general.

FACTS IN WESTERN HISTORY

All historians would like a magical way to discover principally new historical facts, but we are not magicians. We take existing data and use them to reconstruct history. These data, or historical facts, are selected from a myriad of perceptions interpreted through personal biases and cultural filters. Furthermore, where we look for facts, and what we look for, depends on our personal biases. Although many postmodernists have discussed this issue using sophisticated theoretical terms,⁶ the concept can easily be demonstrated through multiple character flashbacks, a technique used by many a television situation-comedy, where various members of the cast narrate a "flashback" scene of the same event. Every account is somewhat different, and each person's story usually embellishes her or his own role. We all rec-

ognize this human tendency, but many assume that experts in social history have found a way to get rid of it. They have not.

To continue the analogy, imagine that the characters in the television show are all members of different cultures. Western history generally has relied on the Western character telling the story for everyone else. As a historical anthropologist, I stopped asking myself if there were a single narrative that I could rely on to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth; instead, I began to ask, “Are there others who can tell me their stories?”

A case in point is the history of the “world system,” in which Fort Elisabeth is but a part. By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly every culture had been affected in some way by Western colonialism, far-flung political alliances, and global trade networks. Twentieth-century economist Immanuel Wallerstein developed a world system model to describe this phenomenon.⁷ In Wallerstein’s model, Europeans accumulated wealth at the “core” (mostly Europe) by exploiting the “periphery,” namely, the rest of the planet. The core-periphery aspect of the model is by definition Eurocentric, but this should not be used to condemn it; it gives us a Western perspective on something that the West was clearly involved in. One substantial benefit of applying world systems theory in anthropology is examining Europe’s role in broad patterns of culture contact, culture change, and the redistribution of wealth and resources around the globe.⁸

Where the model is inherently overgeneralized is in the lumping of most portions of the globe into the “periphery.”⁹ Applications of world systems theory tend to treat the periphery as a zone of European exploitation, but it is only a uniform entity in its geographic separation from the core. As Europeans and Euro-Americans were the ones responsible for contacting most “peripheral” areas, it is easy to assume that populations in the peripheries were passive participants in the world system. This implies that culture change in the periphery was—and is—driven by the core.¹⁰ Such an implication can be seen in the title *Russia’s Hawaiian Adventure*. Not only is history constructed from a Russian perspective, but Russians are also the adventurers in a passive Hawaiian setting.

NON-WESTERN HISTORY: VICTIMS OF PROGRESS

A fundamental issue in understanding Hawaiian history is that foreigners often are portrayed as the only instigators of culture change after the arrival of Captain James Cook, in 1778. So much changed so quickly. Foreign diseases, weapons, mercantile systems, and world views all descended

on the Hawaiian people. For good reason, we tend to look back on the time of these profound transitions as an era of Hawaiian victimization perpetrated by haole influence. When taken to an extreme, however, this perspective leads to a historical dichotomy, creating active Western victimizers and passive Hawaiian victims. Although this portrayal remains popular, it propagates a misrepresentation of Hawaiian culture after 1778. Hawaiians were not merely passive historical entities being manipulated by foreign designs. They continued to form concepts of their world, to redefine their values, to make their own history, and to pass on old traditions as they perceived them. Without this realization, we view nineteenth-century Hawaiians as people without their own history,¹¹ people no longer capable of redefining what Hawaiian culture was or should be. Their actions are seen only as reactions, and their histories become subsumed in the history of the West. Stone structures built by Hawaiians become Russian forts.

If you accept that Hawaiians were not simply passive victims, they become agents of history—and they need to be recognized as such if we are to understand why events unfolded as they did. Though Hawaiians lived in the context of a Polynesian world vastly changed by haole influences, Hawaiians' actions and decisions gave meaning to their lives and affected the lives of Western explorers, merchants, missionaries, and entire foreign governments.¹² Using the example of Fort Elisabeth State Historical Park, I aim to demonstrate that European agendas did not guide historical events as much as previous narratives suggest.

THE RUSSIAN-AMERICAN COMPANY IN THE WORLD SYSTEM

Cultural encounters in the world system often resulted from Western exploration, economic expansion, and religious conversion. Consequently, the particular institutions that came out of the West, like naval expeditions, trading companies, and missionary organizations, are useful units for studying cultural interaction.¹³

The Russian-American Company is one such institution. Although this company was ultimately directed by Russians in St. Petersburg, it can hardly be considered exclusively Russian, or even Western. Native Alaskans comprised the majority of its work force, along with Siberian hunter-gatherers, native Californians, Ainu peoples from the Kurile Islands, native Hawaiians, Euro-Americans, Germans, and a multitude of other ethnic groups.¹⁴ To understand the RAC, one needs to understand the multi-ethnic communities that formed under its flag.

