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Paradise Laborers: Hotel Work in the Global Economy

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Paradise Laborers: Hotel Work in the Global Economy

Abstract

Resorts have become important to American society and its economy; one in eight Americans is now employed by the tourism industry. Yet despite the ubiquity of hotels, little has been written about those who labor there. Drawing on eight years of participant observation and in-depth interviews, the renowned ethnographers Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler reveal the occupational culture and lifestyles of workers at five luxury Hawaiian resorts. These resorts employ a workforce that is diverse in gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality. Hawaiian resort workers, like those in nearly all resorts, consist of four groups. New immigrants hold difficult and dirty low-status jobs for little pay. Locals provide an authentic Polynesian flavor for guests, a ready pool of youthful high-turnover employees, and a population trapped in a place that offers few occupational alternatives. Managers tend to be middle-class, college-educated young and middle-aged men from the mainland whose lifestyles are occupationally transient. Seekers, mostly young, white, and from the mainland as well, escape to paradise seeking adventure, warmth, extreme sports, or some alternate life experiences. The Adlers describe the work, lives, and careers of these four groups that labor in organizations that never close, with shifts scheduled around the clock and around the year. *Paradise Laborers* adds to the growing interest in the global flow of labor, as these immigrant workers display different trends in gendered opportunities and mobility than those exhibited by other groups. The authors propose a political economy of tourist labor in which they compare the different expectations and rewards of organizations, employees, and local labor markets. Patricia A. Adler is Professor of Sociology at the University of Colorado and Peter Adler is Professor of Sociology at the University of Denver. Their many books include *Peer Power: Preadolescent Culture and Identity* and *Backboards and Blackboards: College Athletes and Role Engulfment*.

Keywords

Hawaiian, hotel, job, labor, pay, immigrant

Disciplines

Tourism and Travel

Comments

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ENTERING PARADISE

You land in paradise. Departing the airport in your canary-yellow rented convertible, you wend your way past mountains and beaches, past valleys and pastures, past cities and towns, past pristine golf courses and arid volcanic terrain, past sugarcane, pineapples, and coconuts. You head toward your vacation destination: an exclusive Hawaiian hotel. You see the tasteful and large sign at the resort's entrance. Turning off the main road onto the winding driveway, you see the rich, vibrant colors of the beautiful trees and flowers lining the peaceful path. As you drive up to the lobby, a potpourri of pleasurable sensations assaults you. You smell the fragrant plumeria and gardenia blossoms, indications that you are in a tropical Eden. You hear the rumble of the waterfall and then behold its magnificence, a torrent of rushing streams tumbling over rocks and crashing into a pool below. The cascading water and its splash fill the air with moisture and your nostrils with the hydrated aroma. You have entered paradise.

As you pull up to the *porte cochere*, a smartly dressed bell captain approaches and opens your door, welcoming you with a resounding "aloha." A bellman wheels up his cart and unloads your bags. You give your name and hand your keys to the valet and wander toward the lobby. You're a little disoriented from the long flight, so your car and bags are mindlessly forgotten behind you. Immediately, a beautiful Polynesian woman appears and, in soft tones, welcomes you, slipping a colorful and sweet-smelling lei over your head. Walking into the high-ceilinged, open-air lobby, you are escorted past grandiose floral arrangements, rock formations fashioned from native volcanic eruptions, marble-inlaid floors, a shock of delicate orchids in every direction, pools of azure water on both sides, and Hawaiian art and artifacts in all directions.

You are steered toward the front desk where another Polynesian employee greets you and begins your check-in process. Discreetly, your lei greeter re-

turns, carrying a silver tray from which she offers you glasses filled with tropical fruit punch and a sugarcane swizzle stick to chew on long after the last sip of liquid ambrosia has gone down. As you navigate your room reservation, your credit card imprint, and the details of your stay, you gaze around at the impressive space, the many workers bustling around in diverse uniforms. They range among the different Hawaiian hotels from the flowing raiment of traditional Polynesian garb to the starched, dignified British uniforms summoning images of old-world butlers and high service.

After you complete your transaction, the front desk clerk summons a bellman who appears with your luggage and escorts you to your room, orienting you to the mysterious and marvelous features of the property and the island. Immaculately dressed in either a colorful aloha shirt or a white, starched uniform with gold buttons and rolling your suitcases on a gleaming bronzed cart, he introduces himself and asks you about yourself, about your family, and if this is your first visit to the Islands. He offers to assist you should you have any questions or problems during your stay. You have made a new friend. As you follow behind him, you feel the gentle trade winds moving through the lobby and corridors, notice the perfect air temperature, and see the abundant sunshine bringing diffused light all through the open-air hotel. Your bellman takes you to your room via elevator, winding open-air hallways, or golf cart, presents you with a view of the expansive ocean, brings in your bags, lays them atop the unfolded luggage holders, and fills your ice bucket. You have arrived in the lap of luxury.

This surreal guest experience is made possible by a set of carefully planned structures surrounding and underlying what customers see. Most guests do not notice the precise ethnic and racial stratification of those attending them. They do not recognize that the lei greeters and front desk clerks are locals, selected for their Polynesian appearance;¹ that many valets and the bell captain are "haoles" (Caucasians), selected to give an atmosphere of continental service; and that the bellmen are a combination of these two groups. At the same time guests may completely overlook the new immigrants: outdoor housekeepers sweeping the lobby or gardeners raking the leaves. If they notice a manager passing by in an elegant aloha shirt and slacks or pressed skirt and heels, they take for granted that this person is a mainland haole or a European.

