



**Transatlantica**

Revue d'études américaines. American Studies Journal

**1 | 2002**

**Jeune République**

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A Study in the Sacrificial Origin of Monarchy

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### Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/525>

DOI : 10.4000/transatlantica.525

ISSN : 1765-2766

### Éditeur

AFEA

### Référence électronique

Joanne Carando, « Hawaiian Royal Incest », *Transatlantica* [En ligne], 1 | 2002, mis en ligne le 23 mars 2006, consulté le 29 avril 2021. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/525> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.525>

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# Hawaiian Royal Incest

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- 1 When early navigators reported on Hawaii, its practices and customs, one of the most often mentioned features of the archipelago was the practice of incest among members of the royal families. Though it was restricted to a limited number of people, it was such an openly practiced tradition that it could not go unnoticed, all the more so as it concerned the rulers of the islands. What struck these first observers was also the fact that it was not considered as a sin nor as a peculiar custom by the natives, although the taboo of incest is almost universal. The historic specificity of incest in Hawaii is thus dual: it was not allowed except for a handful of people—but for these people it was not only accepted but even encouraged.
- 2 What historians call “modern Hawaiian history,” that is written accounts concerning the history of Hawaii, began when Captain James Cook’s expedition made its first contact in 1778 with the Hawaiian people of the islands of Kauai and Niihau. In modern Hawaiian history one can distinguish three main groups of sources: 1—the accounts of European voyagers, who from the time of Cook visited the Hawaiian archipelago; 2—the writings of missionaries who set foot in Hawaii in 1820; 3—the traditions or eyewitness accounts recorded in their own language by the Hawaiians who had received a Christian education. These works have provided general information concerning Hawaiian royal incest but no interpretation. For this purpose, anthropological or psychoanalytical tools could be summoned. However, the anthropological explanations of incest are for the most part related to its prohibition in primitive societies, its practice being presented as a most rare phenomenon attributed only to the extraordinary status of the king. On the other hand psychoanalysis propounds an approach linked to a patriarchal family structure, not found in Hawaii. It is René Girard’s theory which allowed the most relevant reading of incest, bringing to light a connection between the practice of royal incest and a general comprehension of the sacrificial origin of our societies.

Social Hierarchy and Kapu System

- 3 Ancient Hawaii was a strongly stratified society, from the high-ranking class of the ali'i to the commoners or maka'ainana. The concept of family was an essential feature of Hawaiian life. The great chief (ali'i nui) was often presented as a father caring for his people and this relationship was an extension of the social custom based upon folk ways. An intermediary class between the ali'i and the common people was that of the konohiki. The priests or Kahunas were not set apart, they were not placed on a separate status level. The status of a priest was determined by his inherited rank, it could vary from low to high. One group was completely set apart, the kauwa or untouchables. They were born outcasts and were strongly despised. They were so contaminating that it was improper to eat with them, to sleep near them; not even their shadow could fall on an ordinary man (impure inferiors were believed to pollute their pure superiors in Hawaii)—and the penalty for such an infraction was death.
- 4 The ali'i, the highest status level in Hawaii, comprised “ordinary” members of the aristocracy, the high chiefs (called ali'i too) and their families, and the paramount chief (ali'i nui). For the ali'i, the choice for a first wife of high rank was a necessity, lest it would lower the rank of the child. Rank appears to have been far more influential than gender as a basis for social differentiation. As chiefs, male and female enjoyed the same prerogatives. The first union of a chief was the most important for it secured a proper offspring for the succession. The higher the parents' rank, the higher the child's. However the lineage of the mother was most important: the rank of a child would not diminish if the status of the father was lower than that of the mother; in the opposite case, the rank of the child would be lowered.
- 5 Another essential feature of Hawaii was the kapu system, the Hawaiian sacrificial system at the core of the islands' social organization, a complex network of prohibitions and prescriptions. The most important form of kapu was possessed by the chiefs of the highest rank; it required others, commoners but also lower rank chiefs, to immediately lie face down upon the ground on their presence. The penalty for the nonobservance of the kapus of the chiefs was death. Some kapus of chiefs were considered equal to those of the gods. The proximity between kings and gods was extreme.

#### Royal Incest

- 6 Most Polynesian societies preferred intrastatus marriages, varying from mere bonds between chiefly families to the extreme case of Hawaii, where special care was taken to select the nearest possible relative as a wife for a high chief. This was practiced to such an extent that it led to marriages between brothers and sisters, what Westerners describe as incest, a word which does not exist as such in the Hawaiian language. Thus what is dubbed “Hawaiian royal incest” (marriage between blood relatives of the first degree among the ali'i) appears as a unique case of intrastatus union in Polynesia. Practiced among the ali'i only, incestuous unions were considered with much respect. If the royal union bore fruit, the child would be of the highest kapu rank. His kapus would be equal to those of the gods. He was called divine, akua, and was considered a god. The most perfect and revered union was that of a full brother and sister of highest rank.
- 7 Incestuous relations are at the core of various myths and cosmological legends. Thus myths are crucial for their connection with the establishment of the social order and classes. It shows that incest, the sacrificial system and kingship are related. Valeri (170-171) points out that myths explain the genesis of kingship as the result of a

process. The first stage being the production of taro (a sacred food at the core of cultural life in Hawaii), and the second, the institution of the kapu system.

