Performing Culture in Samoan Dance

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Abstract

This thesis is an auto-ethnographic account of ethnographic research conducted over a thirteen-week period on dance, or *siva*, in Samoa, a country in the South Pacific. This paper shows both how Samoan culture is performed in dance and how located in the lived experiences of Samoan dancers are larger tensions about westernization, tradition, and authenticity. This paper argues that classifications of dance as “authentic” versus “inauthentic” or “traditional” verses “appropriated” are often problematic and unproductive. Instead, this paper refocuses these conversations on the real world impacts and implications of Samoan dance in an increasingly global world on the dancers themselves. This paper poses questions such as: Why do people talk about culture as if it is stagnant? Why might someone want to maintain “tradition?” Why does “authenticity” matter? How can we reconceptualize what “tradition” and “authenticity” mean? In attempting to answer questions like these, this thesis pokes holes in the existing literature and argues for rethinking the taken-for-granted categories we have.
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Fa’afatai lava,

Thank you.
Introduction

Western Samoa, the country this paper focuses on, is located in the South Pacific and is comprised of a group of islands. The two main islands are Upolu, where the capitol Apia is located, and Savai’i, which is larger in area but smaller in population. The country is referred to as Western Samoa (officially Samoa) because in 1899 the Samoan islands were split up, with the eastern islands (now known as American Samoa) becoming a territory of the United States and the western islands falling under German rule (taking over from Britain). In 1914, New Zealand took over control of the Islands and in 1962 Western Samoa became an independent country. Last year, they celebrated their 50th year of independence.

I went to Western Samoa in February 2012 as part of a study abroad program that included myself, 18 other American students, and an Academic Director who is a dual citizen of America and Samoa. I chose Samoa because I wanted to experience a different culture, specifically a non-western one. I knew that I could study anthropology and therefore other cultures in a classroom for a lifetime, but it would never be the same as experiencing it for myself. I also knew I would never be able to problematize taken-for-granted aspects about my own life and culture unless I was somewhere that obfuscated my own culture. I wanted an experience that would challenge my world-view. This goal was realized as the six months I spent in Samoa not only facilitated a new understanding of myself and others, but also made me see the discipline of anthropology in a new light as well.

As part of the study abroad program, I had to conduct a three-week independent research project, which is where my research on dance began. I chose to look at dance after attending a student dance benefit concert at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji, put on to raise money for flood relief. The dances blended elements from various pacific island dances and
European dances. The concert had a powerful impact on me and put dance on my radar as a possible topic of interest. The concert, combined with the fact that everyone in Samoa seemed to know how to dance (which struck me as a huge cultural difference from America), are what led me to explore the topic further. The impacts of westernization had become a growing interest of mine while in Samoa and dance seemed like a perfect site in which those impacts might be located, and so my research began.

A narrative of my time in Samoa is integral to this thesis because this thesis and the problems it posits were born out of the intellectual journey I went on. A journey that started when I landed in Samoa, continued over the six months I spent there, and continued throughout the process of writing this thesis. This is a journey that is far from over, but that has informed this thesis from beginning to end; from the topic I chose to the types of questions I asked my informants; from the theorists and academics I chose to read and engage to the way I chose to represent my research. In the first chapter, I will attempt to show you what this intellectual journey looked like, starting with the narrative of how my thinking constantly shifted while in Samoa. The main story I wish to convey is how I started my trip to Samoa off thinking “tradition” and “westernization” were definable autonomous entities that were mutually exclusive. I saw the former as good and the latter as inherently evil. I thought western influence was easy to see and that it was “corrupting” Samoa. Eventually, I started to problematize that notion, pulling back from it, questioning my romanticizations of “tradition.” I began to reconcile these two ideas, seeing that they were not as separable as I thought; that western influence is entrenched and embodied everywhere.

The other main struggle was coming to grips with my increasing discomfort with my identity as an American, a product of westernization. I began to wonder if my very presence was
effecting Samoa. I questioned the ethics of conducting research there because it felt abhorrent to research people as if they were subjects to be studied for my own gain: i.e. a grade, to learn more about myself, curiosity, etc. The question then was why represent at all? Who is this research for? I wanted to reject and dismiss anthropology altogether. Therefore, in chapter two, I will walk you through my first project upon returning home, which was to research and look into the politics of representation, to see what the field had to say about these issues. Was I the only one who was uncomfortable? Was I essentially another colonialist performing an act of colonialism? Was there an ethical way to represent my research or should I reject my research altogether? This thesis, specifically the way it is written, is a reconciliation of these struggles. From this process, I formulated my own beliefs about how to represent, which informed the methodology of this thesis.