Ethnohistory and archaeology, two related disciplines, can help us re-

construct this multiethnic past. Richard Henry Dana Jr.'s *Two Years Before the Mast*¹⁵ is a classic example of the kind of information ethnohistorians use. Dana was a well-educated New Englander, who signed aboard a merchant vessel bound for the Pacific in the 1830s. He labored as a common sailor and provided fascinating descriptions of each port he visited and the people he met. Such texts, broad in geographical range, are perfect for ethnohistorians interested in studying panregional processes.

Nevertheless, these ethnohistorical texts often are strongly biased.¹⁶ Take, for instance, Dana's description of RAC men on a ship in San Francisco Harbor in 1835:

She had five or six officers, and a crew of between twenty and thirty; and such a stupid and greasy-looking set, I never saw before. Although it was quite comfortable weather and we had nothing on but straw hats, shirts, and duck trousers, and were barefooted, they had, every man of them, double-soled boots, coming up to the knees, and well greased; thick woolen trousers, frocks, waistcoats, pea-jackets, woolen caps, and everything in true Nova Sembla rig; and in the warmest days they made no change. The clothing on one of these men would weigh nearly as much as that of half our crew. They had brutish faces, looked like the antipodes of sailors, and apparently dealt in nothing but grease. They lived upon grease; ate it, drank it, slept in the midst of it, and their clothes were covered with it. To a Russian, grease is the greatest luxury. They looked with greedy eyes upon the tallow-bags as they were taken into the vessel, and, no doubt, would have eaten one up whole, had not the officer kept watch over it. The grease appeared to fill their pores, and to come out in their hair and on their faces. It seems as if it were this saturation which makes them stand cold and rain so well. If they were to go into a warm climate, they would melt and die of the scurvy.

The vessel was no better than the crew. Everything was in the oldest and most inconvenient fashion possible: running trusses and lifts on the yards, and large hawser cables, coiled all over the decks, and served and parceled in all directions. The topmasts, top-gallant-masts, and studding-sail booms were nearly black for want of scraping, and the decks would have turned the stomach of a man-of-war's-man. The galley was down in the forecabin; and there the crew lived, in the midst of the steam and grease of the cooking, in a place as hot as an oven, and apparently never cleaned out. Five minutes in the forecabin was enough for us, and we were glad to get into the open air.¹⁷

Consider some of the biases in Dana's account. First, what Dana chose to write about is strongly influenced by his own interests—sailors and ships. Second, Dana's distaste for the Russians is fairly clear. Finally,

given that most Russian-American Company vessels in the 1830s were manned by native Alaskans and “creoles,” or people of mixed Russian and native Alaskan descent, the statement that they were Russian is already a great oversimplification of ethnicity. As a historical anthropologist, I am interested not only in objective facts of history, I am interested in peoples’ perceptions of themselves and of others. It is for this reason that Dana’s description—no matter how ethnocentric, arrogant, or exaggerated—is valuable to historical anthropology.

To date, most of our understanding of the RAC’s contact with indigenous cultures has been based on ethnohistorical research derived from Russian documents.¹⁸ These documents provide extensive and sometimes detailed descriptions of Russians and the people they came in contact with, yet they remain Russian perspectives. How would the people described by Russians have described themselves? What other ways do we have to comprehend these people and times?

This is where excavations at the “Russian fort” on Kāua‘i become relevant to this discussion. A popular Hawaiian slogan one of the participants applied to our project was “*nānā i ke kumu*,” most commonly translated as “look to the teacher.” But in this instance the phrase was intended to mean something slightly different—“look to the source.” In other words, we hoped to learn about a particular aspect of nineteenth-century history by looking at the physical remnants of that history. The interpretations—and the biases—would be our own, however, giving us a means to circumvent the biases of history based on Russian documents.