- 8 The special relationship brothers and sisters maintained in old Hawaii is also perfectly illustrated, in history this time, by the story of Kauikeaouli, Kamehameha III,<sup>1</sup> and his sister princess Nahi'ena'ena. Some historians believe the king and his sister had slept with each other as early as 1824. If such is the case, when the gossip burst out and reached the mission houses in 1827, years had passed by without the secret love of the young ali'i being revealed. The secret had been kept by the princess, despite the love and devotion she had towards her brother, who was educated according to missionary principles. It seems that young Kameamea III was also deeply in love.

#### Deculturation and Acculturation

- 9 The processes of deculturation and acculturation are complex and could justify a study on their own. What is of great interest for our present analysis is to see how incestuous unions were at first perceived by Westerners, from criticism to reluctant acceptance. The first literature dealing with Hawaii is the accounts of European travelers who visited the archipelago from the time of Cook (1778). Even though the value of these accounts can be discussed (for the sailors ignored the Hawaiian tongue and their stays were relatively short) they remain the most important documents concerning the Hawaiian islands, from the time of the discovery to the first missionary writings. These accounts are precious for they relate practices that were only known through tradition by the nineteenth century Hawaiian historians. Though the navigators did introduce their beliefs among the Hawaiian people, their purpose was not to christianize them. For them the Hawaiian islands constituted an important pole in the fur business, it was the place to obtain provisions.
- 10 This foreign influence contributed to the changing of Hawaiian society; a process of deculturation and acculturation was being started. Hawaiians were confused and had trouble deciding where kapus began and ended regarding Westerners. Forty years of contact with the navigators led to the modification of the system of royal incest; it first began to weaken toward final abolishment in 1819, before the arrival of the first missionaries.
- 11 The main difficulty at this point is to distinguish original indigenous behavior from acculturated behavior. Thus not only were the early writers describing Hawaiian life from a Western view point, what they described were conditions, for the most part, which had already been through a process of acculturation. Ellis began to write forty five years after Cook's first visit. The chances that what he observed were the early effects of acculturation are important. The same remarks can be formulated regarding the works of the Hawaiian historians. As opposed to Western accounts, both Malo and Kamakau, when describing the incestuous union of a brother with his sister, do not use the term "incest" but the Hawaiian word "pi'o," but they were already half-way between two worlds.
- 12 Like Malo and Kamakau, most historians of the past and even nowadays, explain incestuous unions by the need to produce a high ranking heir. In other words to keep the royal blood pure, to perpetuate nobility. These are reasons linked to the hereditary system. Incestuous bonds were associated to political strategies of conquest: because of the bilateral determination of rank, high ruling chiefs married their sisters "to guard them," to monopolize the sexuality of high ranking women, thus to impeach their rivals by increasing their own rank by lineage.

