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## Sharing Aloha on the mainland: Cultural Identity and Connecting to Heritage through Commercial Luau Shows in Central Florida

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SHARING ALOHA ON THE MAINLAND: CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CONNECTING  
TO HERITAGE THROUGH COMMERCIAL LUAU SHOWS IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

by

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B.A. Whitworth University, 2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The Polynesian luau is one of the most well-known examples of cultural tourism. As such, it has accrued plenty of criticism, from issues of authenticity to primitivizing stereotypes and bodily framing. Lost in these critiques, however, are the voices of Polynesian performers who have chosen to participate in this form of cultural presentation. Based on ethnographic research with Polynesian performers employed in tourist luau shows in Orlando, Florida, from 2012 to 2014, I argue that not only are performers presenting their culture in a way that is meaningful for them and their audience, but that they are also using their employment as a way of connecting to their cultural heritage and reifying their cultural identity. By looking at performers' perspectives within cultural tourism, scholars can perceive the agency those performers use to assert their cultural identity and connection to their heritage.

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And finally, *Sipa lambon Toara sang. Toumba kakis, bambae Nivin trahim.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Thesis Overview .....	3
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	7
History of the Hula, the Hula Girl and the Luau Show .....	7
Cultural Tourism and Authenticity .....	15
Critique of the Luau, Performer Agency, and Cultural Embodiment .....	24
Critique of the Commercial Luau .....	25
Performer Agency and Identity .....	33
Embodiment of Culture through Dance .....	36
Summation of Literature .....	38
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	39
Methods .....	39
Analysis Strategy .....	40
Limitations and Implications .....	41
CHAPTER FOUR: CONSULTANT PROFILES AND EVENT DESCRIPTIONS .....	42
Interview Profiles .....	42
Maile and Julie .....	44
Donny .....	45
Tehei and Honi .....	47
Harold .....	49

Kumu.....	51
Jessie .....	54
Mahina .....	56
Will .....	59
Toma .....	62
Events.....	64
Hālau .....	64
Pae’aina.....	66
Events at the Resort Luau Stage .....	68
Ho’ike .....	70
Ho’ike Saturday Night Show .....	73
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	77
Negotiation of Culture .....	79
Balancing Entertainment and Culture .....	80
Practice Theory .....	90
Blurred Lines .....	100
Back Regions / Front Regions .....	100
Performers’ Community Crossover .....	104
Connecting with Cultural Heritage and Identity.....	108
Cultural Identity and “Doing” Culture.....	108
Enacting Place.....	113
Cultural Embodiment.....	124

Existential Authenticity .....	127
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION .....	129
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER .....	134
APPENDIX B: IRB CHANGE OF STUDY APPROVAL LETTER .....	136
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	138
REFERENCES .....	141



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The lights go down. From out of the darkness the *toeti drums* begin their staccato rhythms: boombadaboombada. Boom. Boom. Boom. As the lights come up to a golden glow on stage, four men dressed in Tahitian costumes walk to the center of the stage. They turn to the audience and raise large conch shells to their mouths. The conch shells emit a long, sorrowful note, but they hush any residual dinner conversation. As they return the shells to their sides, the lights raise a bit more and the female narrator is spotlighted. “Ladies and Gentlemen, the moment you have all been waiting for. It’s time for our traditional Polynesian dances. We begin on the beautiful island of Tahiti!” The band chants and the *toeti drums* and congas resume their frenetic beats. Four female dancers in colorful grass skirts and Tahitian headdresses enter behind the men. Hip movements are strong and concise. The crowd of dining tourists has fallen under the captivating spell of drumbeats and shushing skirts. They have been drawn into the spirit of Polynesia at the resort luau dinner show. [Fieldnotes October, 2012]

For nearly a century, scholars, Hollywood, and Hawaiian tourists have examined the Polynesian Luau as a cultural and entertainment phenomenon. Some scholars have criticized the luau or similar cultural tourism productions within cultural tourism, for issues of authenticity, commodification, and exotification (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; O’Connor 2008). Others scholars have offered specific critique of the luau show in that it promotes a stereotypical sexualized and feminized image of the hula girl as the mainstay of Polynesian culture (Desmond 1997; 1999; Imada 2004; Trask 1993; 1999).

While many of the criticisms raised by such scholars are valid and need to be addressed, the potential problem of critical analysis is that it leaves out the perspectives of those performers involved in the entertainment industry. In order to bring awareness to both sides of cultural tourism, the academic purview needs to be multivocal in addressing performers’ perspectives alongside academic critiques.

There is a growing compilation of literature focusing on meaningful experiences of culture through cultural tourism, in spite of its commercialized presentation (Smith and Forrest 2006; Cohen 1983; Medina 2003). Scholars working on identity formation are looking at ways people practicing or performing their culture can use these practices to bolster their cultural identity (Bunten 2008; Stillman 2001). This cultural connection becomes even more important in communities separated from the land of their heritage as persons in diaspora communities are working to claim their cultural identity (Kaimikaua 2010). Thus, the involvement of performers of Polynesian luau shows, participating in a commercial form of culture, especially those working and living “off-island” in mainland United States, needs to be further examined.

Performers working in tourist luau shows in Orlando, Florida are quick to acknowledge the tension between cultural presentations for the sake of passing on culture, and commodified cultural entertainment. Yet, I find that these performers still exhibit pride in their heritage and in their performance. Furthermore, in a diaspora such as the Polynesian community in central Florida, the line between performer and cultural representative is often blurred. Not only are these performers reconstructing their cultural identity about what it means to be Polynesian in this context, they are also connecting to their heritage by physically performing the dances that embody Polynesian cultural values and connect the performers to the place and culture of their heritage.

Based on the interviews of the performers involved in commercial luau shows in Orlando, Florida, my analysis is that Polynesian performers, away from the Polynesian islands, use their involvement in commercial presentations of their culture to connect to their heritage and reinforce their cultural identity. Furthermore, I propose that performers view their experience similar to Ning Wang’s idea of “existential authenticity” (1999) in which tourists

understand the creative license entertainment can employ, but can still view the experiences as a meaningful experience for themselves. In the same way, performers can find their cultural presentation as meaningful, even with its entertainment framework.

Throughout my research, I meet and associate with many performers who are passionate about what they do for a living and about their cultural heritage. I offer their perspectives in an effort to illuminate the role of the Polynesian performer, away from the home of his or her heritage, who chooses to present his or her Polynesian culture for commercial entertainment.

### Thesis Overview

The structure of my thesis begins with three sections of literature review to give context to my study. Section One of the literature review focuses on the political history of the hula in Hawaii and the rise of the luau show as a commercial form of entertainment. Here, I discuss the image of the hula girl and how it was shaped as the welcoming figure of Hawaiian tourism (Desmond 1999; Imada 2004). I also address the formation of the tourist luau show, some of the local Hawaii-native-run successful shows, and the formation of the major commercial luau shows both in Hawaii and in the mainland. I conclude this section with the current state of luau shows presented in Orlando, Florida.

In Section Two, I focus on anthropologists, tourism scholars, and sociologists who weigh the merits and detriments of cultural tourism. I introduce some of the anthropological theory of tourism and explore the debate on “authenticity” in cultural tourism (Said 1979; MacCannell 1973; Medina 2003; Cohen 1988; Wang 2007; Wang 1999).

For the last section of my literature review, I present some of the literature directly relating to the Polynesian luau. This section includes an overview and response to some critiques in the literature pertaining to the luau and cultural tourism raised by Desmond (1997; 1999), Comaroff and Comaroff (2009), and Trask (1999; 2001). I contrast these critiques with literature that focuses on the agency of performers as proposed by Edward Bruner (2005) and Alexis Bunten (2008). I explore the publications of anthropologists studying Polynesian identity in mainland America, for example, how mainland hula groups connect to their cultural heritage through their involvement in dance (Kaimikaua 2010; Shaka 2011; Bades-Fernandes 2011). Finally, I incorporate the work of anthropologists looking at the embodied experience of dance and culture (Buckland 2001; Kray 2005; Stillman 2001).

Upon concluding Chapter Two of my literature review, Chapter Three includes a description of my methodology, a review of my research time line, and the strategy I used to analyze my data. Chapter Four introduces the ten different consultants I interviewed for my research. This chapter also introduces specific events or experiences from my participant observation in a local *hālau*, (hula school), and various events that I attended over the course of my fieldwork, such as competitions and Polynesian shows. I include these to provide the reader with a better understanding of the culture of the Polynesian community in Orlando, Florida, and the performers' approach to their involvement in cultural tourism entertainment.

In Chapter Five, I present a discussion of the major findings from ethnographic research, my interviews, and participant observations. This chapter focuses on the discussion of these performers' perspectives along side, and in contrast with, my experiences in the *hālau*. During the discussion, I apply my findings to the existing literature in order to shed further light on the process of cultural tourism.

This discussion and findings section is separated into five major themes. The first theme deals with the negotiation of authentic cultural presentation and some of the limitations of presenting culture as entertainment (Desmond 1999; Bunten 2008). This section also includes the way that performers negotiate the tension between entertainment and culture by being able to shape their performances from the inside, just as is described in practice theory (Bourdieu 1990; Ortner 2006).

The next section addresses the blurring of boundaries between “front regions” of performance, and “back regions” of learning and practicing culture (Goffman 1959). This section utilizes Goffman’s (1959) definitions of physical space and my participant observation to show that the line between performers and cultural representatives is not hard and fast, but rather, this line is blurred. The lines are further blurred, as it is not only physical space that is being crossed, but also the community distinctions between those who are cultural members and those who perform professionally in commercial luaus.

In the third section of my discussion, I draw upon the data from my interviews that address comments linking the performers to their cultural heritage and their cultural identity (Bunten 2008; Kaimikaua 2010). I show that not only are performers linked to their cultural heritage, but also to the physical land of their heritage through performing the different dances and destinations presented in the luau show (Johannesson and Baerenholdt 2008).

In looking at how place is performed and embodied in the motions of the dance, I continue to discuss issues of embodiment into the fourth section. In this section, I call upon scholars who use Bourdieu’s bodily hexis concept to explain the embodiment of cultural values within physical movements of dance (Buckland 2001; Sherlock 1993; Kray 2005; Stillman 2001). Using the work of these scholars and through the accounts of the performers and

experiences from my hālau, I show that through the action of performing the dances, performers are embodying and connecting with their cultural heritage.

Finally, in the last section of my discussion, I apply these findings to the literature on authenticity in cultural production to demonstrate how these performers are creating a meaningful experience of their culture for themselves, as well as their audiences. I refer to Wang's "existential authenticity" (1999) as a way of explaining performers' decision to participate in a commercial form of their culture.

I conclude in Chapter Six with a summary of my findings and the application of these findings to the existing literature. I continue to note what these findings contribute to the field of anthropology and suggest further applications of this research.

The progression of my thesis through the history of the luau show in Hawaii, through the literature on cultural tourism, and through the exploration of alternate theoretical viewpoints, gives context to the current Central Florida luau show. By giving this context and continuing with my ethnographic findings, I address the perspectives of the Orlando performers who are choosing to participate in commercial cultural tourism and highlight their ability connect with their Polynesian identity and cultural heritage.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### History of the Hula, the Hula Girl and the Luau Show

Prior to the commercialization of the hula through luaus, pop culture, Hollywood, and Broadway, the hula was a traditional form of dance in Hawaii. The hula had special meanings and specific significance to each performance. “Before contact with Europeans, hula had played an important social role, with special chants and dances produced in honor of royalty or to commemorate important events” (Desmond 1999:61) and it was also connected to Hawaiian religious practices (Badua-Fernandes 2011).

The puritanical Christian missionaries were not keen on this practice, however. One missionary wrote home to explain that hula was too sexual, too vigorous, and too barbaric for civilized people to actually enjoy, despite the fact that it was sometimes aesthetically pleasing (Kirch and Sahlins 1994). Certain hulas celebrated fertility and sexual union; these hulas, such as the *hula ma'i* (genital celebrating hula), definitely conflicted with the missionaries’ puritanical views of constrained sexuality (Silva 2000).

During the early 1820s, missionaries advocated the prohibition of the practice of hula dancing on the grounds that it was amoral and a heathen practice (Imada 2004; Silva 2000). Noenoe Silva (2000), in relating the history of the hula’s prohibition, illustrates how the missionaries also condemned the hula as an idle pastime. The missionaries, instead, lauded labor as a more honorable occupation, thus serving the dual purpose of eliminating the overt sexuality of the hula and increasing productivity for their growing plantation interests.

The missionaries' desires were aided by the political ambition of Queen Ka'ahumanu. After the death of King Kamehameha in 1819, Queen Ka'ahumanu took advantage of her position as a favored wife and wielded her power as his widow. King Kamehameha had conquered all of the Hawaiian Islands and unified them under his rule. According to tradition, the lands would be redistributed at his death. Instead of continuing this tradition, Queen Ka'ahumanu threw out the old traditions by breaking *tapu* (sacred taboo), but in doing so needed to replace the old beliefs with a new religion (Kirch and Sahlins 1994). She chose Christianity. She allied herself and her son with the missionaries, championing Christian morals and outlawing the hula in the 1830s (Silva 2000). Patrick Kirch and Marshall Sahlins (1994) explain that the Hawaiians were used to having some new moral codes enacted at the coronation of a new monarchy, or chief. Therefore, in the case of the joint reign between Queen Ka'ahumanu and her pliable son, 22-year-old Liholiho, Christianity as a religion and as a moral ordination spread quickly throughout the islands. Despite the royal prohibition, however, hula continued to be practiced in secret, much to the missionaries' dismay.

Even as the missionaries were somewhat successful in banning the hula in Hawaii, mainland America was hosting "hula girl" performances throughout the 1850s. Some of these shows occurred in international expositions, like the Chicago World's Fair. Other hula shows were part of the menagerie of exotic oddities presented in sideshows and burlesques. One such show exhibited signs proclaiming, "Kanaka dancing girls! Hula Hula! Ladies prohibited!" This advertisement is framing the dance as an erotic presentation and reinforcing the idea that the hula was too barbaric for female sensibilities (Desmond 1999:61).

The rumors of these mainland hula shows being associated with peep shows did not help the reputation of the hula in Hawaii. One court performer of King Kalākaua details to



anthropologist Jane Desmond that she was mocked and denigrated upon returning from her tour because of her participation in mainland hula exhibitions, only to be venerated years later, when hula regained its former prominence in Hawaiian culture (Desmond 1999).

The hula remained an underground practice in Hawaii until its revival in 1883 for the coronation celebration of King Kalākaua. This so-called “Merrie Monarch” was instrumental in bringing hula back from underground to its former prominence (Skillman 2012). King Kalākaua called hula “the language of the heart, therefore the heartbeat of the Hawaiian People” (Merrie Monarch Festival 2013). Since the ancient chants and hulas were the means of passing on genealogy, mythology, history and religion through oral tradition, King Kalākaua saw the revitalization of the hula as an important way to revitalize Hawaiian history and culture (Merrie Monarch Festival 2013; Skillman 2012). This revival under King Kalākaua caused *hālaus* (hula schools) to become public once again and many people began training in the art of hula.

Still, the mainland traveling shows of this time were perpetuating the image of the sexualized hula girl and this image became the brand of the Hawaiian Islands. Adrina Imada (2004) suggests that the inviting female bodies of these early hula dancers framed Hawaii in the mind of mainlanders as feminine, exotic, and available for the taking. She asserts that Americans began to view Hawaii as open to their desires and as an abundant resource of pleasure. This feminized image of Hawaii led to the tourist mindset that this was the place for their enjoyment, and that it was their right to enjoy it (Imada 2004).

Imada (2004) claims that with this same feminine image of Hawaii in mind, as innocent, undeveloped, available and receptive to masculine interests, the sugar and pineapple plantation owners soon felt entitled to pursue the interests of their businesses above the interests of the native Hawaiians. These plantation owners began to hatch a plan to take over the power from

the Hawaiian monarchy and install their own “Democratic” government (Imada 2004). The political, and at times, violent power struggle of the plantation owners with the monarchy eventually ended in the forceful annexation of Hawaii to the United States.

On January 17, 1893, Queen Liliuokalani conceded to the annexation of the country to the United States as a way to try and abate the violence, but not turn the control of her country over completely to the board of plantation owners. She put her trust in the United States government and President Cleveland, thinking that he would help restore her country to self-rule (Trask 2001). Unfortunately, the United States viewed Hawaii as a strategic military location in the Pacific and President Cleveland was at the end of his term. President McKinley, the succeeding president in office, had much more expansionist views than President Cleveland and backed the American businessmen in Hawaii. Hawaii was considered a territory of the United States until it became the 50<sup>th</sup> state of the United States of America in March of 1959 (Trask 2001).

Preceding the creation of the Polynesian luau show, Hawaiian performers appeared in the Chicago World Fair in 1893 and the San Francisco Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915 (Desmond 1999). Through these expositions and through the explosion of picture post cards, the “hula girl” became the new image of Hawaiian tourism (Desmond 1999). In 1903, the Hawaiian promotion committee was created to draw tourists and investors to Hawaii. This committee was formed and blossomed in the midst of what Desmond calls the “golden age of postcards” and it became the golden age of the hula girl image on these postcards (Desmond 1999:43). Desmond relates that the era between the 1900s to the 1930s “demonstrates the emergence of this raced and gendered figure in tourism discourse” (1999:6).

This era also began the mainland appropriation of the hula dance and the hula girl in performances by Ziegfeld's Gilda Gray and in other Broadway and Hollywood shows. These portrayals of the hula included sexualized lunges and hip gyrations that exaggerated and exoticized the dance. These performers and performances lacked the years of training or technical subtlety of the historic hula. These renditions were also often included different dance moves that had been appropriated from other cultures around the world as well, including African dance, and Oriental influences (Desmond 1999). Performances by these actresses typified how the mainland came to view the hula.

It was through these portrayals that the image of the "hula girl" was transformed from strictly Hawaiian women to *hapa-haole* (half-Caucasian, half-Hawaiian), or generally exotic looking females. These portrayals also helped to shape the image of the hula girl as "nativized," that is, more barbaric and more sexually free, but also innocent to civilization (Desmond 1999). Desmond notes that between 1915 and 1930, the "half-white hula girl emerges as the ideal, literally embodying the fantasy of the nativizing troupe melding the two bodies into one" (1999:8). Thus, the iconic, dark-haired, tan, but not too dark-skinned, thin, alluring hapa-haole hula girl was integrated into the mainlanders' perceptions of Hawaii.

With the "hula girl" image fully formed as the icon of Hawaiian tourism, it was not long before hotels started marketing the hula as a tourist experience. Between 1922 and 1927, the tourism industry doubled in Hawaii (Desmond 1999:91). Post annexation, tourists were invited to explore the exotic, without ever having to "bother with passports and other formalities," as Hawaii was now part of the United States (Desmond 1999:84). Hotels began to take advantage of this hula girl popularity. The Royal Hawaiian began the tradition of Hawaiian shows as part of their tourist package. For their grand opening, there was a performance pageant reenacting the

landing of King Kamehameha (Desmond 1999). As a precursor to the show, Hawaiian women dressed in hula costumes greeted guests and “draped important shoulders with *maile* leis” (Desmond 1999:92). Part of the show also included a hula dance presentation. These performances served as precursors to future luau shows hosted by hotels and tourist agencies.

By the mid-1930s, the luau dinner show had become a main tourist attraction. Desmond addresses the emergence of the food component, along with the entertainment, by referring to magazine articles of the time that noted the desire of tourists to see the local people in their “native haunts.” The author of this advice, Elinor Langton, was writing for a magazine located in Honolulu, but whose audience was Euro-American. In this article, Langton encourages that the incorporation of the island’s edibles, as well as the parts of the “Hawaiian dance worth preserving,” should all be rejuvenated and included in the proposed luaus (Desmond 1999:101). It was the idea of experiencing the culture “in-situ” that perpetuated the combination of local food with local entertainment of “natural” or traditional dance and culture (Desmond 1999).

The Kodak Hula Show was instrumental in framing the images from these luau shows, giving tourists ample light and staged poses for hula pictures. The Royal Hawaiian Hotel hosted performances outside by the ocean (Desmond 1999). Cruise ships that docked in port in Hawaii began to host elaborate shows featuring the hula, as well (Imada 2004).

Although the major tourist industry hotels dominated much of the entertainment market, some Hawaiian performers, such as the Mossman family, reclaimed the luau shows to some degree. The Mossmans were performers who created a revitalization village comprised of Hawaiians who could “sing, dance, speak Hawaiian, cook Hawaiian food, and explain Hawaiian life” (Desmond 1999:112). Their goal was to offer entertainment to tourists and compete with

the bigger luau shows, while also providing support to elders who could pass down traditional knowledge of dance, ancient chants, and genealogy (Imada 2004).

This revitalization village was set up as a live-in village where they could house the teachers and students while also allowing tourists to peek at the “staged back regions” (MacCannell 1973:596), or as Desmond calls it, “living exhibits” (1999:113). The difference that Desmond (1999) notes about these luau shows was the emphasis on the hula as situated within Hawaiian history. This village formed a cross section between tourist and non-tourist activities.

While the Mossman family luau is considered by Imada (2004) as a successful negotiation of local people within cultural tourism, it finally fell to ruin after World War II and could no longer compete with the bigger commercial luau market. Still, the Mossman family helped to shape the luau show as a tourist experience, promising that:

[visitors] will thrill to the romance of Island yesterdays. Delicious foods of the Luau (native feast) will please the most discriminating. Ancient Hulas . . . native maids . . . weird chanting . . . thumping gourds . . . strumming ukuleles . . . plaintive Island melodies . . . majestic palms . . . quaint grass huts. [Visitors will] enjoy a never to be forgotten experience [Imada 2004:121].

It wasn't until the mid 1950s that these shows departed from solely focusing on Hawaiian dance to incorporating other dances from the Polynesian islands. Desmond claims this was initiated by the popularity of movies such as “South Pacific” (1958) that generalized Polynesia into one “pan-Polynesian” culture (1999:133). The sensationalism of the fast paced Tahitian hip movements and the Samoan fire knife performances were bigger draws for tourists to these Pan-Polynesian luau shows and, therefore, began to be incorporated into every successful luau show (Desmond 1999).

With the tourist entertainment luau shows gaining popularity as an island attraction, entertainment producers on the mainland once again looked to Hawaii for imported renditions of these luau shows. In New York, the Hawaiian Room was one such venue. Here, Hawaiian male musicians were hired to play on a stage set with palm trees and imitation rain forests, while female hula dancers were hired to dance in accompaniment.

While the dancers fit the type of the hapa-haole look and were lighter skinned brunettes, they still found that they could make a better living in these shows than in the plantation economy back in the islands (Imada 2004). There became within New York an enclave of Hawaiian performers who would aid each other in navigating the new city and the new culture (Imada 2004). Pretty soon, Polynesian fever swept the nation and many hotels began offering Polynesian-themed resorts, incorporating the tourist aspects of the luau show as the featured entertainment (Imada 2004).

Currently, there is a plethora of different luau shows tourists can choose from when they visit Hawaii. These range from major shows like the Paradise Cove Luau and Germaine's Luau to smaller shows like Hale Koa, and even shows similar to the Mossman's staging of "natural" villages, such as the Polynesian Cultural Center run by the Mormon Church (Desmond 1997). Desmond notes, "The tourist industry is the leading source of income for the state, generating \$11 billion a year in revenue, representing a quarter of Hawaii's gross state product and employing nearly a third of all workers" (1999:13).

In 2011, the Summary of Visitors report states that visitor expenditures came in at \$12.26 billion (Hawai'i Tourism Authority 2011). Tourists in Hawaii can also visit a hula hālau to learn a bit of the hula or to see a more traditional version of the dances than usually appear in the luau shows. Festivals, such as the *Merrie Monarch Festival*, host visitors more interested in the

technical aspects and execution of the Hawaiian hula than the Polynesian conglomeration offered in the tourist luau shows.

Additionally, there are many mainland luau shows that have been incorporated into theme parks, such as Sea World, and in resorts owned by the Walt Disney Company and Universal Studios. There are also many independent entrepreneurial groups who offer their performances for hire for birthdays, conventions and special occasions. These latter mainland shows can be run by dancers of Polynesian descent in some cases, and in other cases they may be a feature of someone's party business. While these shows still base their marketing efforts on the recognized image of the "hula girl," they usually make an effort to produce a show more situated within history and, therefore, create an entertaining, but more educational, venue for inviting outsiders to learn about Hawaiian and Polynesian culture.

### Cultural Tourism and Authenticity

In the previous section, I give a brief overview of the hula and the luau. I discuss the image of the "hula girl" and the commercialization of this cultural practice from its circulation via mainland postcards and fair to its current day prominence in Hawaiian tourism. This presents the context for my examination of mainland representations of the Polynesian luau.

