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Vāsā (Ocean)—The Space that is Sacred: Pacific Islanders in Higher Education

By

David Ga'oupu Palaita

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Patricia Penn Hilden, Chair

Professor Rick Bonus

Professor Michael Omi

Professor Waldo Martin

Spring 2015

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Abstract

Vāsā (Ocean)—The Space that is Sacred: Pacific Islanders in Higher Education

by

David Ga'oupu Palaita

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Patricia Penn Hilden, Chair

“Vāsā (Ocean)—The Space that is Sacred: Pacific Islanders in Higher Education” investigates how Pacific Islander students across three college campuses—City College of San Francisco, University of Washington, Seattle, and the University of California, Berkeley—change their schools through the use of their indigenous cultures (ocean). Creating a voice for an often invisible community in higher education, students “talk-story” about the challenges and triumphs of their journey in higher education while questioning the politics of knowledge production, identity constructions, indigenous cultural practices, community formations, and inclusion in their schools. The project illustrates how these Pacific Islander movements are critiques of diversity in post-secondary educational institutions but also explores students’ engagement with contemporary colonization as a way of understanding their personal lives, their families and communities, and their worlds.

To my family,
for guiding me through my journeys across the oceans

Tavita Konesane Palaita ♦ Vivian Tutogi Palaita

Alasi Johnson

Nane Palaita-Cunningham & Howard Lincoln Cunningham III

NeriaH Vieni Palaita-Cunningham
NoaH Earl Lowell Palaita-Cunningham
NethaniaH David Lincoln Palaita-Cunningham
NazarethH Elekiko Matthew Palaita-Cunningham

Marie-Fa’atamāli’i P. Moimoi & Leki T. Moimoi

Logan F. Moimoi
Loyalty-Mark F. Moimoi
Leonidas F. Moimoi

Vieni Siane Palaita-Tinitali & Oliver Tinitali

Ozias Fa’amaoni Tinitali
Ozadiah Oliver Tinitali
Ozekiel Malosi Tinitali

Daniel Tavita Palaita

Josiah F. Palaita
Elijah T. Palaita
Boston Rome

Darrell Tavita Palaita & Etta Akenese Palaita

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Darretta Vivian Akenese Palaita
Daviniel Tutogi Palaita

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Matthew Tito Scanlan
Neveah Nane Palaita
Naveena Paula Palaita
Mark-David Fa’amaoni Palaita

Mark Tavita Palaita & Lucy Palaita

“Tama” & “Steeler”

“Maple Bear”

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Bree Gutu ♦ Elekikio Afoa ♦ Rachel Fisi'iahi ♦ Virginia Mancenido ♦ Daniel Filimona

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Famoksaiyan”

--Chamoru Saying

Point of Entry:

As an undergraduate student at the University of Washington in Seattle I experienced one of the best times of my life in higher education. Coming from Hawai’i, especially from a public high school that had the lowest college entry rates in the state, it seemed too surreal that I would get admitted into a great institution of higher education. Three significant experiences during this time period would shape not only what I am currently doing as a college teacher but it has informed the design and outcome of this project and expresses exactly what this project addresses.

Dorm Life 101

One of the first things I did when I moved into the dorms my first year was to find friends who shared similar experiences with me and I was fortunate to meet many other students who came from Hawai’i. This helped to ease homesickness. I would soon come to learn that UW had a long history of admitting students from Hawai’i, and at first I found this exciting. It made me feel as though I were no longer alone. I made many friends who by the end of my first year became members of the Hawai’i Club because this was where students from Hawai’i would get together to party, organize events, and help put on the annual lu’au. In my first year, my friends were from Hawai’i, but I felt even more different than I thought I should have felt. My friends would tell jokes about Samoans in Hawai’i by talking fob-English¹. They would say things like “eh, sole!²” or pronounce my name as “tafit” (tay-phit) rather than “David.” Of course I laughed along with them not knowing that deep inside this made me feel different. But the jokes kept coming and a conversation about Samoans and school stuck with me forever:

Punahou Grad³: “Eh, tafit, what school you wen grad from?”

Me: “Waipahu”

Punahou Grad: “Oh you live Waipahu, but you went to a private school.”

Me: “Na na, I live Waipahu and went to Waipahu.”

(Punahou Grad and other friends start laughing.)

Punahou Grad: “Whoa sole! How did you make it out of Waipahu⁴?”

Me: The same way you did, did well in school, applied, and prayed.”

Punahou Grad: “I’m glad you made it out alive, sole. Usually Samoans don’t get this far and go on to school...plus, it’s expensive.”

¹ Fob-english meaning broken English as if one was not well versed in English language.

² Meaning “hey, boy!”

³ Punahou School is private school in Honolulu.

⁴ Waipahu, HI, a city in Honolulu County is stereotypically seen as low-income, high crime rates, and the place where most struggling communities reside. In those days, it was surprising for many to hear that anyone from Waipahu went on to be successful but let alone even made it out alive.

Me: “Who brah! What school did you go to?”

Punahou Grad: “Punahou.”

Me: “Your parents paid thousands of dollars every year to put you into school. My parents paid maybe \$100 bucks every year to put me into school. We ended up at the same place.”

Asian American Studies 101

A few years later in my undergraduate career, I decided to take courses in Asian American Studies. Here I was promised that I would begin to learn more about my culture as an Asian American. My professor proceeded to talk about Pacific Islanders in one of her lectures when discussing the major ethnic groups that make up Asian America. She began by writing out the name of a Samoan documentary “O Mai Fa’atasi.” The following conversation ensued:

Professor: “Good Morning class, today we are going to discuss the major and minor groups that make up Asian America. I want first start off with the minor groups—Pacific Islanders...here’s a short clip of a film called ‘Omaifaatasi’⁵ about the Samoan community.

Me: “Professor, can I make a correction of the spelling of that phrase?”

Professor: “Are you Samoan?”

Me: “Yes, I am”

Professor: “But are you Samoan from Samoa”

Me: “No I’m not”

Professor: “Well my friend who studies Samoans in Samoa said it was correct”

Me: “Really? But I speak the language and I know that the spelling of that phrase is not correct.”

Professor: “But a good friend of mine has studied Samoans in her research and has learned the language for so many years. I think it’s correct.”

Tutoring 101

During my years at UW, I and many other Pacific Islander students decided to do tutoring at the local high schools with Pacific Islander students. Rainier Beach High School one of the public schools that enrolled one of the largest Pacific Islander communities in Seattle. One afternoon our students were supposed to have attended preparatory workshops for the ACT and SAT. When we got to the school all of them were playing basketball. A conversation happened like this:

Me: “Hey, why aren’t you all in the SAT and ACT prep sessions.”

Students: “We didn’t sign up according to our counselor.”

Me: “What do you mean? We signed you all up last time we met and your counselor said it was okay.”

Students: “Well, we went today and they told all of us that we weren’t on the list...and they also said we didn’t have the grades to be able to take the class.”

Me: “Let’s walk in and see your counselor.”

Me: Hi Mrs. Leow, didn’t our students sign up to be in the SAT and ACT prep classes?”

Mrs. Leow: “Yes, they did, but they don’t have the grades to be in here. Maybe this is a good

⁵ This is the way the professor spelled the word

time to encourage them to do well when they go to a community college.”

Me: “But don’t we want to encourage them or at least get the experience of learning about these exams. Most might want to go directly to a four-year college, right?”

Mrs. Leow: “True. But the reality is many of them now won’t go to any college. That’s why they’re not in here and that’s why you guys are tutoring.”

As you can see from the three conversations above, each one has a theme which this dissertation seeks to explore and address. In conversation one, this notion that Sāmoans and other Pacific Islanders don’t usually go to school or succeed is a common and disappointing stereotype that continues to plague this community. While most Islanders look to be recruited for athletic sports, hidden are the narratives of those students that actually go on to change their lives through the schools and the communities they become a part of. This dissertation challenges the assumptions of low expectations commonly associated with Pacific Islander students. The second conversation exposes the limitations of Pacific Islander curriculum in academia, making invisible a community that for decades has lamented the complexities and the struggles that arise when a group—with entirely different historical experiences with the U.S.—is lumped under a racial category that most Islanders reject. The “Asian Pacific Islander/Asian Pacific American” category conceals those struggles in both the community and in academia. This project will address this invisibility in both campus climate and in curriculum. Finally, the third conversation exposes a painful assumption—that Islander students are not smart enough. This project shows that despite that assumption, Islander students have created and produced programs and publications—counter-narratives—that is testament to their ability to produce knowledge.

Considering these three themes sets up the larger context for what my project is doing. For one, the work is in an attempt to understand the contemporary status of Pacific Islander students, particularly in schools. Secondly, the work is a critique of schools that assist in the colonization and devaluing of Pacific Islanders. Finally, the project highlights the creative responses and resistances generated by students. I myself identify as a Pacific Islander and so the project has a special meaning to me that is personal, collective, and political.

Description:

For this project, I was able to “talk-story” with about 40 students across three campuses—City College of San Francisco (CCSF), University of California, Berkeley (CAL), and University of Washington, Seattle (UW). Of the 40 students, 27 were female, 3 identified as transgender, and 10 males. Most of the students, about 30 of them, identified as Sāmoan and Tongan, while the rest were Native Hawaiian, Chamorro, and Filipino. A Majority of the students are state-side born islanders, meaning, they were born in the U.S.,⁶ while the rest are undocumented⁷ or have dual-citizenship⁸. All of the students who participated in this project at the time were pursuing social science majors while a handful, about 5, were pursuing science degrees. While majority of the students were on financial aid, an indication of their class status, only about two identified themselves as coming from a family that was “well off.” The

⁶ This includes students who were also born in the U.S. territories of American Samoa and Guam.

⁷ Some of the students are in the country “illegally.”

⁸ Some of the students identified their homeland—despite its political relationship with the U.S.—

student's ages ranged from 19 to 36 years old which means most of the students in the project were current undergraduate and graduate students while others were either alumni or did not graduate.

The schools that I chose were located in cities or regions next to large communities of Pacific Islanders which I had affiliations. The City College of San Francisco, an urban school situated in the city of San Francisco on the west side of the Bay Area region, is a two-year community college that enrolls about 100,000 students a year⁹, making it the state of California's largest public institution. Offering courses across nine campuses, the school is well known for its tradition in offering courses and programs that are not found at any other school in the state or the nation. This attracts so many different and vibrant communities and cultures making the student body one of the most diverse. So diverse that it has the highest enrollment of Pacific Islander students than any other public institution of higher learning in the state.

The University of California, Berkeley, in the city of Berkeley on the east side of the Bay is well known for its scholarly contributions to American society recently ranking fourth in the world and first in public schools in the nation in 2014. It is the flagship school of the 10 member University of California system and is considered a research institution. It enrolls about 37,000 students: 25,000 of them are undergraduates. Of those students less than 1% are identified as Pacific Islanders. The school, within the last decade, has begun recruiting Pacific Islander students into their football program, which makes up a sizable part of the small Islander community at CAL.

The University of Washington is an urban four-year research institution located in the city of Seattle on the shores of Lake Washington and has a student enrollment of about 45,000 as of 2014. The University's Seattle campus, where majority of the student population is, is part of a three campus system. It has a highly competitive admissions record and has been working on diversifying for years. In order to support that effort, it currently supports state-funded student offices that focus on enhancing the educational goals of minority groups. The campus also boasts creating and supporting permanent programs for Native Americans and Pacific Islander students who have one of the highest drop-outs in the institution and in the state.

The project included students who were enrolled at any one of the campuses between 1997 and 2014, a span of 17 years. This means that students that I interacted with were students who I either went to school with or students who have taken my courses in Pacific Islands Studies. It is important to know that throughout this time frame, students from each of these campuses were engaging in campus issues specific to their school. The dissertation covers some common themes that are found at each campus. For example, while students at UW were focusing on curriculum issues, other students from UC Berkeley were engaged in issues of cultural programming. The point here is that the students' at all three campuses are at different stages of their movement but all are working towards the same goal. I met many of these students primarily through the classroom where I either taught, TA'd, or took courses with them. On many occasions, I served as their mentor, offered advice, and when they needed me to, served as their club advisor for their respective organizations. Many knew that I was doing this project and all of them were supportive of the work by lending time to sit down and talk-story, going out to eat and having conversations, engaging in group discussions in the classroom,

⁹ Due to its accreditation crisis in 2013, the school saw an exodus of students leaving to neighboring community colleges bringing its enrollment to about 79,000.

planning cultural events together, and working out together. When time allowed for it, some conversations were done via skype, telephone, and email. Because many of them are old friends, I'd visit them in their cities outside of the Bay Area. These settings to me drew the most conversations because I considered them as not only strengthening our relationship but it also allowed the students to speak frankly and freely about their experiences. The "talk-story" methodology (which I use throughout the project), is informal and unstructured. It is found commonly in oral traditional cultures as a way to preserve knowledge by sharing and passing it down. But I did not leave it to that. Immediately after our conversations, I took notes and stored them on a hard drive and organized them by campus and by person. Out of all the students that I came in contact with, I decided to go with the responses from students (40) who I frequently talked to which can number about 350 hours of conversations. Most of the conversations were on things unrelated to the project and these were not included in the work. These conversations did not factor in the student's grading in anyway, especially if they were enrolled in my courses at the time the project was being conducted.

All in all, this is a project that centers the voices of a community in higher education. It reflects their resistances to the ways they are imagined and treated and tells a story about how they have been able to change the school, (which most hold dear to their hearts today), for other generations of students to come.

Situating the Work:

Though this work crosses many disciplines and fields, the work is being situated in conversations about contemporary colonization and the continuous affects it has had on colonized and indigenous groups, proving that it matters and still exists. Colonization cannot be something that is thought of "in the past" and "already done with" but rather as something that lingers and continues to shape colonized peoples. This work converses with the literature on colonization and its after math. Not only does it trace the colonization of a group people whose histories are hardly studied but is also a continuing project that emphasizes the colonization of the mind. Applying this way of thinking on colonization of Pacific Islanders, this dissertation performs and engages with the works of Epeli Hau'ofa and Frantz Fanon, who write about the horrible consequences of colonization and how that colonization has shaped the ways natives view themselves.

Pacific Islander Oppression and Colonialism

In his essay, *Our Sea of Islands*¹⁰, Epeli Hau'ofa writes about how colonialism and regionalism have shaped the ways Islanders perceived themselves that continues today. This perspective is rooted in what he calls two levels of operation:

"In our region there are two levels of operation...the first is that of national governments and regional and international diplomacy, in which the present and future

¹⁰ Hau'ofa, Epeli. "Our Sea of Islands" In *We Are The Ocean*, edited by Epeli Hau'ofa. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008. 27-40

of the Pacific Islands states are planned and decided upon...the other level is that of ordinary people, peasants and proletarians...”¹¹

Frantz Fanon, in his famous work *Les Damnés de la Terre* (1961) writes about the psychopathology of oppression by describing the compartmentalization of colonialism in two sectors: “the colonists’ sector, and the colonized or native sector.”¹² Fanon goes on to give a description of the colonist and native/colonized sectors:

“[The colonist sector] is being built to last, all stone and steel. It’s a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed of leftovers...it is a sated, sluggish sector, its belly is permanently full of good things...[the native/colonized sector] a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light.”¹³

By differentiating these two sectors or levels of operation within a relationship of dominant and subordinate positions, Hau’ofa and Fanon state that the roots of self-hate, racism, oppression, dehumanization, and of difference—all acts and behaviors of colonialism—are structured within these two relational areas that have an effect on the psyche of the colonized. Hau’ofa writes:

“...Views held by those in dominant positions about their subordinates could have significant consequences on people’s self-image and on the ways that they cope with their situations. Such views, which are often derogatory and belittling, are integral to most relationships of dominance and subordination, wherein superiors behave in ways or say things that are accepted by their inferiors who, in turn, behave in ways that serve to perpetuate the relationships.”¹⁴

Colonization then is not about just resources but also about the ways it affects the psyche that manifests itself in every day ordinary practices. This connects to the larger argument made by Malcolm X in one of his final speeches before his assassination. In his speech to the Corn Hill Methodist Church in Rochester, New York on February 16th, 1965, Malcolm X was concerned about the ways in which imagery shaped how African Americans looked at themselves and the results of that self-imagery:

¹¹ Hau’ofa, Epeli. “Our Sea of Islands” In *We Are The Ocean*, edited by Epeli Hau’ofa. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008. 27-40

¹² Fanon, F. (1961). *Les damnés de la terre*. Paris: François Maspero.

¹³ Fanon, F. (1961). *Les damnés de la terre*. Paris: François Maspero.

¹⁴ Hau’ofa, Epeli. “Our Sea of Islands” In *We Are The Ocean*, edited by Epeli Hau’ofa. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008. 27-40

“...This is a science that’s called ‘image-making.’ They hold you in check through the science of imagery. They even make you look down upon yourself. Some of our own Black people have eaten this image themselves and digested it—until they themselves don’t want to live in the Black community.”¹⁵

This dissertation highlights an alternative imagery, a counter-narrative, which the students make for themselves in challenging racial stereotypes that are rooted in colonial imagery of the Pacific.

I chose to write about students because personally I experienced my own awakening of my identities in a school setting. Because schools, especially the ones mentioned in this project, are public and state institutions, they structure and impose ideas of racial identities. According to Michael Omi and Howard Winant in their ground-breaking work on racial formation, the state has an interest in setting the standards of how one can identify:

“In our view, racial meanings pervade US society, extending from the shaping of individual racial identities to the structuring of collective political action on the terrain of the state...Race is a matter of both social structure and cultural representation”¹⁶

Ever since I became a student and a teacher I and many other Pacific Islander students experienced first-hand the differing perspectives between our own identities and the ones assumed by the schools—in most cases, the root of student movements and protests. As we know from the literature on student protests, schools are not innocent. One only needs to look at the strike for Ethnic Studies in 1968 (which grew out of the 1960’s civil rights movement) organized by the students of the Third World Liberation Front¹⁷ at San Francisco State University where students were the ones advocating for change that included courses and curriculum. In her book, *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-1975*¹⁸, Joy Ann Williamson-Lott charts the evolution of black consciousness (on a predominantly white campus) and a long history of the complex and creative ways Black students sought to construct their social, political, and racial identities despite ones imposed by the university. In these books, we get a glimpse of the ways in which students mobilized themselves into action to change the university. The dissertation builds on that history of a kind of activism in which students not only defy, resist, and question their very experiences in their own schools but also attempts at what Native American scholar, Patricia Penn Hilden, in her collection of essays *From a Red Zone* argues about borders and centers:

¹⁵ X, Malcolm. “Not Just an American Problem but a World Problem” Speech for religious congregation, Cornhill Methodist Church, February 16, 1965.

¹⁶ Omi, Michael; Winant, Howard (1994). *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge. P. 66

¹⁷ The Third World Liberation Front was a joint effort of the Black Student Union, Latin American Students Organization, Asian American Political Alliance, Filipino American Collegiate Endeavor and Native American Students Union at San Francisco State University in 1968

¹⁸ For other works on student movements in higher education, see Ibram Rogers *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (2013)

“Each [is] a counter-narrative; each a celebration of a different center, another world. Each means not only to help move the center, however slightly, toward other centers with their other languages, their other cultures, but also to help re-zone so that genuine cultural diversity and gender equality might come into existence.”¹⁹

This dissertation highlights students’ proactive moments to discriminations which are not anything new, but rarely from the perspective of Pacific Islander students. In the field of education, there are very few books written about Pacific Islanders. Most are reports and if there are, they are a chapter. Literature on Pacific Islanders in school is very limited and it is my hope that this work not only adds to it but also opens up a very important area of study for others to contribute.

Famoksaiyan: Keep Paddling Forward

There are reasons why this project keeps us paddling forward. For one, it teaches us valuable lessons about all our students, particularly those who have come to understand their own colonization in a school setting. Their movements—that is the way they have been able to navigate through their schools—have not only taught us to be hopeful but also to persevere, even in the face of unrelenting and sometimes stubborn colonialism. For them, these are de-colonial acts and although “small” to some, for them, they are vast and large as the ocean because the generations that will come to benefit in their work. This in itself is a hopeful message of survival and a powerful testament that reminds us that if don’t keep paddling, we cease moving in any direction, and we risk stranding ourselves to wondering if we could ever make it. Secondly, the voices in this work are not passive. These are student voices that challenge head-on the very same discriminations that impede their own learning in their schools. It is a progressive and critical effort to survive and incorporate their cultures as tools for navigating and as legitimate fields of study. Put simply, it is a way of thinking about the worlds they inhabit that simultaneously challenges the way others have constructed their worlds to be. Finally, this is also lesson about indigeneity and its value. This project has shown to me that indigenous is not about going back to the times when Europeans first “discovered” us. Indigeneity is about bridging generations, connecting people, re-inventing cultures, a source of inspiration, a mix of old and new, that is sometimes well received and at other times rejected. It is really about how we move forward and about the legacies we leave behind for our children and the people we have deep love and admiration for. Paddling forward then is about navigating histories.

The Road Map:

The dissertation has four chapters. Chapter two is a literature review of the debates surrounding ethnography—the social scientific methodology used to study human cultures. Those debates center on the ways in which ethnography has been used as colonial tool to its evolvment as a powerful and de-colonial method for native scholars. The crux of this chapter complicates the notions of “representations” in the study of cultures by questioning the analytical

¹⁹ Hilden, Patricia P. *From a Red Zone: Critical Perspectives on Race, Politics, and Culture*. Red Sea Press. Trenton, NJ: 2006

tools used to construct “truth” and “authentic” accounts about the objects of study especially when the native has moved out of their homelands and migrated to the cities and urban areas or the “mainland.” What are the implications of ethnographic work when it comes to discourse, knowledge, and power? Do native ethnographers articulate and represent a better narrative than the ones done by non-native ethnographers?

In chapter three, students outline for us creative ways they have used their native cultures to reshape the social and cultural landscapes of the school they are attending. In an attempt to survive and make a new home in their educational institutions, Pacific Islander students share their stories about the most important areas in the schools that must change if one is serious about diversity and inclusion. This chapter outlines the student’s use of the cultural element of ocean to redefine what it means to be a Pacific Islander going to school in the 21st century—community, culture, and curriculum.

Implementing ocean is not easy. Chapter four gives a history of the struggles and triumphs of Islander students in their movement—itsself a critique of the school—to implement Pacific Islands Studies at UW-Seattle, UC Berkeley, and CCSF. Furthermore, the comparative histories of these struggles reveal the testimonies of students who have been powerfully changed by courses in the field and how that empowerment has extended beyond the classroom.

The concluding chapter covers the events that are generated by the student’s use of ocean which not only mark their successes within their own schools but the connections they have made on an international, national, and local level with the wider Pacific Islander communities in the diaspora. The events covered in this chapter, among many, were chosen specifically to show the multitude of possibilities when Islander students are able to ground and empower their community in an attempt to reconstruct counter-narratives and imagery of themselves. The chapter leaves us with some thinking points for further discussions on why schools should change to ensure the success of Pacific Islanders and other students of color and what it means to implement real diversity in higher education.

Conclusion:

I conclude this introductory chapter with the following poem by Joseph P. Balaz entitled, “*Da Mainland to Me.*”²⁰:

*Eh, howzit brah,
I heard you goin mainland, eh?
No, I goin to da continent.
Wat? I taught you going San Jose for visit your bradda?*

²⁰Balaz, Joseph P. “Da Mainland to Me.” *Boundary 2: Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production*. Ed. Rob Wilson and Arif Dirlik. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994. 134-135. Print.