Archaeological projects in the Pacific focusing on Russian fur-trade sites began in the late 1950s and 1960s¹⁹ and are increasingly frequent.²⁰ A fascinating case study in northern California examines where Russians built a settlement—variably referred to as “Colony Ross” or “Fort Ross.”²¹

The RAC settled at Colony Ross in 1812 to hunt for sea otter, grow wheat, and build ships. Sea otters were extirpated in a few years, wheat never grew well on the fog-ridden coast, and the few ships that the RAC built rotted prematurely. In 1841, after nearly thirty years with little success, the RAC sold the remnants of Colony Ross to John Sutter—well known in American history as owner of the mill where gold was first discovered in California, in 1848. Colony Ross is now a state park along California Coast Highway 1. In the 1950s, archaeological research at Colony Ross began under the direction of Adan Treganza,²² whose work focused on the stockade and the buildings inside the stockade. The state park is beautiful, with high redwood stockade walls, cannon, a Russian chapel, and

sundry buildings inside the walls, but what is absent is any physical reconstruction of the substantial community that lived outside the stockade.

This community was composed of numerous native Alaskans, who had gone to California with the RAC, as well as California Indians (mostly Pomo and Coast Miwok), and a variety of other ethnic groups, including at least two Hawaiians.²³ Beginning in the late 1980s, University of California–Berkeley archaeologist Kent Lightfoot organized various collaborators and created the Fort Ross Archaeological Project (FRAP) to investigate the multiethnic community at Colony Ross. Instead of digging inside the fort, FRAP spends its time mainly outside the stockade walls.

The results have been outstanding. In the summer of 1992, I had the opportunity to work with FRAP at a site just outside the stockade where many of the native Alaskan workers had lived. The site is on a promontory between the fort and the sea, and resembles sites I have visited on the Alaska Peninsula, Kodiak Island, and southern coastal Alaska. I was enjoyably disoriented in California, seeing the same kinds of bone harpoon points and butchered seal bones I had seen in Alaska.

At Fort Ross, we can see that a Russian fort in California was actually a multiethnic community with a complex history. In part, Fort Elisabeth was a product of the same company in the same era. But the histories of these two forts are distinctly different. When construction of Fort Elisabeth began, in 1816, the people of Kaua‘i were living in a highly stratified complex chiefdom.²⁴ This factor is critical to the explanation of Fort Elisabeth’s unique character relative to Fort Ross and other RAC outposts, and will provide insights into indigenous control of Western activities that debunk perceptions of indigenous peoples as passive adapters to European economic expansion.

CULTURE CHANGE AND SCALES OF HISTORICAL TIME

As an anthropologist working with material from the past, I am interested in how this thing we now call a “Russian fort” relates to Hawaiian and Western culture in the 1800s, and how its relationships to these cultures could have changed through time. To achieve this, it will help to clarify what I mean by “culture” and how I perceive cultures changing through time. These are basic issues in anthropology and history, but they have been approached in divergent and often contradictory ways. Through this discussion, I hope to make explicit my approach to uncovering alternatives to existing perceptions of this site.

A MODEL FOR CULTURE CHANGE

My use of the term “culture” favors a definition proposed by Walter Taylor, an American anthropologist of the mid-twentieth century. He argued that culture should be limited to people’s abstract concepts rather than the by-products of those ideas (material and behavior):

*According to the concept of culture being developed here, culture is a mental construct consisting of ideas. Under the term idea, for present purposes, are subsumed such categories as attitudes, meanings, sentiments, feelings, values, goals, purposes, interests, knowledge, beliefs, relationships, associations.*²⁵

It follows that an understanding of “culture change” using Taylor’s definition would focus on the processes by which people acquire and modify their “ideas.” He states that “the important factor is obviously the one which remains in the mind to be carried on, modified, [and] transmitted.”²⁶

Individuals actively select and interpret information in the construction of concepts of the world. Societies do it; anthropologists do it; historians do it. This is why historical data are selective and subject to more than one interpretation. When people from any given culture take into account perceptions of their environment—a lava flow, a cancer in remission, a bunch of strange-looking people arriving in big vessels, or a new theory about a Russian fort—they interpret and evaluate those perceptions in ways that make the most sense to them. And as this is a creative process occurring in individual minds, there can easily be more than one interpretation of the same situation. People in the same culture communicate with each other and often try to reach agreement, but everyone’s perceptions are unique. More recent theorists than Taylor, in pursuing these concepts, have developed some convoluted theories and jargon to describe what is essentially a fairly simple concept: there is no universal reality.

