Chapter IV
Constitutive history
Genealogy and narrative in the legitimation of Hawaiian kingship
(1990)

One knew that she worshipped the past, and that the instinctive wisdom the past can alone bestow had descended upon her—that wisdom to which we give the clumsy name of aristocracy.

E. M. Forster, *Howards end* (1910)

The legitimating past

The world is not reinvented every morning. Growing up in a culture means learning, unreflectively for the most part, to replicate forms of behavior that already exist, that come from the past. This relationship with the past, however, may come to be partly intentional, and arguments for justifying it (or for rationalizing it) may be advanced. In many cultures an implicit or explicit argument for following the practices and knowledge inherited from the past is that they embody the experience of numerous generations. They have proved efficacious over time; their very duration shows them to be true. Other societies justify present practices by referring not simply to the generic idea of a past that is valuable as a body of accumulated wisdom but more specifically to its representation as a series of events, ordered in time, that are binding for the present. As Peel asks, how is it that “making history,” in the sense of acting to realize a future, becomes interwoven with “making history, in the sense of giving accounts of the past?” (1984: 111). Peel’s answer is that societies of any political complexity consciously hold on to their past and thus “strive to make history repeat itself,” because unreflective
That the development of reflective images of the past may go with an intentional striving to replicate it is undoubtedly true. But one should not take for granted that the past justifies stereotypic reproduction only. This view would be valid only if society represented its past as the stereotypic reproduction in time of the same models and thus as the mere duration of these models over time. But the past, or portions thereof, may be represented as a process, as a becoming; it may even offer precedents of innovation, of successful violation of the tradition. Thus one can find in the past arguments for change, not simply for changelessness. I would claim that both kinds of argument, and both kinds of representation of the past (as process and as mere duration), exist in every society of any complexity. In no such society is the past a monolithic system of models repeated identically in time. On the contrary, there are several, often conflicting, images of the past; and the past is often stratified and differentiated along the dimension of time. For instance, the Māori, whose society is less politically complex than Peel’s Ijesha,

move into the future with their eyes on the past. In deciding how to act in the present, they examine the panorama of history spread before their eyes, and select the model that is most appropriate and helpful from the many presented there. This is not living in the past; it is drawing on the past for guidance, bringing the past into the present and the future. (Metge 1976: 70)

A past in which one is always able to find some precedent for some action, however new, in the present can hardly be linked to a tendency to “stereotypic” reproduction, unless the term loses all meaning. Indeed, Metge’s description of the Māori attitude toward the past could also apply to the political use of history in the modern West (cf. Canfora 1982) or to the use of precedents in the English and American legal systems, neither of which is accused of reproducing itself stereotypically. Peel’s attempt to relate stereotypic reproduction to both the exemplary character of the past and the intentional striving to repeat it is in line with a long tradition in British social anthropology. It is ultimately based on the view that social systems have a built-in tendency to maintain equilibrium, to reproduce themselves in...
a form as unchanged as possible, and thus to promote continuity in
time as the supreme value (cf. Leach 1965: ix–xii).

Fortes, for instance, claims that “observation of the lineage system
in action suggested that its distinguishing characteristic, as a regulating
factor in the social structure, was its tendency towards equilibrium.
This operated in such a way as to leave room for continual internal
adjustments in the social organization without endangering its long-
term stability” (1945: x). Fortes further argues that “if the equilibrium
of Tale society is made possible by economic structure, and if the
lineage system is the chief mechanism of social organization by which
it is maintained, the system of religious values is undoubtedly the
supreme sanction of its existence” (ibid.: x). This equilibrium through
time also “requires the assumption . . . that the social structure of to-
day is the same as it was in the past” (ibid.: 26). Thus the past must
enshrine the image of the unchanging social structure: “All that matt-
ers in the past, which lies beyond the span of man’s recollection, lives
on in the social structure, the ideology, the morality, and institutions
of to-day” (ibid.: 24).

The problem with this argument is that it is largely circular: Be-
cause these societies retrospectively interpret their past as continuity,
they are supposed to have a built-in tendency to changelessness, and
this supposed tendency, in turn, is made to explain why they trans-
form the past into the representation of a changeless social structure.
The entire argument rests on the ignorance (or disregard) of these so-
cieties’ actual history, but also, to a large extent, on Fortes’s (or Evans-
Pritchard’s) lack of attention to the complexity and internal differ-
entiation of these societies’ representations of their past. Nobody
would want to deny that the tendency to find in the past the justifi-
cations for the present is ultimately related to “social reproduction.”
But this ill-defined phenomenon cannot be treated as the ultimate
cause of something that seems in fact to be one of its most important
constituent features. We must search for less tautological reasons why
present action is always to some extent inscribed in the past and re-
ceives its justification more from the past than from the present or the
future.1 Furthermore, the represented relationships between past and

1. Even in societies—such as modern Western societies—that have elevated means-
to-end rationality and progress to ultimate values, the past still plays a consider-
able legitimating role, indicated by its use in political arguments and by the pre-
servation or even “invention” of traditions (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).
present can rarely be reduced to mere replication in any society that has developed a discourse about its past. They are far more complex than that and often contain elements that contrast with the very idea of reproduction. The observations that follow attempt to map a few of these relationships and to delineate some of the more general reasons the past is legitimating (and memorable) for every society. The points made will then be illustrated by the analysis of a concrete case: the representations and uses of the past to legitimate and constitute power in eighteenth-century Hawaii.

In the course of the discussion, more with a view to economy of expression than to absolute conceptual precision, I will be describing some crucial relations among represented events as either syntagmatic or paradigmatic. Syntagmatic relations are established between events qua events, as defined by their position in the temporal chain. Paradigmatic relations are established between events as members of classes of action, that is, as instantiations of the rules (in Winch’s 1958 sense) that govern or constitute them. An event in the present can stand for one (or more) of the past and be treated as its sign or even as its ontological substitute, either metonymically (because they belong to the same syntagmatic chain) or metaphorically (because they belong to the same paradigm). Past events are conceived as constitutive and binding for present events because of either (but more often both) their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations with them.

Gifts are good examples of the constitutive power of events as events and not simply as precedents. A gift is an event that creates an obligation that can only be fulfilled in time. Moreover, its fulfillment usually creates new obligations. The chain of events that forms becomes the major argument for justifying any further event: An event is legitimate because it is appropriate at that point in time, not simply because it corresponds to a precedent, and thus to a rule. Thus an event of the past may cast its constitutive shadow on successive events until the movement it has created is exhausted. This movement can only be apprehended with a notion of time as a cumulative process in

2. See Searle 1969 on the distinction between governing (or, as he says, “regulating”) and constitutive rules.
which each successive event must be distinguished in its particularity.\(^3\)

It is strange that some have denied this notion of temporality to traditional cultures, or reduced it to a universal, noncultural residue mysteriously coexisting with cultural notions (cf. Bloch 1977), for the legitimation of much social action is effected by culturally prescribed references to temporal chains, not only of gifts but also of feasts, of homicides, of wars. Of course this legitimation also has a paradigmatic dimension, since a gift given in the past must be equivalent to one in the present, or any action to some counteraction. But the point is that this paradigmatic dimension is not sufficient to account for the evaluation of the legitimacy of what is done, nor for the very evaluations of equivalences, which vary with time and context. The syntagmatic relations between events qua events is here constitutive, thus time is not eternal repetition, mere duration (cf. Bourdieu 1977: 6–7).

![Figure 1](image-url)

**Figure 1.** The status lineage.

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3. Indeed Gernet (1976: 287) connects the origin of the category of time in Greek thought with the recognition of legally binding relationships between successive events.
A predominantly syntagmatic relationship with the past is the constitutive principle of hierarchy in many systems. An example is a well-known system: the status lineage (cf. Gullick 1958: 69; Goldman 1970: 418–43), where rank depends on the cumulative effects of birth order over generations. For instance, in the lineage represented in Figure 1, IV$_x$ is senior to his brother, IV$_x$, because he was born before him; but both brothers are senior to IV$_z$ because their father, III$_x$, was born before III$_z$, the father of IV$_z$. This is so whether IV$_z$ was born before or after IV$_x$ and IV$_x$, since birth order in a previous generation overrules birth order in a later one. Clearly, the implication is that the system employs a cumulative notion of time. As a consequence, temporal proximity—genealogically reckoned—to a source-event (the founding of the lineage inscribed in an ancestor’s procreation) determines status. Thus, for instance, IV$_x$ as the firstborn son of a firstborn son (III$_x$) of a firstborn son (II$_x$), is temporally closer to the founder of the lineage (I$_x$) than is IV$_x$, who, as the younger brother of IV$_x$, has a somewhat lesser rank because he has come later in the temporal process that structures the lineage. Even later, and therefore inferior, is IV$_ɛ$, who is the son of the younger son (III$_ɛ$) of the younger son (II$_y$) of the founding ancestor (I$_x$).

Of course, paradigmatic relations are built into this system, since the same principles of seniority are used in each generation, but these principles are fundamentally metonymic because they use the dimension of time for structuration. Differential temporal closeness to the founding ancestor implies differential power to metonymically stand for him and thus for the lineage generated and symbolized by him. Different positions in the temporal process that defines the lineage thus correspond to different parts/whole relations of which the hierarchical system properly consists. These metonymic equivalences are made explicit when positional succession (Cunnison 1957: 22ff.) prevails, as in Tonga (Boa 1981: 66–67; Valeri 1989). Then IV$_x$ is named after I$_x$ because he is metonymically identified with him and thus with the whole lineage he heads; IV$_y$ is named after II$_y$ and considered equivalent to him and to the lineage segment he founded, and so on.