Dats right.
Den you goin mainland brah!
No, I going to da continent.
Wat you mean continent brah!?
Da mainland is da mainland, dats where you going, eh?
Eh, like I told you,
dats da continent—
Hawai'i
Is da mainland to me.

This poem is a good anecdote to understanding Pacific Islander cultures and brings up rather complicated issues about knowledge construction—who gets to define “mainland” and “ocean.” This work is not merely just “clicking a box” but a link to larger questions about Pacific Islander peoples. What does it mean to critique colonization? How do we know that our actions are de-colonial? Who has the right to do and claim such work? This dissertation is not a simplistic view about the Pacific but a project that negotiates attitudes which are as vast as the ocean. Because of that, these things take a lot of time to think about but also takes a devoted scholar to want to engage a good amount time and a portion of their lives in order to understand what it means to be an American and Pacific Islander. Therefore, this project is a snapshot of a complex world that continues to define and shape itself by an ocean.

Chapter 2: “Ethnography: Discourse, Knowledge, and Power”

“...The term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism...”²¹

Linda Tuhiwai Smith

The goal of this very brief literature review is to chart the field of ethnography from its colonial past to its present use. Since ethnography’s defining objective is representation—created by discourse, knowledge, and power, I’ll use this notion as the navigational instrument to chart ethnography from its colonial roots to its evolvment as a decolonial tool—an implementation that came to fruition through a series of ‘representational crisis’ after the 1960’s, prompting the native, especially native scholars, to ‘write back’. (Smith 1999)

The literature review will visit, but not resolve, several issues that complicate the notion of “representation”. First, I’ll discuss ethnography and its use as a decolonial tool by natives and native ethnographers that more or less produce discourses from the “border”—a powerful metaphor in social analysis— that challenge Western discourses and representations of native communities historically produced by non-native ethnographers. (Anzaldúa, 1987; Smith, 1999; Hilden, 2005) Secondly, social analytical tools are brought into question, bringing to light the many complications of constructing “truth” and “authentic” accounts, especially given the differing ideological formations of both the ethnographer and the subject that deeply influence the ‘discursive formations’²²—that is, the constructions of “others.” Thirdly, the urban city-space where people and places are “culturally interconnected” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992) raises questions about ethnography and its effort to “represent” people and cultures in spite of the homogenizing effect of globalization. Fourthly, I’ll discuss postmodernism and ethnography and several issues they bring into question that contemporary ethnographers’ can no longer ignore—i.e. writing the researcher into the text. Finally, I’ll conclude with some remarks about ethnography, discourse, knowledge, and power.

I begin this journey of ‘tales’ with a “thin description” of ethnography’s colonial past.

Colonial Ethnography: A Colonial Discourse of Knowledge and Power

Ethnography, a Western discursive practice, is a written representation of people and their culture(s)²³. These representations are discourse(s)²⁴—knowledge of people and cultures via the use of language (usually the West) that, according to Stuart Hall, using Foucault, are very

²¹ Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999:1)

²² See Stuart Hall (1996) *Modernity: an Introduction to Modern Societies*

²³ Van Maanen, John. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (1988:1)

²⁴ For a discussion on discourse theory, see Foucault, Michel, *the Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) or Hall Stuart, *“The Rest in the West: Discourse and Power”*, in *Modernity: an Introduction to Modern Societies* (1996) ed. Hall, Stuart.

much implicated in practice and in power (Hall, 1996). Ethnography then is a “system”—a system where discourse(s) and practice(s) are bounded together by a circulation of power that produces knowledge (representations), which is a constitution of a kind of power exercised over those that are “known”. Basically, it is the knowledge of how the West has behaved towards the “known” (natives) (Hall, 1996, Foucault, 1969).

The discursive practice in ethnography I am referring to is its fundamental methodology called fieldwork. John Van Maanen (1988) describes fieldwork to be an on-going interaction with human targets of study (natives) and the researcher, for a lengthy period of time on the natives’ home ground (Van Maanen, 1988). These social interactions between natives and researchers were never an innocent encounter between equals, and so fieldworkers recorded, interpreted, and disseminated knowledge or representations of the “known.” (Hall, 1996, Smith, 1999, Foucault, 1980) According to Edward Said, these constructions of knowledge (representations) were a Western discourse of the Other that was supported by institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.’ (Smith, 1999; Said, 1979)

When that knowledge is exercised in practice, those who are “known” in a particular way will be “subject” to it (Hall, 1996). According to Hall, those who produce the discourse also have the power to *make it true* (Hall, 1996). It is no wonder then that Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism: The “regimes of truth”—the effective practice of discourses and knowledge that organize and regulate power relations between the West and “others”. (Smith, 1999, Hall, 1969, Foucault, 1980) Furthermore, the natives’ subordinate, “savage”, and “uncivilized” positions were mediated through these Western depictions—these ‘regimes of truth’—held high by colonial bureaucracies, that have gone unchallenged for centuries, and thus, subsequently justifying the colonization of the natives and their homelands. This was no accident by European and American imperialists, but, rather intended.

Ethnography in the age of exploration was an ideal imperialistic tool, with the purpose to “record” and “represent” native cultures, people, and land in preparation for European economic exploitation and eventual political annexation. (Van Maanen, 1988, Kay-Trask, 1999, Smith, 1999, Hilden, 2005, Diaz, 2004, Said, 1979) This could not happen without a constructed body of knowledge or “archives” of “other worlds”. In other words, knowledge was already constructed of the “other”, especially in classical knowledge, religious and biblical sources, mythologies, and travelers’ tales. For example, in classical knowledge, Plato (c. 427-347 B.C.) described a string of legendary islands, among them Atlantis which many explorers set out to find. Aristotle (c. 427-347 B.C.) and Eratosthenes (c. 276-194 B.C.) both made remarkably accurate estimates of the circumference of the globe which were consulted by Columbus. (Hall, 1996)

Realizing the growth of industrial production and population that could not be contained within political boundaries, Europeans set out to find “other” markets, via large-scale scientific explorations, that would provide solutions to a growing European economy. Among other reasons. (Hall, 1996, Smith, 1999, Kay-Trask, 1999)

Large-scale scientific explorations of the mid 19th century provided one means of acquiring cultural data. (Van Maanen, 1988) Anthropologists, along with natural scientists, cartographers, explorers, missionaries, whalers, and other travelers of the West, shipped out,

Darwin-like, to study cultural diversity face to face. The objective of these explorations were to classify and compare societies, applying Darwin's theory of biological evolution, to note how culture(s) evolved from a "primitive barbarism" to a "civilized" technological state. (Van Maanen, 1988) Early writers, especially travelers on faraway exotic places, treated culture as if some had more or less of, which, by their definition, a "civilized" subject constituted an increased possession of culture, while "Others" on the other hand were considered "savage" since they possessed no kind or form of culture. (Van Maanen, 1988; Smith, 1999)

Nonetheless, intellectuals writing from home or "armchair theorists"²⁵ contributed to the imperial cause by studying "exotic" cultures from information furnished by these archives, especially those collected by Western travelers. Equipped with Western epistemological tools, and in an attempt to set off their work as different in kind from the writings of other travelers, "armchair theorists" were analyzing and publishing narrow depictions of distant cultures. (Van Maanen, 1988) As members of "high culture" themselves, their works circulated amongst a "high cultured" readership that included pro-imperialists, expansionists, and politicians. (Van Maanen, 1988) Since pro-imperialists learned a great deal of possible economic opportunities of already civil island nation-states; and since the people residing in those lands were constructed to be without culture and thus "savage", then colonization—that is, the "enlightening" of the "natives" with "civilization", was the appropriate means to economically expand European markets while "taming" the "savage". (Van Maanen, 1988; Smith, 1999) Caribbean and Pacific Island nations at the turn of the 20th century would eventually come, not without a struggle, under American and European colonial rule. Ethnography however would not end here. It would be fortified by anthropologists and sociologists as a legitimate methodological approach to studying culture(s).

Modern Ethnographies: Anthropology and Sociology

Modern ethnography according to Van Maanen (1988) did not emerge until the late 19th century only after serving its intended colonial purpose. It can be characterized as a "turn" or shift where, "...Ethnography as initially practiced was hardly dependent on the personal experiences of the writer going eyeball to eyeball...[It]...was either a speculative form of social history carried out by anthropologists or...it was carried out as a canonical count-and-classify social science based on stiff interviewing...It was in either case shot full of imposed cultural concepts and categories, uninterested in the patterns of everyday life, and grounded almost entirely on what people said, and not what they did." (Van Maanen, 1988: 16) Nonetheless, with the "Science of Culture" in motion by 1910 and with the turn to personal experience or "open-air" methodology in ethnography, American anthropologist Franz Boas along with British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski are credited for bringing fieldwork to ethnography, pushing the anthropologist from the university into the life worlds of those about whom they wrote. (Van Maanen, 1988, Clifford, 1983) Their major contributions to the field were in, "...

²⁵ See Van Maanen (1988)

[Urging] students to stop relying on second-hand reports [to] analyze culture and go to the field themselves to collect their own data.” (Van Maanen, 1988) By the late 1920’s, “...Fieldwork and the image of the scientifically trained fieldworker stalking the...native in his natural habitat had become the cornerstone of anthropology.” (Van Maanen, 1988)

Sociology on the other hand also has sort of an “authorized” history of ethnography. The Chicago School (of Urban Ethnography) became the main force behind sociological fieldwork. Scholars like Robert E. Park, W.I. Thomas, Ernest Burgess, and others pushed their students to, “...Begin exploring the city as if it were a remote and exotic setting” (Van Maanen, 1988)—a fundamental difference from anthropology where their fieldwork took them to distant places while sociologists stayed home. Nonetheless, Park and others encouraged their students, urban ethnographers, to take to the field not so much for scientific reasons, but for more quintessential American ones:

“Muckraking (to expose the lies and hypocrisies of the Exalted Ones in society) and Reform (to improve the lot of the Downtrodden).” (Van Maanen, 1988)

With this approach, sociology found its footing in the academy, bringing to fruition two kinds of ethnographies: community studies, a collection of surveys that were quite similar to anthropology, which didn’t require much “hanging out” with the natives; and sociology’s bread and butter, the study of “deviant subcultures”, where the “downtrodden” became the sociologist’s wily native. (Van Maanen, 1988) The niche for urban ethnographers in sociology was small, due in part to sociology’s distinctive social organizations of both disciplines. (Van Maanen, 1988) The disciplines were divided among two key groups; those who were interested in conducting ethnographies outside of the country and the very few that were interested in staying home.

With ethnography’s colonial past and its evolution into an established body of theory and methodology, began to be used in other disciplines. Soon, ethnography was found in law, social psychology, education, women’s studies (Van Maanen, 1988) Historically, the disciplines that use ethnography to acquire data for analysis definitely shape ethnography’s current and future use, not only by adding or producing new discourses of knowledge and representations of people and cultures, but also by bringing to light other issues—i.e. “representation”—that arise, especially during the process of social analysis that have profound meanings for notions of truth and power—who is doing the representing? Why? What for?

I turn first to a discussion of the linguistic “turn” in ethnography.

Social Analysis, Textual Representations, and Truth

Margaret Mead’s canonical text *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) stirred controversy in the post 1960’s when Derek Freeman, an American anthropologist, publicly criticized Mead about her textual representations of Sāmoan culture and especially of adolescent women. Citing Mead’s neglect of Sāmoan knowledge and culture in her analysis (leading to a ‘wrong’ interpretation), Freeman set off a chain reaction of controversial debates, particularly a ‘crisis of

legitimation and representation', (Marcus and Fischer,) amongst scholars and community members that threatened the moral and intellectual authority of ethnographers. Eventually notions of interpretation, truth, and text came into question. (Atkinson, 2001) Scholars of cultural studies then became critical and frustrated about old and outdated methodologies of analyzing culture and therefore critical of the ethnographer having an "expert" role in 'speaking on behalf' of "other" cultures. (Atkinson, 2001)

Cultural studies scholars' response to the crisis, also critical of "realist tales" present in old ethnographies, pushed for a more thorough and contextual analysis that depended upon language, the so called "linguistic turn", that developed in the early 20th century. Such an approach, "... [Produced] sensitivity to culture as an ensemble of sense-making practices that demand a dialogic and reflexive engagement, rather than expert interpretation" (Atkinson, 2001). Cultural studies emphasized the study of language within discourses to revive ethnography's traditional approach to the study of culture that might lend an enhanced framework for interpreting and constructing social reality—moving towards somewhat of an "authentic" representation and true knowledge.

Several key texts deal with the textual representations of subjects that offer a more thorough interpretive approach to analyzing ethnographic data. The question is not so much if what is represented in the text is true or false. It is more about the discourses, the knowledge, and the power, created out of the ethnographer's interpretation of collected data that eventually *makes them true*. (Hall, 1996)

In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), Clifford Geertz highlights a framework that focuses on the "meaning making process" while also explaining "what ethnography is doing", as a step towards grasping what anthropological analysis amounts to as a form of knowledge. Anthropological analysis, he says is not a matter of methods entirely, although these are important, but rather a definition of the kind of intellectual effort it entails (Geertz, 1973). Borrowing from Gilbert Ryle's notion of "thick description" to explain what he means, he says... "Using an 'I-am-a-camera', phenomenalist observation of a cultural enterprise or setting alone will not work." (Geertz, 1973) Geertz observes that even the most elemental sort of inquiry is "extraordinarily thick" by which he means dependent upon interpretation. (Geertz, 1973)

What the researcher calls "the data" is really, says Geertz, "...our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their members are up to" (Geertz, 1973). Assumptions about the neutrality of the data have led to the position where much anthropological research is seen to be more of an observational, and less of an interpretive activity than it really is. It is in the act of analysis, according to Geertz, that the "structures of significance" are sorted out - and determinations of their social ground and import can occur. (Geertz, 1973)

Geertz describes what an ethnographer is faced with as a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, "many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit..."(Geertz, 1973) He describes doing an ethnography as trying to read a manuscript - "foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations and tendentious commentaries...written (as) transient examples of shaped behavior" (Geertz, 1973).

Geertz, feels that the problem of verification, of how you can tell a better account from a worse one, is only a hollow threat, since the determining question of an ethnography should be whether it, "sorts winks from twitches, and real winks from mimicked ones...."(Geertz, 1973). Ethnography, he says, is "thick description" and ethnographers are those doing the describing and that ethnography and anthropology are really rubbish.

On the issue of description, John Van Maanen lays out several ways in which social reality is described and written, in his text *Tales of the Field: on Writing Ethnography* (1988). He distinguishes three kinds of ethnographic writings or “tales”. First are “Realist Tales”, the style that was popular and prevalent in traditional ethnographies. Those ethnographies pushed firmly for what they called “authenticity” of the cultural representations conveyed by the text. (Van Maanen, 1988:45) The author of a realist tale thus tries to be an invisible narrator who does not write him/herself into the analysis. Van Maanen notes:

“Realist tales are not multi-vocal texts where an event is given meaning first one way, then another, and then still another. Rather a realist tale offers one reading and culls its facts carefully to support that reading. Little can be discovered in such texts that have not been put there by the fieldworker as a way of supporting a particular interpretation.”(Van Maanen, 1988:53)

A second form is the “Confessional Tales”. Characterized by a highly personalized style, these texts intended to challenge the realist accounts by focusing on the authors’ practices and methods. Confessional tales according to Van Maanen actually reinforce and legitimize realist ethnographic works:

“Confessional tales are...Stories of infiltration, fables of fieldwork rapport, mini-melodramas of hardships endured (and overcome), and accounts of what fieldwork did to the fieldworker.” (Van Maanen, 1988)

Finally, there are “Impressionist Tales”, where the reader is encouraged to engage in a kind of “experience”, led by the researcher. The author may be partially visible in the text, but the events are told in such a way that the “learning process” can be identified. For Van Maanen, the idea is to draw an audience into an unfamiliar story world and allow readers, as far as possible, to see, hear, and feel as the fieldworker saw, heard, and felt. (Van Maanen, 1988) In this impressionist view, knowledge is often fragmented and contradictory, and many theoretical questions are left unresolved and un-resolvable.

In short, it is clear that regardless of the ethnographers’ technique, they cannot move away from reinforcing the “realist” tone of the data they have collected. In other words, once data is collected and analyzed, what the ethnographer describes must support the data collected, whatever the “tale” they purport to tell. This raises an obvious question about the truth of the data Van Maanen writes:

“...There is no sovereign method of establishing fieldwork truths.” (Van Maanen, 1988)

If such a “sovereign truth-establishing” method does not exist, then what? Renato Rosaldo offers an ingenious solution. Interested in salvaging ethnography’s methods of representation, Rosaldo (1987) challenged all claims that past ethnographic works were ‘false’ and thus interpretations based on them ‘wrong.’ Pushing for a multiplicity of methodologies for studying culture, Rosaldo refused to employ hermeneutics—that is, the study of language, as the totalizing framework for cultural analysis. He demonstrates how purportedly objective, factual accounts recorded by ethnographers and anthropologists are affected by (some of) the same interpretive frameworks literary and cultural studies use to call into question the “truth” of a (generally fictional) narrative account:

“If classic ethnography’s vice was the slippage from the ideal of detachment to actual indifference that of present-day reflexivity is the tendency for the self-absorbed Self to lose sight altogether of the culturally different ‘Other’... The key concept in what follows is that of the positioned (and repositioned) subject. In routine interpretive procedure, according to the methodology of hermeneutics, one can say that ethnographers reposition themselves as they go about understanding other cultures.” (Rosaldo, 1987)

With that said, Rosado’s text in essence is an examination of how ethnographic renderings of cultures are “truth”, but in each case only one version of it. All versions of truth are created for different audiences, allowing them to act upon a set of “truths” that reveal and shape their power interests. Nonetheless, if Foucault argued that knowledge is power and representations are forms of knowledge rooted in power, then a possible resolution of problems of truth and representation are best left to the natives themselves— (Manalansan, 2000) Native people—the objects of ethnographic inquiry—

are often times absent from the text and thus marginalized and remain the most “credentialed” to speak of their own communities.

Native/Indigenous Ethnographers usually possess an “insider” perspective, which seems to give them some advantage of authenticity in their own communities. (Manalansan, 2000, Vo, 2000) However, as Linda Vo suggests, because of their insider perspective, native ethnographers are prevented from knowing all the “insides” of their own community. In fact, the “outsider” will get to know certain “insides” that the “insider” themselves may never learn of. For example, if a non-native ethnographer establishes a rapport with his/her informants, certain details about an issue may be shared that remain confidential and hidden from the rest of the informant’s community, even from members of his/her own families. (Vo, 2000)

Still lying unresolved at the root of the debate are issues of discourse and power. Do ethnographies produced by native ethnographers authenticate their own representations? How do discourses, knowledge, and power produced by native scholars/ethnographers act against Western ones? Patricia Penn Hilden (2005) suggests one response. Writing about borders in her collection of essays in *From a Red Zone* (2005), about Native observations and Native stories:

“Each [is] a counter-narrative; each a celebration of a different center, another world. Each means not only to help move the center, however slightly, toward other centers with their other languages, their other cultures, but also to help re-zone so that genuine cultural diversity and gender equality might come into existence.” (Hilden, 2005)

“The Border Speaks”

I offer here some works by native ethnographers who are ‘writing back’ from their center, the “border”. Over time, as natives have become increasingly aware of their subordinate subject positions, they have had to continue to struggle with European discourses that produced representations and false, essentialist depictions of them. In fact, oppressive conditions worsened, as consciousness rose, until the “border” could no longer contain their voices, which overflowed into a series of liberal movements—from Native feminists, Lesbian/Gay struggles, Civil Rights movements, to Sovereignty discussions—that demanded legitimate representation on all level: politics, society, education, and especially economy. This latter had long been riding on the backs of “bordered” peoples. (Rodriguez, 1995; Gilmore, 1997) The “border” however, did not speak as one, but rather from a multitude of places in many voices.

Gloria Anzaldua’s powerful text, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Meztiza* (1987) provided a powerful metaphorical use of the “border” as the place that speaks of a particular existence (Anzaldua, 1987), an existence that lives with difference and exclusion from the mainstream, in the midst of a multi-sited identity. (See the next section for a more thorough examination of this formulation). Scholars identifying with this “marginalized” position take up Anzaldua’s metaphorical expression as a powerful means of ‘writing back’ from these “centers and other worlds”. (Hilden, 2005)

Linda Tuhiwai Smith has also joined this move against “the western” outlining her critique of the anthropologist’s version of Maori culture. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2001), Tuhiwai Smith notes the absence of Maori voices, particularly the absence of a female Maori voice. Smith provides a plethora of methodologies that center Maori epistemology and also emphasize the incorporation and the authority of Maori peoples within contemporary research projects that make the gathering of cultural knowledge sensible and humane. (Smith, 1999, Hilden, 2005) Nonetheless, the text implicitly speaks of a more inclusive intellectual space, emphasizing the need for indigenous peoples to reclaim ownership of knowledge—a crucial component of understanding the self, which ‘research’ according to Smith has consistently imperialized and colonized the mind (Smith, 2001; Hilden, 2005; Fiegel, 1996).

In an effort to reclaim and regain all that has been lost from ‘research’, movements such as the Native Hawai’ian Sovereignty Movement (led by women), focused primarily on the revitalization of Native Hawai’ian language—the key—to freeing Hawai’ian culture from its western intellectual prisons (Trask, 1999; Diaz, 2004). The movement itself evolved to include issues of sovereignty, (it’s controversial among many progressive Native people) which has now become one driving force behind the movement for land, language, culture, and for a meaning

for existence/being, which are spatially interconnected. Sovereignty, then, would give the collective voice a sense of social and political power. Moreover, movements like this and many others all have a common fundamental theme—the reconfiguration of power from its “Euro-center” so that moves other centers could flourish and the drive towards equality could expand, despite the struggles of attaining it. (Hilden, 2005) Equality according to Trask and Smith, can only be attained through “consciousness.” Patricia Hill Collins gives a definition of this important stage.

Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (2000), demonstrates Black women's emerging power as agents of knowledge. By portraying African-American women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender, and class oppression, Afrocentric feminist thought, according to Collins, speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people. One distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought is its insistence that both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change. New knowledge is important for both dimensions of change.