In this section, I provide a review of the tourism literature concerning authenticity and identity-making within commercial cultural representations. This provides a foundation for a discussion of the different ways that performers involved in cultural tourism see themselves and my theoretical analysis of how performers create meaning and connect to their cultural identity through employment in the tourist entertainment industry.

From food trucks in Florida advertising “Authentic Maya Cuisine,” to promotional materials for foreign travel and B&B stays in “authentic” Irish castles, the branding of an “authentic” cultural experience is used to sell different experiences to tourists. Tourists to Walt Disney World express amazement at the “authenticity” of the artists’ aging of the architecture in the World Showcase France, or the dusty checkers games in the Tower of Terror. It is important for experiences to be perceived as “authentic,” even when tourists know that they are experiencing a setting made for their enjoyment. Tourism scholars have been exploring what this idea of “authenticity” means for tourists and questioning whether it is ever possible for tourists to experience another culture in a way that is truly “authentic” (Cohen 1988; Graburn 1983; MacCannell 1973; Medina 2003; Said 1979; Wang 1999; Wang 2007).

In a 1979 publication, Edward Said broaches the discussion of authenticity of cultural tourism in his book titled *Orientalism*. Said chronicles how the ‘Orient’ has been exoticized and reified by Western discourse into a concept that no longer includes the actual experience of the Orient. Said (1979) notes that as the orient becomes a commodified product to sell, it is more shaped by market consumer expectation than by the actual culture of the Orient.

Since cultural tourism is essentially the presentation of a cultural practice for an economic exchange, many scholars think of cultural tourism as a form of commoditized culture. Some of these scholars discuss the possibility of a Marxist alienation between producer and product (the cultural performance) that can occur through the commodification of culture cultural tourism (Greenwood 1989; Shepherd 2002). Erik Cohen (1988) defines commodification as the “process by which things (and activities) come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value, in a context of trade, thereby becoming goods [and services]” (1988:380). Highlighting the Marxist critique, Cohen (1988) notes that commodification of culture can be



associated with the loss of meaning of cultural products and the loss of authenticity in cultural products or performances due to the alienation the producer feels once his culture is consumed by others, and is no longer enacted solely for himself. Despite his explanation of the critique, Cohen (1988) does not always agree with others' critiques that cultural production is inauthentic due to capitalist market alienation.

However, before further exploring Cohen's response to the authenticity debate, the critique of commodified culture needs to be examined. Dean MacCannell (1973; 2011) states that the commodification of culture not only needs to be addressed in the public "front regions" of tourism, but also in the supposedly more authentic "back regions" of toured locations. Using Goffman's (1959) separation of tourist spaces into "front regions," places staged for tourists, and "back regions," places that fall outside of these staged tourist areas, MacCannell (1973) explores tourists' awareness of staging and their desire to get past the staged experiences.

MacCannell (1973) recognizes that tourists understand that they are being presented with a cultural product that differs from the "authentic" local culture. Thus, he suggests that more tourists are setting out with an agenda of finding the "authentic" culture beyond what the tourist agencies have staged for them. Yet, the more they search for the "authentic" behind the tourist "front regions," the more the tourist industry of that place will begin to stage their back regions to conform to the tourists' preconceived notions of what is "authentic." He calls this phenomenon the "staging of back regions" or, as in the title of his article, "staged authenticity" (MacCannell 1973:596).

In revisiting his original 1973 publication, MacCannell (2011) provides examples of the viewable "back regions" to illustrate what he means by staged authenticity. His first example details changes taking place in restaurants where they open up their kitchen spaces, former "back

regions,” to the view of their dining guests. He also gives examples of homestays or “off-the-beaten-track” tours, which cater to this same desire of seeing the “real” place and people. He notes, however, that by preparing these spaces to be ready to be consumed by tourists, the spaces are still being staged; the kitchens are cleaner and more consciously painted to coordinate with the restaurant theme. The tours are planned to give tourists what they expect to be authentic, while still keeping in mind that tourists expect certain comforts, language aids, and efficiency of time, all of which may not occur were they experiencing the place like a local. In his initial address of this phenomenon, MacCannell (1973) questions if anything that is supposedly “authentic,” can ever be true, or if every experience, when viewed or experienced by a tourist, is, to some degree, “staged.”

While MacCannell (1973; 2011) is trying to shed light on this emerging enterprise, he does clarify, in response to some of his critics, that he was not trying to assert that all tourists are on this voyage of discovering “authentic” culture. Instead, he is demonstrating that when tourists are on this quest, the phenomenon of staging will arise in toured locations, as it is discovered that “behind-the-scenes” experiences are equally as profitable (MacCannell 2011).

Yu Wang (2007) illustrates this phenomenon of “staging” in her description of the modification of homes belonging to ethnic Naxi Chinese in Lijiang, China. In Wang’s descriptions of the burgeoning tourist market of homestays in Naxi communities in China, she comments on the paradox of how these homes accommodate tourists’ expectations of home and service while also capitalizing on the tourists’ desire to stay in a “real” Naxi home. Wang deconstructs the tourists’ motivations into two forms of authenticity: a search for “object authenticity” of the thing or experience, similar to the examination of museum pieces, and a search for self in experiencing something authentically (Wang 2007). In doing so, she opines

that tourists are looking through the museum lens of finding an authentic object, but in order to experience it and feel like it is authentic, they are also looking for a bit of themselves or their homes in the experience. This allows them to experience the “other” while navigating the discomfort of everything else being so foreign.

Yu Wang (2007) also examines the actions of host communities and how they are actively modifying their “back regions” to stage them for tourists, just as MacCannell (1973) suggests. She contrasts the older buildings and the addition of “traditional-looking” window frames, costumes, etc., with the renovations to install private bathrooms, television sets, and telephone lines into the rooms rented to tourists.

To begin this exposé, Wang illustrates a scene in which her visiting friend photographs some older Naxi women in front of their traditional houses. The women approach the friend and request payment for their participation in the picture. Her friend asks bewilderedly, “But I thought they were real...” This scene sums up the skepticism of the idea of an authentic commodity and the crux of Wang’s study on “how Naxi authenticity was constructed as a paradoxical fusion of ‘the authentic’ and ‘the customized’ at once” (Wang 2007:801). Even if the women were in their traditional costume, and would have been chatting in front of their stylized homes in the past, now that they realize the profitability of this scene they expect to be paid for their cultural presentation. Questions arise regarding whether the people in this setting are real or whether the scene, and, therefore, the tradition, was staged, or invented.

Eric Hobsbawm (1983) hones this idea in his publication *The Invention of Tradition*. In it, he notes, “Traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented” (1983:1). He explains that traditions usually arise in response to a novel experience, but then become ritually repeated, until it is viewed as a tradition. Here, however, he

differentiates a “tradition” from a “custom” as in “so called traditional societies” by explaining that while traditions come and go, the customs are the underlying continuance of certain beliefs that are able to adapt and incorporate new traditions into the ‘custom’ (1983:2-3).

Hobsbawm (1983) also approaches ‘tradition’ as a historian, claiming that ‘traditions’ can only be considered ‘traditions’ once the action that they are highlighting has gone from current use. He gives the example of lawyers’ wigs in Britain. If everyone still wore wigs, this would not be a considered “traditional” garb for lawyers. It is only since the common people have given up wigs as a mode of dress, that this becomes a practice of tradition for British lawyers (1983:4-7). Thus, Hobsbawm claims, it is the recognition of a practice as it is tied to history, which is the invention of tradition. In inventing these traditions, the people practicing the tradition are essentially claiming a combined membership or identity unified by the history or supposed history of the tradition.

Perhaps then, in applying Hobsbawm’s concept to the photographed scene of the Naxi women, the tradition of standing in front of their homes in traditional garb has become an invented tradition in order to earn money from tourists. It is an ‘invented tradition’ only in the sense that it has arisen from the prevalence of tourists arriving in the city and the idea that the women do belong to a historic community who used to dress and chat outside their homes in this way (Wang 2007). Perhaps, then, the tourist can view it either as a fake representation and an invented tradition, or as a link to an authentic custom rooted in their heritage.

From this revelation of staged authentic “back regions” and possibly invented traditions, it can seem futile for tourists to seek an authentic cultural experience. No matter what they do, tourists will only be invited to see that which has been prepared for them. Still, Laurie Medina (2003) responds that MacCannell is viewing “authenticity” as stuck in a dichotomy between

public and private spheres. Medina (2003) acknowledges the idea of staging in instances of tourism, but rejects the idea that this results in every tourist experience being viewed as inauthentic. She takes issue with the claim that experiences in the public view are inauthentic, simply by being observed, while those experiences enacted in the private sphere, uninfluenced by outside observation, are taken to be self-evidently “authentic.” It is this dichotomy of observed and unobserved, in determining authenticity that she critiques in MacCannell’s work. Furthermore, she asserts that if we do not view authenticity through this dichotomy, we do not have to throw out its usefulness. Instead, she proposes we look at authenticity, as suggested by Cohen, as emerging from real interactions between tourist and locals (Medina 2003).

Medina (2003) uses Cohen’s (1988) proposition of an “emergent authenticity” as a way to give new relevance to the term “authenticity.” Cohen (1988) challenges the usefulness of the label “authenticity” within academic debates before proposing that it can be emergent through interactions. His claim is that, as much as scholars enjoy discussing whether something is authentic or inauthentic, they are doing so based on subjective criteria based more in nostalgia for a certain time period, than some defining objective status. Cohen (1988) recognizes that culture and traditions are always fluid. He posits that culture is always changing and that the modern is always viewed as inauthentic, while the past is viewed nostalgically as authentic. Thus, the tourist and the anthropologist are in an inexhaustible search for ‘authentic’ culture that is “yet untouched by modernity” (Cohen 1988:374). Instead of this quixotic journey to find the ‘authentic,’ Cohen (1988) propounds that authenticity is a socially constructed method of framing certain aspects of a cultural past, and, therefore, what is considered authentic is negotiable.

Having the boundaries of authenticity thus expanded, Cohen (1988) professes that there can be ‘emergent authenticity’ within economically based cultural presentations. He claims that not only can meaning often be retained through cultural practices presented, but that it can be used to create new meanings. Examples given by Cohen include presentations of cultural products that bring new meanings through interactions with audiences external to the culture. These cultural presentations could take the form of a political message, or they can reinforce the identity of the performers or artists through a significant representation of their culture to an external observer. So while he does challenge the idea of “authenticity,” instead of throwing out the label, Cohen (1988) recognizes that there is something in particular that tourists desire when they are seeking “authentic” experiences. Thus, he reasons that it is more useful to think of the “authenticity” as emerging from interactions between tourist and locals than basing it on a museum-like process of authentic verification (Cohen 1988).

Ning Wang (1999) takes the experiential notion of authenticity even further. He begins his paper with the goal of “rethinking the meanings of authenticity in terms of existential philosophers’ usage of the idea. While the two conventional meanings in literature (namely, objective and constructive authenticity) are discussed, its third usage (existential authenticity) will be suggested as an alternative” (Wang 1999:350). Wang (1999) organizes the existing scholarly discourse into two subsections: object authenticity and constructive authenticity. Like Yu Wang (2007), Ning Wang (1999), claims that MacCannell (1973) and similar scholars are examining the authenticity of toured objects in the way that a museum curator would, to see whether the culture is authentic by the same measures that a museum would deem an artifact authentic. Conversely, he posits that Cohen and Medina and others have a constructive approach

to authenticity, in which authenticity is constructed through the experience of the tourist and the toured. In doing so, he notes the possible critiques of both viewpoints.

In addressing object authenticity, Wang (1999) recognizes the critiques by Cohen (1988) and Bruner (1994) that objective authenticity is unattainable and immeasurable without a constant regression from the present. Still, Wang (1999) views the constructive authenticity approach that these two scholars adopt as lacking. He claims they focus only on the symbolic authenticity that emerges through repetition of new practices, and that they exclude the subjective experiences of tourists and performers. This tends to pit the culture's authenticity against the tourist's preconceived notions of the culture, recapitulating the opinion of Said (1978). Wang (1999) expresses sentiments that both of these approaches omit an important aspect of how tourists are experiencing the activity for themselves.

Instead of a constructive or objective authenticity, Wang (1999) uses the philosophical position of existentialism to explain how tourists make their own meaning based on their experience in a culture, whether objectively authentic or not. His key argument for existential authenticity is, "that which is judged as inauthentic or staged authenticity by experts, intellectuals, or elite may be experienced as authentic and real from an emic perspective - this may be the very way that mass tourists experience authenticity" (Wang 1999:353). Thus, it is the meaning assigned by tourists to their experience that makes the experience authentic. Similar to Yu Wang's (2007) explanation of homestays, Ning Wang (1999) is integrating the self into the experience of the object or toured space.

It is this idea of exploring the self's ability to create meaning from the tourist experience that I apply to the experience of the performer. A tourist may realize that there are aspects of the activity he or she experiences that are being staged, but that are still personally meaningful.

Likewise, performers can recognize the limitations of presenting culture through entertainment, yet, can still feel that their venture is a meaningful way of sharing their culture. They enact the same “existential authenticity” that Ning Wang (1999) is applying to the tourist experience.

It is this experience that I explore through my ethnography of performers in Polynesian luaus. First, however, I review literature directly relating to Polynesian luau shows and cultural tourism to expose critiques of these shows. I also explore literature relating to performers’ use of cultural tourism as a way to bolster their cultural identity and the agency in creating a meaningful experience for themselves.

#### Critique of the Luau, Performer Agency, and Cultural Embodiment

The Polynesian luau tourist show, having been an extant form of cultural tourism for nearly five decades, has been the subject of substantial literary critique including explanations of the luau show as an example of the commodification of culture. While many such critiques are warranted, the vast array of tourist luau shows cannot accurately be grouped together and critiqued as a singular entity. In examining cultural tourism, it is important to understand the validity of the critiques, as well as to keep in mind that performers, while at times constrained by structures, are able to exert their will and can choose to participate in such shows. Edward Bruner (2005) eloquently asserts that in looking at cultural tourism it is more helpful to view each participating party as having agency and recognize the negotiation of interests and compromises that make up the industry of cultural tourism.



## Critique of the Commercial Luau

A major critique of tourism in general is that tourists are more concerned with their own exotic adventure and pleasure, than they are interested in getting to know the place they are visiting. Examining the validity of this critique, Mark S. Rosenbaum and Ikin Anthony Wong (2007) measure whether tourists are interested in the truth behind tourist presentations, or whether they are more interested in their own constructed “escape.” In order to do this, they arrange a study to determine the interest level of tourists in pursuing “authentic” local experiences as opposed to visiting hotel-presented cultural tourist productions. They base their assessment on tourist spending habits. While Rosenbaum and Wong (2007) discuss that many tourists were delighted to stumble upon an authentic cultural experience, the commodities they purchased indicated that tourists in exotic locales were more interested in experiences that made the trip ‘exotic,’ regardless of authenticity.

Rosenbaum and Wong (2007) recognize that tourist businesses do not have to ensure that their products authentically represent local culture or local history. Businesses only need to ensure that tourists feel like they are experiencing the ‘exotic.’ The experience of the exotic reinforces the idea that the destination is part of an escape from the tourist’s sense of normal. While Rosenbaum and Wong (2007) do advocate that businesses should invest in local culture heritage as a fulfillment of global ethics, they understand that profit is garnered more by creating scenes of the ‘exotic’ rather than authentic cultural learning. Their findings are disappointing to those hoping to educate tourists more about the local culture than provide an exotic locale. In looking at this study, however, one must also recognize that there are many different types of tourists (Graburn 1983). Not all tourists fall into the same category, nor do they all have the

same motivations or intentions. Therefore Rosenbaum and Wong's (2007) study may exclude many different types of tourists.

Unfortunately, the findings of Rosenbaum and Wong (2007) do seem to reify the words of Hawaiian Studies Scholar, Haunani-Kay Trask (1999) in her attack on tourism. In her chapter, *Lovely Hula Hands: Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture*, part of her larger book on colonialism and commodification of Hawaii, *From A Native Daughter*, Trask aims a pointed critique at tourism in Hawaii, stating, "Tourists flock to my Native land for escape, but they are escaping into a state of mind while participating in the destruction of the host people in a Native place" (Trask 1999:137).

Trask is not shy about her position on cultural tourism; she takes a very anti-tourism stand, as indicated by her strong language choices and her revealing article titles. In one such diatribe against Western influence and the institution of tourism in Hawaii, Trask also calls the luau show a "prostitution of hula." In an article entitled, *Tourist, Stay Home*, Trask (1993) continues:

The predatory reality of tourism is visible everywhere: in garish "Polynesian" revues; commercial ads using Hawaiian dance and language to sell vacations and condominiums; the trampling of sacred heiau (temples) and burial grounds as tourist recreation sites. Thus, our world-renowned native dance, the hula, has been made ornamental, a form of hotel exotica for the gaping tourist. And Hawaiian women are marketed on posters from Paris to Tokyo promising an unfettered "primitive" sexuality. Far from encouraging a cultural revival, as tourist industry apologists contend, tourism has appropriated and prostituted the accomplishments of a resurgent interest in things Hawaiian (the use of replicas of Hawaiian artifacts such as fishing and food implements, capes, helmets, and other symbols of ancient power, to decorate hotels) [Trask 1993:32]

Haunani-Kay Trask maintains a fairly polarized view on Western associations with Hawaii. As an activist for Hawaiian sovereignty, she is involved in demonstrations and has been quoted reminding listeners, "We are not Americans. Say it in your heart. Say it in your sleep.

We will never forget what the Americans have done to us - never, never, never. The Americans, my people, are our enemies” (Baker 1997).

While it is valuable to note Trask’s native perspective of strong resistance to the commodification of any part of her culture, this may be representative of only one view in the broad spectrum of native perceptions on tourism in Hawaii. It may be useful, therefore, to look at research that has been conducted to assess the perceptions of Native Hawaiians regarding cultural tourism.

Nadine Ku‘uiponālani Badua-Fernandes (2011) investigates “perceptions of authentic Hawaiian cultural experiences from Native Hawaiians and Hawai’i’s visitors” in her dissertation of the same title. For her master’s research, Badua-Fernandes surveyed native Hawaiians and tourists on vacation in Hawaii to discern what they perceived as “authentic” Hawaiian culture, and how receptive they were to learning more about what “authentic” Hawaiian culture might be. Her surveys covered not only aspects of Hawaiian culture that tourists may or may not be familiar with, but also, ideologies about Hawaiian language, traditional nonverbal communication and cultural history and values. In order to gauge which cultural practices she should deem important for her study, Badua-Fernandes (2011) interviewed Native Hawaiian cultural experts as to what they would consider “authentic” Hawaiian culture.

Though “authenticity” has been widely debated among tourism scholars, as illustrated in the previous section of this literature review, Badua-Fernandes (2011) purports that she is using the 2010 publication by Agrusa et al, *“Integrating Sustainability and Hawaiian Culture into the Tourism Experience of the Hawaiian Islands”* as a starting point for her own inquiry. Badua-Fernandes (2011) explains that in this article, Agrusa, et al. provide statistics of tourists polled

that indicate that more than 80% of them would be interested in pursuing more “authentic” forms of Hawaiian culture as their tourist experience.

This finding led to Badua-Fernandes’ (2011) investigation of how to incorporate tourists’ and natives’ interest of more “authentic” presentations of culture into the Hawaiian tourist experience. Badua-Fernandes (2011) defines “authenticity” for her study in terms of “identity and awareness of Hawaiian culture’s historical experiences as well as its modern experiences” explaining that both contribute to the “ideology of authentic Hawaiian cultural experiences today” (Badua-Fernandes 2011:11).

In Badua-Fernandes’ (2011) findings she discusses that native Hawaiians stressed experiences such as understanding traditional hula, learning agricultural garden practices, and understanding the history of practices such as surfing and land care as preferential for tourists over things like experiencing the tourist beaches and some of the current tourist shows. She also finds that tourists, counter to Rosenbaum and Wong’s (2007) findings, are interested in “authentic” cultural experiences, but that their examples do not align completely with the Native Hawaiian’s perspectives of what those ‘authentic’ experiences may be. In her conclusion, however, Badua-Fernandes (2011) states that there is room within the tourist industry to accommodate experiences that would give tourists a better understanding of the identity and culture of native Hawaiians, as this population wishes to be understood and known. While this study concludes with a hopeful invitation to the tourism industry within Hawaii, it does highlight some of the criticism between the divergence of tourist-targeting luau shows and traditional hula exhibitions within the islands of Hawaii.

Feminism and tourism scholar, Jane Desmond is an anthropologist whose seminal work has focused on such criticism pertaining to the luau show. Desmond (1999) centers her critique

of the luau on how the staging of bodies reinforces certain images of the exotic, but approachable, Polynesian “other.” In her book, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on display from Waikiki to Sea World*, she chronicles the bodies of Polynesian performers from their representation in postcards and “ethnographic” realist photographs, to Hollywood’s hapa-haole interpretations post World War II, to their representations on stages in Waikiki’s major tourist luau shows at the time of her publication. Desmond (1999) begins her assessment by chronicling the image of the “hula girl” through Hawaii’s history with mainland America. She shows how ethnographically framed postcards of hula performers in Ti-leaf skirts and bare chests helped to promote the non-threatening, primitive, and sexually open image of Hawaiian females. These images were distributed in spite of the fact that many Hawaiians by the time of the turn of the century were educated and had adopted Western style dress.

Furthermore, with warm smiles, or inviting gestures, these pictures created a softer image of the “Other,” than the perceived threat of African-American “Other” that Caucasian Americans were encountering in their mainland society. Desmond uses Bernard Smith’s term, “soft-primitivism” to describe the way that Native Hawaiians were presented as “ideal natives” who are graciously welcoming to outsiders and who present visitors with a nonthreatening, alluring encounter with paradisaical exoticism, a ‘soft-primitivism’ (Desmond 1999).

This begins Desmond’s (1999) critique that the tourism industry specifically chooses certain bodies, as opposed to other bodies. Her claim is that performers bodies are chosen and staged so that the certain exotic, feminine ideal of Hawaii might continue in the minds of Hawaii’s visitors. She continues by contrasting the variety of body types, ages, and ethnicities that make up the local hālaus, with those thinner, more Hollywood hapa-haole or oriental exotic-looking performers being chosen for the Waikiki luau shows. By using dancers that fit the

stereotypical body profiles of dark, but not too dark skin tone, wavy long dark hair, and slim feminine body shape, producers of these luaus, according to Desmond, are still invoking the image of Hawaii through the “hula girl.”

In an article adapted from her major publication, *Invoking “the Native”: Body Politics in Contemporary Hawaiian Tourist Shows*, Desmond (1997) also notes the emphasis on consumption in the tourist luau shows, not only centered on the food and drink, but also on the sexualization of the bodies presented in the show. In her descriptions of a large corporation-run luau, Desmond chronicles her trip through the sexualized joking banter of the tour guide on the bus trip to the luau beach to the spectacle of “male strength, female gracefulness...bared arms, thighs, and backs” (Desmond 1997:97). Thus, providing evidence of what Comaroff and Comaroff describe as the common trope of “the interpolation of the erotic into the exotic” (2009:12).

Furthermore, while the hālau performances situate the dances within history and island context, Desmond (1999) notes that in the luau shows she attended, the males are introduced with the listing of their island or origin, but the females’ backgrounds are left unexplained, so as not to disturb the fluency of the feminized native image of the Hawaiian ‘hula girl.’ This serves to reinforce her claim that the luau is a process of staging Polynesian bodies in the roles that outsiders have created for them; that of the uncomplicated, ‘ideal native.’ Yet, just as the Hawaiian native that these dances are depicting are more complicated than the primitivized image that Desmond claims the shows promote, so are the roles within tourism more complicated. By using the verbiage “staged,” Desmond is assigning most of the agency in these shows to the commercial producers, and none to the performers themselves. As Edward Bruner (2005) points out, all participants in cultural tourism have agency. He asserts, “...of course

tourists have agency, as do the local people, the producers, the tour companies, and even the anthropologists - all actors in the coproduction of the touristic drama. There are no persons without agency, without active selves” (Bruner 2005:12). He continues by stating, “To conceive of tourists without agency, or of natives as objects, would be to write about them as if they were automatons. Tourist and native are not fixed, irreversible slots... I argue against a fixed, static model that sees producers as in control, natives as exploited, and tourists as dupes” (Bruner 2005:12).

