

## Cultural Codes (OLA & DIE) Poka Laenui

There are cultural codes in the collective sub-conscious of all societies which defines within that society what is right and wrong, what is moral and natural, what forms of behavior is appropriate in given circumstances and as a direct influence of such codes, the societies develop they systems which express those cultural codes. These codes derive from the myths and legends, from the deep national memories, from the environmental conditions, from the internal conflicts and from a multitude of other processes which have taken place over long periods of time in a society. These codes are generally unwritten. They do not form a constitutive document or are in some explicit statement. They are generally unspoken. But they are so ingrained in a society that they become the driving force of the society. You can see them in the routines and habits of people, in the fears and pleasures of a people, in their dreams and expectations and the systems of reasoning.

These codes form the deep culture of a society.

The deep culture forms the floor or the foundation of a society. Sitting immediately upon that deep culture or value system is a wide social system including economic relations, health care, families, shelter and clothing practices, food and eating customs, education forms and environmental attitudes. These systems are reflective of the deep culture upon which they sit.

A political system develops upon and protects the lower-level systems. Normally, a national security system is placed upon that political system, protecting, of course, the political system.

### DIE & OLA

Today, what we find is a jumbled flow of at least two distinct deep cultures within the Hawai'i society. One is prominent in the formal and the other in the informal systems of community life. The first contains strong elements of:

**Domination** - especially reflected in the formal economic, education, political, military and judicial systems. Ingrained within this element is the idea of expansion, an ever enlarging territory, market, or field of conquest as being a natural order of things. In United States politics, especially in international relationships, this is also expressed in the concept of Manifest Destiny, Colonialism and Exceptionalism.

**Individualism** - protected in the legal system, elevated in the expression of history and dominant Western philosophies. Ingrained within this element is the idea of singularity, a continual parceling apart, fragmenting of things, concepts, person from people. In government practice, we have various silos within departments, each working independently and singularly, i.e., within the Department of Health, Mental Health Division there are divisions between Children and Adolescents department, Alcohol and other Drugs department, and Adult Mental Health department, each with its own sets of rules and procedures.

**Exclusion** - often accomplished by the depersonalization of the "other," the stranger. One favorite technique is by referring to others as non-human entities, "gooks" and "commies" for

example instead of men, women and children, the “evil empire” instead of the people of another nation.

The acronym DIE is an easy reminder of the elements of that deep culture stream. It is prevalent in the formal economic, education, judicial and political systems of the Hawai`i society today.

The second stream contains elements of:

**`Olu`olu** - compatible, agreeable, creating relationships of comfort, of inter-relating with a high degree of respect and trust, even alongside one's competitor, of finding contentment with what one has, of staying within one's kuleana, territory or property;

**Lokahi** - collective effort, many working together for a common goal which gives a foundation for looking at the wide implications of small things and the impact of all things upon each other,

**Aloha** - a propensity toward inclusion of other people and different philosophies, a searching out for the humanity within others and trying to urge that humanity to the surface of inter-relationships.

This "OLA." is generally attributed to the underlying Hawaiian culture and the multiplicity of added cultures to Hawai`i. It is entrenched in the informal economy of sharing and caring, of non-formal education, of traditional healing, of alternate dispute resolution systems and community organizing. In the Hawaiian (and other Polynesian) language, it means both health and life.

Of course, one would have to look long and hard to find a pure DIE or OLA in the general community. These deep cultures continually mix, clash, and cooperate within individuals, families, situations, and systems. They add to the schizophrenia and to the compatibility of the society which makes Hawai`i so incomprehensible for some and so delightful to others. These deep cultures are more than interesting anthropological points of inquiry. They have very serious implications to our society. They form the foundation upon which we build our relationships with one another, how we interact with our environment, our attitudes to time, justice, sharing and caring, family, medicine, . . . They are guiding forces to our individual and collective futures.