The third chapter will be a brief ethnography on how Samoan culture is performed in dance. A brief account of the work done in the Anthropology of Dance and on dance in Samoa will be given at the beginning to provide context. I will then jump into the information gathered from my various informants and observations to show that dance is thought to be an embodiment of Samoan cultural practices and values by many Samoans. I will explain how the dance movements themselves mirror actions from daily life. I will then look at how cultural values are embodied in the dance as well. I will frame these conversations through the words and rhetoric my informant’s used when explaining dance to me. A few brief narratives will be used here as well to show how I came to know this information.

In chapter four I will turn the focus to how larger apprehensions about westernization and globalization are located in discussions of dance. We will first look at how Samoan siva functions in the tourist industry. Views, both positive and negative, about dance’s use in this
context will be parsed out. Using relevant literature, I will look at constructions of dance in this context as “authentic” versus “inauthentic,” and analyze the larger implications of that rhetoric. Then, the conversation will shift to look at larger changes happening to Samoan siva as a whole; changes spurred by globalization. Here, we will look at the use of terms such as “culture” and “tradition” as if they were stagnant definable entities. Again, contradictions will be explored and I will look at ways in which we can reconceptualize these terms.

While this thesis is multilayered, ultimately I attempt to show both how Samoan culture is performed in dance and how located in the lived experiences of Samoan dancers are larger tensions about westernization, tradition, and identity. What is important to understand is this thesis has been in a state of becoming as I have been in a state of becoming, and remains in that state. This thesis will have no conclusions in the normal sense of the word, but rather suggest possibilities for how the information presented can be conceptualized. I say “possibilities” because one of the main epiphanies that was born out of my intellectual journey is that analyses of cultures and cultural practices will never be ontological “truths.” I will present information to you and explain as thoroughly as I can how I came to know and understand that information in a certain way. What is important is that this thesis represents how I came to see the information. Me, as a specific ethnographer with a specific history and specific past experience that contribute to my way of seeing and understanding the world; a way of seeing the world that has been constantly shifting over the process of researching and writing this thesis. Had this been written a week, a month, or a year from now, it would look extremely different, as new experiences would undoubtedly change how I view the information. For these reasons, this thesis attempts to complicate rather than simplify, obfuscate rather than clarify, and rip open rather than seal shut.
Chapter 1: The Journey

“So I begin with the unfolding of this story, of this book: how the shape of experience, the questions I asked and the responses I received, even the writing of the ethnographic text, occupy a space within a particular history of a specific ethnographer and her informants as we sought to understand each other within shifting fields of power and meaning” (Kondo 1990:8).

The disillusionment with America specifically and “the West” more generally started early in my study abroad program. We had orientation in Hawaii where many of us learned the history of how Hawaii became a state for the first time. We all felt angry at how little education we received in our respective schools, particularly in American History classes, about the colonization of Hawaii. We also learned in a lecture, by a Professor at the University of Hawaii, of the sovereignty movement that still exists today whose main goal is for native Hawaiians to stop being recognized as Native Americans and instead be seen as natives of an independent state that has been occupied since 1898. Their main plight in being able to recognize that goal is that it is near impossible to argue that Hawaii would be better off as a small, unarmed country rather than a state in the most powerful nation. Hearing a member of this sovereignty movement talk about it with such passion and conviction moved every one of us.

Our class discussion afterwards revolved around the anger we felt towards the United States for destroying a culture. We were staying about ten minutes from Waikiki Beach, a tourist metropolis, and started to look at it with disgust. In another lecture we learned about the CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child) of which the US is only one of three countries in the world who have yet to ratify it and about CEDAW (Convention Eliminating all forms of Discrimination Against Women) which is also not ratified by the United States. This was all new information for most of the group and we began to feel disconnected from the ‘mainland,’ from our home, and began to idealize island life. These feelings would only intensify over the next few months as we started our lives in Samoa.
When we arrived in Samoa, the hour-long cab ride from the airport to the University of the South Pacific campus in Alafua (a town right outside the capital of Apia) where we would be staying was mostly silent. I had my head out the window the entire time taking in the country in awe. I remember how happy I felt in that moment, how beautiful every single thing I saw was, as instantaneously I put Samoa up on the highest pedestal. Who could blame me? For almost all of us, this was our first encounter with a non-western country. Then there was the beautiful setting. On one side of the road was the ocean, crystal clear, sparkling in the sunlight, palm trees swaying in the breeze. On the other side of the road were villages. The *fales* (houses) were colorful and the landscaping was elaborate in some areas with brightly colored bushes and flowers decorating the front of the houses.