This and other cases of using articulated time to construct hierarchical relations directly contradict Bloch’s claim that the more hierarchical a system is, the more it will rely on “a timeless static past” (1977: 287). It is true that in the status lineage the present is a me-
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Tonymy of a past, but it is so through a recognized temporal process. This system, by making time the principle of its organization, both recognizes history and triumphs over it. Of course it is customary among anthropologists ever since Robertson Smith (1903) to claim that the history embodied in lineage systems is purely fictitious. Evans-Pritchard, for instance, claims that “structural time,” being a “conceptualization of the social structure...less a means of coordinating events than of coordinating relationships” (1940: 108), is “in a sense, an illusion, for the structure remains fairly constant and the perception of time is no more than the movement of persons, often as groups, through the structure” (ibid.: 107). Maybe, but one should also entertain the possible accuracy of the native view that real events in real time determine present relationships, and not the other way round, as Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, and others dogmatically assert to justify their purely systemic and synchronic analysis (see, in particular, Bohannan 1952: 314). Because they claim to make history the basis of hierarchy, their systems may include actual historical events. Indeed, when it has been possible to compare the native representation of the history of a status lineage with independent written documentation (see, for instance, Fox 1971) or with the archeological record (see, for instance, Kirch and Yen 1982: 362–68), the historical veracity of the native representation has sometimes been vindicated.

These familiar facts should challenge the view that the relationship between represented past and present in traditional societies involves merely the replication of models enshrined in the past and thus a dissolution of temporality. The facts suggest that one way in which the past is recognized as founding the present is not incompatible with a historicizing view of the articulation of past and present, and indeed that such a way requires the differentiation of events qua events along the temporal chain. It remains nevertheless true that the paradigmatic (and thus tendentially detemporalizing) component of the relationship between past and present is the most important one. But the reasons for this go well beyond the ideal of stereotypic (or “complex,” for that matter) reproduction of the past in the present. They have to do with a much more general phenomenon: Because the events of the remembered past are human actions, they exemplify rules—and it is as such that they are intelligible, relevant for present conduct, and thus memorable in the first place, even when they are not directly reproducible (cf. Winch 1958: 62).
All cultures with a historical tradition have maintained that the past offers a repertory of rules, of connections among types of action and types of consequences, in the form of concrete events that can be analogically related to present ones. Precisely because this relationship between past and present is analogical (and thus recognizes differences as much as similarities [cf. Canfora 1982: 27]) and because the repertory of rules contained in the past is often perceived as a set of possible choices, not of rules that must all be equally instantiated, the paradigmatic use of the past need not be correlated with an ideal of “reproduction,” but simply with the idea of comparability of all human actions qua actions. In fact even modern professional historians, although they have broken with the tradition of “monumental history” (in Nietzsche’s sense), claim that analogy (and thus the establishment of relationships of equivalence, of paradigmatic relations, among events) is the main organ of historiography (Droysen 1937; Engel 1956; Canfora 1982). Since the relationship between past and present is analogical and not merely replicative, the past need not exactly replicate the present to function as its precedent. This undermines the extreme presentist thesis (derived from Malinowski 1954: 125), which postulates that the represented past needs to be a projection of the present in order to have legitimating effects. In formulating this thesis, extreme presentists are victims of the more overt, ideological aspects of traditionalism. Because traditionalism often emphasizes similarity over difference in the comparison of past and present, particularly whenever past events are used as explicit charters, they do not see that the perception of difference plays in fact a great role in that comparison. Furthermore, presentists do not see that a mere projection of present interests onto the past would defeat such a projection’s purpose, because it would undermine the authority of the past by failing to live up to cultural standards of validation. These standards, however, are not simply the criteria of evidence and argumentation emphasized by some (e.g. Appadurai 1981; Peel 1984); they can also be performative criteria of felicity. With this qualification, I completely subscribe to Peel’s point that the relationship between past and present is one of mutual, not unilateral, conditioning (1984: 113–14).

4. Veyne (1976a: 38) notes that the comparability of past and present implies that, from a typological point of view, history repeats itself—that historical facts are individual but not singular.
But however analogical and dialectical the relationship between past and present is, it remains asymmetrical. Whereas the principle of relevance for knowing and mobilizing the past is clearly in the present (since the rule content of past action is brought out by explicit or implicit analogies with the present, every statement about the past is in fact also a statement about the present), from an ideological point of view it is action in the past that legitimates its counterpart in the present. The present seems unable to justify, or to fully justify, itself.

Why is the value of past action greater than the value of present action? Why is such importance attached to finding the rules of the present embodied in the past? Why, in other words, is duration an argument for the validity of rules and thus a motive for their historical representation? The answer is to be found, I believe, in an argument that—as I have mentioned—is explicitly made in many societies: A rule’s duration is a proof of its validity because it demonstrates its power to successfully resist the vicissitudes and challenges of history and to make society survive and prosper. Duration is validating also because it implicitly multiplies the number of the believers in the rule: So many people could not have been wrong. Furthermore, some were glorious heroes, whose actions further validate the rule by showing that its use was followed by exceptional success.

In sum, the association of rules with duration considerably expands their persuasive force by making past generations argue for them both quantitatively and qualitatively. Moreover, rules expressed in terms of duration allow the social group they define to magnify and thus legitimate itself by adding extent in time to its extent in space. Thus society and its rules mutually legitimate one another through one single powerful image: duration, as proof of “greatness,” “potency,” “vitality,” “righteousness,” “divine election,” “predestination,” “historical mission,” “historical necessity,” or whatever. In the end, by

5. This view was found, for instance, in the Ancient City: “All these formulas and these practices had been transmitted by the ancestors who had tested their efficacy. It was not necessary to innovate. One had to rest oneself on what the ancestors had done, and the supreme piety consisted in acting like they did” (Fustel de Coulanges 1905: 197). Similar views were still expressed in the Venetian Senate in the eighteenth century, to oppose the suppression of an obsolete but traditional type of warship (Casanova 1960, 2: 177).

6. This view was illustrated by the Hawaiian king Liholiho, who, when someone praised his wisdom, answered: “Why shouldn’t I know, when it is a road often travelled by my parents?” (Pukui 1983: saying 2301).
allowing a society to communicate with its image in time triumphing over time, its history (which includes its defining rules and their effects) constitutes that society and makes it endure. What Lévy-Bruhl says of myth and sacred history can be said of any representation of the past:

When a myth narrates the adventures, exploits, the good deeds, the death and resurrection of a civilizing hero, it is not the fact that he has given the tribe the idea of fire-making, or cultivating corn, which, in itself, especially interests and moves the audience. What occurs is rather that, as in sacred history, the group is able to participate in its own past, that it feels itself living, in a sort of mystical communion, with what made it what it is. In short, myths are, for the primitive mentality, both an expression of the solidarity of the social group with itself in time and with other beings in its environment, and a way of perpetuating and rekindling the feeling of this solidarity. (1912: 437)

The ability of past events to instantiate the rules that make them comparable to present events and thus relevant to them tends to vary with their distance in time. Events that have been directly experienced, whose memory does not come from tradition, manifest a greater resistance to analogical appropriation and thus to being reduced to the rule on which their analogy with other events is based. As a result, these events tend to be viewed less as tokens of a type than as events qua events. Thus, also, the syntagmatic component of their intelligibility is emphasized over the paradigmatic one. The opposite happens with more distant events, which are more malleable in memory and thus more easily typified. This selectivity of memory is another reason why the distant past is able to carry a heavier ideological load than the recent past (cf. Barnes 1967: 120), but the effects of selectivity happily converge with the tendency to associate rules with duration in time and thus to embody them in past events.

Time is not only relevant as undifferentiated duration, however. Different degrees of distance from the present tend to correspond to qualitatively different levels of the past, which in turn correspond to different relations between those levels and the present. Two basic discontinuities can be recognized in many a culture’s representation of its past. The first (as we have seen) is situated at the point in repre-

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7. The most brilliant analysis of this process is still to be found in Granet (1926, I: 171–225, see especially 200–13).
sented time where the paradigmatic apprehension of events becomes preponderant over the syntagmatic one, that is, where events are viewed more as instantiations of rules than as events. The second is situated at the point where the preoccupation with the analogical appropriation of the past by the present gives way to a preoccupation with explaining the origin of the rules and with making the society’s existence unquestionable. The latter point marks the threshold between a past that is comparable (or directly comparable) to the present and that founds it because it is exemplary for it, and a past whose principles of operation are no longer applicable to the present but explain the extraordinary events that made society and its institutions possible. The latter past often instantiates the more general principles that underlie the rules of the more recent past but are not immediately recognizable in them. The heterogeneity of this past with the present expresses the transcendental and unquestionable character of the image of society and of its fundamental institutions as the ultimate condition of the possibility of human relations. The past that is homogeneous with the present, and thus exemplary for it (but also questionable precisely because comparable to present experience), I call historical in the strict sense of the term; the heterogeneous, impossible-to-replicate (and thus beyond argument) past I call mythical.

Contrary to the historical past, then, the mythical past justifies the rules but does not or does not directly embody them. Only insofar as myths are transformable into intermediary representations, which may or may not take the form of narratives, can they function fully as models. Otherwise, their legitimating power applies to both historical events and present ones through indirect, syntagmatic connections. We therefore find that the relationship with the most distant past and with the most recent one are analogous in that they privilege the

8. The many recent and not-so-recent attempts to define myth, most notably through the Greek origins of the notion (see Finley 1965; Kirk 1970: 39–40; Detienne 1981; Brisson 1982; Traube 1986b), show that no absolute definition will do. The contrast I use here between mythical and historical modes of operation is often found in native ideology, particularly in societies with a developed historical literature. The Luapula, for instance, note that “the things which people of old could do, the men of to-day have not the power to effect” (Cunnison 1951: 21).