Here's a simplified example of the practice of DIE and OLA deep cultures. Two young men come into a large source of cash and decide to buy a car for each of them. One goes out and buys a two seat, two door, convertible sports car to “go cruising” with a friend on date nights. The other buys a van so he can take the whole family around the island, to the “games” or just to “go holo holo” (visiting without a specific destination). Those choices are expressions of deep culture.

Consider the implications. Hawai`i's environmental policy can be used as a study. If those who make decisions over such a policy follow a DIE cultural concept, the environment will be treated from a "domination, fragmentation" approach - man has the right, (some argue, even the responsibility) - to conquer, dominate, and subdue the environment. The value of the forests is to

be measured only in terms of its utility to the human population. Likewise, the ocean, the streams, the sky, the plants and animals, the winds, etc. Alterations to the natural elements are accomplished without any second thought: the first and only one being the "good" of man.

An OLA concept would approach the environment from a kinship and a unification approach. The `āina and the kai, the land and the ocean, would be treated as ohana - family. The cutting down of plants or the fishing in the ocean may or may not incorporate ceremony, but in the doing, there is certainly a sense of reverence, of operating within and of performing a special, sacred task.<sup>1</sup>

The operator of a machine uses it and applies it to the environment by creating within him/her self a relationship. He feels the mood and the spirit of the tractor, he can tell when he is pushing it too hard, or not enough. He feels the contours of the earth and the spirit within those contours. He may not be able to explain it, but those feelings are there deep inside.

Hawai`i has a unique food dish called "plate lunch." It is filled with a mixed variety of food. One could find rice, mashed potato, sweet/sour spare ribs, hamburger, chicken or pork adobo, hot dog, chili, laulau, spaghetti and meat balls, kim chee, daikon, macaroni and/or potato salad, toss green salad, and a whole assortment of other dishes. Malihini or newcomers to Hawai`i are generally puzzled by this customary food practice and why it is so popular throughout Hawai`i and among the local population. Their choice of lunch is at McDonald or Burger King. It is another reflection of deep culture.

Visit any public high school in Hawai`i and you can find expressions of DIE and OLA in practice. The morning bell rings and students are in their classes knowing, without naming it, that they are under the DIE culture. There is a clear pecking order and a DIE code to follow. The teacher is the boss, there is a clear division of intellectual structure, and the rules of system are well understood - grades are spread along a curve, no sharing of answers on tests, gain recognition, put yourself forward, and respond in a loud, clear and confident tone your answer or ideas, gaining points or merits for correct responses.

Ring the bell again and students immediately switch to an OLA culture. Sharing and caring become major means of transaction, as food, stories, problems, and joys are circulated among the group. Differences are celebrated. Help is always available. As students return home, sharing continues to be a code. One should not be too proud, know-it all, and act better than others.

The Hawai`i case is not materially different from many other peoples' experience with the mixing of deep cultures from different parts of the world. Generally, we like to limit such mixtures to the will of the host people who are receiving the incoming peoples and cultures. The problem with colonization, however, by its very definition, is that the host people are merely overrun by a foreign, uninvited government.

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<sup>1</sup> An Introduction to Some Hawaiian Perspectives on the Ocean, a paper by Poka Laenui, Institute for the Advancement of Hawaiian Affairs, presented at a conference FREEDOM FOR THE SEAS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A NEW LOOK AT OCEAN GOVERNANCE AND STEWARDSHIP, December 10 - 12, 1990, Honolulu, Hawaii, posted at <http://www.opihi.com/sovereignty> and Reprinted in a book named after the conference, Jon Van Dyke, editor.

If we are truly to control our own future, if we are to have real self-determination, if we are fully to appreciate our public policies and private behavior patterns, we must be aware of these streams of deep cultures within our society and where they come from. We need to teach ourselves to be more observant, to recognize within our own selves that we are playing out our deep culture patterns accumulated over the years, and are passing them to others we influence, especially the children. In this way we become clear of why we think and live the ways we do, of our options, and we are able to be more deliberate in directing our paths to be taken as we unfold into our futures.