

Studying Abroad, Marketing Globalization, Reconnecting Heritage:

A Case Study in Tahiti

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Abstract

This thesis investigates specific dimensions of study abroad in the Pacific Islands, including motivation, classifications of different program types, the experiences of participants and their hosts. Focusing on a case study in Tahiti, this thesis argues several points. First, although research claims that a period of less than three months is not sufficient for cultural immersion through study abroad, this thesis supports findings that the venue or hosts of a study abroad group can lead to meaningful development of new understanding of cultural difference. Second, this thesis suggests that participation in study abroad is a tool of prestige and power for those coming from global metropolises to establish their global citizens. However, I argue that the qualities of prestige are configured differently for heritage students. Finally, with respect to indigenous and local representations of the Pacific, this thesis argues that there is a short period of hyper-indigenization of persons and locations that occurs during the time frame of study abroad programs touching both participants and providers. Where hyper-indigenization produces sense of unchanging and timeless indigeneity, this thesis finds a paradoxical denial of colonial history. However, for those participants who claim Pacific Island heritage, this thesis argues that through study abroad there is also a sense of reconnection to their identity.

“Hindsight, I think, is a useless tool. We, each of us, are at a place in our lives because of innumerable circumstances, and we, each of us, have a responsibility (if we do not like where we are) to move along life's road, to find a better path if this one does not suit, or to walk happily along this one if it is indeed our life's way. Changing even the bad things that have gone before would fundamentally change who we are, and whether or not that would be a good thing, I believe, it is impossible to predict. So I take my past experiences... and try to regret nothing.”

- **RA Salvatore**

Introduction

Traditionally, the Pacific has been a focus of scholarship across many disciplines and within various academic institutions. International studies have used the Pacific Islands as examples of pre-industrialization scenarios, the effects of colonial rule, and the modernization of indigenous communities. These fields have served an agenda that Wesley-Smith suggests, were ways ‘metropolitan countries’ could define the region; “An important driving force behind their development has been a pragmatic need to know about Pacific Islands places with which the metropolitan countries have to deal” (Wesley-Smith, 1995: 117). Knowledge of the Pacific was not only discussed within the region but in global and colonial centers around the world. Through study abroad programs, Western and Eurocentric institutions addressed these areas outside their physical territories of “home” educational institutions. The interests in international education can be highlighted in the increase participation of study abroad, especially in the Pacific in the late 20th Century. These Western programs addressed the colonial presences of their own homelands in the area, and provided further study of the region. At the same time study abroad programs in the Pacific had to acknowledge and traverse contemporary issues presently concerning colonization and the post-colonial social and political development of many Pacific states.

These fields were sites of educational contest where indigenous scholars attempt to address and understand the colonial pall that had befallen the Pacific through European institutions. “Practitioners of the emerging cultural studies of Oceania are seeking ways of referring to Pacific Islander realities using Euro-American discourses while simultaneously undermining colonialist assumptions about the supposed universal applicability of those discourses” (Wood, 2003: 341). Questions of identity and representation are raised in these areas,

as the Pacific Islanders are equally exposed to a foreign subject to their soils. The interactions between the study abroad participant and local are a focus in this project. How does the local populace represent themselves? Do the images of Pacific Islanders change after the program or are they enforced? And what are the thoughts or opinions of the local populace of study abroad? Exploration into the imagined spaces of the Pacific and the address of international education should raise “various imagined givens—tensions such as small versus large, indigeneity and introduced, identity and difference, spatial and virtual” (Subramani, 2001: 151).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith states, “for the indigenous world, Western conceptions of space, of arrangements and display, of relationship between people and the landscape, of culture as an object of study, have meant that not only has the indigenous world been represented in particular ways to the West, but the indigenous world view, the land and the people, have been radically transformed in the spatial image of the West” (Smith, 199: 51). Aware of the complexities that structure the Pacific, this thesis investigates Pacific studies in education, and the operations of study abroad programs in the region. Study abroad programs bring the aspect of globalization into view and they provide new avenues of international awareness. However, the valuing of the institution’s own educational and epistemological policies and the push of globalized education can supersede the local Pacific Islander knowledge systems. According to Woods, “these multiple epistemologies must be embraced in a cultural study for Oceania despite the fact that each (may) produce different truths and realities, but precisely because such multiplicities are and should remain a valued manifestation of this fluid and complex region” (Woods, 2003: 341). The role of study abroad and its impact upon the region are effected by global changes in this sense.

Barbara Freed defines study abroad as “an educational experience in a country or province other than their own” (Freed, 1995: 3). This definition is notable in that it defines the overall educational value of study abroad as an “experience” for students. Study abroad is geared toward an exploration that enhances a scholar’s experience in a different cultural setting and allows for development of foreign language skills and intercultural competence. Programs are gauged and established on the surveys of previous experiences and the pragmatic resolve and laboratory rationality of those previous programs. However, popular images of the cultural exotic or escapist paradise are mainly discussed through the avenues of tourism. The image that tourist industries establish thus and through social media further enforces these ideas of the Pacific and the character of the identity of the native people. Media such as picturesque backgrounds or photos on Facebook tend to hide the disparities existing in the Pacific, and transform the history of indigenous people. Consider Teaiwa’s piece on the ‘bikini’ swimwear popular worldwide. “The bikini bathing suit is testament to the recurring tourist trivialization of Pacific Islanders’ experience and existence” (Teaiwa, 1994: 87). The continued use of the term bikini and imagery of the ‘beach paradise’ that it represents obscures the history of Bikini Atoll islands originally entrusted under the United States after WWII as ‘Trust Territories.’ Victims of US militarization and nuclear testing, the Bikini Islanders were dispossessed of their land, and thus their identity and genealogical ties were displaced. The tourist image of paradise, perpetuated by articles of clothing like the bikini, has been a vehicle of imagination and point of reference for aspiring students in study abroad groups pre-departure of the region.

The re-imagination of place and identity is not strictly confined an exclusive anomaly of the Pacific. Vincente Diaz makes notes that images such as Colonel Sanders, the ‘quintessential southern gentlemen’ contrasts with the “ubiquitous black momma best imaged in Aunt Jemima

of pancake and syrup fame” (2005: 106). A history of referencing identity through western languages and trains of thoughts hide social and political disparities, where Diaz notes that everyday language used during his childhood carried significant meaning. Looking at the terms ‘Paapee or Maamee,’ endearment terms for elderly figures in the Chamorro community, he notes that these terms carry references to political agendas and colonial histories that narrate what ‘white estates,’ push or have pushed in indigenous communities, especially those of Spanish influence. The white southern gentlemen thus are standardized as a means for advancement, and the indigenous representation in the ‘Maamee’ are positioned as an obscure and perhaps insulting reference of the ‘inadequacy’ of any lifestyle that is not western. These types of images are continuously produced and advocated contemporary in the Pacific by western influenced institutions.

One of the biggest industries and institution in the Pacific is tourism. The tourist industry stands as the central point of reference traveling for those to the region in advocating Pacific Islander culture and identity. Students enrolled in study abroad in the region will be influenced in some way by touristic images. The historical fictions of European writers of the ‘nostalgic, noble, grandiose, and dying’ Native American present similar expressions of identity that occur in physical media through postcards and photos of the Pacific. Kahn notes of this especially in Tahiti. Tahiti has invested a great amount of resources in the tourist industry and continued perpetration of the mythical images that were imagined by early European explorers. “The new weight given to tourism as the economic backbone of the Territory meant that representing Tahiti as a pristine paradise was of paramount importance” (Kahn, 2011: 79). The creation of postcards was to reflect the paradisiacal imagined, and characterize contemporary Tahiti in a stagnant image. These postcards that promoted tourism sought to “to eliminate items that were

inconsistent with the myth. Settings were staged with ‘traditional’ props...The images produced were, and for the most part continue to be, of seemingly pristine landscapes, luxury hotels, folkloric activities, and attractive Tahitian women.” (Kahn, 2011: 80) Local personalities would promote this image and modify the image of their home, justifying their actions as manipulation of the market for their economic gain and livelihood. These media are in turn marketed to study abroad programs and students.

Representations of the Pacific are often muddled due to capitalistic interests and mediating institutions that support these interests. Regional representations are not only reflected in contemporary media; they are also historically grounded. The term ‘paradise on Earth,’ found its origins in the language of sailors of the early exploration period, whose first exposure with the islands’ natural landscape and inhabitants invoked fantastical narratives such as islands of love and the Noble Savage. These images found their way across time and geographical distance into western institutions, where the mention of the Pacific continues to impart frenzied media visions of an “escape,” or “vacation.” Kahn notes how the islands became synonymous with the region. In “Tahiti Beyond the Postcard: Power, Place, and Everyday Life (Culture, Place, and Nature)” The effect of outside influences on the local community, i.e. tourism, colonialism, and international advocacy distorted the image of the island. “Consider Tahiti, a geographically inaccurate but vividly evocative name for what in reality is French Polynesia, a French territory in the Pacific Ocean that consists of more than 130 islands scattered over an expanse of water the size of Western Europe, only one island of which (albeit the largest) is accurately called Tahiti” (Kahn, 2003: 308). In discussions between the local community and outside influences in Tahiti, certain imagery becomes prevalent when discussing the region. However, such images and discussions, do not only inform tourism, they also influence both domestic and foreign

institutions of education and are framed into study abroad programs. Need to understand international educational interests in the region becomes more imperative as these programs begun to address or define these distorted images of the Pacific.

A Pacific Inspiration

This thesis seeks to provide a scope of understanding of study abroad in the context of the Pacific. I use French Polynesia and specifically the island of Tahiti as an exemplary case study for study abroad patterns proposed as likely to be relevant to study abroad across the region. My own interests in this work stem from prior experience with study abroad groups, notably as a participant in 2012 and 2014. Both study abroad programs were sponsored through the Department of Anthropology at the University of Washington, with a focus on cultural interaction in a contemporary colonized region. These programs lasted four to five weeks. As an undergraduate, I had the fortunate experience to travel to Tahiti twice on both programs. Although others would venture that I should have found my experience abroad in another location the second time, I found an attraction to Tahiti that resonated with personal questions based on identity and nationality. Having been born in Seattle and raised in a community in New Zealand, I faced two different worlds of western influences. My heritage tied to the island of Samoa, I found only westernized education and influences to guide me. I was byproduct of the diaspora, in a way that suppressed any need to reconnect with my Samoan ancestry, to such a degree where I found myself floundering in the language. New Zealand has one of the largest communities of Pacific Islanders. Yet, even in that atmosphere I found that my own thoughts did not resonate with Pacific Islands but with the western states. I found a fascination with European culture that was further fueled by the instances of cultural dances I saw as embarrassing due to a Catholic upbringing. Having no personal tie to my Pacific roots, I delved into a national identity,

first as kiwi then as a US citizen when my family moved back to America. There I found myself in an education system that did not address my own ancestral home, and a population that was ignorant of Samoa.

My childhood alienated me further away from the Pacific as I learned European and US history in school, and when I finally found myself in a university, I did not seek other islanders. Indeed, I may have actively avoided them. It was one day only when one of my professors introduced me to other Pacific island students who took me in and introduced me to the greater community that I experienced a shift. They told me of home, of Samoa, and told me of the Pacific and a pride they felt in their identity. I found myself craving that sense of pride they exhibited and in exploring that thought I found a study abroad program to Tahiti. The first time in Tahiti, as a Samoan, as a Pacific Islander, I found a connection to a deeper, broader and rich heritage. Although I was Samoan, and although our islands had experienced different histories of colonialism, I found my heritage. I reconnected with it, drew from the experiences of dancing, singing, and interacting with other islanders and when we left Tahiti, I left reluctantly. It was not the home of my ancestors. But it was culture that was kin to my own, and resonated deeply with my sense of identity. This sense was what drove my education as I abandoned the pursuit of understanding European history and began to unravel the history of the Pacific.

This was a history filled with exploration, with imperial designs and with institutional agendas. It is a heavy history of exploitation that I did not know existed and my second trip to Tahiti was to confirm the truths of colonialism and the impact. Studying abroad aided me in this respect; indeed, it was the vehicle through which I found my Pacific roots and the drive to understand the impact of the west on my culture. I was a byproduct of western education that pointed to my heritage through a study abroad program. It is a narrative I repeat to myself, and it

was in that interest of how I found my drive and heritage that I would intersect with understanding how I got there. However, although my experience with study abroad proved beneficial for my own personal growth, I began to question how it impacted the Pacific. Was my experience singular? Did study abroad give insight and sensitivity to a different culture to those who did not claim heritage from the Pacific? What did other students think of the Pacific? The most pressing question to me, as a scholar who was becoming better versed in the language of colonization, was this; is study abroad truly a vehicle for interpersonal growth or is it a tool for westernization and globalization? Thoughts of the families and friends I have made in Tahiti, have driven me to writing this thesis, and exploring study abroad in the Pacific. I draw from not only my own experiences, but from other students who have traveled to Tahiti, from the local populace and from current research on study abroad.

Organization

This thesis adds to the conversation of study abroad, in reference of the Pacific and more specifically the context of Tahiti. Organized into three chapters, this thesis seeks to first establish a definition of study abroad, participants, and experiences of those who travel outside the United States. The first chapter sets up studying abroad, the statistical information on those who participate, the motivation, and benefits of the program, and specifically establishes a classification system of different programs that is widely used by academic institutions (Engle and Engle, 2003). Additionally, I provide in this chapter study abroad programs active in the Pacific, with a quick overview of the study abroad programs at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and those programs by educational institutes in the region. Specifically, I draw attention to those programs involved in Tahiti. The second chapter discusses Tahiti, those who have studied there and their experiences. Establishing a quick overview of the history and socio-

political economic atmosphere of the island, this chapter will also reflect upon the tourist industry. This chapter will review and reflect upon student experiences involving their own identity in special regards to those who claim heritage from the region, as well as a quick overview of a host organization known as Maeva I Te Ora. The third and last chapter provides an analysis and critique of study abroad, the importance of cultural competency, and local responses from within Tahiti to study abroad. This chapter specifically focuses on the interactions of students and the local populace, as well as revealing minor discrepancies involving representation of culture. Two student cases will be presented in this chapter about intercultural competence, as well as some negative responses by heritage students including the establishment of a term I coin as hyper-indigenization. This hyper-indigenization leads to several consequences upon the populace and the study abroad program. This chapter ends on the matter of heritage students and how they study abroad. This thesis will conclude with an analytical discussion of the benefits of study abroad and the value of understanding study abroad in the Pacific.

Chapter 1: Defining Study Abroad

The world is no longer a cluster of confined nations and walled cities. Trade, knowledge and people move freely and quickly with the advancement of transportation overcoming many natural barriers. The affairs of one nation can affect all on a global scale. International education takes a precedent then as a tool in understanding this scale, and in understanding the difference between cultures and nations. Universities around the world trade knowledge freely hoping to overcome the differences that exist between a diverse range of languages and cultures. And students serve as both ambassadors and explorers in these exchanges that manifest themselves in study abroad programs. Yet what is study abroad? What attracts students to places that are culturally and socially different and will surely challenge in the duration of their stay? Who are these students and what do they gain in this exchange? And in understanding the definition of these exchanges, how does this impact the Pacific? This chapter explores the attraction and infrastructure of study abroad, the students and their motivation. Finally, this chapter sheds some understanding on studying abroad in the Pacific, the various programs involved and some insight into where students study in the region.

The Grand Tour and the Attraction of America

Traveling abroad for the pursuit of education and culture has many historical roots in western culture. John Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" (1690) argued travel as means to expand the mind and obtain knowledge from other areas of the world. Other European historians, such as Edward Gibbon stated cultured travel as the completion of an 'English Gentlemen's' education (Bragg, 2002). These thought and motivation manifested in the Grand Tour of Europe. The principle aims of the tour, which was a circuit of Western Europe undertaken by the aristocratic class, "ranged from education to culture to the pursuit of health

and pleasure” (Robinson and Andersen, 2002: 227). A practice of visiting major cultural centers, the Grand Tour was a major cultural influence in Europe, where aristocrats would delve into insights they had gained from their circuit, and exchange their own narratives to each other. The Grand Tour “experience” cut across several ages of insight, the Age of Enlightenment, of Romanticism, of revolution; where socio-political movements became spectacle to these travelers. These notions of science and romanticizing previous ages affected the Culture of Travel, where visitation to another country demanded stops at monuments now deemed nationally important or cultural artifacts (Robinson and Anderson, 2002). The tour itself placed its primary value in exposure to cultural antiquity, a way of superficially experiencing the history of Europe. The Grand Tour, the first notion of travel as educated leisure, can be paralleled as a predecessor to study abroad.

The idea of traveling to enhance one’s own perspective is a now tenet of international education, and of study abroad (IES, 2009). However, the Grand Tour was not merely a scholar’s voyage. The Grand Tour further was a vehicle to enhance one’s own prestige, as generally only upper class European men of means could easily afford educated travel. Those of humbler beginnings would find the means to do so through a sponsor, and with the notable effect of increasing their status. This trait parallels with study abroad, as the inclusion of studying abroad in resumes increases an applicant’s status as a cultured person in job interviews or scholarship reviews (IES, 2009). Perhaps in that context, the US involvement in studying abroad is a way to make their citizens more attractive in the global sanctioned markets. International institutes or study abroad offices find similarities as sponsors for aspiring students to allow them this privilege of travel. This notion of privilege is an aspect I will return to later. For the context of this thesis, I provide the framework and definition of study abroad centers in the US.