The level of service accorded arriving guests differs markedly as well, with one treatment offered new guests, another for returning guests, and yet another for celebrities and VIPs. First-time guests are greeted courteously with the standard service. Returning guests are expected, and may be personally

welcomed by people they know. A card preprinted with their name may be placed on the dashboard of their car. Employee friends will pass them on their way to the front desk and chat or joke with them while they wait in line for check-in. Celebrities and VIPs get another class of service. Each day the roster of incoming VIP guests is distributed to all lobby personnel with the estimated time of their arrival. The VIP liaison personally waits at the entrance to greet them and to escort them to the front desk, chatting with them about their special needs and the custom accommodations that have been arranged. Bell and transportation clerks who normally stand behind desks at the front of the hotel emerge to personally greet these big spenders and important people by name, and to make them feel individually welcomed. Some have been picked up at the airport, in fact, by a resort driver in a limousine or special car. Managers from the front desk and guest services swing by during their stay to assure them of their personal interest in the comfort of their accommodations and service. For the biggest VIPs, the general manager may be present to greet them as well.

There will also be systems determining which faces returning guests are likely to see and recognize, as there is a hierarchy of seniority in each position, with some jobs incorporating a high turnover and others retaining the same people for years. Befriending people low on the seniority list or in a position with high turnover is less likely to give returning guests their desired sense of comfort, continuity, and community, as these people may not be there year after year like more entrenched employees.

Aside from individuals who arrive alone or with their families, there is also the hustle and bustle of groups entering the hotel, as tour buses, which some of the larger hotels accommodate, bring a different kind of rhythm. When large groups are expected, the group check-in desk is staffed, and bellmen stand at the curb awaiting their appearance. Suitcases are unloaded en masse, group handlers herd large numbers of people in the appropriate directions, and there is controlled chaos until everyone is processed.

Employees generally enter Hawaiian resorts through a different entrance from guests. They park separately, often in uncovered lots or on grass fields. To enter the property, they must pass through the cordoned-off security area, carefully observed by security personnel. They are required to swipe their employee ID cards through the time clock as they enter the back of the house, and to do so once again after they have changed clothes (and showered, if they so desire) and are ready to report for work. Penalties accrue for lateness. Employees then walk through the interior catacombs of the hotel to their work destinations, emerging into public sight only at their point of guest service.

Some resorts require six swipes daily, two for entering, two for leaving, and one each for going to lunch and reporting back to work.

Guests are also usually unaware of the complex systems that organize and track the services they receive. Valets and bellmen work on a rotation that calls them forth to fetch luggage or cars in a careful order. In tip jobs such as these, they wolf down their meals during their breaks so as not to miss more than one rotation. Unbeknownst to guests, the passage of every bag through the hotel is meticulously charted. Bellmen have cards on which they record the time and number of bags they take to and from each room, and whether these go to bell storage or are held on a rolling cart. When a bag is missing, this system marks the last time it was handled and by whom.

Guests often check out by calling both the bell desk to send someone up for their bags and the valet desk to get their car. When they arrive in the lobby, they may get the keys to the car from their valet, tip him, and leave, never seeing their bellman to give him a tip. Yet tips are vital to people in these occupations, and a careful system of "tip-tracking" operates. Bellmen record all their tips, and when they do not receive one from a guest they have serviced, they go to the valet desk to see who brought out that guest's car. They then claim two-thirds of the tip that the valet received, since they are entitled to a larger share for bringing down the bags. All this constitutes the complex underground functioning of a large resort that makes the guest experience invisibly smooth.

Resort hotels have become a ubiquitous part of middle-class life, as technology has made travel faster and easier and people have attained greater freedom to vacation. Resorts have become an important institution to society and its economy, as one in eight Americans is now employed by the tourism industry, tourists generate \$900 per capita annually in tax revenue, and tourism as an American industry ranks first in terms of global international export earnings (Travel Industry Association of America 2002). In fact, although estimates vary widely depending on the source, global tourism is the largest industry on earth, employing somewhere between 100 and 230 million people, handling over 600 million arrivals a year, and having an estimated value between \$476 billion and \$3.4 trillion dollars (Apostolopoulos et al. 1996; "Beaches and Bucks" 2002). By 2020, the World Travel and Tourism Council predicts that 1.6 billion of the world's 7.8 billion people will make a trip abroad (Crosette 1998).²

In Hawai'i, tourism has been the state's leading industry since the mid-1970s (Stern 1989).³ In 2002, the travel and tourism industry accounted for

\$7.5 billion or 16.5 percent of the Gross State Product. It employed approximately 154,000 people, or 20.1 percent of the state's total employment. Taxes collected from tourism contributed \$905 million to state and county revenues, or about 20.9 percent of their total income (Hawai'i Tourism Authority 2002).⁴ Fueling these figures, the vacation has practically become a requisite of the American dream (Aron 1999). Yet despite the amount of time that people spend in hotels, little has been written about these institutions and those who labor there. This book offers a glimpse into what goes on behind the scenes in resort hotels from the employees' perspectives.

We focus on a group of luxury resorts situated, among others, along a sandy strip of Hawaiian beach, and examine the work and lifestyle experiences of its staff. To maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of our setting, we refer to our island as "Honua" (Hawaiian for place), and our beachfront strip as "Ali'i" (Hawaiian for royalty).⁵ Clifford (1997) referred to resorts as post-modern organizations where people meet and pass each other, places of transit, not of residence. Yet while guests may come and go, in a fashion the workers live there, and it is they who anchor these resorts.