Despite her critique, Desmond (1997) does acknowledge this agency in some of the smaller, more locally owned and operated luaus in Waikiki that are taking more of an active role in how their culture is presented to outsiders. She explains that, while these luaus are using the roles given to them by an outsider’s perspective (such as the hula girl image), they are shaping these roles to show what is important to them about their culture. In such shows, Desmond tells about the performers intermixing modern Hawaiian culture and traditional Hawaiian culture to show a more dynamic view of Hawaii. She also notes that many of these shows give more historical background to the tourists and explain the meanings of the different hulas presented. She states that one of these smaller luaus won the ‘Keep it Hawai’i’ award, “indicating that even within commodified tourism it is possible to rewrite such images from the inside” (Desmond 1997:102).

In a similar proposal of ways for performers to act as agents of their own cultural empowerment, Adrina Imada (2004) cites the example of the Mossman village, which hosted cultural revitalization efforts alongside catering to tourist curiosity. Just as Desmond recognizes that certain luau shows use the hula girl image, but then write their own version, Imada writes, “While they [the Mossmans] played their ‘soft-primitivism’ for tourists, they also pursued

another agenda. Mossman planned to revive disappearing Hawaiian culture and educate other native Hawaiians at the Lalani Village” (Imada 2004:121).

Imada (2004) concedes that both the *haole* (non-Hawaiian) commercialism and revitalization commercialism of the Mossman luau are portraying “Hawaiian culture” as a bounded and static entity. Still, she recognizes that Hawaiian traditions were under threat from missionaries, and traditional hula and chants were quickly disappearing; the Mossman village was a way to carry these traditions forward. Erik Cohen (1988) similarly purports that if a culture is beginning to lose some of its ability to continue traditional practices to the next generation, cultural tourism can effectively be the conduit to preserve, rather than lose, some of these cultural values.

The elders employed by the Mossman family were the last vessels of knowledge for chants of genealogy and of the ancient goddess/god worship. Therefore, there needed to be a venue in which they could pass on their knowledge and Mossman provided this space. Sadly, the growing monopoly on the tourist industry endangered local venues like the Mossman village. Eventually, the Lalani Hawaiian Village could no longer sustain itself financially in order to compete with the bigger mass-produced commercial tourist luaus that were proliferating throughout Waikiki (Imada 2004). Still, Imada recognizes that local Hawaiians could utilize the example of the Mossman family’s commercial cultural revitalization in future luau enterprises.

John and Jean Comaroff (2009) further take on the debate about whether cultural tourism spoils or flattens culture through its commodification or whether it can be a sustainable way of preserving certain cultural practices. In their publication *Ethnicity Inc.*, they recognize that neither perspective is completely appropriate in describing the reality of cultural tourism. They do, however, recognize that while “preserving” culture through commodification might be a



Panglossian attempt, there are many examples of a prideful reinvention or rejuvenation of identity that can take place through the capitalization on a certain ethnicity or culture as a brand (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

### Performer Agency and Identity

Charmaine Kaimikaua (2010) explores this dynamic of identity construction in Hawaiian communities located in Southern California. In her Master's thesis, she provides examples of how Hawaiian communities in diaspora use their involvement in the Hawaiian hālau as a way of creating Hawaiian identity on the mainland and reinforcing their connection with their Hawaiian or Polynesian heritage. Kaimikaua (2010) asserts that through involvement in dance, the members of this hālau were able to rewrite and renegotiate what 'Hawaiian-ness' meant to them. Because this hula group was located away from the islands, Kaimikaua concludes that they had to orient their cultural identity in ways that embraced the flexibility of what it meant to represent Hawaii. Similar to the tourist luau, this hālau faced questions of authenticity, since they were so far removed from general Hawaiian culture. In spite of this, they used their participation in hula as a way to reconnect with their cultural heritage and to embrace Hawaiian cultural identity. She notes, "This hula community believed that they are not "sell outs" but rather, that through the "staged spectacle" they have reauthorized and legitimated themselves as Hawaiians and "Hawaiians-at-heart" with a different face" (Kaimikaua 2010:313).

Similarly, Angeline Shaka (2011) uses her dissertation work on modern hula choreographies to illustrate how kumus on the mainland may create more meanings in their choreography that connects them to the history and cultural heritage of Hawaii, due in part, to their being located away from the islands. Shaka separates her cultural consultants into "on-

island,” meaning living in Hawaii, and “off-island,” meaning living outside of Hawaii in mainland America, yet maintaining a cultural identity with their home “on-island” (Shaka 2011:6). Shaka’s research goes on to show that the kumu choreographers who are “off-island” but who return to participate in competitions such as *Merrie Monarch Festival*, have adopted a unique style of choreography for their hulas that are keenly situated in both the history and the heritage of Hawaiian culture, but are also reactive against the framed images proliferated by the tourist industry. She sees these kumu choreographers as being even more forward than their “on-island” peers, in their iconoclastic re-appropriations of images such as the “hula girl.”

Shaka (2011) concludes from her conversations with the “off-island” kumus and observations of these hulas that part of this stylistic choice emerges from the greater motivation to reconnect with the island identity, yet also enlarge the limits of that identity to include modern aspects of life, such as different forms of sexual orientation and different diaspora homes across the mainland. Similar to the hālau dancers in Kaimikaua’s (2010) research, the kumus whom Shaka (2011) interviews are using their choreography of the hulas to reaffirm and authenticate their Polynesian cultural identity, and to incorporate modernity and historical context into the portrayals of traditional dances.

From both of these examples of how persons of Polynesian descent, living on the mainland, can connect to their cultural heritage in the islands, it can be seen that there are opportunities for active agency in constructing identity and cultural connections. Alexis Buntin (2008) delves into this concept of constructed identities with her article on agency within cultural tourism. In an article titled *Sharing Culture or Selling Out? Developing the Commodified Persona in the Heritage Industry*, she coins her ideological label, “commodified persona” to describe those persons involved in cultural tourism who are negotiating the emotional labor and

the enacted identity within their role as a spokesperson for their culture (Bunten 2008). She states, “The practices of constructing a commodified persona involve representation of cultural uniformity as a simplifying trope, self-exoticizing as the Other, polyvocal alternations of identity culled from a repertoire of possibilities, and rejection of stereotyping through covert acts of resistance” (Bunten 2008:381).

In unpacking this concept, she shows that while cultural tourism in general has been simplified and reproduced to give tourists an expected product, the individuals choosing to participate in this cultural tourism are not being duped, nor are they grasping onto the opportunity as the only way to create a secure financial situation. Instead, performers are participating in part of the commodifying processes of cultural tourism, bolstering some tourist expectations, but also using narratives that move beyond a unified postcard image.

Bunten (2008) recognizes the possibility of Marxist alienation that the process of producing a product through cultural tourism, in this case a cultural image, can separate the producer from his or her product or culture. She notes Davydd Greenwood’s (1989) critique that the commodification of culture can render culture meaningless to the members of the culture (Bunten 2008:384). She counters, however, that by adopting a “commodified persona” participants in cultural tourism can create a portion of their culture to satisfy and expand tourist expectations, while also protecting their own emotional labor and identity as a part of this culture and as an individual within this culture. She compares the “commodified persona” to performances each of us take in everyday settings, whether it be at a job interview, a first date, or a similar “best foot forward” situation where we are creating a simpler, more consumable version of ourselves, yet not acting against who we are as individuals (Bunten 2008).

By demonstrating the ability of performers of cultural tourism to create their own persona and protect and reinforce their identity, Bunten (2008) is recognizing these individuals' ability to act with agency. She concludes that performers of cultural tourism, when viewed within their own agency, no longer have to be accused of selling out. Instead, they can be seen as making conscious choices about self-portrayal and how to educate the tourists they are hosting.

### Embodiment of Culture through Dance

Since the previous literature deals with how performers of cultural tourism can shape their portrayals in their cultural presentations, I want to further explore the specific effect of dance as a form of cultural tourism. I do so by reviewing literature focusing on the way body movement and posture can enact culture and values. I focus on scholars who have looked at the conflagration of the physical and the ideological. Christine Kray (2005) and Joyce Sherlock (1993) both conduct research on how cultural values are transmitted through the bodily movements of dance.

Kray (2005) uses Pierre Bourdieu's philosophical concept of 'bodily hexis' as a means to explain how ethnographers can discover important cultural values by looking at how people use their bodies. Posture, movement, etc., can all embody principles of traditional culture, which are so emic that they perhaps cannot be explained by the people themselves. Yet, they reveal much about the culture they represent. Sherlock (1993) similarly addresses how movements, especially movements choreographed in dance, reveal significant cultural values. She provides the example of American modern dance being focused entirely on the individual, each dancer uniquely performing his or her own steps. Sherlock's conclusion is that this dance reflects the importance of individualism in American culture. In contrast to American modern dance, more

traditional dances from other cultures emphasize synchronicity and moving together as one. The Hawaiian hula would fall into this latter category. Sherlock might conclude that this is an embodiment of the Hawaiian values of community and social tranquility. Applying this concept to the tourist luau, it is possible that, even if there are aspects of the show that are less authentic than traditional hula, the fact that the movements are based on the same style of dance can help transmit Polynesian cultural values to the dancers through their movements.

Theresa Buckland (2001) recognizes a similar pattern in cultural presentations of traditional Highland dancing. She explains some dances are no longer used in the tourist show, yet they are used in rehearsals because they are a valuable part of the culture. By doing these dances, the Highland dancers are able to understand how to approach the other dances in the performance. Buckland (2001) notes that by practicing steps of these dances that are not performed for the shows, the dancers are able to understand the bodily movements and the values of synchronicity or fluidity of the dances they do perform for audiences.

In applying these ideas to the tourist luau show, it is apparent that Polynesians and Hawaiians on the mainland are using their performances to assert their Polynesian identity. Applying the theory of bodily hexis, we can also look at dance as a way they enact this identity; whether performed for private ritual or public consumption. I provide the opinions and research of these scholars to create a foundation for my research on the perceptions of Polynesian performers involved in mainland luau productions. In this research I recognize the same agency of performers advocated by Bruner (2005) and Buntin (2008), and utilize the theories of identity and heritage connection of Kaimikaua (2010) and Shaka (2011), yet, I do so with sensitivity to concerns of Desmond (1997, 1999) and Trask (1993, 1999, 2001).

### Summation of Literature

Despite the extensive literature about the history of the luau, the role of authenticity in cultural tourism, and the critiques of the luau framings, none of the literature focuses on the emic perspective, the perceptions of Polynesians actually involved in performing in these shows. Furthermore, although Kaimikaua (2010) and Shaka (2011) suggest that persons involved in hālau competitions off-island are creating meaningful connections to their heritage, performers in mainland shows may also be making meaningful connections to their heritage have not yet been incorporated into the literature. I propose that performers' perceptions of cultural identity and the possibility of their meaningful connections to heritage through participation in the luau entertainment show need to be further explored. This thesis accomplishes this task in a limited scope.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Methods

My ethnographic research consisted of participant observation in Polynesian community and dance events in central Florida, as well as face-to-face interviews with a number of professional performers involved in commercial Polynesian luau shows.

I conducted ten interviews between 2012 and 2013; six were semi-structured interviews and four were structured interviews. These interviews were with performers involved in resort Polynesian dinner shows, theme park Polynesian troupes, and convention for-hire Polynesian productions. My sample of participants consisted of volunteers secured through “snowball” recruitment. I was introduced to some of my participants through my father, who works at one of the resort luau shows. Other participants I met through local Polynesian events. Some of my original interviewees also arranged for me to contact additional potential participants.

The performers I interviewed represent three different production groups in Orlando, Florida. One of these groups is located at a major commercial resort, another group was affiliated for many years with another major theme park, and the last production group is a smaller, for hire, luau production organization. I also conducted interviews with two kumus of local hālau schools. One of these kumus is the production manager of the for-hire luau group. I also had frequent contact with one of the stage managers of one of the major resort luau shows and was able to interview and collect stories from this individual concerning happenings at the stage.

In addition to my interviews, and in order to better understand the culture of Polynesian dance, I undertook a year and a half of participant observation in a local hālau from fall of 2012 to February of 2014. Since many of the performers with whom I speak mention growing up learning to dance, I wanted to discover the learning process of the dance skills and the meaning of the dances and the music.

My participation in the hālau also provided me with the opportunity to become involved in the local Polynesian community. I became an attendee of the local Hawaiian church where my hālau danced and where my kumu serves as a pastor. Over the year and a half of research, I immersed myself in local events, such as the annual hālau competition held in Orlando, Florida, at which many local performers showcased their talents on their own time, apart from their employment.

### Analysis Strategy

In preparation for the analysis of the data I collected from my interviews and participant observation, I transcribed oral interviews and reviewed my detailed field notes. The oral interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 75 minutes. I took field notes intermittently throughout my participant observation and some additional notes were written based on later reflections of my experiences. I coded these transcribed interviews and field notes according to thematic topics discussed by many of my consultants, or according to major themes within the literature that I felt were relevant to my research. I arranged my “Discussion Chapter” according to these emergent themes.



### Limitations and Implications

Within any research project, there are limitations in scope and depth based on time constraints and participant access. The snowball sampling method I employed allowed me to conduct interviews with people who were willing or eager to talk to me. However, this kind of a sample can exclude performers who have chosen to stop performing in commercial venues, or who are not as open to speaking with me about downsides of their jobs due to my status as an outside researcher.

Furthermore, while my participant observation in the hālau and in many of the local Polynesian events gives me a greater insight to the community of Polynesian performers in Orlando, Florida, I was not able to conduct participant observation of performers on their stages, which would have allowed me to view their perspectives and experiences in a quotidian manner. This study can have implications for looking at how heritage and cultural portrayal through cultural tourism can be connected, yet, due to the small sample size of the performers in in my study, I cannot apply my findings generally to all performers in cultural tourism, or to luau performers in other locations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: CONSULTANT PROFILES AND EVENT DESCRIPTIONS**

In order to clearly illustrate the findings of my research, I include this section that briefly introduces each of the individuals I interviewed. This is done in order to give the reader a perspective of each of these individuals and their roles in their cultural community and in their participation in commercial luaus. This will also help the reader to organize which individual I am referring to when I use his or her comments throughout my discussion.

Following the profiles of the individuals interviewed, I have summarized the main events that I participated in during the course of my fieldwork. I pull vignettes from these events and other participant observations to elucidate certain themes throughout my discussion sections. All participants in this section and throughout the paper have been given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity.

### Interview Profiles

#### *First set of Interviews At the Luau Resort Show, October 26, 2012*

My first interviews are with the performers at a resort dinner luau show and take place in fall of 2012. The resort is Polynesian themed and this is an extra dinner show for which resort guests can purchase tickets. The hotel is one of many on the property of a major Orlando theme park. There is a storyline to the show focusing on the main female character leaving her hometown in Hawaii for school on the mainland USA. Her hālau and her community are

throwing a party in her honor before her departure. This provides the justification of the luau feast that the resort guests are attending.

The first two acts focus on this storyline and on inviting audience participation in learning hulas, or being honored for special birthdays, anniversaries, etc. There are also characters within the show that play the roles of feuding potential sweethearts, aunties, and the main female lead's boyfriend who has to say goodbye. The last act of the show however, is the Polynesian cultural presentation. Each island country, Tahiti, Samoa, Tonga, New Zealand, and Hawaii, is introduced with greetings in the language of that country. Within the storyline, this is the hālau showcasing everything they have learned together so that the female lead will never forget her culture. There is a distinct difference between the first two acts and the third. The first two acts are expository; the third act is the main event.

There are two shows scheduled each night. I arrange to talk to the performers in between performances. The performers are between shows, but they are also teeming with excitement for a Halloween party happening later in the evening. Many of the musicians and dancers are willing to talk with me about my project, although there are many who are also more focused on trying out different costumes. I sit on one of the couches in the greenroom. In these interviews I utilize semi-structured questions about how they learned to dance and their reasons for choosing this type of employment, but some data are gathered from open forum conversation.

Performers come in and out from the dressing rooms in the back, sometimes in partial Halloween costume, sometimes to be called over by my primary cultural contact. He is one of the main comedic character actors in the show. He is from the Caribbean, and does not dance in the show, but has a great interest in Polynesian cultures since becoming a part of the show. He

has appointed himself to advocate involvement in my research and serves as a valuable liaison between the performers and myself, helping me to establish rapport with my research population.

#### Maile and Julie

I begin my interviews with Maile. She is an airline stewardess who used to dance here full time, but now takes substitute shifts when she is in town. She looks to be in her late 20s/early 30s. She and her sister have both worked at this show previously.

Maile began dancing hula when she was five, but she said hated it. When she was twelve, however, she was able to dance at a local luau show. The ability to get a job dancing established her interest in re-pursuing dance. It was a chance to make money, but “\$15 a night, child labor!” she reflects. She has been involved in professional luau shows ever since. She notes that it has given her an amazing array of opportunities. She traveled with a Hawaiian tourism promotion group all over the world, from Japan to South America. She danced in a theme park show in Japan for a while before coming to Orlando. Now that she has taken the job with the airline she does not have an outside venue for dance. She tells me she misses it and enjoys coming back to this show to perform and dance.

Maile stays for further discussion while I address my questions to another female performer, Julie, who joins us. Julie plays one of the character roles in show, but she also performs a solo hula dance. She is 18 years old and had to wait until she was no longer a minor to join this show. She left Hawaii shortly after her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to sign a contract to be a part of this luau show. Julie comments that it was hard to leave home, and she was unsure of being so far from her family, but then counters that soon after she arrived, everyone in the cast became her new family. They introduced her to the Polynesian community in Orlando. Maile interjects

that it was the same for her when she and her sister first performed here together. After performing in the show and being introduced to the community, she emphasizes, “All of the girls here are my sisters now.” Julie rejoins, “We celebrate birthdays, weddings, everything together. I don’t know what I would have done without this community.”

When I ask about her history of dance, Julie explains that she wasn’t really a dancer back home. Of course she was always around it, but she was brought up to be a singer. Whenever there was a party or a luau, others from her family would dance, but she would sing. She explains that even down here, in Florida, she has pursued her vocal career. Indeed that is part of the reason she decided to come and join this show. She feels that working in Orlando would open up opportunities for her to land recording contracts. She beams with pride when she tells me that she just released her first single and a music video! Florida is good for that industry, she explains. So when someone from her entertainment job in Hawaii mentioned that she should audition for this Florida show, she went to the audition. Even though she was primarily a singer, she is interested in acting as well, and this role gives her the opportunity to do both, and focus on her singing career.

I am not able to explore questions with her more in-depth to know whether her previous experience in entertainment focused on singing or whether she danced, as well. I see her in the show that night and it is clear that she has been well trained in dance, even if that is not what she resonates with the most.

### Donny

Donny appears to be in his mid-thirties. He falls less into the typical dark Polynesian look, and his hair is a short crew cut. He is Tahitian, but grew up in Hawaii. His mother is

Tahitian and he has recently been back to reunite with family and visit Tahiti. He mentions spending a significant amount of time there each visit. Once, in 2003 he was able to go for three months, then back for another six months. He explains that, due to visa and logistical constraints, he can only stay between three to six months at a time.

Donny started dancing when he was five years old and learned both Tahitian and Hawaiian dance. While he began dancing young, he started to get away from dancing as a teenager because it was no longer “cool.” It was “cool,” however, to be able to get a job at age 15, so when the opportunity came to perform at the Polynesian Culture Center (PCC) in Hawaii, he returned to dance and has been dancing ever since. He also mentions the opportunities dancing gave him to travel the world and perform, though he does not mention with which group he was affiliated at that time.

Now he is going to school for graphic design, but comments that it is his dream to open a hālau and teach dancing to young kids, ranging from six-year-olds to teenagers. He tells me that he has helped his brother teach dance back in Hawaii and that even his *kumu hula* (master teacher, trained in hula, music and chanting, and the arts that go along with hula) is still teaching. “Teaching is a lot more than just dance, you know? It teaches respect, honor. It teaches how to live.” He explains that he not only learned to dance from his kumu and from being involved in the PCC shows, but that he learned other life skills, as well. “Even how to be on time to a job, because you have to know how to be on time, or how to keep your costume piece in order.” He explains that there are lessons embedded in learning and performing the dance. He and his wife have talked about being involved in the dance community through teaching once they are both ready to leave this show. His wife is Samoan, and is also one of the dancers at the resort dinner show.

I ask him how he feels about all of the dances from the different islands being combined into one show. He recalls that, at first, it was hard to learn the different styles. He says that each different island has its own style of dance. While he grew up with Tahitian and Hawaiian, it was hard for him to perform the other dances at first, but after a year at the PCC, learning Samoan, Fijian, Maori, etc., he became a leader. He tells me about the different styles, but how they all seem to echo similar cultural values.

When I asked about his connection with the land of his heritage, he said he goes back to Tahiti whenever he can, and that he goes back to Hawaii every 6 months or so. “For some reason or another, it always seems like about every 6 months.”

#### Tehei and Honi

Tehei and Honi are the two band members that I interview. They are older than many of the performers; probably in their mid-forties or fifties. They have been with the luau show for a number of years and have seen the changes, for better or for worse, according to them.

I introduce myself to them first and perhaps from lack of practice, (these are my first interviews), I stumble to say what my project is about. I feel my introduction about culture within entertainment and how it can change or sustain culture, may have influenced the first band member’s response. Tehei begins to speak to me about changes in culture. He says, yes, it definitely has changed. He begins speaking about the culture changes taking place in Tahiti.

Tehei is Tahitian and has been with the show long enough to comment that even in the show there has been an extensive evolution of what is presented. He regrets that there used to be a beautiful Tahitian guitar song in the show, but that it is a very small section now, and sometimes only used as a contingency for a rain show. Because of this, he tells me, the audience

misses the beauty of the Tahitian guitar. He continues to expound “but, at least the guitar! In Tahiti everyone’s switching to keyboard. They don’t want the beauty of the traditional sound.” Still, he catches himself in his examination of authentic Tahitian music by saying that even the guitar is not really traditional. “No guitar, just percussion and bamboo sticks and a cappella.” I try to reflect it back to him, “So culture is always changing?” “Yes,” he responds, “it is changing. It changed to the guitar, and now it is changing to the keyboard. But the keyboard is not as beautiful.” Tehei then excuses himself to go back to his break room.

Honi is from Hawaii. He has been a musician all of his life. He used to dance when he was young, but claims that he is not a dancer, but a musician. He explains that his wife is a dancer, and then he tells the story about how, when they auditioned for this show in Hawaii, she got the part as a dancer. He and his wife told the producers that it was a package deal, if you take one, you have to take the other, if she dances, then he comes to be a musician. Yet when they arrived in Orlando the producers asked him to line up with the dancers. He pulled them aside and told them he was a musician, not a dancer. “They said, ‘we know, we know, just see what you can do.’ And after every song I said, but I am a musician.” Finally, after the dancing was all over, the producers called him over and said, okay, you can play music instead. “I said, I know! That’s what I told you! I am a musician!” From that point on he has been with the luau show for 35 years. He says that at one point the show was more authentic, “more traditional dancing, not this, rock-a-hula” (there is a piece at the end of the show that features an Elvis swing dance.)

He continues, “I try to tell them if things are not right. Like Aunty’s dress being all patchwork from dresses she has worn through the different years of the show.” (“Aunty” is one of the characters in the show). “It is a nice idea, but it’s not right. No aunty would wear that.



Never. .... But I can't change everything.” We talk a little more about the balance between entertainment and cultural presentation. Honi tells me, “Other things, eh, I can live with them.”

I ask about his involvement in the Polynesian community here in Orlando. He says that he plays with other guys from the band at the hula competitions and dances. He also plays for weddings or other Polynesian gigs.

### Harold

The last interview that I include here is not with one of the Polynesian dancers, but with a character-actor who had served as my liaison, as I previously mentioned. While he is not of the same Polynesian heritage, he has some interesting insights as an outsider within this community.

Harold is from the Caribbean, but says, “you know, when you are around this culture, everyone starts picking up things from everyone.” He talks about becoming very interested in Polynesian culture since joining this show. He says it was intimidating at first, since he was hired as a character role, to come into this close community, but that everyone was really welcoming. He mentions that he now does a lot of research on his own time to learn more about the different islands and the different cultures represented in the show.

He mentions watching videos about Polynesian history and dance. I ask him if he would ever be interested in learning to dance? He says he doesn't think he has the body or the training to do so, but that sometimes he will try to follow along with the dances from the side of the stage. He comments how hard it is to just get the technique correct, especially just the way the motion of the hands are going. Even in the male dances, like the Tongan paddle dance, in which there are strong motions and poses, there are very controlled, graceful hand motions. He adds

that he feels that when he does each motion he is getting more of a sense of that culture, just by doing the movements.