Historically, the U.S. has been involved in studying abroad since the late 1800's, when American scholars began seeking courses from accredited German universities and colleges, lauded for their success in science and pedagogical methods (Walton via Sigel, 2011). Walton suggests that to compete with Germany, France modernized its curricula further broadening the pull on American students with means to travel abroad to explore their high prestige programs. Thus, in the aftermath of WWI, American troops stationed in the European theater took advantage of these reforms to education and attended colleges in France (Walton via Sigel, 2011). Ultimately, across the 20th Century, the U.S. saw a progressive increase in foreign interests and affairs, where international colleges restructured their curriculum to attract American college students. The restructured curricula of the European colleges have influence contemporary trends, where the academic year of 2013-14 saw 304, 467 American college and university students participate in study abroad programs (NAFSA, n.d.). Although this number only presents 1.5 percent of U.S. students and 10 percent of U.S. graduate students, it is a 5.2 percent increase from the 289,408 students who studied abroad in 2012-13 academic year. More students are being exposed to different cultural setting each passing year. In comparison, this statistic represents half of the students who studied abroad (691,000) to the US during the 2009-10 academic year, with many of the students having traveled from China. In some ways, the US has gained the “prestigious” image that European countries had to American students in the early 20th Century. Of course, studying abroad is not an exclusive trait of US colleges. A total of 3.7 million students are participating in foreign student exchanges around the world. The Institute for Statistics finds this figure to be increasing by twelve percent each year (BBC, Accessed 2016). Considering these increasing statistics of students seeking their education abroad, defining study abroad becomes paramount as its role becomes more prominent in education.

Defining Abroad

Study abroad is an educational experience outside a student's "home" intuitions (Freed, 1995). "The terms, 'study or year abroad' are particularly American and European references to their society comparatively. As a rule, study abroad programs combine language and/or content learning in a formal classroom setting along with immersion in the native speech community" (Freed, 1995: 3). Soumava and Kakoli Bandyopadhyay state study abroad as "an academic experience where college students physically leave the United States to engage in college study, cultural interaction, and other related pursuits in a foreign host country" (Bandyopadhyay, 2015: 86). For this work, I define study abroad as an exploration that enhances a scholar's experience in a cultural setting outside their native geographical boundaries. A defining characteristic that situates study abroad is its 'out of classroom' experience and is often associated with language studies. Many academic disciplines that support study abroad programs are language based, such as linguistics, German, French, Chinese...etc. (Freed, 1995). The definition of studying abroad though is not confined to language departmentalization, or solely the institutes of education. "Study abroad, an umbrella term to describe all these programs, may also refer to the experience of Peace Corps volunteers who receive intensive in-country language instruction prior to living and working in the community" (Freed, 1995: 3). Freed cites that study abroad is an experience that inhabits all aspects of working with and visiting a foreign community. However, for this thesis, we shall investigate those experiences concerning education.

Study abroad experiences differ, and fall under several categories. "The Institute of International Education (2013) has classified study abroad programs in terms of duration into three categories: short term (summer, or eight weeks or less), mid-length (one or two quarters or one semester), and long-term (academic or calendar year)," (Bandyopadhyay, 2015: 90). Short

term studies seem to enjoy higher rates of attendance with a 2011-12 report citing 58.9% of total US student participants were enrolled in a short-term study. Bandyopadhyay explained that this high attendance maybe due to the financial feasibility of a shorter duration (2015). However, this categorization of study abroad does not consider several other factors associated with study abroad. The variables of location or the geographical area of the host country serves as the central deciding factor but there are also distinct differences amongst the structure of the program that classifies it. Per Lilli and John Engle, they cite,

“Seven defining components of overseas programs. Interlocking and interacting in varying and complex ways in the context of countless programs worldwide, these variables constitute an essential starting point for any form of level-based program classification: 1. Length of student sojourn 2. Entry target-language competence 3. Language used in course work 4. Context of academic work 5. Types of student housing 6. Provisions for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning. 7. Guided reflection on cultural experience.” (Engle and Engle, 2003: 8).

Length of student sojourn applies to how long the program or exchange is. Smaller programs span just a few weeks, but boast larger groups, anywhere from a ten to several dozen students. Usually the one to two-year student exchanges find participation by a smaller number of individuals, around one to three students. Entry target language competence implies the required skill level for the host country’s language and the language level required in the course work associated with that study abroad program. If the home language of the student is more prevalent in the course, or there is no provision for cultural interaction, then the program is most likely not a language studies course and is introductory in nature and structure. These study abroad programs are usually noted as exploration seminars, where participants are being

introduced to the culture. If it does however include a factor of cultural studies, then the program is built around cultural immersion with the host community. Language requirement and provisions for cultural contact also indicate the context of work, which the authors cite determines the type of exchange. For example, a study abroad focused on archeology would find students interacting with the local community more to grasp the historical context of their work. Comparatively, a program focused on mathematics would not need to necessitate cultural interaction as math is a universal language. The type of student housing affects the experience, as students who share housing at the institute will undoubtedly find a different interaction with the local community and culture compared to students who are individually placed into host families. The last two factors of “provisions for cultural interaction” and “guided reflection on cultural experience” are interdependent upon each other, as a student would have little to report in a guided reflection if they were not required to interact culturally. Having no provisions in regards to interaction with the host community will affect the experience the student has or perspective they gain leaving. In contrast, strict provisions, such as prohibiting certain cultural practices that are common in the host country but frowned upon in the “home” institutions of the students will define the cultural experience a student will reflect upon. For example, students would be forbidden to ride mopeds while abroad, but the local population would use mopeds as a regular means of travel.

These factors inhibit or enhance student experience during the duration of their stay and after their time abroad. In classifying these factors, each program is built differently in regards to a collection of these factors. The experience of a month-long program in comparison to a year-long immersion in the host country for example would factor in different traits of Engle and Engle’s definition of study abroad. To clarify these differences into a suitable definition, Engle

and Engle also coined a classification system of different study abroad experiences. These programs are based on factors of housing, language competence, cultural definition and academic context. Engle and Engle's classification system are divided into five different levels that integrate the factors.

“• Level One: Study Tour • Level Two: Short-Term Study • Level Three: Cross-Cultural Contact Program • Level Four: Cross-Cultural Encounter Program • Level Five: Cross-Cultural Immersion Program” (Engle and Engle, 2003: 10).

These levels are each defined by the time, personal and academic rational. As stated previously, students traveling to the same country, such as Tahiti, but on different programs, such as one math or one on history will have different experiences. The complexity in ascribing a study depends on the level of study abroad that is being addressed per Engle and Engle's system. In defining these levels, the authors believe that they can define all study abroad experiences. Level One: Study Tours are normative, spanning several days to few weeks, and the experience may only highlight certain aspects of the culture that may only preview how locales interact with each other and outsiders. Housing is collective and there are no provisions for cultural interaction or orientation to the country. Academic work is conducted by the home institution faculty (Engle and Engle, 2003).

“Everyone is on best behavior because the stay is short, and cultural faux pas or misunderstandings are overlooked or forgiven for the same reason. Feelings often remain intensely positive, and life-long contacts may be established in this short but emotionally rewarding time” (Engle and Engle, 2003: 9).

Level Two: Short-Term Study, are programs that last 3 to 8 weeks, with similar language requirements as Level One programs. However, academic work is situated in an institute for foreign students. Additionally, Level Two programs may provide home stay options where academic work then includes interaction with the host housing. An orientation program is required for those participating in Level Two programs. Similarly, Level Three programs also require an orientation program pre-departure. A Level Three: Cross-Cultural Contact provides the same entry target level language competence, but is a semester long program. Academic work may involve a student group from the “home” institution or be a discussion amongst different students from different institutions. The School for International Training (SIT) program to Samoa is an example of a Level Three program (SIT, Accessed 2016). SIT Samoa brings students from different US institutions to travel abroad to the Samoa for one semester. The housing provided is collective or a home stay option is available but provisions for cultural interaction is limited or non-existent.

A Level Four: Cross-Cultural Encounter Program offers optional participation to cultural integration comparatively. Entry language is pre-advanced to advanced, with the focus on the dominant language in the country. Student groups are housed by home stays or integrated within the community, with orientation programs pre-departure and during their time. Finally, a Level Five: Cross-Cultural Immersion Program differs as “participants in level-five programs are housed directly in the community, usually through an individual integration home stay, which calls upon students with the appropriate linguistic and cultural skills to function as active members of the host family” (Engle and Engle, 2003: 12). These programs last a year to a semester, but require advanced language skills and partial-to-complete enrollment in the host country’s educational institute. There is also a required cultural participation with the community

via work service or internship with an ongoing orientation program or course in cross cultural perspectives (Engle and Engle, 2003).

The study abroad programs and experiences classified by Engle and Engle's theoretical system provide standards where at level one, the participant is a guest, and at level five, the participant becomes an active member of the host community. In defining study abroad, all the different facets and outlets that create a study abroad experience are potentially relevant to distinguishing one program from others. Inhabiting both a cultural complex and a global perspective in the international educational community, study abroad, "through the interaction of its varied components, ... helps students recognize and respect cultural difference and develop skills and a willingness to adapt to that difference" (Engle and Engle, 2003: 19).

Defining the Participant: Perception and Motivation

In defining study abroad, it is also relevant to define who the participants are. Establishing who is participating in study abroad programs and the rationale behind their participation can dictate how the program will be structured. Nguyen and Coryell cite "participation (to) focus on (five levels): (a) social, (b) institutional, (c) academic, (d) personal, and (e) financial that explain participation in international programs" (Coryell and Nguyen, 2015: 23). Coryell and Nguyen state that "perception and motivation" as a central similarity of students who study abroad. Nguyen and Coryell's definition of "perception (as) "a student's localized interpretation," is individually framed from a first-person perspective to determine how a student thinks and makes a meaningful reflection about their study abroad experience (Walker, Bukenya, & Thomas, 2010, p. 3). Explanation of why students participate in study abroad programs have shown a trend to be more for an intrapersonal experience instead of linguistic academic concerns. "In 2012, less than 6% of U.S. students abroad took courses within the field

of foreign languages. Currently, the most common fields of study or courses available in study abroad programs include those for students in the social sciences, business management, humanities, fine or applied arts and physical life sciences” (IIE via Coryell and Nguyen, 2015: 25). Students whose studies focus on international relationships are much more likely to study abroad. Their departments provide a way for global perspective in their field, and in some cases, may necessitate it. Current literature shows a host of interdisciplinary departments operating through study abroad with motivation revolving around their own academic interests. These departments play the role of vehicle for study abroad while the students act as the passengers to the academic curriculum that the department imposes upon a study abroad program. However, student perception of the program will also indicate whether they enter this metaphorical vehicle.

Returning to the Bandyopadhyays, the authors conceptualize participation by student perception instead of actual experience, departmental intent or intuitional academic regards. “General perceptions held by students about study abroad programs (include) relevance of the program in the degree plan, sightseeing, etc.)” (Bennett via Bandyopadhyay, 2015: 88). The authors stipulate that simplicity in participating is also a deciding factor; if the process seems difficult, students will be less likely to enroll in a program. The complexity of the process to be a participant must be accessible for the student, the harder it is to be accepted the less likely a student is to be involved (Bandyopadhyay, 2015). Other variables that factor in student perspective are expected enjoyment of the trip, the chance to meet new people, touristic tendencies...etc (Carsello and Creaser, 1976; McKeown, 2009 via Bandyopadhyay). Student perception is also effected by academic concerns. Students must be convinced of the relevancy of the study abroad program to their respective fields. Mainly student pursuing a social science or

humanities major have been noted to be more involved in study abroad programs (Bandyopadhyay, 2015: 90).

Coryell and Nguyen's studies expand upon this literature of perception citing that the avenues of popular culture have become increasingly relevant in deciding students' decision to study abroad. Study abroad is shown to be marketed in the same way tourism is marketed in the regard. This marketing is distinct as it will attract certain students but on the other hand alienate others. Coryell and Nguyen mention how media portrayals of study abroad skew perception for prospective students as "popular culture portrayals of study abroad promote identification for affluent Caucasian female" (Coryell and Nguyen, 2015: 26). Simon and Ainsworth's study on perceived notions of study abroad programs found that this stereotype of the "affluent Caucasian female" affected participation by minority students. "Black people just don't engage in that kind of stuff. We're kind of like, that's a white thing to study abroad" (Simon and Ainsworth, 2012: p. 11). Minority students see study abroad as inapplicable to their lives and studies as the notion of study abroad being a "white person" experience is characterized with the experience. Adding to financial concerns, research shows Caucasian affluent females to be dominant participants in most study abroad programs.

Bandyopadhyay found that "The National Center for Education Statistics (2013) reported that 77.8% of American study abroad students in 2010-11 were white, while just 61.2% of all full-time post-secondary students in the United States during the same year were white" (S and K Bandyopadhyay, 2015: 90). However, in comparison to ten years' prior, these number stood at 84.3% white participants and 70.8% being post-secondary. As such, it should be noted that there is an increased interest in recent years by minority students to study abroad. A gender gap cited by the National Center study also found a consistent 65:35 females to male ratio in attendance

between the academic years 2000-01 and 2010-11. Literature by Bandyopadhyay suggests then the average study abroad student to be a white affluent female student in pursuit of a social science major (2015).

In defining those who study abroad and their motivation in doing so, it is also key to see why students decide to shy away from the experience. The rationale in studying abroad for each student will differ, based on individual motivation. “Motivations are reasons why a student expresses desire to study abroad” (Coryell and Nguyen, 2015: 24). King and Young compiled a study at Oregon State University that explored motivations for studying abroad, and why students had decided against studying abroad. In their study, King and Young found that 20% of the student populace were not aware of foreign study programs available in their school (1994). That meant around 80% of the student populace as aware of foreign study programs, most those students having been informed by the school newspaper. “When students who did know about study abroad programs were asked to indicate whether certain sources had supplied them with information about study abroad, the source marked by the largest number of students was the campus newspaper” (King and Young, 1994: 78). Awareness of study abroad by newspaper was over 55% of those who participated in their survey. Yet, despite many hearing about studying abroad from the newspaper, the percentage of those students who had listed the newspaper as an information source and deciding factor to attend study abroad programs was significantly lower than other information sources. “Whereas 10% of those students who listed “friend,” as a source of information had definite plans to study abroad, only six percent of them listed the (newspaper)” (1994: 78).

King and Young’s study showed negative decisions considering heavy advertisement by the campus newspaper. The highest indicator being ‘expense’ at 82% amongst freshman and

72% amongst seniors. “After expense, the second largest series of reasons for not planning to study abroad was a set of factors related to anxiety about the foreign experience” (King and Young, 1994: 79). Many students felt they could not afford the experience, however the next biggest indicator was fear of foreign environments as 49% of freshman and 28% of seniors expressed anxiety about learning a foreign language (King and Young, 1994). Further study by the authors showed women were less anxious about learning a foreign language over men supporting Bandyopadhyay’s research. In the field of academics, students who studied in liberal arts or business found study abroad more appealing, while those in engineering or pharmacy degrees “were often convinced that their departments’ inflexibility did not leave room for time abroad” (1994: 80). The author’s study shows trends of participation were dependent upon degree flexibility. Most students coming from liberal arts and business found study abroad to fit in with their curriculum. However, the authors note that two other majors, education and agriculture, seemed to have similar number of students who had studied abroad despite a ‘rigid’ education track (King and Young, 1994).

Studies of those who had expressed a wish to study abroad but cited the importance of study abroad in relation to their academic or professional objectives are also relevant. Students expressed international employment as a factor, whereas 44% of students cited using their experience with international and cultural expertise to find job prospects. Additionally, 22% of students found that being able to speak a foreign language also added to marketing themselves more competitively for the job market (King and Young, 1994). However, more students expressed that broadening their own perspective on culture (86%), enriching their personal life (84%) and enhancing their own undergraduate experience (77%) as deciding factors regarding their participation in study abroad programs (King and Young, 1994). Thus, there was more

motivation to study abroad as a means for personal development and growth. Also, the influences of experiencing life in another culture (90%) travel and adventure (85%), and learning more about a country (64%) heavily factored in in the attractiveness of study abroad for students at Oregon State University (King and Young, 1994).

Personal Development

In a study on the benefits of study abroad, Dwyer and Peters cite that “When questioned about intercultural development, 98 percent of respondents said that study abroad aided them to better understand their own cultural values and biases. 82 percent replied that study abroad contributed to their developing a more sophisticated way of looking at the world” (Dwyer and Peters, 2004: 56). Additionally, study abroad not only enhanced the perspectives of the participants, but made them aware of global issues. This awareness noticeably improved the academic and professional careers of participants. Dwyer and Peters note that “when questioned about academic pursuits, 87 percent of respondents said that study abroad influenced subsequent educational experiences, 63 percent said that it influenced their decision to expand or change academic majors, and 64 percent reported that it influenced their decision to attend graduate school” (Dwyer and Peters, 2004: 57). Coryell and Nguyen cite that this influence may have potentially stemmed from necessary engagement in self-reflection on future goals and prospects (2015). “Individuals who commit to participating in study abroad programs likewise may need to engage in a complex process involving self-questioning and reflection, educational planning and goal-setting, risk taking, and completing scholarship and funding applications” (Coryell and Nguyen, 2015: 26). These influences prepped former participants for future interactions with multicultural workplaces. Development of empathy and awareness to different cultural backgrounds gave former abroad students the capabilities to work in multiple environments.