Like nearly every resort—whether located near beaches, mountains, deserts, or on ships—the hotels we studied employed four distinct types of workers: new immigrants, locals, seekers, and managers (as we discuss more fully in chapters 3 and 4). These different groups ensure that hospitality workers constitute a broadly diverse population and therefore embody quite a few of the varied features distinguishing the essence of work and occupations in contemporary society. We examine the culture of this tropical island resort community and the workers' varied occupational subcultures. We delve into the kinds of work experiences and patterns evinced by resort employees as they service guests, follow management rules, and adapt to the personal dynamics of their co-workers. Resort workers differ, however, among the four types, with two groups (seekers and managers) whose members are *transient* and two (new immigrants and locals) whose members are *trapped*,⁶ completely subject to the economic vicissitudes of the local labor market. Using this distinction, we examine differences between the alternative careers, lifestyles, families, and relationships of those transient populations who have stepped off the normative track and their more conventional trapped counterparts. Another realm of contrast can be found in employees' differential "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1984), stemming from distinctions based on race/ethnicity, gender, age, education, and class.⁷ Workers' differences—whether they are transient or trapped, advantaged or disadvantaged—then lead them to react differently to their employment situations, with some more likely to

stand up for their labor rights than others. Drawing on these distinctions, we examine the problematic nature of the politics of tourism labor relations and unionization. Finally, this is a study of the political economy of tourism, as we examine the role of resorts and their employees in economically adapting, each to its own benefit, over the short term, to local labor market conditions. We show that the result is that resorts and employees together unintentionally reconstruct the political economy of global labor market conditions, over the long term, to their mutual disadvantage.

Literature

A variety of sources have looked at resorts empirically and conceptually. Popular literature has focused on hotels—including works from highly acclaimed novelists such as Elinor Lipman (*The Inn at Lake Devine*, 1999), David Lodge (*Paradise News*, 1991), Alison Lurie (*The Last Resort*, 1998), Jeffrey Robinson (*The Hotel*, 1997), and Paul Theroux (*Hotel Honolulu*, 2001). While many of these offer insights, often satirical, of hotel life, none of them is based on rigorous social scientific research. *Thus, these works have used hotels as backdrops and settings, but they have not examined them systematically.*

Some academic attention has been paid to flophouses and other low-rent hotels,⁸ cruise ships,⁹ service at luxury hotels,¹⁰ the location of hotel development,¹¹ the history of hotel and restaurant employees,¹² the social dimensions of hotel work,¹³ the culture of a resort community,¹⁴ new immigrant workers in a hotel restaurant,¹⁵ and the labor (union) organization of hotel workers.¹⁶ Related sociological research on the restaurant has examined its social structure,¹⁷ the culture of kitchens,¹⁸ waiters and waitresses,¹⁹ the interaction between waitresses and their customers,²⁰ a licensed restaurant,²¹ and fast food establishments.²² *Nowhere, however, has there been empirical research on the culture and labor relations of exclusive resort hotels.*²³

A third related area of literature involves workplace ethnographies, with studies conducted of hospitals,²⁴ schools,²⁵ factories,²⁶ domestic work,²⁷ high tech areas,²⁸ corporate and governmental organizations,²⁹ banks,³⁰ assembly line manufacturing,³¹ and police, fire fighters, and rescue workers.³² *Workplace ethnographies of hotels, however, are nonexistent.*³³ This book offers the first systematic, scholarly, ethnographic study of hotels and the people who work in them, examining worker cultures.

The composition of Hawaiian resorts' workforce is global, especially with regard to the new immigrants who moved to Hawai'i from all over Asia, the

Pacific, and Latin America. The social and cultural movements of these global workers cannot be understood without reference to international economic and demographic considerations.³⁴ Studies of global labor migrants have referred to these people as "transmigrants," or as "immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationships to more than one nation-state" (Glick-Schiller et al. 1995, 48). Most global labor migrants move back and forth between their host countries and countries of origin, retaining their core ties and plans for retirement in their ancestral homes.³⁵ In this book we show a different global relocation pattern and discuss how and why our resort workers established it for themselves.

Globalization scholars have also written about the feminization of the international labor force, with more immigrant women than men finding jobs in industrialized nations. This imbalance has fostered an upheaval and dislocation of gender relations in immigrant families. Many new immigrant women found employment in the often demeaning and repressive household labor force as domestics when higher-statused American women took work outside the home.³⁶ This removed immigrant women from their own households and families. We discuss two factors that set the circumstances of our new immigrants apart from this trend.

Organizations examined in the late twentieth century must be addressed from a postmodern perspective. As postmodern organizations, resorts operate incessantly (24/7), expecting workers to labor around the clock, through all the days of the week and seasons of the year. The culture of our society has been characterized as a rhythm of time, with interaction itself primarily a matter of cadence.³⁷ People may be tied together or isolated from one another by the invisible threads of pace and tempo and the hidden walls of time (Hall 1983), with consensus constituted by interpersonal coordination (Durkheim 1912). But Durkheim's (1893) mechanical conception of solidarity, lodged in people coordinating things together at the same time, is tied to a modern era of society. Postmodern society increasingly displaces this form of cohesion, replacing it with an organic temporal solidarity, where individuals do things at different times and are tied to one another by their interdependence. If modern society had a consonant rhythm based on coordinated movement, we are left to wonder what rhythm we find in postmodern organizations lodged in the postmodern world, with people working around the clock and calendar, in a blur of motion and sound. Brissett and Snow (1993, 245) have suggested that rather than having a simple organic rhythm, postmodern society is characterized by cultural arrhythmia: "the absence of entrainment associated with

a decline in contrast in everyday routine and the destruction of rhythm through accelerated tempo." In this book we examine the temporal rhythms of resorts and their effects on both workers and guests.

But a postmodern community may have an impact on the people who work and live within it. Sociologists have long posited a relationship between society and self, so that change in the one fosters change in the other.³⁸ We analyze the selves of resort workers to see how they correspond to modern and postmodern images. The conventional, modernist model of the actor views the self as a genuine, real attribute—as reflexive, self-conscious, rational, and therefore autonomous. This self is seen as anchored in stable, mainstream social structures, in social values, in relationships to friends and communities—that is, in permanence (Mead 1934). The interactionist-derived model of the postmodern self posits that the self adapts to transformations in society. Dislocated from enduring social institutions, it has developed impulse (Turner 1976). Anchored increasingly in change rather than stability, it has become process- rather than product-oriented (Wood and Zurcher 1988). In a rapidly evolving, transformative society, it is mutable (Zurcher 1977).