This reminds me about a section in the show where his character is accused of not taking the dances seriously (his character comes on stage with a huge set of Poi balls following the Maori section of the traditional dances.) We get into a conversation about humor and about culture. He says that there used to be a scene in which his character goes on stage and tries to imitate the Samoan slap dance, but kind of makes fun of it. He says that the performers complained that it was rude to be making fun of the Samoan dance, and that it was disrespectful. The show directors listened and cut this section of the show.

I comment that, within the Samoan dance, one of the dancers kind of makes fun of himself by slapping himself and then rubbing it and making a visual “Ow!” to the audience. Harold rejoins that he thinks humor is a big part of this culture as well. He tells me that the performers are serious about the respect for the dance, but they are laid back and they can have fun within their own presentation of it too. He refers to a Samoan television show from New Zealand. He relates a scene in which one of the characters has just arrived from Samoa and still has a thick pidgin accent. One of the New Zealand Samoans asks him if he has any “scissors.” He responds, “Oh yes, I have 4 sissers and 3 brotha.” So you see, he tells me, if you look at the media the Polynesian community creates, they have a sense of humor and can play at each other.

Harold concludes that the performers here are very passionate about their culture, and mentions that he knows of at least one woman performer is learning Hawaiian language, and really trying to get back to learning her culture. He also mentions that a lot of the performers were just back in Hawaii for the funeral of a well-loved kumu hula. He tells me from this and

other stories he has heard, it seems like the kumu relationship is more than just teacher. We conclude our conversation, as these performers have to prepare for their next show.

*Second set of interviews, Fall 2012 through Summer 2013*

The next set of profiles gives the background of the individuals I interviewed during this period. These interviews were more in-depth, usually lasting 40 minutes to one hour. I begin each interview with a question about how each person became involved in dance and then continue with questions exploring perceptions of entertainment and of the involvement in the Polynesian community. While *kumu* refers to teacher, I use the capitalized version to refer to my specific hula instructor.

Kumu

*September 2012-January 2014, Interview November 1, 2012*

The first time I meet Kumu is at the Hawaiian service at a nearby church. I had driven past the sign many times on my way to drop off my son at school, but since I worked or had school on Mondays, I had never thought of going. Yet here I am, starting to explore Polynesian culture, and I have a Monday off. I decide to stop by and see what the once a month service was like.

The service begins with the blowing of the conch shells to call the rest of the lingering congregation from the parking lot into the building. The prayers and the call and response alternate between English and Hawaiian. There is a large section at the beginning of the service dedicated to focusing on the community. Where in my church the “turn and greet your neighbor” section of the service takes about enough time to shake hands with the four or five

people adjacent to your pew, this service allowed for people in the front to come all the way to the back pews to embrace those they had not seen in the last month. Throughout the service, dance is incorporated with the homily and the hymns. I believe that I recognize a couple of the musicians from the luau shows.

The man leading the service is a big man in stature, but he displays a gentle spirit. His face erupts in a smile reaching from his eyebrows to his cheeks each time he asks the congregation to introduce visitors or to announce special events. Later, I find out that this is Kumu, pastor of the monthly Hawaiian service and the *kumu* (hula teacher) of the local hālau.

The next time I meet Kumu is at the first hālau session I attend. I am told that the dancers from the church meet for classes in the lobby of the Polynesian themed resort at one of the major tourist destinations. My son and I try to get there early, but we don't find anyone who looks like they are preparing for a class, I ask the front desk clerk. She seems to think that maybe the resort gives lessons outside in the pool area. We walk around the pool and some of the other areas of the resort looking for a group of dancers.

When we make our way back to the lobby we find them, but they are already in the midst of practice, so we make ourselves comfortable on the couches to watch. Kumu is kneeling on the ground in front of the dancers. He is keeping the rhythm on an *ipu ipu* drum (Hawaiian drum made from two gourds connected to each other) on which he alternates slapping with his hand on the side of the ipu ipu and thumping on the ground for different tones. He is calling out different steps to the dancers. Every once and a while he stops and corrects a dancer. Sometimes he is stern, "Stop, show me a *ka'o*! Okay, now, feet together. Amy, you are going too fast, slow down." Sometimes he is very gentle, "Baby girl, open your knees a little wider, there you go, you see how you go lower then?" With one of the newer women, he approaches her and has her

try one of the moves in which she is supposed to do a figure eight with her hips, he tells her to imagine a figure eight in the air that she is tracing, “There you go! *Mai Ka’i!* Very Good!”

After this practice session everyone is beginning to pack up to go to another room. I go over to Kumu who is still on the floor and I introduce myself. I tell him that I had seen them at the church and wanted to come and check out the class. He invites us to join them in the other room. This is how I begin to get to know Kumu.

Later, through an interview, and through being in his class, I learn more of his story. When I ask how he got into dance, he tells me that in seventh grade he had a teacher find out that he could chant. The teacher pulled him aside and said, “You are a chanter!” He began then learning how to control his voice and began chanting. He learned to dance in ninth grade because the school he attended required everyone to take hula basics. He tells me that he learned from a certain kumu who probably influences his teaching style to this day. Still, he had not thought about teaching hula, until he happened to be asked to help teach a hula for a charity event his mainland college was hosting. He started teaching the hula basics for the Hawaiian club and then kept on going. He makes sure to give equal credit to his wife for keeping him accountable to Hawaiian culture and to the hula, as well.

When we talk about language and culture, he tells me that most of the Hawaiian language he learned, he learned from his grandmother. He notes that sometimes he finds the Hawaiian he speaks is a little different than the Hawaiian many kids are learning in school now, because they have standardized the Hawaiian language in order to teach it. He says he had learned from an older generation before this standardization.

Kumu represents a passionate voice for Hawaiian culture, but also a welcoming presence for many students of all different nationalities to come and learn about his culture and the hula

dance. In his lessons, he often incorporates personal stories about folk legends from his grandmother, history lessons of Hawaiian occasions, and the spiritual background of the places highlighted in each dance.

Jessie

*June 24, 2013*

I am interested in meeting Jessie because she is both the kumu of a hālau and also runs a production company that puts on luau shows for events, conferences, parties, etc. I am curious about her perspective on the distinction of training for cultural knowledge and performing for entertainment. Jessie says that I may stop by one of her classes and talk to her and potentially members of her hālau in between class times.

The studio is located behind an adorable little café, closed, but with different sets of personal china on the table set for the next day. It is on a strip mall along with a craft/art center, a thrift store, an empty front, and a nail salon. While the strip seems grey and somewhat lifeless at 6:30 in the evening, the moment I follow the signs “Aloha Fitness”, and round the corner, I see a storefront studio filled with light and color. I see a patio chair across from the front of the big windows, and I am early, so I don’t want to interrupt. I go to sit down in one of the chairs to watch, but then the door opens. “Brittany?” I affirm. “I’m Jessie, come on in.”

I take off my shoes and follow her in. She introduces me to the class and lets me explain a little bit about my research. I say that I am interested in talking to Polynesian dancers, especially those involved in commercial performances, to see how they use the dance to connect to their heritage and cultural identity. I find a back corner to stow my things and sit on the floor to watch her direct the rest of her Tahitian class.

She calls the third run through of the main Tahitian dance they are working on, and then she calls the class finished and comes over to talk to me. Jessie has a dark tan, but bleach blonde hair. She mentions her blonde hair being something that gave her trouble performing when she was younger. Now, she jokes, she is one of the darkest in her group, even though many are fully Polynesian! She has a tattoo around her bicep. She is very fit, is well toned, and has strong arms. She works her class hard in drills and in making sure that every dancer is doing the move correctly before she moves on to the next drill. Yet, her laugh comes easily and it is evident that her dancers have a lot of love and a lot of respect for her way of teaching.

I ask a little about how she got started with dance and with commercial entertainment for-hire. She explains that her mother led a performance group. She, her siblings, and her cousins all danced with the group from the time she was little until she was much older. She tells me how it was a big family responsibility to dance with the performance group. Now, she is one of the only ones of her family to continue. Jessie moved from Hawaii when she was young, but danced in the family show while growing up in Northeastern USA. We talk about some of the differences between commercial performances and a hālau and I ask her as many interview questions as we can get through in the time between the last Tahitian drills of the first class and the start of the next class.

Later, as I watch the intermediate hula class, a friendly woman nearby points out significant people and observations about the studio she feels I need to know. She points out the black and white pictures in the windowsill. “That is kumu when she was a little girl.” There were three of four framed black and white photos of a little girl in kahiko costume. I respond that the whole studio was beautiful. She told me that there was a dancer who was an artist who

painted the back mural. “It is from a picture of kumu and her mother on the beach when she was little. And that back there,” she points to further background of the mural, “is Merritt Island.”

The mural covered the back wall and wrapped around to the wall under the window. It was a beach scene at sunset or sunrise with the changing reds, oranges, yellows and pinks of the sky. There were two female figures with arms raised and with the *lei po’o* (the lei that goes around the head) and arm pieces of the kahiko costume. It looked like it could be any beach, but I found the fact that this woman had specifically identified Merritt Island in the background to be an interesting example of how the scene from Hawaii could incorporate the home of the kumu in Florida, as well.

### Mahina

*August 20, 2013*

I first see Mahina at the Ho’ike evening show. She is introduced as one of the main producers of the evening show. I subsequently contact her through email and we arrange to meet at a Barnes and Noble café for an interview. She is the president of the entertainment group, which for many years had a continuous contract with another amusement park, but has recently closed the contract. She now continues to elicit for-hire performances for corporate events and luau shows, but she also seems to be looking toward her next stage in life.

Mahina holds herself in a posture of confidence and is very eloquent and takes her time to contemplate the questions before preparing her answers. She radiates warmth as we speak and chides me for being afraid to ask her, or anyone else to share their time with me. She is gracious with her time and her contacts and throughout the interview, and asks me about myself, as well. She considers herself one of the older generations of the Polynesian performers here in Orlando,



but her beauty and grace hide any sign of a particular decade. She has long brown hair, perhaps lightened with a bit of grey.

Mahina is Tongan through her father and Hawaiian through her mother. Her parents met at the Polynesian Cultural Center where her dad had come to work at the opening of Tonga village. Her mother had attended the church college connected with the center. Together, both of her parents moved to California, got married and performed in smaller luau shows in San Francisco. They then created their own group of performers. This group got a contract with an amusement park in Ohio, but when a new park opened in Florida, eventually, this group ended up in Florida, as well.

Mahina tells me that she learned to dance from her mother and from being surrounded by the dances. She suggests that most Polynesians learn this way, more from being around the culture of dance. At a certain point growing up she made the decision to begin learning for herself, apart from just being born into a performing family. She notes that this is similar to how she has raised her own children. She made a point of having them learn their culture and who they are, but who they become and what they do with it is up to them. She tells me that all four of her sons work outside of the dance entertainment industry, but all four incorporate their heritage into their work and their identity. While the performing group began as a family affair, Mahina says that her immediate family is now a minority within the group. Still, at the end of the contract with the amusement park show, there are up to four generations of her family still within the performance group.

We talk about why she and her dancers have chosen to continue dancing and I go through many of the interview questions I have prepared. At one point I suggest that perhaps this way of entertaining is a sustainable way to pass on the cultural heritage, but she stops me and reminds

me that there are many Polynesians living and working in some other capacity than in entertainment, who are equally competent in music and dance. She explains that she can pull people out of the woodwork who know this or that specific Tongan song, or whom she knows can play this or that song for a performance, yet who are not performers.

I ask whether any of her kids or she has been back to Tonga. She has just had a long trip back to Tonga this year. This starts a long discussion between the two of us about the differences in lifestyle between the island and the fast-paced lifestyle of the States. She asks me about living on my partner's island and we find many similarities in our experiences. We nod and smile and laugh about the emphasis on personal relationships, lack of privacy and figuring out what to do with our time when we come from America to a forced isolation from technology and the availability of distractions.

She concludes by saying that there is a cultural side of her which is fed in spending time in the place of her heritage, but that there is a part of her that is a part of the culture here in Florida too. When she speaks about her children going back she thinks that it will be even harder for them to accept the simplicity of the island life, but she also thinks that as they grow older, it will be something that is important to them too. She mentions that her son often goes to work with Troy Polamalu at football camps back in Samoa and so perhaps he is on the cusp of wanting to try Tonga; still, she concedes, Samoa is a little more Americanized and less rural than her father's village in Tonga.

When we conclude our conversation and have exhausted my interview questions, she asks whom I have interviewed or will be interviewing. She suggests a couple of other performers in the community for different perspectives in terms of age and experience, either coming to Florida, or growing up in the community here in Florida and making their own

connections to their heritage. As we finish up our session she picks up the phone and calls one gentleman and asks if she can give me his number. I call him as soon as I get home and have another interview with Will for the very next morning. She reiterates that all I have to do is ask, and people are happy to share their stories. I thank her profusely and assure her that I keep this in mind as I continue with my interviews.

### Will

*August 21, 2013*

I call Will as soon as I get home from my meeting with Mahina. He says he would be happy to do an interview so we schedule for the very next morning at a Starbucks near both of our homes. I get there a little early to make sure to find a spot that is quiet enough for us to talk. When he arrives, I realize I have met him before. He gives me a big hug hello and tells me how my father is his brother from another mother. I realize then, that I have met him through my dad when they worked at the same theme park show. I have seen him at other events in the community, and have had contact with him, even though this interview was initially set up through Mahina.

Will is older, and his children are all beginning families of their own. He is Samoan, born in American Samoa but with paternal heritage in Western Samoa. For many years he has been employed in the Broadway-quality show put on by a major Orlando amusement park. He performed a fire knife dance to the music of the villain character in the show. Initially however, he tells me that when he was younger, he performed in the resort luau show. He is recently retired, which he tells me is a point of cultural pride. He says he would not want to perform fire

knife poorly on stage, but he would rather make way for the younger kids to go and put on a good show if his body is no longer capable of doing what it used to.

Throughout this interview I ask many of the questions I have prepared, but it is also a conversation of stories. I often find myself re-visiting topics, but also find myself intrigued with all of the different anecdotes Will relates. We *story* (to converse through stories) for at least an hour and a half to two hours during our allotted interview time. I begin by asking how he got into dancing and performing.

Will tells me that he was exposed to fire knife dancing through his brother when he was little. He tells me a story of his brother and cousin practicing. He came near them and they told Will to come and light the fire. When he lit the fire knife, they had poured a circle of gasoline around him and lit the circle so that he was trapped in the middle. He could not run away from the fire then. I'm not sure that this was a training technique, as much as a big brother stunt, but Will tells me that they were just having fun, but that he had no idea that this stunt would someday take him here.

Will recounts that he grew up in American Samoa, but that for his high school graduation, his father gave him the gift of a trip to Hawaii. His brothers and other family were already in Hawaii. When he first began working in Hawaii, he worked in construction, however his cousin took him to a night show and said why didn't they do this instead. Will claims that, while he learned fire knife dancing in Samoa, he was not really a dancer. He claims that he was shy and didn't even dance at his prom dance! Yet when he got to Hawaii, this changed. In Hawaii, he became involved in the luau shows there, and soon used his talents in music, fire knife, and solo dancing to travel to Tokyo Disney and other performing opportunities around the world. Eventually, this path took him to Orlando where he worked at the luau resort show before

moving into the park and working at the theme park show as a fire knife performer. He tells me he misses dancing though. He says that sometimes he just wants to stand in back of the luau show and do the dances. Other times, he tells me, he misses it so much he does not want to go, even to watch.

During the course of our storying, Will emphasizes his culture and his heritage often. These seem to be very important topics to him. He also adds long discourses about the need for kids to grow up understanding respect and caring for other people. He tells me both about his kids finding out that they had kinship ties to the royalty lines of Samoa and about how his son helps an older neighbor but refuses to accept any payment for clearing storm debris from her lawn. He emphasizes that these are the most important things for kids to learn; the importance of family and the importance of knowing one's heritage.

While Will is very proud of his culture and of being able to perform his culture on stage, he has mixed reactions to some of the luau shows. He claims that previously, the dancers in the luau resort show would perform no matter what the conditions, they would dance in rain, cold, etc. because they wanted to make sure that the audience saw their dedication. He tells me similar stories from his own experience dancing through pain, or getting hurt during a show, but continuing as best as he could so that the audience would not know anything was amiss.

Now, he expresses disappointment with some of the emphasis on the storyline of the luau show, calling it a "Mickey-Mouse show," rather than a focus on the culture. Still, he says that, while some of the kids in these shows are maybe doing it just to feed their families, he also notes that he is proud of them for doing their culture. He seems to go back and forth, evincing mixed feelings about the concessions cultural presentation sometimes makes for entertainment limitations.

Will emphasizes that two of the most important experiences in his own career were being able to “do” his culture on stage, and get paid for it, and also being able to connect with families and children who were having a hard time in life. He says one of his biggest rewards for performing came from an interaction with a “Give Kids the World” little girl and her family. He says that these things (seeing kids fighting cancer) can make you sad, but that they are also the reason he loved his job. He tells me I am doing a good job with my own son, making sure that he is exposed to his culture and also teaching him respect and love. Our conversation meanders, but the themes of culture, respect, and family are recurrent throughout all of his stories.

Toma

*September 12, 2013*

Toma is young, probably mid to early twenties. He is a fire knife dancer at the main resort luau show, however he grew up in Mahina’s production company, participating in her shows when he was little. His hair is long and kinky and pulled back into a ponytail most of the time. He has a ready smile and a great laugh. We email back and forth while he leaves for Hawaii, but when he returns, he agrees to meet me for an interview in the greenroom before his show.

He performs the finale of the show, so he has plenty of time to talk with me before he needs to get ready. We find a quiet corner of the greenroom couches to talk. During our interview, other performers are coming into the greenroom and going to the dressing rooms to get their costumes set. One guy makes food in the microwave while listening to headphones. During our interview I see him in the background, dancing to his headphones with Tahitian style

steps. One of the female dancers enters and begins dancing with him for about 4 minutes before heading to the female dressing room. Most of the performers let us be, some wave hello.

Toma is unique among my interviewees, in that he grew up completely in Florida, surrounded by the entertainment industry. His father is from Samoa, and while Toma wants to someday travel to Samoa, he has not yet had the chance. He often visits relatives in Hawaii though, and has just returned from this trip when we talk. He tells me that growing up, even though he was not in Samoa, he was surrounded by Samoan culture from the tight community here in Orlando. He tells me his dad had come from Samoa to Hawaii to perform, but had then followed other relatives to the entertainment industry here in Orlando. Toma mentions that he had aunties working for this company, his dad and uncles working for another company, and many of the family members working and growing up in Mahina's production company.

Toma tells me that he began learning fire knife dancing when he was four. He notes that it was expected that he would learn some dance for events and celebrations growing up, but he learned fire knife first, since it was definitely the most exciting for a four year old. He tells me that his dad figured out his interest in fire knife and so began making little sticks for him to practice with and he began learning from this dad. He thinks that, had his father not been an entertainer, and had Toma not grown up in the entertainment industry, he might not have learned as much as he did in order to perform now. He explains that while he learned from his father, fire knife is also a very individualized technique, so it is a skill that one has to discover solitarily, as well.

During our discussion, Toma highlights that he has learned a lot of his dancing and history and cultural stories through learning to perform. While Toma says he never attended a formal hālau, his training was much like in the hālau where each dance is explained based in its

physical and mythical contexts. In this way, he learned the stories and culture through growing up surrounded by performers.

We talk some more, working through my list of interview questions before I wrap up the conversation so that he has time before he has to get ready to go on for the show. Toma flashes a last big smile and I thank him for his time, before walking myself out of the greenroom.

### Events

Over the course of my research, I try to become as involved as I can in the Polynesian community in Orlando, to corroborate the findings of my interviews with my own experiences in participant observation. In this section, I briefly introduce some of the main events I attend during my research so that the reader will have an understanding of the events when I refer to them in my findings and discussion section.

### Hālau

*September 2012- March 2014*

Many performers with whom I speak, talk about their training in dance, either through a specific kumu, or teacher, or from being involved in a performing family. In order to investigate what this training entails, over the last year and a half I become a member of a local hālau. A hālau is a school dedicated to teaching Hawaiian dance, culture, and language. While some hālau groups may incorporate other styles of dance, the one I participate in focuses solely on Hawaiian culture and dance.

At the beginning I find this hālau through attending a local Hawaiian church service. There were dancers there and when I ask about lessons, they tell me to meet at the Polynesian



themed resort in the lobby at 10am on Saturday morning. They motion to the pastor that has been leading the Hawaiian parts of the service and tell me that he is the kumu of the hālau.

The hālau meets on Saturday mornings in the lobby of the Polynesian themed hotel for an hour. During this time, tourists can stop and watch while they wait for others from their party. The classes are focused on learning certain dances, practicing dances already learned, or running drills on certain moves. A couple of very brave tourists or outgoing children occasionally join us during regular lobby time, but the classes are not always open to audience participation, and it has a more exclusive look with all of the dancers in matching hālau shirts and black *pa'u* skirts. Still, our class provides entertainment to an otherwise open area with couches.

After this hour, all of the dancers and the kumu pack up our gear and go to an employee training room where we practice for another 3 hours. A different hālau comes into the lobby after our class for their hour of lobby practice. This sister hālau focuses more broadly on Hawaiian, Tahitian, Maori, and Samoan dance and is led by Aunty Akela. Aunty Akela is considered to be an elder or leader in the Polynesian community here. She organizes a lot of the different events and my kumu tells me in our interview, that, in terms of the Orlando Polynesian community, her word goes first.

Every third Saturday we have *ho'olaule'a*. This is where many of the different hālaus that have sprung from Aunty Akela's original hālau gather in the lobby and present different pieces they have been working on. These mornings start with many dancers crowding the tourist resort bathrooms, adjusting costumes, or wrapping wraps and greeting each other with Aloha kisses on the cheek. At about 11am, or when everyone is present, all of the dancers from the different hālaus make a large circle and a prayer in Hawaiian and then in English is said. There is a printed line-up to tell which hālau and which dance is going next, but mostly it seems that we

all watch the different performances until we're called to go line up. The lobby area is overflowing with performers and resort guests stopping to watch.

My hālau also meets on Thursday evenings for two hours from 7pm to 9pm. I cannot originally attend these classes due to scheduling conflicts, but when I have the ability to so, my dancing improves at a much quicker rate than when I only attended Saturday morning class.

The hālau is run like a club, with a \$40 membership fee each month. All costumes are created and sewn by the members of the group during our meeting sessions. There are fundraising events throughout the year to earn money for the hālau, ranging from performances at local churches, to garage sales and Christmas ornament sales. Within the hālau there are many students of different levels. The hierarchy of leaders, as opposed to newer students is loosely based on a grading system of years of *Pae'aina* performances completed.

#### Pae'aina

*February 21, 2013 and March 1, 2014*

*Pae'aina* is an annual event in which the newer students showcase a dance they have researched and mastered. The first year students choose an *'auana* (modern style hula) piece from the hālau's repertoire with the help of the more experienced leaders in the group. This is a dance that they rehearse and receive feedback on until they have completely mastered the dance. They also are expected to research the history of the dance and translate each verse of the song. For the performance aspect, the dancer introduces the piece, chooses his or her costume and handmade lei based on the song's location, and then explains the costume choices and a little bit of the background to the song before performing a solo of the song.

During the solo piece, the leaders of the hālau and certain chosen members of the Polynesian community act as judges. Each judge has a copy of the research paper completed for the song and dance, and then they give comments both on the research and the dance. The second year students do this same process, but with a *kahiko* (ancient style chanting hula) the kumu has choreographed, which takes even more consultation from some of the leaders in the group, as the dance moves are very specific. The third year students choose an ‘auana style song of their choice and choreograph their own steps, justifying their choreography with their research of the translations and the origins and meanings behind the songs.

Once the student has gone through all three years of Pae’aina, he or she is considered one of the *ali’i* (leaders) of the hālau. The kumu depends on the ali’i for answering questions during the process of the learning of the dances, and to remember the moves for specific dances as he choreographs them. The ali’i also act as the judges and the support people during Pae’aina. While the Pae’aina can sound intimidating, much of the feedback given by the judges is positive and encouraging more than destructive criticisms of the dancer. Following the presentation of all of the dancers participating in Pae’aina, there is a big party potluck to celebrate.

Through Pae’aina and through the daily classes, history, culture, and language are interwoven into the dance lessons. The requirements of Pae’aina allow students to know certain songs in depth, but also allow for the students to realize that there are meanings within every dance and song. One aspect I learned while participating in the first year ‘auana solo is that there can be multiple meanings to certain Hawaiian words or phrases, but that the songwriter can use this to express many different sentiments in a certain phrase. It also helped me during my research to understand why the kumu choreographed certain movements and what the attitude of

the entire song, is based on the writers intentions or the multiple meanings built into the language of the song.