### From Anthropology to Psychoanalysis

- 13 Emile Durkheim brought to light the ambiguity of the concept of the sacred as animated by antithetical forces. He argued for a dynamic of forces that are beneficial and pure, generative of life on the one hand; in tension with forces which are impure, productive of disorder and death on the other. The first set induce a sentiment of respect and adoration among the worshippers. The second group are feared.
- 14 Though antagonistic by nature, the pure and the impure maintain a close relationship. To prevent any distortion in a given system, such as the overflowing of the pure on the impure, and vice versa, prohibitions regulate the separation of the pure and the impure. With regard to incest, the ambiguity of the sacred and the reversibility of the pure and the impure has been illustrated very well by Roger Caillois.
- 15 The concepts of the pure and the impure are observable in most primitive societies and are found at the core of prohibition systems. The reversibility of the pure and the impure helps explain why a particular taboo prevails in some societies while it is absent in others. The practice of incest, for instance, is severely banned and prohibited in most societies. Cases of non-prohibited incest are few and the exceptions concerned the royalty of Egypt, Hawaii, and among the Inca who dominated ancient Peru.<sup>2</sup>
- 16 In the societies prohibiting incestuous unions, incest must have belonged to the impure category. But this observation does not imply that incest belonged to the pure category in the societies in which it was practiced. In fact, in these societies incest was only practiced by a minority of people, precisely by some members of the royalty, while it was prohibited to the rest of the community. Marcel Mauss was the first to suggest an organization of the rites in two categories: on the one hand the positive rites (what one must do)—which illustrate the beneficial forces of the pure; the negative rites (what one must not do) which correspond to the malicious forces of the impure. According to Mauss “doing” amounts to “not doing.”<sup>3</sup> Later, Durkheim, who followed Mauss’s reasoning, brought to light the reversible nature of the positive and negative rites.  
Incest and “Innate Aversion”
- 17 One of the reasons frequently put forward regarding the taboo of sexual intercourse between kindred has been the postulation of an “innate aversion” for incest. The fact that most primitive societies are, according to anthropologists’ reports, “repulsed” by incest, the fact that the incest taboo is almost universal, and that its prohibition is frequently extremely harsh led some thinkers like Lowie, or Westermarck, to suppose the existence of a natural aversion for incest (Cazeneuve, 45). For Frazer this reasoning is not satisfactory; if there is a natural aversion, there should not be any need for it to be reinforced by some laws. On the contrary, what he postulates is the existence of a natural tendency to practice incest. In this case, legal repression is needed, for men had become aware of the negative consequences of incest from a social view point.<sup>4</sup> Freud’s reasoning is similar to Frazer’s in the sense that he demonstrates in his psychoanalytical studies (see below) that the first manifestations of sexual desires are incestuous by nature.
- 18 Biological reasons were indeed formulated in an attempt to explain the prohibition of incest. Nowadays we know that some diseases, like hemophilia, color blindness, harelip or diabetes, are of hereditary nature. Some biological studies have also shown that if a genetic weakness is not challenged (which was probably the case in old Hawaii where genes were not forced to adapt since the physical environment was practically unchanging) a person could bear a latent defect and still live normally. But the belief,

still well anchored in our modern societies, that incestuous marriages can only produce monsters or avorted fetuses, has now been proved false (Bushnell, 27).

- 19 Many objections against biological explanations of the prohibition of incest can be formulated. First, if primitive societies knew anything about the consequences of interbreeding it is doubtful that they would have set up the taboo of incest knowingly.<sup>5</sup> We know that many ancient societies, even those in which incest was prohibited, did not establish the link between the sexual act and procreation. This renders biological explanations doubtful. Second, it is very probable that hybridizing experiences on plants and animals, which yield information as to the effects of consanguinity, were posterior to the prohibition of incest. Besides, as noted, the prejudicial effects of interbreeding are far from being universally admitted. Though obviously without any scientific proof, Hawaiians went as far as to believe that the mana of an ali'i could be increased by mating brothers with sisters: "in several accounts about Hawaiians, an ali'i who was the issue of an incestuous marriage [...] was noted for a splendid body and a superior intelligence" (O.A.Bushnell, 29).<sup>6</sup>
- 20 Along with psychological and biological reasons explaining the incest prohibition, are the social organization theories. This new category of explanations of the taboo of incest was brought to light by the study of totemic tribes. According to the totemic system, marriages between members of the same tribe are prohibited. In this case, incestuous unions are forbidden for reasons similar to those that rule out intraclannish marriages: the totemic tribe is assimilated to a family, since the totemic animal is considered as the common ancestor of the whole tribe. In this case, the prohibition of incest is simply the extension of the exogamic rule (Durkheim in Cazeneuve, 99).
- 21 Freud in *Totem et Tabou*, reminds us of Darwin's viewpoint: men lived in small hordes in which the jealousy of the dominating male prevented sexual promiscuity. Thus, young generations were forced to leave and constitute analogous hordes, in which the prohibitions of sexual unions was similarly controlled and maintained by the jealousy of the chief. With time these particular conditions brought about, permanently and at a conscious level, the incest taboo. When totemism was introduced the prohibition of incest remained and became the rule of totemic tribes (Darwin in Freud, 189-190). According to Darwin the main consequence of the chief's jealousy was forced exogamy (i.e., marrying only outside one's own clan). And it was only by extension that the taboo of incest was set up. In other words, exogamy entails the prohibition of incest. Darwin's reasoning was along the same tracks as Caillois, giving priority to social reasons from which follow exogamic rules and the taboo of incest.
- 22 Lévi-Strauss went one step further and postulated that the incest taboo was a means to realize and maintain a principle of exchange among tribes, which illustrated the passage from biological to social organization (in Cazeneuve, 99). Here the concept of reproduction as the basis of social organization was put aside. Lévi-Strauss directly linked the prohibition of incest to social organization. The concept of exchange was considered as the foundation of all relations between human beings. (It is thus similar to the potlatch principle, a system based on free exchange structuring the cultural functioning.) The prohibition of incest was interpreted as just one means to secure another level of exchange among tribes. This effected a passage from an autonomous organization within the tribe to an organization between tribes.