One of our first discussions upon arrival in Samoa was to talk about the main thing that grabbed our attention on the ride from the airport. I remember that my answer had to do with noticing that all the tools the people we passed by were using were made from all natural materials found in their environment. For example, the brooms were made from the coconut tree, as were the baskets they used to carry produce. I thought it was amazing. Another big one that many people talked about was how friendly everyone seemed because the entire ride as we passed through village after village, people would stop what they were doing to smile and wave. We began to compare aspects such as these to the materialist, cold, individualistic nature of America.

One of the first themes that I remember arising in this America vs. Samoa dichotomy, which came to be a running belief in discussions, was the idea that America is a place devoid of custom and tradition. In a paper I wrote in Hawaii after a visit to the Bishop Museum, I said “customs and traditions…are so interesting to me because there is such a level of respect
involved in both their creation and in upholding them. Coming from a society that is rapidly losing any sense of tradition and a family that has virtually none, things like this greatly intrigue me.” The entire concept of tradition fascinated me and was something that I viewed as only positive. I hated the “fact” that America was devoid of tradition, of culture, which I greatly equated as being devoid of humanity. I was equally upset by the “fact” that westernization was destroying non-west cultures as “we” corrupted “them” into being a similar place devoid of tradition. At this point I did not problematize this notion at all.

One of our first activities in Samoa was a drop-off. For this, each student was given the name of a village and we were brought to the bus depot and told to find the village. This was our first time navigating the unique bus system of Samoa. The buses are all colorfully painted and each has its own personality. When the bus gets full, the ‘stacking’ starts, meaning people sit on each other’s laps. As a palagi (foreigner), Samoans do everything they can so that you do not have to stack: both so that they do not have to sit on you and you do not have to sit on them (many even refusing when we made an explicit gesture that it was okay). This was one of the first of many things that would consistently remind me that I was a foreigner, an outsider and contributed to my discomfort with my identity as an American. My drop-off experience also added to that feeling. After thirty minutes on one of the buses, I had yet to find the village on my card. I decided I would just get off at a random village so that I would have enough time to explore before returning back at the designated time.

As I walked through this village, every person I passed stopped to stare at me, which made it obvious that it was a rare occasion to have a palagi just stroll through. One woman was sitting with her back to the road and her young child alerted her to my presence. She turned around in her chair and continued to watch me until I passed out of eyesight. We made eye
contact a few times and it became obvious that she did not care that I saw her watching as her
gaze never wavered. This straight-forward nature continued as people constantly asked me
“where are you going?” This was a question I immediately struggled with because every answer
sounded wrong. To say I was studying or observing them was to create a dynamic of me vs. ‘the
other.’ To say I was exploring their village made me feel like an intruder because I felt like I had
no right to be there. I just was not prepared for this question and it was the first sign of my
discomfort with my privilege, with the fact that I was there to experience another culture
essentially out of my own curiosity. I did not recognize it then, but this would become a theme
later when I started my research.

I finally settled on a neutral answer, telling anyone who asked (which must have been at
least 15 people), “I’m just walking through” or “I’m just looking around.” Then, as I was
walking I passed a group of pre-teen boys yelled at me in Samoan, which I did not understand,
and proceeded to laugh hysterically. That is when I met Leotele, a woman who stepped in on my
behalf to scold the boys. She laughingly told me that if I were not married, the Samoan boys
would continuously follow me around. She then asked me if I wanted to have a rest at her fale. I
had heard about the hospitality of Samoans, but I was still not prepared for this. She was so nice
and caring and it warmed my heart instantly. Knowing that it was customary in this circumstance
to offer a gift, I gave her some yams with coconut milk that I had picked up from the market
before getting on the bus. She instantly sprung into action bringing a small table to where I sat
and telling her ten year old son to get plates. She served the yam to her elderly mother-in-law
and I and cut me some fresh bread in return. She then went out to her coconut tree to get a fresh
coconut to pour me some coconut water. I was taken aback by her hospitality, attributing my
reaction to being used to individualistic America where it would be dangerous to go to a
strangers house with them.