### Events at the Resort Luau Stage

*September 2012 and May 2013*

I attend two main events at the resort luau stage during my fieldwork. The first is a rehearsal for some of the performers who are just learning the show, but who need an audience to practice the audience participation parts of the show. This rehearsal takes place early on in my research and is my initial introduction to many of the performers at this stage.

The next event is a hula competition for employees of the resort company. This is hosted as a way to honor and participate in the culture for which the resort is themed. It takes place during the day and is completely voluntary. Many groups from this resort, and a couple of groups from other resorts run by the same company, are present. It seems that within each group there are one or two employees of Polynesian descent who have training in Polynesian dance. These individuals serve as leaders to pass on their knowledge to the others in their cohort.

As we enter to witness the competition, I see many *haole* (non-Polynesian) employees getting dressed in their leis, and skirts, etc. Then I see a couple of familiar faces from the hālau lobby time. Kumu's wife is present. Brad, from the front desk, who often joins us in the lobby and the Tahitian boys' father is there, as is Auntie Akela. One of the men that teach the boys in Auntie Akela's class is there, as is one of the girls I recognize from *ho'olaule'a*. One of the women from my hālau accompanies them. They are performing a *Kahiko* dance together for the competition.

Many dancers meander about: fixing costumes, chasing after their small children, and practicing their steps. The band takes their place on stage, the manager next to me wonders aloud if he will have to be doing repairs for tonight's show after they are done with the instruments, he is praying under his breath that they know what they are doing, as the instruments for the luau are not easily replaced. They have to be special ordered either from Hawaii or from local Polynesian artisans. It takes time for each piece to be created, so replacements are not available for day-of-order pick up.

Once the band is set, the techs give an okay, the emcee does a double check, then retreats to the side of the stage. One of the musicians blows the conch shell into a microphone to silence the audience. The emcee, a haole employee who has worked at this Polynesian resort for many years, enters from stage left chanting a Hawaiian chant. He does an admirable job. He then gives a welcome to all of the performers and iterates how this is the tenth year of this cast competition and that it is within the spirit of aloha and the admiration of this culture, that this tradition has continued. He then asks the judges to join him on stage. Two of the judges look of Polynesian descent. Both gave the years they performed on this stage, about 10 years each. Both look to be in their 50s-60s. They give their current employment positions; one is still working at the Polynesian resort and another is now working in the engineering field at another nearby resort owned by the same company. Both comment that it is an honor to be asked back to this stage to judge the competition.

The competition proceeds with a creative category, and then proceeds to more traditional hula categories of 'auana and kahiko competitions. Prizes are awarded at the end of the show. By the end of the competition, it looks like it has been a fun day had by all, and all of the instruments are, blessedly, still intact.

## Ho'ike

*July 27-28, 2013*

In 2012, as I prepared for my research on the Polynesian luau, I hear about an annual event happening just down the street from my work place. I stop by on the last evening of the competition, but everything was being shut down. Still, this was my first introduction to many of the musicians and performers who had come to support or participate in the event. In spring of 2013, I begin to prepare with my hālau to participate in the event, which I had only witnessed briefly the previous year.

The Orlando Ho'ike is a major annual hālau competition held in Orlando, Florida. The webpage outlines the purpose and spirit of the ho'ike by stating, “**Our Goal:** The mission of the Ho'ike Hawai'i Organization is to bring people together of all cultures and ethnicity to share in the Spirit of Aloha by holding Hawaiian Hula Competitions, Exhibitions and Concerts annually. In addition, Cultural Workshops are held annually and offered to all who have an interest in Polynesia and to educate those of Polynesian ancestry and their children in an effort to perpetuate the culture.” (Ho'ike Hawai'i Florida 2013)

The Orlando Ho'ike is held at a hotel near the main international tourist drive. It takes place in a large conference room, which may have been two or three conference rooms put together. Next to this room, a smaller conference room houses a chess competition. It is interesting to see the bright colors and big personalities of the Polynesian community next to the serious players carrying their chess brief cases.

The hallway toward the entrance of the conference room for Ho'ike is lined with three or four tables on each side. The first table belongs to the Florida Hawaiian Civic Association. Next to this table is a table selling musical instruments and woodenwares. I see them playing

ukulele with the men from the Hawaii Civic Association whenever customers are scarce.

Across from these two tables there is a display board honoring Pualani Mossman as an “Ambassador of Aloha.” It gives a little history of the Mossman luau and Pualani’s involvement in the tourist industry as the face of aloha, welcoming all to Hawaii. She was the first winner of the “Ho’okahiko Duke Kahanamoku Award, a generous donation was given to Ho’ike Hawaii, Inc. to assist in its effort to perpetuate the Hawaiian culture through hula, music and the Aloha Spirit” (Ho’ike Hawai’i Florida 2013). There is also a special note on the webpage thanking the Mossman/Avon *ohana* (family), for their generous donations to the Hawaiian Ho’ike community in an effort to further perpetuate Hawaiian culture for Polynesians on the mainland. I find this interesting because the Mossman family was a well-established production family specializing in presenting early luau shows in Hawaii and in bringing luau shows to perform throughout mainland America.

Cloths of reds, oranges, and yellows adorn the adjacent table. This stall is selling all bright varieties of hanging sarongs and muumuus. Matching sets of ruffled midriff tops and children’s sarongs hang prominently in the front of this merchant’s table. Through the course of the week I see more and more little girls posing adorably in their new little outfits while moms, aunties, and uncles click pictures and encourage poses. The table next to this one sells flower barrettes, bone and plastic carved necklaces, and all kinds of other Hawaiian style adornments.

Further down is a table selling leis and has a poster of Hawaiian immersion summer camps. I look at the pictures and ask about the program and a younger boy answers my questions. Later I hear the announcer encouraging people to come and buy a lei from this young man who has made the leis to sell and fund his own way to this summer camp.

Across from the conference room and in between these tables, there is a wide socializing

space. Different hālau groups congregate throughout this lounge area. The first day there are clumps of people stringing leis, practicing steps, and putting finishing touches on costumes. The days during the competition it becomes home to resting aunties and uncles in charge of the spirited kids running and playing tag. It also hosts groups of family and friends around coolers of *masubi* (spam sushi) or bags with meals from local fast food restaurants.

Inside the conference room there is a large stage at the front and a side stage for the band. A table of awards sits to stage left. The judges sit next to the trophy table. There is a ramp leading to the stage that passes the judges table onto the stage. This is used for entrances and exits for the performers. There is also a set of stairs leading down from the front of the stage.

The first two rows of seats are reserved. The signs list names, one of which is Uncle Fred's, who organized the event, others being honored guests, and many of the last names listed are Mossman. There are three sections of rows of chairs. Different hālaus with matching shirts sit in the different rows. Around the edges of the room are more merchant tables, some of which belong to the hālaus. The hālaus have cards with the information for the hālau and the often are selling something as a fundraiser. Our sister hālau's table sells ipu ipu drums that one of the husbands designs.

My hālau had decided that we would not compete in this year's ho'ike, but that we would present dances as exhibitions instead. My hālau participates in three exhibition dances over the lunch hour. These dances are just for show and not a part of the competition. For two of these dances, we are joined by other hālaus who have learned the dance at workshops held throughout the year. One of our dances is our kumu's solo exhibition of his hālau, so it is only our hālau dancers on stage.



We also support our sister hālau that is competing. Preparations of costumes for ho'ike began back in March. Our practice sessions in May and June are full of sewing, ironing, cutting, and modeling these costumes. The week before ho'ike we take over one of the dancer's community clubhouse and set up shop, stringing flower leis, spray painting Spanish moss, and twisting *ti leaves* together for the gracious ladies outfits.

Throughout the two days of ho'ike I witness a great number of different troops from around the country, even one from Canada. The first day is focused on performances based of 'auana (modern style of graceful Hawaiian dance) hula dances. Saturday night there is a show to which we can buy tickets. Sometimes this evening show features a popular Hawaiian musician or group. This year it is a Polynesian cultural show put on by many of the local performers. The second day is focused on kahiko, which is the ancient style with much stronger moves, and is danced to the chanting and the ipu ipu gourd drum. Later on in this day is the Tahitian competition and an award ceremony.

The ho'ike is a ticketed event, so while it could be open to anyone to come and watch, it is mainly attended by members of the community either involved in a hālau or in the Polynesian culture. It is seen more as a community event than an event for public entertainment.

### Ho'ike Saturday Night Show

*July 27, 2013*

The line to get into the show is a sea of color. Men are adorned in a bright array of Hawaiian Aloha shirts and women are a sea of colored muumuus and fragrant-looking flower hairpieces. As we show our tickets and are allowed back into the room, we find that many people had already snagged and saved seats for the whole of their hālau group. We find some of

our ladies and they said we could join them, but we might have to squeeze more in if others came. Kids start congregating in the front around the steps. They would be admonished throughout the show that they need to go back to their seats, but right now, no one bothers them.

Before the show officially begins, it is introduced with an explanation of the vision of the different groups coming together to cooperate in performing the show. Originally they had hired a special band to come and play, however, when the band cancelled, Uncle Fred asked Mahina, whose production had just ended a long contract with an amusement park, if her performers would create a show for this evening. Mahina is introduced as the main producer and is asked to say a couple of words about the evening's performance.

She relates that it was three months before ho'ike when she sat down with Uncle Fred and asked what his vision was for her group. He told her that he would like to see a real luau show and a demonstration of Polynesian cultures, however he would really like it if all of the different groups around Orlando and Florida could come together to make it happen. It would be a celebration of the different performance groups cooperating to show what Polynesian culture is to the community here in Orlando. So despite never working together, and, perhaps, even growing up in mild competition with each other, performers from Sea World, Disney and a couple of performers from independent dance companies, come together to create a spectacular show. Different leaders choreograph and lead each section. Kids are included. The announcers say that the performers have spent weeks and weeks preparing and rehearsing, often until 4 am. The announcers emphasize that this will not be a show anyone else will ever see, nor are the likes of this show available elsewhere. Mahina highlights the fact that rarely do shows have this caliber or this many talented performers in the creation and the execution process of the show. And with this entreaty to be amazed, the lights go down and the show begins.

The show begins with Fiji. Fiji is often left out of Polynesian luau performances. Perhaps because it does not match the “look” of Polynesian stereotypes, as there are more dark-skinned Fijians than the typical Hawaiian look of lighter brown skin and softer, flowing hair (Desmond 1999:24). Or perhaps because, also for this reason, Fiji is sometimes classified as Polynesian, and other times classified as Melanesian. I find it extremely powerful to start with Fiji because of its omission in other luau shows and based on my personal experiences with Melanesian cultures.

The performers begin chanting in Fijian, They call out, “*Bula vinaka!*” Then marching/running children warriors file on stage with sticks. They stand, faces painted, completely still. Faces are painted black on top, white on bottom. They wear *lavalavas* (male sarongs) and pigs’ tooth necklaces. The lights go dark. As lights come up, we can see the kids. There is a commotion behind us, as audience members are turning in their seats. We look back to see a group of men, slowly, slowly, all in synch, marching up the aisle; Frozen almost at first, they are a fierce sight. Each of the men carry pig killing clubs, similar to ones I have personally seen in Fiji and Vanuatu.

As they came onto the stage, one of the warriors performs a kava ceremony with the “chief,” the chanter, who was now seated on the floor of the aisle. All of the performers on stage recite the ritual conversation with, “*bula*” “*bula vinaka*” “ah!” I remember the first mate on my ship explaining when we visited Fiji that this is the ceremony you do anytime you are approaching an island or coming into a village. You must bring a gift of kava for the chief, then participate in the kava ceremony, making sure that you say the ritual acceptance phrases of welcome.

Following the kava there is a custom dance to drum beats that the warriors dance with the pig clubs. In this dance, they strike the air with their clubs. The men ended with clubs down on the stage. They freeze. The kids come through the men and do a chant dance. Next, the men join the kids and perform a dance to a more modern Fijian pop song. The Fijian performance is a mix of modern Fijian and traditional Fijian dance and music styles.

The show continues along the same path, traveling through each island of Polynesia and introducing the island in that island's language. There are audience participation sections in which audience members come and put money in a basket at the feet of female dancers. There are also smaller dances with classic storylines of jealousy or competition between female dancers for the one male dancer. The show ends with three fire knife dancers choreographing some of their moves in sync with or complementing the moves of each other.

When the show ends the audience bursts into applause and many stand for an ovation. As the whole cast comes on stage, the rest of the audience stands and shows their appreciation and amazement at the spectacular show. The announcers are correct; it is not a show that you could see anywhere else.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

Now that I have introduced the reader to my main consultants and to the events I will be discussing, I will present the findings of my research. My findings and discussion are subdivided into major thematic sections: Negotiation of Culture, Blurred Lines, Connection with Cultural Identity and Cultural Heritage, Enactment of Place, Cultural Embodiment, and Existential Authenticity.

In Negotiation of Culture, I discuss many of the critiques brought up by Jane Desmond (1997; 1999) about the portrayal of the Polynesian luau as an entertainment venue. In this section I acknowledge the limitations of the luau as a form of cultural tourism, but also discuss my findings that performers are actively negotiating the tension between meaningful cultural presentation and entertainment constraints. Furthermore, I show how performers are using their participation in this form of entertainment as a way to shape the show from the inside, thus applying practice theory to show how agents can adjust the structural restraints even from within those structures.

Next, in the section Blurred Lines, I show that the lines between entertainment and cultural presentation for community consumption are not as clear as critics might assume. Rather, the lines between performer and cultural representative are often blurred. In this section I address Goffman's (1959) distinction between public 'front regions' and private 'back regions' to show the blurred lines between the physical spaces of cultural presentation. This section will also illuminate the blurred lines between professional performer and member of the Polynesian

community in a way that refutes the idea that performers are “selling out” by participating in a commodified version of their culture.

The third section, *Connecting to Cultural Identity and Cultural Heritage*, focuses on the performers’ perspectives of themselves and the agency they demonstrate regarding their perspectives on their participation within the luau show. Here, my findings center on the ways in which performers are using their participation in the luau show to reinforce their own identity and connections to cultural heritage. I use literature that focuses on the flexibility inherent in enacting identity with diaspora communities to support the findings from my interview consultants.

In the fourth section, *Enacting Place*, I further demonstrate that the destinations being performed within these commercial shows not only tie performers to their cultural heritage, but also to the physical land of their heritage. I also give accounts of how this enactment of destination perpetuates the connection to the lands of their heritage for the performers’ children.

While the fourth section focuses on some of the physicality that is embodied in the choreography, the fifth section, *Cultural Embodiment*, focuses more fully on issues of embodiment based on the use of Bourdieu’s concept of bodily hexis (Kray 2005). Based upon my analysis of the comments of performers and the scholarly literature, I argue that cultural values are imbedded into the dances and that by performing the bodily movements of the dance performers are enacting these cultural values, thus, connecting with their cultural identity.

The sixth and concluding section of my findings, *Existential Authenticity*, synthesizes the perspectives of the performers discussed thus far, and revisits the notion of “authenticity” in cultural tourism. I apply Ning Wang’s concept of “existential authenticity” to demonstrate that

the performers can still view their participation in the luau show as an authentic experience of their culture, based on the meaning they themselves ascribe to their experience.

### Negotiation of Culture

In order for a show to be entertaining and marketable to commercial audiences, it often has to be adjusted in order to fit time, expectations, and interest guidelines of the tourists. Melanie Smith and Kathryn Forrest (2006) in their study of cultural tourism festivals comment, “Tourists have limited time to spare, they are not always familiar with local traditions, and they frequently encounter language barriers, and therefore need interpretation or translations” (Smith Forrest 2006:136). Yet, they assert, the adjustments of a cultural presentation to fit these limitations does not necessarily render the cultural presentation inauthentic (Smith, Forrest 2006). Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) note that in order to produce a consumable product, cultural presentation must fit a certain form with which tourists are familiar. They state, “Those who seek to brand their otherness, to profit from what makes them different, find themselves having to do so in the universally recognizable terms in which difference is represented” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:24). Many of the performers with whom I speak, also note this balance between catering to the expectations of audiences and of staying “authentic” in their cultural presentations.

In this section, I provide examples of how performers are negotiating this balance between entertainment and cultural presentation. In the second part of this section, I address “practice theory,” in which individuals can change the system by working through a system

(Bourdieu 1977; Ortner 1989). I use this theory to demonstrate the agency afforded to performers based on their participation and involvement in the commercial forms of their culture.

By including these theoretical frameworks and by including the stories and testimonies of the performers about their involvement in shaping their cultural presentation within the bounds of entertainment, I argue that performers are exemplifying practice theory and that they are able to concede some aspects of their cultural presentation in order to emphasize other aspects of it, thus still maintaining integrity within their cultural identity. In order to do this, I begin with a discussion of some of the limitations of entertainment as cultural presentation, and expound on the ways that performers are navigating this tension.

### Balancing Entertainment and Culture

While all of the performers with whom I speak express pride in what they do, many of them do speak of the limitations of performing their culture for entertainment, rather than just for cultural presentation. Some of these professed limitations echo the criticisms of Jane Desmond (1999). One such criticism highlighted by Desmond (1999) is that while a person visiting a hālau in Hawaii might find many different kinds of bodies, ethnicities, ages, etc., the same person visiting a commercial luau would be presented a more uniformed look. She notes that while hālau dancers might be “hefty or slender, young or even retirement age, local or Oriental looking, white, black, part-Caucasian, Hawaiian, or any mixture of the above,” the performers in the luau are typified by a certain exoticized “Other” look (Desmond 1999:27). This look, Desmond (1999) claims, has been shaped by the images of the hula girl that were proliferated through the mainland during Hawaii’s early involvement with the United States. She notes that



this look is typified by exotic, but not too exotic, facial features, fit/thin female bodies, tan, but not too dark skin tones, and long, dark hair; the ideal native.

Jessie, the kumu who also runs a production company, concurs that in her experiences, there is a certain expectation within her audiences for long, dark hair, dark eyes, and tan skin, as measure of authenticity. Jessie had been born into a performing family and learned dance from her mother. She has been dancing from the age of 4, and now runs a hālau and a performance group for hire, but she does not fall into the typical look of a luau dancer; she is blonde, and has light brown eyes. She tells me, “I’ve performed all of my life, but when I was younger I wore a wig. Because you know, they don’t...(she pauses, looking for the right words)... I’m not dark hair and brown skin. Now when we perform, I perform, but I am surrounded by brown.” She recognizes that, based on her status as the leader and as one of the lead dancers in the troupe, she no longer needs to wear a wig to hide her blonde hair. She does, however, continue to cast her dancers according to this expectation. She herself maintains a deep tan and tattoos that help to assert her authenticity.

As Jessie and I talk about the differences between hālau performances and her paid gigs, she echoes some of Desmond’s critiques of heterosexual storylines and strict feminized and masculinized gender roles presented in the commercial luaus. Desmond claims that there is an underlying script of sexuality beneath the entire luau experience. From the moment tourists board the tour bus to take them to the performance, to the conversations inspired by the show back at the hotel, Desmond claims the tourists are saturated in the language and anticipation of sexuality (Desmond 1997; 1999).

Similarly, Jessie comments that in taking some of her students from the hālau to incorporate them into the performing group, she has to coach them to emphasize different facial

expressions than she would coach in a hālau setting. She explains, “When I have dancers from the hālau join to perform, I have to teach them, eyebrows this (*she raises them high*), smile here, flirt more.” As a matter of engaging the audience and making the performance exciting, Jessie admits that there is a level of sexuality transmitted through the instructions to her dancers to “flirt more,” thus, perpetuating to some degree, the stereotype of the hula girl as more sexually available.

In the hālau in which I conduct my participant observation, there is a young woman who is very graceful and has beautiful execution and depth in her dancing. Her mother is Hawaiian and her father is Caucasian. When I ask if she would ever consider dancing in a professional venue, such as the resort luau show, she responds that she probably would not. I ask why not, and she answers that she would like the dancing part of it, but that she doesn’t like how it changes when it is entertainment. She gives the example of the skirts being “here” (*pointing to mid-thigh*) “instead of here” (*pointing just above the knee*). Again, this statement echoes the critique of Desmond (1999) and Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) who note that often performances become more sexualized when they are performed in front of an audience of Westerners; there is a thin line between eroticism and exoticism in the minds of the observers (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

Jessie similarly notes that not only are females presented more sexually, but they are also presented more in line with stereotypical female gender roles, performing soft, graceful ‘*auana* dances, rather than the more warrior-like *kahiko* chants. In the hālau, women and men dance both styles, yet in luau performances, you are most likely only to see men performing *kahiko* and women performing ‘*auana*. This selective presentation reinforces the gender divide in the

presentation of female and male bodies as strictly feminine and soft, and strictly masculine and strong, respectively.

The critiques of the feminization and sensationalism of the Polynesian luau dancers mentioned by Desmond (1997; 1999) are commented on by Jessie and Mahina in our discussion about the balance between authentic cultural representations and entertainment. In terms of sensationalism, Jessie and Mahina both emphasize that there are certain things they do in creating their shows to make the shows sensational and to capture the full attention of the audience.

Jessie comments that in transitioning her dancers from hālau to performing groups, she is often asked why they are performing these certain songs when other songs are more beautiful. She responds to her girls saying, these songs are more upbeat, and so they are more appealing to the audience and capture more attention.

Mahina is the leader of the production group who for many years, were hired to dance in a major theme park. In our interview, Mahina mentions that she usually starts her show with Tahitian dances to draw the crowd's attention with the upbeat drums and the quick movements of the dancers' hips. She then goes on to some of the other dances from the other islands. She also incorporates kids when they are young enough to be cute or when they are old enough to join the older performers. She notes that you want the audience to walk away with a new awareness of the culture, but you also want them to walk away saying that it was a really good show.

During our separate interviews, both Mahina and Toma, a resort fire knife dancer, contrast the cultural presentation they gave at the ho'ike competition to the limitations of the commercial luau shows. From my own observation, I found that limitations mentioned by

Desmond (1997; 1999) of commercial luau portrayals are both fulfilled and contested in this ho'ike show. The main difference between this show and a commercial show is the way in which the ho'ike show situates the dances within their history. In the ho'ike show, modern songs from Fiji, Tahiti and Hawaii, are incorporated along with more traditional drumming and chants. This frames the performers as more dynamic, rather than frozen in one static snapshot of culture.

Ho'ike, at some points has a party-like atmosphere as audience members storm the stage during the fundraising/ audience participation dance sections. In this way, the ho'ike show breaks the 'gaze of primitivization,' which Desmond (1999) claims is usually reinforced in luau shows. The ho'ike show is able to emphasize the holistic culture, incorporating modern and ancient, audience and dancer, into one presentation.

While the ho'ike show is outside of the realm of commercial entertainment, it is still impacted by some of the same entertainment expectations faced by more commercial shows. A kahiko section for the women is still absent, thus reinforcing the female as feminine and sensual, and the male as strong and virile. The Hawaiian sections of dance seem to blend with the Tahitian section, so I am not sure exactly when Hawaii was presented. Heterosexuality is still played upon, similar to Desmond's critiques of sexuality within the luau. In the ho'ike show, however, the sexuality seems natural to the purpose of the dance, rather than as a way to titillate the audience.

Entertainment techniques and audience assumptions influence not only the commercial productions, but also in some ways the shows meant to be for insiders, such as the ho'ike show. This show is unique in that it refuted many of Desmond's criticisms about the framing of the "native bodies" but even the ho'ike show is not immune to luau audience expectations. Mahina and Jessie both acknowledge that the audience expectations of sexuality and sensationalism

influence their show. Still, they maintain that there are some audience assumptions that they can work to change through their presentation. Both Mahina and Jessie comment on audience assumptions about what “Polynesian” is, and how this preconception can influence commercial performances. In our interview, Jessie notes the difference between the expectations of the audience when watching a hālau recital versus watching a hired production. She says, “They are both very different, performing and dancing/teaching in a hālau. In performing, it is more about the audience and well, in a hālau, you don’t have any ideas about grass skirts, etc.”