Intercultural sensitivity is crucial in enabling multinational workplaces and societies to function (Landis and Bhagat 1996). Bandyopadhyay cite that intercultural awareness impacted study abroad experience and the student's "personal growth, professional development, and intellectual growth" during their time abroad. (Bandyopadhyay, 2015: 88). Raising awareness of cultural issues and learning to adapt to a foreign environment also influenced their experience and personal growth during the program. Cultural immersion through community orientated learning allowed student to stay in local housing, interact with native people and engage in cultural foods and traditions. "The experience of studying and living in a foreign environment not only builds confidence in navigating basic living skills but also increases individuals' beliefs in their abilities to be introspective with respect to their reactions and personal styles in culturally diverse setting" (Cisnero-Donahue, Krentler, Reinig and Sabol, 2012: 175). Intercultural awareness that was gained during a student's time abroad improved their own ability to navigate communal mannerisms or a normative that was "other" to their own cultural and societal norms. A study conducted at the University of St. Thomas found that this ability to navigate and adapt to different cultures would aid students within the US, where a large demographic of diverse cultures resides (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen and Hubbard, 2006). Studies cite that this improved perspective of cultural relations and adaption would also prepare students for an international workplace (Carlson and Widaman, 1988).

Professional development is another key benefit of cultural immersion and attendance in a foreign institution or cultural society. Study abroad programs prompted students to confirm their career choices or even specify their fields of studies. Hannigan notes that foreign exposure markets students as more viable to employment in multinational corporations (Hannigan, 2001). Indeed, the Institute for the International Education of Students reported that 97% of their alumni

secured a job within one year after graduation, and 84% of their alumni “felt that studying abroad helped them build valuable job skills, such as language proficiency, cultural training, tolerance for ambiguity, adaptability, and communication” (IES Abroad, n.d.). Norris and Gillespie (2008) argue that the importance of professional development is shaped by cultural immersion programs. In their study, which included a 50-year analysis of IES alumni, Norris and Gillespie argue that participants were 55% more likely to attribute their educational experience abroad in the career direction they forged and developed. 55% of students also cited the ability to speak a foreign language in the workplace and an increased benefit to their own careers (2008). Studies also show study abroad programs promoted leadership skills, problem solving, open-mindedness and ability to adapt to unfamiliar environments, giving participants greater potential to succeed in the work environment.

The benefit of personal and intellectual growth also provides an attractive prospect of studying abroad (Ingraham and Peterson, 2004). A study by the College of Business Administration of San Diego University found that “Students returning from study abroad frequently describe their experiences as “life-changing” and “transformative. Students often report improved academic and cognitive growth, along with intercultural competencies and psycho-social development” (Cisnero-Donahue, Krentler, Reinig and Sabol, 2012: 170). Engagement in leisure activities such as cooking international cuisine, reading in medias other than English and traveling for pleasure increased amongst participants after their time abroad. A study from the University of Wisconsin-Madison “show(s) that alumni of study abroad programs are more likely than their peers to engage in behaviors that involve a connection with peoples or the material products of other cultures, providing at least the necessary preconditions for developing intercultural competence and, it stands to reason, global engagement” (Murphy,

Sahakyan, Yong-Yi and Magnan, 2014: 12). Additionally, study abroad allowed students to acquire new knowledge of physical and political geologies, global interdependence, and flexibility and patience in communication with other cultures (Cisnero-Donahue, Krentler, Reinig and Sabol, 2012). Literature studies find an academic advantage in supporting study abroad as evidence of participation has been cited as a ‘deep learning’ activity by the National Survey of Student Engagement Institute (Kuh, 2008). Another case study of participants with the Study Abroad for Global Engagement or SAGE found that 39% of their alumni, from 1950-2007, published an academic piece (Murphy, Sahakyan, Yong-Yi and Magnan, 2014).

Understanding global affairs and building their academic and professional repertoires provided students an ease of access into a globalizing world. This growth allowed perspective into common communication with the international community and discussions of global events which, became tangible to students after their experience abroad. Freed stipulates what “students most(ly) gain (from study abroad) is some type of global fluency; the ability to ‘sound good’ by increasing the rate of speech and/or decreasing the length of time between utterances, and by learning appropriate filters, modifiers, formulae and compensation strategies” (Freed, 1995: 10). This is shown in the context of language, but if we were to extrapolate this the global scale, we would find common ground in participation by various departments, where learning is being filtered through specific types of knowledge systems, usually those of Western epistemologies. The value of language takes a different role to communicate between different departments and different knowledge systems. Study abroad is conceptualized as a tool for learning and academic success. In understanding and defining study abroad, we must also understand the changes occurring worldwide and thus in the education system. The role of globalization must be considered when understanding the role and experience of studying abroad in a foreign country.

Globalization of Education

The phenomenon of globalization finds its roots in economic development, and can be said to refer “to the process of whereby countries become more integrated via movement of goods, capital, labor, and ideas. International trade and capital mobility are the main channels through which globalization is occurring” (Bloom, 2004: 59). Increase in technology, communication and sharing of knowledge and experiences have broadened the scope of university and academia. The year 1948 saw the Universal Declaration of Human Rights “declare free and compulsory education to be a basic human right” (Bloom, 2004: 57). In declaring compulsory education, a system of learning must be favored to meet this right. What kind of curriculum meets this declaration? Subsequently, at the same time, globalization has shifted paradigms of knowledge by implying ‘universal education.’ Many primary schools in the US offer secondary language courses in their curriculum, and at the university level, this bilingual background is considered required upon entry. Study abroad programs address this requirement, and promote a multi-cultural integration into education. The standardization of education has moved to a new realm of meaning; it is not only the placing of students but the placement of nations and their education in an equal realm of understanding through acceptance of various cultural differences. In this realm of understanding, study abroad takes a large role in understanding the push for globalization.

This understanding being that the role of international education is pivotal for development. Developing countries aspire to grasp at educational values that have been foreign to their own traditional knowledge systems. In that, we see a new seed of colonization, a neo-colonial value of Western education replacing indigenous ways of learning. It is not because they are better, but because they are increasingly becoming ‘universal.’ What is the role of study

abroad then? Is it a tool that addresses the domination of indigenous cultures by Western epistemologies? Or a tool that only presents a façade of cultural understanding, a mark of prestige for a student that states that they are ‘culturally competent.’ Or perhaps it is a vehicle of connecting the international community, and reconnecting those of the diaspora. In a sense, all three are true, and this thesis argues that the case of study abroad becomes more complicated by that fact. The complication is that study abroad has the power to address globalization; however, it must do so in a way that bridges the gaps of understanding other cultures. If a study abroad fails to do this, if it becomes just a way for a student to highlight their resume. Equally, a study abroad must allow a host country to present a contemporary view of their state, not deny historical events that hide the disparities that corrupt developing countries. In addressing these concerns, the role of globalization in education must be established.

The case of education was highlighted by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The World Conference on Education in 1990 pledged to provide primary education to all by 2000, a declaration that was reaffirmed in 2002, when statistics in 2000 shows around 113 million children of primary school age were not enrolled in educational institutes whatsoever (Bloom, 1999). Mostly a statistic of developing countries, the number only shows the attention of these governments to be focused on other concerns such as health care, financing of their economies, and developing domestic industries to name a few. However, the implementation of development is catered to a certain system, whereas the most developed and successful countries are held as the models to attain. These states integrate into their curriculum cultural studies to better understand international trade. Consequently, these very same countries are mostly Western and European states, or states that have integrated similar regulations by copying their own development off the pattern of Western states, i.e. China and Japan. Building this

development on international trade, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund argue that a global market and trade will pave the way for other countries to bridge the gap that these Asian states have done with the US or the European Union. An arguable and controversial stance, this has a direct consequence on the view of education, and brings to light the first argument for globalized education; economic gain. The stance by the World Bank and IMF and the success of certain Asian states stresses a monetary importance of international understanding and thus globalized education. Developing countries would view a globalized system of education in the light of economic capital and return. Understanding this international trade and the relationship of money between developing countries becomes a purview for those who study abroad. The experience of study abroad can be used as tool of introducing globalized education to developing countries as it will allow fluency in regards to international monetary exchanges. In this aspect, study abroad is tool of globalization, a causeway for understanding issues and politics between developed countries and developing nations, where the students would be able to interpret for governments how to approach development.

Another argument for a globalized system of education stems from the increase in the immigrant population globally. A 2002 United Nations Population Division report estimated that around 175 million people live outside their counties of birth. Around 40 percent of that population live in defined developing countries. Cultural sensitivity will highlight study abroad as a component of globalized education, as it prepares students for the very likely chance of encountering an immigrant person in their workplace, school...etc. Bloom goes further to provide that schools need a 'sensitive and effective response' to aid immigrant populations to gain the necessary skills to navigate a globalized economy. Levitt notes that the 'social remittances' that immigrants send to their home also will need to be addressed and accounted for

in developing countries (1996). The understanding of immigrant populations and more so the education and highlighting of identity conflicts that occur with these populations are pertinent in a globalized education. This type of sensitivity to identity is provided in studying abroad. The understanding of cultural differences was a main benefit for students who traveled to Tahiti, which will be later detailed. This skill of openness to and awareness of differing heritages allows a more accepting view of others, and an ability to cooperate with others in a diverse environment such as an educational institute or workplace. Proponents for a globalized education would declare that there is a direct link to human development on the personal, physical and economic. Bloom states that very case in the 'creation' of competent decision making skill;

“a strong educational system can help create a deep pool of resources from which competent policy makers will emerge. The ability to grasp, absorb, and select from a large number of facts; aptitude for flexible, creative thinking; skills in working with others to achieve goals; and a determination to get results all can be developed by a good education” (1999: 57).

The ability to cognitively assess information, and creative thinking is indeed a sign of good education. However, stating that this type of system is lacking in all struggling developing countries seems farfetched. Indeed, the idea that global education is the only path for creativity alienates other forms of indigenous educational systems that may not align with globalized methodologies. Study abroad becomes a point of conflict, as the exchange of knowledge between the students and local community become a discussion of placing value of whose epistemology is better. Students will perceive and value the knowledge gained from the community in a different aspect than the local populace does. This conflict of valuing knowledge is a consequence of globalization. It is the devaluing of all other systems of knowledge, and

establishing a standard set of ideals and epistemologies that are deemed most valuable for problem solving. This standardization ironically denies other possibilities that other systems consider. Bloom expands upon a second argument stating how globalization is the key to healthy human society,

“Education has powerful effects on human development – weak human capabilities are the source of many of the problems policy makers are confronted with. Knowledge promotes health-seeking behavior and good health, not to mention good doctors and medical staff. It can also help improve women’s status in society. Poverty, too, is easier to escape if people can learn new skills and work productively with others” (1999: 57).

Perhaps more jarring than his last point, this controversial stance glorifies western education and shows several inconsistencies on globalization of education. First, it shows a sense of superiority over other systems of knowledge, identifies them as the source of problems with policy, when in fact this disparity may stem from the implementation of globalization and lack of dialogue with the community. Second, the idea of good health is not new to many indigenous communities, especially the Pacific. ‘Health-seeking behavior’ implies a sickness with indigenous communities, when in fact the most developed countries, such as the US, face the worst health problems. And third, the stance on poverty and women’s rights only shows a lack of understanding in regards to where these disparities stem from. The colonial history of implementing policies that disregarded former indigenous system consequently created many of these issues. In stating his stance for implementation for globalization, this thesis finds conflict with Bloom’s argument. As an indigenous scholar, I find contention with Bloom on the point of standardization and devaluing of traditional knowledge, which I argue can find a place in education, especially in study abroad programs. Students learn to interact with new knowledge

systems and beliefs through different cultural interactions. However, Blooms' final argument states how

“Economic development in a global market is easier if a country's workforce both is productive and has the mental agility to retrain for new industries as old ones become defunct and new opportunities arise” (1999: 57).

In this case, the connection of education and economic development is a point this thesis finds some agreement on. The need to educate policy makers on aiding the country's workforce in that regard to promote domestic industries and sustainable use of their natural resources is needed in most developing countries, especially the Pacific. However, this stance only provides that such a notion will occur if the government is strong enough. And in most Pacific countries, there is a corruption due to a push for fast economic development that challenges indigenous traditions and socio-political systems. In this regard, study abroad programs stand on the precipice of both a challenger to globalization and its champion. Study abroad programs can reveal the disparities and corruption that exist in developing Pacific nations who try to embrace globalization and shed light to the doctrine a neo-colonist's push to assimilate and suppressed Pacific cultural and socio-political foundations. It can also hide these disparities by denying that there is a problem, or by clouding the fact that Pacific nations are underdeveloped since they have “failed” to implement a “universal” educational system. In this instance, Pacific communities that host study abroad programs must not only show the cultural aspects of their community, but reveal the histories of colonial suppression that coincidently finds parallels in the push by globalization in the name of economic development. Study abroad programs catered to only the cultural will undoubtedly fail in this aspect as they skim over the contemporary issues existent in local communities.

Studying the Pacific

The benefits of study abroad illustrate the strength of a cultural educational experience. Indeed, some sort of cultural immersion and reflection will take place for the student, if it is intended or not. This cross-cultural understanding of difference is potentially more pertinent in contemporary society. The globalization of education has caused more interaction with different nations between different schools. In that same instance, students are being introduced to diverse cultures of different populaces. Interaction with the local populace while abroad is a main component of the experience. Studying abroad is built upon these interactions, and the idea of leaving the traditional classroom for one that is different and outside the societal norms appeals to most students. This appeal is built upon the images of the destination. The average student will always conjure an image of the destination, romanticizing their expectation as aristocrats did during the age of the Grand Tour. This has proven the case in the Pacific, where the prevalent image of paradise sometimes overrides the culture of the Pacific.

Many educational institutes find themselves in the Pacific, with Australia and New Zealand having always played an active role as the leading countries in the region. However, new interests by institutions abroad have brought attention to the region. The increase in study abroad over the years has extended to the Pacific. The School for International Training (SIT) is a key example of this interest in the region as they have provided a venue for many universities in the US that lack their own study abroad department. “SIT has been providing immersive, field-based study abroad programs for undergraduates for more than 50 years. SIT programs are based on the experiential learning model, which merges hands-on learning with reflection” (SIT. Accessed 2016). A popular program they sponsor is the study abroad option to Samoa, with a collaboration of several different schools. The study abroad program focuses on the social,

economic and political impacts of westernization and globalization in the Pacific. The focus and impact of globalization in the region has interested other schools and thus has spawned additional study abroad programs in the area. Figure 1 presents these other study abroad programs by leading institutions in the region that offer direct exchanges or programs to other areas in the Pacific. Additionally, Figure 1 also highlights the program or organization associated with the school, if prevalent, the minimal requirements to participate in the program, the length and type of enrollment, and type of housing provided. Provisions regarding cultural interaction, such as guidelines or rules of student immersion into the local community are highlighted for each program. These provisions are based on whether there is a direct or indirect requirement present.

Figure 1. List of Study Abroad Programs in the Region

University of Auckland	Direct Exchange	International School/ IES Abroad Institute housing Direct Enrollment Require GPA and Departmental specific One to two semesters Optional provisions on cultural interaction
University of Waikato	Direct Exchange to Waikato	Institute of International Education Generation Study Abroad Institute housing and homestay Direct Enrollment Require GPA, two semesters of study, English Competency One to two semesters Optional provisions on cultural interaction
	Exchange with L'Univesite de la Nouvelle-Caledonie	Institute of International Education Generation Study Abroad Institute housing and homestay Enrollment in French courses Required GPA, Competency in French One semester Provisions on cultural interaction
	USP -School of Law	Institute of International Education Generation Study Abroad Institute housing/ homestay Enrollment in Law program Require GPA, Law Students only One semester

		No provisions on cultural interaction
School for International Training	SIT Samoa	School for International Training Institute housing/ Homestay Cultural/ language studies in Samoa No prerequisites 15 weeks Strict provisions on cultural interaction
University of Hawaii at Manoa	Direct Exchange: NSE	National Student Exchange Institute Housing Direct Enrollment Require GPA, completion of two semesters at a National institution One to two semesters No provisions on cultural interaction
	MIX with Partner Universities in the Pacific	Manoa International Exchange Institute housing Direct Enrollment in partner universities Require GPA One to two semesters/ summer option Provision on cultural interaction
The University of the South Pacific	ISEP Exchange	International Student Exchange Program Institute housing Direct Enrollment in partner universities (Papua New Guinea, Victoria University of Wellington, UH Manoa) Require academic and personal references One semester Provisions on cultural interaction
	Direct Exchange	USP Study Abroad Institute housing Direct Enrollment Required GPA, two semesters of education completed Strict provision on cultural interaction
Victoria University of Wellington	Direct Exchange	IES Abroad Institute housing Direct Enrollment Require GPA, English competency One to two trimesters No provision on cultural interaction
University of Otago	Direct Exchange	IES Abroad Institute housing Direct Enrollment Require GPA, English competency One to two trimesters No provisions for cultural interaction
	Otago International	Otago International School Institute housing

	School	Enrollment in intensive courses Required GPA Three weeks Provisions for cultural interaction
University of California Education Abroad Program	Pacific Island Environmental and Community Health – Australia and Solomon Islands	UCEAP Institute housing Enrollment at the University of Queensland and Solomon Islands National University Required GPA, Developmental, Environmental, Marine Biology, and Pre-Med students preferred Eleven weeks Provisions for cultural interaction

Most programs highlighted by Figure 1 are direct exchanges with other universities. The study abroad programs are several months with direct enrollment in courses pertaining to a student's major or academic interests. Figure 1 notes that most programs offered in the region are based in the South Pacific region. Many of the programs offered require optional cultural immersion and interaction with the local community, with only a few programs having none. The universities highlighted in Figure 1 are the leading institutions involved in study abroad in the region, with a high focus on attracting American students to their institutions.