9. As Bakhtin notes, toward a past that is “walled off absolutely from all subsequent times” (1981: 15) one can only have “the reverent point of view of a descendant” (ibid.: 13).
syntagmatic dimension over the paradigmatic one. The relationship between past and present thus turns out to be much more complex than it appears at first. Clearly, too, the represented past is rarely characterized by timelessness, or undifferentiated duration, alone, and its constitutive power for the present depends on a combination of detemporalizing and temporalizing aspects, on a play of discontinuity and continuity in time. This play—and even conflict—is particularly intense in hierarchical societies and perfectly illustrated by the Hawaiian case, to which I now turn.

**Genealogies and narratives**

A major division characterizes Hawaiian society: that between nobles (*ali‘i*) and commoners (*maka‘ainana*, lit. “people who attend the land” [Pukui and Elbert 1986: 224]). The nobles are people with a genealogy (*kū’auhau, mo‘o kū’auhau*), people, then, who have a history and whose identity is determined by relationships with the past. Commoners, in contrast, are not allowed to have genealogies (S. M. Kamakau 1961: 242; Apr. 20, 1896, article in *Ka Makaainana*, trans. in McKinzie 1983: 2): They are defined only by their present relations of subordination to the nobles who grant them the use of the land in exchange for products and services (Richards 1973: 22.; Malo 1951: 61). Evidently for the Hawaiians an identity that does not endure in time has little value: it is not noble.

Noble genealogies do not automatically persist in time, though; they must be validated by a continuing relationship with a “core” line—the senior line, which is also by definition the ruling line. To be considered a noble, one must be able to trace, through either female or male links or both, a genealogical relationship with at least one ancestor appearing in that senior line within a ten-generation limit (Malo 1951: 192; S. M. Kamakau 1961: 243). Largesse, privileges, and particularly land (which is controlled by the ruler) are in theory distributed proportionally to the degree of closeness to the core line. The single-line (cf. Cartwright 1933: 3), mostly patrilineal dynastic core is thus surrounded, for a span of about ten generations, by a dense bilateral network that depends on that core for its reproduction. In the genealogical, chanted panegyrics called *mele ko‘ihomua* this network is ignored and the dynastic line is represented as autonomous: it
is allegedly reproduced by an inner virtue that comes from its divine past.  

The historical narratives (mo’olelo) and the informal, ambilateral, and even bilateral genealogies that complete them tell a different story, however. They show that multiple-line networks and single-line dynasties are mutually dependent for their reproduction (Valeri 1985b [see Chapter II, this volume]) and, moreover, that the unilineal, indeed mostly patrilineal, characterization of the dynastic lines in the chants is largely illusory. The basic reason why this characterization is illusory is that the distinction between patrilinearly inherited titular rank and bilateral personal rank that exists in Tonga (Bott 1981, 1982) is not found in Hawaii, where succession goes from father to son only if the son reproduces or increases the rank of the father. But since the son’s rank depends on his mother as much as on his father, a dynasty can autonomously reproduce its rank only if its male members consistently marry their sisters. However, brother-sister marriage is allowed to happen only exceptionally; otherwise the collateral lines would steadily lose rank for lack of access to the rank of the senior line (Valeri 1972).

The dynasty must reproduce, then, by way of a trade-off between it and its collaterals: In exchange for political support, it gives the collaterals part of its rank through its women. But unless the ruling line periodically shuts itself off by making a few brother-sister (or uncle-niece) marriages, its rank becomes equal to that of some of its collaterals, who may then wrest the rule from the patrilineal success-

10. The most extended and most important genealogical chant is the Kumulipo (Liliuokalani 1897; Beckwith 1951). The chant of Kūalili contains another important genealogical tree (Fornander 1916–20, 4: 370–73). Most one-line pedigrees written down in the nineteenth century seem to have been extracted from genealogical chants (see S. M. Kamakau 1961: 241). The most important may be found in the newspaper Kumu Hawaii (1835: 133; reprinted in McKinzie 1983: ix–xv); in the chronicle Moolelo Hawaii (1838); in Fornander (1878–80, I: 184–96); and in Beckwith (1932: 191–92). The genealogy put together by the nineteenth-century Hawaiian historian Samuel Kamakau, and first published in the newspaper Ka Nonanona on Oct. 25, 1842, is much fuller than any of these, perhaps because of the antiquarian interests of its compiler (reprinted in McKinzie 1983: xix–xxiii; cf. 1).

ors. The historical narratives show that the collaterals frequently take control, thus belying the image of dynastic continuity presented in the genealogical chants. Moreover, the bilateral reckoning of rank creates another and more disruptive (from the dynastic point of view) possibility: A lowborn upstart who has mustered enough support and military power to take the kingship by force is able to graft himself onto the royal line by marrying the sister or daughter of the defeated ruler. His children’s rank will be increased by their mother’s; and if his sons marry high-ranking women, their own children will bring the new ruling line to the high status that the displaced line possessed.

Insofar as there is genealogical continuity in this case, it is through females and not males, contrary to what the genealogical chants, with few exceptions, claim. Indeed, the chants suppress the fact that even father-son successions are mediated by matrilateral relations and that the patrilineal reproduction of a dynasty depends on its ability to secure high-ranking wives. But while the prose narratives emphasize the centrality of these marriages and of the matrilateral relations they secure, genealogical chants include women mostly as appendages of their male spouses, very rarely as sources of relations.

Narrative representations of succession to kingship contrast with the genealogical chants’ representations in another—and perhaps more fundamental—respect. They show that genealogically inherited rank is not the only criterion of succession and that other criteria may be equally—and sometimes more—legitimate. These alternative criteria are particularly prominent in the narratives that cover the period of ten generations or so from King Līloa to King Kamehameha I (who died in 1819) on the island of Hawai‘i. As we have seen, a past ten generations deep is the most relevant for the internal organization of a kingdom and for political action in general. Not surprisingly, therefore, this is the temporal span best covered in the narratives and in-

12. “Sometimes the hereditary chief lost his land, and the kingdom was taken by force and snatched away by a warrior, and the name of ‘chief’ was given to him because of his prowess” (S. M. Kamakau 1964: 4; cf. 6, 9).

13. This process (and the ensuing break in the dynastic continuity) is thus described by a native historian: “The branch of Keawe’s line was broken by those below; those below climbed up to the peak and those above went down to the bottom. Hence the chiefs were now up, now down, like the olapa dance” (Kepelino 1932: 132). One understands why an appropriate blessing for a high chief is e nī‘aupi‘o o ka lani—may he and his descendants live on in purity of rank (Pukui 1983: saying 339).
formal genealogical records, and also the one they account for in a manner very different from that of formal genealogical chants, which make no difference between it and earlier periods.

The tone for the period that begins with Līloa is set by the traditions concerning this king’s succession. They stage a major paradox of Hawaiian political life: A high-ranking person may not act like one—be pious, generous, and valorous—whereas a low-ranking person may act like a high-ranking one. To understand how the paradox is resolved, we must keep in mind that rank is the expression of a divine potency (mana) acquired through descent from the gods, who are the ultimate ancestors. But mana may also be directly given by the gods to a person they elect, or it may be obtained by ritual, priestly mediated means. However obtained, god-given mana is the true source of legitimacy, and its presence is demonstrated, in the last analysis, by the success of a person’s endeavors. Therefore Hawaiians treated as divinely legitimate, indeed as divine, not only the highest ranking nobles but also those who, however low born, successfully conquered the kingdom (Remy 1862: 157; S. M. Kamakau 1961: 230; cf. Valeri 1985b: 95, 98 [Chapter II, this volume]).

All these points are illustrated by the story of Līloa’s sons: ‘Umi, who is very low ranking (his mother is a commoner) but who has all the chiefly qualities, and Hākau, whose high rank is unimpeachable but who behaves in a cruel, unchiefly manner. After a brief and unsuccessful period of joint rule imposed by Līloa, ‘Umi is finally able to defeat Hākau and to become the only successor to his father because he obtains the support of some important priests and because his generosity and valor attract a number of faithful followers. While the genealogical chants present ‘Umi as a legitimate successor to Līloa by descent, the narrative traditions openly present him as genealogically illegitimate (he is considered merely a kanaka, “servant” or “vassal,” by his father and called kauwā, “slave” or “outcast,” by Hākau [For- nander 1916–20, 4: 185; S. M. Kamakau 1961: 8]) but as legitimated by his very success, obtained by generosity and valor but also by violence and trickery (for instance, he pretends to have magical powers but has none [Valeri 1985b: 82 (Chapter II, this volume)])

That these actions are considered legitimate and even legitimating (since they are successful) is indicated by the fact that they are also

14. After having enumerated their taboos, Ţī concludes: “So you see, our chiefs used to be gods” (Ţī 1841). See also Valeri (1985a: 141–53).
used to characterize other rulers’ methods for rising in power. For instance, the parallelisms between the biography of ‘Umi and that of Kamehameha have been emphasized by the latter’s historians to justify his career. But the correspondences were not just constructed a posteriori: they were produced, in the first place, by Kamehameha’s following the precedents set in the biographies of ‘Umi and similar rulers. For instance, he probably used the analogies between his relationship with Kiwalaˈō (the high-ranking son of his uncle, King Ka-laniˈōpuˈu) and ‘Umi’s relationship with Hākau to feel allowed by precedent to liquidate Kiwalaˈō (for these and other analogies, see Valeri 1982 [see Chapter III, this volume]; S. M. Kamakau 1961: 209; Kuykendall 1938: 62). Another chief who clearly had ‘Umi’s precedent in mind was Boki, who, when he planned to rebel against Kaˈahumanu in 1827, started a huge farm to attract clients (Tī 1963: 153), precisely as ‘Umi had done.