This use of the “grass skirt” as a measure of inauthentic representations that some audiences expect is reiterated throughout my participation in the local hālau, as well. I overhear a conversation by a couple of members of my hālau, which follows:

A young woman passes a group of the ladies from our hālau, who are sitting and chatting during a break from ho’ike competition. As soon as she has passed, one of the ladies mentions that the girl was in such and such hālau, but quit when the kumu wanted them to wear plastic skirts for one of the shows. This leads into an impromptu discussion on authenticity in the luau shows in Hawaii. The conversation continues like this, “That is just like ----- luau show in Hawaii!” “I can’t believe that tourists would pay for that crap.” “Yeah, those are fake luaus, if you want to see a real luau show in Hawaii you have to go to \_\_\_, \_\_\_, or PCC.” (Malama lists three of her preferred “authentic” shows. Malama is a Hawaiian dancer who said her mom had pushed her when she was little to perform, but that she always just wanted to dance for herself). “The other ones are just for the tourists, but not the real Hawaii.” Debra, the auntie I am chatting with, who is a white, mainland American, chimes in, “When I was there, I couldn’t believe that they still did that. I’m sitting in the hotel and I see some of the luau show at the hotel through the window. People paid big money for that, too. They aren’t cheap. Yet, the girls come out in plastic grass skirts. Oh! I would go demand my money back! I wasn’t going to any of those kinds of shows! No way!” [Ho’ike July, 2013]

Similar to these comments about “fake luaus,” Mahina, the president of a production company, also tries to distance herself and her performers from the commercialized tourist expectation, which she labels, the “tiki-craze.” When I ask Mahina about the webpage for her

group emphasizing “authentic Polynesian entertainment” and what this means to her, she responds:

“There’s...I don’t know if you’ve heard this phrase, but, a tiki-craze?”

I clarify, “*Kind of like plastic grass skirts and stuff?*”

“Yeah, I think it came out like 70s or so. The craze about how Polynesian things are supposed to be. I’m trying to think of the book. But anyway, I just call it the Tiki-craze, cuz that era, whatever, was to do that. So that kind of Polynesian that is commercialized and all is not necessarily what I like to focus on. I like to focus more on traditional island dancing and that. We do commercialize it a little bit with lighting and costuming, but the basics are still there. And I think that’s the difference, if that makes sense.”

Both leaders, Jessie and Mahina, are recognizing that the audience may have preconceived notions of what “Polynesian” is, and while they understand that this may play into the desire for their troupes to be hired, both also emphasize that they want to move beyond this expectations to show their audiences what Polynesian dance really is. In the above quote, Mahina recognizes that her group does make allowances for entertainment, but that in doing so, they are also shaping the perception of a luau away from the more plastic, “tiki-craze” perceptions to more informative and traditional presentations of the dance.

Beyond pushing her audience past mainland stereotypes of Polynesia, Mahina goes on to differentiate her group’s performance from other shows. It is important to her to help the audience understand that each dance is representing a different island, and a different culture and country within Polynesia. She notes the frequent confusion between what is Hawaiian and what is Tahitian. She says:

Tahitian and Hawaiian are your two most popular. To the general public they all think its Hawaiian. And then when you go, okay no, no ,no those girls whose skirts that shake

like that, that's Tahitian, and the hulas, that's Hawaiian.,....I don't know how else to explain it, but you kind of have to show them those two islands, and then educate them that there's others."

In her shows, Mahina makes a clear distinction in the introduction of each dance that it is specific to its own island.

In a very similar account, one of the fire knife dancers, Toma, says that there is a balance between entertainment and authentic culture. The show in which he performs is the show that follows an entertaining storyline, but also introduces each dance with a call and response greeting in the language of that island.

Toma reports, "I get some people, too, that say, oh you do the Hawaiian fire thing right, and they really don't understand. It really is just Hawaiian to them, but, I know for sure at least in this luau, we kinda make it stand out that there are five islands, that they are not all the same, but that they are not all just one." Toma is echoing Mahina's explanation of the confusion or misperceptions that audiences may have before they come to the luau about all of the Polynesian cultures being the same or all being attributed solely to Hawaii.

Jane Desmond (1999) expresses concern that all of the different cultures are presented together. She notes that in the beginnings of the luau shows' popularity, "a passion for pan-Polynesiana, fed by the popularity of movies such as 'South Pacific' (1958), with its generic Pacific locale, resulted in a change in tourist shows - with the addition of Tahitian and Samoan dance styles, they become more spectacular" (Desmond 1999:133). Desmond seems to be critiquing this lumping of all of Polynesia together as damaging to the audience's understanding that they are each separate places and each have their own unique culture.

After reading Desmond's critiques, yet also being aware of the growing political movements within Oceania to join together in a cooperative entity similar to the European Union, I am curious how the performers felt about this idea of all of the cultures being presented together within the same show.

When I speak to Donny about his perceptions about all of the different islands being included together, he speaks positively about the exposure to the different cultures, but also about the difference between the cultures. When talking about learning the different dances and learning the different emphases of each culture, from the shaking hips and upbeat drums of Tahitian to the graceful hand movements of Hawaiian, he tells me that when you learn the different styles, "you feel that difference in each place, in each dance, but [they are] all from the same culture of hospitality, and welcome." Thus, he is emphasizing not only the differences, but also the common value systems underlying Polynesian culture, in general.

In my interviews with Mahina, she similarly recognizes the overlap of cultures that possess a shared value system, but also recognizes why she personally enjoys the presentation of Polynesian culture together in the luau. She effuses passionately, "For me in particular, do I like grouping all of the islands into a show? Yeah. My mother is Hawaiian, my father is Tongan, I have half brothers that are Samoan, and I have cousins that are Fijian. So, do I want them all together in one show? Absolutely. So I have no problem with that." While there is a concentrated emphasis by many of the performers to maintain the distinction between islands when they are being presented to the audience, there is also a general feeling that they should be presented together based on their shared history and shared values, not to mention the mixed heritage that make up the personal histories of many of the performers.



The only exception to this attitude is the local kumu with whom I speak, who mentions that he stayed out of the commercial business because he wanted only to focus on his specific Hawaiian culture without needing to incorporate all of the islands. Yet in practice, he too incorporates Tahitian songs, interpreted and translated into his Hawaiian choreographed hulas. The reactions of the performers and even with the local kumu demonstrate that there is an overriding importance and pride in recognizing the individual country of one's heritage, but also in recognizing the cultural commonalities between the islands. Through this and other examples, it seems one motivating factor for many of the performers is to continue to share their culture as a way of educating their audience..

When I speak with the young fire knife dancer, Toma, he addresses the balance of cultural education through more authentic presentations in the show with the entertainment structure of the show. I ask Toma about his perceptions of the authenticity of his show and he replies:

Umm...half and half, like pretty much half and half. I think the show is a lot more on performing in the first half of the show. It's a lot more of a performance (he has gotten quieter while discussing this part). ...But with a lot of luaus, I know that it could be a lot more education. Especially with the MCs. This show took a storyline, which is why it's a lot more entertainment to perform at first. Um, but when we get to the second part of the show we all do authentic dancing and they do tell, before each number, you know, uh, kind of a good amount [of education/explanation] about what they're going to see.

Toma gets quiet in the first part of his answer to this question and it seems like this question makes him a little uncomfortable. There are concessions that the performers are making to "perform" the storyline of the show, which seems to follow more of the stereotypes of a Polynesian luau. The tension between the structure of entertainment and the presentation of Polynesian culture is evident in this portion of our interview. Toma recognizes that in his show

there is a lot of performance for audience entertainment in the beginning of the show. However, he also points out that this show does do a good job of informing the audience and educating the audience during the second half of the show, which is more focused on the cultural presentation, rather than the fabricated storyline.

An older Hawaiian musician, who has been with the show for more than a decade, sums up this negotiation between entertainment and cultural presentation, and the tension between his participation as a performer of a show and as a representative of his culture. After talking about how he tries to tell the managers or show directors if something is not right, Honi tells me, “But people here do care. And sometimes we do it for the smiles of the people who come. Sometimes this is all they see of this, and so if they see some of the culture then we have shown them, even if it’s not what it was.” He concludes eloquently, “Entertainment on one side and tradition on the other.”

### Practice Theory

The statement, “entertainment on one side, tradition on the other,” epitomizes the continual balancing act between presenting the culture performers want to share and providing good entertainment and show value. However, as these performers mention, they “do care.” Performers use their positions within these shows to influence the way the show is structured and how their culture is presented. Over the course of my research, I become privy to many different stories that illuminated the agency of the performers to initiate or thwart show changes as a way of maintaining the integrity of their presentation. Some of these examples come from my discussions with the stage manager and some come from performers formerly employed in the major resort show. I use these anecdotes to illuminate the theory that while agents can be

constrained by certain structures, in this case, the entertainment limitations of a cultural tourism show, performers can also use their participation in this structure to change the structure itself.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) "logic of practice" introduces the idea that there are certain constraints on human behavior, and that any resistance to these constraints still occur within the accepted behaviors of the culture. Sherry Ortner's (1989) use of practice theory goes further, however, to note how practice "emerges from structure, it reproduces structure, and it has the capacity to transform structure. Human action considered apart from its structural contexts and its structural implications is not 'practice'" (Ortner 1989:12). Thus, "practice" is when the structures of unequal power exist, but when there can be an action taken from within, to shape this structure. Ortner (2006) states that in this way, practice theory provides "a dialectical synthesis between 'structure' (or the world as constituted) and 'agency' (or the interested practices of real people)" (Ortner 2006:16).

I use this explanation of practice theory to address the limitations of the structure of cultural tourism as entertainment and the agency of the performers to change the presentation of their culture and the way it is structured. In this section, I show that performers are maintaining the integrity of their culture in these shows through their involvement. By choosing to participate in the luau shows, the entertainment structure, the performers are able to affect, to a degree, how Polynesian culture is presented, thereby changing the show itself.

In one anecdote from the stage manager of the resort luau show, he tells how the decorators of the stage wanted to have carved pineapples as part of the stage décor. One of the musicians went to talk with them and passionately related that it would be very offensive to him, as a Hawaiian, to have emblems of the commercial pineapple industry that helped to overthrow the monarchy of Hawaii on the same stage where he is sharing his heart and his culture. He felt

that this was an oppressive symbol of Hawaii's past and was visibly upset at the thought of having pineapples as part of the stage decoration. The decorators heard what he had to say, and instead commissioned ipu ipu drums as decorations for the stage. Pineapples were dropped from the conceptual designs.

In another account, the stage manager tells me about a dancer coming off stage and being berated by another musician about his performance. The stage manager heard about the incident from the dancer, who was apologetic for his own part, and realized that the musician had made a valid critique, but perhaps had not gone about his confrontation in the best way. The problem had been that the young male dancer, who is from Samoa, had been performing the Hawaiian kahiko and had smiled during his dancing. The musician, who was Hawaiian, took offense to this, saying that it is not okay to smile during the kahiko as it shows disrespect and is not demonstrating the seriousness with which warriors would present this dance. The dancer apologized and realized he was at fault, but he thought the manager should know that, while this musician's passion and critique was warranted, other people, confronted similarly, could take it the wrong way. This incident not only portrays the degree of passion that dancers and musicians have about accurate presentation of their culture, but also that there is an underlying system of self-correction and accountability to respect each other's culture.

In another example, Harold, one of the performers who is not of Polynesian heritage, relates the history of the evolution of certain portions of the show. In a previous version of the show, as part of the introduction to the Samoan slap dance, his character would try to join in, but would butcher the movements of the slap dance. He tells me that the performers staged a complaint with the show director that this was disrespectful of the dance and they felt that

including his character's foolishness made a mockery of their cultural presentation. The act was revised to include only the dancers.

While I listen to this, however, I am curious about something I had seen in that night's presentation of the same dance. Within the dance, one of the males does seem to play at the fact that he hit himself too hard and made exaggerated faces to the crowd. Harold explains that within Polynesian culture their sense of humor is evident, yet it is from within the culture that it can be expressed. They still take outside representation or misrepresentation seriously. So in the case of this scene, there is a village clown character within the mythology of the dance. It is okay for him to make jokes with the audience, but to have a non-Samoan character come in and just do the dance incorrectly, would be disrespectful, not humorous.

The ability to have a sense of humor, but still a deep respect for the culture, is evident in another scene that I witness in the setting of this resort. At some point in the history of this Polynesian resort, a hula competition for employees across the company became an annual tradition. Many of the performers from the actual luau show are not involved, however many of the Polynesian employees who work in other capacities in the resort are involved. This competition took place on a weekday morning, on the same stage as the luau show, when it is usually empty.

Aunty Akela, who is one of the initial dancers to be cast in the luau show nearly 30 years before, organized the competition. Aunty Akela now performs the role as a greeter for the resort, and she also heads a hālau that performs and practices in the lobby of the resort. She is a leader in the Polynesian community within Orlando, and she is somewhat of a cultural icon for this Polynesian resort. Aunty Akela has overseen many of the preparations for this competition and, in some ways, these preparations have to meet her approval before they can be included in the

show. In order to illustrate the tolerance of “fun” or teasing, but the importance of learning the culture hidden behind the mainland Americanized stereotypes of Polynesia, I include a vignette taken from my fieldnotes on this resort-wide hula competition.

The competition groups so far have been doing actual hulas, but since this is a creative section, many of the Polynesian workers have choreographed dances to popular radio songs, such as a song by Hawaiian pop star, Bruno Mars. Following this, however, the next group to take the stage is the Polynesian resort recreation staff. All are wearing grass skirts and leis. They have three boys in their group. The boys join the stage initially, and then exit off stage while the girls begin a Don Henley song. Their moves are less ‘auana. Instead, their dance moves incorporate thumbs over shoulders, bouncy hula-esque moves and general campiness. The boys come back on stage pretending to paddle through the dancers. They are all connected to each other now wearing children’s inner tube floaties. I wonder what the judges are thinking of this demonstration, being that all were classically trained in hula. Then I realize that the “creative dance” section may have made allowances for this foolery. The boys finally drop their act half way through the song to join in the dance. They freeze, vaudeville-style: the boys lounging on the stage and the girls in Hollywood hula pose.

Next the MC comes on and announces the beginning of the more traditional hula styles for competition, leading with kahiko; the ancient style of hula accompanied by chants, percussion and sharper dance moves. He introduces a friend of mine from hālau and her team. I note that they are dancing to the chant performed by our kumu. They enter with billowing *pau* skirts, and with bands around their heads, arms, and ankles. They enter the way kumu had suggested. They chant to begin and then perform the kahiko, *Piano Ahi Ahi*.

Between each presentation, the band plays the fast Tahitian style of dance and music. After the end chant of this performance, as the team is exiting, the Tahitian gentleman breaks into the fast male part of this dance as he exits the stage. He may have also been a performer at the Luau at one time.

Next the resort recreation team is back on stage. I am surprised. I assumed that the kahiko section would be mostly serious hula dancers, and after their last performance, I am a little skeptical. Only the men go on stage this time. They are bare-chested, still wearing their grass skirts. They kneel down and do a chant and slap dance that Auntie Akela’s boys often do during performance weeks. Their performance is okay, but they do seem to be trying hard.

The MC comes onto stage at the conclusion and gives a special note. He says that the boys deserve some credit because they learned this dance in the last 72 hours at Auntie Akela’s request. He asides that she told him that this would be included and, “when Auntie Akela says something, that is what it is, you do not say no.” I lean over and whisper that it was good for her to tell the boys that if they were going to make a bit of a mockery of the first hula, they would need to learn a real hula too! Auntie Akela seems to accept both what the hula is or has been commercialized to be in the past, and what it is to her and to her culture. I have seen her walk this line before during the lobby

performances. She will play ukulele to a Don Henley kind of tune, but demand her dancers to respect and execute all of their hulas with the command of a cultural authority.

While this was not an official luau presentation, it is an event that is supposed to honor the Polynesian culture and those who work in the resort. The pool boys are tolerated in their stereotypical Hollywood-influenced “Polynesian Party” style dance, but they are commanded by Aunty Akela to also be prepared to learn and present a traditional dance. Even in this performance that was not for guests, but for the resort employees, Aunty Akela retains a balance between the “tiki-craze” commercialized Polynesia and traditional dancing. By being involved in putting on this competition, she is able to assert her authority to have the boys show respect to the culture they were having fun with earlier. She uses their interest in being represented in the show, to teach them a little bit about the work that it takes to learn and execute a real Polynesian dance.

While this example does not take place in the context of the tourist dinner show, it takes place on the resort stage and includes many Polynesians working in the resort. Not only do the organizers of Polynesian heritage have the ability to influence what is presented or what is learned, they are also able to share Polynesian culture with the other employees that work for the company. This competition provides an opportunity for those who are not trained to a professional level, but have danced as a part of their culture, to participate and share their culture and to perhaps correct some of the misrepresented stereotypes held even by those mainland employees who work within the Polynesian resort. Aunty Akela and the other Polynesian dancers are able to use the stage and their influence to create an opportunity for education about their culture within their job through using the resort’s stage and Polynesian theme of the hotel.

The employee competition is one way in which the Orlando Polynesian community helps to influence the representation of their culture within the capitalist sphere of the resort. Another way in which the Polynesian community is able to constrain outside changes to their cultural presentation is through the interconnectedness of the Polynesian community, both within and outside of Orlando, Florida. When I speak with the older Samoan fire knife dancer, he relates two stories that illustrate this interconnectivity.

Will tells me that, while he always tried to be respectful of his culture for himself, he also had to be respectful of the culture because he never knew who would be watching. When I ask him about his performance in a show that incorporates the fire knife as a part of the show storyline, but not in the framework of a Polynesian show, he relates:

“You represent what you mean to the show. You’re in the show. So you represent everything that comes through there. At the same time, I’m up there, representing this culture. And believe me, I will not do anything stupid, cuz you don’t know who’s watching the show. Because, I can hear, my, I know my people. I can hear when they are in the house, believe me. I know, because soon as I light that thing up, throw it up on the roof, and all I can hear is that scream, coming from somewhere. You know the scream I’m talking about?”

*Laughing, I acknowledge, “yeah....tchi hooo!”*

“And soon as I hear that I’m like, (*cocks his head, raises his eyebrow*), yup there they are. They in the house.”

He notes that, even without having to say ‘here is a Samoan fire knife dancer,’ the Samoans in the crowd know that he is up there representing their culture. He knows that they are there and their presence keeps him accountable to represent his culture accurately and respectfully. He goes on to relate a story that illustrates just how influential this community is in rectifying a performance that does not maintain the integrity of the culture. He relates:



A couple years ago, two years ago, last year or two years ago, My phone ring. I pick up my phone. And it was (808) number, so I was like, I saw that and it was one of my brothers, the one who had been dancing fire knife long time. So one of [my brother's] friend who does fire knives too, he came out and watched the show. I was off, or I was done working, and I was on my way home. But somehow, one of our kids, this Hawaiian kid that was doing the fire knife, he start doing Michael Jackson, you know, there on stage. And [my brother] called me, and he was pissed! He was, and I don't blame him, you know, you can make fun of whatever, but when it comes to that, no. When you, it's a fine line. So he called me and he ask me, who was that?! And I was like, and I remember, and I was like, okay. I go in the next day and I said, come here, let me talk to you. 'When you're on that stage, I did not teach you to do that. I'm the one who trained you for this show. If somebody questioned that, my name would come out first, cuz I trained you. Did I ask you to do Michael Jackson? No. Did I ask you to do a moonwalk? No. You are not Samoan, I am. How do you like me to do a kahiko and do stupid things? Do you enjoy that? No. It's the same thing that I am dealing with right now. I'm telling you I just got a call from Hawaii. The [Samoan] guy was watching the show, and he told me, good thing that he was far away. You know, if he is sitting where he's walking out, you are going to find out, either he will slap you, and...they will not hold back, you know, you cannot... I think that's the only thing about Polynesian culture that is very strong. We are offended very easily. And that's the thing, you know, I told [the dancer], Be on stage, every single day, do not fool around. Do what you are supposed to do and Get out and go home.

By issuing the warning that someone is always watching, Will is illuminating the interconnectivity of the Polynesian community on the islands to those performers living and working on the mainland. His story of the phone call with his brother is an example of how any misrepresentation can be noticed, and how this keeps him and the dancers he trains in check. The possibility of Polynesians being in the audience holds the dancers responsible for maintaining the integrity of the culture and the dance.

In another instance, luau resort performers called on the influence of the local Polynesian community to advocate for them and resist changes to the show. To illustrate how the community within Florida influences the cultural presentation, I share a story that Will relates about his influence, even after he had retired, in resisting changes to the Samoan section of the resort dinner show. He tells me that it is frustrating sometimes in entertainment because

“everyone” (meaning new show directors, new management, etc.) wants to have an artistic input; they all want to “dip their hand in.” He goes on to tell me that when he started dancing at the luau show the performers and choreographers tried to make the show culturally strong. Yet, after some years, directors started to come in and change things, “start to rip it from the culture.” As an example of how show directors sometimes want to change things without knowing the culture, he tells me how, long after he left the show, one of the dancers called him and told him that they were trying to change the Samoan dance. He tells me:

I choreographed the Samoan number. That was my section. And one of the, ah, show directors tryin’ ta change my show direction. So one of the lead [dancers] call me, and say, [Will], one of the show directors trying to change your section. And I say, you better tell him, he’s going to touch my section, take my whole section out. My name is on it. He’s trying to put like chest moves into a slap dance and ..we don’t have chests in Samoa, we don’t and he’s trying to put that... and create that...that...whatever, he’s thinking about. But I told [that dancer], tell him this is what it comes from me. I put that number together, and if he touch it, take my whole section out. Make his own. This my name is on it. So, and that’s the thing. People don’t know what they doing, they just like,... touch it. And I don’t appreciate that, you know, its like, ahh (shakes his head in disgust).

While Will relates this incident with disgust at some of the frustrations the dancers have to tolerate within entertainment, he also demonstrates how, by having an interconnected Polynesian community, dancers are able to dispute inauthentic changes by contacting the original dancers who choreographed the dances. These choreographers can then raise their voices to protect their work from influence by people who may not have an understanding of the culture or the dance. Thus, as Will states, if the show director wants to change something, he’d have to scrap the whole dance. If he wants to keep the dance, he would have to maintain the integrity of the dance using the original choreography.

Similarly, the stage manager discusses his challenges with helping new show directors and resort managers understand the culture of the show. Like Will, he tells me that he has had to

compose explanatory emails to show directors who are proposing changes or additions, in an effort to help them understand the scope of what they are asking. He tells me he has explained to them that, in order to change to a different song, or to add a number to the front of the show, the show director needs to understand that each dance is choreographed specifically to the song being played. This means that the show director not only would have to find and get the rights to the song, he would have to find someone fluent in the language, knowledgeable about the cultural stories and contexts within the song, and proficient in creating choreography, in order to work with the dancers to create this new piece.

This stage manager echoes the statements of the fire knife dancer saying that the show directors sometimes come in and want to add something so that they can put their name on it, “look I put this part in,” but that they don’t really know what they are getting into. He tells me that they don’t understand how much goes into each dance and each song. “You have to know more than just the show; you have to understand the culture that is being presented.”

During one of our meetings, the stage manager reiterates that if there is something that is against the dignity of the culture, or that is not right, the musicians and the performers will speak up about it. He tells me that sometimes an aspect of the show can be changed, sometimes there are things done for entertainment or for the show director’s personal “stamp,” but the performers and musicians are vocal and passionate about creating an honorable presentation of the Polynesian culture to share with their audiences.

In these preceding examples and by their dissent or assent of costume changes, stage décor, and music choice, the performers are asserting their agency on a continual basis to shape the representation of their cultures, while also negotiating some of the constraints of presenting culture as a form of entertainment.

## Blurred Lines

In this section I focus, in two different contexts, on the blurring of lines traditionally drawn between culture presented for entertainment and culture for native consumption. The first context is the blurring of lines between staged “front regions” and perceived authentic “back regions,” as defined by sociologist Ervin Goffman (1959). The second is the blurring of the line between communities of individuals who perform for profit and those who perform for cultural learning or the cultural experience itself.

### Back Regions / Front Regions

In tourism studies, scholars recognize that there are generally physical spaces crafted for tourists and spaces that lie outside of these areas that are reserved for locals and their quotidian activities. Goffman (1959) differentiates these spaces as “front regions,” staged for tourist consumption, and “back regions,” those spaces falling outside of normal tourist view. He details, “We often find a division into back region, where the performance of a routine is prepared, and front region, where the performance is presented” (Goffman 1959:1). He continues by saying, “Access to these regions is controlled in order to prevent the audience from seeing the backstage and to prevent outsiders from coming into a performance that is not addressed to them” (Goffman 1959:1).