As change becomes central to their lives, change itself, according to Collins can be an inspiring development in the mind and thus can lead to empowerment (Collins, 2000). Collin's consciousness-change-empowerment model is, in itself, a powerful decolonial tool, opening up new spaces of “heretopias²⁶” that allow black women, and others—members of lesbian/gay communities, indigenous peoples, the oppressed—to deal with “change”, within a range of struggling issues from history to identity, from personal to the social, amidst the ongoing struggles of confronting a time of hybrid cultures, new forms of racisms, and metamorphic identities— that, are due largely to globalization. (Figel, 1996; Ferguson, 1990; Hall, 1996; Bonus, 2000; Anzaldúa, 1987; Morton, 2002; Keith, 1993; Rodriguez, 1995; Gilmore, 1997)

In conclusion, this chapter looks at one exemplary ethnography by an “inside” writing of his own communities, the Filipino American worlds of Los Angeles and San Diego. Rick Bonus's, *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Space* (2000) emphasizes the relationship between the construction of a Filipino American ethnic identity in relation to people's socio-cultural-political space. He considers the ‘local’ performativity of Filipino culture as a manifestation of the ‘global’ conditions that shape community members. Arguing that “...Alternative community spaces enable Filipino Americans to respond to and resist the ways in which the larger society has historically and institutionally rendered them invisible, silenced, and racialized” (Bonus, 2000), ‘Oriental’ stores, “the social halls and community centers, and community newspapers”, is a spatial demonstration of how the “public” constitutes ethnic identities and transforms communities via the “appropriation of elements from their former homeland and their new settlements as a means to resist racism, assimilation, and exclusion” (Bonus, 2000). These “moving archives” offer varying degrees of possibilities, allowing the ethnographer to draw from rich and deeper resources and make more informed descriptions about the cultures they are studying. In other words, Bonus's text encompasses spaces that reflect how community narratives are created, engaged, and transferred, reflecting that the world of native cultures are not “stuck” in the past, but rather evolving on multiple levels, in varying places, at different times.

²⁶ For a reading on “heretopias”, please see Foucault, Michel “Of Other Spaces”

A common thread, then, runs through all the texts, described above. All don't deal with issues of multi-locality. By multi-locality, I mean the idea that people have not only moved away from their respective "homelands" but have imagined the homeland in other places, which poses questions of representation for the ethnographer. If local conditions are manifestations of global processes demonstrated by Bonus, then ethnographers, in social analysis, must incorporate the increasing influx of peoples towards the urban center, the place where many migrants, especially native peoples, have made their new "homelands". Why is this important? Because representations of peoples, especially those living in culturally hybrid places like the city, poses a whole new set of complex issues. Who is the "native" now?

Urban Spaces: Reconsidering "here" and "there"/ "local" and "global"

Questions surrounding "here" and "there" and the designation of research sites have in the contemporary become complicated. A clearer view of this complication can be understood by asking several questions: What happens when the native from "there" (faraway) comes "here" (local)? Rewording the question, what happens when the native, who might be from "here" (local) goes "there" (faraway)? Or consider the former question contextualized differently, within a single nation-state like the United States: what happens when a native from an area designated "there" in most popular discourse, such as a very rural area, moves into a "here," a local, urban center? Clifford Geertz might have the most telling question: "What does it mean, at the end of the twentieth century, to speak...of a 'native land'?" (Clifford, 1986)

All this mixing, a characteristic of the U.S. for centuries, increased where an immigration influx in the 1960's brought into peoples from various cultures and various places in to the U.S. Many of these were those who had once been "subjects", if you who played the central figures in the anthropological research of earlier decades. As a byproduct of modernity, globalization has created a world of diaspora(s), mass movements of populations, and transnational culture flows, in which the geographical spaces in between places are becoming more de-territorialized or differently territorialized, thus, interconnecting spaces and places (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). These changes pose a challenge to ethnographers, especially in the context of the urban/economic center/spaces or cities— the migratory destiny of those in the diaspora(s) where the lines between "here" and "there" blur, bringing the notion of "culture" as a static unit of analysis, and thus representations, into question.

Robert Park and his students' development of community studies next enter the discussion. They study the city as a "remote and exotic setting" (Atkinson, 2001) an ideal concept because ethnographers today must deal with the myriad conditions of urbanization. They must make innumerable attempts to shape their ethnographic approaches that once perceived "here" as "local" and "there" as "global". In other words, as Gupta and Ferguson argue, globalization, renders places on a map unstable. One can no longer define a rigid distinction between and among locations of cultures (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). It is fair to say that in the contemporary world, the Sāmoan archipelago is where Sāmoan culture(s) are rooted, but not necessarily the only culture flourishing in Sāmoa. For example, globalization has

brought an influx of Filipinos to Samoa where they continue to practice “Filipino” cultures. Moreover, the importance of examining communities within both local and global contexts is crucial for ethnographers since the demographic portrait of the urban city is now composed of peoples from various cultures that are either monoracial and multiracial. (Anzaldúa, 1987) How does ethnographies—discourse, knowledge, and power—of these subject positions represented, given the urban conditions?

One solution is to echo what Ruthie Gilmore, Rick Bonus, Patricia Hilden, and many others argue about “multiple centers”: globally celebrating and embracing the centers that are manifested at the “local” level. In other words, everyone or anyone represented in ethnography should be celebrated as a possible center of knowledge and truth, not merely as a subject, where knowledge and truth are “discovered” for them. (Smith, 1999) Moreover, when ethnographers travel to faraway places, they too can not dismiss the concept of the globalizing economy, as all nations regardless of geography, contribute to global capitalism in some shape or form. (Gilmore, 1997)

To accept this notion is to consider new approaches to studying culture, where the urban place is a composition of intermixing cultures producing and re-producing new forms of identities that complicate notions of “truth”. Why? Urban ethnographies are loaded with “thicker descriptions²⁷”, not only allowing for the construction of multiple truths (discourses, knowledge, and representations), but also pushing the ethnographer to explore multiple analytical approaches to analyzing culture and truth; a similar argument made by Renato Rosaldo (1988).

If the use of multiple analytical approaches creates many versions of truths, then which version is the “authentic” truth? Or does “truth” exist at all? Perhaps a discussion on postmodernism, ethical relativism, and ethnography might reveal an enhanced, if not, a complex framework for studying culture, if any.

Postmodernism: The end of Ethnography?

Beginning in the 1960s and '70s, ethical relativism became associated with postmodernism, a complex philosophical movement that questioned the idea of objectivity in many areas (Marcus & Ficscher, 1986) including ethnography. Many postmodernists regarded the very idea of “objectivity” as a dubious invention of the modern, post-Enlightenment era many argued that the time of the Enlightenment, philosophers and scientists believed that there was an objective, universal, and unchanging truth about everything—including science, ethics, religion, and politics—and that human reason is powerful enough to discover this truth. (Atkinson, 2001) The eventual result of rational inquiry, therefore, was to be one science, one ethics, one religion, and one politics that would be valid for all people in all places and eras. According to postmodernism, however, the Enlightenment-inspired idea of objective truth, which has influenced the thinking of virtually all modern scientists and philosophers, is an illusion that has now collapsed. (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Harvey, 1996) What does this do to ethnography, whose fundamental principle was founded on “truth” making? Is it the end? The answer to this is still being resolved but postmodernism, particularly the discussion around ethical relativism,

²⁷ By thicker descriptions, I mean that social analysis cannot simply be simply all narratives.

complicates issues of representations—discourse, knowledge, and power—that can be liberating and/or disempowering.

Ethical relativism is attractive to many philosophers and social scientists for many reasons. For one, the issue of morality—that is, the set of standards developed by a society that distinguishes acceptable and unacceptable behavior, that means that every judgment of “right” and “wrong” presupposes one or another of these standards,—have shaped pre-modern and modern ethnography. For example, pre-modern ethnography was a “moral” colonial tool based on European moral beliefs of the “savage”. Modern ethnography on the other hand, influenced the production of “moral” and “humane” approaches to studying people and cultures. (Atkinson, 2001; Rosaldo, 1987) This leaves us with several questions. If ethnography in the contemporary now adheres to human subject standards of the university, does this absolve the ethnographer from moral responsibilities in representing their subject? Postmodernists would argue yes if the ethnographer morally believes his interpretations are “truth”. Secondly, ethical relativism is based on emotion and experience—a fundamental premise of early modern ethnography—rather than reason. It relies on the use of moral language by organizing facts or “truths” in a way that “influences the actions and attitudes” of members within a society. (Atkinson, 2001) Does ethnography have this effect still? Postmodernists would ask what does it matter? No matter how the ethnographer decides to organize data, a valid truth will always be constructed. Thirdly, ethical relativism explained the variability of moral beliefs which also explained how the world emotionally operates; a similar argument made by Clifford Geertz about culture as being a complex web of significations that makes sense of the world. (Geertz, 1973) This explains why he asserts the phrase “thick description”—because ethnographies are loaded with ideological formations of the researcher and the researched that includes moral beliefs—an influential factor in constructing discourses, knowledge, and thus representations of its subjects. (Atkinson, 2001; Hall, 1996) For example, homosexual practices according to the ethnographer’s moral beliefs might be considered wrong and unacceptable in his society and thus choose to dismiss this from analytical purview. However, sexuality might govern power relations within that society, which a major intentional omission by the ethnographer could spell a “representational crisis”—that is, wrong and immoral representations of the “other”. (Atkinson, 2001, Hall, 1996) Postmodernists would argue that if moral beliefs are a major influence, then the ethnographer should write themselves into the text that more or less serves a kind of self-reflection of the ethnographers’ own moral beliefs that regulate power relations in their society. Finally, ethical relativism has a dimension of tolerance and appreciation for “other” cultures, which anti-relativists argue is *false* due to the fact that societies, especially ones living along side each other, sometimes enter into physical confrontation citing social differences. (Atkinson, 2001) For example, the lynching of African Americans prior to the 1960’s by members of the Ku Klux Klan totally opposes ethical relativism’s “tolerance” approach. Postmodernists would argue that a reconstruction, particularly in history, of these events should be tolerable, regardless if the reconstruction is conflicting with the moral beliefs of those that find such an act offensive. For example, Disney’s recent interests in building an amusement display aimed at taking park attendees on a history tour of the slavery period. This to many might be offensive, while postmodernists claim it is an appropriate claim, and thus truth of a particular history. (Hilden, 2005)

So all in all, what does postmodernism, relativism and ethnography spell out for each other? Well for one, postmodernism liberates ethnography from Western practices of cultural

analysis. For example, postmodernism calls for a multiplicity or a “whatever feeds your ego” kind of approach to social analysis, echoing postmodernisms boundless, chaotic, anti-essentialists, and non-restrictive nature. After all, according to postmodernism, we’ll never arrive at “truth” because “objectivity” doesn’t exist. (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Rosaldo, 1987) Secondly, discourse, knowledge, and power—integral ingredients of “truth”—are now more than ever complicated by postmodernism because representations can be asserted without ever defining a particular time and space. For example, history is framed in notions of time and space through periodizations. This concept is highly defied by postmodernism. Finally, postmodernism brings to reality our own attempts to studying social reality. In other words, throughout humans’ existence in the world, how far have societies come in producing knowledge? Or how far can we continue to produce that? Again, these questions of postmodernism and many more are still being contested. For me personally, as an indigenous Pacific Islander, the postmodern perspective cannot be a “whatever feeds your ego” approach. That means, anyone from anywhere can come into my life, construct a story about me, and spin it off as “truth.” What about my own truths that I myself and so many others arrive at within the worlds we occupy? Your neighbor, even your own blood brother, will never experience the things I’ll go through in life. That’s the truth!

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out core debates of the field of ethnography through a “tour d’ horizon” of the field. As scholars and ethnographers pursue new ways of representing people and cultures through consistent revisions of methodological approaches, the question of “authenticity” and “truth” still loom. Whether or not a “universal” approach to arriving at “truth”, power, and knowledge is uncovered, an important issue for ethnographers is to decide where “truth” lies in their work. In other words, “truth” is only as good as the process and that users of ethnography should be more concerned with this process as it shapes the construction of “truth.” Truth for ethnography then is not so much about arriving at “absolute truth”, but rather “truth” as a “sense making” *process* of discourse, knowledge, representations, and power linked together in a system that can produce many versions of truths.

So what is truth for me? What do I think about ethnography today especially considering its past as a colonial tool? How do I situate my work within these conversations? I believe it’s still useful and I believe that native ethnographers can produce alternative and powerful narratives about the people they work with, especially if they are grounded in the everyday worlds of those communities. I think when a strong relationship is forged between researcher and communities, trust and truth no longer become objects of concern. Ethnography to me becomes a better tool for research when we can learn to listen first and understand how knowledge that is shared with the researcher is contextualize in a particular world. Understanding that world and knowing how translate that knowledge from one world to the next is integral to understanding how communities operate. Because I have been able to spend countless years of my academic life sharing the spaces of education with the communities that inform this dissertation, I believe that the discourse I have produced in this work is stronger,

relevant, and powerful and definitely a kind of work does at sometimes speaks from the border but a scholarship that speaks from an ocean—a borderless and multi-dimensional space of engagements.

Chapter 3: The Ocean(s) in the School

“Our ocean demands that we live up to the expectations of our ancestors and bring to life what it means to be people of the ocean, especially in school.”

--Emani Ilaoa

Across three different campus—University of Washington in Seattle, University of California in Berkeley and at the City College of San Francisco—I was blessed to meet many talented and educated students. As an undergraduate student before, I could imagine the hardships and struggles that accompanied so many of these students, all attempting to find the “American Dream,” hoping to turn things around for themselves, their families, and their communities. In all my years of working with students of color from many communities, one group drew much of my attention. These were students from the Pacific who usually, in the U.S., identify themselves as Pacific Islanders. This identity is not always recognized, however. In many venues, they fall into the category “Asian American.” Sometimes, they are identified by specific national origin: Sāmoan²⁸, Tongan²⁹, native Hawaiian³⁰, Chamorro³¹, Filipino, and others.

In the past 17 years I have engaged Pacific Islander students who strike me as particularly humble and respectful of others, despite limited resources for them in higher education. I have witnessed these cultural values come into play in the events and organizations they build, in the church services they conduct, and in the social gatherings they put together. These values are even present during tense negotiations when students make certain demands for new programs or ask the institution for more services specifically targeting their communities. They do it with such grace and they do it well.

Still, Pacific Islanders across college and universities remain few. In institutional counts of their numbers it is clear that Pacific Islanders not only struggle to get into colleges but also struggle to finish³². Those who do find their way into post-secondary institutions are, in fact, if usually connected either to a strong family tradition of going to college or those offered athletic scholarships. Still, even with small numbers, they are one of the most vibrant and visible student populations. Most are prominent on athletic rosters. Others are student founders of some of the most popular student organizations on campus. And, despite their struggles, they manage to

²⁸ The term Sāmoan serves both as the national and ethnic identification regardless of polity. For example, Sāmoans from the Independent State of Samoa and the U.S. territory of American Samoa both identify themselves as culturally Sāmoan.

²⁹ The term Tongan is both the national, ethnic, and cultural identification.

³⁰ Refers to the indigenous peoples of Hawai’i.

³¹ Refers to the indigenous peoples of Guahan (Guam) and other outlying islands of the Mariana archipelago.

³² In the fall 2014, the University of Washington increased its PI numbers by 0.2%; at UC Berkeley .05%; and at the City College of San Francisco 1.1%. Data from Office of Admissions. CCSF, UW, UC Berkeley.

build cohesive groups³³ that remain.

What links these students and those who precede them in universities? What makes Pacific Islander students strong? This chapter explores this phenomena of one cultural element that draws all together many geographies and localities. That element is what I am calling Ocean³⁴. Ocean informs and organizes all islander experiences in school. Although ocean is used in many different contexts, there are three distinct areas students use ocean as both a guiding and organizing principle in getting through the everyday college life—community, culture, and curriculum.

Ocean as Community

One of the most powerful ways students survive the tribulations of college is to build a community. For some, communities are temporary. For Pacific Islander students however, ocean is about longevity transmitted with two common practices that defined for them the practice of community and thus ocean. These practices are the recognition of connections and linkages amongst themselves through the sharing of stories (“story-telling”), and the planning of cultural events that express and strengthen those connections. In all occasions, students seize and use every opportunity to remap and reroute their ocean in preparing for future generations of navigators.

Connections to Community: Linkages Trough “Story-Telling”

In the world of the Pacific, ocean is a word naming a place that connects land rather than separating it. And because the Pacific connects land, and people, then the stories that they share, are also connected. In fact, those stories are about connections. Participating in many Islander³⁵ student organization events, I always experienced what everyone there always experienced: the ocean is about these strong connections. A breakage from that practice of connecting almost spelled rough seas ahead on several occasions. Telling and sharing stories provided the navigation, helping them to strengthen bonds to recognize shared histories of struggle and oppression, and to create educational partnerships.

Strengthening the Ties

In several of their club meetings, a leader asked students to share something about their homelands or their cultural origins in the Pacific. A common theme arose: amongst its members was the importance of family and the role of their family in relation to all things each student was doing. In fact, for many, the number one reason for being in school was to change the economic conditions of their families. Ironically, family, according to many of them, was also the reason some could not get to school on time, attend club meetings, or work an extra job. One

³³ Between 1997 and 2010, several Pacific Islander organizations were built across these 3 campuses. Many are still active today putting on several events a year. The organizations at the University of Washington for example have succeeded in attaining permanent funding for their organizations.

³⁴ The ‘ocean’ is a metaphor to explain the organization and connections of life. It is used here in this dissertation as a way to explain PI community formations in higher education.

³⁵ The term “Islander” will be used here and throughout the dissertation to denote Pacific Islanders. This term is also in circulation within Pacific Islander social group circles.

student lamented about the contradiction:

“...I am here because my parents say that I have to be here in order to make our family stronger and provide a future for my family but it’s weird because how can I concentrate on school when they want me to work, take care of my siblings, and go to church.”³⁶

To an outsider, these complications might seem too difficult and too intense for young college students, but to the students themselves, these complications were all part of the life of an Islander.

“...It’s a tough life for me and my friends here at school, but we don’t concentrate on how hard it is to juggle all those things with our family, we think about how grateful I am to connect with people. We’re here for each other because we’re family. If one of us fails, we all fail.”³⁷

When they spoke of these things, they shared this aspect of their families, and, in a quirky way, almost mimicking what it means to be a part of a family, including—sharing resources, fighting among members, and finding constant support. Over time, all these experiences together strengthened their bonds and trust. Students took from this learning the means to build relationships, to love and support each other, just as they would in their own families or with friends in the absence of a family.

Recognizing Histories

A second common theme in “story-telling” for students was the origin narrative, the tale of how and when they arrived in the contiguous United States. On the surface the stories were about family. But deeper conversations revealed stories of migrations, of divergences, and of separation. Stories about sadness and being uprooted, as well as thoughts and reasons about leaving the homeland for better opportunities were common, too. And if students were well-versed in European and American histories of colonialism in the Pacific, then I heard stories of oppression, struggle, and cultural change and the difficulties adapting into another culture. When I asked several students about their Pacific histories, many of them shared stories of their migration and how their migrations were in part due to the “white man” coming to their islands. Many of them talk about the resultant effects of colonialism and how their families have struggled to reconcile their lives around this impressive cultural change and encounter. One student shared:

“...Our coming here is not of our doing. My parents told me that we came here because the palagi³⁸ made us do it....and that we had to learn a new way of life. Doing that was hard and still is hard for lots of people back home in Sāmoa.”³⁹

³⁶ Fatu Lefotu, talk-story with author, October 2007, Washington, in-person

³⁷ Futi Malaga, talk-story with author, October 2007, Washington, in-person

³⁸ The word “palagi” refers to white man or in broader terms “foreigner.” Today, it is interchangeable with colonizer.

³⁹ Pagopago, talk-story with author, December 2010, California, in-person.

Each of their stories were beautiful and complex, all of them are equally powerful in the ways they were told. The stories tell us how they have survived; they tell us where they are headed. The stories students recognize are those that quickly teach about adversity and also teach each how to make it through with community support. These story-telling gatherings, then, not only strengthen bonds, but also highlight the stories that are woven into this bond. The most important aspect of the practice of story-sharing, was the relationships that were made from the experience. One series of Pacific Islander Club meetings I have observed at the City College of San Francisco, Lia and Lome, gradually became friends, first because of their Sāmoan ancestry and then as they learned that they had followed parallel journeys to the United States. One of them shared:

“...I met Lia here in San Francisco and we started to hang out because we were from the same island but different villages. But she is here at school for the same reasons and because I understand what she is doing, I can relate to it and we can better support each other. When she doesn’t have money to eat, she always has my back. I do the same for her. I just learned that our families are also related⁴⁰”

The bonds between Lia and Lome have become stronger because they also learned from the stories that they are related,—a fact that immediately drew them into the circle of extended family.

Educational Partnerships

Probably one of the most powerful things to come out of these community gatherings are the study groups the students formed. Over quarters and semesters, students have set up study groups by subject and this created little islander communities within their college ocean. These groups wove a strong support net, facilitating studying and generally support all academic endeavors. Each group organized its own study table and rented facilities, bringing together students to tutor and mentor each other. On any given study day, about 20-25 students attend a group. Students also follow deeply-held Island protocols, some bringing food, others bringing materials and books to share. One amazing result of study table meetings was the formation of the Pacific Islander Partnerships in Education (PIPE)⁴¹ program. This is now a fully funded and institutionalized program at the University of Washington and at the City College of San Francisco. Thus, what began as a means to come together to support studies has grown into a program that confirms the place for Pacific Islanders inside the academies.

Rising Islands: Connections in Action

Story-telling has also created opportunities for gathering the whole Pacific Islander community giving the students a chance to test their connections to those beyond the academy.

⁴⁰ Lome Lumana’i, talk-story with author, California, October 2009, in person.

⁴¹ The PIPE program is operated by the Office of Minority and Diversity Affairs, the department of American Ethnic Studies, and the ASUW-Pacific Islander Student Commission at the University of Washington where it receives permanent funding for mentors. The program was later instituted at CCSF.

Students across these schools regularly plan and implement public events, bringing visibility to their three communities. This process of event production has broader implications for community building. These events bring together their immediate communities as well as the extended communities. Families and friends outside of the university attend their events. Several students like Futa, explain their motivations for these events in metaphor:

“...Bringing awareness to a new set of “rising islands” (upcoming generations of students) of the sea, helps expose educational struggles for Pacific Islanders today, and celebrate the arrival/survival of canoes to a new place of learning and a chance at future possibilities.”⁴²

Bringing Awareness

The formation of cultural and political events are integral to sustaining a community. For students, each event marked for them a time of revival, the moment when the ocean has finally arrived. In one conversation, a student, “Mika,” and I discussed how the events let the school know that we are here and that we’re here as a community. It marked the moment when our Pacific Islander community took a stand about the resources we need to address our struggles in higher education. Most other students talked about how these events gave them a sense of revival, and renewal, and of freedom and felt free from the confines of some “foreign” entity.

“...when I come to these events, I feel like I can identify with my native person. A part of me that is always mistakenly considered to be ‘Asian’ or ‘Asian American.’ Nothing about being ‘Asian’ but the experiences are different and feel different. These cultural events allow me to express who I am and share with others and students like me how our struggles relate to each other.”⁴³

Until this moment of recognition, Islanders had been identified within institutions as “Asian” or “Asian American.” This label, so commonly and ignorantly imposed, has masked the problems and complexities of forcing people to identify with something that barely, if ever, reflects them. All these cultural and political events, (described in more detail below) were not about fund-raising but rather were markers of the moment in history where Islanders in higher education begin to embark on a journey of their own in search of new possibilities for success. They are the new islands—the students— and they have risen.

Rough Seas Ahead

A second critical aspect of these events is the exposure to the campus community the struggles in higher education for Pacific Islander students. Strikingly, raising these issues also shaped alliances with other communities of color, similarly struggling inside these institutions. “Mika” who has been creating alliances for years with other communities’ talks about the importance of seeing the larger issue:

⁴² Futa Mealofa, talk-story with author, California, September 2009, in-person.

⁴³ Mika Eleele, talk-story with author, Washington, September 2009, in-person.