Incest and the Freudian Myth

- 23 The same ethnographical observations of primitive societies, which led some thinkers to believe in an “innate aversion” of incest, led Freud to postulate that an “incest phobia” could be the reason for exogamy, from which followed the social organization of the tribe (Freud, 23-24). Freud used a myth to illustrate the origin of totemic organization. This was, according to Freud, that “one day..” in prehistoric times, the sons of a clan rebelled against, killed, and devoured their father—for sexual promiscuity was prevented by their father. But once the murder was accomplished, they experienced a sense of guilt. From this culpability followed the prohibition to kill the totem and thus the taboo of incest, as a retrospective means to expiate their crime. This myth underscored in Sigmund Freud’s eyes the universality of the Œdipus complex.
- 24 The Freudian explanation of incest postulated the existence of the unconscious, from which it followed that the desire to commit parricide or incest was repressed. But, according to Girard, it was the quasi-absence of the theme of incest in Western culture, at the end of the nineteenth century, that led Freud to believe that human culture as a whole repressed the desire to commit it; and he thus interpreted its presence in the myths and rituals of primitive societies as a confirmation of his hypothesis (Girard 1972, 174).
- 25 It seems that the Freudian theory regarding incest is the most vulnerable when confronted by anthropology. The structure of the Œdipus complex suggests an autonomous and universal reality of the concept of incest. But the Œdipal structure can not be universally reproduced. And since there are infinite variations of the taboo, it becomes, on the contrary, essential to analyse the taboo and its transgressions within a given context. Moreover it does not explain why incest is taboo in some societies but practiced in others. Though it is clear that in some cases incest is perceived as “good,” as in Hawaii (and only for the high ranking ali’i) and for others as “evil.”

#### Valeri’s Theory of Sacrificial Destruction

- 26 The previous theories we have considered principally resulted from mere observations. First degree reasons simply connect incest with hereditary and genealogical issues. Second degree reasons generally explain incest according to its prohibition. Since it was only practiced formally and publically by royalty, reasons have often been connected to the peculiar status of the king. Thus to an extraordinary status was assimilated an extraordinary custom.
- 27 At the core of other explanations was the god/king connection: the observance of myths as well as religious beliefs often led to the conclusion that incest was the king’s prerogative because his gods practiced it. No attempt to explain incest in Hawaii (and royal incest in general) for what it was, and not for what it was not, has been formulated. Our purpose now is to analyse Hawaiian royal incest as an autonomous phenomenon in understanding what hides behind the bare facts. Valeri was the first to have related the sacrificial destruction of human beings to incestuous unions in Hawaii. We shall briefly sum up his theory.
- 28 Valeri demonstrated that the human sacrifices performed by kings in Hawaii could be described as fratricides. Indeed, a historical study of royal dynasties in Hawaii reveals that each generation was marked by a violent conflict among closely related pretenders. The one who succeeds in sacrificing all the others, who are “his brothers,”<sup>7</sup> becomes the unique pretender to the throne.<sup>8</sup> The king also sacrifices transgressors<sup>9</sup> who have broken either his taboos or taboos basic to the whole society. In Valeri’s view,



transgressors were similar to the brothers, sacrificed by the winning king, and acted as substitutes for the king who sacrificed them. This was possible because, by violating the king's taboo, the transgressor struck down the hierarchical difference which the notions of the sacred and the profane imply, and thus the transgressor identified himself with the king and became his "double." The sacrifice of the transgressor (like that of the enemy brother) enabled the king to purify himself since through the destruction of his "doubles" he eventually regained his status of unique and extraordinary being.

- 29 In sum the sacrifices performed by kings always corresponded to a fratricide, regarding whoever was actually killed. This was so, first, because his most likely rivals were his brothers; and, second, because on a metaphorical level every transgressor implicitly identified with the king. For Valeri the elimination of "destructive male doubles" was logically connected to the matrimonial appropriation of "productive female doubles" through incestuous marriages (165).<sup>10</sup> On a political level the destruction of a "brother" enabled the king to keep the high ranking women for himself and thus to produce the right heir for the kingdom. On a metaphorical level both incest and sacrifice appeared as the complementary features of the king's powers. In sum, for Valeri, incest was the "fitting end" (165) of a process of constitution of kingship, which begins with the destruction of the "brothers" to accede to the throne, and which ends with the appropriation of the "sisters" to maintain and regenerate kingship. Once again the image of the circle, symbol of autonomy and completeness, characterized the king's divine power and transcendent status.