Dean MacCannell (1973) expanded on the tourist experience by noting that there is an interesting trend in which back regions are now being staged for tourists who are looking to go beyond the usual front regions. In the abstract of his article in the *American Journal of Sociology* on the arrangement of social spaces, MacCannell presents his view that, “tourists try to enter back regions of the places they visit because these regions are associated with intimacy of

relations and authenticity of experiences. It is also found that tourist settings are arranged to produce the impression that a back region has been entered even when this is not the case. In tourist settings, between the front and the back there is a series of special spaces designed to accommodate tourists and to support their beliefs in the authenticity of their experiences” (MacCannell 1973:589). Thus, MacCannell (1973) expands the distinction between Goffman’s (1959) back regions and front regions to include a third stage in between these two; the back region that is staged like a front region, yet is given the appearance of a back region. Some examples of this phenomenon are the open viewing kitchens in restaurants, or attending a rehearsal for the philharmonic orchestra, or a behind-the-scenes tour hosted by an amusement park. These experiences allow the observer to go behind the curtain of Goffman’s front regions. Yet, since the spaces are prepared to accommodate the aesthetics of the observer, they are no longer truly back regions.

While MacCannell (1973) suggests that there is a new liminal stage between Goffman’s (1959) front region and back region, I propose that there is also a new phenomenon, in which, like MacCannell’s staged authenticity, back region activities are interacting in front region spaces to authenticate the space. Yet, unlike MacCannell, I would argue that these back region activities are not being staged, in terms of being prepared for performance, but are being put in an arena usually associated with staged performances. There is a trend of hotels and other businesses such as some bars and dance clubs, of inviting a third party instructor to conduct classes in the businesses’ open spaces in view of the guests. Thus, the practices usually occurring in back regions, such as the training of amateur performers, are now being incorporated into the front regions as a form of authenticating entertainment.

To give an example of this, I relate my own experiences taking hula lessons in the hālau. On each Saturday, the hālau meets in the lobby of a major Polynesian-themed resort. There is an hour of practice in the lobby area, where guests are milling about, waiting for members of their party, or on their way to breakfast. The class proceeds just as it does in other, more private practice spaces. Members of the class put on their skirts and join as they come. Dances are stopped in the middle of the dance to correct certain moves, or to learn new steps. Dancers are critiqued or praised by name, and social interactions of giggling or hugging are interspersed between each dance.

The hālau often proceeds with drills, new hulas, and the awkward re-learning of forgotten dances, so it is far from a smoothly produced form of entertainment. Furthermore, all of the dancers are members of the hālau, and pay for the monthly lessons to learn language, culture, and the movements of this form of dance. So, while the class takes place in a public setting, it more or less proceeds much as it does out of the public view. The lobby time is in view of tourists, but it is also a genuine passing of culture for the sake of learning and not for performance.

Still, while the resort does not dictate how the classes proceed (what looks or body types of performers are presented, or any other show direction), there are concessions that the kumus make towards entertainment. Often, if there are enough families gathered to watch the practice, the kumu will break from lessons to host an interactive dance in which children and parents are invited to join our class and dance the “Hawaiian Roller Coaster.” This is a simple hula that involves surfing poses, choo-choo steps and a traverse across the floor where one half of the dancers form arcing waves and the other half duck down into surf stance. In this break from

lessons, the distinction of the hālau and hula lessons having an audience, is in some ways similar to MacCannell's "staged back regions," can blur a back region activity (1973:596).

Yet, because most of the lobby time is focused on the class itself, the experience leads most observers to feel like they are witnessing a back region activity. This can serve the hotel's interests as evidence that authenticates its overall theme of Polynesia. MacCannell claims that the staged back regions are occurring because of the desire of tourists who seek a more "authentic" experience than those staged experiences in the front region. He explains that just by the essence of there being a back region, and the possibility that this back region could be discovered, gives rise to the feeling of tourists that there is a distinction between what is "show" and what is "real" (MacCannell 1973:591). Since the hālau often breaks the "show" or the dances, in order to focus on the training, the experience feels more "real" or "authentic." Thus, the tourists witnessing this traditionally back region preparation of dancers are more likely to consider the entire Polynesian theme of the hotel as a more authentic.

This phenomenon is interesting not only from a standpoint of new social spaces and new ways of "authenticating" front regions with back region activities, but is also interesting from the viewpoint of economic cooperation. After an hour of lobby time, the hālau is then provided space in an employee training room for another two to three hours of practice. This symbiotic relationship between the hālau and the Polynesian resort serves both groups. The hālau obtains a practice space and the kumu can instruct as an independent instructor without having to own property or pay rent for a studio. The resort gains an additional form of entertainment for guests passing through the lobby and also is able to authenticate its Polynesian theme through the presentation of a semi-staged back region activity without having to pay for additional performers from the luau show to come and entertain.

If one were to divide traditionally along back region or front region zones in Polynesian activity in Orlando, the luau resort shows would fall into the category of front regions, staged and prepared specifically for tourist consumption. The hālau, as a hula school, would traditionally be considered a back region practice, for it is the place for passing on of traditions and culture to amateur dancers, usually outside the view of tourists. The line between “back region” training of culture and “front region” cultural productions for entertainment has traditionally been distinct. Yet, the cooperative relationships formed between the resorts that host amateur lessons as a way of authenticating their theme, and third-party private instructors taking advantage of free practice spaces within the resort, cause the lines between “front region” staged entertainment productions and spaces for “back region” amateur lessons, to become blurred.

#### Performers’ Community Crossover

The second consideration, in which lines are blurred between the realm of culture for entertainment and culture for practice, is within the Polynesian community itself here in Orlando. I have found from my participation in events that individuals from within the entertainment community and individuals outside of the entertainment community are both commonly found at local Polynesian events and sometimes in each other’s venues for events. While Jane Desmond (1999) contrasts groups of performers involved in entertainment luau shows with groups of hālaus performing for themselves or for competitions, she does admit that there is a continuum between both groups. Similarly, this continuum exists within the local community in Orlando. There is not a major break between entertainment performers and local Polynesian performers.



Both communities of performers interact at social events and both cross over into each other's spaces.

As mentioned in the previous section, members of the hālau cross into the spaces of entertainment during the lobby time portion of their class. Similarly, performers employed in the resort luau shows are active in the hālau gatherings and local Polynesian events. Musicians employed at the luau show often can be found playing at the Hawaiian church service or, on presentations days, for the hālau. Dancers from the luau show volunteer their time to put together a nighttime paid show at the annual ho'ike hālau competition hosted in Orlando. Dancers from the luau shows also come and compete against each other at this competition in the independent unaffiliated section. Both groups interact regularly at Polynesian church services, and at the anniversary for a local Polynesian restaurant, as well as for, birthdays, weddings and other personal events within the Polynesian diaspora community.

One example of the cross over of non-performers into the space of performers occurs during the fall of my 2012 research. At the hula competition hosted by the resort luau stage, employees from across the different hotels and across different jobs within the resort company came to take part in the competition. This event acts as a tribute, either to shared heritage, or to the shared appreciation for the Polynesian heritage. I originally attend this event to support one of the members of my hālau, but soon find that I recognize many individuals from the Polynesian community. The wife of my kumu is present and is leading one of the group's choreography. Quite a few of the Polynesian employees that work at the front desk of the hotel and often join or watch our hālau practices have put together pieces, as well. The competition lasts probably three hours and maintains the spirit of community and honoring of the Polynesian culture. Yet, while this is an unadvertised, employees-only event, it is hosted in a space created for Polynesian

entertainment. During this event, the members of the hālau and other Polynesian individuals from the community were taking over the stage and venue of the entertainment performers.

Similarly, there are many professional performers in attendance during ho'ike, the annual hālau competition and Polynesian cultural event organized for the Polynesian community. The stage manager of the major resort luau mentions that he uses many of the substitute dancers this weekend because many of his main dancers had requested time off to participate in the event. Three of these dancers use their time off to choreograph and showcase their own talent in the competition in the category of unaffiliated or independent dancers (unaffiliated with a hālau). Many of the other dancers volunteer their time to participate in a formal show, which is a highlighted ticketed event at ho'ike. These dancers work with other dancers from other amusement park resort shows to collaborate in an extensive cultural presentation luau show.

The emcee comments how the audience would not be able to see a show like this anywhere in any resort. Performers with whom I speak reiterate that it is a special show for them to be able to celebrate and express their culture without the usual time or entertainment constraints. Mahina explains, "I think the Ho'ike show ending up being 2 ½ hours and I was worried that I could get an hour! I'm looking at everybody going okay, we're going to break it all out! So you know? It was kind of funny, but yeah....[laughs] , it was so long, but I think that it afforded us that opportunity to indulge a little bit and to dig a little deeper and pull it out more, so.."

Comments like this show the pride in a performance of this caliber being able to be conducted outside of the usual constraints of the entertainment industry. But, while these individuals are dancing for their community at this event, they are the same individuals who have been trained and are working professionally in the entertainment industry. These performers are

not performers who are seen as “selling out” to entertainment. Instead, they are the stars of the weekend. The performers are lauded by the rest of the community for the pride and the hard work they put in for this celebration of Polynesian culture.

When I talk to one of the young fire knife dancers who works occasionally at the luau resort show, but more often as a fire knife dancer in a show featured by the theme park, he expresses amazement and incredulity at the long standing ovation the audience gave at the end of the show. “I wasn’t expecting that,” Roy tells me. When I reiterate that what they did in that show was amazing and that the hard work that each performer put in was evident in the performance he shakes his head and says, even so, he wasn’t expecting such an ovation.

Performers are looked upon with pride by the community of Polynesians. It is not a matter of selling out, but of having a place to make money doing what they were trained to do. While one member of the Florida Hawaiian Civic Association says that sometimes people have to make money and that is why they perform, other members of the local community are more effusive and mention being proud of the “kids” who are working in entertainment shows for continuing to dance and perform.

Within the Polynesian community in Orlando, Florida there is not a distinct separation between those who are involved in the entertainment industry and those who train outside of entertainment. Both groups often share the same physical spaces, whether in the front regions in the view of tourists, or in the more traditionally labeled back regions, such as competitions and local events. Both groups cross over and interact for cultural events or special events within the community. There is a blurring between front and back regions and between what it means to be a member of the entertainment community and member of the Polynesian community.

### Connecting with Cultural Heritage and Identity

While in previous sections, I have addressed some of the critiques of anthropologists studying the Polynesian luau shows in Hawaii, in this section I emphasize the performers' perceptions of their involvement, especially those performers who are employed away from the islands, in connecting with their cultural identity through their involvement in these shows.

#### Cultural Identity and “Doing” Culture

Identity has often been associated with physical locations of heritage. Yet, in an increasingly global world, identity is becoming a purposeful choice that can be performed. This is especially true for diaspora populations that ascribe to a particular cultural identity, yet no longer are geophysically located in that culture. For many members of diaspora communities it is important to connect to the culture of their heritage, and to assert their cultural identity despite the physical distance from their homelands.

Employing Alexis Bunten's (2008) concept of “commodified persona,” and Kaimikauau's (2010) research highlighting identity in the Hawaiian diaspora of Southern California, I focus this section on showing how performers are actively using their involvement in Polynesian luau shows to connect to their heritage and to assert their cultural identity.

Bunten (2008) coins the theoretical concept of a chosen “commodified persona” to illustrate how performers negotiate their own identities within cultural tourism. She shows how performers highlight and create a “commodified persona” in order to differentiate between their on-stage persona and their off-stage personhood, thus allowing performers to save some of their own cultural stories and practices for their own enjoyment outside of the realm of presentation. However, she also claims that performers use this “commodified persona” to emphasize

belonging to a certain cultural group through the public performance of their culture. Therefore, they are not only avoiding the possibility of alienation, by saving some parts of themselves for the private sphere, they are also asserting their identity to the outside world by performing these commodified, condensed versions of their culture.

Engaging in similar work on how identity can be asserted through performance, Charmaine Kaimikaua's (2010) research focuses on performers of a Hawaiian hālau, or hula school, in Southern California. While she differentiates her group of performers from those in more commercial luau shows, the crux of her paper is how these dancers are re-defining what it means to be Hawaiian on the mainland by enacting this identity through their participation in the dance competitions. She notes:

Those individuals not Hawai'i-born and whose identity was shaped in the diaspora must reckon with their own issues and understanding of who they are and what are they becoming in terms of "Hawaiian-ness"—forging two realms of consciousness, namely how one perceives the self and how one is publicly known [Kaimikaua 2010:306].

In studying this group, Kaimikaua (2010) recognizes the flexibility inherent in establishing and asserting a cultural identity away from the physical location traditionally tied to that identity. She shows that the involvement of these dancers in the performance of their culture helps them to assert their connection to their Hawaiian identity.

By applying these theories of how performers can enact their cultural identity through performance, I apply these theories to the perspectives of the performers I interview. In this section I also use vignettes from my participant observation in the hālau to highlight some of the ways Polynesian identity is reinforced through participation in the luau shows in Orlando.

One of my significant findings is the emphasis that all of the performers place on needing to understand and connect with the culture and the history of the islands in order to perform.

Many stress that they would not be able to do the dances well without understanding the story and the meaning behind the songs. The kumu teaches custom stories to help his pupils in the hālau understand the movements of the dance. Similarly, commercial performers are learning the dances within the context of their history. They assert that the background they have to learn for the different dances helps them to connect with, and understand their own heritage. I am told that in order to do the dances, they have to embrace the island and the culture of that dance. As Mahina, the leader of a luau production company, tells me, "... with this type of dance, if you are not learning for yourself, if it's not in you, it will never work. I mean, it will, but it will be ... motions without expression."

This sentiment is reinforced during one of my first visits to the hālau. During the once-a-month exhibition of all of the hālaus, I sit watching the dances with Kumu's wife, one of the moms in the group and another *Ali'i* (dance leader):

There are three teenaged girls performing a Tahitian number. When they finish, Auntie Kai turns to the other woman and says, "they were good, but they have no presence." The other woman, while preparing a bottle for her youngest, and straightening the flower in her oldest girl's hair, replies, "Yeah, the moves are just mechanical." From my observations the girls are working hard to get the right moves, but as soon as the music ended they slouched back into self-conscious teenage girls.

The comments made by these more experienced women show the emphasis on the need to internalize the dance in order to maintain a presence and have the meanings of the dance come across, rather than performed as "mechanical movements."

When I speak to the older fire knife dancer about a show that was recently put on for a local hula competition, he reiterates the necessity of internalizing the culture of the dance in order to perform it well. This Samoan gentleman, who had been employed as a fire knife dancer

for 25 years in the Orlando entertainment industry, told me about teaching the kids to embrace the island within the dance. He says:

You learn the kids, like, when you are doing the Fijian number, you are, you become the Fijian. Your heart is there. You're not just doing it because you want to do it. No. Make sure that everything is in your heart and it shows. Or, any other number from our Polynesian culture, you know. And the kids learn that, make sure that everything goes with what you are believing.

Comparable to Kaimikaua's (2010) claims that the dancers in her hālau are asserting and displaying on their Hawaiian-ness, Will is claiming that in order for the performance to come across successfully, the kids learning the Fijian section of the dance must embrace a Fijian identity. They have to get fully immersed in learning that culture in order to "become the Fijian."

Along with this emphasis on connecting to their cultural heritage to participate in their cultural identity, the performers speak of being able to "do" their culture through their participation in these shows. Two performers, when asked how they became involved in the entertainment industry tell me, "It's not about the money, it is about being able to "do" my culture." While they receive their income based on this "commodified persona," similar to Bunten's (2008) consultants, they specify that their performance enables them to solidify and tie them to their cultural identity.

Illustrating this idea of embracing cultural identity, Will, the older Samoan fire knife dancer, tells me how his sons discovered that their family line was linked to royal blood in the Samoan line. He says that when his sons learned this, Will emphasized to them it was even more important they represent their culture in the way they perform, knowing their connection to their lineage. He says:

I tell them, if you are going to do something. Do it from the heart. And if it's not, don't. Don't even. Not only just performance, but it's everything you do. You know, everything you do, you got to do it from the heart.

In speaking of his own performance, he tells me:

To me, I was doing my own culture. I was part of my culture up there. When I'm out there, I'm representing all of it. Both, my job, and my culture. ...As I say, it was not about the money. We had all of the old school there. And believe me, we are one of those people, our culture is so strong, when we were there [on stage]. Its just enjoying representing what we do.

Along with sharing their culture, performers also phrase their performance in terms of sharing who they are, thereby highlighting their identity through their performance. Will describes how sometimes he would get sore up on stage while he was doing the fire knife act, but he notes that:

All I got to think about is what I'm doing and I think that's why it's so easy for me to be out there, on the stage. I just pushed myself and think to myself, this is what I am, and I do it from there.

Will says he is able to push himself more than he would if it were just a job, by identifying himself with his culture. He is claiming that since his culture and his presentation are integral parts of his identity, that "this is what I am," he is able to go onstage and push himself past physical tiredness to share who he is through his performance.

The kumu with whom I speak explains that when Hawaiians and other Polynesians are living here in Orlando, they have to work to hold on to who they are, because they are separated from the islands. He says, "I think, especially on the mainland, away from Hawaii, Western culture can start to pull at us, and pull us from our culture." He then goes on to explain that if



Polynesians are being pulled from their culture, employment opportunities at the luau can be a good start to get them interested in their culture again and to bring them back to “who they are.”

The performers stress that their cultural heritage is “who they are,” and affirm that performances are a demonstrations of “what I am.” This emphasis on identity within the performance, along with performers asserting that they are doing their job “not for the money, but to ‘do’ my culture,” demonstrate the ability of the performers to assert their cultural identity through their involvement in luau shows.

### Enacting Place

By enacting this cultural identity, performers may reinforce their connection to the physical, as well as the cultural, “destination” they are performing. The connection to their heritage links the performers to their culture, but it also connects them to the physical location of that heritage. When I ask the performers about the island of their heritage, many either tell me they go back regularly, or that they wish to live in the physical place of their ancestors for some amount of time. All of the performers whom I interview express a connection to the physical location, even those who have grown up here in Orlando. Thus, I argue that not only are performers connected to the physical destination they are creating through their performances, but that they are also perpetuating this connection for their children through their involvement in this industry.

Two scenes from my participant observation demonstrate this connection to the heritage and the physical land through performing Polynesian dance. The first scene illustrates the strong connection to the physical land of the performers’ heritage. The second illustrates the way in

which certain dances connect to the physical features of a place and the meanings corresponding to the landscape of the specific islands.

The first occurs at an annual competition in Orlando for different hālau schools. The Saturday evening event is a grand ticketed show organized as a collaboration between many of the professional performers of two different production companies. It is a luau show celebrating Polynesian culture danced by people who are passionate about their culture. Most of the performers in this show are employed in the local commercial shows. The following text records a scene from the introduction to the section of the show featuring Tongan dance:

“Ladies and Gentlemen.” A man walks calmly on the stage and addresses the audience. He is wearing a long lavalava men’s skirt with a *tapa* (a painted cloth made of bark) wrapped around his middle. His upper chest is bare but he has a shell and feathered necklace lying over his shoulders, which hangs low. His ankles are wrapped in shells and his wrists in yellow feathers. He wears a yellow-feathered comb on one side of his head, like a half crown. He opens his arms wide, “Aloha!” The audience answers, “Alohaa!” “That’s great, but it’s the wrong island.” He tells us with a smile. “In the island of Tonga we would greet you by saying *Mālō e lelei!*” “Maaaloooo e lelei!” The audience replies. He goes on to tell where Tonga is located and how many islands it consists of. He paces, then clears his throat. He leans back and takes a deep breath before beginning to tell about one of the northern islands in particular. “Our story line, for tonight, comes from a place, um, in the north group of islands, called Vava’u And ah...” His voice catches. He pauses, the only sound are his shells as he shifts his feet. He purses his lips and brings his hands together, then up to his eyes in front of his face. The crowd claps at his display of emotion. He stays for another moment, rubbing his eyes. He is smiling, but trying to collect himself to continue the story. More quietly now, he lowers his hands and says, “Alright, Vava’u.” He begins his story again, “Vava’u, is where king Tāufa lived after he united everybody and introduced Christianity as the main religion in Tonga. And he was asked by his counselors, who should we give Tonga to, to protect it? Should we give it to England? France? Germany, Japan, all these big powers that were going around through the islands? And the king picked up his bible in one hand and a handful of soil from Vava’u in the other, and put the soil on top of the bible and said, we give the land to God.” He breathes in deep as the audience claps. He then explains that of all of the South Pacific islands, Tonga has never been colonized and is the only remaining monarchy. Cheers erupt from the audience. He backs up, “Ladies and Gentlemen, without further ado, we welcome you to our people, to our islands, to our Tonga!” [Ho’ike Saturday Night Show 2013]

I include this emotional introduction to highlight the importance of not only the heritage that is associated with the Polynesian culture, but also the physical place and ground of their ancestors. This vignette demonstrates the “journey” that these performers are taking into the memory of their own islands, while they are presenting the destination to their audiences. Performers continue to connect to the destinations they are performing and are using their position in entertainment to concrete this connection.

Gunnar Thor Johansson and Jorgen Ole Baerenholdt (2008) discuss this idea of “place enactment” through tourism. They show how human involvement helps to create the physical and perceived boundaries to define a place. While they are examining how tourism constructs the physical boundaries of a place, I am examining how tourism creates the imagined destination in the minds of the tourists, and also constructs a connection to the physical place for the performers. Therefore, I call this the enactment of place, as opposed to their term “place enactment.” In both contexts, the meaning of a place is defined by the importance humans attribute to that place.

The enactment of place is emphasized in another example that not only highlights the sense of place that is built into each dance, but also serves as an example of the training many of the performers discuss as connecting them to their heritage and, furthermore, to the physical place of their islands. The following vignette, based on my lessons at the hālau, demonstrate how the cultural stories and locations are incorporated into the learning process of each dance. This is done to ensure that the dance movements are not “mechanical,” but are instead done with understanding of the story and the place the song is describing. In this example, the kumu breaks from teaching the steps to a certain dance to provide the background of the dance. He not only relates the meanings, but also the specific locations being portrayed in the movements of the

dance. He tells us all to stop for a moment and sit down if we want. Then he begins to connect each of the movements we have just learned to his personal story:

In the middle of the class that is learning a long kahiko dance, with as many as six very different verses, the kumu stops. He tells us all to stop for a moment and sit down if we want. Then he begins to connect each of the movements we have just learned to his personal story.

Do you know what all this is? Let me tell you. You are doing more than just movements with meanings, this is a story, and this is my story and auntie's story. It is the story of our families. People out here in the mainland, they hear, but they do not understand that this is a story that is connected to our families. It is who we are. So when you are dancing this dance, you are making them *po'ho*, making them remember their connection to the land. People of every place before had connection to the land. That is what we are doing in this song, getting grounded. Do you know that when this calls you," he taps on the *ipu*, the drum made from carved gourds, "this is *lono*. *Lono* is god of all of the things on the ground, all of the crawling things on the ground. So *ipu ipu* comes from a vine that crawls along the ground, so it belongs to *Lono*. In this song, you are putting yourself into each of these animals, into the *honu*, the sea turtle, into the *evi* bird, into the *mokokai*, and the *mono*. So you have to ground yourselves." "Go play in the dirt if you have to, feel the mud swish, squish between your toes! Then bring all of this to the dance, be grounded in the land and the animals of this dance. This dance has many elements in it. You are having some parts slow, some fast, some gentle like the *honu*, some fierce like the *mono*. Do you know why we start and end with the *evi* bird? It is actually a harbinger; it can be bad news for the hula. You know why? The fishermen, they watch the birds. When they see them, they go out to the ocean, good fish. When they see them come in from the ocean, uh-oh! Time to gather all the nets and bring them in. It's gonna be a storm! So in this dance we follow the *evi* bird, and it is a warning, that everything is coming. Everything from the ocean and the waters are coming up. The *mokokai*, the *mono*, the mermaids, they are all coming. Then we end with the *evi* bird again going back out. There is a story, too, about the *mono* and the mermaids warring. The mermaids finally won and pushed back the *mono* into the hills. Now one of the hills looks like a *mono* on the side of the hill. This is a story from my place, my home.

By stopping the class from doing the dance and sharing the personal connection to his home, Kumu is helping us to internalize the place and the meanings of the dance. He refers to a specific hill on the island of his birth to illustrate that these characters are built into the landscape. He details that these stories describe not only the action, but are also situated in the

physical place on the island. He is connecting his mainland dancers to his cultural identity in the hills and seas of his island in Hawaii.

Kumu is also connecting the dancers to the physicality of the land in general. The following week he asks if anyone has gone and played barefoot in the mud like he had assigned. One woman mentions that she hadn't, but that she just got an image of herself when she lived in Palau, running through the muddy grass, having the splash of the mud and that same squish between her toes. "You see," Kumu says, "you remember. This brings you back to your island, too. Whether we are here and remember because we are from the islands, or whether it is because we are interested, like many here are, about true Hawaiian culture, this is what we are doing when we dance. We are connecting with the stories of the past in our islands, our gods, and our families." Just as Kaimikaua (2010) emphasizes that even *haole* (non-Hawaiian) members, expressed a connection to Hawaiian identity through their participation in the hālau, Kumu is emphasizing the importance of understanding the connection to Hawaiian-ness through knowledge of the place in order to perform the dance he has choreographed.