Culture change is another concept on which anthropologists have developed often differing, complex theories. In my view, culture is constantly being reinterpreted and redefined by its practitioners. Change is inherent in practice, because each reapplication of a “tradition” is somewhat different, as people reinterpret tradition or intentionally modify it to fit new situations. This focus on individual creativity emphasizes that people often deliberately modify their traditions rather than letting outside stimuli determine the particular nature of change.

Many anthropological models of culture change are decidedly opposed to the roles of individuals in determining culture change, relying instead

either on environmental determinism or on coercive pressure from outside forces to explain change. Diffusion models, for example, were some of the earliest constructs used to conceptualize culture change. They were based on the concept of an isolated “invention” or “innovation” spreading out from its source.²⁷ This concept persists in many traditional world systems models, including the implication that the pile of rock in Waimea is Russian. The perception of a “Russian fort” in Hawai‘i attributes a new architectural form on the Hawaiian landscape solely to a Western source—just as though some giant force picked a fort out of Russia and dropped it in Waimea. In this diffusionistic model, Russian imperialism is the omnipotent force, and Hawaiian culture has no influence whatsoever.

Within a broad theoretical framework known as “acculturation theory,” there are some less static concepts of culture change, such as “syncretism.” Syncretism is the adoption of an object from another culture with little or no change in function but with a significant change in meaning. In other words, an acquired object is reinterpreted to conform with the receiving culture’s patterns of meaning.²⁸ Recently, some anthropologists have emphasized the dynamic nature of culture boundaries and dual symbolism in material objects that develop in situations of culture contact.²⁹ Some have adopted the term “creolization” to define “how people modify, create and syncretize material objects in culture contact situations.”³⁰ Others refer to “hybridity,” “cultural fusion,” and “ethnogenesis.”³¹

In the past two decades, such social theorists as Antony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, and Marshall Sahlins have attempted to overcome many of the shortcomings of culture-change theory.³² By emphasizing that social structures are not synchronic (static) entities, culture change is seen as a dynamic process brought about by the very act of implementing ideas into behavior, or “praxis.” This idea combines what is traditionally seen as static (the structure of a particular culture) with a dynamic process (culture change). This apparent paradox has spawned volumes of theoretical essays on “practice theory,” replete with specialized vocabulary. One of my favorite terms is Antony Giddens’ idea of “structuration,” where the traditionally static root noun of the word “structure” is combined with a suffix implying process.

Researchers in Oceania have been leaders in combining the concepts of structure and process in anthropology.³³ One of the reasons is that Oceania benefits from a multitude of early ethnohistorical texts. Besides the journals of explorers and merchants, historical documents derive from several other sources, many of which have been published and are commonly available. In Hawai‘i, these include books written by mission-

aries and nineteenth-century Western scholars;³⁴ Hawaiian histories written by Hawaiian scholars;³⁵ publications resulting from the early formation of historical societies and museums;³⁶ nineteenth-century English and Hawaiian-language newspapers;³⁷ and various twentieth-century syntheses by Hawaiian and European scholars.³⁸ Archival collections, such as testimony given during transitions to fee-simple land ownership (the Great Mahele of 1848–1855), as well as numerous unpublished journals and letters, provide immense sources of written data.³⁹ Oral histories in the form of mele (chants) and family traditions also offer rich contributions to Hawaiian ethnohistory. This diversity of sources enables us to understand how different people from various cultures interpreted the same events.

Based on our own interests, we attend to particular aspects of the history within the body of ethnohistorical data. For example, frequently studied subjects include the events leading up to Captain Cook's death at Kealakekua Bay, in 1779,⁴⁰ and the transformation of Hawaiian socio-religious structures after the abolition of the Hawaiian eating taboo (*ai kapu*) in 1819.⁴¹

With the arrival of Cook in Hawai'i, Hawaiian and Western peoples' concepts of the world were transformed by their own discoveries. Hawaiians became more vividly aware of people beyond Polynesia, and Westerners faced the task of explaining where Polynesians came from and how they got there. For example, American missionary Sheldon Dibble searched for aspects of Hawaiian culture that would connect Hawaiians with the "scattered tribes of the children of Israel."⁴²

Westerners and Hawaiians reinterpreted their universes to make sense of their experiences. In the process, they began to communicate with each other, and they revised their understanding of the world based on their discussions and experiences. Hawaiians shared ideas with Westerners, and vice versa.