#### The Limitations of Valeri's Theory

- 30 If Valeri's theory seems to be innovative at first, for it brings to light an evident connection between incest, kingship and human sacrifices, in our view point it still does not explain the true function of incest in Hawaii. We agree with the fact that royal incest becomes intelligible in the light of sacrificial rituals. But our analysis requires a reflexion on the origin and the function of rituals in societies based on René Girard's theory. For Girard human desire is mimetic, which means that one desires a given object only because someone else does too. The mimetic relationship thus set up can only lead to violence because the other, the mediator, is also an obstacle to the fulfillment of desire. Aggressiveness, then, is not an innate instinct or motivation but ensues from mimetic rivalry. Man, contrarily to animals, has no biological restraints to his violence. The hatred and jealousy aroused to take possession of a territory, of food, of a sexual mate, or of any goods, threaten cultural cohesion. And violence is mimetically propagated through a mad spiral of interminable revenge and hatred: it is reciprocal and contagious. When the crisis reaches its paroxysm, the killing of a member of the community suddenly restores harmony. This death is a cathartic purge which enables the reestablishment of cultural cohesion. The lesson is learned: if violence re-appears, a new victim will be found and the cathartic action that once brought peace will be repeated. It can also be repeated in a preventive way, before the apparition of a new crisis. From the founding crime and the original spontaneous and unanimous violence follows the sacrifices.<sup>11</sup> Thus the sacrifice is the repetition of a violent act which enables the community to collectively expel violence.
- 31 The first victim has a particular status. Since his death restores peace and cultural order, it means he was guilty of some crime, that he was a source of impurities which disrupted the community. He was evil. But at the same time his capacity to bring peace



again reveals a positive dimension. To succeed in reuniting the community he must have possessed extraordinary powers. Consequently the victim acquires a superhuman dimension. He provoked the crisis but he also put an end to it. He symbolizes the two features of violence. On the one hand the most maleficent ones, linked to the sacrificial crisis; on the other, the ones which spread the benefits of the sacrifice, which purify and rejuvenate society.

- 32 The notion of the sacred, fundamentally dual, is thus set up, as the aftermath of the “magical” transformation of the victim into an almighty and divine being. The sacrificial rite becomes more than a simple method of pacification. It becomes the worship of an original victim called “god.” Progressively, a distinction between gods and sacrificial victims develops. Thus were religions born. In Girard’s view, unanimous victimage is the generative mechanism of all religious and cultural institutions: culture as a whole follows from the sacred, in other words from sacrificial violence.
- 33 To succeed in reuniting the entire community against a single and powerless individual is a matter of specific circumstances. It is the scapegoating principle, which runs through humanity in the form of pogroms, lynchings, witch hunts, and which governs the exclusion and the condemnation of political ideologies, religious beliefs or cultural behaviors. The fact that the victim is seldom guilty of the crimes which she or he is accused of clearly demonstrates that people ignore the principle which activates them. Since they are not conscious of the violence inherent in them, the scapegoat principle appears as a loophole for violence. It allows the repudiation and collective expulsion of violence.
- 34 With time, in some societies victimization was downscaled and people tended to emphasize its positive aspects. Gradually the actual sacrifice became unnecessary or more precisely it was indefinitely postponed. What remained was the result of the sacrifice, if it had taken place; the positive transformation of the victim into, depending on the cases, a god, a hero or a king. All the same, even though the community came to forget that these real or mythical characters had once been on the verge of being sacrificed, the possibility of their execution had to be regularly reactivated if they were to remain potent. The reasons of such reactivation were most of the time unconscious. The community just “remembered” that it had to be done. It was of course unthinkable to now perform the actual sacrifice (how could a king or a hero be murdered?—though it should be noted that such executions took place in some African tribes); but the sacrificial nature of these beings had to be recalled. The best way to do it was to make them again, as they once had been (albeit wrongly), guilty; guilty of a crime strong enough to have justified their sacrifice. The stronger the guilt the more efficient the reactivation.
- 35 In the eyes of humanity two crimes are particularly unqualifiable: incest and parricide. Sigmund Freud, in observing totemic tribes, brought to light that the objects marked by the strongest taboos are in fact the most accessible ones: mainly women and food. In Girard’s view, this is explainable in terms of mimetism: accessible objects, more than others, are those capable of easily inducing mimetic rivalry. Incest and parricide concern the most accessible “objects” of any given society, i.e., the members of the family or of the totemic tribe. With time, the women of the tribe, the heads of the families, as well as the totemic animal became consecrated to prevent any form of conflict in a given community or family. The consequence of these two crimes is the destruction of the difference, from which follows mad rivalry (Girard 1972, 115). For

instance, in *Œdipus Rex*, parricide is the conclusion of the conflictual symmetry between the father and the son. It is anger that led Œdipus out of Corinth for there he was the bastard child, and it made him kill the old man who was blocking his way, his real father. The same anger led Laios to first hold his whip against his son; and in the beginning it is anger again that motivated the paternal decision to eliminate his child. Parricide implies the destruction of the difference with the father. Incest, in *Œdipus Rex* again, is destructive of an other major difference in the family. Jocasta is the mother/spouse whose womb bore both Œdipus and his sons. In this case incest entails a double lack of differentiation: between the son and his mother and between the father and his sons.