When I left Leotele’s house, she insisted that I come back sometime to swim in the sea
and sleepover (which I still regret today that I never got the chance to do so). That day, the main
theme that came across as my fellow students shared the stories of their drop-offs, was a sense of
wonderment at the inherent goodness of the people we met. It was a shock to us and that was
because we did not see Americans that way. Samoa was establishing a place in our hearts rapidly
because we had so much respect for that kindness.

One of the first times I remember there being slight disillusionment with Samoan culture
rather than constant acclaim, was a few days before we were to do our first home-stay, where we
were to stay with a family in the rural village of Lotofaga. This was a few weeks into the
program and in preparation for the home-stay we were warned that we might encounter our
families disciplining their children by using physical force. This sparked a conversation about
child abuse with 90% of the group believing that using physical force in any capacity against a
child, regardless of cultural consideration, was abuse. It was the first aspect of Samoan culture
that anyone criticized. However, it did not lower Samoa too much on the pedestal everyone had
put it on, as these negative feelings did not extend outside of the one conversation.

Another big event that lead to further idealization of Samoa was when we participated in
a full *umu*; i.e. helping prepare a traditional Samoan meal. We all got to walk around and try
different steps in the process. We prepared a meal made completely from scratch with everything
from the food to the oven to the plates being made from nature. What we found so amazing was
that nothing went to waste. For example, a staple in Samoan cuisine is coconut milk. To make
the coconut milk, coconuts are dehusked and the inside of the coconuts are scraped out. The
shreds of coconut are then squeezed out using a cloth made of the husk into a cream. The dried out shreds are thrown in a bucket that is used as food for the pigs. The scraped out coconut is used as bowls for the meal and also as fuel for the oven fire. The leaves of the coconut tree are used to weave plates to eat off of, baskets, and fans, and to make brooms. This made us further see America as the antithesis of Samoa; excessive and wasteful.

Meanwhile in the classroom we were learning about the history of Samoa; a history of colonization. We learned in lectures about how one of the influences of the missionaries in the Christianization of Samoa was to push women toward domesticity and subordination. This made us feel disgust with the west and its values. We were then taught that Samoa “Samoanized” colonial influences: Samoans were selective in which Christian values to take and adapted them to their culture. This made us praise Samoa as we loved that Samoans cherished their traditions and actively worked to retain them in the face of colonization. Another lecturer told us that there is no such thing as homelessness in the pacific because family will look after you if you have no job. We were amazed by how community was put above all else and people were genuinely unselfish.

We were told that Americanization and westernization is slowly changing the culture; particularly that money is being put first which makes people individualistic. We were also informed with globalization junk food is becoming an increasing problem as young people prefer to eat McDonalds rather than locally grown staples like taro. Hearing stories upon stories about colonization’s disruption of culture and westernization and globalization’s current uprooting of tradition and values made it hard to not unquestioningly despise the west. We even began to engage in the classification sometimes used by locals of “palagi Samoans” and “Samoan Samoans,” the former a pejorative term referring to someone who is “western” (usually because
they spent part of their lives overseas and their lifestyle embodies western culture in some identifiable way) and the latter to those who are more “traditional.”

A four-day excursion to American Samoa was a huge break through for me in terms of problematizing my growing negativity toward America, although it did not start out this way. The way American Samoa had been described to us prior to the trip led us to refer to it as “consumer American on an island.” It is a place, recognized by us as well as the people there, that is more westernized then Western Samoa. Our home stay experience here was the polar opposite of that in Lotofaga. Each of us was staying with the family of a student at American Samoa Community College (ASCC). Houses here more closely resembled American houses, with separate bedrooms as opposed to a single open room characteristic of houses in Western Samoa. There was air conditioning and hot water in some of the houses, many families had cars, we were taken out to eat, to the movies, and generally pampered. The similarity of our host families’ lifestyles to that in America irked us. Some of the things we criticized were that American Samoans ate fast food frequently and spent little time with family because at home would either be on computers or watching TV. What we failed to recognize was that we were criticizing our own lifestyle.