It appears, then, that while genealogical chants legitimate rulers by showing that divine potency flows to them in an uninterrupted descent from firstborn to firstborn, historical narratives legitimate rulers mostly by allowing them to demonstrate that their actions correspond to successful precedents. Thus genealogical chants legitimate through predominantly syntagmatic connections with the past, whereas historical narratives legitimate through predominantly paradigmatic ones. Of course, the two forms of legitimation may be combined. Rarely do successful upstarts have no genealogical connection at all with the past, nor can genealogically legitimate rulers succeed their fathers or main-tain their rule without having recourse to the Machiavellian methods illustrated in the narratives. Furthermore, there are components of paradigmatic legitimation in the genealogical chants and of syntag-matic legitimation in the narratives.

One important paradigmatic component of the status lineage depicted in the genealogical chants is the contrast senior/junior, which correlates with certain expected behavioral traits: Junior lines are supposed to be unruly, more active than the senior ones, and so forth. From this point of view, the genealogies may be read as statements to the effect that one is predestined (and thus also legitimated) by birth

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15. For a similar striving in eighteenth-century Java to follow a historical precedent and then to emphasize historiographically the correspondence between the precedent and its replication, see Ricklefs (1974: 74–76).
to instantiate certain categories of action (cf. Sahlins 1981a: 16).\textsuperscript{16} However, the junior dynasties' attempts to demonstrate their connection with the senior ones, or even to take their place as seniors, show that the main thrust of the genealogical chants is to legitimate rulers by providing, not a justification for their modes of action through a connection with the appropriate ancestors, but the closest possible connection with the senior line of the status lineage. Consequently, genealogical space is viewed as more homogeneous than heterogeneous; different hierarchical positions in it are identified more by the degree to which they metonymically instantiate a single form (thus by a scale type of classification [cf. Collingwood 1933: 60]) than by a logic of genus and species.\textsuperscript{17} Examples of the tension between the two logics in the genealogies, but also of the preeminence of the former one in the Hawaiian as in all other status lineage systems (see supra section on the legitimating past) are provided by the dynasties of the islands of Maui and Hawai‘i.

From the categorical standpoint, the activism of these dynasties fits their junior position in the status lineage (they belong to the junior Hema section of the junior Ulu branch [cf. Fornander 1878–80, I: 190–94]). Yet their members have constantly attempted to counter this junior status by claiming connections with the most senior line, the Nanaulu (Fornander 1878–80, 2: 22, 48). For instance, the Kumulipo chant, which was composed for a noble of the dynasty of Hawai‘i, bypasses that dynasty’s genealogy altogether to trace his ancestry, through his mother’s patriline, to the higher-ranking line of the island of Maui, which, via a crucial alliance, was connected with the

\textsuperscript{16} This view receives some support from a few Hawaiian sayings (Pukui 1983: sayings 2418, 794–97, 817, 921, 1922).

\textsuperscript{17} Interestingly, the primary meanings of mo‘o, the word that, alone or compounded with others (especially kāʻauhau), designates “genealogical line,” are “succession, series” (Pukui and Elbert 1986: 253). The word does not convey the notion of genus, which is so prominent in the English term genealogy, derived from the Greek génos, and in equivalent terms in many other languages (Tibetan is a particularly interesting case, although the notion of genealogy as a “chain” or “series” exists in it too; see Stein 1971: 537–45). Another indication that the “genus” aspect is less important than the “series” aspect in the Hawaiian notion of genealogy is that neither the “kinship I” (Prytz-Johansen 1954: 36) nor positional succession with its frequent correlate, a title system (respectively a pronominal and a nominal reduction of all members of a line to a genus), is found in Hawaii, as far as I am aware.
ruling line of O’ahu and through it, with the “blue-blooded” (Beckwith 1940: 387) Nanaulu line (Kumulipo, II. 2092–2102; Beckwith 1951: 137–39; Fornander 1878–80, I: 189, 2: 83–87). While the connection with the Nanaulu is alluded to but not developed in the Kumulipo chant, it becomes the only one in another royal genealogy that exploits the same alliance (Fornander 1878–80, I: 188–89). Analogously, some genealogies attempt to prove that King Keawe of Hawai‘i and his half sister and wife, Kalanikauleleia‘wi, descend from the Nanaulu (Fornander 1878–80, 2: 204), although others stress their connection with the Ulu-Hema branch (Pogue 1858: 33–34; Ke Kumu Hawai‘i 1835: 133, reprinted in McKinzie 1983: xiv–xv; Ka Nonanona, Oct. 25, 1842, reprinted in McKinzie 1983: xxi–xxiii). No doubt, different connections were mobilized for different purposes, probably also reflecting the above-mentioned contrast between classification by scale or by genus and species. But we also know that certain shifts from junior to senior became exclusive and permanent. For instance, when Kamehameha, the most famous of the junior heroic rulers of the Hawai‘i dynasty, conquered Maui, he stole the Maui dynasty’s senior status relative to the Hawai‘i dynasty by stealing their apical ancestor, Hanala‘anui (Fornander 1878–80, 2: 27).

These attempts to show that the usurping juniors are in fact genealogically senior contrast sharply with the narratives’ frank recognition that they are not and that the major sources of their legitimacy are not genealogical. The contrast is even more strident in the case of the mythical founder of the Hawai‘i dynasty: Pili. Although the narrative traditions represent him as a usurper sponsored by a priest who brought him to Hawai‘i from a distant land, the genealogies “piece him on to already existing Hawaiian lines” (Fornander 1878–80, 2: 27, cf. 33–38). Indeed, they transform him into a descendant of the ruler he displaced (Kapawa, known in the genealogies as Heleipawa [Fornander 1878–80, I: 191; cf. Sahlins 1981a: 10–11]). In sum, the dominant preoccupation of the royal genealogies is apparently to stress unbroken syntagmatic continuity with the founding past. Because this past’s specific categorical content is left vague by them, it can be viewed as embodying a generic potentiality for actions whose models may be freely chosen rather than predetermined by heredity.

Even when genealogical chants such as the Kumulipo include narrative portions detailing certain formative events, they do not abandon the dogma of genealogical continuity and the correlative emphasis on the syntagmatic dimension of the relationship with the past. It is true
that these portions have been interpreted by Beckwith (1951) as allegories of usurpation, as veiled references to the displacement of established lines by upstart ones. But I find little evidence in the text of the *Kumulipo* itself for these farfetched interpretations, most of which were suggested to Beckwith by modern Hawaiian informants.

Let us begin with the latest of these “usurpations.” Beckwith claims that the youngest of the four Maui brothers, the famous trickster (called Maui-a-ka-malo, “Maui of the loincloth,” in the *Kumulipo*, I: 1,986), succeeds Kalapana (Beckwith 1951: 128). However, Beckwith must recognize (ibid.: 116) that her claim is merely a hypothesis since the chant, contrary to other genealogies (see Fornander 1878–80, I: 191), does not explicitly say that the Maui who succeeded Kalapana was the youngest one (see *Kumulipo*, I: 2,049). But even if we grant the hypothesis, we cannot accept Beckwith’s further claim that the youngest Maui was not the son of Kalapana but of some god. Beckwith’s thesis is based on the arbitrary conflation of the version of Maui’s birth contained in the *Kumulipo* with the version in the prose rendition of the myth. According to the latter, Hīna, the wife of Kalapana, finds a loincloth on a beach, puts it on, and as a result conceives her youngest son. Kalapana recognizes him as the offspring of a god (Beckwith 1940: 229). This divine origin qualifies him to succeed Kalapana in violation of the rule of primogenitural succession. But the *Kumulipo* explicitly says on two occasions (II: 1987, 2009) that the loincloth worn by Hīna belongs to her husband, not to a god. Thus, while the chant agrees with the prose version in saying that the youngest Maui was not conceived in an ordinary way, it contradicts it in stressing that he is his father’s son nevertheless. In sharp contrast to the narrative, then, the chant makes the ideology of descent triumph even if we accept the hypothesis that it is the youngest and most extraordinary Maui who succeeds his father.

An earlier episode of the chant that Beckwith also interprets as usurpation concerns Wākea’s succession. Wākea begets a child with the goddess Hīna. In a very obscure passage the chant describes the child as a cock perching on Wākea’s back. According to Beckwith, this means that “he usurps the normal succession upon the family line” (1951: 99). However, the *Kumulipo* and all other genealogies trace Wākea’s descent through his firstborn son, Hāloa, not through this pretended (and unnamed) usurper. The label usurpation applies somewhat better to the earliest mythical episode in the *Kumulipo*. The story is that a human, Kiʻi, succeeds in impregnating his elder
sister, La‘i‘a‘i, before the god Kāne does. Because La‘i‘a‘i’s firstborn
is a son of Ki‘i and not of Kāne, Ki‘i’s descendants—“the long line of
chiefs of the forest upland enumerated in chant eleven” (Beckwith
1951: 103)—take precedence over the line of gods descended from
Kāne. In this sense, the humans have usurped the gods’ preeminent
position. But they have done so by using the principle of genealogical
seniority to their advantage, not by violating it. Furthermore, Ki‘i
himself is born before Kāne, who is his younger brother (Kumulipo,
II: 613–14). Thus the chant affirms the principle of genealogical le-
gitimacy all the more strongly because he does so by way of a
paradox; it shows that the principle overrules even the ordinary
superordin-ation of gods to humans. But this reversal does not occur
again in the Kumulipo: it happens once and for all to explain why the
royal lineage is divine.

In sum, the incorporation of narrative elements in the Kumulipo
implicitly counters their possible paradigmatic use to justify usur-
pation. The chant attempts to demonstrate either that those mythical
events do not involve genealogical discontinuity or that the usur-
pations depicted are only possible in the founding past, with which
subsequent generations have had (and thus future ones must continue
to have) only syntagmatic connections determined by descent, not
paradigmatic ones.