Once exchanges like these begin to take place, the tidy categories of one culture versus another are no longer easy to discern. Possession becomes a matter of perception. On one hand, some scholars argue that Western ideologies determine the direction of indigenous culture change.⁴³ Others contend that many aspects of indigenous ideologies are resilient to the world system and continue today unaffected by it.⁴⁴

I favor neither position. In today's world (and even in the past), any and all cultures are affected by the existence of "others," and seemingly unchanged traditions have been recontextualized to serve different purposes in a changed world. Nicholas Thomas views this active creativity in

the contact period as the “inventive appropriation and recontextualization of culture, as a science of misnomers.”⁴⁵ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger call the new practices the “invention of tradition.”⁴⁶ In other words, practices that serve symbolically as connections with the past are used in new contexts to solidify the identity of a group.

History is a highly creative and selective representation of the past, which people often use to define cultural traditions. Over the past several years, I have had the opportunity to teach at the University of Hawai‘i–Hilo in the midst of a vibrant revitalization of Hawaiian culture filled with themes of sovereignty and self-determination. How Hawaiian history is to be interpreted has been a central aspect of this movement, spawning a healthy distrust of the written observations of Westerners, and, in many cases, preferring the remembrances of twentieth-century Hawaiian *kūpuna* (respected elders) over nineteenth-century writers. Between these two positions are the literate nineteenth-century Hawaiians, who wrote their own histories but are sometimes criticized for having been influenced by Western missionaries.

The conventional separation of written history and oral history is not as complete as some people may assume; information is constantly passing back and forth between these two spheres. First, most written histories began as oral histories—stories that were told to someone, who eventually wrote them down. For example, Abraham Fornander’s *Account of the Polynesian Race*,⁴⁷ originally published in 1878, is the result of Fornander’s compilation of Hawaiian oral history. Alternatively, many events that are commonly spoken of today in the Hawaiian community may have been partially or wholly learned of from written texts, and thus are reentering the sphere of oral tradition. Nevertheless, buried in old archives and old books are many events not commonly remembered or spoken of today, and, similarly, oral histories exist that have never been put in print.

The further into the Hawaiian past one attempts to go, the more ambiguous and incomplete history is. Certain genealogies may be precisely remembered and certain tales of battle and discovery told and retold over millennia, but other real people and events become lost in normative generalizations of culture. For example, I have yet to find anyone who has heard of the building of the “Russian fort” through oral tradition. What is remembered about it (at least publicly) derives from written histories.

As I attempt to understand how the fort in Waimea reflects changes in Hawaiian culture, I must establish what Kaua‘i was like before the fort was built. While previous histories of the fort have relied on Russian docu-

ments, both archaeology and a broader perception of the relevance of Hawaiian history allow me to go beyond Russian texts to expose “alternative histories, competing accounts, and muffled voices.”⁴⁸

The approach I employ explores how different individuals—and ultimately, different cultures—structured their interaction. I attempt to get beyond the static, dual representation of “Hawaiian” and “Western” to understand how cross-cultural interaction, or “the structure of the conjuncture,”⁴⁹ provided an environment in which people transformed their cultures. At first glance, Fort Elisabeth suggests dramatic culture change dominated by European concepts and goals. By turning to Hawaiian ethno-history and archaeology, we can take a second glance and see something else.

A MODEL FOR TIME

Perceptions of time also affect what we label as “important.” To identify different meanings and connections, we need to examine culture and history on different scales of time. Fernand Braudel, of the well-known Annales school of history, focused on culture change and historical process.⁵⁰ He divided time into three scales: the *longue durée*, or culture change over centuries to millennia; the *conjoncture*, which covers between ten years and a century; and the *mentalité*, or event, which focuses on short-term phenomena of fewer than ten years. Previous historians generally focused only on events and central figures in history, and Braudel’s concern with longer-term processes provided a new perspective on history.⁵¹ Nevertheless, his lack of emphasis on events was challenged by such later Annales historians as Le Roy Ladurie,⁵² who saw events as critical episodes for explaining change.

The construction and use of Fort Elisabeth between 1815 and 1864 falls neatly within Braudel’s concept of the *conjoncture*. The history of culture contact between Hawaiians, Russians, and others at the site also corresponds well to Sahlins’ concept of “the structure of the conjuncture,” both in frames of time and cultural interaction. Sahlins used this term to describe the conditions shaping interactions and choices in the context of cross-cultural encounters. He stated the following about the structure of the conjuncture:

Practice has its own dynamics—a “structure of the conjuncture”—which meaningfully defines the persons and objects that are parties to it. And these contextual values, if unlike the definitions culturally presupposed, have the capacity of

*working back on conventional values. Entailing unprecedented relations between the acting subjects, mutually and by relation to objects, practice entails unprecedented objectifications of categories.*⁵³

I will examine this generational process of interaction and change, but I differ with Sahlins on one point in the above quotation; the “structure of the conjuncture” does not define things; *people* define things (including the structure of the conjuncture) and reformulate structure in the process. Thus, I place considerable emphasis on the role of individuals in understanding short-term and long-term patterns.