The students in American Samoa, in describing the difference between them and Western Samoa, identified with distaste that Western Samoans were more strict culturally and more traditional in lifestyle. The comical example they gave as evidence was that people in Western Samoa climb the coconut tree to get a coconut whereas in American Samoa they just get a ladder. They viewed American Samoa as more accepting of the modern age and open to change. On the other side, some people in Western Samoa thought those in Am. Samoa were losing their culture, not real Samoans, *palagi*, etc. We ascribed to this belief as well and we were
disgusted by our own culture. We hated America for how it had corrupted such a beautiful
culture. We found it sad and we unanimously liked Western Samoa more in essence because it
was more traditional.

A big part of this is because we are all left-wing liberal-minded people so we look at
aspects of America such as consumerism, industrialization, and development in disdain but my
breakthrough came when I realized that at the end of the day we get to go back to this life. How
can we judge people for wanting the American lifestyle for themselves when all TV, music,
adverts, etc. advertise America as the ideal, the people to be? I began to push back on my fellow
classmates who absolutely hated American Samoa with these questions. More importantly, I
began to push back on myself. The inherent contradictions in our idealization began to pop up
everywhere. For example, there was widespread disapproval of the Pacific Island students being
on facebook all the time at the University of the South Pacific. We had the luxury to spend a
semester where we could let go of our material lifestyle. A semester where we barely used
technology, lived without hot water, did not wear makeup, etc. and suddenly we thought we were
all high and mighty.

Since we were deconstructing our normal way of living and seeing our new lifestyle in
Samoa as more meaningful and personal, we thought everyone should see it that way and reject
the things that we were rejecting. We were in a position of privilege to be able to idealize that
way of life. For us it was temporary, a cultural immersion activity if you will. And yet we were
judging others for the life we lead every day. We thought they should understand that their life is
way better, full of meaning, and they were ruining it by engaging with western lifestyles. It was
patronizing and condescending. What’s more we hated upscale resorts but used them. Our group
would sometimes spend the day at the pool at Aggie Greys Hotel in town. If a local Samoan who
was not a guest of the hotel tried to use the pool for the day, they would likely be kicked out. Yet our privilege allowed us to use the pool undisturbed. The contradictions were unending.

So what was going on? Going to Samoa, myself and the other 18 Americans on my trip, fell into the trap of “the romantic, antimodernist dream of escape” from America; escape from America’s traits such as “‘modern’, ‘materialist’, ‘fast-paced’, ‘alienated’, etc. etc.” (Stewart 1996:4). Instead we saw Samoa as how Stewart (1996) identifies people saw the “other” America: “‘simple’, ‘essential’, ‘authentic’, ‘time-less’, ‘lived’, etc.” (5). We all experienced what would be described by Rosaldo (1989) as “imperialist nostalgia,” where “someone deliberately alters a form of life and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to his or her intervention” (Rosaldo 1989:108). While not playing a direct role in the westernization of Samoa, this was definitely a sentiment we felt. We wanted Samoans to hold on to their traditions and were upset when we thought certain traditions were being “lost.”

As a class we were staunchly against westernization. We found it sad that imports and western foods were becoming trendy in a way, a mark that you had cash. In class people would constantly bring up how sad it is that people are selling their fresh crops to buy unhealthy imported food. I remember we attended a talk by the High Commissioner of New Zealand at the University of the South Pacific. She talked about all of these changes and projects Samoa needs in order to take people out of poverty. A main project she was pushing for was for better housing in rural areas. We were really against the classification of people in rural areas as “impoverished.” We saw the High Commissioner as someone who was imposing western standards on the Samoan people, imposing change in the name of a western view of a “better” life.
Epeli Hau’ofa, a Pacific Islander anthropologist, poses the possibility that the motive behind western countries preoccupation with non-west cultures preserving their traditions is to keep “sections of communities contented with their relative poverty and oppression” (1985:152). He argues that for western countries, “their position of dominance has been achieved and maintained through constant ruthless changes in their traditions; the whole idea of growth and development means continuous change of technologies and value systems” (Hau’ofa 1985:152). While the motives behind our beliefs were pure, albeit naïve, Hau’ofa was right. We were further exercising our dominance and denying Samoans autonomy in these decisions. Rosaldo (1989) argues that imperialist nostalgia is a “seemingly harmless mood…a mask of innocence to cover [our] involvement with processes of domination” (120). Part of my journey involved confronting and questioning my own complacency in that process of domination; a process of domination I felt was embedded in the doing of ethnography itself.