- 36 The taboos of incest and parricide are directly linked to the sacrificial crisis and their unique purpose is to prevent its repetition. But there still remains the exception of some societies in which incest, for a few, is not considered a taboo. In those communities incest is perceived as beneficial. Indeed if some rites reproduce the sacrificial crisis, others represent its aftermath. As we have already mentioned, the notions of pure and impure are the two sides of a single notion. Similarly, destructive and beneficial violences represent the two sides of the sacrificial crisis. With this theory, Girard puts an end to the classification of rites (positive and negative rites, “rites de passage,” and the like) and brings to light their unity. Thus, according to the violence that is reproduced, rituals can elect certain forms of incest as good against others which remain evil and taboo.

#### Royal Sacrifice and Royal Incest

- 37 Girard’s theory sheds a new light on Hawaiian royal incest. The sacrificial system in Hawaii is characterized by the non-remembrance of two features: on the one hand the sacrificial origin of the king and on the other hand the criminal dimension of incest. In marrying his sister, the Hawaiian king became guilty of the crime of incest, but of course unknowingly—since incest was not considered as a crime in Hawaii. The community too was unconscious of the crime the king was made to perpetrate. It must be concluded that those most directly affected by the practice of incest are so unaware of its origin that they explain it with arguments similar to those of outsiders. Indeed Hawaiians praised incestuous unions for they believed it produced high ranking heirs, and similarly, as noted, the reason most often attributed to royal incest by observers was linked to genealogical and hereditary reasons. Observers, though, point out the criminal dimension of incest that Hawaiians refused to acknowledge. But it was denounced on moral grounds only, and the true nature and function of this criminal act remained uncovered. Incest was not a crime in the sense that it was a breach of traditional morality; it was a crime because it constituted a punishable act, what Girard calls “a victimizing sign,” needed to designate a given individual as guilty, and thus “worthy” of a sacrifice. That Hawaiians were not conscious of this principle does not invalidate our reasoning.
- 38 In some societies the king must commit the act of incest at regular intervals only;<sup>12</sup> while in Hawaii, on the contrary, it was a permanent transgression. That incest remained a transgression, and not the setting of a new ethic, was proven by the very fact that it was practised by a few ali’i only. This major transgression reminds us of the other unqualifiable crime: infanticide, which indeed was often associated with incest in Hawaii. Concerning the veracity of this accusation, viewpoints vary and are often contradictory. But the mere accusation must be considered.

- 39 From a structural view point infanticide was a victimizing sign<sup>13</sup> which reactivated the king's culpability and confirmed his status of potential victim. Incest and crimes involving parents or children are similarly related in the Œdipal tragedy. Both Œdipus and the Hawaiian king represent the extraordinary transgression of a unique being. Even though parricide and incest clearly illustrate the dissolving of differences, they also generate a new difference: the monstrosity of Œdipus only.<sup>14</sup> The purpose of these crimes, in *Œdipus Rex*, is to reinforce the efficiency of the sacrifice since they call for Œdipus' immolation. In Hawaii, on the contrary, they did not call for the sacrifice of the king but stood as survivals of his sacrificial origin. The negative dimension of incest was forgotten, and only beneficial and founding violence remained. That the sacrificial origin of the king disappeared in Hawaii does not mean that sacrifice was secondary in relation to incest. Indeed if sacrifice was intelligible without incest, incest, on the contrary, was unintelligible without sacrifice, this of course in connection to unanimous victimage.
- 40 Use of Girard's theory enables a new reading of myths. The similarities between myths and the actual functioning of Hawaiian society are striking, and myths are often presented as an account of the institution of the sacrificial system in Hawaii. We think such a statement is a misreading. They must not be understood as a historical origin or an explanation of the kapu system and the practice of incest, but as a justification a posteriori of the functioning of Hawaiian society. In Girard's view, the process of mythical elaboration comes after the setting of a given practice. It implies that incest or other details could have been added to the myth only after the sacrificial system and royal incestuous marriages were set up.
- 41 An interesting feature of Hawaiian myths, though, is that they present sacrifices next to incest. Indeed the burying of Haloa I for instance, the first child of Wakea who was still-born, can be interpreted as a sacrifice. The Naua society version of the legend of the lauloa taro<sup>15</sup> counts that Haloa I was not born in the form of a human being but in the form of a root and was thrown away. Lyman's version of the same legend present Haloa as a deformed infant born without arms or legs who consequently was buried by the house of Wakea (Beckwith, 297-298). Girard points out that the exposition of deformed infants, or deformity only, is common in myths, and must be associated to the scapegoating principle (1972, 145; 1978, 169). He illustrates the role played by infirmity or deformity<sup>16</sup> by the way selection is accomplished among herds of predators: the chosen beast always bears a difference (extreme youth or on the contrary old age, or any deformity which prevents the chosen individual from moving exactly like the others). Thus behind the burying of Haloa, who bears a deformity, one can recognize an evident manifestation of unanimous, founding violence. Indeed it must be remembered that from the burial spot grows the stalk and leaves of the taro plant, a most important material basis in Hawaiian life. Sacrifice appears in disguise which corresponds to the fact that it is forgotten in Hawaii.<sup>17</sup>