At the forefront of regional and foreign studies in the Pacific is the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The location of the school as a hub of the Pacific and as a crossroads between mainland America and Asia has allowed different interests and schools of knowledge to emerge. In regards to academic programs involved in the study abroad program at University of Hawai'i, the School of Pacific and Asian Studies, (SPAS), College of Social Sciences Global Experiences (GEPO) and the Shidler College of Business are highlighted as partners of the office of study abroad. Studying abroad at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa is also divided by type of experience and associated offices, the main branch of course being the University of Hawaii at Manoa Study Abroad Center (UHMSAC). Their program highlighted that during the 2014-15

academic year, 321 students studied abroad and enrolled in 399 courses associated with their study abroad. In regards to the Pacific, the UHMSAC cites that past programs have focused on French Polynesia, Cook Islands and Tonga, which were programs established on curriculum demands for Pacific Islands related study abroad programs. These programs were requests by faculty and students interested in the region, as most programs were focused on European and Asian related scholarship. However, there are no programs (excluding Australia) offered in the area of the Pacific for the academic year of 2015-16. In preparation for the trip abroad, the UHMSAC cites that

“Both students and faculty receive 12 hours of pre-departure cross-cultural sensitivity and academic training. In addition, the standard of care includes providing training/workshops to program faculty resident directors in risk management areas such as health, safety, risk and liability, crises, and emergency procedures and protocols” (Accessed 2016 from UHMSAC website).

The 12 hours of training is dependent upon where the program is offered, the location of the country and the academic interest. Safety protocols are found to be similar, focusing mostly on ways to return to the US or to a US establishment in the cases of legal or political troubles. Additionally, the requirement for students to travel abroad is based on the department involved, with the UHMSAC only requiring a 3.0 GPA (UHMSAC, accessed 2016). However, the University of Hawai'i at Manoa also offers another vehicle for students to study abroad, the Manoa International Exchange, which is a separate entity to UHMSAC.

“The Manoa International Exchange (MIX) advertises itself as a way to provide exciting opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students from UHM to study overseas and also allows students from overseas universities to study at UHM. Student exchanges may

be for one or two semesters. There are also summer options for outbound UHM students”
(Excerpt from MIX brochure).

In mentioning overseas opportunities, the MIX is associated with two dozen different countries. In the Pacific (excluding Australia), MIX is associated with the University of the South Pacific (Fiji), University of French Polynesia (French Polynesia), Auckland University of Technology, University of Auckland, University of Otago, University of Waikato, and Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand). MIX students would be classified in Engle and Engle’s categorization of study abroad as level four or five experiences. However, the requirements would be considered minimal, level 1 or 2 as MIX has no language requirement and only requires a 2.5 GPA to participate. In this aspect, Engle and Engle’s system of study abroad categorization is more so a model that intertwines with different levels instead of having static rules that categorize the programs. However, what sets aside MIX from being integrated with the University of Hawai’i at Manoa Study Abroad Center (UHMSAC) is the fact that they work with incoming students from the partner institutions. As such students from Fiji on an exchange with UH Manoa would be processed through MIX instead of the UHMSAC.

Finally, under the heading of studying abroad at the University of Hawai’i is the National Student Exchange. This program that makes the three-part entity of UH Manoa’s study abroad program stand out as it is technically an exchange within the country, a national program. For the purpose of this thesis and to define study abroad at UH Manoa, this thesis includes this program as it is heavily promoted by the UHMSAC. The National Student Exchange (NSE)

“offers students the opportunity to study on the mainland for one or two semesters (most exchanges begin fall term), paying either UHM tuition or resident tuition at the host

campus. Approximately 170 institutions participate in the student exchange program. The program does not include private universities” (NSE, Accessed 2016).

The focus on studying in the mainland presents a perspective of Hawaii being separate in a sense from the United States. The state of Hawaii itself stands apart from the US, both in the historically, geographically and culturally to the mainland. UH Manoa works on this detail of difference citing for students traveling out of the mainland that,

“Through new social, cultural and educational experiences, the mainland experience promotes growth in maturity, independence and self-confidence, as well as new perspectives of self, family and the world outside of Hawai’i. Students who have participated in the program are enthusiastic about their experience and recommend the program to others” (NSE, Accessed 2016).

These tenants are seen more in line with exchanges with foreign countries, not within the US. However, the offer of studying abroad to the mainland also draws on the aspect for those who have never left Hawaii, similar then to a person from Fiji or Samoa traveling to a more industrialized place, like New Zealand. The NSE exchange allows students from Hawaii to broaden their perspective on the greater nation that they are part of. This perspective differs for those of the mainland coming to study in Hawaii. The youngest of all US states, Hawaii is still atypically seen as a foreign paradisiac region to many who reside in the mainland of America, and the study abroad offices of UH draws on images of paradise to advertise their program in this fashion.

“Many students are attracted to the dream of studying on exchange at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa (UHM). Visions of sandy beaches, palm trees, sparkling blue water,

and endless days of sun fill their fantasies. Others are attracted to the idea of living in such a diverse environment, learning more about the peoples of Hawai'i, Asia, and the Pacific. Indeed, the opportunities for study in Asian and Pacific languages and cultures; their related social science and humanities courses; and the world-renowned earth, ocean, planetary, environmental/climate, and biological science areas are unmatched" (NSE, accessed 2016).

This reference to visions of sandy beaches and endless days of sun would prove attractive to students from the mainland. Yet, this reference is more so damaging as it supports a stereotypical image of paradise in the Pacific that will give incoming students a narrow interpretation that Hawai'i. Although it presents the opportunities of diverse education and world renown research, the starting idea of paradise and visions of fantasy can disassociate the culture and history of Hawaii with their experience. Instead of local interaction or perhaps cultural fluency that is a dominant feature of UH Manoa, students would attend based on interests more associated with vacations or leisure. This interest and perspective is inherent and is potentially relevant to all the study abroad programs in the Pacific.

The interest in the Pacific finds foundation from early journals of navigators, artistic renderings and tourist promotions. Educational interests, however, have extended beyond these interpretations of the region to understanding the effects of globalization on the region. The topic of the Pacific in the realm of study abroad is one of dealing with a globalized world that is intertwined with a history of colonialism, of urbanization and of diaspora. Equally the conversation of study abroad is a pathway of dialogue for environmental issues and culture, of social justice and art and of national development and international relations. The Pacific and interest by study abroad institutes or organizations draw on the wealth of knowledge, and history

of the region to see the development of globalization and of the impact of colonization. This interests include factors in the migration of islanders to and from their homes. Much of that migration and emigration is considered studying abroad itself, as Pacific Islander leave their islands to attend schools in the US, Australia or New Zealand (Gibson and Mckenzie, 2009). Not only are students traveling into the Pacific, but from the region as well, taking advantage of the educational opportunities and foreign institutions that are becoming prominent in the Pacific.

Taking note of the interests in the Pacific by academia then becomes more pertinent as it presents an opportunity to understand colonialism, how local people are addressing the impact of colonization, in education and through their culture, how foreign students interact with the Pacific nations, and how those of the diaspora perceive their own homelands after having been removed from them for an extended period. Every different Pacific nation is a different narrative in respect to those considerations, and the students or participants involved weave their own narratives into the discussions of the region. Defining study abroad programs and who participates will only give a partial picture of the effects of study abroad in the region. Statistics and classification systems do not consider how the experience of study abroad programs impact students. The stories of students, based on their background and what they perceived in their programs paints an interpersonal picture that stems from how they grapple with the complexities of colonialism in the Pacific. The case of Tahiti serves such a site of study. It is a narrative of tourism, of cultural pride and awareness and of educational pursuit. In that manner, the narratives of those studying in Tahiti is one of studying the Pacific. This thesis uses the case study of Tahiti to potentially explain study abroad in the region, as academic and study abroad program interests have been abundant in Tahiti in recent years. The following chapter explores studying abroad in Tahiti, the structures and resources offered, and student experiences.

Chapter 2: Tahiti - Heritage through Education

The Pacific is a region heavily influenced by universities. Regional need to develop has prompted some Pacific nations to invest in educational institutes to allow economic and developmental insight. “An important driving force behind their development has been a pragmatic need to know about the Pacific Islands places with which the metropolitan countries have to deal” (Wesley-Smith, 1995: 117). In the same instance, indigenous scholars and locals also must address stereotypical images of the Pacific by foreign institutions. Equally, Pacific scholars are also addressing the colonial undertones behind the push for development.

“Practitioners of the emerging cultural studies of Oceania are seeking ways of referring to Pacific Islander realities using Euro-American discourses while simultaneously undermining colonialist assumptions about the supposed universal applicability of those discourses” (Wood, 2003: 341). In understanding these spaces, we must also note a major economic factor that drives the Pacific, which, is tourism.

Tourism is a regular facet of life in the Pacific. Use of culture not only brings lifeblood into island economies but also justifies the commodification thereof. The term ‘paradise on Earth,’ has invoked fantastical narratives, such as the cultural exotic or islands of love that are embedded in western education and leisure. Even the mention of the word “Pacific” situates a person on the beach by the sea. At the same time, it simultaneously reimagines all islands as the same place. In recent years, there has been a keen interest in Tahiti by many institutions, where the island has played host to many students. This chapter thus explores student interaction in Tahiti, noting the region and people of Tahiti. Additionally, this chapter presents a view into a study abroad organization run on island by a local family, and its interaction with participants with the organizations’ program. And finally, this section explores the experiences of students

studying in Tahiti. These students are interviewed on their knowledge of the region, their experience and how that experience questions their own interpretations of indigeneity, identity and future interests. In analyzing their experience, this chapter explores then the concepts of indigenous identities and the impact of studying in Tahiti.

Tahiti: Enduring Colonization, Tourist Destination and Educational Hotspot

Tahiti stands a central island to the territory of French Polynesia. An overseas collectivity of the French Republic, it is composed of 118 geographically dispersed islands. This collectivity is divided into five groups: The Society Islands, composed of the Windward Islands and the Leeward Islands, the Tuamotu Archipelago, the Gambier Islands, the Marquesas Islands, and the Austral Islands. Only 67 of the 118 islands are inhabited. Tahiti, which is the most populous island and supporting 68% of the population of French Polynesia, is host to the seat of the capital, Pape'ete. The largest island of the Windward group, Tahiti is divided into two parts, Tahiti Nui to the northwest, and Tahiti Iti to the southeast. These two parts are divided further into 12 communes, Arue, Fa'aa, Hitiaa O Te Ra, Mahina, Paea, Papara, Pape'ete, Pirae, Punaauia, Taiarapu-Est, Taiarapu-Ouest, and Teva I Uta (Aldrich, 1993).

Formally the Kingdom of Tahiti, the first recorded contact with European explorers was by Samuel Wallis in 1767. Subsequent visitations by Wallis, along with explorers and captains Bougainville and Cooke saw the rise of the Pomare Dynasty who was supported by Great Britain. This reign would remain uncontested until 1842 when Admiral Du Petit-Thouars imposed a document of protectorate in the name of France, placing France in command of foreign relations in Tahiti. In the years between 1842 and 1880, Tahiti saw conflict between local Tahitians and the French, loss and displacement of land and the eventual exile of Queen Pomare. Additionally, France put an end to British influence in Tahiti, and of the Kingdom of Tahiti when

the successor of Queen Pomare, abdicated the throne and Tahiti became a formal colony. The year 1903 saw the creation of the *Établissements Français d'Océanie* (French Establishments in Oceania) when Tahiti and the collection of other French controlled islands were combined to create a French overseas territory. However, its indigenous populace did not receive legal citizenship to France until 1946. Today, Tahiti is the center of the overseas region, French Polynesia, and is dominated by two major political parties, the conservative pro-France party, *Tahoera'a Huiraatira* and the Union for Democracy, a pro-independence party. Aldrich notes that the Constitution of the Republic of France remains supreme law, with the Parliament dictating laws, and the French President behind the appointment of the chief administrator and officials (1993). France controls commerce, defense, law and order, health care, social services, and media outlets for the French Polynesia region (Aldrich, 1993). The island's main economic income is from tourism.

The tourist industry stands as the main source of reference in terms of advocating Pacific Islander culture and identity in Tahiti. In the historical fictions of European writers, the 'nostalgic, noble, grandiose, and dying' Native American, similar shaping's of identity has occurred in physical media through postcards and photographic images of the island. Tahiti has invested most its resources in the tourist industry and continuing perpetration of the mythical image placed by early European explorers supports that industry. "The new weight given to tourism as the economic backbone of the Territory meant that representing Tahiti as a pristine paradise was of paramount importance" (Kahn, 2011: 79). Creations of postcards were to reflect the paradisiacal imagined, and characterized contemporary Tahiti in a stagnant image of paradise. These postcards that promoted tourism sought to "to eliminate items that were inconsistent with the myth. Setting were staged with 'traditional' props...The images produced

were, and for the most part continue to be, of seemingly pristine landscapes, luxury hotels, folkloric activities, and attractive Tahitian women” (Ibid via Kahn, 2011: 80). In that regard, local personalities would promote this grandiose image rationalizing their decision to influence the market.

These images of beautiful ‘Tahitian’ women proved to be incoherent. Presented in the dialogue that Kahn gathered from a local photographer, the Tahitian native cites, “Most of the women are not fully Tahitian because the men who visit Tahiti want a woman they already possess in their head or in their libido. They want (to see) women they are used to” (Ibid via Kahn, 2011: 80). Foreign interpretation of beauty and the exotic were based off conceptions of Europe or America instead of native interpretations. The photographer cited this interpretation in statement to Kahn when recollecting on one of his former pieces, “look at #911. She is one hundred percent French. But I put the crown of leaves on her head, a garland of flowers around her neck, and a coconut-leaf basket to give her a Tahitian look” (Sylvain via Kahn, 2011: 80). Conceptualization of the Tahitian woman thus involved repurposing and claiming of cultural and environmental aspects of the land to promote European centric ideals of the exotic; and in placing Tahitian characteristics upon European bodies, Tahitian identity is displaced and commoditized. These conceptions would be center place in the dialogues of study abroad groups in the region. In the same instance, these images would conceptualize the culture for visiting students.

Most auspicious and heavily propagated in Tahitian culture is the dance style of Ori Tahiti. “Dance was first used to promote tourism in the early 1960’s, and it still plays a dominant role in the global marketing of Tahitian tourism” (Kahn, 2011: 148). An avenue of cultural expression, Kahn noted that Tahitian dance has been commercialized for the purposes of

economic gain. “Although dance is an important cultural expression for Tahitians, in the tourist setting it becomes primarily only spectacle” (Ibid: 149). Tourism then plays a role in highlighting aspects of culture, but twists the dance from “meaningful cultural expression to a stage(d) commercial enterprise - exhibiting its own synthetic arrangement” (Ibid: 149). Dance then became a monotony of work relations instead of cultural fluidity. This relation adds weight to paradisiac images that may potentially skew visiting scholar’s perceptions of Tahiti and the culture. Consequently, Kahn notes that “Tahitians in a clearly defined, acceptable, and picturesque setting (where) the visual dominates” (Ibid: 149). Commodification, displacement of cultural expression, and promotion of the exotic then misconstrue participant perceptions of study abroad programs into the Pacific. Lack of address to these issues of image that commodify study abroad programs instead of piquing academic and cultural curiosity and interests can negatively affect a student’s experience. It also closes dialogues on Pacific identity and instead serves only to commemorate a study abroad experience in ways that are akin to a holiday.

These same notions and images that stem from colonization are sometimes hidden, from the students and by the local populace. In favor of economic development, student perception of Tahiti then is further altered, and their experience then becomes of one of interpretation of these images. Programs lacking the proper curriculum or schedule to address these images potentially denote the chance to further promote a false culture. In Tahiti, the history of colonization has been displaced, both in education and in the media, to allow the image of an ‘untouched paradise.’ Locals and higher educational institutes such as study abroad groups often tackle these issues of suppression and colonial reinventions that define Tahiti. In doing so, the experience of participants in study abroad takes a different role of awareness, and cultural appreciation. In the academic year of 2015-16 Tahiti offered several different study abroad options to the island.

Each organization, school, or department involved were structured to enhance and define the experience abroad per the agenda of supporting institution. Figure 2 highlights several study abroad programs and institutes that are active in Tahiti, the type of exchange they offer, housing situations for each program and requirements that the departments or schools required to be inherent in the exchange. The table also notes that these are the current programs of the academic calendar of 2015-16 for US schools and do not include study abroad programs prior to that academic year.