“...It’s important to that other communities hear our voices because it allows them to connect and compare our struggles to theirs. We find that we’re really not alone.”⁴⁴

In fact, each event drew students of other cultural communities in solidarity. The important issues raised include the lack of scholarships for Pacific Islander students, funding for essential cultural programming, courses that study their cultures/histories, and programs to recruit and retain students. As these issues were raised, the community got involved, engaging in community politics both within the institutions and the surrounding local cities.

The mere fact that other people from other communities of color come to support their events says a lot about how far across the landscape Islander students have traveled. This means that Islanders have also gone out to support events put on by other communities of color. One such example of these collaborations exist with the Native American student groups. These non-islander students, moreover, do not attend solely for Islander politics but rather, they are there to work together and build alliances. For Islander students, outsider’s attendance signifies how far we’ve come and how far we need to go. The moments they have to organize across communities, such as with Native American students, not only deepens their working relationship but also is a testament to the many possibilities that lie ahead for a community seeking to create a voice for themselves as the schools continue to make and remake themselves. This is important because according to Futa, “We cannot do this alone. We will need everyone if we’re going to succeed.” This is an opportunity to create a narrative of their community inside institutions.

Ocean as Culture

The school environment has not always been welcoming for Pacific Islander students. “Futi”, who continues to advocate for more programs talks about the difficulty of maintaining her grades without having a place to share her culture:

“...I feel that at times the school doesn’t really care for who I am. They just expect me to come and do what a ‘normal’ student should do—just study. But this has been difficult for me and many of my friends. We aren’t just people who can come to a place like the school to this. We come with a family, we come as a community, and we come as entire beings. But sometimes I feel the school tears us a part and dissects us, which makes it even harder to stay alive and stay in school.”⁴⁵

Even with recent developments such as plans for new courses and small funding to support a few events, difficulties continue. Students like Futi, and many others, continue to face a lack of permanent programs and services that are geared towards their communities. But despite that, these amazing students have found ways to re-imagine their school in ways that produce for

⁴⁴ Mika Eleele, talk-story with author, Washington, September 2009, in-person.

⁴⁵ Futi Malaga, talk-story with author, Washington, October 2009, in-person.

them opportunities to transport, situate, and practice their cultures, making their journey through education a lot easier to endure. Furthermore “Leone,” a good friend of “Futi’s” and many others similar to her have lamented about their school being a place of loneliness, isolation, homesickness, expensive, and invisible which makes it tougher to find meaning in their education or why they have embarked on this journey in the first place:

“...What makes it even more difficult for as Pacific peoples is that school becomes a lonely place. When we don’t feel supported by our school, we just don’t feel the need to be here. It’s weird because on one hand, we’re expected to do well in society by getting good jobs, but on the other, the very same place that is supposed to prepare us with the skills to get those jobs, doesn’t want us here. This is hard for many of us who rely heavily on our culture to get through school because culture gives us a way forward and our culture gives us meaning to understand how to move forward.⁴⁶”

These lamentations have had its results and throughout my experience working with Pacific Islander students, many have left school and have found other career interests due to the effects of their school environment. Those that have remained have continued to break the barriers of education to future generations of Pacific Islander students who might someday wish to come to school or return.

Imagining Ocean: Three Ways to think of the School

There are three imaginings that students have used to rethink their school environment from a place of loneliness and isolation. Although all are not neatly organized, their ideas have changed the landscape of their school environment. Students have imagined their school as an ocean in 3 ways: Imagine the ocean as a way to connect their homelands with the mainland, ocean as a space of possibilities by using indigenous knowledge, and ocean as security and familiarity.

Maintaining the Village: Outreach and Recruitment Programs

One of the most powerful ways students have addressed feelings of isolation is to think about their school as a place that connects their homeland and the mainland. The way to maintain this connection is through outreach and recruitment programs.

“...It’s obvious that we need a community to sustain ourselves and so to make this connection to the homeland because it is culture, you go and tell the gospel of education to students who have connections to our homeland even if they’re not actually from there.⁴⁷”

⁴⁶ Leone Ofu, talk-story with author, November 2009, California, in-person

⁴⁷ Leone Ofu, talk-story with author, November 2009, California, in-person.

This connection is so important because it is the very source that allows the students to transport and practice their cultures, especially for students born in the mainland. Most outsiders assume that those islanders born stateside have less understanding of indigenous cultures. That is not true, as is clear from the kinds of cultural productions that occur in the school that are connected to outreach and recruitment programs. How do they come to realize that they know their cultural practices? When they recognize their school as an ocean, they find the places in the school that allow them to create things for themselves. Imagining “school” as “ocean”, they also think of their families, their extended relatives, their communities, and of course, their elders. The ocean traditionally maintains these connections and the school fits into this world, it compass giving meaning to the institution of education. It is almost as if the village has never left them despite where they began and so while the school environment might feel like a place where the individual is developed and central, the ocean is where the collective/community is strengthened.

In 2007 at the University of California, students organized a series of meetings to address this isolation from their families generated by the schools. Many knew that few in their families had ever ventured into the schools. They were the first students from their families to experience college culture. This in itself caused feelings of isolation.

“...We have never been to these school before...it’s like new territory and new land but if we don’t come I or my other family peoples may not know what to expect if they tried to come here.”⁴⁸

To counter these feelings, they begin to brainstorm ideas for recruiting future students to the university. They began by addressing the invisibility caused by the labeling of Pacific Islanders as “API” or “Asian Pacific American”⁴⁹. This rubric, used commonly since the 1970’s not only made students feel out of place but it also made Pacific Islander student data unavailable or almost difficult to retrieve at both the local and national level. Thus it is difficult to examine the extent of school involvement in the Pacific Islander community.

“When we first tried to request information from the admissions office about the number of Pacific Islanders that applied and admitted into the school since 2000, the response was that the office of admissions didn’t disaggregate the group from Asians and Asian American. In others words, in their office, we’re considered ‘Asian’”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Viliami Tokouso, talk-story with author, November 2009, California, in-person.

⁴⁹ Depending on community and geography both “Asian Pacific American” and “Asian American” encompasses all Asian and Pacific Islander groups.

⁵⁰ Tikona Alualu, talk-story with author, California, November 2009, in-person

Furthermore, this hiding of Islanders had seen years and years passed with barely any contestations to the rubric. It was fairly recent, in fact, that Islanders, particularly those coming into higher education, have begun to object the misrepresentations of their identities:

“I’m sure others before us have challenged the notion that we are only athletes and entertainers but now that there are more of us on campus and are educated, we see how hurtful those images are.⁵¹”

At the U of W, just a few years earlier in 2000 students organized meetings with administrators to discuss making data available so that university services could be appropriately geared towards the Pacific Islander community. Of course, the students were met with resistance:

“We demanded that their admissions office begin to disaggregate data on Pacific Islanders and have more categories that allowed Pacific Islander students to check boxes appropriate to their cultural or ethnic identities. We were met with resistance because in Washington State, we were considered ‘Asian’ and therefore over-represented.⁵²”

With the support of Vice President, Dr. Myron Apilado who is of Filipino descent, along with unrelenting student advocates from several organizations and faculty members, that new found relationship would open the way for the building of outreach and recruitment programs for Pacific Islander students.

Polynesian Day & Polynesian Student Alliance

In 1999, the Polynesian Student Alliance (PSA) was founded at the University of Washington to support and advocate for the recruitment of Polynesian/Pacific Islander students. At that time, students of the Micronesian Islands Club⁵³, a handful of Polynesian students, some on the football team, and a few non-athlete students, constituted the small Islander group at the university. The PSA began organizing meetings inviting other Islanders who were on campus but not aware of campus politics. One of the many reasons for PSA’s formation had to do with the growing tensions between settlers⁵⁴ and Indigenous Pacific Islanders. Indigenous students were feeling different when they would attend Hui Ho Aloha Ulana⁵⁵ club meetings.

⁵¹ Daniela Sala, talk-story with author, California, December 2009, in-person

⁵² Mafi Togafau, talk-story with author, December 2009, Washington, in person

⁵³ The Micronesian Islands Clubs was established a few years earlier than the PSA.

⁵⁴ Settlers refer to those peoples, most on-indigenous, that have “settled” and continue to reside in places that were illegally and formerly colonized.

⁵⁵ Hui Ho Aloha Ulana is one of the largest Hawai’i Clubs at any college or university on the west coast of the U.S. and quite possibly the nation. Majority of its members are students of families who have settled in Hawai’i but are not indigenous. However, there are indigenous students who are members of the organization.

“As a former member of the Hawai’i Club, I joined because I felt I could make a difference in sharing my perspective as a native Hawai’ian. I quickly learned that they were not interested in the struggles of indigenous peoples and islanders. It was only an organization interested in social events.⁵⁶”

This came to a head at an annual spring lu’au⁵⁷ sponsored and put on by the Hui Hoaloha Ulana Club celebrating Hawaiian culture through dancing and eating. A few weeks following that event a member of the PSA denounced the annual lu’au in an editorial in the student newspaper:

“The annual event ‘culturally appropriates’ native/indigenous Pacific Islander culture and offers nothing more than misrepresentations of our identities.⁵⁸”

Worse, the money raised did not go back to native communities where it might have revived and preserved the very cultural practices the annual spring lu’au performed. The money instead went to fund “social” events like ski trips, boat cruises, camping, etc. The new organization that arose at this time had the support of a few faculty and administrators. Eventually, it grew into one of the most powerful outreach and recruitment programs. In place of the traditional lu’au, the PSA established “Polynesian Day” or “Poly Day” for short that blended an outreach and recruitment program and culture displays of culture that open to the campus community which is still in existence today.

One of the fundamental reasons for the creation of “Poly Day” was to raise awareness for the educational needs of Polynesian and Pacific Islander students.

“When we first built ‘PolyDay’ we kept in mind resources. We wanted to share our culture, but we wanted it to be free to the campus community. We didn’t feel that people should pay but we felt that the university should pay to fund our recruitment programs and allow us to bring Pacific Islander students from local high schools to be exposed to the possibilities of higher education.⁵⁹”

The goal was also a response to the institution for its lack of services to the greater Pacific Islander communities:

“PolyDay was about a voice for our people. It gave us a chance, through our culture, to talk about our needs and our desire to be heard. But it also became a way to connect to our

⁵⁶ Lili’u Malama, talk story with author, October 2009, Washington, in person.

⁵⁷ The annual spring event has been in existence for over 50 years.

⁵⁸ The Daily @ UW, Spring 1999, Seattle.

⁵⁹ Puloka Puloka, talk-story with author, October 2008, Washington, in person.

students in the local high schools, to show how important it is to preserve our culture and that our culture can be used to guide us through school.⁶⁰”

Poly Day also became a response to the “cultural appropriation” claim being made by the PSA to other groups who continue to misrepresent Pacific Islander cultures.

Built as a two-part program, Poly Day ushers in students who were serviced through PSA’s tutoring program called the Polynesian Outreach Program (POP) which runs throughout the academic year from August to April at local high schools across the Seattle and Tacoma areas. For the first part of the day, students are transported in, provided breakfast, and are placed in college workshops around topics such as culture, financial aid, admissions, and social justice. After lunch, the students and the public are treated to cultural performances by student members of the PSA. The ultimate goal of putting on this annual event is to motivate students:

“Bringing our students to our campus means we have a hand in making a difference in their lives. Athletics is not the only option and most importantly they are smart and capable students. Poly Day is about fulfilling that mission until we can reach our high school students to give them better alternatives for life choices and education.”⁶¹

In hopes of inspiring Pacific Islander by expanding educational opportunities to the University of Washington the pipeline continues to draw more students seeing attendance rise from a low of 20 students back in 2000 to about 175 students in 2014. In its 15th annual celebration in 2014, Poly Day seems to be serious about continuing the work to provide a consistent community on campus by increasing the numbers of Islanders to the school. It is definitely sustaining a village for many more generations to come.

Spatial Possibilities: Indigenous Knowledge: Pacific Islander Speaker Series

Seafaring Islanders have a famous saying when they are voyaging the ocean. They say that the canoe never retraces the same path. In other words, depending on your reference point if one thinks that the route from Samoa to the Philippines is in northwesterly direction, then, travelled over time, we can say that although it is the general direction for a canoe to take from Samoa to the Philippines from the southeast towards the northwest the precise route across the ocean is unmarked. Even though voyagers over centuries travel this route, their canoes never traced precisely the same path. For students who are reconnecting with their cultures after being in the contiguous states for years, these kinds of indigenous perspectives help to think of their school as spaces of possibilities, of many routes through a single space. Multiple routes differ for each trip, still get to a goal. For the institution, this means not demanding a single route from each student. Both the student and their teachers must think of several ways to get to the goal. Another truth in this saying is that a storm in the path of canoe voyaging to the Philippines is not cause for turning back but rather cause for finding a different way to the destination. Helping to

⁶⁰ Puloka Puloka, talk-story with author, October 2008, Washington, in person.

⁶¹ Tumau Valu, talk-story with author, October 2008, Washington, in person.

alleviate some of the students' feelings of isolation, this kind of traditional wisdom inspires hope and allows students to also imagine new kinds of possibilities to voyaging their education or think about the possible outcomes from staying the course:

“Taking courses that talk about my cultures allows me to see a way through the rough seas ahead. Knowing that my people created ways of seeing the world and surviving it allows me to see my own path no matter the time and distance.”⁶²

Talanoa Speaker Series

Using such indigenous knowledge to guide their way, students at the City College of San Francisco created the annual Pacific Islander Speaker Series. This has evolved to be called “Talanoa”⁶³ or conversation. The development of the speaker series was an opportunity for expanding ideas for majors and career paths and to expand community networks and resources. Students did this by advertising the subjects and times of the talks through email and visiting classes to do small presentations. By notifying the campus administrators of the visiting speakers in the series, it kept administrators apprised of the ongoing social and cultural issues their Pacific Islander populations have been contending with in hopes that an awareness develops to support and create future programs addressing their educational needs.

As I think about these events, three themes come to mind. First, I think the speaker series served as a source of inspiration, suggesting the many career possibilities in career fields available to students after they finished college. Second, the speakers themselves helped to expand the school community by linking students with their own professions such as public health, nursing, or teacher. Finally, the speaker series moved beyond Pacific Islands Studies area to inform and educate the whole of CCSF about the work and political concerns of Pacific Islander community activists and professionals. Evy Pati, a rising student leader of Samoan ancestry, helped to organize one of the most successful Talanoa events:

“Our club members talked about themes we could use to decide the kind of speakers we wanted to invite. Our speaker series focused on people in our community who were engaged in the political arena or were community activists. But we didn’t just want anyone. We wanted women because we felt that women’s voices in our community are always silent.”⁶⁴

The speakers helped counter Islander students’ isolation. Because the series continued throughout an entire semester, the messages had important continuity. Public health officials, teachers from local high schools and colleges, and community activist, all visited. The latter

⁶² Evy Pati, talk story with author, January 2012, California, in person

⁶³ Talanoa generally means conversation or to speak. It is two words combined. “tala” meaning words or story; “noa” meaning to tie or bind. Put together it means the “stories that bind” or “stories tied together.” It’s also interesting to note that the word “noa” also means name or title. Name and tie refers to genealogy. For example, when one asks what is your name or “O ai kou i noa,” the literal translation is “Who are your ties?” or generally, “Who are your names/genealogies?”

⁶⁴ Evy Pati, talk story with author, October 2010, California, in person.

were all involved in many causes important to the students. For example, Natalie Ah Soon and Taunu'u Ve'e spoke about the importance of using our culture to heal our bodies. For most students, however, the most important result of the visits was the opportunity to meet the speakers:

“Most times you just hear of their names in the community, but to actually see the in person gives you a sense of fulfillment. You finally see them in the work that they do. It's humbling because they take the time out of their busy schedules to come share their knowledge. I also like how they spoke about what it's like to go through college and finish⁶⁵”

As the series has continued through 12 semesters, each talk has proved to be a source of encouragement. Connections between students and community leaders and professionals have also flourished. In fact after some visits, speakers returned voluntarily to support their students, especially in final presentations. Some helped to students to transfer to other universities by helping them with personal statements and also organizing tours to the universities they attended.

Security & Familiarity: Pacific Islander Partnerships in Education

Sometimes schools whether it be CCSF, UW, or UC Berkeley, can be places of hostility and turbulence. Every Islander student feels the pressures of juggling many demands from work, schoolwork, families, and from personal lives. Centering the ocean in their lives not only makes connections to community and culture, but it also brings about peace and calm that help them navigate turbulent times and isolation.

At the University of Washington, students created the Pacific Islander Partnerships in Education (PIPE) program adding another piece to the map of their educational voyage. PIPE is a mentorship program, pairing newly admitted students with upper-class students. Mentorship by more advanced students was designed to address the high drop-out rates of Pacific Islander students at UW. In fact, the drop-out rate was alarming. Although statistics were not available, stories shared by the students in their tight-knit community were enough to prove that many of them were leaving their education to pursue other things:

“...A lot of our friends were leaving [school] because some found it easier to get quick money by working a job. Their families needed them to work and I don't think they understand that an education will increase their chances of better paying jobs in the long run...Some of those jobs were the military because it's a guaranteed pay...⁶⁶”

Besides the need to find quick-paying jobs, other factors contributed to student drop-outs such as a lack of faculty, lack of supporting staff, and administrators, resources to pay for school, and most importantly students not having the basic skills to thrive in college courses:

⁶⁵ Sweetheart Tupuola, talk story with author, October 2011, California, in person.

⁶⁶ Sita Pangilinan, talk story with author, April 2006, Washington, in-person

“Many of our students lack the financial tools and resources to pay for their education. If there are scholarships, they are competing with groups under the API label which means they are stereotypically seen as ‘model minority’ and many don’t do well in scholarship competitions. As one of the few faculty of color on this campus and probably the only one identifying as Pacific Islander, students are immediately drawn to me but having only one faculty member to so many students cannot fulfill students’ needs. One the biggest impediments is that students come to the university having only the basic skills and are not prepared. My point here is that the problem supporting our Pacific Islander students is extensive and beyond the university. We cannot wait until they come to college.⁶⁷”

The role of PIPE was key, then. Developing partnerships created opportunities to form study groups or study partners in hopes that Islander retention would increase:

“PIPE was developed to help students in their education. The ultimate goal was not only to retain students but also to successfully graduate them.⁶⁸”

We quickly realized that most of the students—low-income and first generation—found studying difficult. Often, their families didn’t know how to support them other than to provide what material resources they could:

“I love my family but being in college especially when you’re the first one in your family to ever venture off into college is unknown territory. There are things about college that I cannot go home and talk to my parents about...It’s not that they don’t care or are not smart, they just aren’t familiar about how college works. Many of us first-timers actually are teaching many of our relatives about college. I’m lucky to even be in college and as much as possible I try not to ask my parents for anything because I know they are struggling financially as well.⁶⁹”

PIPE also provided stipends to upper-class students by creating mentorship positions. This helped to cover the costs of their mentorship meetings but also helped these students with their school expenses. Because students often shared about the lack of existing resources at the institution, PIPE became a program that helped to coordinate and organize university resources:

“Being in the PIPE program, my mentor helped me to find resources at the library. I honestly had refused for a while to step in the library because the feeling of being in

⁶⁷ Dr. Rick Bonus, talk-story with author, April 2007, California, in-person.

⁶⁸ Mika Eleele, talk-story with author, April 2005, California, in-person.

⁶⁹ Futi Malaga, talk-story with author, May 2007, in-person.

there was quite over-whelming. Many times I felt I didn't belong. But the mentors in PIPE helped me to get over that. They also helped me to get through things emotionally even when I couldn't get through tough times with my family, they were always there willing to listen. Sometimes you need that to make it through.⁷⁰”

Although PIPE could not save all the students that left the institution, the program became a kind of moving center for many of the students that remained. It is where students taught each other to be role models, where they developed learning skills and performed research. They worked on projects together that focused on integrating culture and research and also met up to settle disputes with others within their communities, work on term papers or group presentations:

“What I liked about PIPE, looking back at the program, was that it wasn't only about school things. It also became an all-in-one central program that allowed me to talk out issues I had with other members of the community. In many ways it helped avoid fights (but I won't go into that ha!), it helped to focus more on my studies and support with writing papers. I also liked how the focus of my projects in my ethnic studies courses was infusing culture into the work that I was doing and it was helpful to have PIPE mentors and faculty supporting us during these times.⁷¹”

What I learned from the stories of these students this is how addressing isolation is process rather than something can be fixed overnight. In fact, a common thing I find at all three campuses that PIPE at UW has taught me is that isolation itself does not go away completely: it takes a community and so many links, both weak and strong, and of course strong student leaders themselves to make a program like PIPE work. If we take a look at PIPE over a decade we find that there isn't anything exciting or boring other than a community that continues to take on the challenges of finding a home in school and making meaning of their education with the time that they have in school.

⁷⁰ Malia Koko, talk-story with author, May 2005, in person.

⁷¹ Vake Togafau, talk-story with author, October 2005, California, in-person.



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3



Figure 3.4

Ocean in Curriculum: Advocating for Pacific Studies

Ocean also came to shape curriculum. When I arrived at CCSF, I taught the only course on Pacific Islander cultures and communities. Courses in other departments, as in UW and UC Berkeley, rarely offered anything on Pacific Islanders: if they did mention PI history or culture, these were lumped in with other groups. This last part of the chapter focuses on the process advocating for Pacific Studies curriculum. Critical Pacific Islands Studies along with a history of its formation in the U.S. mainland, will be covered extensively in chapter 4.

All three institutions, CCSF, UW, and CAL, offered students unique circumstances in which to implement the new curriculum. Four-year universities posed more difficulties. A

community college like CCSF proved an easier place to advance curriculum. At each, however, three areas of student advocacy developed—identifying a faculty mentor who can help guide curriculum construction, connecting with administrators sympathetic to the cause, and reaching out to the wider Pacific Islander communities outside of the institutions.

Like all new ideas for programs, conversations usually starts when students have an interests to create or implement new curriculum. Across three schools, the general path to creating a course was identifying a faculty mentor that was interested in the work of the students. At UW for example, students identified Dr. Rick Bonus in the department of American Ethnic Studies who mentored students and served as faculty-advisor for many of the student-initiated programs. One of the biggest aspects of this faculty-student relationship was the connections to administrators who had access to program funding:

“It was important to connect with Dr. Bonus. He became the link to other resources and other faculty who were already working on Pacific Islander issues like Dr. McGrath and Dr. Kahn in anthropology. Dr. Bonus had that student vibe and was easy for students to relate to him. He taught us how to engage with administrators and best strategies for preparing reports for funding requests. But more than that, he helped us to think about curriculum and what it was we wanted to learn in Pacific Studies.”⁷²

I was involved at the University of Washington from 1997-2003, part of the outreach to Vice President Dr. Myron Apilado and professors McGrath, Kahn of anthropology and professors Sumida and Bonus of American ethnic studies. In addition to these faculty people, we students organized within our respective organizations—Polynesian Student Alliance, the Micronesian Islands Club, and the Filipino American Student Association. For Pacific Islands Studies, we were also fortunate to have Pacific Islander graduate students who not only mentored undergraduates but also helped with curriculum building when they had the time out of their busy schedules. The first meeting was held by faculty from American Ethnic Studies and Anthropology. Initially, faculty in both departments played a sort of “tug-of-war” over the field and its formation. Eventually a compromise resulted in a cross-listed course that was first offered in the spring of 2000 and every spring since then.