#### The Brother-Sister Relationship

- 42 One last point need be analysed: the brother-sister relationship. Indeed one can wonder why this particular bond is privileged rather than the parent-child relation. In our first part we underlined the most essential and recurrent features of incestuous unions in Hawaii, that of perfection, autonomy, and completeness. From a structural view point a brother-sister union is different from a parent-child relation. But as we have pointed out in the myth of Wakea, even though the incestuous relation corresponds to a

father-daughter one, the ideals of self-sufficiency and perfection remains; we have presented Wakea and his daughter as two identical beings belonging to the same world (the heavenly spheres), and their union as symbolic of autonomy—since Wakea, in breaking the rule of exogamy, shows he can do without reciprocity. This couple, though, is not representative of completeness, and complementarity is an essential dimension of the Hawaiian conception of incest. Ku and Hina are generative of life and become symbols of fertility only once their couple is formed. Thus, a brother-sister marriage, more than any other incestuous union, represents an ideal of completeness. First, because both beings are identical for they belong to the same generation and are issued from the same womb; second, when reunited they form a perfect and single entity because of the mere sex difference which implies perfect complementarity.

- 43 To understand royal incest, one must consider it in relation to the sacrificial system, which itself is directly related to the institution of royalty. The practice of incest gives the king his royal feature, not because it is a privilege, but because it is a survival of the original sacrifice of the king. Incest is the obligation of the King, it is a need whose purpose is to renew and reinforce the efficiency of the sacrificial system. The latter is comparable to a “cordon sanitaire” whose purpose is to put the king aside because he is sacred, that is connected to violence. In fact the kapu system is not a means for the king to protect himself from the profane and impure world, but on the contrary, it is unknowingly imposed by the community on the king as a means to protect itself from the king’s association with violence. If the king practices incest it is only because the group unconsciously remembers that it is a crime. Thus the distinction between the sacred and the profane comes from the original and founding violence, and is that which enables the group to live peacefully. In other words, the profane is an unconscious loophole out of violence. This last point is essential: religious thinking cannot point out the scapegoating mechanism from which it comes, simply because it structurally rejects violence and thus would reject itself if it consciously recognized its origin.

#### Conclusion

- 44 Hawaiian ancient beliefs and customs declined progressively. But at the end of the nineteenth century attempts to rescue ancient customs were made. King David Kalakaua (1874-1891) showed a great and sincere interest in the songs, chants, legends and dances of the people of old. At his death, his sister, Queen Liliuokalani (1891-1893), continued the revival—but the overthrowing of the Hawaiian monarchy, shortly after she inherited the throne, put an end to her efforts. It is interesting to underline that towards the end of her brother’s reign she was left as regent while her brother went to California because of declining health. Indeed she was next in line for the throne, but she also appeared as the perfect successor for she was his sister. The brother-sister bond still existed but obviously in different ways. Yet Kalakau and his sister were considered complementary individuals who yearned for a revival of ancient customs.
- 45 Nowadays, incestuous unions are forgotten except by scholars whose field of studies concerns Hawaii. And if they are to be explained, as we have tried to show, it is mainly by genealogical reasons. In general, most sacrificial features of ancient Hawaii are now nonexistent, and what are nowadays called Hawaiian revivals must be considered as offshoots of the “profane” customs of the people of Old.<sup>18</sup> For instance, beside the sacred hula, there always existed a profane form of dancing to entertain both ali’i and commoners, and most of today’s dances derive from this “popular” type of hula

(Mullins, 53). “Popular” appears as an essential word here as it hints at our modern societies whose functioning, as a whole, is based on consumption and commercial culture. Moreover, an Hawaiian renaissance movement was started only recently (in the 1960s), which was expressed culturally through a renewed interest in arts and traditions, including history, literature, music, hula and crafts, and socially with renewed pride and consciousness in being Hawaiian.<sup>19</sup> These revivals, for the most part, are mediated by modern demands and expectations. Hawaiian grass houses, ancient weaving techniques and tapa making, poi eating, luau[s] (Hawaiian feasts), flower lei[s] (necklaces), surfing, the spirit of aloha, etc, all this now serves the tourism industry. Moreover certain elements which are said to belong to Hawaiians were in fact introduced by new cultures who immigrated to Hawaii in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hawaiian culture must be understood in terms of a multifarious heritage.