Postmodernists reject this model as clinging to a modernist view of the real, or autonomous, self and failing to recognize its demise (Dowd 1991). They consider the self in the postmodern era as erased and dismantled by the bombardment of incoherent or "technologically saturated" (Gergen 1991) images coming from the media (Dowd 1991; Ewen 1988; Tseñlon 1992). These commercial images have replaced the constraints and framing supports of social structures like community and family, leaving individuals adrift in a world where the signifier has come uncoupled from the signified (Eco 1986; Manning 1991); the quest for self-presentation has replaced the quest for meaning. The self-concept has become an artifact of Baudrillard's (1983) hyperreality, replaced by the simulacrum, or the self-image. Postmodernists see the self, then, as an illusion, evoked situationally but adaptive and fragmented, emotionally flat and depthless (Goffman 1959, 1974; Jameson 1984). Fundamentally eroded, the postmodern self is like the layers of Goffman's metaphorical onion: devoid of a core, it is decentered and ultimately dissolved.³⁹ We show here how people exhibiting classical postmodern lives and inhabiting a highly postmodern community cling to a modernist model of the self.

Finally, the labor of resort workers falls into several areas of interest to scholars. In a review of the literature, McCammon and Griffin (2000) have suggested that service labor is a vastly understudied topic, especially given the huge percentage of the labor force that it encompasses. Little is known, in particular, about hotel work as service labor (although see Sherman 2003). The

vast majority of service labor research focuses on the direct interactional experiences between workers and their customers or clients. Hodson (2001) has suggested that employees' dignity may be affronted by mismanagement and abuse, overwork, challenges to authority, and contradictions in directives. Leidner (1999) has traced the stages at which service workers may be forced into demeaning emotional labor from their selection to their training, the scripting and feeling rules they receive, and their monitoring, leading them eventually to break out in resistance. We examine here not only the way resort workers feel about the direct service labor they deliver but how they explore new territory by considering the indirect effects of a service labor economy on both the workers and their broader community.

Issues of ethnicity abound in the labor literature. In a multiethnic labor force, workers may be racially stratified. Lieberman (1980) has suggested that racial and ethnic groups have historically come to inhabit occupational niches for one of two reasons: they have some cultural characteristic (perceived physical, mental, or social ability) that is associated with a given job, or they find a ripe opportunity structure available for this job at the time they enter the employment market.⁴⁰ We examine the racial and ethnic stratification of jobs in the Ali'i resorts, from the way workers seek and are placed into various ghettoized departments to the stratification in pay scale between ethnically associated jobs and the way workers legitimize and feel about these inequalities.

A spate of literature has addressed labor studies in the new economy. During the twentieth century, the United States shifted from a manufacturing economy to one dominated by its service sector.⁴¹ The growth in what the Bureau of the Census terms "service—producing" industries has been monumental, increasing from 30 percent in 1900 to 50 percent in 1950 and 80 percent by 2000, with 90 percent of all new jobs created by 2000 falling into the service sector.⁴² In addition, companies outside the service sector also contain service occupations, including 13.2 percent of employees in manufacturing who work in clerical, customer service, telemarketing, and transportation jobs (Kutscher 1987).

Service industries foster the existence of a dual labor-market economy, with large numbers of jobs requiring little to no skill that pay poorly and a smaller number of high-skilled, high-income jobs (Macdonald and Sirianni 1996; Nelson 1994). Labor segmentation theory suggests that in this new economy, race/ethnicity, age, class, and gender differences have increasingly stratified the labor pool.⁴³ People with demographic advantages have a greater opportunity to capture primary market jobs, while their more disadvantaged counterparts generally land in the less skilled secondary labor-market econ-

omy.⁴⁴ This has been exacerbated by the greater migration of workers from one country to another in search of jobs, as we have witnessed the rise of the global economy.⁴⁵ The tourist industry, with its preponderance of unskilled and semiskilled jobs, draws heavily from the secondary labor market.⁴⁶ Moreover, the secondary market is increasingly composed of contingent jobs.⁴⁷

The contingent labor force has its roots in what Morse (1969) first called "peripheral workers"—mostly blacks, women, and European and Asian immigrants, dating back to the turn of the nineteenth century, who were assigned to or accepted secondary, disposable, or "marginalized" employment roles (see also Harper and Simpson 1983). Contingency work became a meaningful lexicon in labor parlance when the term was coined in the mid-1980s by labor economist Audrey Freedman (Freedman 1985) in response to the corporate restructuring and downsizing that thrust, for the first time, many skilled, professional, white people into peripheral work roles.

The 1980s' economic boom saw a great rise in employment that created a large number of temporary, part-time, and other forms of unaffiliated positions that never converted to full-time jobs, burgeoning instead into their own segment of the economy (Golden and Appelbaum 1992). By the turn of the twenty-first century, the proportion of workers falling into the contingent labor force was estimated to have grown to between one-quarter and one-third of all those employed (Smith 1998). This situation has benefited management greatly, as prior to the 1980s only finance and marketing were considered flexible costs; employing people on a contingent basis added human resources to this list (Belous 1989; Osterman et al. 2001). Businesses have been able to expand without assuming the costs and obligations of affiliated workers, while increasing numbers of individuals have found themselves unable to find access to permanent, secure employment.

Like peripheral workers, certain populations are demographically more heavily represented in the contingent labor pool. Women hold approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of contingent jobs, although some indicators suggest that the United States may have more men in the contingent labor force than other countries.⁴⁸ By age, contingent workers are bi-modal, the majority being young people looking for their first or supplementary job (Tannock 2001), with another group falling into the bridge retirement category.⁴⁹ The service and retail sectors are those most commonly employing contingent workers, with 40–50 percent of their employees falling into this category (Rogers 2000; Tilly 1996).