Figure 2. List of Study Abroad Programs 2015-16

University of French Polynesia	Direct Exchange	UFP/ IES Abroad Institute housing/homestay Direct Enrollment Required GPA, some competency in French preferred but not required One to two trimesters Provisions regarding cultural interaction
University of Washington	Tahiti Study Abroad: Exploration Seminar	Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity Homestay/ Collective housing Course Enrollment, cultural and history studies Required GPA, OMAD students preferred Four weeks Strict provisions regarding cultural interaction
	iTahiti: Oral Traditions	Library School Homestay Course Enrollment, cultural and history studies Required GPA Three weeks Strict provisions regarding cultural interaction
	Athletic Exchange	Athletics Department Homestay Course enrollment, cultural and history studies Required GPA, Athletes only Ten days Strict provisions regarding cultural interaction
University of Oregon	Archeology	Archeology Department Hotel/Boat Course Enrollment, cultural and history studies Required GPA

		Two weeks Optional provisions regarding cultural interaction
University of Georgia	Exploration Seminar	School of Marine Biology Homestay Course enrollment, marine biology studies Required GPA, Marine Biology students preferred Two weeks No provisions regarding cultural interaction
Sea Education Association	SEA Semester Abroad: Tahiti	SEA Semester Abroad Ship and personal accommodations while in port Voyaging and ship navigation studies One semester/ summer option Some provisions regarding cultural interaction

Figure 2 highlights that the duration of most study abroad programs are several weeks and most programs are exploration seminars and departmental specific. The University of French Polynesia does not offer any special departmental exchange programs in their institutions comparatively. The UFP study abroad office also notes that they host only a dozen international students in their direct exchanges that last one to two semesters. The need to understand study abroad programs in French Polynesia is potentially more relevant for incoming programs as Figure 2 shows that most study abroad programs are based outside the region. These programs that insert themselves onto the island are more likely to seek aid and housing outside the university as UFP does not offer a substantial base of operations for study abroad. Programs usually make use of both hotel and local contacts to provide housing and enhance student experience while in Tahiti. The next section delves into a local organization that has hosted and still hosts many study abroad programs from the US. Known as Maeva I Te Ora, this study abroad focused organization based in Tahiti continuously challenges the perceived notions of paradise while acting as hosts and housing to many visiting scholars and faculty.

Maeva I Te Ora: Inheritance and Appreciation

In the summer of 2015, I found myself in French Polynesia on the main island of Tahiti. It was humid, a hot day where the wind seemed suppressed and the constant buzz of mosquitos had me waving my hand subconsciously every few moments. My fourth trip here, neither business nor pleasure, I had come to Tahiti to observe one group; Maeva I Te Ora. A family founded organization established in 2008, Maeva I Te Ora “has a mission to support schools, community groups, and other institutions in creating life-changing educational experiences for students of all ages studying in Tahiti. Our goal is for all students to leave with not just a better sense of French Polynesia, but a better sense of self” (Accessed from Maeva I Te Ora Website, 2016). This group differs from other study abroad hosting organizations, as the program was more structured towards personal growth of the student and applying intercultural sensitive activities. Their programs are usually a few weeks, and from Engle and Engle’s interpretation of study abroad experience, schools and institutions involved in their organization usually categorized as Level One to Three programs.

Schools would develop the structures of their program from the contacts with the family on the island, depending on the context of their work and departmental interests. Workers, contacts and organizers are also family and friends of the organization marking Maeva I Te Ora as a family friendly business, which proves more attractive to study abroad groups focused on community centered activities. Maeva I Te Ora, translated from Tahitian as, “Welcome to the Life”, is an organization that stood apart from other programs that were defined by institutional policies. This organization delved heavily into addressing the paradise image that Tahiti had garnered from years of colonization and tourism. Many activities are centered around time of year, where visiting groups could potentially be guests at the festivals or witness to political

changes that were occurring in Tahiti. One such program, through the University of Washington, happened to coincide with the annual Heiva I Tahiti, a month-long festival during the later summer months. Alumni from the program cited a cultural exchange that allowed them to fully appreciate Tahiti beyond postcard scenery. Becoming aware of the issues with a paradise image, Kristen Walker, a former student and participant of the organization quotes,

“Tahiti is not the perfect paradise we so often see romanticized on postcards or showcased on Instagram. It has poverty, homelessness and pollution. Many fear that the Tahitian oral traditions and language that have carried centuries of accumulated knowledge and wisdom are in danger of fading into history. It’s a real place with real issues that are complicated.” (Kristen Walker, accessed 2016)

Walker takes notice of the political, social and environmental issues often hidden by postcards in Tahiti. The program allows a deeper introspective and reflective consideration of Tahiti that most other study abroad programs may shy away from to entice students to choose their program. Maeva I Te Ora allows a raw view of Tahiti, instead of simple iteration of cultural lessons that are dominant in most study abroad programs in Europe. The program simultaneously raises questions of the effects of colonial government and the economic emphasis on the tourist industry. For example, Maeva I Te Ora educates students on how Heiva I Tahiti, a traditional festival, has become commercialized. A competition between traditional dance groups, rules and regulation favor the groups that are more entertaining and support the tourist economy. Cultural commercialization is not new to the Pacific, but the fact is that this commercialization is extended to traditional cultural festivals is sometimes glossed over by study abroad programs. Many students in the program were even enlightened about the history of Tahiti that was changed to hide the dark colonial pasts from future generations of Tahitians.

However, despite the stark reality of the island and the hidden colonial history of nuclear testing and forced treaties, Maeva I Te Ora gives credence towards the people and community that are usually left out of discussions of culture by other academic programs in Tahiti.

“Tahiti is breathtakingly beautiful. The blue water and vivid sunsets, and the lush tropical forests and striking mountains are the stuff of Hollywood. But what they so often leave out of the movies are the people, the history, the culture and the community’s shared story. Those elements, to me, are what make Tahiti truly breathtaking. Our time on the island was spent in the company of some of the most incredible teachers, mentors and friends that I’ve ever known, and the experience fundamentally changed my perspective as a storyteller. The most beautiful backdrop in the world is, in the end, still just that—a backdrop” (Kristen Walker, accessed 2016).

Kristen found a meaningful experience in Tahiti when her perspective was not limited to a simple image of the island. Her perception of the island was further enhanced by the host organization and she connected with their teachings. This experience and connection is especially prevalent and meaningful for heritage students. Heritage students, in the language of study abroad, are students of the ethnic background or culture of the region they are visiting. A large portion of students who joined in the study abroad option to Tahiti in the last few years all have had ties with Pacific culture. In fact, from 2009 to 2016, at least one heritage student has been present in all the programs Maeva I Te Ora has hosted from the University of Washington. Many of these students who are not Tahitian, are diaspora individuals, meaning they claim heritage from the Pacific but live outside their respective homeland. Their only experience of the Pacific extends to their family and church on the mainland. Visitation through a study abroad program had allowed these heritage students a change of pace in regards to how they view and

interact with their culture. Heritage students have reported that the introspective and personal view of Tahitian culture has made them revisit their own island heritages in the Pacific, whether they are Samoan, Chamorro, Fijian, or the other large host of various cultures existent in the region.

Student Experiences: Heritage and Awareness

Study abroad programs in Tahiti are rather limited. Many programs that have visited the island do so for a limited period, whereas longer stays are usually single student enrollments with the local college or universities. These long term international visitors are few, only numbering around a dozen participants during a school year. In the context of this study, interviews were conducted with a former group of students, who stayed in Tahiti only for durations of one month/several weeks. The paradisiacal image of Tahiti was a major factor in their program during their visitation to the island. Touristic desires of sandy beaches and warm waters prompted some students in a study abroad to enroll initially. One student noted no prior knowledge of Tahiti, and had simply enrolled because of the image of a coconut on a sandy beach in a brochure. Another student noted some knowledge of Tahiti due to interests in diving and had cited an interest to visit the island, but had no prior access or way to justify a visit until a program had become available. Another former participant also responded in similar fashion to the academic requirements that would be fulfilled through the study abroad to Tahiti. Study abroad became an avenue of vacation from which a student would be able to fulfill interests both academic and personal. However, one student noted their visit drew from an interest in the diverse cultural aspect that was lacking in their own institutions hometown. This student of ethnic background (Native American) noted that their interests in Tahiti came from a desire to know of other cultures affected by colonialism. In exploring these responses from different individuals and

their experience in Tahiti, the following section is a series of interviews of former participants to study abroad programs in Tahiti. These interviews are not a complete synopsis of all participants of study abroad programs to Tahiti, and are representative of the minority demographic that visits the island. However, their experiences are noteworthy as each claims a heritage that is American and other.

In an interview of several individuals, I noted a similar trend amongst different individuals, some who were of American ancestry and culture, and others of minority or ethnic heritages. For this study, this thesis focuses on the narratives of six students, each with a different background. All six of these individuals claim a national identity that is predominantly American, while three claim a heritage that extends to an ethnic background. Gender plays a significant role in study abroad, so in reflection to trend, three of the six students mentioned are female. This thesis will introduce these six students under pseudo-names in respect to their privacy. All interviews were conducted with the same set of questions, and each response recorded. Sophie is a Japanese American. She grew up in Seattle, and prior to her trip to Tahiti had not been in contact with Pacific Islanders before. She traveled to Tahiti for a ten-week exchange, where she stayed with other students in a shared housing unit. She recently graduated from the University of Washington with a bachelor of science. Kam is a teacher at an underprivileged school in San Francisco. She attended the same program as Sophie, but has some experience with Pacific Islanders in her high school. She is African American, and graduated with a bachelor of arts.

Jose is Mexican American, having been a child of immigrants, he grew up in Eastern Washington. Having graduated from the University of Washington, he works as a social worker at Latino and Hispanic community center in Seattle. He attended a four-week exploration

seminar to Tahiti, where he stayed with a dozen other students in a single housing unit. Moana participated in the same seminar as Jose, in a larger group, (two dozen students) two years after. She claims Samoan and European ancestry, and grew up in Seattle. She also graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in social work. Johnson is Native American, having spent a significant amount of his life on the Klamath reservation in Oregon. He currently is pursuing a PhD in linguistics at the University of Arizona. He attended a one-month program in French Polynesia, but stayed on a homestead with one other student on the island of Huahine, a thirty-minute plane ride south of Tahiti. Toa is Samoan, who grew up in New Zealand due to his parent's status as citizens. He attended the same program as Johnson. He graduated with a bachelor of arts and is currently seeking a graduate degree at the University of California in Los Angeles.

Kam, Sophie, Moana, and Jose had most of their experience with the Pacific on the 'metropolitan' island of Tahiti, whereas Toa and Johnson found their experience on the outer islands. This thesis cites metropolitan, as the island is the more developed of all the isles in the French Polynesia chain. And, the four students, Kam, Sophie, Moana and Jose also share similarity in having been participants of the Maeva I Te Ora organization. Johnson and Toa's experience differs as their group was not housed in a single housing unit, but in multiple homesteads, and were part of an anthropological exploration program to Huahine, an island that is not as highly developed as Tahiti. However, the experiences of all six align or converse on similar matters of identity and cultural awareness. The same set of poised questions were given to each student on their experiences abroad. Each question considered their experience with studying abroad, the duration, thoughts and notions of Tahiti, activities during the program, what they learned and how the view of the Pacific had changed. In a guided reflection piece, each was

also asked to describe any interpersonal growth, and in regards to their own culture, any reinterpretations or insight that they gained from viewing Tahitian culture.

Referencing the image of paradise, most the students interviewed had an image of the Pacific that only extended to sandy beaches and warm ocean waters, or other more known islands such as Hawai'i, Samoa and Tonga. Toa and Moana are notable exceptions as they both have cultural and ethnic ties to the region. Kam noted her only prior experience being, very limited especially in regards to Tahiti. Her only exposure being "with Samoan and Tongan culture. I had (gone) to Hawaii when I graduated from high school, but still was fairly limited in my understanding" (2015). Jose states a lack of knowledge of the region as he had to research Tahiti to understand its geographical situation.

"Before I went to Tahiti I had assumed beaches and water. My imagination was only reaching from photos I had seen on google when I research Tahiti. I actually had little to (no) knowledge of the rich and historical cultural presence there was in Tahiti" (Jose, 2015).

Access to social media found only images of beaches and photos of pristine waters. Jose's use of the internet in this regard only prepared him for an experience in the sense of geography and some notion of the appearance. Use of the internet however did not separate the images of paradise with the island. Indeed, in this case the internet enforced them. These notions extended to even familiar knowledge. Sophie had to research Tahiti to understand the location as Jose had. Her research through the internet yielded similar results of a tourist destination.

“I had no idea where Tahiti was on the map. I had to look it up before travelling. I knew Tahiti was a tropical island and a popular vacation destination, but culturally, I was oblivious” (2015).

Study abroad programs are meant to address this lack of understanding. However, if not done so adequately, then the pre-departure orientation or meeting can sometimes add to the initial confusion and fears students harbor of interacting in a different cultural environment. Seeking information online can also draw on intended images of the government and tourist industry of Tahiti. However, these images were addressed by the local populace and organization of Maeva I Te Ora, and in an aspect, that greatly enhanced the student experiences.

Referencing the benefits previously stated in chapter one, all participants developed a motivation to further their own careers. Their experience in addressing colonial and capitalist interests with culture provided intellectual growth and motivation for their respective career choices (IES, 2009). Even more interesting, was an expressed desire by participants to return to Tahiti that will involve their future career choice. Sophie mentions this desire as she cited,

“My experience in Tahiti help me focus on my goals to become a dentist and in return I plan to go back with a team of dentists to provide free dental” (Sophie, 2015).

Sophie’s intention to revisit with medical support underlines two considerations. One, being that her plan to return to Tahiti with a team of dentists may suggest that Tahiti is lacking in that medical expertise. Lonely Planet, a travel journal, cites that although medical facilities are of “good standard,” the less populated islands have little to no service, while most practice are private, and expensive (Lonely Planet. Accessed 2016). Second, Sophie’s expressed desire to return to address the lack of medical resources shows an understanding of the disparities of the

community. An understanding that per Engle and Engle is usually attained in study abroad programs that are one to two semesters (1995). This awareness of socio-political problems that plague Tahiti shows an interpersonal growth within a shorter period.

In addressing awareness of cultural and social issues, the other four individuals, Jose, Johnson, Toa and Kam established that they learned or expanded their knowledge about colonialism. Jose found that he had limited experience with Pacific, and states that it “was the first time I had stepped on a plane in my life” (Jose, 2015). Through the program to Tahiti, Jose first experience abroad was informative on the issues inherent in the Pacific, its colonial history and the contemporary consequences that stemmed from that history. Jose cites that,

“I learned about the colonization of the Tahitian people and the very unjust (experiences) meant to assimilate the Tahitian people to the western civilization culture. I learned about the history of the island and dove in as much as possible in the Tahitian culture of beautiful music, dance and art. It was an experience set to engage my mind in not only the present moment of appreciating where you are at, in that moment and separate yourself from the materialistic way of life that we are so comfortable in western society” (Jose, 2015).

Jose discovered the meaning of disparities existing in Tahiti defining them as “unjust olives.” Jose expands upon these olives as labors by indigenous people being exploited by the colonial institutions. This is a reference that Jose extends to his study of the use of land in French Polynesia as a nuclear test site and the radioactive fallout that occurred as byproduct on both the land and people. His interaction with the native populace enhanced his trip by involving discussions of assimilation and suppression of culture. Similarly, Jose mentions this as a reference to the history of language in Tahiti, where the native language was suppressed in

schools, and the promotion of French has affected native speaking in contemporary Tahiti. This loss of language and forced assimilation allowed the French government to implement their own agendas such as nuclear testing without immediate protests. Kam notes that such actions have drastically changed her own perspective on colonization.

“Colonization has drastically impacted/sought to destroy many cultures and communities beyond the United States” (Kam, 2015).

Her own experience with the issues of assimilation and colonization stemmed from lessons and teachings back at her home institute. She states that her experience in Tahiti allowed her to appreciate the cultural diversity in the contemporary US. Comparatively she notes how this diversity has been actively rooted out by colonialism in Tahiti. Kam also found an understanding of how the local Tahitian populace is addressing the past suppression in the structures of the Maeva I Te Ora program.

“We had regular Tahitian classes taught by a family friend of our host family. We learned and performed dances from Vai, a participant of Heiva. We learned how to sail a va’a and how to row. We learned how to make a variety of meals. We spent a considerable amount of time in Papeete. We spent a lot of time in the water and discussing the impacts of colonization” (Kam, 2015).

The aspect on culture gave context for the students on how indigenous people address colonialism in the Pacific. Indeed, Sophie mentions how her lessons contextualized colonialism as she had no prior experience before the study abroad. Johnson found a similar experience of framing the cultural and historical awareness of Tahiti that fueled his career and studies in indigenous language. An indigenous scholar who drew narratives of his own upbringing as a

Native American, Johnson states his learning experience in Tahiti, or Huahine specifically to have allowed him knowledge of,

“New manners of implications of indigenous projects facing continuing colonial occupation, issues in language endangerment and revitalization, the politics of gaining independence. Ma’ohi Language, new styles of art how to maintain a melon farm, importance of immersion methods of cultural and language revitalization” (Johnson, 2016).

Expanding not only his understanding of colonialism in education and culture, he found that current struggles for independence in Tahiti to be especially enlightening as his trip coincided with political discussions by former president Oscar Temaru. These political discussions and sharing of culture evident in his program allowed him to draw comparisons to his own community’s socio-cultural and political history with the US. It allowed an expansion of his previously held notions of the Pacific, where he found a shared experience of colonization.

“Of Tahiti, I thought of it as a case of colonial occupation wherein tourism remains key in domination. Never really had a notion of the Pacific in general outside of shared colonial experiences.” (Johnson, 2016)

The shared experience of the host country and individual is a key highlight of the mantra of studying abroad. A cultural exchange of knowledge and histories, Johnson reveled in his cultural experience as the program allowed him to reciprocate his own cultural knowledge as a Native American.

“(I) learned basic Ma’ohi via Immersion, taught some home stay family member's maqlaqsyals (Klamath-Modoc). Participated in Heiva. Assisted with home-stay family's

farm. Built kites, model of traditional houses, to'ere. Visited homestay family's kin and network. Learned to play ukulele, learned songs and played live music with family” (Johnson, 2016).