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## NOTES

1. Kamehameha III (1814-1854) reigned for twenty nine years, from 1825 to 1854. It was the longest reign of any Hawaiian monarch. He was king at a difficult period in Hawaiian history. In his time Hawaii moved from kingship to constitutional monarchy. Yearning for a return to old ways, he also rehabilitated the *hula* dancing which had been abolished by the first missionaries.
2. Accordingly, studies whose topic concerns the prohibition of incest are more numerous than those dedicated to its practice.
3. « Ne pas faire est encore une action, un acte d'inhibition est encore un acte » (Mauss quoted in Cazeneuve, 17).
4. « Il n'y a pas de loi ordonnant à l'homme de manger ou de boire ou lui défendant de mettre ses mains dans le feu. Les hommes mangent, boivent, tiennent leurs mains

éloignées du feu instinctivement, par crainte de châtements naturels, et non légaux, qu'ils s'attireraient en se comportant à l'encontre de leur instinct. La loi ne défend que ce que les hommes seraient capables de faire sous la pression de certains de leurs instincts. Ce que la nature elle-même défend et puni n'a pas besoin d'être défendu et puni par la loi. Aussi nous pouvons admettre sans hésitation que les crimes défendus par une loi sont véritablement des crimes que beaucoup d'hommes accompliraient facilement par penchant naturel. Si les mauvais penchants n'existaient pas, il n'y aurait pas de crimes; et s'il n'y avait pas de crimes, quel besoin aurait-on de les interdire ? » (Frazer quoted by Freud, 186-187).

5. « Il est presque ridicule d'attribuer à ces hommes incapables de toute prévoyance, vivant au jour le jour, des motifs hygiéniques et eugéniques dont on tient à peine compte même dans notre civilisation actuelle » (Freud, 188).

6. However, one should be careful not to confuse marriages between close relatives and incest *stricto sensu*.

7. The concept of 'ohana, according to which all people were of one family, must be kept in mind.

8. One of the most famous conflicts that took place in Hawaii is the one between Kamehameha and Kiwala'o: at his death, Kalani'opu'u, in accordance with his council of chiefs, decided to leave the land to his son Kiwala'o, who was the highest ranking heir, and to leave the god of war to Kamehameha. Thus Kiwala'o was given the right to consecrate the state temples and Kamehameha was in charge of the warlike side of kingship. When Kiwala'o began to redistribute all the lands among his subjects, this according to custom, the ali'i who lost their land or who did not receive enough forced the conflict to erupt between Kiwala'o and his rival Kamehameha. It is Kiwala'o who ended up on the altar leaving his throne to Kamehameha. Valeri points out that the tragedy of succession is repeated with Kamehameha's death in 1819. The king, following old traditions, left the right to consecrate the luakini to his son Liholiho, and the God of war to his nephew Kekuaokalani. When Liholiho abolished the kapu system Kekuaokalani gathered an army to defend the old ways, but he lost his battle and was killed with his men. But he was not sacrificed since Liholiho had put an end to the sacrificial system (Valeri 161-163).

9. All the sacrifices were performed during the luakini temple rituals.

10. It must be remembered that women are never sacrificed in Hawaii.

11. Similarly, Freud postulated that a murder was at the origin of the totemic system.

12. Girard gives the instance of an African monarchy in which the king must commit incest, and other "crimes," during the enthronement ceremony: it seems, through the ritual, that the king makes himself guilty of precise transgressions: « On fait manger au roi des nourritures interdites ; on lui fait commettre des actes de violence ; il arrive qu'on lui donne des bains de sang ; on lui fait absorber des drogues dont la composition — organes sexuels broyés, restes sanguinolents, déchets de toutes sortes — révèlent le caractère maléfique » (1972, 158).

13. "Victimizing sign" is the translation we propose for the expression "signe victimaire" coined by Girard.

14. It is interesting to point out that when Œdipus reaches in Athens, in *Œdipe à Colonne*, bearing the detestations of parricide and incest, he presents himself as sacred and as a source of benedictions for the country: "je viens, pieux et sacré, apporter un bienfait à ces citoyens" (Sophocle, 901). The dual nature of the notion of sacred illustrates the two



sides of violence, with on the one hand the destructive one which forced him out of Corinth, and on the other hand the one which is constitutive of the social order.

15. A variety of taro said to be the original taro brought to Hawaii.

16. Œdipus is a famous instance of infirmity in mythology.

17. To define myths Girard uses the expression “lynchage fondateur camouflé” (1978, 146).

18. The rapid loss of ancient customs can be explained in terms of mass deculturation and acculturation. Indeed, compared to small African tribes which, for the most part, did not experienced systematic intrusion of Western culture, Hawaii was from the very beginning confronted to sudden and massive contact with Westerners.

19. Sporadic attempts were made before the Hawaiian renaissance movement, but they were usually restricted to a single aspect of old culture. Duke Kahanamoku, in the 1910s, for instance, stimulated a world wide enthusiasm for surfing, Hawaii’s true national sport.