Both programs from the UW have not made any additional moves to add courses from the time I arrived as a PhD student in 2003. My cohort, unusually, included two of us from the PI community. The other student, Michael Tuncap, who is Chamorro and also a UW alumnus, joined me in our organizing. At UC Berkeley, the students had the support of Dr. Patricia Hilden, a Native American Studies faculty and Dr. Michael Omi of Asian American Studies, who helped to provide units to offer courses in the department of Ethnic Studies where I had the opportunity to offer CAL’s first courses in Pacific Islands Studies. The courses focused on colonialism, histories of militarization in the Pacific, and contemporary issues on culture in the diaspora. Over a span of three years of student meetings with department chairs and the chancellor at one point, the director of Native American Studies agreed to hire an assistant

⁷² Vake Togafau, talk-story with author, July 2005, California, in-person.

professor of Pacific Islands Studies, although, no such candidate materialized. From that point on, only isolated courses were offered here and there by the ethnic studies department.

At CCSF, students advocated with the department of Interdisciplinary Studies (IDST) where they found native Hawaiian professor Pritchard, already teaching courses in history who eventually helped to organize students to launch a course in 2002. The course in Pacific Studies was originally housed in Asian American studies but was moved over to IDST as the chair did not want anyone to teach it unless they had a degree in Pacific Islands Studies. After the passing of professor Pritchard, Professor Fuifuilupe Niumeitolu worked closely with students at CCSF to maintain the only course in Pacific Islands Studies until in the fall of 2007, I was graciously asked and supported by professor Niumeitolu to take over the course where I have remained since. From 2007 until 2014, I and our students, along with many other allies, administrators, and community members together built an official certificate program in Critical Pacific Islands Studies that was launched in the fall of 2014.

Unfortunately, since 2007, there has been a decline in the advocacy of Pacific Studies at both the UW and UC. The enthusiastic organizing at UW and 2004-2007 at UC lapsed as students graduated or left school and faculty retired, replaced by people with no interest in Pacific Islands Studies. For both schools, it's important to think here that their positioning as research-one institutions mean changes comes only slowly. In other words, if there are demands for changes or additions to curricula, they are met with administrators and faculty intent on keeping the disciplinary status quo. Suggestions for expanding or demands for inclusion were regularly met with opposition by faculty, usually justified by explanations that current faculty work in the department was already over-committed. For a field like "Ethnic Studies" however, dismissing communities of color and their demands offers many ironies. The faculty's purported inspiration for their scholarship on race, cultures, and ethnicity are these same communities. Students also found that keeping these conversations alive and up to date was difficult.

There were a few years at both UW and UCB when a younger group of students matured and continued the work of those who had graduated. Sometimes they were able to "pass the torch" smoothly. This happened for example at UW in 2005 and CAL in 2007. Since 2007, however, both the UW and UC have seen advocacy disappear. This doesn't mean that students have stopped thinking of ways to create programs that legitimate the intellectual study of the Pacific and its peoples. Perhaps what has happened is more of those who had been strong advocates and the voices of PI students have gone on to graduate school, many attaining their Masters and PhD degrees:

"What is amazing is that the students who started and pushed these conversations were trail blazers. It would have been nice for them to stay and keep up the fight but they would be better advocates with professional degrees and hopefully one day come back better armed and ready to discuss strategies for building new programs."⁷³

⁷³ Dr. Rick Bonus, talk story with author, Washington, June 2006, in-person.

As former students begin their professional lives as teachers, professors, and administrators, they find new sites for advocating for Pacific Islands studies. Thus the students' argument there are no administrators or faculty who look like them is beginning to alter.

“Someone once said that others won't do it for you, you have to get up and do it yourself. Islanders can no longer count on others to be the voices for their needs in school. Now it's time for us to get up and do those things, the same way our ancestors got up to navigate the ocean.”⁷⁴

Ocean for these students in the school is about their communities, their cultures, and the kinds of things included in their education.

“For us, the ocean is our archive, it is the place where knowledge is produced, contested, rejected, recreated, and stored. It is the space that is sacred because it connects all living forms by connecting the experiences and the cultures that are produced by people being around this entity. We draw inspiration and we draw struggle and we draw our way of life which gives us our way to the world.”⁷⁵

It is so fitting then that ocean explains exactly what these students have been dealing with. It is a place that is unstable, that consistently needs to be cared for, and cannot be something that can be sustained on its own. However, the ocean is infinite, a place with so many ideas, a place with an infinite wealth of ideas and sources and potentials, and it is definitely a place that brings so many possibilities. The ocean is their site of resistance and navigation. It allows them to reach back into indigenous practices that brings them both life and light to understanding a world of oppression.

“It's troubling the things we are going through today because of year of colonialism and destruction. But ocean gives us hope and reminds us that there are ways to navigate around a storm.”⁷⁶

It is an amazing element of their lives that they have to take care of because it is the foci of their cultures and thus power. Their ocean of communities, cultures, and education are things to celebrate but also things to keep an eye on as they whither new challenges ahead. What makes me believe that they'll succeed is their constant desire to change and share their stories.

⁷⁴ Daniela Sala, talk-story with author, August 2006, in-person.

⁷⁵ Tumau Valua, talk-story with author, August 2006, in-person.

⁷⁶ Andrew Tuala, talk story with author, May 2010, Washington, in-person.

“Our ocean demands that we live up to the expectations of our ancestors and bring to life what it means to be people of the ocean, especially in school.⁷⁷”

⁷⁷ Emani Ilaoa, talk-story with author, May 2012, California, in-person

Chapter 4: Critical Pacific Islands Studies

“...I become a stronger person and better student when I am given the chance to succeed and be who I am. We are the ocean.”

--Andrew Tuala

In this chapter, I will cover the movement for Pacific Islands Studies across three campuses—City College of San Francisco (CCSF), University of Washington (UW), and University of California, Berkley (CAL)—by looking at some of the resistances and challenges students faced in pushing for the formation of a new program. The main question in this chapter is why culture is important in the classroom. To answer this question, the chapter covers three areas: “Culture,” as a site of critique and resistance, shapes the first. Here I talk about the student movement for Pacific Islands studies at these institutions. Second, I discuss how implementing culture in the classroom can reveal how dominant culture (whiteness) has long been invisible in the curriculum. Students then choose various reactions to the implementation of PI culture in the classroom. Some respond positively; others reject a culturally-inspired syllabus and curriculum. I this chapter by narrating the results: what happens to students after taking the courses and after they’ve connected this “missing link” to larger events in the school and in the larger community. Thus, this chapter is not only about the push for the presence of Pacific Islands Studies but also about the on-going processes and struggles involved with group and school transformation.

Culture as Critique and Resistance

When I was a student at the University of Washington in the late 90’s, colleges and universities were dealing with the public mandate that race not be used as justification for admissions into universities (that is that there be no “affirmative action.”) Of course, this challenged schools’ efforts to diversify their student population. These movements to remove race as a justification for admission followed California’s landmark decision called Proposition 209⁷⁸ in 1996 striking race from UC admissions. That case began a trend that was soon followed by others including states like Texas and Washington which passed their own laws. Because of Washington’s new I-200⁷⁹ law, the UW’s work to increase Pacific Islander student enrollment (and that of other minority groups) became even tougher. For those students already admitted to the university they faced increased work and found themselves directing many of their cultural programs to now include outreach and recruitment components.

Pacific Islander students from several student groups—the Micronesian Islands Club, Polynesian Student Alliance, the Filipino American Student Association, and the newly formed Pacific Islander Student Commission—began to think about how inconsistent it would be to

⁷⁸ Proposition 209 also known as the “California Civil Rights Act” which amended the state’s constitution through a ballot measure preventing the state’s public agencies from considering race, sex, or ethnicity particularly in areas public employment, contracting, and education.

⁷⁹ Initiative 200 in Washington State was a ballot measure passed in 1998 that prohibited the state from considering race, ethnicity, sex, color, or national origin in the operation of public employment, contract, or education.

recruit new students to their schools while not having a program or courses in Pacific Studies as an academic option:

“...It was a double-standard for us. We felt that it didn’t make sense to recruit students to the UW when there are no programs or classes that studied the Pacific and their cultures. We’re not saying that all would want to major in Pacific Islands studies but it wouldn’t hurt to offer something that would make UW their home feel a bit more comfortable.”⁸⁰

The latter were absent and although the UW had offered courses through American Ethnic Studies on Filipinos and Filipino Americans and in Anthropology on Tahiti, there were no courses about any other Pacific Islanders.

Student leaders then began to push for new courses in Pacific Islands Studies. There were some courses about the Pacific Islands taught in Anthropology, but for many reasons, Pacific Islander found them unsatisfactory. Stephen Sumida, chair of American Ethnic Studies at the time did develop a course in Hawai’i’s Literature. Sadly, the course offered literary works by mostly Asian American writers from Hawai’i. Very few were on and about the Indigenous Pacific. This course held us for a while but students soon became hungrier for courses studying the cultures of the Pacific, particularly those places colonized by the U.S.—Guam, Hawai’i, Samoa, and the Philippines:

“I remember taking the course by Professor Sumida. That course was great and it inspired us to think about how we as students would begin to develop courses about Islanders in other regions of the Pacific.”⁸¹

Working together and following the lead of the Filipino community, Pacific Islander students linked up with Professor Rick Bonus, newly-hired professor in American Ethnic Studies. With his support and mentorship, students began to develop a series of other programs. Over time, in meetings with Professor Bonus, with faculties of American Ethnic Studies, Anthropology, and the Office of Minority of Affairs, a plan for a program grew that would include an outreach and recruitment which included tutoring and mentoring services to high schools, retention of current Pacific Islander students, cultural programming, and the development of courses in the Pacific. The first few meetings focused on a 4-tier plan directed toward potential and newly admitted Pacific Islander students. First, tutoring programs in local high schools, would send UW Pacific Islander students into the Seattle and Tacoma school districts where a high number of Pacific Islander students were enrolled. Outreach and Recruitment programs then brought high school students to campus for workshops and visits. Cultural programs put on throughout the year by student organizations attracted community members, and retention programs provided mentorships for younger UW students who worked with upper-division Islanders. This system soon expanded and the fifth tier included new

⁸⁰ Natalie Naputi, talk-story with author, Washington 2008, in-person.

⁸¹ Lolohea Mata’utia, talk story with author, Washington 2000, in-person.

courses and new curriculum. A kind of new Pacific Islander cultural renaissance at UW was emerging.

The first part of this approach were heavily successful. Students organized powerful and creative events throughout my undergraduate years. Some students even ventured into documentary and film making, producing a documentary about Pacific Islanders and their experiences at the UW. This film is now in university collections at several schools in the U.S.⁸² Outreach programs to the high schools were also highly successful, as was the student effort to get a new commission office—the Pacific Islander Student Commission⁸³—within the Associated Students of the UW—the student governing body. A new retention program was formed, the Pacific Islander Partnerships in Education ((PIPE), a fully funded mentorship program that continues to receive institutional support.

These years, then, proved to be a time when Pacific Islander students mobilized to push the boundaries of inclusivity and to challenge the university on its claims of diversity. Students successfully advocated for new spaces in various cultural centers where they created strong coalitional ties with other communities of color, especially with Native Americans. Students even successfully petitioned the Office of Admissions to begin separating Pacific Islander numbers from Asian America.

While this new and critical movement and cultural renaissance opened path-ways for Pacific Islander students, something was still missing. That void was the absence of any academic program that focused on the Pacific, despite the existence of other programs and departments that addressed the intellectual worlds of other groups. The Pacific Islander movement thus turned its attention to the development of a Pacific Islander Studies Program. We began convening meetings with several faculty and students to discuss the issue. Within a year, anthropology and American Ethnic Studies would developed one cross-listed course entitled “U.S. Pacific Islander Cultures”⁸⁴.

In the spring of 2001, the course began. An eager and excited PI community whose members spent a year of meetings and negotiations about a course, began enrolling. A colleague of mine remembers the first day:

“I was filled with optimism and was really interested in how the delivery of the course material would progress. That day was awesome and I remember thinking for a moment that I was a part of an historical moment in my education and in the history of our community.”⁸⁵

On the first day of enrollment the course quickly filled, forcing anthropology to increase the course capacity to 55 students. A waiting list grew. By the time the course started, however,

⁸² The film entitled, “*Forward: A Story about Pacific Islanders*” was produced by native Hawaiian filmmaker Kapi’olani Lee in conjunction with the Native American Studies department at UW.

⁸³ Chamoru student Michael Tuncap along with many other students successfully advocated for the formation of the Pacific Islander Student Commission which effectively split the Asian Pacific Student Commission into two separate offices.

⁸⁴ Tongan PhD student in Anthropology Tevita Ka’ili served as the graduate student instructor for this first course.

⁸⁵ Puloka Puloka, talk-story with author, August 2008, in-person.

very few of this list had been added, emphasizing the desperate need for such courses. The course's first teacher was Dr. Barbara McGrath, a medical anthropologist, who had studied Tongan societies in the U.S. Students who took the course were slightly disappointed over the curriculum because it focused very little on Islanders in the diaspora but continued to enroll since whatever the course's problems, students found it a phenomenal experience to sit in a college class focused on the P.I. community. The formation of this course proved to be the height of our movement and instilled in us hope that one day a whole program might develop:

“We would come to believe that our work at UW would really create a new program. I think as young as we were, we didn't know how difficult it was to actually develop a program. It wasn't something you demand and you all of a sudden get. I realized that even amongst faculty in a single department it can be really political.”⁸⁶

Within a few years, however, those student leaders who led the movement for such a program went on to graduate school while others graduated and pursued careers away from UW, putting further activity on hold indefinitely. Still, for the first time in the university's history, the course launched a serious dialogue about the importance of academic programs including the inclusion of diasporic Pacific cultures into the curriculum.

This course was not the only result of the student-driven meetings. Showcasing Islander intellectual and cultural production was a series that brought important guests to campus. One such visitor was Dr. Vilsoni Hereniko⁸⁷, who was working on film⁸⁸ that included the oral histories of Rotuma⁸⁹. Students would also invite Native Hawaiian activist and Professor Haunani Kay-Trask⁹⁰ to speak on indigenous land rights. Students organized dance groups from Aotearoa (such as a Dramatic Impact⁹¹) and from the local community, sponsoring cultural events that drew thousands of community people to campus. The course became a new center to create events and link existing programs at the UW.

⁸⁶ Philip Mateaki, talk-story with author, August 2006, in-person.

⁸⁷ Professor Vilsoni Hereniko was professor of Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai'i at the time.

⁸⁸ That film entitled, “Pear ma Taf” or the “The Land Has Eyes” would be released in 2004.

⁸⁹ Rotuma is an island within the political jurisdiction of Fiji. However, the people of Rotuma commonly refer to themselves as an independent nation.

⁹⁰ Professor Haunani Kay-Trask is professor of Native Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawai'i.

⁹¹ Dramatic Impact was a group formed out of Aotearoa (New Zealand) the comprised of students whose mission was fighting drugs and gang violence through performance arts and music.



Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2



Figure 4.3



Figure 4.4



Figure 4.5

During our time organizing at the UW, we depended on one crucial argument: preservation of culture through curriculum. Although we had Pacific Islander programs in place and functioning, nothing was more important to us than seeing this last endeavor materialize:

“...Building a class and a program was so important that we didn’t feel complete without it. Our non-Pacific Islander friends were enjoying courses that focused on their cultures and to us that was merely a dream. But it didn’t have to be that way. UW could and should be a place that is diverse and its curriculum should reflect that. To many of us a program or a class on Pacific Islander societies was a practical way of preserving our culture.”⁹²

When I arrived at UC Berkeley as a doctoral student in Ethnic Studies in 2003, I and many others were immediately taken aback, again, by the lack of courses in the department. I and other colleagues, Michael Tuncap, Joanne Rondilla, and Jordan Gonzalez, and many more others to follow begin to organize both graduate and undergraduate students under the newly formed graduate group Indigenous Pacific Islander Alliance (IPIA). The group brought together Pacific Islander student-athletes and students of other disciplines around discussions about courses in the Pacific and the creation similar programs that Tuncap and I had experience building at UW during our undergraduate years. Two goals were created out of these discussions: find ways to offer courses and advocate for a new Pacific Island Studies concentration within Ethnic Studies. While these two goals were primarily ones for IPIA, undergraduate students would go on to create an organization called PAC or Pacific Islanders @ CAL. Although the focus of that group was to organize undergraduates and create outreach and recruitment programs, the work of both

⁹² Philip Mateaki, talk-story with author, Washington, 2006, in-person.

groups together would create a voice—a crucial voice in pushing for Pacific Islands Studies courses.

In our first year as graduate students, Tuncap and I had several discussions with our first year professors regarding the Pacific. Every opportunity we had in our graduate seminars our discussions and talking points would include the Pacific. For both of us this had to be done. We felt the need to familiarize our cohort about Pacific Islanders and to begin inserting the language into graduate discussions. Tuncap said it better during one of our conversations after a graduate seminar:

“Our presence is important in graduate school more than ever. We have to start talking about our communities because people continue to see us as API. If we don’t do it now, then our coming to graduate school is meaningless.”⁹³

Taking inspiration from these conversations, I immediately set a meeting in the spring of 2005 with Dr. Michael Omi who was chair of Ethnic Studies at the time. In our first set of meetings which included preparation for committee memberships and ideas for the kind of work I wanted to pursue in the field, we discussed opportunities to offer a course in Pacific Islander Studies. Our conversations included the long-term goals of implementing such a concentration but for the immediate time, Professor Omi supported our requests by making units available for the design of a graduate course in Ethnic Studies 103: Introduction to Pacific Islander⁹⁴ Studies. Under the supervision of Dr. Michael Omi and my mentor, Dr. Patricia Hilden of Native American Studies, the department offered the university’s first course in Pacific Islands Studies in the fall of 2005. Furthermore, this gave us an opportunity with their support to design the curriculum and syllabus which ensured Pacific cultures would be woven into it the class. The course was successful by reaching full enrollment and undergraduate students that were initially part of the organizing appreciated the course offering:

“It was about time! I’d never thought I’d be able to take a class at CAL like this. I’m happy to be a part of this amazing experience.”⁹⁵

Reaching this milestone was interesting. In my years organizing at the UW, getting a class or a course was the last phase of organizing. But at CAL, it was the other way around. We started off with a course and all other programs—outreach and recruitment, tutoring, and cultural events would follow. The difference in both schools was having Pacific Islander students in graduate level positions—positions where change can be effective. But this would prove to be tough because for many graduate students, organizing and putting on events was not what we had come to CAL for, our first priority was to study and conduct research. Because of this, most of our energies would be focused on developing a concentration in Pacific Islands Studies by—developing and offering more courses, putting on programs, participating in conferences,

⁹³ Quitiga, talk story with author, California 2004, in person.

⁹⁴ At the time, the term “islander” was used interchangeably with “islands.” There two do not carry the same definitions but was presumed to be the same thing.

⁹⁵ Malele Malele, talk-story with author, California, 2008, in-person.

bringing in speakers to give lectures, and organize meetings to discuss the hiring of a scholar in Pacific Studies.

While other courses are being offered on the Pacific, including a course on “Samoan/ Samoan American History and Culture at one point, it seemed like the courses would serve as a springboard for other events. Through the courses I was teaching, PI community members were brought in to share their experiences with the class. Undergraduate students started organizing outreach programs to local bay-area high school students called “Mua O”. This allowed the high school students to sit-in to the courses. Graduate students Michael Tuncap and Jordan Gonzales would begin to organize a Chamoru conference with the Chamoru community organization Famoksaiyan⁹⁶ which incorporated a conversations about Pacific Islands Studies. Joanne Rondilla and Fuifuilupe Niumeitolu would organize meetings with other communities and department faculty. While there were moments of disjuncture, the key goal was being met: ensuring that a Pacific Islander presence was at CAL.

While the PI community at CAL would enjoy some of the most memorable times together in expressing and sharing our culture, the move to hire someone permanent in Ethnic Studies was tantamount to all that we were doing. This was important not only on the level of scholarship but also community engagement:

“We didn’t want someone that was only interested in producing and teaching. We wanted someone that could come and stay for a while and connect with our communities and mentor undergraduate and graduate Pacific Islander students. We wanted someone that would do all these things and advocate for us throughout CAL and the UC system.”⁹⁷

One of my last meetings at CAL before leaving for a teaching job at City College of San Francisco, serves kind of a realization about the difficulties that lie ahead for the PI community. In fact, this meeting was for me, the “nail in the coffin” and summed up why it would continue to be difficult to develop a Pacific Islands Studies concentration in ethnic studies nor hire a professor. In a meeting that took place in 2008 with two professors within the department, the conversations was a review of the state of Pacific Islander community at CAL and what ethnic studies could do to support this emerging group. One of the issues discussed was the hire of a scholar in Pacific Islands Studies which was already supported by Native American Studies. Of course and as always, their response was that funding would be an impediment. But what surprised of all of in that room was a comment made by one of the professors about ways to secure a funding source to hire a scholar:

“...If you want to get Pacific Islands Studies here, you’ll need to ask money from your NFL players, who make millions to donate, for us to create an endowment that can be matched by the University.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Famoksaiyan is the Chamoru word/phrase for “Paddling Forward.”

⁹⁷ Makana Paris, talk-story with author, California, 2009 in person.

⁹⁸ Professor in Ethnic Studies department, UC Berkeley.

This comment, which is blatantly racist, made clear to me that that the hire that was promised to us in Native American Studies would not be for an Islander scholar and it was evident that our community had a long ways to go. Unfortunately, as graduate teaching positions dried up, I could no longer be employed to teach courses. Students who had worked so hard to organize were graduating and moving on with their lives, while other graduate students left to focus on their field work to complete their dissertations moved on and key faculty retired. We had failed for the moment to change Berkeley's ethnic studies program, but others who remained continued their presence at CAL.

Shortly thereafter, coming off a successful stint in offering Pacific Islands Studies courses at UCB, the City College of San Francisco (CCSF) through the Interdisciplinary Studies department was looking for a new hire to teach their only course entitled "Pacific Islanders in the U.S." Previously taught by female scholars Kumu Pritchard and Fuifuilupe Numeitolu, I enter the conversations at CCSF when students, since 2002, had already been advocating for a program and courses. My arrival at the college was met with eager and excited students looking to expand the program. Because I was finishing courses and working on a prospectus for a dissertation during this time, ambitious students met my arrival with skepticism. They questioned my commitment to stay beyond a year or two. This was important for those students as the community colleges are seen as temporary employment for doctoral students. Students needed someone who would teach and commit to developing a program and organize events that would bring education into the lives of a community that desperately has been lacking in recent decades:

"We have a lot of Pacific Islander students here, but the resources to support their education were lacking. We needed faculty and staff that would commit themselves to our community because it takes for Islanders to trust other people."⁹⁹

CCSF enrolled a large population of Pacific Islander students, primarily of Sāmoan ancestry, who were members of their nationally renowned football team. Teaching a Pacific Islands studies course, however, meant that the course would need to be inclusive of other Pacific peoples, who were students on campus but not as sizable as the Sāmoan population. From 2007-2014, I and so many students developed outreach programs, created a retention program for Filipinos and Pacific Islanders, organized a national conference which brought students from over 50 colleges and universities even as far as San Juan, Puerto Rico, and developed a 2nd new course in the humanities to add to the line-up of courses in the Pacific. The culmination of that work lead up to the recently approved Critical Pacific Islands Studies certificate program in April 2014—the only program of its kind in the nation outside of the state of Hawai'i. This would mark a turning point and new direction of the field of Pacific Islands Studies in the U.S. diaspora.