As the genealogical chants may legitimate not only through the
predominant syntagmatic relations but also through some paradig-
matic ones, so narrative traditions may establish the legitimacy of cer-
tain events through their syntagmatic relations with antecedents, in
addition to establishing it through the more usual paradigmatic  rela-
tions. In fact the global image of history derived from the narrative tra-
dition as a whole is that of a cumulative process in which later events
presuppose earlier ones. Each event is a step in the formation of
Hawaiian society. First Wākea establishes the taboo system, par-
ticularly the alimentary separation of the sexes and the separation
of things impure from things pure. Then Haho institutes the ‘aha ail‘i,
the system that sharply contrasts those who have genealogies and
those who do not. At a later stage still, Pā‘ao modifies the style of tem-
ple architecture and increases the frequency of human sacrifice
(Remy 1862: 84–85; Fornander 1878–80, 2: 28, 33–38, 59; Valeri
1985a: 169–71). The process never seems to stop at a point where a
complete structure, to be replicated in identical form in successive
generations, is achieved; it continues down to the present and thus
invites its further continuation by the invention of new institutions and practices. From this point of view, narrative history constitutes a precedent not simply for established practice but also for the establishment of new practices. This undercurrent of syntagmatic legitimation is particularly evident in the history of the ten generations or so from Līloa to Kamehameha (see details in Valeri 1990c [Chapter V, this volume]).

In sum, this comparison of narrative and genealogical history demonstrates that paradigmatic and syntagmatic dimensions coexist in both, although for purposes of legitimation, the paradigmatic one dominates in the narratives and the syntagmatic one in the genealogies. But it is also obvious that both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations are much more complex in the realm of action depicted in narrative history than in the status lineage depicted in the genealogical texts.

The comparison also shows that however much one genealogical chant may differ from another chant, and one narrative from another narrative, their genres differ more because they correspond to different views of history. Narratives depict succession as a complex social process, which encompasses genealogical argument as only one (though extremely important) component and which takes a variety of forms that cannot be reduced to a single rule (cf. Valeri 1990c [Chapter V, this volume]). Genealogies, instead, represent succession as merely the instantiation of the rule of primogeniture and, with few exceptions, represent the firstborn as male. They thus reduce the social history of kingship to natural history—to mere procreation. The effect is to make succession appear to be beyond human choice and intention and thus to make it unquestionable.

Some may object, however, that I am reading an ideological contrast where only a difference of purpose and complexity may exist. Genealogical chants attempt to validate the claim of a certain individual to high rank by following the most favorable line, not to depict the process of succession in all its complexity. They are selective, but not necessarily untrue, and they may in fact implicitly refer to the wider context described in narratives and other genealogies. But the chants’ accounts of genealogical relations are not simply selective; they are often incompatible with the larger picture that they supposedly refer to. For instance, they treat king lists (lists of successors to kingship) as descent lines (Cartwright 1930: 46; Beckwith 1951: 149); they transform complicated consanguineal or affinal relationships into
descent in the direct line;\(^{18}\) they make elder brothers out of younger ones or, conversely, transform younger brothers into sons of the elder brothers to whom they have succeeded;\(^{19}\) they leave out defeated rulers, corulers (cf. Fornander 1916–20, 4: 364–65), and others. They do all these because their genre requires that all relevant ancestors be presented in single-line pedigrees to convey the idea of uninterrupted succession.

Whatever the compatibility or incompatibility in propositional content that may exist between a certain genealogical chant and a certain prose narrative, their true difference lies in the fact that their genres do not give propositional content the same importance to obtain their effects. The basic fact about the genealogical chants is that they are chants—compositions powerful because of their formal qualities—whereas the basic fact about the narratives is that they use prose, in which form retreats before content.

**History as magic and as argument**

The genealogical chants, the *mele koihonua*, have much in common with other chanted panegyrics that are the property of a high-ranking noble—*mele inoa* (chants [praising] the name), *mele ma‘i* (chants [praising] the genitals), *mele hanau* (birth chants)—in all of which the praised person is related to ancestral, divine, and cosmic entities together with their attributes. The *mele koihonua* differ from the other chants just mentioned in representing these relations in predominantly genealogical, and therefore metonymic, form. Indeed they make human dynasties the continuation of cosmic ones that include gods and natural species and that go back to the origins of life. The other chants, in contrast, present some of the same relations in

18. For instance, in the *Kumu Hawaii* genealogy, Kanaloakapulehu, the successor of Iwikauika‘a, figures as his son, although he is his son-in-law.

19. The *Kumu Hawaii* genealogy again provides an example: Most incongruously, it puts Kauikealo‘ula‘ula (Kamehameha III) in the position of son of his elder brother and predecessor, Liholiho (Kamehameha II). This example confirms that royal genealogies are often just king lists.

20. “A birth chant is similar to a name chant. Both concern the origin and ancestry of a line of ruling chiefs. The main difference is that the birth chant, as the term suggests, concentrates at some point on the circumstances—cosmological, astrological, and by necessity gynecological—of the actual begetting and bearing of the infant” (Pukui and Korn 1973: 198).
pre-dominantly synchronic and metaphoric form. In all cases, a high-ranking noble is praised as the epitome of the whole cosmos, its representative in human form, at the center of society. Even when the chants do not have a genealogical form, they indirectly exalt the genealogical principle.

While the mele hanau focus on birth as one’s connection with an ancestral line and ultimately with the cosmos, the mele ma‘i celebrate one’s ability to continue, through the act of procreation, that line and the cosmic process that encompasses it (Handy and Pukui 1972: 84).

Both therefore implicitly celebrate a line by explicitly celebrating the individual in which its generative potency is manifested at a given moment; both can potentially be expanded into genealogies. Reciprocally, genealogical chants proper can expand themes already contained in them to become birth chants or genital chants or name chants. Indeed, many chants combine these various aspects and may therefore be called by any of the names for the chants.

The Kumulipo, besides being the most elaborate mele koihonua extant, is also a mele hanau and a mele inoa. The genealogical framework of the chant is filled with various poetical developments that make it appropriate for use in a birth rite and as praise for Kalanimui‘ama‘amao, the newborn noble for whom it was composed. One of many name and birth chants that, reciprocally, include genealogical sections or allusions is the mele inoa of Kūali‘i, a king of O‘ahu. It contains a long genealogical section (Fornander 1916–20, 4: 370ff.) that preserves the so-called Kumuali‘i and Kumulipo genealogies, which is why Samuel Kamakau calls it a mele koihonua rather than a mele inoa (S. M. Kamakau in Roberts 1926: 59; cf. Stokes 1930: 26). The mele inoa of Pele‘iohōlani is also a mele koihonua in that it includes the genealogical tree of Olōlo and Hāloa; and the mele inoa of Kamahanao includes the genealogical tree of Palikū and Puna‘imua (S. M. Kamakau in Roberts 1926: 59).

One designation was probably applied to a chant in preference to another because of the context in which the chant was used at one particular moment. The very multivocality of their expression, the stratifications of meaning that they contain, and the multiple interpretations that they allow facilitate the use of the

21. Together the two types of chant imply that “the individual in old Hawaii viewed himself as a link between his long line of forebears and his descendants, even those yet unborn” (Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1971–79, I: 182).
same chants for different purposes and even, it seems, for different people (cf. Pukui 1949: 255; Pukui 1983: saying 1621).

The chants’ elaborate compositional forms are based on “name and term associations expressed through identities and antitheses” (Stokes 1930: 8), which create rhyming patterns. The chants also have a musical, particularly rhythmic structure that is subtly intertwined with their semantic component (Roberts 1926: 57–69). In addition, they are frequently choreographed (K. Kamakau 1919–20: 2–4; Malo 1951: 231; Handy and Pukui 1972: 84; Barrère, Pukui, and Kelly 1980: 21).22 Chants, genealogical or otherwise, are thus “total works of art” and should be evaluated as such and not simply for their propositional content. But they are works of art that have magical, not simply aesthetic, effects (Handy and Pukui 1972: 93). For instance, mele hanau (such as the one composed for Kauikeaouli, the future Kamehameha III) are performed to facilitate birth or even to revive a stillborn child (Pukui and Korn 1973: 12–28). Also, panegyrics with ancestry included are chanted and danced during the pregnancy of a chief in order to protect the fetus against sorcery and to help its development (Malo 1951: 136; K. Kamakau 1919–20: 2–3; cf. Pukui and Korn 1973: 12; Valeri 1985a: 218). The Kumulipo was chanted, according to tradition, in connection with the birth of Kalaninui‘iamamao and on the deathbed of one of his descendants (Liliuokalani 1897: introduction), probably because as a celebration of the life of the cosmos as embodied in a noble, it was believed to ward off a noble’s death.

Panegyrics with genealogical and sexual elements (probably, thus, of the mele ma‘i type) are also chanted and choreographed to bring “an enriching and empowering magic” (Handy 1931: 12) to the first union of a high-ranking noble (Malo 1951: 136). The magical character of all panegyrical chants is also indicated by the strict taboos that surrounded their composition and their composers (cf. S. M. Kamakau in Roberts 1926: 59–60) and particularly by the rule of auspiciousness that dictated the choice of the words employed in the compositions. Writes Pukui: “Carelessness in the choice of words might result in death for the composers or the person for whom it was

22. The chants that were not danced to were called oli, properly speaking, especially if they had “prolonged phrases chanted in one breath, often with a trill (‘i‘i) at the end of the phrase” (Pukui and Elbert 1986: 285). But according to some, to distinguish oli from the other chants (mele) is not so easy (Emerson 1965: 254).
composed. . . . Words and word combinations were studied to see whether they were auspicious or not” (1949: 247; cf. Pukui 1983: sayings 800, 2062). Samuel Kamakau stresses that the choices were meant to obtain definite effects: “Each word had to be studied for its meaning, whether lucky or unlucky, and for its effect [in this particular connection], whether it suggested good or bad luck, a stingy or kind person, a grumbler or a brave one” (1961: 241).