Johnson found his one-month experience allowed for a cross cultural immersion, a tenant and exchange that Engle and Engle (2003) state to be more indicative of a year or two-year long program. Johnson sharing his own cultural roots as Klamath Native American with his host family's own Tahitian culture allowed a deeper and meaningful experience for him and the family. Wilkinson (1998) comments that this is a level of cultural sensitivity is garnered from having a shared experience. In coming to Tahiti, Johnson who had minimal experience in the Pacific, kept an open mind due to his own background as an indigenous person. Added to the preparation of the program leader, Miriam Kahn, who was fluent in the culture, politics and society of Tahiti, Johnson perhaps benefited the most out of the non-Pacific students. This level of cultural sensitivity was only achieved by Moana as she drew from her own heritage as a Pacific Islander. Moana, a person whose narrative revolved around the diaspora experience, stated that prior to her arrival to Tahiti, her image of the islands was just as skewed as the other students.

“I definitely had the image of sunshine, sand and water as the primary thoughts in my mind when I thought of Tahiti. I have always been so curious to learn firsthand about the Polynesian culture and people since I grew up without that side of my family present” (Moana, 2015).

Her experience in Tahiti on an exploration seminar that was only a few weeks allowed her greater personal growth in her culture and intellect. Moana found a reconnection to her heritage and cultural insight into a region she had been displaced from. Her one-month

experience in Maeva I Te Ora confirms their pursuit of interpersonal growth and introspective reflection amongst their participants. Toa also noted a similar experience of cultural reconnection.

“I grew up around a lot of Polynesians, so I was use to the culture. But when I was younger, I felt as being Polynesian was bad. Like it wouldn’t get you anywhere. This experience changed that, and I immersed myself in something completely foreign yet familiar” (Toa, 2015).

Toa had more access to the culture than Moana, who had grown up in the US. However, Toa had not fully embraced or explored his cultural roots as he states that while living in New Zealand, it was a navigation of a “mash up of different cultures.” Toa addresses that to develop community amongst different cultures, Pacific Islanders sought common ground as Kiwis, embracing their national identity over their own Pacific Islander roots. Moana equally found her experience in the US to be a valuing of her national identity over her heritage to find community and a sense of family. However, Moana states in exploring those roots that she,

“learned a lot about family, that they are the people who encourage you to be yourself and support you through times of doubt, and cheer you on in times of success. I learned about the power of being connected to your surrounds and the land that you're standing on - that your environment can give you all the strength you need. I learned about self-love and self-acceptance, how free it really feels to love yourself just as much as you love the people around you” (Moana, 2015).

Moana and Toa’s experience in Tahiti also allowed a reconnection to the land that had been muddled by their experience in the diaspora. Both heritage students, their connection land

to Tahiti extends to their own ethnic background as a Samoan. Their upbringing in the US and New Zealand led them to believe that they were disassociated with this background. This study abroad proved the most beneficial to these two individuals. Moana states she began to exercise her Samoan identity as result of her duration in Tahiti.

“I feel like I gained some of that permission I had been searching for my entire life about claiming the identity of Polynesian or Pacific Islander. I had always felt like because I didn't grow up with my father and that side of my family, that I didn't deserve to be a part of that community” (Moana, 2015).

Moana's self-permission to claim herself as a Pacific Islander allowed her express a new avenue of identity she had no prior access to. Toa's experience differs on this account as he had access to his Pacific Islander roots but had chosen not to embrace this identity.

“I grew up Polynesian. At the same time, I didn't. I grew up as a foreigner in another land, which soon I began to identify with. I had always been around the culture, but I had never been in it. My experience abroad and in Tahiti made me find my culture” (Toa, 2015).

Loss or disassociation with language and culture and integration in an environment that was not her own ethnic identity lead Moana to believe that she could not claim a Pacific Islander identity. As a US citizen, Moana's narrative explores how students interpret their own national identity in comparison to their cultural background, and more importantly the value of their culture in a society that is not built on it. Moana's trip was then not only a permission of exploration but one that showed value in her identity, especially in a system of education where the Pacific Islands are footnotes usually to US histories. We can see a sense of clarity for Moana

to give value to her own culture as a Pacific Islander. Toa experienced navigating his national identity and his cultural roots. He was a Samoan who lived outside of his own culture and language. Even though New Zealand has one of the largest concentration of Pacific Islander communities, Toa states

“We were all Kiwi. You were not Tongan. You weren’t Samoan, or Cook Islander. Just Kiwi. And we embraced it, so we could talk to each other” (Toa, 2015).

Toa cites that he found comfort in his national identity as a Kiwi, as he could gain access to the community in New Zealand by embracing this identity. Yet as consequence, this access and drive to find common ground in a community full of different cultures led him to value his national identity over his Pacific Islander one. He embraced a history that was colonial, a language that was English and a created national identity that suppressed his own heritage. Toa’s experience abroad in Tahiti proved meaningful to him as he reevaluated and reflected upon his cultural ties, and finally gave credence to them over his national identity. Toa states that,

“I found my culture again. I had always been (disconnected) with my heritage as Samoan as I couldn’t find common ground. Tahiti taught me give value to who I was and where I came from” (Toa, 2015).

A Colonial Agenda: Blurring Indigenous and National Identities

The diversity of the Pacific dwells in the differing traditions and practices of each island; with a commonality found in the largest in nationality. In accessing national identities, Pacific Islanders resolve their own different cultural ties through international communication. This commonality however is not a “cultural homogeneity” or assimilation of nations. In fact, insomuch as Hau’ofa is concerned, “diversity is necessary for the struggle against the

homogenizing forces of the global juggernaut. It is even more necessary for those of us who must focus on strengthening their ancestral cultures in their struggles against seemingly overwhelming forces in order to regain their lost sovereignty” (1998: 42). Due to an increasing pressure of globalization, Hau’ofa realizes that an overall indigenous identity not only denies the differing narratives of colonial impact existent amongst each island, but also the different responses based on culture and history of that islands. An overall Oceanic identity thus would combine these differing stories into one narrative, not only convoluting the differing aspects of colonial aggression that the island faced but also their cultural identity, a reverse assimilation.

However, the concept of culture and identity are contended in the Pacific not because of globalization, although it might be a factor; or fear of a cultural homogeneity found in embracing a common identity. It is the creation of borders in the contemporary Pacific post-WWII that have led to points of struggle in addressing value to culture. It is the creation of nations that have developed and introduced new social and political structures. Nations and nationality are not ethnically bounded, although some countries such as Samoa or Tonga share the ability of having an intertwine of national and cultural identities, other countries such as Papua New Guinea are nations built by the combination of hundreds of differing cultures. Heritage and culture can be problematic for governments, as they become a point of destabilization for nations. Although there may be a service to the indigenous in the land, even bias, political leaders still tend towards reference of national identities instead of ethnically conscious ones. Some programs actively attempt to address these cultural suppressions such as Maeva I Te Ora, yet most study abroad programs deny or gloss over these cultural identities to avoid confrontation with their institution. By subtracting the discussion of cultural identity from their programs, study abroad organizations can thus enforce nationalistic or colonial ones that inhabit spaces of globalization.

In this aspect, study abroad programs are detrimental, and student experiences like those in Tahiti can be skewed because of this preference. Students noted that Tahitian preferred speaking French or claiming French identity in discussions about Tahitian independence. These narratives are prevalent in the politics of Tahiti, where the state and education systems have attempted to change and suppress indigenous expressions in the face of growing educational interests.

In “Tahiti: Beyond the Postcard”, Kahn presents the commodification of culture to oppress ideals of independence. In the chapter, ‘From Our Place to Their Place’, Kahn demonstrates how the interim president at the time, Gaston Flosse, came to Huahine to discuss a cultural project of building a *fare pote’e*, an eco-museum, which would give information on the nearby historical sites called the *maraes*. The group behind the project, Opu Nui, and the project leader, Dorothy Levy, found initial opposition to these plans, as Kahn points out; “this brief exchange embodied the core of the ongoing debate between Opu Nui and the Territorial government” (2011: 170). Students were raised aware of this classical debate of colonial designs versus native representation. Johnson stated that the experience of addressing how the government was defining culture for Tahiti paralleled issues he faces as a member of the Klamath tribe. His host family, who opposed French rule, instilled in him a discussion of how he should address his national identity as a US citizen.

Thus, in the context of studying abroad, the debate becomes one of understanding themes of political, cultural and historical differences of national and cultural histories. Students add to this conversation on the diversity of the Pacific and the assimilation of nations by sharing their own individual narratives and reflecting upon their national identities. In this way, study abroad then becomes an instrument that explores identity and gives value to cultural ties. Moana’s assigning of value to her culture over her national identity allowed her to be able to

explore her cultural identity. Johnson's comparison of shared colonial experiences allowed him to refocus his own research in developing his native language. For Jose, this experience gave insight to refocus on a part of his cultural roots he had ready access to but had not done so until he had studied abroad. Kam and Sophie similarly found a dialogue of colonialism they had little to no prior experience beforehand, with a desire to return to give back the same sense of enrichment they obtained from their experience. Toa gave credence to a part of his identity he had readily suppressed so he could find community in a nation. Ironically, he found community by exploring his own cultural ties.

This type of fluency of cultural identity and national histories allowed students to attain perspective and interpersonal reflection while abroad in Tahiti in a short period. Their programs stood as unique as they introduced them to the discussion of colonization and imparted upon students to reaffirm and reevaluate their national histories. In reconnecting their heritage, ideas and bringing awareness to students, organizations like Maeva I Te Ora and host families in Huahine introduced students to new perspectives of how they address themselves. In this way, the study abroad programs that these six individuals were part of allowed them to explore questions of their culture, identity, colonialism and their own nation. It gave them a perspective on the Pacific region that made them both appreciate their own situation as US or New Zealand citizens and open the conversation into the difference of nationalism and indigeneity. The United States, New Zealand, and other national metropolises are engaged in a dialogue about immigration and diversity. It is one that finds precedent in the political undertones in Tahiti, as they build their own sense of autonomy from France. These six students that studied in Tahiti thus reflected on both their ethnic heritage and their obligatory roles as national citizen. For heritage students of the diasporic pool of immigrants who have migrated to global metropolises, this reflection is

pertinent to how they navigate their identities as heritage students, national citizens or as Pacific Islanders.

Chapter 3: Interpreting Experience, Assessing Fluency and Competency

What is gained from studying abroad? Studies have shown that professional development, personal growth and cultural sensitivity and awareness to global issues are key benefits. Indeed, in the case studies of Kam, Jose, Johnson, Sophie, Toa and Moana, their experience in Tahiti allowed them to become privy to these benefits. A study abroad program is a costly affair, whereas students not only can spend a semester's tuition in a single month, but pay for airfare, baggage, and lodging, excluding any personal spending costs. In interpreting student experiences abroad, it is important to also interpret if the cost is worth the trip. In assessing their experience, this thesis takes note of the cultural fluency and growth students developed during their duration abroad. Professional development, personal growth and cultural sensitivity can be all attained in their own education in their home country. The US carries a rich history of diverse cultural backgrounds, and potentially could have fulfill the kind of understanding they gained in traveling abroad. However, in traveling outside the normal classroom, studying abroad achieves lessons that allows them contextualize their experience with hands-on events. But, in the theoretical realm, it may also contextualize the experiences of those around them, and even more so allow them to think that their short soiree abroad has made them not only fluent but cultural and language experts. Freed cites that

“There is a popular belief, one long subscribed to by many of us, that students who study abroad are those who make the most progress in their language of choice and are the most likely to become fluent” (Freed 1995: 123).

This belief cites that those who have studied abroad gain insight to the culture that would be comparable to local expertise. However, this type of fluency is hard to discern as Freed states that very definition of ‘fluency,’ is disputed amongst experts. The construct and wording

of “fluency” implies a standard of culture. However, culture and language continuously evolve, and fluency comes at different levels of understanding the evolution and changes a culture experiences. Natives of a culture enjoy this understanding through continuous exposure to new nuances or mannerisms that may develop. Studying abroad allows a participant access to this local insight of the culture, yet, what if this information is misinformed? Education and understanding of local insight before and during studying abroad should give a participant a small understanding of the cultural expertise local people has, and in that regard, they would potentially return more knowledgeable than their compatriots back in their home country. The problem stems from what is taught to the student and how they may interpret those lessons.

In studying abroad to Tahiti, this thesis found some discrepancies existent with some of the locale populace on knowledge imparted to the students. More so, local communities may have framed their lessons as true for all French Polynesia. In imparting such reasoning to these students, local people had potentially developed a false sense of prestige for students. Students were led to believe that they have gained a sense of expertise in the culture they explored. The type of fluency that local people enjoy was muddled as students falsely left after their short period abroad believing themselves just as knowledgeable. In these cases, where students believe themselves experts, the programs become not a lesson of intercultural competence that should address discrepancies and conflicting ideas of culture while abroad, but of belief of status earned in another country. In creating a sense of prestige, local communities led students to believe themselves cultural experts of the region. Potential experiences of students who would study abroad then could be skewed as they drew on generic knowledge from former participants dubbed experts and generalized it to the entire region. This chapter thus explores intercultural competence, the definition and importance of attaining this ability. This chapter will also focus

on two individuals who studied in Tahiti but either responded to their experiences negatively or had a point of contention. Secondly, this chapter explores the understanding of gaining the status of ‘cultural expert’ in lieu of only several weeks. It also sheds some understanding on the effect of studying abroad in Tahiti, and response of the local community to the students. This response, has in some instances, been fabricated to the students and has led to a sense of hyper-indigeneity that has alienated heritage students. Finally, this chapter considers how these heritage students have responded to their experience considering their time in Tahiti and if their experience abroad affirms their own identity or contends with their status as heritage students.

Intercultural Competence: Cultural Miscues and Shock

Literature on studying abroad states that a key benefit for student participants is insight into cultural differences. Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe describe this ability in terms as intercultural competence. The authors define intercultural competence as “the ability to step beyond one’s own culture and function with other individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds” (Sinicrope, Norris, Watanabe, 2007: 1). The ability to address different cultures and keep an open mind in conversations with other people of diverse backgrounds is offered in both study abroad programs and colleges. However, in defining cultural competence, we must also clarify cultural sensitivity, which a student’s competency is dependent on. Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe define sensitivity as the ability to experience and define cultural differences (2007: 3). Pre-departure meetings to study abroad should introduce and instruct students on empathy for other cultural situations but it is the experience abroad that defines how the student learns to be culturally sensitive. The skill of assessing cultural differences is how a student will competently act upon situations that are new and challenging to them. In the case of Tahiti, the class sessions the six students mentioned in the previous chapter during the trip were

to analyze and interpret their experiences with local people. These experiences were enhanced or hindered by their openness to new people, and how they responded to the culture.

In one case a student, named Joy for privacy reasons, found difficulty in her study abroad group. Joy repeatedly express disbelief in accepting certain cultural practices, having been raised in a Caucasian American household that saw little interaction with ethnic cultures. In a short interview, she expressed concerns of traveling to Tahiti, the weather, the environment, if she would be accepted, and what the other students would think of her. These fears unfortunately manifested to where she continually shunned certain practices in Tahiti as simple or crude and often would sit back by herself instead of interacting with the locale populace.

“I gave this trip a bad review as it was not what I thought it was. I didn’t think they would make us do so much stuff like dancing or singing. I can’t do either of those. And it felt unorganized” (Joy, 2015).

A cold response, Joy expressed she didn’t wish to partake in the Tahitian festival and repeatedly complained of last minute changes by families. These changes were in fact fishing trips, or seeking permission from the instructor if they could showcase the students to the village, which was a common way of showing respect and placing honor upon visitors. Joy, in this instance, showed cultural insensitivity, having been closed minded to the experience and to family attempts to make the study abroad more meaningful for the students. Chen suggests that Joy fell into a behavioral pattern that rejected a new environment. She was unable to adapt to her environment due to a sense of culture shock in a foreign environment.

“Symptoms of culture shock include washing hands excessively, being overly concerned with food and drinking, fearing people, being absent-minded, refusing to learn the host

country' s language and customs, and worrying about being robbed, cheated, or injured” (Oberg via Cheng. 2013: 23).

‘Culture shock’ inhibited Joy from adapting to her study abroad experience and as such, she was unable to benefit from the experience. More so the lack of competence in communication was indicative of her ability to function in a manner that was consistent with the local environment while maintaining her own needs, goals and expectations (Ruben, 1976). Joy repeatedly replied to all conversation by local people in English, or otherwise did not interact at an interpersonal level with her host family. Joy, unable to reconcile her own usual environment in the US to that of Tahiti thus become judgmental and evaluative of her surroundings.

“I just wanted to go home after the first week. The mosquitos were too much. The people overbearing and I was getting sick all the time. I just wanted to go back home (where) it was normal” (Joy, 2015).

Joy’s repeated rejections accumulated in her host family being reluctant to open to her, as one member of the host family cited they would not be upset when she left. This also draws into the conversation of empathy. In many ways Joy’s own empathetic nature or lack thereof caused her friction with her own host family. In some other ways, it was also her host family’s lack of empathy to Joy’s frustrations in navigating a culture she saw completely foreign to her own socio-cultural norms. Ruben ascribes empathy as indicative to intercultural competence as it places the person in the other’s shoes (1976). Unfortunately, Joy could not attain this level of understanding and she found herself floundering in her study abroad experience. This experience was not singular to just Joy.