Fort Elisabeth’s history comprises many events. Following Ladurie, I argue that changes in any of these events could have altered the outcome of the *conjuncture*. Schäffer, Kaumuali‘i, and others not only participated in events, they collectively created them. To understand their individual roles, I find the concept of “moments” useful.

I use “moments” to refer to the smallest perceptual unit of passing time or perceived change within a system. Moments are segments of time that individuals use to initially perceive change. Unlike events, moments pertain to individuals rather than groups. I suggest that this scale of time, focusing on the individual, is most appropriate for identifying how change is introduced into the system. I see the moment as the critical period of time in which individuals make decisions and take action, redefining their perceptions of themselves and their universe in the process.

The concept breaks time into perceptual units bounded by an individual’s experiment with the universe. For example, it is the time a warrior took deciding to stab Captain Cook. It is also the time between stabbing him and finding out if he would live or die. Moments are actively created and perceived by people in the process of interpreting their world. They are perceptual, subject specific, and often communicative processes that could affect the direction of culture change.

Antony Giddens describes this process in his “theory of structuration,” without isolating any particular frame of time for this process to occur. He states, “According to the notion of the duality of structure, rules and resources are drawn upon by actors in the production of interaction, but are thereby also reconstituted through such interaction.”⁵⁴ The question of whether the reconstitution of rules and resources is instantaneous with the action remains. I argue that cognitive structural change is a continual process, which is never fully completed with an act; all the results of an action are not readily apparent, and reformulating structure by definition takes time. Thus, a temporal difference exists between an act and the

results of that act. In this ongoing process, individuals create and perceive change.

Social action is originally perceived by individuals in their own moments, overlapping in time and often interconnected through communication and shared environments. A sequence of moments with a particular focus, such as the death of Captain Cook or the construction of Fort Elisabeth, constitutes an “event.” The “event,” by my definition, involves a group of social actors. For example, a Hawaiian fisherman who goes to sea and drowns in a storm may experience numerous moments before he dies, but these do not form an event. The event of his disappearance is formed by the social group when he does not return. Within an event, there are as many moments as there are people’s perceptions of change, any of which could affect the outcome of the event based on the social actors’ creative responses to their perceptions. Some of the fisherman’s relatives may conclude that he paddled safely to a different island, while others may conclude that he was killed. Events are constructed in retrospect by all social actors who reflect on the past, including historians.

These sentiments have also been expressed by Edmund Leach:

Time, as we experience it, is continuous, it contains no discrete “events.” The events are put there by reflection on the past. As the past becomes more remote, the remembered events become fewer in number and more limited in kind. It is for the psychologist to say just why we remember this and forget that, but at the end of the day, the remembered past reflects our interests. It makes us what we are now.

The same is true of the publicly shared experience that we describe in history. Eventually time past is reduced to a sequence of named happenings punctuated by major discontinuities: The Reformation, the French Revolution, World War I each was, in its original occurrence, a blurred ambiguity without beginning and without end.⁵⁵

I am interested in the significance of Fort Elisabeth on several scales of time: individuals’ creative actions and perceptions pertaining to the site (moments); cultural constructs of events; general patterns of perception and use by various cultures over the nineteenth century (structure of the conjuncture); and how Fort Elisabeth fits within long-term patterns of cultural expression and change (*longue durée*).

The construction of the fort was the result of numerous moments perceived and created by social actors. These people did not respect the cultural boundaries later defined by anthropologists, historians, and modern

people attempting to invent timeless ideas of Hawaiian tradition. I employ moments as the foundation for understanding individual roles and perceptions within historical events, the structure of the conjuncture, and, ultimately, the *longue durée*. This leads us to different conclusions about history, most specifically that “Fort Elisabeth” is best understood as a dynamic construct in a rapidly changing world. Many actions and interpretations contributed to the historical processes centered on the site. Hawaiians were the main occupants of the fort for nearly half of the nineteenth century, and I regard their perspectives as crucial for assembling the fort’s anthropological history.