While the student movements at all three campuses—UW, UCB, and CCSF—questioned and critiqued the school environment as tending toward dominant white culture or "whiteness," Pacific Islands studies courses allowed us to question the disciplines about why some cultures

⁹⁹ Leuma, talk-story with author, California, 2007, in person.

are valued more than others. It exposed even more the notion that American classrooms are objective and unbiased spaces of learning. Students found this to be untrue and quickly pointed out that other disciplines such as history, sociology, anthropology were disciplines that studied human cultures:

“I’m not stupid! Every discipline in college is studying a culture and learning about another culture. When someone is taking courses in anthropology, you are learning the culture of anthropologists and how they study other cultures...sociology, physics, astronomy are doing the same things. In astronomy for example, you are learning a culture of how to study the constellations from the perspective of an astronomer’s organization of the universe, which weirdly, is grounded in a cultural perspective. How is Pacific Islands studies different from these disciplines? They’re not. Since it’s not, then it’s time to make room in academia.”¹⁰⁰

Ocean thus, is expanding.

Curriculum Reveals “whiteness” (Dominant Culture): Syllabus

One of the biggest critiques made by students was the absence of Pacific Islander histories or topics in the curriculum—that is curriculum in their schools and curriculum in their specific courses. They identified how the curriculum in courses across their schools focused on “western” culture—the culture that introduced modernization, which means outdated and traditional cultures are seen as “old” or “of the past”, and industrialization, which means a new system of regulating resources through capital exchange. If teachers covered the Pacific in their classes, it discussed it only in economic terms while glossing over key elements of history such as colonization, imperialism, cultural change:

“When I first took an economics class at UW, they covered the Pacific, but it privileged material that talked about Islanders in a certain way with no context for how or why Islanders might have been living in that cultural lifestyle at the time they found them. I understand that Islanders aren’t innocent but things happen when outsiders come to their homes. Change occurred but how did that change occur. It cannot only be how the Pacific was beneficial to the American or European or the world economy. I want to know how that economy affected Islander peoples or what economies existed prior to formal colonization. That’s what I’m looking for.”¹⁰¹

The “certain way” that Kapi’o talks about emphasizes how Islander students generally felt about their courses in school: one-sided, limiting, uninteresting, and invisible:

¹⁰⁰ Matau’tia Elisara, talk-story with author, Washington, 2003, in person.

¹⁰¹ Kapi’o Lamalama, talk-story with author, Washington 2005, phone conversation.

“In looking back, I never realized how one-sided the material was. You’re just unconscious about it. There have been courses that I’ve taken in school that I was sure would cover the Pacific and every time my teacher would mention it, he would never go in detail. I suspect that he was limited in the subject area. But it was false excitement and my interests in the class declined because I felt the material was no longer relative to me or the things I wanted to study. This doesn’t mean that I gave up on the class, it means teachers need to do better at offering other perspectives on the same issues.”¹⁰²

Maluia’s unconsciousness about the absence of Pacific Islander perspectives in curriculum is real and powerful that it reminded me of my own “awakening” in my undergraduate years. It is so ingrained in our lives that you never notice it.

There is an irony however about education and the Pacific. Education itself as both an institution and a tool was used to “civilize” Islanders. It was part of an imperialist policy that was rooted in the European perspective that indigenous peoples lacked a sense of culture because to be civilized was to have the means to build, construct, and maintain a culture. This was and continues to be the justification for colonization. The result of this perspective not only brought destruction to traditional native cultures but also re-defined their cultures as “savage,” “barbaric,” and “uncivilized.” After years of exercising this definition over native communities, especially through schools and churches, it replaced and made inferior indigenous “ways of knowing/knowledge,” effectively normalizing “whiteness”—dominant culture rooted in the “west” and in European ways of knowing. The history of education in the Pacific is a history of colonization that has allowed Islander communities to believe that western culture and history are the world, while the Pacific world remains invisible.

When I asked the students how they felt about their cultures being shared in the classroom, one student in particular had this to say:

“All we’re learning in school is about other cultures. Which is fine with me because learning about other cultures is important, but when you tell me that my people’s way of understanding the world is only through entertainment then we have a problem. That only says how little you know about my community but it also says that this is what you have been teaching students for years. My culture is not something that sits out there. It is with me everywhere I go. I carry it with pride.”¹⁰³

Having the chance to offer Pacific Studies courses has been one of the most fulfilling experiences that I and so many students have had in our college education. Addressing the need for more courses in the Pacific, I was given the opportunity to teach and create a course in Pacific Studies. Keeping in mind the opportunity to raise awareness on a host of issues in the Pacific, I also made sure that some part of the course allowed students to feel good about

¹⁰² Maluia Maluia, talk-story with author, California 2004, in person.

¹⁰³ Emani Ilaoa, talk-story with author, California 2012, in person.

themselves. Most of the students that I learned with came to school uninterested and practically bored of the prospects of having to take classes that were not about them. This was not a matter of intelligence but rather a matter of making the classroom inviting. It meant that the course that I was putting together needed to be designed in a way that allowed them to participate fully while also sharing their experiences of their journey through higher education and in America.

In creating curriculum for the course, the goal was to ground the course in both community and academic scholarship. I was aware that a curriculum that only attacked the west for the atrocities in the Pacific was not the kind of course that engaged students in critical thinking. For example, it couldn't be a course that was entirely about blaming the "white man" but a course that allowed opportunities for students to respond to those histories, but most importantly, finding ways intellectually, to make sense of those atrocities and find innovative and creative ways by using their education to challenge them. This was going to be a course that was about learning and healing all at the same time. One of the first things I did was choose three over-arching themes that would guide the course. These themes needed to engage students in areas that I felt were fundamental to build self-consciousness and cultural pride: Identity, colonization, and knowledge production.

Identity for me was important for several reasons. First, colonialism has had a hand in reconstructing identities of so many groups in the Pacific. A good example of this are the Philippines where under the explorer Ferdinand Magellan, "discovered" and named the nation's thousands of islands after the King of Spain—King Phillip—naming them Filipinos or subjects of King Phillip. In one quick sweep, the identities of so many indigenous groups changed, most without their consent. This has happened in the rest of the Pacific as other European nations raced to scoop up its "discoveries" reorganizing the Pacific into regions we now know today and used as markers of identities as "Micronesia," "Melanesia," and "Polynesia." Secondly, these new reconstructed identities have been internalized by Islanders for years and have shaped the way Islanders relate to each other. Islander youth, for example, have embraced the identity "polyneisian" without knowing the history of its etymological formation. These identities have become instrumental in setting island cultures as different and only thriving within the confines of "small" (micro), "many" (poly), "mela" (black), when in reality they are one and in the same people. If students complicated the historical formations of their identities, (a crucial foundation in Critical Pacific Islands Studies), then an alternative narrative or story to their identities, or stories of who they are, is grounded in a culture of shared co-existence.

I was also careful about making sure that the curriculum covered specific histories of cultural groups in the Pacific. In other words, teaching students the histories of their identities didn't mean asking them to forget or all of sudden reject the use of their identities but rather to how to think about those histories in connection to other cultural histories of the Pacific. To ground this comparative approach I use a unifying theme, an old cultural epistemology. That way of knowing is ocean.

The second issue was colonization as a process. I say process because colonization was not only about the physical manifestations of the changes that took place like the erection of new styles of housing and buildings, for example, but the colonization of the mind—the way of thinking that manifests elements of colonialism in everyday human practice that dehumanizes the

self. One example are conceptions of “beauty”¹⁰⁴.” Islander perspectives of themselves were powerfully incised through what Malcom X calls the “science of image-making”¹⁰⁵ or “imagery”—the body of images that collectively defined a group in a particular manner, usually negatively.

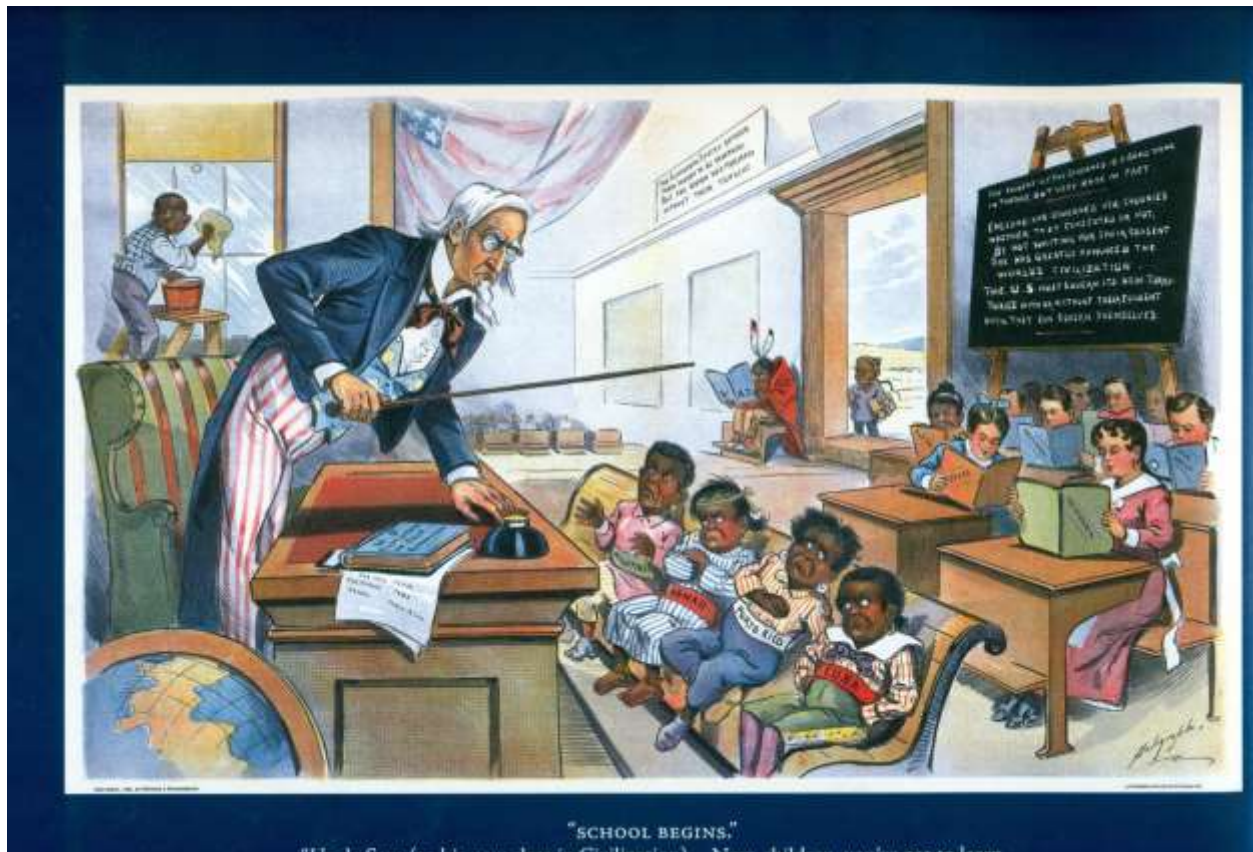


Figure 4.6

Images like the one above circulated in media as legitimate forms of knowledge through—magazines, newspapers, and books—during the colonial period that not only defined Islanders in particular way but also created the conditions to internalize hate for themselves and embarrassment of their skin color.

I thought that a unit addressing this colonial process allowed them to openly discuss and question the effects of mental colonization or what Bob Marley refers to as, “mental slavery” in regards to their communities, their families, and especially themselves. To deconstruct that history, students are introduced to several archives in the curriculum—tatau (tattoos), ngatu (bark cloth tapestry), music, dance, and many others humanistic forms, as a way to look at their past. Through creating and using these archives, making them central components of the course, we

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion on “beauty”, see Rondilla, Joanne. “Colonial Faces: Beauty and Skin Color Hierarchy in the Philippines and the U.S.” PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley. 2012

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion on imagery see Malcolm X. “Not Just an American Problem but a World Problem” Speech for religious congregation, Cornhill Methodist Church, February 16, 1965.

enact a practice that challenges colonization and provides an alternative way to thinking about history and legitimize these ocean archives as knowledge and thus, text. This is decolonization of the classroom.

Finally, a third overarching theme for the course was knowledge production. That is, the students creating and producing work and sharing their work classmates, the local community, and students at other colleges and universities. I designed the course so that students could use their “funds of knowledge,”¹⁰⁶ that it, allowing students to incorporate aspects of their cultures to shape their assignments, class discussions, and community projects. Like other indigenous cultures, Pacific cultures are rooted in reciprocity or shared responsibility and so the idea that all things are shared gives students the chance to bring their experiences and their cultural ideas into a space where it can be critiqued, questioned, supported, and reinvented while providing them opportunities to see and feel their potential for growth. More than just creating knowledge, students are equipped with tools that not only free them from mental imprisonment and undue constraints giving them the freedom to “bring forward a vision” and the stories of who they are. This important piece of creating something for themselves is a meaningful site of transformation. I call this *matamai*—knowledge production and transformation, which I cover in the next chapter.

Teaching Ocean: “Our Sea of Islands” vs. “Islands in a far seas”

One of the first things students learn in the curriculum is the revival of an old cultural concept called ocean. Students are introduced to Epeli Hau’ofa’s essay “Our Sea of Islands”¹⁰⁷. In it, he writes about the ways in which the west has written and defined Pacific Islanders as “small” islands and how that vision promotes a certain attitude toward the Pacific that shapes Islanders’ view of the world and themselves. According to Hau’ofa, this perspective is both limiting and powerful, it has hindered the ways in which Islanders think of their self-being and potential in the world. He frames this view as “islands in a far seas,” meaning that the construct already situates the islands and people and culture as something that is “out there” as part of the periphery and not the center. In other words, the western definition of Pacific cultures is framed within the construct as “islands in the far seas” = “small,” “belittle,” “out there,” “periphery,” “savage,” “uncivilized” = the west’s definition of Pacific Islander cultures = western knowledge.

Hau’ofa then counters that view by reorienting the phrase to “Our Sea Islands” and reintroducing the cultural concept ocean that serves as a lens or new perspective of looking at the world. By doing this, he offers an idea that allows students to latch on to a new identity and identity that is grounded in the sea:

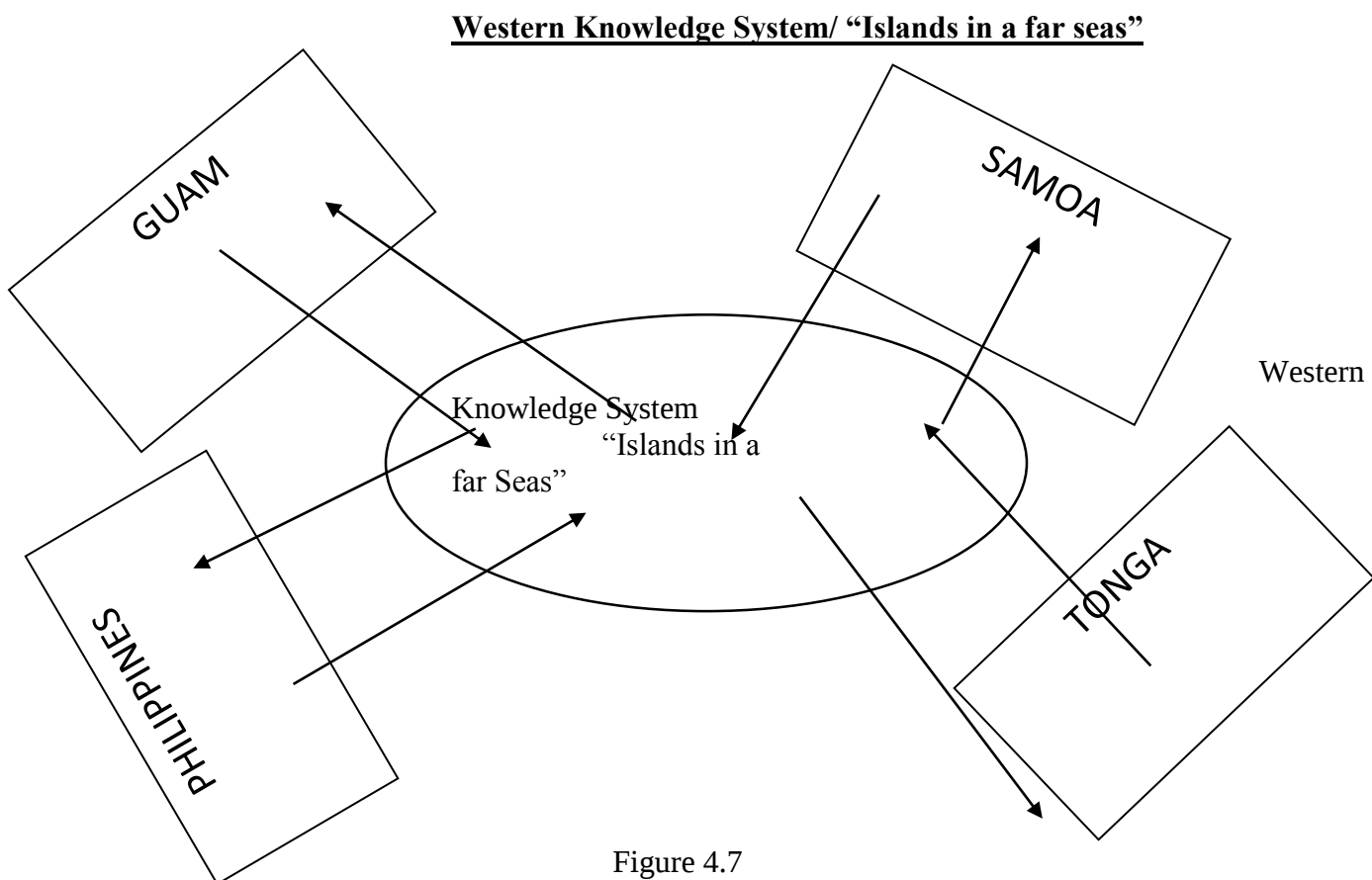
¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of “Funds of Knowledge” see, González, N., Moll, L., & Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities and classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

¹⁰⁷ Hau’ofa, Epeli. “Our Sea of Islands” In *We Are The Ocean*, edited by Epeli Hau’ofa. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008. 27-40

“An identity that is grounded on something so vast as the sea is, should exercise our minds and rekindle in us the spirit that sent our ancestors to explore the oceanic unknown and make it their home, our home.”¹⁰⁸

In other words, for Hau’ofa, the Pacific Islander definition of culture and identity is grounded in our ocean home and can be framed in the construct “Our Sea of Islands” = unifying, expanding, powerful, growing, resilient, collective, fluid = ocean = the space where knowledge and culture is archived and produced = the space that is sacred or sacred space = vāsā¹⁰⁹.

Now we have two competing sets of constructs here from Hau’ofa’s essay. Because the article is in “high scholarly language”, sometimes inaccessible to first year college students, I have created two visual maps, which I sent to Hau’ofa prior to his passing for review and approval. Each of the visuals explain how the definition/knowledge of Pacific Islander cultures are produced in both the west and in ocean.



¹⁰⁸ Hau’ofa, Epeli. “The Ocean in Us” In *We Are The Ocean*, edited by Epeli Hau’ofa. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008. 41-59

¹⁰⁹ Vāsā is the Sāmoan translation for “ocean.” Vā meaning space or relational space and Sā meaning sacred. The ocean then is a space that is sacred or sacred space.

There are three key elements in this visual. First, this visual is “mono-centered;” there is only one center and all knowledge produced about the islands is filtered through one center that then transforms it and returns it back out to its outposts where it is exercised over the people in western discourse about their cultures. Knowledge production is created from the center and relayed through new western lenses that frame the outposts with new labels: “Philippines,” “Fiji,” Hawai’I,” etc. The visual map reflects the construct “Islands in a far seas” where the discourse from the west frames the culture.

Vasa: Ocean Knowledge System

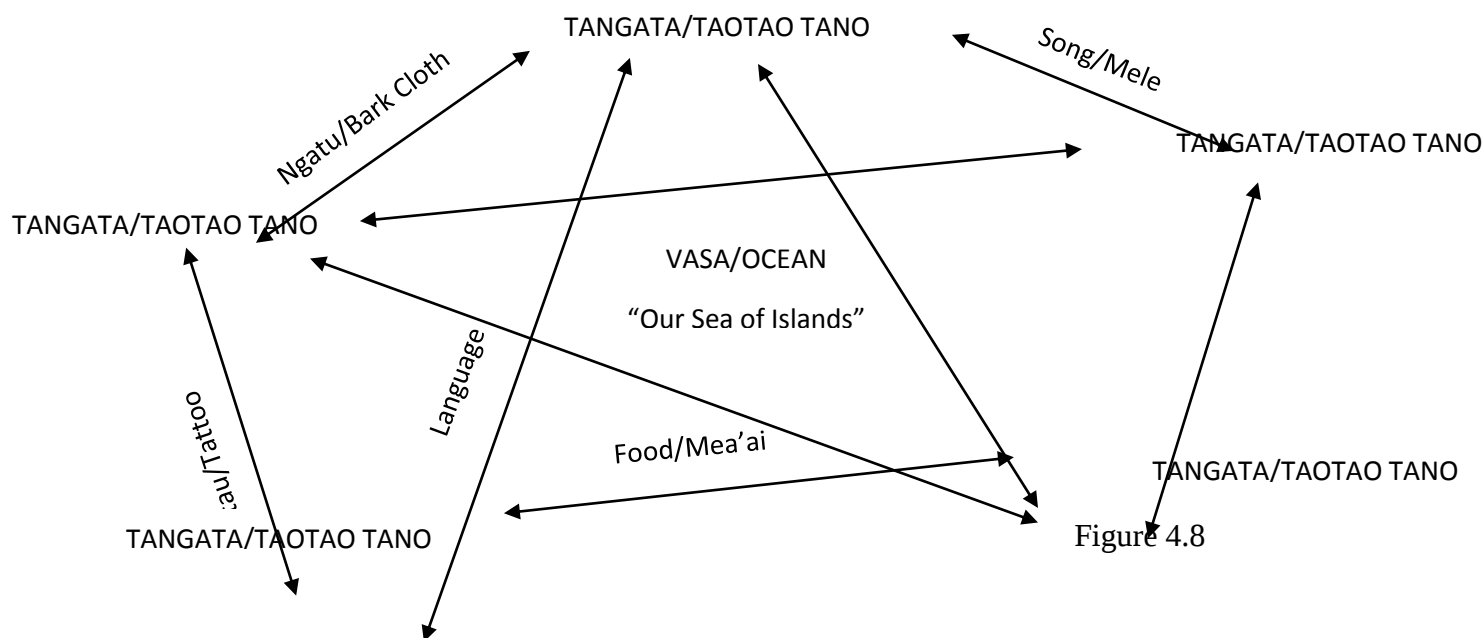


Figure 4.8

In this visual, the islands’ designations reflect indigenous terms, including the indigenous name of the people of the ocean and the name used to identify native. Although all the terms are found in different variations across Pacific languages, they nonetheless are linguistically related. The name I am using here is “tangata” or “taotao tano” which mean “native”. Each “tangta” is an island. Secondly, “taotao tano” replaces colonial names allowing students to see the unity of islands across an ocean. Third, there is no defined center; all islands are multiple centers. Last, the lines connect islands. These represent the discourses that are rooted in cultural archives. In other words, the discourses between islands and people are in collective cultural archives including tatau, ngatu, dance, music, etc. This visual reflects “Our Sea of Islands” where the indigenous culture, not Western, frames the discourse. The visual displays ocean as a large archive; everything in it is deemed sacred knowledge and knowledge that is relational and interconnects.