Another student, referenced as Will, found similar difficulty while studying in Tahiti. A member of Johnson's study abroad group, Will repeatedly misinterpreted communication cues much to the delight of the local populace. Will, though very open minded and willing to open communications with his host family, embraced Tahitian culture. However, he did express in his interview some instances where he felt he was out casted. These instances of course included speech. Will, having learned basic Tahitian, had attempted to speak to the local village when his host family had presented him and his compatriots during the Heiva festival.

"I had to deliver a speech in Ma'ohi. It was nerve wrecking man. I had a script and I just read out loud to what it said to this audience of hundreds of Tahitians. Here I am, a white guy trying to speak to all these locales in their native tongue" (Will, 2015).

Will's incredulity of the moment still was not negative. Indeed, he expressed how it seemed the family and village appreciated greatly his speech. He also took this chance as a challenge to share his own willingness to learn Tahitian language and culture. Will did expand on one moment after from which his host brother came and told him of some dissent caused by his speech.

"After the 'thank you' speech, my brother Teiha comes up and says, 'hey. These guys said they want to beat you up. They said you mispronounced words, and disrespected them.' I was shocked! I instantly became nervous and started to walk around half scared because I thought I offended someone. For three days, I kept looking over my shoulder until one of my family came up and said it was joke" (Will, 2015).

Will's own interpretation, though somewhat humorous, did show that although he showed an openness to the culture, one miscue caused him to falter. More so, it was Will's

positioning of himself as “other” to the locale community that placed him in a sense of tenseness. Of course, this kind of behavior is common in study abroad programs as students are thrust in an unknown environment. Interpretation then is key to understanding. Assumption of situations will only cause more misunderstanding or close off any attempts to bridge understandings. Defining these instances and behavior of the students in foreign environments becomes imperative in understanding intercultural communication and how students will develop and use this ability to navigate their study abroad experiences.

Again, reiterating intercultural competence as imperative, study abroad groups must be informed through orientation and continued conversation to tackle personal or group difficulties in adapting and communicating with other cultures. Ruben’s seven dimensions of intercultural competence is potentially relevant as it allows insight into behavior that will benefit students and their experience abroad. Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe characterize the first of Ruben’s seven dimensions (1976) as;

“1. Display of respect describes an individual’s ability to “express respect and positive regard” for other individuals” (Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2007: 5).

In this dimension, Joy failed to present a display of respect for the culture of Tahiti. Her own regard was expressed only towards herself and if her experience would be personally fruitful. Will on the other hand demonstrated this by learning the language and showed a willingness to his host family to practice his lessons to the village. In Pacific Islander culture, the use of native language is indicative in all social norms and is the foundation of most cultures in the Pacific. Will’s practice of the language thus showed a respect to Pacific Islander society.

“2. Interaction posture refers to an individual’s ability to “respond to others in a descriptive, non-evaluative, and nonjudgmental way” (Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2007: 5).

Joy did not exhibit a posture of interaction. In her interview, she described how she shied away from others, even during class sessions, and the use of crude language in describing Tahitian culture shows high evaluation and a judgmental attitude. Will, though both succeeded and failed in this posture. Learning the language and giving a speech to the village earned him a positive response from the community. Unfortunately, for Will, his response to his host sibling’s joke still indicated some reservations he had about the culture.

“3. Orientation to knowledge describes an individual’s ability to “recognize the extent to which knowledge is individual in nature.” In other words, orientation to knowledge describes an individual’s ability to recognize and acknowledge that people explain the world around them in different ways with differing views of what is “right” and “true” (Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2007: 5).

Joy’s own experience in this tenet was again misguided. She could not place herself in the view points of the local populace as it did not match her own view of the world. Will succeeded in this as he navigated the language and knowledge systems to relate to his host family. His host brother’s playful nature shows a personal connection they both developed.

“4. Empathy is an individual’s ability to “put [himself] in another’s shoes” (Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2007: 5).

Joy's lack of empathy was responded in kind by her host family. Will humorously was perhaps too empathetic as he thought he had offended his family and the culture after his siblings had joked that local youth had dispute with him for his miscues in his speech to the village.

“5. Self-oriented role behavior expresses an individual's ability to “be flexible and to function in [initiating and harmonizing] roles.” In this context, initiating refers to requesting information and clarification and evaluating ideas for problem solving. Harmonizing, on the other hand, refers to regulating the group status quo through mediation” (Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2007: 5).

Will established his role as a student and attempted to develop a role as a community member. His willingness to learn and embrace culture allowed him a perspective as both student and visitor. Will, additionally functioned as son to his host family. In this manner, he also established ties of kinship. Joy could not place herself as daughter to her host family. This sowed discord between her and the family. She instead kept to herself and consequently distanced herself from the community and her host family.

“6. Interaction management is an individual's ability to take turns in discussion and initiate and terminate interaction based on a reasonably accurate assessment of the needs and desires of others” (Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2007: 5).

This dimension of intercultural competence Will fail to attain. He could not accurately assess the seriousness of his host brother's joke which resulted in little interaction with the local populace for several days. Joy, of course, could not involve herself and failed in learning interaction management or employ methods to open conversation.

“7. Lastly, tolerance for ambiguity describes an individual’s ability to ‘react to new and ambiguous situations with little visible discomfort’ (Ruben, 1976, pp. 339-341)”

(Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2007:5).

Will still managed to be interculturally competent, though not to the degree Ruben envisions as standard. Yet, he still formed ties and interacted with his host family on a level that allowed a meaningful exchange. Miscues are bound to happen, but it was Will’s tolerance to the situation and desire to continue that allowed him a meaningful study abroad experience. Joy, on the other hand, due to her upbringing, nature, and unwillingness, failed to be interculturally competent. She interpreted her environment as too foreign, where she responded in hostility instead of tolerance. The use of Joy’s and Will’s interview gives a contrast to the previous six participants. Joy and Will stand apart as they are Caucasian affluent students and their experiences, although not representative of the average study abroad participant, opens discussions of both extreme cases of acceptance and denial of a diverse environment. Using Ruben’s seven dimensions of cultural competency to reference how students interpret their experiences allows a conceptualization and analyzation of student experience abroad. However, analyzing the student experiences only considers one side of the coin. Misinterpretation during a study abroad program is not singularly a student’s own fault or lack of understanding. It is also how the culture responds to the students that dictates a participants’ perception. Sometimes, the response by the local community can potentially propagate problems and complicate the experiences of students instead of addressing contemporary issues.

Façade of Culture?

In the realm of promoting educational value, study abroad programs in the Pacific find an uneasy task in revealing colonial prejudices in the Pacific. Although this reveal of histories is

not always warranted or even acknowledged sometimes by the local community affected, study abroad programs spark some recognition of the current “status-quo.” More jarring than the reveal of colonial history and the heavy impact of colonization on Pacific communities is the outright denial of colonialism by these communities in the face of visiting study abroad groups. Host communities in the Pacific, especially, promote a sort of hyper-indigenization of their culture to the students, a promotion that states their cultural ties are still strong and have overcome past and contemporary colonial systems of oppression. Returning to the case study of Tahiti, this denial of colonial history to ring especially true. Under the veil of strong indigenous ties, the local communities in Tahiti specifically cited there was no need for contemporary or globalized development. Many of the elders of the community in Huahine advocated a spirituality to the land and traditions that extended to the descended generations. This promotion was especially pertinent while Johnson’s group visited the island, and the host families in Huahine presented the students to the village. Stating the preference of Ma’ohi language (Tahitian) over French, the constant mantra of tending of the land for sustenance and the increase in cultural performances and demonstrations lead students to believe that there was a sense of simple living in the Pacific that thrived. Gaumin, the host father to Johnson cited that,

“We have what we need from the land. It is the Ma’ohi way. Do not speak French. No French. We are Ma’ohi” (Gaumin, 2015).

Gaumin’s image of the Pacific, which was a promotion of culture that can address colonial disparities is positive in the sense that it shows resilience and indigenous opposition. But, this image can be a double-edged blade in the fact that it can also hide from students issues inherent in colonial regimes. First, such a promotion such as outright advocacy against colonial rule denies colonial history. In Johnson’s group, rarely did a host family acknowledge that there

was a negative impact to French rule, i.e. the nuclear testing, and the only time they did learn of this was from the instructor, who made it a priority in revealing this side of Tahitian history. Breaking silence on the matter of this dark piece of history would force the community to acknowledge that they had been exploited, and that their culture and religious ties had been used against them. It may also reveal that their knowledge system on the matter was not adequate to understand the danger, and such an acknowledgement would damage the pride they have in their culture. Although such pride is warranted and should be promoted extensively to students visiting, cultural pride should not cloak the issues of a colonial past. This denial can separate and divide communities, where those who attempt to reveal the past are “trouble makers.” In Johnson’s visit to Huahine, this contention formed in local advocates for Tahitian independence against the former host families. These indigenous empowered individuals accused host families of muddling over a dark past when students questioned them about how they had originally received the news that Tahiti would serve as a nuclear test site. One member of the decolonization community, (who will not be named for personal reasons), stated how for years during the nuclear testing she had actively protested the use of such weapons testing and the dangers entailed.

“I am fed up with them now. They did not listen to me before, saying I was only causing trouble, as the testing brought money to the island (Huahine). I was outcast by these families and now they state how nuclear testing is bad...no I do not associate with them anymore.” (anonymous, 2015)

Acceptance of these critiques and the reveal of the colonial past and original exploitation would implement host families as perpetrators. Johnson found fault in this as he stated that he did not believe the advocate over his own host family, one of the many families

who she contended were included in promoting nuclear testing. In building a strong personal relationship, Johnson's own perspective of his family was biased and he readily believed that such a family heavily involved in promotion of culture could not have betrayed their ancestral heritage so readily. This contention may or may not have founding, but the fact that there is a disagreement gives credence to the fact that they may have ignored their own history of oppression instead of discussing it.

Secondly, a pristine image of the Pacific, and resilient against all colonial intrusions can and will deny current expressions of identity. This would prove especially true for generations in the diaspora, who may not speak Tahitian but identify as such. Constant denial of anything colonial to study abroad groups and promotion of hyper-indigenous ties to the land narrow cultural expressions for the new generations, who did not experience such traditional upbringings. Students would be lead to believe that a person is not 'Tahitian enough' despite their ancestry and heritage claiming otherwise. This is especially dangerous, as it brings forth the idea and tenants of authenticity that is so heavily intertwined in the tourist industry. Study abroad groups would then become a tool to promote a 'pristine and untouched' culture in that sense, whereas the host family would lead the students to ridicule and judge Pacific immigrants as they do not meet the standard of the hyper-indigenous person they had met while studying in the Pacific. A person born in the diaspora, outside their country or their heritage, would come to feel that their ancestry is not validated as they do not meet the standards set by their peers from their ancestral lands.

This standardizing of indigeneity is both ironic and completely colonial in nature. Disposition of cultural fluency onto a person would of course not occur in a month, six months, or even two years while studying abroad. It may allow a person a short insight in the culture, but

it would not permit them such privilege as deciding what is ‘Pacific enough.’ This disposition and standardization of what an indigenous “Pacific” person is does not even exist amongst Pacific people themselves, as the history prior to European contact was one of continual cultural evolution. Toa found ridicule in struggling to speak Tahitian during his study abroad as a member of Johnson’s group. Toa who is Samoan but not proficient in his native language, recalls one instant when he and a fellow student, Max, a European-descent American, took the wrong bus home while staying in Tahiti.

“At the time I was on the bus, me and Max knew that we had to ask the locals for help. So we tried to speak in Tahitian to them. I was shy. And I couldn’t say it properly. Max then stepped in and tried his best, which made them laugh. One lady smirked a little and said to me in broken English ‘aren’t you Polynesian? Can’t you speak Tahitian?’ I could only shake my head” (Toa, 2015).

Toa’s experience abroad shows his own embarrassment in navigating the language. Having attended pre-departure meetings that gave him basic Tahitian language he still had trouble navigating the language. His proficiency in his own native language was minimal as well due to his upbringing in the America, but the women assumed that he could speak his own native tongue since he was Polynesian and therefore could speak Tahitian. This instance shows a lack of understanding by locals on the differences in the Pacific Islands. It also highlights the ideas of authenticity, as Toa found his own floundering in Tahitian to be like his own lack of knowledge in Samoan.

“It discouraged me. I couldn’t speak Samoan. But I couldn’t speak Tahitian. Her comment made me feel like I wasn’t Polynesian” (Toa, 2015).

Finally, a definition of cultural standard would potentially cause cultural stagnation consequently. In promoting traditions as unchanging, or stating any colonial identity or expression as ‘non-Pacific,’ and creating a standard indigenous person, we may find a stifling of any expression whatsoever of the culture by those outside their heritage lands. Stating a diaspora person or even a person from Tahiti that their identity is invalid due to them not meeting a standard does not allow room for cultural adaptation. Which is truly the story of the Pacific as many islands and cultures were created from the adaptation to their environment and interactions between themselves. ‘Polynesian voyagers’ only existed because they were voyaging away from islands because of disagreements within their society. That is the reason there is a Fiji, a reason there is a Samoa or Tonga, and a reason that Pacific Islanders all speak different languages (Teaiwa, 2015). Of course, this is not to say that such a thing would occur if local communities continued to define what a Pacific Islander was, but personal expressions of identity would be stifled. The changes and adaptations that occurred over countless generations and formed different language trees and thus cultures could be hindered by mantras of authenticity. In standardizing, only one way a language is spoken, or how culture should be expressed, even if for the one month a study abroad group is present, Pacific communities stand to not only deny their colonial influences and history but their own ancestry.

In arguing this, this thesis notes that the host communities do not consciously push for such hyper-indigenous sentiments. Indeed, perhaps, it is a subconscious response to their colonial histories. Many host families in Johnson’s group cited that the programs gave them a chance to address the age-old image of paradise. Equally important, this thesis found from interviews with the host family that they did not wish to alarm the students, or lay the shackles of oppression upon them. Tamahahe, a local from Huahine that was the host brother to Johnson

noted a sense of being Ma'ohi, a pride in their Tahitian culture. However, in that same breath, he stated “Ceci est la France” (2015). A claim stating that even though they were Tahitian, this was French territory, and they had no further desire to change that aspect. A conversation with another host family father, who will be named Mata for privacy reasons, stated that,

“We are pro-independence. We are Ma'ohi, but we are tied to the economy of France.

We cannot thrive economically or politically if we become independent” (Mata, 2015).

Reliance upon France's economy and the fear and issues of having to establish their own economic foundation have tied many Tahitians away from the notions of interdependence. Dependence upon the political and economic ties with France equally hinders Tahitians from addressing the history of colonialism. The claims of their cultural pride thus allow them a way to cope with their colonial situation. In attempting to discuss their past, they would then have to accept the reality of such oppression, the history of it, when it is much easier to bury under a façade of cultural influences.

Studying Abroad: Mark of Prestige, Perceptions of Privilege

What is gained from study abroad? A study by IES found a greater chance of securing a job or graduate position from having studied abroad. Although the study is skewed in some aspect as the report no doubt was to sell study abroad, a connection exists with international studies and professional development. The idea of cultural competency is much needed in an increasing globalized world, and the attraction of participants who have studied abroad is more appealing to both the workplace and academia as they intersect with a larger international and immigrant community. In this aspect, participants gain a sense of job or graduate security by having studied abroad, a notion that marks them as having had a prestigious advantage. Study

abroad allows them two types of claims, one of cultural competency, and another of international fluency. Cultural competency implies having gained an understanding and sensitivity of how to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. Considering the IES study, the key words *sensitivity* and *understanding* will be highlighted. International fluency follows a similar line to cultural competency but should be more noted as dealing with the contemporary and current international political and societal structures of different nations.

These two traits allow alumni of study abroad groups leverage in the international community. However, more striking perhaps is the notion of what they gain. Being declared as cultural-competent and allotted that title after a short period in another country can have drastic consequences. Culture is arguably a system that is learned in a life time and not in a short span of time. In gaining the prestige that is cultural competency, and the positions that accompany that ‘honor,’ former participants set the standard in how to deal with cross-cultural situations. When in fact they may not be qualified to do so and as aforementioned, have seen a part of culture that is not inherently a true representation of the contemporary community they have ‘familiarized’ themselves with. In that aspect, study abroad comes under scrutiny, as the ideal of cultural understanding is skewed by the fact participants have little to no real understanding. More disconcerting is the fact that gaining this assumed trait may enforce cultural misappropriation as participants may access cultural traits from their host countries simply because they feel they have the authority to do so. Perhaps this second trait with the idea of having earned the title of cultural expert.

International fluency is gained through studying abroad by exposing students to difference. Returning to the conversation of Hawaii, Narimatsu and Franco cite this ‘internationalizing the educated citizenry’ to be a central aspect for University of Hawaii

Community Colleges. “Proponents of this study abroad goal posit that an overseas experience confronts students with ‘difference’” (2013: 146). However, understanding culture and understanding difference are two separate notions. Cultural competency can imply a sense of deep understanding of a culture but a participant may never be truly fluent in this aspect. However, noting the differences and having some idea of the cultural differences in the context of their own culture does imply fluency at some level. Study abroad provides this understanding of international differences, and in that case, this trait is more conducive for participants. The conductivity of understanding difference would then also align with study abroad program’s goal of improving international relations. “The premise (being) that a focused overseas experience provides students with a unique understanding of international social issues as they relate to foreign policy” (Narimatsu and Franco, 2013: 146). Being able to understand international issues gives students of study abroad programs an edge in international conversations and dialogue. However, gaining that sense of understanding should not allot students a title of prestige or expertise. The connections participants find while abroad should be more meaningful than a status gained as being labeled as well traveled or worldly.