All contingent work is not alike; it is patterned by several characteristics. Contingent work may be either voluntary—with individuals choosing to di-

vide their time between several positions, employers, and pastimes—or involuntary—where people want full-time, permanent jobs but are unable to find them (Levenson 2000). Some contingent jobs are tightly controlled, having little freedom, and may involve assignment to more dangerous or unpleasant tasks (Bronstein 1991). Others have a great deal of flexibility or autonomy, liberating workers from the monotony of a daily grind and enabling them to plan work schedules around other commitments.⁵⁰

While some workers prefer more flexible employment relationships,⁵¹ contingency work almost always favors employers.⁵² In assessing the pros and cons, Kalleberg et al. (2000, 274) have stated: "Nonstandard work arrangements represent a potential source of employment flexibility for both employers and workers, and they are doubly attractive to employers because they often reduce employment costs. For many nonstandard workers, however, any gains in flexibility come at a high price, and for the society they are likely to exacerbate socioeconomic inequality if qualified workers who seek regular full-time jobs must settle for less desirable alternatives." Individuals working on a contingent basis may be skilled and highly trained, but most of them are drawn from the secondary labor market with its lack of skills, low pay, high turnover, and diminished career ladders for advancement (Barker and Christensen 1998; Bridges 1994).

Contingent work may be short-term, done on an interim or entry basis, or it may be permanent, with individuals stuck in jobs where they have no opportunity to acquire the long-term and ancillary benefits of full-time labor. Some contingent jobs fall at the point of origination, serving as stepping-stones into organizations and industries (Houseman 2001), while others are retention-oriented—created to hold onto the skills, knowledge, and expertise of valued individuals (Tilly 1996). Contingent workers may be integrated into departments and offices with full-time workers; or they may be relatively segregated, located in all-temp environments (Rogers 2000).⁵³ Despite rhetoric suggesting that contingent workers embrace this occupational form, by far the majority of contingent jobs are involuntary, highly regulated, point-of-origination positions located in the secondary labor market.⁵⁴ Negrey (1990) has argued that contingency work is debilitating, exploitive, and fraught with instability.

Unionization is an important labor issue in Hawai'i, with its strong democratic tradition. The last three decades of the twentieth century witnessed a decline in union membership in the United States (Osterman 1999). Unionization was challenged during this period for a number of reasons (see Parker 2002). First, contingent workers are considered hard to unionize because

their relationship to their employer is unstable and fragile (Carré et al. 1995). Second, certain categories of workers are less likely to unionize. Women may be inferior union prospects because of their family responsibilities, their marginal commitment to the labor market, and their submission to a patriarchal system. Workers of color and youth may also be difficult to organize because of their large participation in the secondary labor market.⁵⁵ Immigrant workers, too, may represent challenges to unionization because of their submissive attitudes, their strong work ethic, their satisfaction with low wages, their linguistic barriers, and their potentially problematic citizenship status.⁵⁶

Labor segmentation theory suggests that in this new economy, race/ethnicity, class, and gender differences have increasingly divided the labor pool (Wells 2000). To the extent that employers are successful in exploiting this segmentation by creating a stratified labor force within their organizations, they can maintain divisions between their employees, hindering workers' recognition of shared labor interests (Gordon et al. 1982). This structural situation represents a challenge to the politics of labor organization.

The history of labor relations and unionization in the hospitality industry in Hawai'i is a successful one. Although it began with frustration immediately following World War II and moved into hard-fought and sometimes violent strikes, by the 1960s and 1970s resort employees were largely well represented (Stern 1989). Hawai'i has been a notably Democratic state with a strong orientation toward unions since the 1950s.⁵⁷ Union representation of hotel workers first established a strong foothold on O'ahu and then spread to the outer islands (Stern 1989).

These major changes in the relations between employers and their employees occurred as the institutional structure that shaped the postwar labor market progressively eroded. Economic times became tougher, technology was substituted for human labor, unionization declined, and existing norms of loyalty between workers and their firms weakened (Osterman 1999). We have witnessed the evolving pattern of labor organization in the postindustrial world (Piore and Sabel 1984). To best understand employer-employee relations in the current, evolving context, organization theorists have adapted their perspective from focusing primarily on organizations to including other relevant factors in the equation. The "new structuralist" paradigm⁵⁸ abandoned a "closed system" approach focusing solely on the internal structures of organizations in favor of an "open system" paradigm that investigated how organizations interact with their employees and with labor markets (Kalleberg et al. 1996).

Resort hotels, as part of the tourism industry, have seen no such change

in their production methods, forms of work organization, or employment relationships, because they have always been organized on a seasonal and fluctuating basis, capitalizing on high employee turnover and contingent labor. Yet these issues, recently raised about broader segments of the economy, are germane to hospitality organizations. Some of the labor studies cited engage a few of the issues noted above, while others focus more exclusively on a single dimension of work in the new or global economy. *In this research, the diversity of worker types we studied allows us to engage nearly the full spectrum of issues raised by labor scholars.*

Some of these labor studies are single-case studies, focusing on particular organizations or workplaces (Devinatz 1999; Graham 1995), while others are multiple-case comparative studies (Rogers 2000; Smith 2001). In this book we use a single-type organization approach, focusing on five different resorts all within the same industry. *While most single-type organizational studies are based on survey or archival research (Kalleberg et al. 1996), we employ ethnographic methods to delve more deeply into workers' experiences across a range of similar organizations.*

The Setting

Resorts in the Hawaiian Islands are some of the most spectacular and famous in the world, regularly gracing the pages and top one hundred lists of such upscale magazines as *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Travel and Leisure*, and *Gourmet*. The Ali'i resorts were elegant, located on a beachfront strip in a community which we call "Lanikai." Their tropical waters featured lava rock and reefs, complete with fish, whales, dolphins, and sea turtles. Their regal palm trees towered over their manicured lawns. Their rushing pools and waterfalls filled the air with a soothing sense of serenity. Fragrant smells perfumed the air; gigantic floral arrangements dazzled the eye. Their guest rooms were spacious and well appointed.