Comparing the two visuals makes it obvious that the construction of knowledge is organized and shared differently in two cultural worlds. In the west, discourse—those set images and representations of Islanders—frames and defines Pacific cultures, the predominant perspective. In ocean, the culture—the set of archives and sacred collective knowledge—frames and defines

the discourse about Pacific peoples, a cultural perspective I am attempting to return our students to.

Centralizing Culture: Decolonizing Pacific Studies

A second theme I address in this teaching is inspired by the work of Konai Helu Thaman¹¹⁰. She writes (talks) about how Pacific Studies has customarily centered on the discourses and knowledge produced by the west. She posed a question for her audience, so how can the decolonization of Pacific Studies create a space for Pacific Islander communities to thrive? Helu Thaman argues that we must centralize culture in the classroom. Although she does not specify which aspects of culture she is refer to, I think that the “culture” she talks about must refer to our ocean.

One of the most beautiful things I observed in the classroom was the use of cultural archives/material culture to convey the point of the importance of artifacts in teaching students. This is exciting because for quite some time access to many of our cultural materials from the Pacific have been sent off to museums making it difficult for Pacific and other indigenous communities to repatriate them relying solely on our elders or families (who reluctantly give them up) to provide cultural materials for use in the classroom. Taking a cue from the works of Konai Helu and Linda Tuhiwai Smith¹¹¹, I have shared their methods of disentangling knowledge from western paradigms utilizing the stories embedded in things like dance, music, ngatu, tatau, etc. These cultural practices (most are still in circulation today in some shape or form) can be understood as the glue that not only preserves narratives but also binds communities together.

¹¹⁰ Thaman, Konai Helu. “Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education.” In *Contemporary Pacific*, edited by Center for Pacific Islands Studies. Honolulu. University of Hawai’i-Manoa. 2003

¹¹¹ Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies*. University of Otago Press. Dunedin, NZ. 1999



Figure 4.9

In an attempt to untangle the knowledge, I introduced the class on form of an ocean archive called ngatu¹¹² (bark cloth) as a form of text and as a way of reading how the Pacific, particularly women, engage with the material archive. The most significant thing about these repositories of knowledge is not the material itself but the processes—acts of preservation, storytelling, and community bonding—taking place while the material is in motion between two participants. In the classroom, the students are asked to sit on the floor¹¹³ to inspire a collective impression. This reorganizes seating arrangements from a traditional classroom where all are usually seated in their own individual seats. This setting is crucial for understanding how the ocean works in community and how community works in ocean.

The Effects of Ocean: Students Respond to the Curriculum

As a teacher, I have had the privilege seeing what a new curriculum in Pacific Studies can do to students who have such a hunger for new material that focuses on their cultures.

¹¹² For a discussion on ngatu, see the film, “Hina e Hiapo”

¹¹³ Sometimes this didn’t work due to space limitations and weather.

“The courses I’ve taken with Professor Palaita so far gives me a new way of looking at life and at myself. I may not be able to take all of my courses in Pacific Studies but I can feel confident in going into other disciplines with thinking about how knowledge in the Pacific is related to my desire major.”¹¹⁴

But more than that, students already come to class with “funds of knowledge” meaning they come to the classroom already having had experiences throughout their lives engaging with what it means to be American and or Pacific Islander.

“This class gave me an opportunity to share with others the problems and the issues surrounding what it means to be an American...what it means to be Pacific Islander. I at least that I’m not alone and that navigating school and society is tough, but I realize I don’t have to do it alone.”¹¹⁵

When I asked the students what was about the ngatu that was “decolonizing” activity a student gave a powerful response:

“Decolonization is a chance to discuss issues in way that is healing and non-confrontational. I naturally have a respect for the person sitting across me and next to me. I don’t have the urge to create an argument but the urge to make peace and listen to others and their pain”¹¹⁶

For this first time in a classroom, students brought issues of inter-ethnic conflicts between groups, Tongan vs Samoans, or Hawaiians vs. Filipinos. The ngatu set up the atmosphere in a way in which students could express their concerns about issues in the community. Many of them raised issues about topics the curriculum was not prepared for such as homophobia or molestation.

“I don’t consider myself gay, but I want to share an experience that continues to shape the way I see the world. I am angry, I am always confused, and I am always sad about the events that took place in my family years ago. I love them but I never understood why the ones that purport to love me are also the ones that take advantage of me, even at my most vulnerable times.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Reo Tafa’i, talk-story with author, California, 2012, in person.

¹¹⁵ Malakosi Tagaloa, talk-story with author, California 2010, in person.

¹¹⁶ Mona ‘Otumaka, talk-story with author, California 2011, in person.

¹¹⁷ Setu Fiaola, talk-story with author, California 2012, in person.

Students got the chance to also lay out stereotypes they had been dealing with for so long, struggles about money, and conflicts with parents. One of the most prominent issues raised was not being able to explain the process of schooling to their parents and why this continued to hamper their ability to stay after school and participate in activities that further their learning or allowed them to develop skills for new or better jobs:

“Aw man! I love my folks, but they be too heavy on me sometimes. On one hand they want me to get an education to get a better job but on the other they want me home from school right after classes so that I can help with house chores. This isn’t high school, this is college!”¹¹⁸

Student athletes also laid out problems with conflicts about administration and coaches and some of the harsh physical and strenuous activities being expected of them as athletes:

“We have this play scheme in football called “pineapple” and I was like who are they referring too? Turns out they were referring to the whole offensive line who happened to be all Islanders. Racist if you ask me.”¹¹⁹

In seeing all these issues get raised by Pacific Islander students, we can see that ocean itself not only allows the space to be used for sharing experiences but ocean also becomes the place where social issues can be discussed in Islander communities. How do we use ocean to study this?

Meaningful Education: Ocean Inspiration

Once students have taken these classes, they change the way they look at themselves. This is the power of culture and how culture can be so significant in a student’s learning. At all three campuses, the result of student participation in school activities increased, especially at CCSF:

“The courses are important for our communities. They are central to everything we do here at school. It keeps us together, we are excited about learning, and we know more about ourselves. The courses give us meaning for why we organize and create events at the school. It gives us a foundation for our path in life.”¹²⁰

I can say that this was directly linked to the creation of new courses. In fact, what they learn in the classroom is immediately applied and drives them to create events that acts an extension to the classroom. At the University of Washington, for example, students created outreach and

¹¹⁸ Nani Halaholo, talk-story with author, California 2011, in person.

¹¹⁹ Troy Vaitogi, talk-story with author, California 2012, in person.

¹²⁰ Emani Ilaoa, talk-story with author, California 2013, in person.

recruitment programs connected to a dance and music performances. At CAL, students began to protest the use of the “haka¹²¹” at CAL’s Big Game festivities, and at City College of San Francisco, the students developed the first national conference they entitled VĀSĀ—evidence that the ocean has inspired these motivations to create change.

Students also change their outlook about how they think about their education. For example, students who have already taken the class end up becoming the tutors, the teacher’s assistant, and they help to facilitate group discussions:

“I took Professor Palaita’s class a year ago and I come back to support the class because I want others to know that there is a community that cares about their learning. I help by making preparing the space and if the opportunity is given to me, I’ll teach a few lessons. It makes me understand the material even better.”¹²²

A few semesters ago, I had many former students volunteer to run activities, organize potlucks, and teach lesson plans—all this done on their own and helping to change the classroom dynamic:

“I remember making it a point to have food at the class because I understand what the life of a college student can be like. It’s not easy many don’t eat. Students should never have to sacrifice their ability to learn just because they can’t eat.”¹²³

¹²¹ Haka is the Maori term for “fiery breath”. “Ha” meaning breath and “ka” meaning to strike or fire. The performance of the haka by the UC fraternity has been for years been a staple performance leading up to the rivalry football game between Stanford and CAL. The focus in these performances were the body movements but in Maori culture, the emphasis is placed on the words that are spoken.

¹²² Solo Togiaso, talk-story with author, California 2013, in person.

¹²³ Evy Pati, talk-story with author, California 2013, in person.



Figure 4.10

Several students who have taken my classes have renewed their interests in education, almost leaving and giving up on school altogether:

“At one point I was about to bounce and leave school. I didn’t feel it was for me and I didn’t feel like I needed to do it. After taking this class, it gave me perspective and direction and also revive my hope about my schooling. It’s not a done deal yet, but I’ll do my best to stick it through.”¹²⁴

Our student are beginning to see the value and the importance of being educated in America. More than that, they begin to see and understand and make sense of many of the interlocking social forces that take place around their homes, their communities, and of course the nation like racism, globalization, war, and politics. Throughout the semester, I mentor about 20-25 Islander students who many to this day continue to work on certificates or associates degree. The more amazing thing about student excitement is that many of them look to transfer to four-year

¹²⁴ Danny Olelo, talk-story with author, California 2013, in person.

universities to continue their school. Some who have already transferred are now looking forward to going on to graduate school to complete a masters or doctorates in hopes to one day teach in the field or become professionals in their chosen careers:

“I hope one day after completion of my Bachelor’s degree at SF State, I can go on to get a Ph.D. in Sociology or Ethnic Studies. I feel I can interrogate these fields to by interrelating Pacific Islands Studies with them.”¹²⁵

Although graduation rates continue to be low, students are countering a trend that for almost 30 years, has seen the decline of Islander students from colleges in general. What this really says is that the struggle continues and the school will need to make important changes to curriculum to accommodate students who look to advance their skills and apply them to their communities. Schools need to a critical look at how they organize the disciplines and really make the ultimate decision to expand course offerings, especially for students who find that culture can be a powerful source of inspiration and motivation. This is testament to all the positive things that students have organized to raise awareness to issues that, for the first time finally has serious academic inquiry.

¹²⁵ Andrew Vai, talk-story with author, California 2013, in person.



Figure 4.11

In conclusion, culture in the classroom can be significant in changing student's ideas about their communities and themselves. Students find education to be even more meaningful to their lives and their future. On a broader scale, these courses also critique the very same institutions that continue to question the value of an academic and cultural program like Pacific Islands Studies. But if the goal is to make students successful, would it not be better to allow students to thrive with their culture? Would we produce better and smarter students by developing critical thinking in curriculum that is culturally sensitive? So far, mainstream educators have been resistant to the idea because of complications that arise over territorial disciplines. One of my best students sums up the answer to these questions:

“In the end, western culture cannot be the only and legitimate form of knowledge and a way of looking at the world. Everything about us deserves a chance to live through us. I become a stronger person and better student when I am given the chance to succeed and be who I am. We are the ocean.”¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Andrew Tuala, talk-story with author, California 2011, in person.



Figure 4.12

Chapter 5: Ocean is Expanding

“We should not be defined by the smallness of our islands, but by the greatness of our oceans”

-- ‘Epeli Hau’ofa

In chapters 3 & 4 I show how students change their schools using ocean and how course curriculum in my courses have been shaped by the use of this indigenous Pacific cultural perspective. In this final chapter, I will focus on three powerful items that were generated from the students’ use of ocean. Focusing on three events—the publication of an anthology, the formation of a national conference, and community presentations—the students illustrate how their education is meaningful to their success in school but how these events are attempts to bridge students on a local, national, and global level while simultaneously creating visibility and counter-narrative for the Pacific Islander community in higher education.

MATAMAI: “Bring Forward a Vision”

As a graduate student at UC Berkeley, I had already been in discussions with students and colleagues who were taking my class in Pacific Islands Studies regarding the possibility of creating ways to construct better imagery of our communities. One idea that surfaced between I and several students was the creation of an anthology of students’ work from the classroom:

“...We could do something with our work from the class or we could do a class presentation to the community but we need something that can be remembered and can be archived and be looked too.”¹²⁷

Although the idea of a student publication did not come into fruition at that time, it nonetheless began a discussion about ways students could turn their coursework into something that could be shared with the public. I and my colleague Michael Tuncap and several students one evening began to look at the possibilities of creating a professional organization that would focus on scholarships and vocational opportunities geared towards Islander students. We set out to find a name or a term that would encompass the meaning of success but also something that exemplified a person that was engaged in “forward and visionary” thinking about their future:

“The organization was about arming students with monies for education, particularly those that had good ideas about supporting other Islander students later on in life. This was important because there were hardly any scholarship programs for Pacific

¹²⁷ Fonoti, talk-story with author, California 2007, in person

Islander students. We wanted to give back in some kind of way and the hope was to pull together professionals who could donate to our cause...easier said than done.”¹²⁸

The model student and the recipient of these scholarships was a student that exemplified success on a personal level but someone who uplifts their cultures and communities. Inspired by the fluidity and the non-linearity of Pacific languages, we decided to look at the ocean archive/culture for a term that was common across all Pacific languages. We wanted a word that represented the kind of student whose work contributed to knowledge production in our ocean archive and whose work stood as a counter-narrative to the mainstream and negative imagery about Pacific Islanders:

“You can say this was all political at first but it began to evolve into something else. The student we were looking was not afraid to challenge and speak-up about themselves.”¹²⁹

Realizing the difficulty of finding a term and rolling with the idea that cultures are inventions, we decided to create a new one. This was our “way out” of the politics of naming. For us, creating this word was not only about “pulling another island out of the ocean” per se, but creating an island, connected by ocean, that unified the voices of our communities. We wanted a term that was organic, a term that would provide inspiration about students’ own perspectives about the world and a refreshing term that allowed our students—with or without educational degrees—to contribute to the ocean archive/culture and our ideal student.

That term became “Matamai,” which is a contraction of two words found widely across the vastness of Pacific languages. Using two words—“mata” and “mai”— we created the name of our new island. “Mata” which means “eyes,” “to see,” “vision,” “to watch,” and “to look” and “Mai”, which means “to come forward,” “to welcome,” “to come in,” “to bring,” and “to summon”. When the words are combined, “Matamai” is created, which translates to “bring forward a vision.” At the time that the foundation was established, Tuncap and many of the students involved in these discussions had already left to pursue other areas of their professional careers and it seemed for a moment that our idea for a scholarship foundation would never materialize. Not all was lost.

In 2009, I was offered a visiting professorship through the department of American Ethnic Studies at the University of Washington in Seattle where I was provided with the opportunity to teach a course in Pacific Islands Studies—the very same course that I and many others had created during my undergraduate years at UW and the very same course I was already teaching at CAL and at CCSF. Flying between Seattle and Oakland twice a week, it began to dawn on me that I was spreading myself too thin and that at some point I began to feel that the quality of my instruction was fading because I had been so tired and my sleep patterns were inconsistent. I needed a new kind of motivation and infusion of sorts to remind me that my travels over this 10-week period was not in vain. And it wasn’t. Midway through the quarter,

¹²⁸Tagaloa, talk-story with author, California 2007, in person

¹²⁹ Valavala, talk-story with author, California 2008, in person

students of the Polynesian Student Alliance approached me during office hours to discuss the formation of a national conference and ideas for a publication—this would give me the strength to continue my travels until the end of the quarter.

While the students began laying the groundwork for a national conference, I reached out to Vaeomatoka Valu (Toka), a rising artist who I had known for years throughout my undergraduate education. Inspired by his work as a visionary artist, we discussed the possibility of creating an anthology of student works who were taking my Pacific Studies courses at UW and CCSF at the time. It did not take long for me to think of a name for the anthology series which would be entitled “Matamai”:

“I thought it was a brilliant idea. It also gave me a chance to share my work with students and with other readers in Pacific Islands Studies.”¹³⁰

Since Dr. Rick Bonus had been a part of the lives of Pacific Islander students at UW for years, Toka invited him to produce the forward for our first edition. It didn’t take long to find a publisher either. Chamoru Professor and good friend, Craig Santos Perez, who was a doctoral student in Ethnic Studies at CAL and an assistant professor at the University of Hawai’i, owned his own publishing company¹³¹ and enthusiastically embraced the project. Once these key contributors were in place a call for submission was formalized and was then tailored to students enrolled at in my courses at CCSF and UW and became part of the curriculum and an assignment for the courses.

Matamai: Creative Pedagogy and Curriculum

The decision to make the students’ submissions part of the curriculum was difficult and risky. It was never a guarantee that all students would want their submissions to be widely published which I gave them the option to do. When I first introduced the idea to two classes, it was met with both excitement and fear. Many students felt that they hadn’t the experience or the training in publishing an original piece of work:

“I felt nervous because I was a student with no degree. I wanted to write something exciting but I felt that I didn’t have anything good to say about who I am. Would people even like my work?”¹³²

I couldn’t have been any more wrong! Students were immediately excited. In fact, several students visited me in office hours sharing that the idea was a good idea:

“I liked this project because it was more than just a grade. I felt

¹³⁰ Toka, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

¹³¹ Achiote Press would publish the first anthology until Craig S. Perez moved on to create his own publishing company based out in Honolulu.

¹³² Sisay, talk story with author, Washington 2009, in person.

like I could get a lot more out of my education especially thinking about how expensive school is. More than that, my parents could finally see what it is that I do in school.”¹³³

I realized how powerful the anthology might become. At the same time, the students relief at thinking they could accomplish something underscored their collective fear that they would not. Many told me that they thought school/college was about how much you memorized to regurgitate on exams rather than how much you could contribute or demonstrate how much the process of learning had changed their perceptions of the world. Linking their submissions as an assignment made students even more excited not only about the process but about taking ownership of their learning in way they haven’t done before.

For the first edition entitled, “Matamai: The VASA (Ocean) In Us,” guidelines were not restrictive. Students only needed to write about their idea of the meaning of the ocean. I decided that instead of grading on the basis of content, I would include an array of forms and styles so that they could write essays, poetry, make works of art, short stories, compose music, etc. All submissions were accepted as long as the piece was within the preset theme of the first edition. It was a success and in the fall of 2010, Achiote Press released the first edition and was sold to the public via Amazon. When students received their first copies, many of them were delighted and overjoyed about seeing their own work:

“I was stoked. I couldn’t believe that I was in a book with so many of my other classmates. I’ll look back at this a 100 years from today and think about my time as a student. What excites me even more is that my children and grand-children will have something to read that came from me even long after I have gone.”¹³⁴

At the end of the semester course, students shared their work through a poetry reading and research presentation to the campus community.

Matamai: Ocean Crossings and Conversations

The anthology became more than just a project about “owning” education and cultural empowerment. It became a platform for engaging in social and cultural issues many of them faced in the U.S. One student noted that the anthology was an outlet for her:

“Finally a place where I can talk all my shit! And say what I really feel about my experience in America so far. Bullshit if you ask me! I’ve been taught to be embarrassed of my skin color, my roots, and my sexuality and for once this is where I can ground my thoughts and share my wisdom.”¹³⁵

¹³³ Pelesasa, talk story with author, California 2009, in person.

¹³⁴ Waipahu, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

¹³⁵ Waipahu, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

The students in their submissions chose to write from the core of their inner-selves by grounding their thoughts in a “sacred space” or ocean. By doing this, it effectively centralizes their ocean and using it in a way to connect conversations with other students across other schools. It also allows them to use the ocean as a platform to mirror and reflect about the social oppressions that they have so longed dealt with and wanted to discuss openly:

“As a fa’afafine, I found Matamai as a way to envision an ocean community in which I would be accepted and that I would be judged for my contributions to society, my community and my family, and not by who I love or who I am attracted to. My parents would kill me if they ever read my work but I think about how many other people I could save just by writing this.”¹³⁶

The topics and themes chosen by students were quite vast. They varied in topics like “cultural preservation,” “histories of colonization,” “politics of gender and sexual identities,” “responses to incidences of racism,” “class struggles,” “transplantation of culture from ‘homeland’ to ‘mainland,’” “notions of transnationalism and nationhood,” “engaging oral traditions,” “stories of families and survival,” “reinventing identity and cultural politics and representations,” “tales of athleticism,” and the list goes on and on. The point here is that for once, the students are conceptualizing the ocean as a site of connected struggles and an interdisciplinary framework for better understanding human cultures. Ocean opens up critical dialogues about the intersectionality of social issues and experiences that can no longer be relegated to simple and mainstream categories. Ocean as a lens and for these students “brings forward a vision”—*matamai*—that incorporates new voices of people who make the ocean their home and a way of understanding the worlds they inhabit.

Matamai created magnificent experiences and renewed dialogue at the local, national, and global levels. In just the publications first edition, it became highly requested in other colleges and universities teaching Pacific Islands Studies courses. It was well received by Pacific Studies at Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand and other schools such as De Anza College in the San Francisco Bay Area which uses it as a required text in their curriculum. Although Matamai created a written opportunity to archive the social experiences of students in the U.S. diaspora, the conversations would not end there. Students from these very same courses created a national conference to put those conversations in motion, gathering Pacific Islander students from several colleges and universities around the nation to engage in a series of discussions about social issues affecting the success of Pacific Islanders in education and in their communities. The students would “matamai” of a national conference and assembly that is inspired by ocean creating a “sacred space” for dialogue.

¹³⁶ Loaloe, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.



Figure 5.1

VASA National Conference and Assembly: Within and to the World

On January 23, 2010, students from the founding schools—City College of San Francisco, University of California, Berkeley, California State University, San Francisco, the Graduate Theological Union, and University of Washington, Seattle—convened in Albany, CA and founded the mission to create a network of Pacific Islander students across colleges/universities. That meeting was held at the University Village—a student housing complex of the University of California, Berkeley. As the students gathered, one student proclaimed how momentous the occasion was. While definitely not the first time that Islander students have organized on a national level, it was the first time Pacific Islander students from these schools came together to create a conference of this magnitude:

“It’s amazing what we can do as students. Much of it is having a heart and having the determination to bring together that have the same passion for learning and the same passion to create something better for ourselves. I’m sure our ancestors did this before but

this time around feels even more powerful...it does because I feel like I'm giving back to them in the very same ways they did for our generation."¹³⁷

VASA has a short but profound history. The students who first organized in Albany, were also students that were currently enrolled or have taken Pacific Islands studies courses at the City College of San Francisco, University of California, Berkeley, or the University of Washington, Seattle. Their mission was to create a national assembly of Pacific Islanders in higher education across the United States. Drawing inspiration from the works of the late Professor Epeli Hau'ofa (whose scholarship was introduced to the students in the courses) along with other kinds of knowledge learned from the classroom about the VASA or "sacred (sa) space (va)" or "ocean", students conception of the ocean—a compilation of all things sacred to them which includes the arts, dances, music, canoes, tattoos—became a meaningful site for reviving ancient cultural practices of community. They also used the ocean as a compass for understanding and navigating the complexities of Pacific Islander lives in the United States. For students raised outside of their homelands—or the diaspora—, the study of the 'ocean' from a socio-cultural perspective allowed them to see their world in multiple dimensions, giving them renewed strength in their ability to navigate the terrain of colonial challenges they continue to face, by all means necessary. It also allowed students, especially those born outside of the Pacific to reconnect in ways that had been limited to them before:

"Putting together VASA was about hearing about the experiences of other students at other schools. For me personally, I didn't want to think that I was stuck on some island. As an Islander, you navigate, you connect, and you use your ocean in a way to build a community...many of us desired to our cousins and provide the necessary support to each other so that we could deal with everyday oppressions...the ocean teaches us about bridging our families and therefore, ocean is teaches us that we don't have to do things alone."¹³⁸

From that initial convention, delegates from these schools agreed to launch an annual conference/assembly that emphasized the commitment to their ocean by implementing three (3) foundational elements: First was to create a forum for discussing socio-cultural issues affecting Pasefika communities. Secondly, create the opportunity to develop a political structure for a national assembly of Pacific Islander students. Lastly, bridge ocean communities by gathering Pacific Islander students to apply their educational skills for advancing and addressing Pacific Islander issues.