Both the scene from the evening competition show and this scene from the hālau, emphasize the importance of understanding the physical ground connected to the culture and the dance of each island. Whether it is through performing the motions that represent the physicality of the land, or through the connection to their heritage, many of the performers with whom I speak are also connected, in a literal sense, to the physical "destination" they were portraying in their dances. All of the performers I interview have either been back to visit the land of their heritage, or express explicit desire to go back and walk in the places their ancestors walked.

Donny, who is of Tahitian heritage, spoke of going back to Hawaii every 6 months or so "for some reason or another," just to connect with family members there and to teach with his

brother in a hālau. He also recounts that it was important for him to travel back to Tahiti to his mother's island and spend time understanding where he came from. He spent three months in Tahiti in 2003, then returned for another six months. He plans trips back periodically to Hawaii and wishes to return to Tahiti soon, as well.

Toma has just returned from Hawaii. Even though he has grown up in Florida, he finds himself going back to Hawaii often and expresses a desire to go to Samoa to find the land of his parents. When I ask him if he would want to travel there he says, "It is something that I am definitely going to do." He mentions that it is important for him to someday visit where he came from, especially having learned about his culture and the history of the island while growing up dancing.

Will and Mahina are of an older generation, and both speak not only of their connection and travels to the place of their heritage, but how they are paving a path for their children and their children's children to know the place where they are from. They both speak of tending to the land, in a physical sense, to prepare for their future generations' return to the islands.

Will emphasizes that with his sons and their cousins learning about their royal heritage, it is more important than ever, that he is preparing their way to travel back and investigate their heritage in Samoa. He also notes that he goes back to care for the land of his family in Hawaii every couple of months. He says he doesn't want to kick anyone off of the land, but that sometimes he has to go back to settle disputes or make sure that everyone is maintaining and respecting the property belonging to the family.

Mahina speaks of her own experience, spending a couple of months in Tonga this past year to rebalance herself and connect herself back to what is important. She mentions that while

she was there, she began preparing the land so that her kids could have a physical place to which they could return. She says:

I know my kids and my grandkids will eventually want to go back to Tonga, if anything, just to see it. And at that point, right now, what I'm trying to do, is figure out ways to keep things, ah, for example, my grandparents' gravesites, you know, I'm going to go back and put a stone, so when they come, they know that it is here. And actually, its my great-grandparents, that they have a mark, so that they know, okay, my family is here. My grandfather built a house back there. We want to go and fix it up. No one is living there, except distant relatives because all of the immediates are here in the States. But it's like, it's not for me, it's, I'm not going to be there, but it's for the next person that comes. Let them know that they have, that their family was here. And that's it, that's the only reason.

Mahina mentions that in terms of lifestyle, life on the island is much different than here, and notes that her kids might not be able to handle it right now, going from cell phones and fast internet to island time. As her kids get older, she wants them to have the opportunity to investigate the place of their heritage more if they want to do so. She tells me that it was good for her to go, because it brought her back to an emphasis on relationships. That it is who you are with that is important, not the other distractions of modern American life. She notes:

It is different, but I like that simplicity. I think that it's right and it should be. I don't think it would work here now, but there, it's just the way things always were. And it's just different. We value different things here. And that's the difference for me. There's the cultural side of me, and then there's this culture for me, here.

Mahina recognizes the value of knowing the place and the culture she has come from, but also embraces that culture while she is immersed in American mainland culture. And while she does not think her kids would do well to live in Tonga now, she wants to prepare the land for when they are in a place like she is, where they are curious and hungry to know the land and the ways of their cultural forbearers.

Mahina talks about preparing the land for her children, but she also talks about how her children and the children of her performers grew up connected to their culture and their heritage in the islands through attending rehearsals and being around the industry here in Orlando. When I talk to Mahina about how she learned to dance, she tells me how, as she did so, she also learned the stories and histories incorporated into the lessons of the dance. She relates:

I learned dance through my mother and being around it. That's how most of them learn, most of Polynesians learn. Their parents are doing it, so they come and do it as well. I've encouraged it with all of my performers as well, yeah, bring your kids, you know? They are kids let them learn. That's the best way to learn. They sit, they learn stories while we are doing it, they participate, they dance with us, they do the whole thing.

She emphasizes that for her own children she made sure that they understood the importance of learning the dance and their history and culture. She says she would tell them,

You will learn your culture, you will learn it, and after that you can do what you want. You don't have to stay here, but you need to learn it, because it's really important to know where they came from and who they are, both where they start and who they become is up to them.

Sociologist and tourism studies scholar, Erik Cohen (1988) mentions the potential usefulness of commodification of a cultural practice that may be in danger of discontinuance, to perpetuate it. He notes, "The emergence of a tourist market frequently facilitates the preservation of a cultural tradition which would otherwise perish. It enables its bearers to maintain a meaningful local or ethnic identity which they might otherwise have lost" (Cohen 1988:382). In a diaspora situation such as the Polynesian community in Orlando, Florida, it may be easy for the children to be pulled away from their culture. Yet, perhaps as Cohen suggests, their parents' involvement in the entertainment industry presenting their Polynesian culture, can help the younger generations to stay tied to the cultural identity and the place of their heritage.



While Mahina objects to the claim that commercial dance is the only way to perpetuate the culture, and says that many Polynesians on the mainland who are not involved in commercial shows still hold tightly to their culture, she does reiterate that many of her dancers' kids learned their cultural stories and their heritage through attending rehearsals with their parents and being involved in the entertainment community. She says that for her own children, she made sure that they were there and learned their culture, even if they decided to pursue different career paths later.

A younger male Samoan fire knife dancer who was born here in Florida, but who grew up in the dance community reiterated his connection to the history and islands of Samoa through learning the dances. When I ask him what he likes or dislikes about performing for tourists, he says:

Its good for me to perform and connect to my culture because, songs and dances are a really big thing, it's a great way to represent your culture, and you learn the history through the dances. In order to perform the dances and understand what your motions are and what you are doing, a lot of it ties back to ancient times on the islands. Especially when it comes to fire knife dancing, where the actual fire knife originated. Did it start out with fire, or did it not, you know. So I learned a lot of history through the dancing, actually mostly all of my history that I learned growing up here, through the dancing.

When I ask Toma about growing up in Florida and whether he would have learned fire knife dancing if his parents had not been involved in the tourism entertainment industry, he says that no, if his parents had not been involved in the luau shows, he doesn't think he would be doing it now. In explaining how he began dancing, he says, "Nobody's ever been pushed, but I think when you see everybody else in your family up on stage, you feel kind of left out." He goes on to explain:

There are a lot of Polynesians who do grow up here in the States, and they don't dance at all. Even like a lot of people that are from the islands and don't even dance and they are from the islands. I think a lot of the best performers, Polynesian-wise, are...ah, a lot of them come from the States. You know, there are a lot more luaus and there is business. There's more to see, more to be around. Especially like when your parents are doing that, compared to just living in the island. It's just what it is; it's just there.

Toma emphasizes that because his family was away from the islands, they might have placed even more importance on passing down the cultural practices of dance than if they had been surrounded by the culture on the island. He also notes that since there are a lot of entertainment businesses that promote Polynesian dance on the mainland, this might be a way for more mainland Polynesians to be exposed to the dance. He goes on to state that he learned a lot more when he started dancing professionally, but that dancing was something that he was expected to do as a kid to make sure he was practicing his culture. He tells me that it will be the same for his kids; he will make sure they learn, but whether or not they will perform professionally is up to them.

Toma demonstrates how his experiences within an entertainment family helped perpetuate his own involvement in his culture. When I talk to two of the other performers who were recruited from the islands, Donny and Maile describe having to learn dance when they were young, but then leaving dancing when they were teens until they realized they could pursue a career in dance. Now, these performers passionately emphasize their desire that their own children learn the dances and their culture.

An integral appeal of the luau shows is the sensation that guests are being transported vicariously to a distant and exotic location. I find that not only are the performers transporting their audiences to the Polynesian islands through their presentation of dance and music, but that they also are connecting themselves to the land of their heritage through the performance of this

“destination.” Thus, despite critiques of cultural tourism as devaluing, or mitigating cultural meaning, my findings indicate that performers, away from their homes in the Pacific, are meaningfully engaging in commercial cultural tourism entertainment as a way to connect with their heritage and effectively construct their own cultural identity through their employment. Not only are they connecting to their heritage through their dance, but they are also connecting to the physical location of their heritage. Performers are presenting dances whose movements and meanings tie them to specific settings in the islands.

Furthermore, these performers are looking forward to ways in which they can pave the path for their children and future generations to know the roots of their heritage. These performers are using this connection to the land of their heritage to motivate them to connect with the real land of their forbearers by going back, working the land, and finding the places where their parents, grandparents, and great grandparents grew up. By doing this, and through the way Polynesian dance is taught, I argue that performers can possibly perpetuate this sense of place and culture through introducing their children to the entertainment community within the context of cultural tourism. Within commercial presentations of culture, such as in the luau dinner show, an exotic destination is being painted in the minds of the consuming tourists, yet it is also creating an important connection to heritage in the hearts of the performers. By enacting these exotic destinations for audiences in commercial luau shows, performers in Orlando, Florida are not only connecting to their culture, but also are making the destination real for themselves.

### Cultural Embodiment

In the previous section, I speak about performers connecting to the physicality of the land through the motions of the songs and dances they are performing. In this section, I focus on the cultural values imparted through the enactment of the dance, based on the cultural values embodied in the dance's choreography.

Christine A. Kray (2005) borrows Pierre Bourdieu's concept of bodily hexis to explain the unconscious values and cultural practices that are embodied in learning how to stand, sit, and move. Using Bourdieu's explanation of "habitus" (the cultural values which constrain and dictate certain practices) and "bodily hexis" (the bodily internalization of habitus), Kray (2005) notes that, "The same principles that inform the hexis are extended by homology to all manner of embodied practices, including how people interact with one another, how they share food, converse, work together, do commerce, play, court, and marry. In turn, as people reproduce the hexis, they reproduce the dispositions (the habitus) that inform it" (Kray 2005:342). In applying this to cultural dances, Kray shows how the performances of Maya women dancing are critiqued based on the cultural values embedded into the dance. When one girl is especially energetic with her moves, she is criticized for making herself stand out (the literal translation for acting different is to be "strange") (Kray 2005:341). Thus, Kray applies Bourdieu's bodily hexis concept to describe how the cultural values of tranquility and communal harmony are embodied in the movements and technique of the dance.

Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman (2001) takes the theory of embodiment and applies it to the Hawaiian hula and to the formation of a cultural identity within the choreographed movements of the dance. She states:

In performing traditions, structured systems of poetic expression, sound, production and bodily movement encode aural and visual practices in culturally meaningful ways. Such performative practices convey information in ways that are not quotidian but formalized and even expressive. The efforts involved in creating items to be performed, as well as maintaining the practices needed to perform them, suggests that the information thus encoded is of significance to performers and audiences. Significance multiplies when performers maintain older repertoire alongside contemporary creations, for older repertoire preserves expressions from past times. Performances, then, constitute not only instances of communication but also, over time, recollection and commemoration. Such is the case with the tradition of Hawaiian hula dance- a multifaceted complex of poetry, vocal recitation, and choreography [Stillman 2001:187].

In understanding how poetry and history is remembered, Stillman (2001) emphasizes that the technique and the “contents of the poetic expression” are embodied in the action of singing or dancing (Stillman 2001:188). She illuminates the responsibility that the kumu hula has when choosing choreography to accompany a song, or when he or she is composing a song. Stillman stresses the care that must be taken when choosing specific words and in addressing the possible connotations in the phrases so that the composer will convey only the messages intended, and so that the choreographer can pull on the many meanings hidden within the song to choreograph an original dance which captures the values and history being addressed in the song. She notes, “poetic repertoire makes possible the re-membering of what poets of the past wanted, or needed, to express” (Stillman 2001:201). Stillman uses “re-membering” as a way of addressing both the memory of the history and as a way of reinforcing the membership in a cultural identity. She goes on in this passage to say that the embodiment of these sentiments by the performers can then engage the audience in transmitting the intensions of the poet who wrote the *mele* (hula song).

When I speak with the kumu of my hālau, he tells me that when he choreographs a hula, he takes the words of the song, finds the different meanings, then matches these words with the

movements of the hula. Since there are different meanings to certain words, he can use the different connotations in the choreography to emphasize different values. He gives an example of using a Tahitian word that means rain, but also means coming together as one. He says, “So I use the rains to tell the story, but it means that we are moving all together, coming together in the dance.” Comparable to Kray’s (2005) example of the cultural value of tranquility being embedded into the bodily hexis of the dance, Kumu places the emphasis on “coming together as one” in the dance he is choreographing.

Joyce Sherlock (1993) notes that in different dances from each place, different cultural values are enacted. She compares the movements of American modern dance, very focused on the individual, to group dances from cultures that emphasize the community as a higher ideal than the individual. She states, “Once dance movements are read as signifying such cultural values and the responses of different social groups towards them, it is then possible to reveal dimensions of... the way of life mediated through dance” (Sherlock 1993:36). As in Bourdieu’s concept of bodily hexis, where culture is transmitted through how we hold our bodies, learning the steps of a dance can help an individual to learn the values of that culture, as well (Kray 2005).

Another resort dancer, Donny, emphasizes that the different dances he performs during the luau show embody the different cultures from each island. He also reiterates the shared Polynesian cultural values of hospitality and community. He tells me that in each of the dances from the different islands, “[There are] different styles, you feel the difference in each place, in each dance, but all from the same culture of hospitality, and welcome. You go to any of the islands and they treat their guests with the same hospitality. If you are a guest, you get fed, you will not go hungry.” Donny notes that there are differences in the dance that you can “feel the difference” in the culture while performing them. He also emphasizes that no matter where you

go within the Polynesian islands, you will encounter the same value of hospitality and that this also shows through all of the dances.

By learning the dances and the proper choreography to each of the dances, performers of Polynesian dance can learn about and continue the cultural values of their shared heritage. By employing Bourdieu's concept of bodily hexis, scholars are acknowledging the embodiment of culture through movement. Thus, even within a commodified environment of the commercial luau, performers are still connecting to the embedded cultural values through the movements of each dance they perform.

### Existential Authenticity

Using the examples in the preceding discussions sections, I now re-visit the idea of "authenticity" within the context of cultural tourism here in Orlando, Florida. Ning Wang (1999) proposes that tourists can feel like an experience is authentic, even if it is produced only for them, so long as the tourists can find an authentic meaningful experience of themselves within the experience. In his 1999 publication, Wang states, "In these activities they [the tourists] do not literally concern themselves about the authenticity of toured objects at all. They are rather in search of their authentic selves with the aid of activities or toured objects" (360).

Wang (1999) applies this concept to tourists to allow for flexibility within the label of authenticity. I argue "existential authenticity" can also be used to explain the motivation for Polynesians living in Orlando, Florida to participate in a commodified version of their culture for entertainment and tourist consumption.

My findings show that performers are finding their entertainment employment

meaningful through sharing their culture with the audience and connecting to their cultural identity and heritage. Therefore, Wang's (1999) concept of "existential authenticity," that is, realizing an authentic self and meaningful experience of one's identity, can be applied to performers of cultural tourism in Orlando luau shows, just as it has been applied to tourists.



## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION**

The pervasiveness of the stereotypical “hula girl” image, propagated by early postcards and Hollywood movies, is still prevalent today. The Polynesian luau has grown from smaller revitalization villages to tourist industries operating within Hawaii and all over the world as an attraction at Polynesian themed resorts. The commercial luau is an established example of commodified culture within tourism and is, therefore, the subject of much critique and discussion.

The issue of the authenticity of cultural performances is a topic within cultural tourism that spurs an exhaustive depth of literature (Graburn 1983; MacCannell 1973; Said 1979; Smith and Forrest 2006; Wang 1999; Wang 2007). Yet, traditional forms of assessing authenticity are being challenged, and new flexible definitions of authenticity, based on emergent qualities or meaningful experiences, are beginning to be embraced within this discussion (Cohen 1988; Medina 2003; Wang 1999).

Jane Desmond (1997, 1999) and other scholars (Kaimikaua 2010; Trask 1993) critique the luau as framing the performers as primitive, eroticized natives, staged for consumption by foreign, predominately white, tourists. Other cultural tourism scholars criticize the commodification or “prostitution” of culture within cultural tourism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Greenwood 1989; Trask 1993). They share concerns that cultural tourism marketing homogenizes the complexities of culture and perpetuates only the stereotypical image the tourists anticipate, thereby rendering the cultural traditions meaningless for the native peoples. Yet, there are tourism scholars that are exploring the agency of the performers within cultural tourism

and examining how they use their involvement to connect to their heritage and reify their identity (Bruner 2005; Bunten 2008). Furthermore, awareness of cultural values instilled in bodily movement and posture, is shedding new light on ways culture and place can be enacted (Buckland 2001; Kray 2005; Sherlock 1993; Stillman 2001).

In conducting research with Polynesian performers employed in Orlando commercial luau shows, my aim was to invite the voices of mainland Polynesian performers to be incorporated into the academic conversation surrounding the tourist luau. I find that performers are negotiating the tension between entertainment constraints and respectful cultural presentation. In some areas, performers corroborate the critiques of the academic scholars about the sexualization and stereotypical commercialization of Polynesian culture. However, many performers also mention that it is possible for mainland luaus to play off of audiences' initial expectations as a way to draw them into a deeper exposure of Polynesian culture. In looking at the negotiation between entertainment and cultural presentation, I utilize Susan Ortner's (1989) interpretation of practice theory. I focus on the ability of performers within cultural tourism to change the way their culture is presented by working within the commercial luau. I find that the performers hold each other and the show accountable for respectful representation.

I demonstrate that a clear distinction between Goffman's (1959) public "front regions" and private "back regions" is no longer relevant in explaining the cross-over between entertainment space and private learning space. This goes beyond MacCannell's (1973) staging of back regions into a new kind of shared space that blurs front and back. Based on the analysis of my participant observation in the Polynesian community, I extend this blurring to the roles within the community. The Polynesian community in Orlando is not divided between performer

and cultural representative; instead, the majority of the members of this diaspora population share both roles and both physical spaces.

My findings suggest that performers in Orlando are not only using their employment for economic stability, but they are using their performances as ways to “do” their culture. Thus, by performing dances based in their culture, these performers are reifying their cultural identity, reinforcing “who they are,” and connecting with their cultural heritage in a way that is culturally meaningful for themselves and their audiences.

Furthermore, these performers are enacting the physical places of their heritage within the songs that tie them to the land of their ancestors in a way that can perpetuate a sense of place to the next generations. The stories built into the songs and into the dances create a concrete memory of the physical place of their heritage, and many performers demonstrate that through this, they are continuing to “travel” back to their islands. Older performers speak of cultivating the actual land of their islands for when their children need to return and walk where their ancestors walked. Through performing the dances, these performers are enacting the destinations for the audience, but also solidifying their ties to the ground of their forbearers.

Additionally, the physical movements of the dance not only emphasize the destination, but also embody the cultural values of the Polynesian islands. By utilizing Bourdieu’s concept of bodily hexis, scholars focusing on dance and embodiment demonstrate how cultural values are transmitted through the precise technique of learning the ancient dances (Buckland 2001; Kray 2005; Sherlock 1993; Stillman 2001). Performers echo this statement describing how they learn culture and history through the choreography of each dance.

Performers are using the physical movement of the dance to connect to the cultural values and heritage within each dance. They are also using their commodified persona to demonstrate

their membership to a particular cultural identity and Polynesian heritage (Bunten 2008). Performers are finding self-meaning through their employment in the commercial luaus in Orlando. Ning Wang (1999) uses “existential authenticity” to advocate for an authenticity based on the meaningful experience of self during an event. In applying this concept to the performers in the commercial luaus of Orlando, these individuals are performing cultural presentations that are “existentially authentic.”

Polynesian performers involved in the entertainment industry in Orlando, Florida are passionate about sharing their culture. They are not performers that have “sold out” or succumbed to “cultural prostitution” (Trask 1993). Instead, they are proud of their ability to perform and to show outsiders a bit of their cultural heritage. Performers also use their involvement in the entertainment industry to shape their culture’s representation from within the structures of the entertainment industry, while negotiating the delicate balance between entertainment and authentic cultural presentation.

Many performers with whom I speak express amazement and gratitude that they are able to earn a living, “doing” their culture. Furthermore, performers are connected to their cultural heritage and to the land of this heritage in a way that makes their performances ‘existentially authentic’ and enables them to pass their cultural identity on to their children. As Mahina shares:

There’s a sense of pride that we have something that we want to hold on to that, and expose that when we can and we want to share when we can, and That’s how your going to keep it alive. And I think that the only way you are going to keep it alive, and its some of the things that our predecessors...that no matter what you do you have to remember who you came from, because if they don’t keep it alive, and they didn’t don’t pass it a long and we don’t dig deeper and keep it alive and pass it on, then we’ve got nothing left.

By acknowledging flexibility within how identity is performed, as well as taking into account the globalized realities of diaspora populations seeking a connection to their culture, anthropologists can begin to view performers in cultural tourism as purposeful agents rather than as victims of commercialization. Instead of having their culture exploited through commercialization of the Polynesian luau, these performers are using their employment in the tourist shows as a way to make meaningful connections to their heritage and as a forum for asserting their cultural identity as Polynesians, while living away from the islands, in Orlando, Florida.

## **APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**  
**FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Brittany R. Hoback**

Date: **October 08, 2012**

Dear Researcher:

On 10/8/2012, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Dance for them, dance for us: Using a commercial venue for the preservation of cultural traditions through Polynesian dance.
Investigator:	Brittany R. Hoback
IRB Number:	SBE-12-08750
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	n/a

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 10/08/2012 09:44:43 AM EDT

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Muratori".

IRB Coordinator

## **APPENDIX B: IRB CHANGE OF STUDY APPROVAL LETTER**





University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**  
**FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Brittany R. Hoback**

Date: **May 29, 2013**

Dear Researcher:

On 5/29/2013, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Modification Type:	The study will be for Master's thesis rather than class paper and the total number of study participants will be increased from 15 to a maximum of forty individuals. The expected calendar schedule has been changed from Fall 2012 to Summer and Fall 2013.
Project Title:	Dance for them, dance for us: Building Cultural Identity through commercial cultural tourism.
Investigator:	Brittany R. Hoback
IRB Number:	SBE-12-08750
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	n/a

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 05/29/2013 09:20:17 AM EDT

IRB Coordinator

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **Interview Questions:**

When did you learn to dance hula? How old were you?

Who taught you?

How were dances passed on to you?

Why were they passed on?

Were you taught so that you could perform or so that you could know your heritage?

Were you taught within your family or within your community?

What was taught along with the dance?

Was dance presented with other lessons (language, culture, stories, etc.)?

What were some of the reasons your parents would give for teaching you the dances?

How are the dances you perform in the luau different or similar to when you learned to dance?

When did you begin performing for entertainment?

Why did you start performing?

Do you think tourist opinions of what is “authentic” influence what is presented? Stereotypes, etc?

How is your performance an authentic representation of Polynesian culture?

How is it not?

How is it authentic to you?

How do you feel about Polynesia including different cultures of Hawaiian, Tahitian, Samoan, Maori, etc. all under one grouping?

How does your involvement in the luau affect your participation in the Polynesian community here in Orlando?

Have you borrowed any traditions from one of the other Polynesian islands since you have been involved in the Luau show?

What have you learned about your own heritage and culture through participating in the show?

What do you gain from your performance in the luau?

What might you lose?

What do you do to highlight or practice your culture outside of this show?

How does your participation in the Luau affect your feelings of connection with your culture and heritage?

What do you like about performing for tourists?

What do you dislike about performing for tourists?

How do you feel about presenting your culture to tourists?

Do you feel differently about the motives of tourists looking for entertainment more than information?

Tell me about stereotypes of Polynesians/ Hawaiians, etc.

How do you feel the show enforces or breaks down these stereotypes?

How much input do you get to put into the show? Do you get to make choices about costume, authenticity, dialogue, etc.?

What desires do you have for your own children about their heritage?

What are your desires for them in learning the dances?

Will you teach them?

Will you send them to a school?

Do they want to learn (if they are older)?

Is it something that you let them choose, like what instrument they may want to play or is it something that is expected, like doing well at school?

Do you speak a language other than English?

Is this your first language?

If not, how did you learn your language?

(These are the kinds of questions I am planning to focus on in my interviews. I plan to ask clarifying questions/follow-up questions during their answers to these questions.)

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