Some but not all of the Ali'i resorts we studied received the prestigious AAA five-diamond rating, reserved for the most exclusive and expensive properties, while others routinely achieved four diamonds (hotel ratings also changed from year to year). These hotels were built over a two-decade span, with some of the earlier ones featuring an older style and simplicity.⁵⁹ Newer, more recent additions incorporated the latest in resort design, with open lobby ceilings, vaulted room entrances, bathrooms suitable for royalty, and dramatic waterfalls and fountains. These Ali'i resorts ranged from family- to

honeymoon-oriented, from modest to outlandish, from simple to elaborate. They included independents, small chains, and large chain resorts (and shifted among these modes frequently); were Japanese- or American-owned; American or European managed; and catered to a different mix of predominantly American clientele supplemented by some local, Japanese, and other international guests. We call these five resorts the "Lukane Sands," the "Kahana Surf," the "Pono Beach Spa," the "Lei Gardens," and the "Hula Club Towers."

Visitors to this part of Hawai'i could walk up and down the beaches, venturing into the lobbies and pool areas of the various resorts, enjoying the quiet privacy of some, while gawking at the majesty of others. Shopping was situated conveniently nearby, so that guests who tired of eating or shopping at the resorts' restaurants and arcades could have a variety of alternative choices.

Simulacrum and Hawaiian Resorts

Key to contemporary Hawaiian resort architecture is the construction of simulations of the natural beauty of the Islands. In the more elaborate properties, these went beyond representation, which tries to recreate the real, to simulacrum, which enhances the real. Simulation progresses, according to Baudrillard (1983), from reflecting the basic reality to masking and perverting basic reality, then to masking the absence of a basic reality, finally abandoning relation to any reality whatsoever; it becomes its own pure simulacrum. Baudrillard noted the relation of simulacrum to truth and nature, suggesting that it was once the case that we sought to make models of the real, to make maps or mirror images. The real would remain, but these models would fade over time. Now that has become reversed. We see "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The real territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory" (Baudrillard 1983, 2).

Hawaiian hotels, as some of the most exotic in the world, seek to attract and to retain their guests. Many are destination resorts, where guests are encouraged never to leave the property.⁶⁰ If there are natural sights to be viewed, these lure away guests and their spending dollars. Resorts able to construct representations of natural sites that compete with the existing reality may entice guests into abandoning their thoughts of touring the island. Once developers began to construct these simulations, they became so grandiose that they shot to eclipse the real. Baudrillard (1983, 3) noted that "Simulacrum no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance . . . it is no longer real at all." Destination development is a science and an art that relies on the construction of fantasy. Chuck Law,⁶¹ the deputy di-

rector of the Pono Beach Spa, commented on the simulated atmosphere created at his resort: "We're always creating this fantasy world—the Hawaiian experience. The Far East, Las Vegas, they're super plastic, but they have a certain glamour to them. This is another world, totally opposite from that. . . . I wanted to associate myself with this kind of fantasy of what luxury is."

Different resorts up and down the Ali'i strip constructed various kinds of simulacrum. Waterfalls were the most common effect, and most had more than one. More elaborate waterfalls incorporated natural flowers and plants growing out of the rocks behind and around the water, or had water tumbling into ponds filled with peaceful and stunning koi fish. Some waterfall simulacra sought to imitate the natural dripping walls of the Islands, where water leaked slowly along open-faced rock, rather than tumbling or rushing down, promoting a growth of exotic flowers.

The use of natural and artificial materials to create the rock walls around the resorts' waterfalls, pools, ponds, and restaurants ranged from simple to elaborate. Some properties used the natural indigenous rock from the area to build displays. Others gathered lava rock from the Islands and incorporated this rugged texture. Rock was also imported from off-island to create particular mountainous effects. Finally, some rock was artificially created from synthetic materials. Molds of Hawaiian mountains were taken and used to cast synthetic rock formations that were assembled in varied positions so that repetitions would not be noticed. Artificial volcanoes were built, lava flows simulated, natural cascading rivers and streams reproduced, and lava tubes and caves constructed. Flora and fauna from all over the islands and beyond were imported, from an array of plant life to birds and fish. These were often complemented with elaborate art collections.

A resort developer at one of the Ali'i properties explained to us his aim in designing his hotel, his conception of the image he wanted to portray:

The philosophy behind today's hotel development is based heavily upon commercialism. Seldom considered is the idea of creating it [a hotel] to be a cultural asset and making it the center of culture for the region. . . . Many years ago, as far back as the early 1990s, there were some dedicated people who had dreams and created very special hotels of extremely high quality. . . . Recently a number of so-called high-class hotels have been built in Hawai'i, but they fall short of the needed, true, high quality standards. Most of such "luxury hotels" tend to charge high room rates, stand on false pretense, and ignore the importance of harmony with Hawai'i's nature. Some of these hotels are no different than ordinary city hotels,

and many are more like a Las Vegas establishment, while others seem more like something from the Arabian Nights. A visitor may wonder where he had drifted to. Seasoned travelers find such hotels less than satisfactory. Unless someone with accurate vision creates a true quality hotel with real cultural value and flavor, the future of resorts in Hawai'i may be in danger.