The VASA National Assembly, which has done only two conferences so far, has grown to include students from more than 30 colleges and universities from around the nation—a manifestation of the ways in which students take ownership of their learning and make meaning of their education for themselves and their families by using their cultures.

At the first meeting, which took about 3 to 4 hours of discussions, key ideas of building a conference emerged. One of those themes was ensuring that the ocean could be used as a

¹³⁷ Manaialif, talk-story with author, California 2010, in person.

¹³⁸ Dela Merced, talk-story with author, California 2010, in person.

framework for organizing students. Disagreements abound and at one point threatened to derail the visionary cause.

“I remember getting into a heated argument over issues of gender and I felt that the real cause for change always needs to discuss how those changes women and especially transgender communities. It’s not so much they were excluding us but if VASA was about connections then for me it had to be about conscious connections.”¹³⁹

But to quell the instability, students kept referring back to their ocean and reminding themselves about the power a community can have when organizing with the spirit of the ocean:

“So many differing views for organizing our conference and our ultimate goal was to make everyone feel included and make sure that all perspectives are heard...although challenging at times, it exposed how different our upbringing has been and to recognize this was important because this helped us build from those differences and create something that honors our histories...this is what it means to be in an ocean...it is to believe in the our ability to do that...that’s the spirit.”¹⁴⁰

For them, the ocean is building a sense of unity and attempting to reorganize their cultures on a horizontal plane rather than one that was aligned vertically. One student explained it to me like this:

“You see, Hau’ofa’s work was not just theory or cultural theory. It is culture. It is a way of looking at the world. It’s a way of organizing our human cultures, theoretically, on a horizontal plane rather than a vertical hierarchy, which is how we are currently organized...there’s an equality you feel when we can align our cultures this way...this is why the ocean is so peaceful and calm and respected because it has the ability to flatten a society if it wanted to...jus kidding lol.”¹⁴¹

Thinking in this way, it helped to resolve the tensions between people and allowed the meeting to progress in a way that underlined unification as a staple theme of the first conference. The conference organizers set its theme to “Within and to the World,” which was inspired by another piece by Epeli Hau’ofa entitled, “Our Place Within”¹⁴² as a reflection of the movement’s three main causes for the conference:

¹³⁹ Uipi, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

¹⁴⁰ Sosefina, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

¹⁴¹ Toka, talk-story with author, California 2010, in person

¹⁴² Hau’ofa, Epeli. “Our Place Within: Foundations for a Creative Oceania” In *We Are The Ocean*, edited by Epeli Hau’ofa. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008. 27-40

“Our first theme was about unification and we thought that we should focus on this first in order to build a strong foundation for a conference we envisioned would happen every year.”

The first cause was making a political statement and creating a voice for themselves as a generation that was conscious and aware of the work our elders had laid since the 1970s. The idea was to not reinvent the wheel per se, but to extend on the work of an older generation of Islanders. This was about responding to their work and marking this as a contribution of the 3rd generation of Islanders:

“We definitely wanted to honor the work that my grandparents and parents came to do. Now that they’re old and tired, this was our way of continuing that legacy. I feel like this was also about healing: The first generation that came had to endure forced assimilation, the second generation rejected culture or played it down, and my generation, the third generation, is about reviving what was lost and ‘back to our roots’.”¹⁴³

These students wanted to make visible a growing population of students in higher education that awakened and was capable of lodging a campaign of visibility and advocacy efforts to expose the struggles of the larger Pacific Islander community in general, especially in education. This “within” as referred to in the conference theme was about expressing all that was within themselves and the ocean to showcase unity and provide a sacred place and space to lodge a borderless, unbounded, unconfined, and interconnected conversations of a racialized group historically relegated to the “smallness” of their islands by western culture.

The message of hope and struggle for these students needed to operate on both a national and global level, hence the inclusion of the term “world”—worlds that are equally important and relevant. For the students this was not about popularity, but rather about creating imagery that countered mainstream conceptions of the Pacific Islanders as “hula dancers”, “exotic,” “entertainers,” “football players,” “criminals,” “uneducated,” “savage,” “uncivilized,” and “stuck in the past,” etc., which to them, were the origins of the struggles they now currently faced:

“VASA is an opportunity to reframe and create for ourselves our own realities, our own imagery for us and our people. We have been defined by this ‘smallness’ mentality and ‘belittled’ for too long. We’ve had enough and if no one will do it for us, then we’ll have to do it ourselves.”¹⁴⁴

This was a moment for the students to challenge head-on the inequalities rooted in imperialist constructions of the Pacific made by Europeans and Americans which eventually

¹⁴³ Folola, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

¹⁴⁴ Sisay, talk-story with author, California 2010, in person.

helped them in their conquest of the West and the Pacific. The ocean for these students was a place of balance and neutrality.

A second theme of the conference was to build a political structure by which voices from all sectors of the Pacific Islander community could be included. Although the structure did not materialize in the 1st conference, it was implemented in the 2nd conference that was hosted in the SF Bay Area by CCSF and SF State University in 2012. The political structure was meant to place students and their educational aspirations or expertise to committees that would work towards resolutions in addressing the issues. For example, students pursuing the “environment” as their educational goals had the opportunity to contribute and “intern” in the committee as a way to address environmental issues while also receiving experience in their desired fields through connected internships. The following committees were created: “Cultural and Community Affairs,” “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” “Education and Research,” “Finance, Budget, and Management,” “Governmental and Internal Affairs,” “Health and Wellness,” “Indigenous and International Affairs,” “and Labor, Business, and Technology.” By putting together these committees, it offered students opportunities to become advocates of their most interested social issues and trained future leaders in areas they are most interested in.

Finally, the third central theme to VASA was advocating for Pacific Islands Studies, especially students from other colleges and universities who didn’t have courses on the Pacific. Many of the participants in the first and second conference gatherings were students interested in being able to initiate conversations for creating Pacific Studies courses at their respective institutions. A participant of the conference shared:

“These courses along with Pacific Islands Studies would help bring an awareness to issues regarding the Pacific but it also allows state-side born Islanders opportunities to studying their own cultures.”¹⁴⁵

Students from the schools who had already taken courses in Pacific Studies provided the following strategies for initiating conversations for the formation of new courses in Pacific Studies. In a short memo that I received from members of the organizing committee, it outlined strategies useful for starting conversations around building Pacific Islands Studies. Although these suggestions are unique to CCSF, UW, and CAL, they not universal in any way as local politics at their schools or cities usually shape conversations about Pacific Islands Studies. These are the strategies the committee outlined for VASA participants:

Start an Ocean. What are the values and elements that bind students under the rubric “Pacific Islander.” This became a point of contention for many students as there was tendency to equate “Polynesian” with “Pacific Islander” which in the process “excluded” others who identify as PI such as Chamorros of Guahan or Filipinos or other groups in the Pacific from Micronesia and Melanesia. The formation of this term shapes what it is to be learned in a course in Pacific Islands Studies and students needed have a grounded definition of the term “Pacific Islander” and how that term connected with the local area and the state.

Organize the Archive. Students should decide as a collective or by student organizations what topics expect to engage in Pacific Islands Studies. Most of the students from UC, CCSF, and UW

¹⁴⁵ Mulamula, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

were more interested in indigenous cultures and how those cultures are transplanted from the “homeland/mainland.”

Locate an Island/s. Convene a meeting with prospective faculty, professors, or department chairs for possibilities to creating courses in Pacific Islands Studies. This has resulted in one of three outcomes:

- a. The faculty member is not interested and tells the students that there are no resources or there isn't an interest at the school. Most times it is not framed this way but it can be concluded contextually that the faculty member has no intent in pursuing the issue with other people or with the students.
- b. The faculty member is interested and supports the students by locating resources to strategize and organize other members of the academic community to consult. Faculty usually become advisors to new programs or new student organizations along with graduate students. If the outcome is that a faculty member is on board and is supportive of the needs of the students, this would be an appropriate time to meet frequently to strengthen relationships and begin planning incremental steps to ensure the needs are met. In most cases, students will find an ally in a faculty member who becomes the “access point” to other tools and resources. Such is the case at UW, CAL, and CCSF.
- c. Faculty are generally interested but have no idea how to pursue or where to look for resources to support student demands for courses or there isn't any faculty on campus that deals specifically with the subject area, although this is rare. This has resulted in students venturing off to organize with Pacific Islander staff in other areas of the school such as classified staff or administrators.
- d. Surf the Big Waves. If the outcome is that the faculty is not interested, then this is the appropriate time to begin meeting with administrators in student services and deans of various colleges or units. You have to start somewhere. This usually forces the dean to consult respective department chairs under their supervision.
- e. Maintain the Currents. Whether or not the support is there, the discussions around Pacific Islands Studies needs to be maintained. One of the most difficult aspects of initiating conversations about Pacific Islands is not so much starting the conversation but sustaining them. In recent years, students at UW, CAL, and CCSF have struggled to maintain those conversations as students tend to graduate, transfer, or sadly most often, drop-out. Maintaining a continuity of the discussions around Pacific Islands Studies can be quite challenging. However, this highlights a critical point and has allowed the students at these respective institutions to create programs and request demands to avoid the discontinuity. At UW and CAL, for example, there have been requests to hire a faculty member who focuses on scholarship in the Pacific. The problem is that there weren't many Pacific Islanders with doctoral degrees to fill research-one positions. CCSF on the other hand, which only requires a Master's degree, has been able to higher specifically a faculty member teaching in Pacific Islands Studies. The point here is that because students come and go, having a faculty member at the institution helps to ensure a continuous dialogue of the field.

One of the creative ways to maintain the dialogue in the school is to create programs that bring about awareness of the issues facing Pacific Islander communities. Some ideas for these are

discussed in previous chapters but can include outreach and recruitment, speaker series, cultural events, and so on. What has worked at UW and CCSF are organized marches and protest. Most times “protests” are woven into the event rather than your “traditional” protests movements. Although, there have been attempts to create those kinds of protests.

By looking at the student’s suggestions to VASA constituents, it lays a bold and provocative set of strategies that help to implement and sustain conversations about Pacific Islands Studies. These strategies were about creating spaces in academia and realizing the powerful connections an academic field can inspire when all members of an institution support its creation. CCSF, UW, and UCB experienced tremendous results when Pacific Islands Studies courses become the foundation for organizing. This allowed students to make extensive connections to cultural events and the wider community.

Since the inception of VASA, the committee of students that met in 2010 decided to launch the conferences first gathering at UW Seattle in conjunction with one its most popular outreach and recruitment events called “PolyDay”. Two years later, the 2nd conference would be organized by students of SF State and CCSF in the SF Bay Area which would be attended by students from over 50 colleges and universities nation-wide and as far as the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan. The theme for the 2nd Conference was called, “Intersecting Knowledge across the Diaspora,” and creatively used as the theme for the 2nd edition of Matamai. Although there were plans to conduct its 3rd gathering in Salt Lake City, Utah at the University of Utah, it has been on a hiatus as funding and other problems stalled its formation. Currently, there are now plans to revive the gathering to be hosted back at UW-Seattle in the spring of 2016 and future plans for the University of Hawai’i to host its fourth annual summit.



Figure 5.2



Figure 5.3



Figure 5.4

Our Sea of Islands: Celebrating Pacific Islands Studies

Courses in Pacific Islands Studies helped to revive students' interests in their own cultures and created a framework to engage with many other Islander communities in the local area. This was one of the students concerns about their education in the classroom. In one of my courses, there was a student who shared insights about their conversation with their parents and the kinds of courses they were taking at school. The student shared with their parents that they were taking a "Polynesian" course and not to my surprise, their parents responded condescendingly about the student's interests in the course:

"When I told my parents that I was excited about school and that I was taking a 'Poly'¹⁴⁶ class they didn't like the idea. I feel they looked down upon it because economically our culture wasn't going to provide me or my family the necessary means to survive in America."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Poly means Polynesian and is accepted slang amongst the Polynesian community.

¹⁴⁷Olewasami, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

Of course, not all parents feel this way. In fact, a student-parent shared another perspective about the importance of Pacific Studies courses:

“I was sad to hear my classmate share that but it is a reality and I completely understand where their parents are coming from. I think they were growing up at a time when your languages and your cultures were devalued...most of our grandparents were forced to learn English and if they couldn’t then their children would. But the circumstances at the time were such a way that our parents saw their survival in America was totally economic. But I have children now and I am coming back to school and I say that I hope these classes are still around because I think it’s important for my children to take these classes...it fulfills what I myself can’t give them.”¹⁴⁸

These conversations exposed a contradiction for a generation of students who, on one hand, were expected to fulfill the promises and the desires of their parents, by going to school and choosing fields that amounted to lucrative careers, while on the other, fulfill their own desires to learn more about who they were and where their cultures come from and how they themselves fit into this sphere of Islander culture:

“My parents don’t understand this is so important to who we are and I feel these courses helps to guide my understanding of the world we live in now.”¹⁴⁹

In a discussion with some of the student leaders at CCSF—Andrew Tuala, Emani Ilaoa, Mary Ann Cunningham-Palaita, and Fifita Halaholo—discussions centered around how we can move beyond countering stereotypical ideas of Islanders as “athletes” and sharing with their parents things that students do in college. This was important to them and one way to do this was create an end-of-the-semester event that both countered stereotypical images of the “athlete” and the idea that Pacific Studies amounted was not relevant and beneficial. Having already organized large scale events like VASA, students wanted something more “academic” an event that demonstrated Islander engagement in academia. Nane Palaita-Cunningham shared:

“We were doing well with outreach and recruitment of Islanders in higher education but we weren’t showing our communities we were doing with our education. This was an opportunity to that.”¹⁵⁰

The students proposed an idea that would become an integral part of Interdisciplinary Studies and Pacific Studies courses at CCSF. That idea was to create an end-of-the-semester event that celebrate culture by sharing the students’ work in the courses. In 2010, they established, “Our Sea of Islands” which was inspired by ‘Epeli Hau’ofa’s foundational essay about the ocean and

¹⁴⁸Phillips, talk story with author, California, 2010, in person.

¹⁴⁹Fulufulu, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

¹⁵⁰ Palaita-Cunningham, Nane, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

has been used to ground the curriculum of the courses. Students developed three key arguments for establishing the event—build community around scholarship, share knowledge with local community members and their families, and inspire upcoming generations of students about the higher education.

Building Community and Scholarship

Many of the students taking the courses made moves to organize with existing student organizations. This was important to them because they understood that other racialized groups were facing the same kinds of stereotypical ideas of being “uneducated.” Students of the class not only reached out to several of the Pacific Islander organizations but also clubs like Poetry for the People Club, the Filipino PEACE club, the Black Student Union, Students Supporting Students, and VIDA¹⁵¹. The goal of this commendable act was to build a group that transcended racial, class, and gender lines that shared similar experiences of stigma in society.

In their first event, students from other organizations were given the opportunity to share poetry and testimony about their experiences in higher education and most shared how they felt “different” and often times “disconnected” from what is expected of them. Many also shared how they “didn’t feel as if they were a part of the learning experience” as they were often looked at as someone that was “unable to communicate effectively about the assignment.” The event allowed students to share and make sense of their experiences while engaging with a community of students who had similar feelings.

The event also allowed students to meet parents and families who were invited by the students enrolled in the class and it was this particular engagement with parents, families, and community members, did students begin to “breakdown” invisible” barriers to school. For example, one student shared:

“I bought my Mom and my Dad to this event and they were so pleased and happy because they never knew what I was doing in school. They just thought that I went to college but didn’t know how extensive my participation in school was. My Dad asked, ‘Are we going to a play? or are you getting an award?’ And I told my Dad that he was coming to see me learn.”¹⁵²

By the end of the event, parents expressed how grateful they were to see their child:

“It’s awesome to see the students get up in front of the audience and share their presentations. It made me realize how much I needed to continue supporting them and the other students who are also trying to make it.”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ VIDA is an organization that supports undocumented students.

¹⁵² Tautolo, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

¹⁵³ Nukuhiva, talk story with author, California 2010, in person.

Sharing Knowledge

The central foci of “Our Sea of Islands” are of the student presentations. About five weeks of the semester is used to prepare students for the event. To prepare them, students are placed into groups of my choosing. This ensures that students are not grouped with their traditional friends and that Islander students are spread out across the groups. Students then are instructed to choose a topic, especially a topic that was not covered in class or a topic that we spent very little time covering. In the past three events, students have primarily chosen topics that were about material culture such as dances and tattoos. Only recently have students decided to venture off on social issues like youth and gang violence and mental health. After spending three weeks conducting and gathering research materials, class time is spent to organize their findings so that it can be streamlined into a presentation. Students are then given an opportunity to share their presentations in any format as long as certain requirements are met. Although most choose to use power point as their medium, many others have presented their topics in the forms of skits, dance, song composition, and through poetry and spoken word. The array of presentation styles allows the students to be comfortable and confident as possible to deliver their presentation and share their knowledge of the chosen topics with the community.

Outreach and Recruitment

A final aspect of “Our Sea of Islands” is inviting students from the high schools for the evening program. Although the students do not participate in presentations they do however participate by providing performances and at the same time are exposed to ways they can concurrently enroll in courses at CCSF. This begins the conversation of familiarizing students with educational opportunities at the college. In their first event, over 30 high school students were invited to attend the presentations and were linked with a student mentor that would provide answers throughout the academic year. Those mentorships created ongoing linkages to other resources such as tutoring, help with financial aid, and most importantly, links to counselors who start to educational plans.



Figure 5.5



Figure 5.6

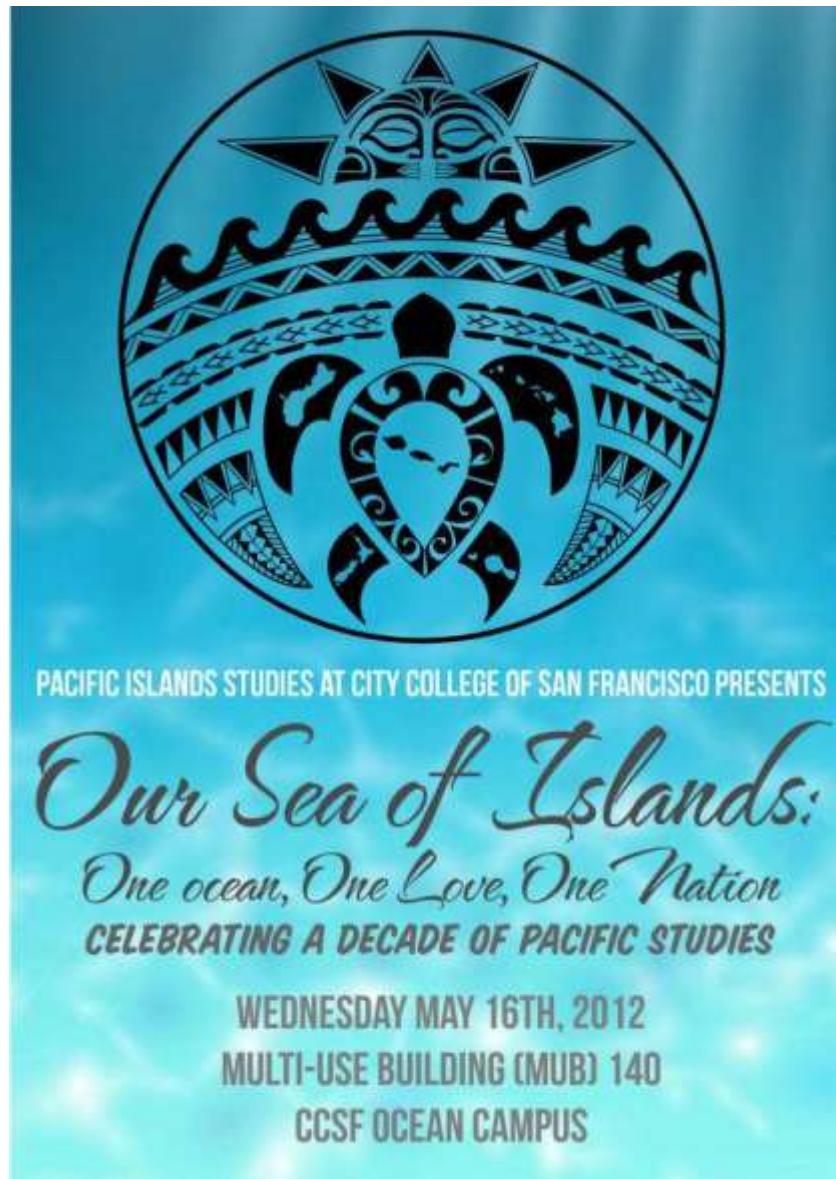


Figure 5.7

Final Remarks & Thinking Questions

The story unfolding here is one that will continue to do so even at the end of this chapter. What is important to think about is how these students continued on with their lives after they have left the institutions where they spent a good amount of time learning, forming communities, reviving their cultures, and challenging their own ideas about the world. For many of them, the classroom and by extension, the school, has become their ocean—the sacred terrain/space where notions of “homeland,” “mainland,” and “culture” are critiqued, invented, constructed, and embraced. It is not a smooth terrain and one that it is easily navigable. But it is definitely one that despite its unpredictability, has become safe for many Islander students in this dissertation. When these spaces can be recreated and supported, it not only reminds us of the power students create for themselves when we give them a chance to speak and be heard. Colonialism doesn’t

end here but it is at least an attempt to making sense of a colonialism that will forever shape their lives. Schools must be ready to shift and the only way to do so is to ground our ideas of learning and education in an ocean—a place that privileges inclusivity and connections over individuality and difference. *Mo tatou motu.*

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Epilogue: Multiple Ocean Narratives

At the time this dissertation was completed and submitted for approval the students in the dissertation continued to progress and move on to others areas of education. Many have transferred to San Francisco State University and other California State University schools and UC schools while many have dropped out and pursued other life opportunities. This dissertation does not in any way serve as an authoritative account but rather one of many more ocean conversations about the challenges and the triumphs of higher education in the U.S.

There are many students and community leaders who have not shared their perspectives about the Pacific Islander movements at these institutions. However, I hope this work will inspire many others to add or challenge what is written here creating a “thicker” account and a deeper analysis than one study could ever reveal. If not, this work will serve, at the very least, as a testimony and a record of Islanders and their voyage through higher education.

The City College of San Francisco would be the only institution of higher learning in the spring 2014 to launch an official Critical Pacific Islands Studies Certificate Program outside of Hawai’i and the Pacific, the lower 48 states, and the state of California. The College of San Mateo, where I began teaching in the fall of 2014, approved a preliminary curriculum design in the spring of 2015, hoping to launch a certificate program similar to CCSF, in the fall of 2016.

Imua! Waipahu! Vasa!