



# World Heritage Research

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## Abstract

Actions taken in order to preserve culture can be perceived as controversial in support of self-determination. However, cultures that move from their homeland and geographically relocate to other parts of the world may face additional pressures that physically, emotionally, and culturally challenge the cultural heritage of a diaspora group. This inquiry focused on how one specific Hawaiian diaspora community (hula hālau dance school) in Southern California communicates their cultural identity through the preservation, interpretation and performance of the hula. Through questionnaires and interviews from the participants of this hula community, the research explored themes of cultural identity, resistance and empowerment when interpreting and performing the hula. However, strategies created by this hula community to preserve their cultural legacies of the hula dance may resist pre-established Hawaiian identities as what it means to be “Hawaiian” for off-island Hawaiians was historically predefined by Western perspectives and predetermined by island Hawaiians. For this hula community, the group has come to recognize that prearticulations of identity and cultural practices are not “fixed” spaces; rather, through imaginative dialogue, Hawaiian identity can be (re)negotiated, co-constructed, and experienced as empowering. Therefore, the conclusion of this research is that what it is “to be Hawaiian” is then determined by what diaspora Hawaiians believe to be “Hawaiian” for them and subject to change in different Hawaiian communities. Importantly, another strategy to empower diaspora Hawaiian communities may be acceptance of outside cultural membership by non-Hawaiians to ensure cultural preservation.

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