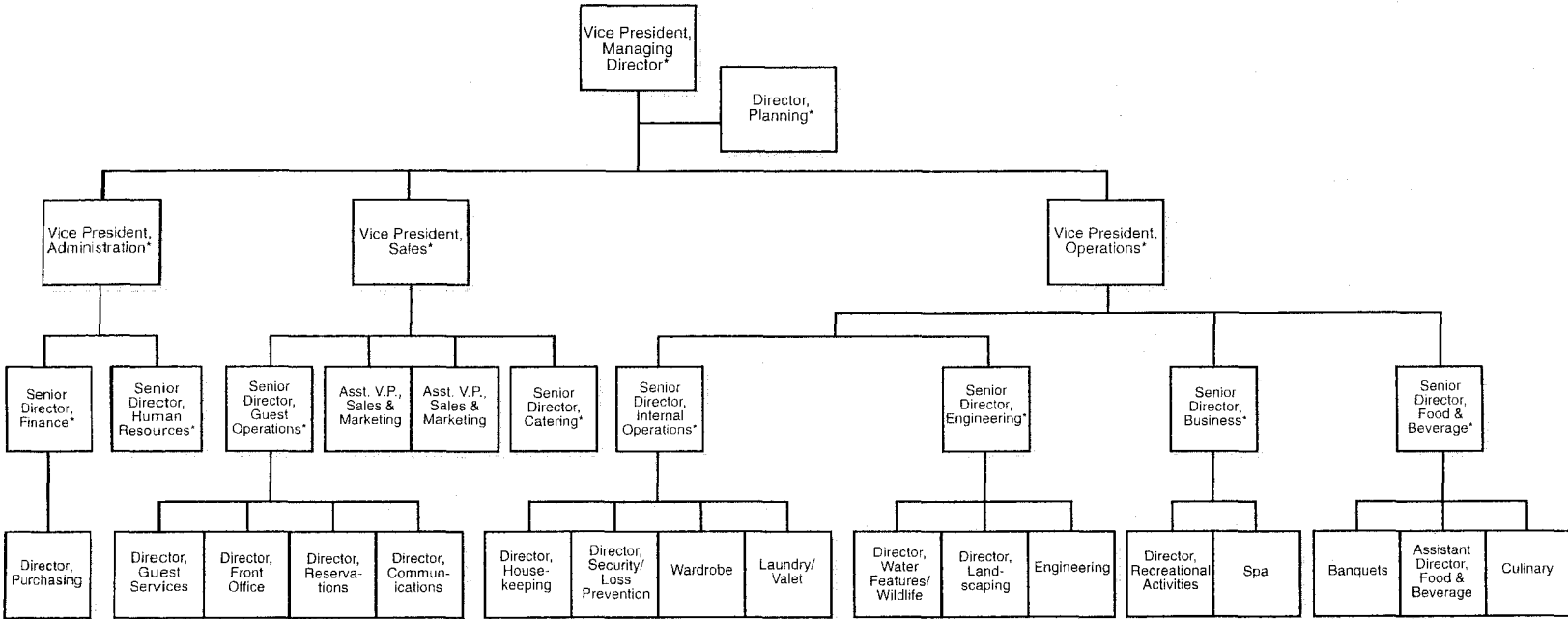
What this developer was proposing was that the simulated images of Hawai'i he created offered a more real cultural representation and center of culture for the region than the genuine sites. It is this image that the Ali'i resorts wanted to sell to their guests, the notion that they embodied the "real Hawai'i," one that could not be found as accurately outside the hotels (see Desmond 1999). Baudrillard (1983, 25) echoed this concept, noting that the simulacrum of nature is there to conceal the fact that "real" nature is no longer real; the hyperreal is the real. Real nature is of the order of the hyperreal and of simulacrum. "It is no longer a question of the false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle."

Functioning of a Resort

The Ali'i resorts were complex organizational and social systems. They operated continuously; they employed hundreds, sometimes more than a thousand workers; and they encompassed many different departments. These resorts slotted employees into a range of work areas. Back-of-the-house departments included laundry, housekeeping, tailoring, room reservations, hotel operator, human resources, comptroller and accounting, information systems, and security. Food and beverage departments included the restaurants, kitchens (prep workers and chefs), room service, banquet, stewarding, housemen (who set up and broke down the functions), weddings, and catering. Front-of-the-house departments included bell, valet, front desk, concierge, beach and pool (also commonly referred to as either recreation, or simply, rec), fitness and spa, retail shops, beauty salon, camp, outdoor housekeeping, water features, and engineering.

The chain of command through various positions and departments at the Ali'i resorts shifted constantly, resulting in a frequent redrawing of their organizational flow charts. Different positions appeared and disappeared with the recruitment and loss of upper-level management. Chains of command shifted similarly, with changes in personnel and new strategies for efficiency causing departments to move out of one unit's sphere of influence into another's. The

Executive Committee Organizational Chart



* Executive Committee member

Executive Committee Organizational Chart

composition of any Ali'i resort's executive committee was apt to change with shifts in ownership and management, and even while these two factors stayed constant. It is thus difficult to sketch out the key positions of authority in any of these resorts and to identify the departments that fell within the realm of various executives. We present one sample, composite organizational chart from the period during which we conducted our research, chosen because it represents the best example of what key departments and positions could be found in any of these resorts at a given time.

Hotels are notoriously ghettoized in their allocation of labor. Some of the Ali'i resorts' departments were marked by their gender assignment, others by age, and still others by ethnicity. While individuals might come in understanding this stratified placement system and request jobs in their demographically appropriate locations, those ignorant about it were quickly funneled into departments with others like themselves (see chapter 8). Women tended to work in laundry, housekeeping, hotel operator, human resources, weddings, beauty salon, and camp; male departments included MIS (management information systems), security, stewarding, housemen, bell, valet, water features, and engineering. The remaining departments were mixed-gender staffed.

Resorts tended to feature young workers; there were rather few departments where older employees could keep up with the work or feel comfortable. Attractive, slim, young workers populated the most visible areas. Older employees congregated in departments marked by little to no guest contact, mostly in the back of the house. Finally, a range of ethnic stereotypes existed, pushing workers into departments with others of their race and ethnic background (see chapter 8). Workers' pay scale was directly affected by the department in which they worked, and these ghettoized placements created a system of stratification that arose from the entrenched assumptions of what kinds of workers would be appropriate for each location. These employment trends are discussed more fully in later chapters.

Overview of the Book

Chapter 2 brings to life the resorts we studied and our role within them. We discuss the evolving nature of our research and the character of the resorts. In explaining our methods, we specifically examine our early research interests and our formal application for study, establishing our membership role, gathering data, expanding our focus, and reflecting on our methodology.