Reinhart and Gruzweig find that students perceive studying abroad to be a unique experience and a novelty in regards to learning culture (2002). Caucasian females, as stated previously, are more likely to participate in study abroad program (Nguyen and Coryell, 2015). However, the authors also found that popular media portrayals gave a perception of affluence associated with studying abroad, that present the case of Caucasian females to be more successful after their abroad experience. Media attention such as movies or Instagram provided for students with a way to highlight their trip in ways represented a program or trip as mere novelties. A quick search of study abroad on Instagram found a range of pictures in different

locations around the world. However, each caption and message left by friends and family were similar. Many fellows or friends of the participants left messages of envy, joy or statements of desire to travel abroad. Student media were equally marked with messages of how lucky they were to have traveled outside of their home country. Through exposure to social media, those who had studied abroad were given social affluence and credence. This mark of prestige students earned would highlight their time abroad as vacation. However, this mark of prestige and social affluence arguably applies to those participants who find the culture and country foreign to their own. A different experience is interpreted by heritage students as they interact in an environment that they find similarity in.

Heritage: Appreciating Inheritance

Heritage students find a more meaningful experience while studying in the region they claim their culture from. These are diaspora students, descending from generations or a generation of immigrants, or more usually the case of Pacific Islanders, immigrants themselves who were raised in the host country. In speaking about diaspora, it must be noted that the Pacific diaspora is thousands of years old. As previously stated, Pacific people have migrated across the vast ocean, island hopping, by small boat, and small groups of people moving back and forth (Spickard, 2002). The migration of Pacific people to America or Europe was a natural response after colonization made pathways possible outside the Pacific. This migration proved even more so with the advent and closing years of WWII, where the Pacific came under the authority of America and the allied states, (New Zealand and Australia). Spickard notes that the creation of economic conditions by colonialism allowed Pacific people to immigrate through international pathways. The appeal of migration to highly developed counties also gave a way for Pacific

people to send remittances back to their own developing nation states, where there were few ways to balance the developing economies.

In moving from developing Pacific nations to the highly developed states such as America, Pacific people developed a new identity. Becoming immigrants to the US and keeping the native identity of their homeland, they gained a transnational status. This identity proved resilient to the assimilation model that assumed that

“prosperity and happiness did not exist in (their ancestral homes) and that they were widely available in the (global metropolises) The immigrant assimilation model emphasizes not just first-generation enthusiasm for the United States, but also successive generations obliterating their ancestral identities and taking on an undifferentiated American identity” (Spickard, 2002: 13).

. The diasporic model is an interpretation of Pacific Islander extreme movement away from their ancestral homes in large numbers. Perhaps most striking is the late 1990s, where the world saw the large fractions of Pacific Islanders living in industrialized countries. However, this movement has affected this immigrant populations both culturally and nationally. In the US for example, there is an increasing trend of second generation Pacific Islanders who find difficulty in speaking the native tongue of their parents.

The goal of study abroad for Pacific Islander students is a re-exploration of their heritage (Narimatsu and Franco, 2013). Even in the face of cultural façades, they can reevaluate and reaffirm the truth simply from having their own family as a resource. They work to not only develop and ascertain their native roots but come to interpret their transnational identity that they were born with. Inheritance and their own experience with their family thus position heritage

students to confirm their identity abroad. However, this access does not prove so for those students whose families are disconnected or displaced by past colonial designs. Study abroad then allows them a measure of comfort and way to address the issues of colonialism.

Through visitation to the land they claim ancestry, heritage students gain a permission to explore their identity, and thus appreciate their own inheritance. Reiterating the sentiments of Moana, heritage students can start a conversation to express their own identity from traveling to their ancestral lands that develops their understanding of their culture. Study abroad programs become tools then to reinterpret their ancestry and culture from a perspective that is both outside and inside the community. In the same aspect, study abroad allows students to address the globalization of their education, heritage students specifically, as it opens the dialogue of what has been loss and what Pacific communities stand to lose if they continue along the tract of development through globalization.

In building a trip through an academic lens, students can expand and confront socio-political differences, give name to these differences and question their own prejudices they have built from their upbringing. These prejudices extend to Pacific communities where heritage students from the region not only address differences between islands but find similarities. In this aspect, study abroad takes a role of appreciation for the heritage for not only the student, but the Pacific nation that is not their own. Johnson's interview noted this especially as he connected the struggles of his own heritage as a Native American to those of Tahiti. This connection of difference and similarity to his heritage allowed him to address issues within his Klamath community, such as language loss.

“Language and cultural revitalization and maintenance are major foci in my research and career trajectories and my home stay family made their home a domain for Ma’ohi

language and cultural considerations. I hope to do the same and believe my institutional affiliations (as well as other members of our home stay family) may be a venue in which we can (promote language) for our families instead of perpetuating colonial tourism projects” (Johnson, 2016).

Johnson cited that his experience provided a new focus in his academia career that was inspired by the issues of language loss in Tahiti. His drive to do so points to a cultural understanding of not only Tahiti but of his own inheritance as a Klamath Native American. In this instance, he thus connects both his heritage and the heritage of Tahitians to an issue of education. That connection delves into the area of language for Johnson. The experience of study abroad in this instance not only provides context to Johnson’s work and language but also serves as a tool to address globalization of language. Study abroad connects the culture for heritage students of the region and those of other indigenous background who have faced similar issues of westernization and colonization.

Moana found her connection in the Pacific by way of ancestry. For Jose, a heritage student of Central America, he found a reconnection to his own culture by separating his own experience as an American and as a Latino. Jose’s biggest insight was that his cultural identity was not married to a standard of norms he had grown up with in the US.

“I realized it is okay to separate yourself from western society. It is not set to be the norm, there is no need to be the norm. For my culture, I (fell) back in love with my culture. It created a much stronger passion to get back into my culture by listening to the music, dance and my people. It is also helped me dive into the rich history of my own culture” (2015).

Through a study abroad program in Tahiti, Jose found an appreciation of his own culture. Given in the context of the pride Tahitians felt in their culture, Jose found a passion to ‘fall’ back to his own ethnic heritage and explore an identity he may have suppressed in the subtle, and not so-subtle, atmosphere of patriotism and nationalism in the US. Study abroad provides an avenue of expression for students of differing heritages, where they can discuss their own culture in relation to their nationality. This does not prove so for all participants. Indeed, Sophie was unsure how to answer a question of how the view of her culture was affected by her experience in Tahiti. Even Kam only relates the question of her culture to that of being an African- “American”. Conversation and dialogue on the topic of culture seemed to be expressed more so by those who had direct ties with their ethnic background, and had recently migrated to the US. For Jose, for Johnson and for Moana, who have stronger ties with their ethnic heritage instead of a national identity, this connection came easily. But for Kam and Sophie, their ties to America and a greater national identity is generational, as their parents and parent’s parents are naturalized born citizens. Such family histories allow a perception within those bounds where they can only appreciate an inheritance that is American.

Toa in that respect found an appreciation for both his Kiwi identity and Pacific Islander roots. He cites that his experience abroad, despite a ‘lack of language,’ drove him further to study issues around the region.

“I realized I needed to immerse myself. I did so by doing anything I could that would tie me to the land. I listened and practice every word of Tahitian. To this day I can still speak some Tahitian, but now am focusing on my Samoan. Studying abroad made me appreciate my experience as transnational and as a Pacific Islander” (Toa, 2015).

Toa was motivated to reevaluate and reflect on his roots from his experience abroad. His own trouble with the Tahitian language showed a need to familiarize himself with his own identity as a Pacific Islander and as a Samoan. In this way, he reembraced his heritage and inheritance as a Samoan. Even more so, he readily accepted his identity as fluid, taking this experience to add to his own transnational Pacific Islander identity. The experience of heritage student in study abroad programs encompasses the issues of identity, authenticity, colonial history and suppression. This narrative is different for students such as Will and Joy who must navigate an environment radically different from their own. Sometimes this navigation has bumps both metaphorically and literally as Will found in his experience. Other times this journey only aggravates the fear of differences as Joy correlated from hers. A heritage student can reflect upon their trips in regards to their culture. In this way, heritage students arguably find deeper meaning through study abroad programs. Additionally, it is a way to discuss both local and outside interpretations of Pacific Islanders. A more in depth understanding of identity coincides with understanding the consequences of study abroad programs such as hyper-indigenization. Equally, addressing their identities in the context of colonization is imperative for cultural competency. It is in this way that student participants do not simply “buff up” their resumes and carry potentially false senses of cultural expertise. Study abroad programs are meant to be an experience that opens a deep understanding of these cultural differences, not just an embellishment.

Conclusion

The interest in the Pacific has increased in American universities and (although not a focus of this thesis) universities globally. The creation and development of nations, the narratives of colonialism, of resources gained and lost, of clashing culture and histories have brought many institutions to the Pacific door. Although this door has been facilitated by colonialism, study abroad programs have taken a new role in the Pacific as an entryway for understanding the affairs and issues of the region. In discussing the effect and impact of studying abroad in the Pacific, this thesis has investigated programs, participants and their motivation of one part of the Pacific in detail; Tahiti. In describing the hotspot of educational interest that is Tahiti, this thesis concludes that this exemplary case study of Tahiti can be extrapolated to describe the patterns of all study abroad programs in the region. This thesis has also highlighted several individual experiences and has analyzed and assessed the fluency and cultural competency of these students. Although not a complete depiction of students who travel abroad, the stories and narratives of these students are pertinent in establishing an overall picture of study abroad in the region. In establishing the role of study abroad, the benefits, the categorization, motivation of the students and where they study, we see a reach and organization by an educational program that potentially exceeds colonial regimes. This reach has allowed for students to appreciate and reflect on their own lives in respect to the lives that they have encountered abroad. Of course, the narrative of interpersonal reflection is different for each student, as heritage students reflect differently than other participants, but the experience for all students is quite similar. Study abroad is a vehicle of change and progress, yet at the same time the effects of a program can be detrimental for both student and host country. In describing study abroad as consequential and beneficiary, this thesis defines study abroad as tool or means of service in understanding key

issues in the region. Hyper-indigenization, the stagnation of culture, alienation of heritage students, lack of empathy and communication, all are the consequences of study abroad and participant experience being misinterpreted. Studying abroad is tool of colonialism that has again and again been used to exert ways of thinking or propagate standing stereotypes and perceptions. It is a story of power, a power that is wielded by both institutions and nations to shape their own policies in regards to how they interact with the international community.

The narratives of study abroad are not lost on the Pacific and are tied closely to how host islands have received these programs. Tahiti is one of many islands in the region that has housed international students, and although this case study of Tahiti provides insight into study abroad patterns in the region, it is but one of many narratives of differing interactions with outside influences. Take, for example, the story of power between the US and Soviet Union and the impact of these countries on Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The role of image dominates the sense of place in such an aspect that displaces colonial history. “Within the subsequent context of a cold war with the Soviet Union, the United States proceeded to further test and develop its nuclear and naval powers on and around the Pacific islands entrusted to it by the United Nations” (Teaiwa, 1994: 89). The displacement, testing of nuclear weapons and subsequent ‘unofficial’ testing on the Bikini Islander of the effect of nuclear warfare was hidden by the fashion industry, the “bikini, as it was christened, celebrating the Allied efforts in World War II” (Teaiwa, 1994: 91). The bikini thus was used to not only negates the historical foundation of the term, but the exoticism and sensuality of the piece further “coded Bikini Atoll and its Islanders as exotic, malleable and, most of, dispensable” (Teaiwa, 1994: 93).

Thus, the commodification of an atoll perpetuated the exotic and affirmed colonial thoughts of Pacific Islander character. Fashion served as point of conflict for native Marshallese,

as it perpetuates one image and hides a history through wear. In noting the fashion industry as an institution of change, this thesis sees a similar aspect in the programs of international education. Similarly, the infrastructure of study abroad in the region serves to address mindsets of their participants while raising awareness to key issues such as tourism. Teaiwa notes that tourism plays a heavy role in further displacing “Islanders’ perceptions of themselves and their environment, and increasing numbers of upwardly mobile Islanders - especially in Fiji, Hawai’i, and Tahiti - (whereas) (they) may be seen lounging leisurely on the beach in their bikinis” (Teaiwa, 1994: 98). However, this narrative is only one of the “militarist and tourist notions that (shape) a particular historical moment in the West and continue to shape the contemporary Pacific Islands” (Teaiwa, 1994: 101). Study abroad programs similarly shape the Pacific in a Western framework for their participants.

Whereas the culture of the fashion industry hides a dark colonial history, other western infrastructures (military, mining corporations, international companies) take advantage of a lack of information and insight to propagate their own agendas. Colonialism is the foundation of support for international education. Studying abroad is a byproduct of that support. However, it is also a vehicle of change to address past and contemporary colonial systems. If implemented properly, study abroad allows a perception and revealing of these disparities. Participants can reflect upon their own personal experiences in the lens of revealed colonialism. Tahiti proved to be a definitive location for several students while they were abroad, and aided them in reshaping and reevaluating their perception of the world. Maeva I Te Ora, an organization built for the love of the culture brings that sense of enrichment to the students. One of many study abroad programs, the organization’s inclusion of locale people with the students allowed for a more natural and communal experience. In the same instance, Maeva I Te Ora gave insight to students

as to how to address diverse situations, foreign events, and a different culture. However, this does not prove true for all who study abroad. Study abroad is the map for which the students potentially navigate to the destination. Ruben would argue that the destination is intercultural competence. Others, in the context of the Pacific, would state it to be revealing of colonial agendas. For those who claim their ancestry to the country or location the study abroad program is associated with, it is a meaningful journey to explore their own roots. Heritage and understanding of their own background allows those who live outside their native lands to traverse two identities. One that is their own ethnic background, and the other that is their national persona.

Study abroad programs and colleges provide students a way to bridge gaps of cross cultural differences. These programs pave avenues to greatly develop character, profession and skill sets. Literature reveals that many who studied abroad did so to broaden their own personal lives, enriching their education (IES, 2009). In enriching their own knowledge systems, they opened a door into the international job market. The attractiveness of foreign study is not inclusive to students. It is also a highlight for businesses and institutions that work in the international community. Cultural insight and international fluency gained in study abroad are important for businesses that depend on international trade. The ability of intercultural competence gives student's insight into the history and place such as Tahiti, and in the Pacific, that are under continuous development. Studying abroad holds the potential to enlighten and inform international communities of the people and diversity that existent in the Pacific. Students who have studied abroad are potentially able to perceive and adapt to diverse cultural situations and respond appropriately, and it is that insight that can be taught to their compatriots in their home state.

In discussing national persona and identity, it is also imperative to place into context the identity that Toa, Moana, Johnson, Jose, Kam and even Sophie carry. Their ethnic ties carry different histories of oppression, of suppression of culture and the forced assimilation of ideas. They are the byproduct of colonial designs and regimes, living in one of the greatest constructs of colonialism. US history has shown conflict with indigenous people and has attempted in the past to hide the effects and issues created in the aftermath. Study abroad allowed these students to reaffirm their ties and revealed the oppressions they have interacted with for most of their lives. Study abroad is a way to address the points of conflicts student participants grapple with back in their home countries. Universities and educational institutes in the US, in implementing study abroad in their education, have presented a place of dialogue for indigenous people and those dominant cultures to come to a shared understanding of the disparities created by earlier interpretations of their culture and forced assimilation into a new identity. This identity, both globalized and nationalistic, devalues their own ethnic stories and can create tension within the students and in their communities. Study abroad is a way to ease this friction caused by different cultural standards, and the environment of the diasporic student. Heritage students must come to terms then with an identity that is forced upon them by their national ties.

Their identity is one that is transnational, an identity that crosses borders and inhabits a space of several nations. Johnson, Toa and Jose can especially claim this as they still hold ties to their parents' native country. Jones, cites that this identity "include(s) (1) "norms of the nation-state" and (2) "indigenous, and especially autochthonous, claims by 'tribal' peoples" (Clifford via Jones, 2010: 50). Study abroad allows students to understand an identity that encompasses an adaptation of national normative behaviors. These practices and behaviors are key in addressing situations requiring intercultural awareness and adaptation. The ability to adapt is, of course,

beneficial for all student participants but is much more meaningful for heritage students as it allows them to grapple with concepts of their own background that they may have been disassociated with due to their upbringing in the US. Study abroad allows ethnic students then to interact and adapt with the inherent national and cultural traits of their identity on a higher level that encompasses their background as transnational and diasporic. Study abroad then, in this instance, is a tool to review practices that give students insight into other cultures. Jones cites “the benefit in understanding identity as a practice is that it leaves room for transformation and rejects a vertical or unchanging view of cultural identity distinct from history and context” (2010: 51).

In highlighting the infrastructure of study abroad, this thesis argues then that the greatest aspect of studying abroad is coming to understand and reflect upon one’s own identity through differences in cultural practices and mannerisms. This thesis thus has explored the nuances of study abroad in the region and its impact on students, and how, they in turn, address revealed disparities of their experiences in their home countries. Understanding and accepting cultural and nationalistic traits in one’s own identity allows an appreciation of difference, and opens dialogue to challenge colonial representations and stereotypical imagery that are potentially accepted on a sub-conscious level by national citizens. Of course, the challenge to colonial representations and interpersonal reflection is only plausible if the student accepts cultural difference in their experience abroad. Study abroad programs must ready and orient participants in response to be both open and empathic, especially in the atmosphere of various intertwining cultures and societal norms that exist in the Pacific.

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