Even the purely genealogical portions of the chants show that they are meant to achieve effects through poetic means, rather than through argument. Not only is “the whole meticulous structure” of these genealogies a rhetorical device whose purpose is to convey the idea of “unbroken inheritance” (Beckwith 1951: 143), but even the “genealogical” connections among ancestors (particularly the more distant ones) are in fact often based on name association and various other principles of poetic composition, whose purpose is partly incantational, partly mnemotechnic (cf. Stokes 1930: 8–12). The obsessive repetition of the same schemes—and ultimately of the genealogical one that unifies them all—is meant to capture the entire universe, the entire history of nature and humankind, and to bring it to bear on the noble whose name is put at the end of the chant. As Stokes puts it:

The charging of the divine chief with mana is made possible through the belief in the magic omnipotence of names. We find in the Kumulipo chant the name of every form or being apparently known to Hawaiians, arranged in progression from the state of chaos through all known and many other stages of growth, creation, evolution or generation, through gods and human beings, right down the line to the newborn chiefly babe. There is nothing which may be regarded as prayer. The mere recitation of names forms a chain along which the accumulated mana of ages untold may be moved into the recipient shell. I have observed fears among Hawaiians that mana may not go straight. The chain then becomes a verbal tube, the leaks of which are closed by the repetition of the innumerable name variations. (1930: 12–13)

Therefore, in comparing the narrative accounts of succession in the last ten (and, to a lesser extent, twenty) generations with their genealogical counterparts, one should not separate the latter from all that precedes them in the chants. For when they are viewed in their proper setting, these genealogical accounts cannot be considered simplified renderings that implicitly refer to the more detailed descrip-
tions of the narratives; they refer, instead, to the rest of the chant and reflect its structure, which has little to do with that of the narratives. This autonomous structure was the main ground for evaluating the chanted genealogies, and on it we must base our understanding of their relationship with the narrative texts. Moreover, the contrasting structures of the two genres must be related to their purposes, which are also to a large extent different.

The purpose of a genealogical chant is to obtain various effects (to facilitate birth, ward off death, promote procreative potency, or simply to glorify a name) by establishing a connection between the person who must benefit from the effect and the ancestral line (human and beyond a certain point cosmic) through which flows the life force that produces the effect. The question arises, Why should the chant describe that connection in order to make it efficacious for the particular goal it has in mind? Is birth not sufficient to establish a connection with the ancestral line and thus to obtain its potency? Is not membership in a noble line and the benefits, magical and otherwise, that come from it, a given?

We see it as a given, and yet we are told that the Kumulipo, for instance, is called he pule hoʻolaʻa aliʻi (Liliuokalani 1897: 1), “a magic spell for the consecration of a noble [that is, for making one a noble—V. V.]” (Liliuokalani 1897: introduction; Beckwith 1951: 9). Why was the chanting of Kalaninuiʻtamamao’s connection with his ancestral line at his birth a necessary condition for making him a member of that line and thus for “consecrating” him—making him into a sacred noble? We may surmise that in this case, as in the case of any other charm or prayer, the names of the ancestors must be recited to call them so that they can witness the birth of the new offshoot of their line and convey their potency to it.23 The ancestors’ acceptance is what really makes the newborn a descendant. This connection with the ancestors, and the flow of potency, of life, that it brings about, will have to be established again by the performance of the chant every time the noble is threatened by death, sickness, or simply the

23. Going back in time is equivalent to reaching the other world, in which the ancestors continue to live. This other world is referred to by the same metaphor (pō, “night”), which is also used to refer to the distant, original past with which the Kumulipo chant begins. There is thus a clear parallelism between the memory of the Hawaiian chanter and the Mnemosyne of the archaic Greek chanter: In the Theogony, as in the Kumulipo, “The past appears as a dimension of the other world” (Vernant 1974, 1: 87).
challenge of those who deny his or her noble ancestry (Pukui 1983: sayings 31, 231; Beckwith 1951: 36; Handy and Pukui 1972: 199). As in every Hawaiian royal ritual, divine and ancestral recognition is doubled by a less explicit, but no less crucial, recognition that comes from a living human audience (cf. Valeri 1985a). The human spectators witness the successful evocation of the ancestors and gods (indeed of the entire universe, mobilized through the names of its components), and through their recognition the evocation becomes real, socially efficacious.\textsuperscript{21} The ancestors’ recognition thus presupposes the spectators’ recognition—in fact it is the spectators’ recognition in disguise and, so to speak, partly alienated from them. \textit{Vox populi} presents itself as \textit{vox deorum}.

That the audience is not a passive spectator of the power of the ritual chanting but an essential part of what constitutes it is explicitly recognized in Hawaii. Indeed Pukui reports that “the kaona of a chant was ineffective unless chanted before a gathering” (Pukui 1949: 249). The word \textit{kaona} refers in general to the “inner meaning” (ibid.: 247) and in particular to “words with double meanings that might bring good or bad fortune” (Pukui and Elbert 1986: 130). The idea that the magical force of the chant depends on the reaction it elicits in its audience and that this force is all the more powerful the more numerous the audience is, is illustrated by Pukui, who, after mentioning that birthday parties were a favorite occasion for performing such chants because they were attended by many people, reports the following anecdote:

A relative of mine, of my grandmother’s generation, had a lover who was very dear to her. He came to Honolulu and forgot to return after finding another sweetheart in town. She promptly composed a poem in which she used many words meaning to bind, make fast, to nail down securely, and wove them into a poem for hula dancing. She chanted it at the first birthday party of a cousin, and so delighted her hearers that she was asked to repeat it several times. In the meantime, a feeling of restlessness came over her lover in Honolulu. A longing to see his Kau sweetheart seized him, and he took the first boat to Hawaii. He could hardly wait to marry her. (Pukui 1949: 249)

\textsuperscript{24} This view exists among other Polynesians. In Tikopia, for instance, “considerable importance” is attached to a ritual’s “validation by consensus” (Firth 1970: 224).
The notion that divine (and, implicitly or explicitly, human) recognition is necessary to make one a member of a noble dynasty—and that this recognition is the result of the very power of the verbal magic of chants—can have a narrow or a wide application. It has a narrow application when the thing to be recognized is actual birth. Here the performance of the chant allows the children of a royal couple who are recognized as members of the dynasty to be discriminated from those children of the same couple (or of each spouse separately) who are not. By adding to mere descent another and more important quality (being represented as a descendant in a chant), the chants in effect constitute single-line genealogical trees while claiming merely to represent them. Far from being a simplified account implicitly demanding to be completed by the accounts of informal genealogies and narratives, then, genealogical chants stand in opposition to them. Indeed, they are the instrument for invalidating them, or rather, for making them irrelevant. What they implicitly say is this: The persons we exclude undoubtedly descend from that king, but the fact is irrelevant because it is unsung.  

25 After all, commoners are also said to descend from kings, but they are forbidden to own genealogical chants or even informal genealogies that make that fact good (cf. S. M. Kamakau 1961: 19, 242). The use of genealogical chants thus belies their overt content: that birth alone is the principle of legitimate succession. Not birth alone, but the representation of birth as if it were alone. Therefore political rivals may fight one another by opposing the possession of chants to nonpossession (for an example, see Fornander 1916–20, ...
4: 280–89) and also, of course, by opposing one chant to another (cf. S. M. Kamakau 1961: 152–53).

But the constitutive, magical power of the genealogical chants may have a wider application than the validation of proper birth. The chants may be used to make one a member of the dynasty irrespective of proper birth or even, exceptionally, irrespective of birth altogether. The latter case is illustrated by the alleged chanting of the *Kumulipo* in Hikiau temple to confirm the identification of Captain Cook with Lonoikamakahiki. This is the name of the god Lono when he arrives in Hawaii during the Makahiki festival; but in the *Kumulipo*, the name is also used to refer to Kalaninui‘iamamao, probably because this noble was born during the festival. The name stands at the end of the chant that consecrates Kalaninui‘iamamao as a member of the royal dynasty. It seems, therefore, that the performance of the *Kumulipo* equated Cook not only with Lonoikamakahiki the god but also with Lonoikamakahiki the member of the royal dynasty (cf. Liliuokalani 1897: introduction; cf. Sahlins 1981a: 16). Since the latter Lonoikamakahiki was the father of Kalani‘ōpu‘u, who ruled at the time of Cook’s visit, it would seem that Cook was also given the status of Kalani‘ōpu‘u’s father! The eyewitness accounts of Cook’s consecration in Hikiau temple mention that a chant was recited, but it is of course impossible to establish whether this was in whole or in part the *Kumulipo* (cf. Cook and King 178, 3: 8). Furthermore, it is difficult to trust any of the Hawaiian traditions on Captain Cook. But the accuracy of the tradition matters less than the fact that it testifies to an idea: that chanting an ancestral line with the name of a person not born to it included in the line could transform that person into a member. At any rate, that usurpers from collateral lines such as Kanaloakapulehu could appear in genealogical chants as sons of their predecessors on the throne (*Ke Kumu Hawai‘i* 1835: 133) indicates that the successful performance of these chants was enough to make the usurpers members of the ruling line. The history of ‘Umi says that his father, when he decided to recognize his son, directed him to undergo a rite in which he was symbolically reborn and incised again in order to be incorporated into the royal line (Fornander 1916–20, 4: 184–85). It is possible and indeed likely that this rite involved the chanting of the dynasty’s *mele koihonua*, since birth rites for nobles (such as the one undergone by Kalaninui‘iamamao [Liliuokalani 1897: introduction]) required this recitation (cf. also Fornander 1878–80, 2: 75 n. 1).
All these would tend to confirm the literal truth of Beckwith’s claim that a genealogical chant is “in the nature of a charm” (1951: 36). What the chant describes—sometimes in connection with fictitious representations of birth and/or incision (both are referred to by the same expression, “oki ka piko”)—is brought into existence by the mere act of describing it. More precisely, the description—of somebody’s birth in a genealogical line, say, or simply of somebody’s being part of a line—brings about what it describes if it is approved by an audience that ideally consists of ancestors but in practice consists of living humans. The crucial question, then, is: what criteria guide public support? What prompts the audience to validate the chant’s claims?