The major typology of workers is introduced in chapters 3 and 4. Here we begin introducing the many people we studied (for ease of reference, we include an appendix with a complete list of individuals, their hotels, and the departments in which they worked). We use these chapters to set the framework for all the work we subsequently develop analytically, as these groups have distinctly different work and living arrangements. Chapter 3 focuses on the trapped workers, the new immigrants and locals. Chapter 4 looks at the transient workers, the seekers and management. We discuss the background, composition, lifestyle, family arrangements, and customs of each group, using extensive quotes to give readers a flavor of the types of people who fall within each. These chapters articulate the various kinds of leisure pursued by each group and its relation to its work.

In contrast to the embedded nature of the new immigrants and locals, the trapped population, the seeker and management categories of workers are highly transient groups, as we will see in chapter 5. Occupational transience has been given scant attention sociologically, and it is tied in to the increasingly global flow of workers. In this chapter we look at these workers' lifestyles: their types of transience—transient careers, transient families, and transient friendships. These are postmodern workers with postmodern lifestyles.

Dealing with seasonality is one of the organizational challenges faced by resorts, as many of them are located in areas that are favored by weather and the seasonal fluctuations of families with children in school. Organizations that can streamline their staff during slow seasons and expand it during busy seasons can operate more profitably. Resorts thus have an economic incentive to maintain a flexible workforce. In chapter 6 we discuss the three seasons faced by Hawaiian resorts: group season (when corporations bring their workers for incentive reward and convention trips), "FIT" season (when families take their vacations), and slow season (when guests are scarcer). Departments in the resorts are affected differently in these periods, as groups use the convention, catering, and banquet services, while families throng to the restaurants, shops, beaches, and pools. During slow season employees are released, although cutting the workforce too sharply is damaging, as it shrinks the reliable, year-round steady core of employees who know how to operate the resorts. We discuss the seasonal adaptations made by these resorts as they expand and constrict their labor pool. We then discuss the lifestyle adaptations workers must make as they plan the yearly fluctuations in their patterns of work and anticipated income.

Time is a dimension that has become increasingly relevant to our "insatiant" society in the postmodern age. We have increasingly conquered what

was once referred to as a new frontier with a society that operates around the clock. In chapter 7 we contrast the rhythms of “natural time,” so important to the beach- and sun-seeking guests in the Hawaiian Islands, with the “commercial time” artificially constructed by the resorts that keeps many departments operating around the clock. More time to sell makes resorts more profitable and increases the convenience for guests who can order food, make reservations, or speak to a concierge at any hour of the day or night. Experimentally, however, breaking out of the rut and rhythm of the workday time clock offers freedom to guests, who take vacations to be freed from the constraints of temporal management. To provide this service to guests, however, resort employees must labor around the clock in daytime (first), evening (second), and graveyard (third) shifts. We discuss the experiential dislocation that occurs for employees who work in atemporal shifts and the adaptations they make.

Resorts are organizations where the ethnic ghettoization of their multicultural workforce is dramatic. Employees are steered into departments populated by members of their ethnic/racial groups by administrative stereotyping. In chapter 8 we go in-depth with several cases that dramatically illustrate this occupational stratification. Focusing specifically on the departments most affected by seasonal fluctuation, the catering and convention arena of food and beverage, we present the work and leisure lives of workers in three departments—new immigrant stewards, the most poorly paid of the three areas; local housemen, from the median-paid area; and haole banquet servers, who make the most money. This chapter delves more deeply into these workers’ lives, discussing how these individuals came to Hawai‘i and to work in the Ali‘i resorts, how they came to their particular departments, what their work is like, and how their income is figured. They specifically discuss their placement in these highly stratified departments and the way they feel about their differential pay and work conditions.

Chapter 9 begins our examination of the occupational careers of resort employees. To understand the differential fluctuations of these workers’ span of resort employment, we focus on each of our four worker groups and consider those who last for short-term (two to three years) or intermediate (up to eight or nine years) lengths of stay. In each category, we look at factors that led workers to remain in or depart from paradise, taking into consideration both their initial intentions and how these may have changed along the way. In so doing, we examine reasons why people leave resort employment, influenced by a variety of push-out and pull-out factors from becoming burned out to getting fired to seeking preferable jobs.

A variety of factors lead employees to stall in their jobs. Encountering adverse working conditions, they may become dissatisfied or uncomfortable. In chapter 10 we consider a variety of glass ceilings and other factors that shorten the careers of women, people of color, and older people. We then turn to those who make the hospitality industry their lifetime career, what the motivations and experiences are for each of our four worker groups, and why even those who decide to remain in resort work to the end usually leave at an earlier age than they might retire from other occupations.

Finally, in chapter 11, we examine the theoretical implications of the data presented in the previous chapters and the nature of resort work in paradise locations. We begin by analyzing resorts as postmodern, global communities, from their demographic composition to their temporality and to workers' social psychological self-portraits. We then look at work and labor issues, beginning with the nature of the service work involved in the hospitality industry, the demographics and characteristics of the Ali'i resorts' contingent laborers compared to the broader contingent workforce, examining why some contingent jobs were considered good and others bad. We consider the influence of ethnicity on the Ali'i diverse tourist labor force, examining how people of color are ghettoized, commodified, exploited, tokenized, socially closed, and ethnically stratified by job queues. We look at the difficulties cited in organizing hospitality labor in the tourism industry and discuss how the Ali'i resorts and their employees dealt with the issue of unionization, analyzing the particular impact of the two dimensions of transient/trapped as well as advantaged/disadvantaged on their labor organizing. Finally, we discuss the political economy of tourism, bringing issues of the relationship among resorts, employees, and the local labor market to the fore, as each factor plays a part in contributing to the structure of labor opportunities in paradise. We examine the short-term needs of each group and how these contribute to the long-term implications for the paradise workforce and the economy.