One answer is already implicit in my insistence that the chant is a total work of art. It seduces the audience with its beauties, which can be perceived independently of its propositional content but which may rub off on what is minimally perceived of that content: that the person on whose behalf the chant is performed is the legitimate successor in a dynasty. Indeed, one may speculate that the symmetries, antitheses, and musical and gestural devices of the chant serve to put any other content into the background and are thus efficacious, not because their dazzle illuminates, but because it blinds.

Another answer seems more obvious and more important: Precisely because there is a belief that words chanted in the appropriate context and by appropriate persons do not simply communicate what already exists but are capable of validating and even bringing about what they communicate, the appropriate performance of an appropriate chant is considered by the audience as sufficient grounds for believing in its effects. Therefore the successful description of a ruler as a member of a dynasty will prompt the audience to believe that he or she has been successfully validated as such and thus to offer their support.

26. “Genealogies were carefully memorized . . . because of pleasure in recitation” (Elbert 1951: 348).

27. In this respect, Hawaiian panegyrics are functionally similar to the laudes regiae of medieval Europe. As E. H. Kantorowicz has brilliantly demonstrated, these panegyrics had a constitutive or “crypto-constitutive” meaning (1946: 76). “To ‘acclaim’ meant: to ‘create’ a new ruler and to recognize him publicly in his new dignity” (ibid.: 77). The same is true of royal panegyrics in many other cultures. See also Marin’s study of the role of kingly representation in the constitution of Louis XIV’s power, where he concludes that “the power-effect of representation
itary success, prosperity, etc.) that are interpreted as further signs that the ruler has been accepted by the ancestral gods as their legitimate successor. Belief is of course self-fulfilling: It brings about its content precisely because its content is a matter of belief.

However, this answer raises problems. It presupposes that everybody in the audience is equally able to understand and evaluate the performance. While most people are capable of evaluating whether certain minimal felicity conditions (time and place of the performance, status of the performer, uninterrupted utterance of the chant, proper rhythm, etc.) are met, few can probably evaluate felicity in the choice of words, antitheses, and parallelisms—all of which constitute, we are told, the most important sources of the efficacy of the chant. Moreover, because each individual does not react separately to the performance, the collective reaction cannot be viewed as the sum total of individual analyses and judgments, unaffected by the rest of the audience. On the contrary, the chanting is experienced together with the reactions of all those who witness it. Thus what weights an individual judgment is less its object (the chant) than the crowd’s attitude toward it. In the extreme, the object may be fictitious—only the reaction to it gives it reality. This is particularly the case when one does not have the knowledge (and the interest) to judge for oneself. It seems likely, therefore, that the belief that the performance is felicitous forms less as a result of analytic evaluations of the performance itself than as the cumulative result of the influence that, in the course of the chanting, each interpretation of what others think has on each other.

In other words, in the absence of a real ability to interpret the performance, one will believe what all others (and those who are believed to be more knowledgeable in the first place) appear to believe. Belief forms in a play of mirrors, so that for this collective belief in the felicity of the chanting to form, it sometimes suffices that nobody shows disapproval. The collective approval that this abstention from criticism makes possible may eventually influence, malgré eux, even those who disbelieve the chant, perhaps because disbelief (like belief) cannot fully sustain itself without some public echo to it, without making some converts—particularly in a culture where truth cannot be

is representation itself” (Marin 1981: 11). One could say of the Hawaiian king, as of the French one, that “the king is really a king, that is, a monarch, only in his images” (ibid.: 12).
easily differentiated from opinion, since historical information resides in living people, not in inert traces (documents) that appear independent of human relations and interests.

Thus, while disbelieving, one may yet believe. This paradoxical believing in disbelief and disbelieving in belief has often been remarked upon (see, in particular, Mannoni 1969; de Certeau 1981; Valeri 1981a [see Chapter IX, this volume]; Veyne 1976a). It may account for the strange coexistence of two attitudes toward the chanters and thus their products. On the one hand, chanters seem to have been viewed as seers who, precisely because they had the power of making the ancestral deities present in their performances, had access to a superior truth to which it was necessary to yield—at least in the context of the performance—even when it contradicted what was actually remembered or known from purely human sources. On the other hand, the chanters were seen, more cynically, as distorters of historical truth in the interest of their masters. David Malo, for instance, reports that “genealogists were called the washbasins of the ali, in which to cleanse them” of any connection with lower-ranking people or even outcasts (1951: 71). He notes that traditions were sometimes fabricated (ibid.: 1–2). Samuel Kamakau, analogously, remarks on the political function of the court genealogist: “He was like a premier in a foreign country who watched for trouble that might come to his ruler from without, and guarded him against those who spoke disparagingly of his rank and called him slave (kauwa)” (1961: 242).

But it is not necessary to invoke the paradoxes of belief to account for the coexistence of assent and dissent vis-à-vis a chant’s claims. Many clearly manifested their assent to the chant not so much because they believed or half-believed it as because to do so was a conventional sign of allegiance to the ruler who owned the chant or a mark of courtesy and of peaceful intentions toward a peer.29 In fact,

28. Indeed the composition of the chants and accompanying dances “was not a matter of mechanical fabrication, but rather of inspiration: the mele and the hula were often given in a dream” (Handy and Pukui 1972: 84; cf. S. M. Kamakau 1961: 241). Inspired truth does not have to be argued, then: Like the aletheia of the archaic Greek seers, it is valid because it is asserted by a representative of the gods (cf. Détienne 1967).

29. That genealogical claims could be tolerated, although recognized as fictive, is indicated by saying 151 in Pukui 1983.
we must conclude that the chanters themselves did not quite believe in their lofty constructions, since they were usually also responsible for composing and transmitting the prose traditions that not infrequently contradicted them. For many people, the performance of the chants was not very different from those rituals in which one engages just to show where one stands and where one belongs; the basic criterion was owning a chant and being able to perform it, or have it performed, successfully when challenged to do so. A famous episode in the Hawaiian annals provides evidence for this point of view (although it refers to a mele inoa rather than to a genealogical chant proper). A king of Hawai‘i visiting O‘ahu is unexpectedly challenged by the king of that island to produce his mele inoa. The king of Hawai‘i owns no such chant. As luck has it, however, he has spent the previous night with a visiting chief of Kaua‘i and memorized her name chant in the course of their amorous exchanges. He now successfully meets the challenge by reciting this chant. Because the challenger is perfectly aware of the fact that the chant recited is not the king of Hawai‘i’s own but nevertheless accepts it as valid (Fornander 1916–20, 4: 280–89), we must infer that the ability to perform a chant, not its content, counts as a criterion of status legitimation in this case.

But of course genealogical chants may also be used as arguments in the controversies between rivals. Samuel Kamakau describes one such controversy between the cousins Keōua and Kamehameha:

The strife between the chiefs took the form of denying each other’s pure descent from a line of high chiefs. Each was well-versed in genealogical lines, oratory, and minute details in the histories of chiefs, their birthplaces, rules of government and the signs and omens that revealed their ranks as chiefs. Both sides also had composers of meles [chants—V. V.] who chanted the names of ancestors, the high and godlike rank of their own chief, and the mean ancestry of the other. This form of controversy between the two chiefs is well-known today and will be remembered for all time. (1961: 152–53)

Even when used in these controversies, however, the chanting was more effective performatively than argumentatively: It created a ral-

30. The po‘e mo‘olelo (historians) also composed genealogical chants (Kepelino 1932: 134) and in the latter capacity were referred to as po‘e kū‘auhau as well (S. M. Kamakau 1961: 242). They used both genres, history and chants, to establish their master’s legitimacy (ibid.: 242).
lying point for the supporters of a contender, it added their strength to that of argument, and it thus weakened the adversary through more than words. The special emphasis on the performative dimension of chanting in contrast to other, more specifically argumentative forms of communication is revealed by what reportedly happened when Keōua, weakened by the force of words and rituals (cf. Valeri 1985a: 162-63), sought peace: He approached Kamehameha, uttering a chant in his honor, one that perhaps mentioned the exalted ancestry he had previously denied to him (Pukui 1983: 228). The choice of a chant instead of other signs of submission is evidently due to the belief in its superior constitutive power. While all speech putatively had a magical dimension (“ʻolelo, ‘word’ or ‘speech,’ was far more than a means of communicating. To the Hawaiian, the spoken word did more than set into motion forces of destruction and death, forgiveness and healing. The word was itself a force” [Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1972-79, 2: 124]), chanting intensified it—as testified by the fact that most prayers or spells were chanted.

In contrast, prose deemphasizes the magical aspect of speech and emphasizes its descriptive, argumentative aspects. Indeed, it is nowhere said that the recitation of the prose chronicles in appropriate contexts and by appropriate persons has conventional (or expected) effects. One does not even have to follow the prescriptions applying to the stories about the gods, which are sacred and thus “told only by day and the listeners must not move in front of the speaker; to do so would be highly disrespectful to the gods” (Beckwith 1940: 1; cf. Pukui in Hawaiian ethnographical notes I: 1602-5). Although not used ritually, prose narratives are nonetheless constitutive because, as we have seen, they provide arguments for the legitimacy of certain actions and for certain ways of obtaining power. They are constitutive through argument, not through magic. And while genealogical chants may be used as arguments reinforcing or complementing those contained in the narratives, ultimately the global picture of the reproduction of Hawaiian kingship that emerges from the narratives challenges the global picture offered by the genealogical chants. For the latter, kingship is the continuation in society of the procreative principle of nature: the royal dynasty perpetuates and sustains itself only through this principle, and all rulers are thus legitimated exclusively by their birth. For narrative history, however, dynastic continuity is not the hard natural core of society; it is a social fact itself, because it depends on successful social, rule-governed actions. Furthermore,
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Dynastic continuity appears as a retrospective effect of another, deeper-running continuity (which may or may not occur): the continuity of power, where power is defined as the ability to make people act on one’s behalf by the use of force, wealth, and persuasion. Of course, the narratives themselves show that one of the most potent of these persuasive means—and thus one of the most important sources of power, if not the most important one—is genealogical legitimacy. Genealogy gives no empty “prestige” (Kaeppler 1985: 128) in Hawai‘i: even conquerors yield to its power—in order to obtain it for their heirs—in the arms of the sisters or daughters of the kings they have defeated.31 However important genealogical rank is as a source of power, it is not the only one: it is just a part of a complex whole whose functioning is revealed in the narratives. By showing this fact and revealing its consequence—de facto dynastic discontinuity retrospectively represented as continuity—narrative history ultimately accounts for its contrary: magical history. For it is in the chants that the supreme value of continuity is magically reproduced out of the discontinuities represented, and justified, by narrative history.

The coexistence of the two genres, and of the conflicting views of history that they enshrine, is thus explained by the coexistence of a dynastic ideal with the actual social conditions for its realization. To some extent, these conditions are such that the ideal can only be realized in representation, and becomes real only insofar as reality-producing powers are attributed to its representation in certain forms. What is particularly interesting is that the social conditions for the

31. The political importance of genealogical legitimacy (and its ideological supremacy) is well illustrated by the discussions on the criteria to follow in the succession of Kamehameha, an upstart king: “The chiefs disputed about the succession while Kamehameha was living, and Kamehameha asked the opinion of men skilled in genealogies and of the orators and those who knew about government in ancient days. Some of the chiefs and governors thought that the old standards should not count in the succession. But the skilled men told Kamehameha that in order to keep the kingdom united as he left it and prevent its falling to pieces at his death, he must consolidate it under one ruler and must leave it to an heir who was in the ruling line from his ancestors. He should therefore appoint Liholiho his heir and his younger brother, Kau-i-keaouli, to succeed him because, although they came [through their mother, Keōpūolani—V. V.] from the side of the defeated chiefs who were his enemies and not one of whom had aided him to gain the kingdom, they were pi‘o chiefs [the highest ranking—V. V.] belonging to the line of chiefs who owned the rule from their ancestors” (S. M. Kamakau 1961: 429–30; cf. Fornander 1916–20, 4: 262–65).
reproduction of kingship do not have a subterranean, tacit existence in Hawaii: they are legitimated by their explicit articulation in narrated precedents. Furthermore, the narrative genre as a whole enshrines and legitimates a singularly sober, occasionally almost instrumental view of history. In this history the gods are only allowed to intervene indirectly through human spokesmen or through humanly controlled rituals. It is a history made almost entirely human by divine kings, as if only they were powerful enough to banish the gods proper.

Conclusion
Nietzsche, in his scintillating treatment of the use and abuse of history, humorously places the grazing cow, enclosed in the happiness of the eternal present, in silent dialogue with the human passerby, lamenting his inability to forget:

“Why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only stand and gaze at me?” The animal would like to answer, and say “The reason is I always forget what I was going to say”—but then he forgot this answer too, and stayed silent; so that the human being was left wondering.

But he also wonders at himself, that he cannot learn to forget but clings relentlessly to the past; however far and fast he may run, this chain runs with him. (Nietzsche 1983: 60–61)

To be human, then, is to move forward into the future, constantly dragging the chain that binds one to the past. But peoples like the Nuer, the Tallensi, the Merina, or the Balinese are dehumanized by some of their ethnographers, who, by claiming that they live in a “timeless present” (Bloch 1977: 288) or “wholly in the present and the immediately recollected past” (Fortes 1945: xi), seem to suggest that they are not very different, as far as historical consciousness is concerned, from their cattle. It is true that one among these ethnographers, Bloch, claims that traditional societies, particularly hierarchical ones, think of themselves in a timeless present only when they have recourse to their culturally constituted concepts. He is generous enough to concede that they may escape from the fictitious world of culture into the real world of nature and social processes, thanks to an alleged natural “cognition system” (1977: 287), which remains identical in all societies and times. Bloch’s generosity stops short of his colleagues, however; to them he refuses to explain how the intellect can be at one time so extraordinarily free from cultural constraints
that it has a direct line of communication with the “infrastructure” and at another time so extraordinarily determined by them as to be unable to perceive any change or contradiction in society.32

In the Hawaiian case both a representation of history (such as the one contained in the genealogical chants) that stresses continuity between past and present and one that stresses discontinuity and change have their roots in the same culturally constituted social form. Far from lying outside the sphere of culture, the representation of history as a discontinuous and conflictual process is as culturally codified as the continuistic one. More importantly, it is used to give cultural legitimacy to the practices it represents. These often include usurpation, the liquidation of incumbents, successorial arrangements of extreme diversity, and such. Historical precedent may even be used to legitimate change. But even when it is not so used, the relationship between past and present is never conceived as one of mechanical replication. It is instead analogical and thus implies difference, not only similarity, between past and present. It implies, moreover, a choice between alternatives. This is precisely what is implied by my use of the term paradigmatic to describe its dominant mode.

Even the metonymic equivalence of past and present that is depicted in the mele koihonua implies a dimension of difference and does not suggest what Bloch calls their “total fusion” (Bloch 1977: 288), for these chants use the time dimension to differentiate individual ancestors and living people by the degree of their closeness to an origin point. Indeed, the most encompassing image of history, in the mele koihonua genre as in the moʻolelo genre, is one of progressive development, of time as a cumulative, not a repetitive, process. The genealogical image differs from the narrative one because the process is conceived in essentially procreative, indeed sexual, terms and not in terms of social action proper. History is naturalized in the genealogical chants, but not totally denied. Its presence is indicated, among other things, by the very infrequent repetition of proper names in the

32. Note that this criticism applies to Bloch whether or not there is “a massive central core of human thinking which has no history” (as claimed by Strawson 1959: 10). For if this central core exists, it is a “primary theory” (Horton 1982) applying to our basic perceptions of the physical world but hardly to our knowledge of social events and processes, which is inescapably evaluative and thus cultural (it is thus a “second-level theory” in Horton’s terminology). On this question see also Valeri 1991.
genealogies, so that each ancestor is pinned down to a specific time by a name that belongs to him or her alone.\footnote{Pariente has noted that “proper names... present their bearers as different from all other things, but do not go so far as to specify in what this difference consists: they affirm it as such, but they do not make it reside in a specific predicate, thus leaving the mind of the receiver free to assign it any predicate that discourse may attribute to the named object” \cite{1973:69}. One could say that genealogies are also a history of proper names, from which most (but not all) predicates have been eliminated, so that the listener is free to discover the appropriate predicates in each case.}

Finally, the Hawaiian case should undermine the simplistic view that because a representation of history serves political interests, it is necessarily distorting or even fictitious. The implicit correlate is that only a “disinterested” history can adequately capture historical reality. But political interest may motivate a “realistic” attitude, a need to preserve the memory of past action \textit{wie es eigentlich gewesen ist}. Because their political system rewarded successful action, Hawaiians had a vested interest in recording the actual successes or failures of political strategies. Furthermore, they had a vested interest in preserving the variety of the past because it provided them with the means for legitimating the variety of the present.

Ultimately, the most striking feature of Hawaiian narrative history, the escape of the past from a single reductionist scheme, both reflects and justifies the independence of the Hawaiian ruler from the constraints of a fixed and immutable system of rules.\footnote{On the autonomy of Polynesian rulers, see Sahlins \cite{1985}. On the autonomy of rulers in general, see Durkheim’s famous page in \textit{The division of labor in society}: “Chiefs are, in fact, the first personalities that emerge from the social mass. . . . In dominating society, they are no longer forced to follow all of its movements. Of course, it is from the group that they derive their power, but once power is organized, it becomes autonomous and makes them capable of personal activity. A source of initiative is thus opened which had not existed before them. There is, hereafter, someone who can produce new things and even, in certain measure, deny collective usages.” \cite{1968:195}} Hawaiian rulers are to some extent free to invent, so their history records what escapes traditional custom, or perhaps even reflects, as in the case of succession (where we find a bewildering variety of solutions \cite{1990c (Chapter V, this volume)}), a certain looseness of custom in the first place.

In sum, I would argue that since narratives of comparatively recent history (ten generations or so before Kamehameha) do not instantiate
a single, timeless custom, since, rather, their content reflects the very complex dialectic of past and present that they serve to legitimate, they may therefore have a certain degree of historical veracity. I would further argue that this interest in history as it really was is very much a function of the workings of the Hawaiian polity. Those workings also explain, however, why the realistic image of history coexists with a magical counterpart.

I remain convinced, then, that what Bloch (1977) calls somewhat improperly the “social determination of knowledge” explains both false and authentic consciousness. Although all representations are cultural, they do not have the same representational power. And they do not, in part, because different interests make different experiences possible, because they stimulate or block perception to go in different directions. Interest has more complex relations with representation than a distorting effect. But I must leave a fuller and more satisfactory discussion of this problem for another time.

Acknowledgments [1990]
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