In a lecture during my group’s short stay in Fiji, Professor Hereniko talked about the importance for people who have experienced colonialism to attain the position to be in charge of their own representations. He emphasized the importance of creating a dialogue between “other’s” (i.e. the West’s) representations of native people and their own representations of who they are. This immediately spoke to me. My discomfort with my privilege and western identity had also made me extremely uncomfortable with the upcoming three-week research project I was to embark on because I kept thinking, “who am ‘I’ to represent ‘them?’” So, during this lecture I asked how Professor Hereniko thinks foreigners can play a part in helping native people represent themselves rather than representing them for them. He replied that it is about how your engagement with other cultures is changing your own way of thinking, asking me: “Are you moved by it or are you objectifying it, just using it for academic purpose?” He said, you need to
put yourself in the work even though academics teach you not to; write about how it is transforming you; do not try to express truths and be aware of limitations. He left us with this quote: “identity is not a box we are stuck in, it is roots we grow from. It is a life-long journey in which you never arrive. We are always in a state of becoming.”

This moment was a break through for me. I had yet to read any literature on the politics of representation. I thought all anthropology was a particular way, mainly that anthropologists talked in “truths” and I was adamantly against this. In my lecture notes on the side I wrote “taking self out of work makes you talk in truths, but they are not truths.” This was the start of another running theme of this project: coming to grips with being a westerner attempting to represent a non-western country. I remember crying during a conversation with the assistant director of my program during my three-week fieldwork project. I felt that my project did not benefit anyone in Samoa in anyway and so why do it at all? In an email I wrote home to my advisor I wrote:

“Being here I just feel like it is not my place to be studying other cultures. I feel that it is a very western thing to go in and study other cultures, which often leads to research done for someone's grade and not the benefit of the culture (which even if you do it to 'benefit' the culture, who are we to decide what is beneficial), and when the research is written, it is often inaccessible to the culture being written about. This is such a catch-22 because I obviously love soc/anth but I don't know how to remedy these things. So there is a tad bit about my identity crisis that is currently happening.”

I decided to write the thirty-page report of my research in an unconventional way. I let my interviews completely structure the paper, with very little analysis from myself. I had only been in the country for a little over three months. I knew I could not make judgments or claims off my limited cultural understanding. I used my interviewee’s statements to narrate the entire paper. This was a method my director did not approve of or understand, but it was the only thing I felt comfortable doing.
After my program, I extended my stay for ten more weeks to continue my research, funded by the Pennock Grant for Public Policy. Living with two other students, on our own, apart from the structured and sheltered nature of our abroad program, provided me with even more insights. Different experiences shed light on the fact that there was poverty in Samoa, there was domestic abuse in Samoa, I had times where I feared for my safety, and finally I truly questioned my idealization of the country. These few negative experiences allowed me to take a step back and evaluate exactly what I had been romanticizing about Samoa and what I was damning about westernization. Evaluating the classifications I was making and confronting the contradictions I was pushing aside were tools I cultivated and came to use throughout this project. The further breaking down of stagnant notions of tradition, however, would not come until much later in the process.
Chapter 2: The “Crisis” of Representation

“We need more than assertions that the local has its own epistemology or that everything is culturally constructed. We need to approach the clash of epistemologies—ours and theirs—and to use that clash to repeatedly reopen a gap in the theory of culture itself so that we can imagine culture as a process constituted in use and therefore likely to be tense, contradictory, dialectical, dialogic, texted, textured, both practical and imaginary, an in-filled with desire.” To do this we need to understand “not that culture is a ‘complex’ ‘thing’ but rather that it cannot be gotten ‘right’” (Stewart1996:5-6).

When I returned to the states, I did not know what to make of my research. I knew that before I could move forward with analyzing it, I had to confront my discomfort with representation. My first project was therefore familiarizing myself with what the field of anthropology had to say about the ethics of representation and how it dealt with the dilemmas I was having. From these conversations, I drew on various elements to create the methodology for this thesis.

Theories about the “correct” way to represent a culture have been circulating the field of Anthropology for years. The 1960s and 70s are identified as the first time representation, specifically as it relates to non-Western cultures, was problematized (Marcus and Fischer1999:3). Marcus and Fisher (1999) call this problematization a “crisis of representation” which “arises from uncertainty about adequate means of describing social reality” (1999:8). The debate heated up in the late 80s and throughout the 90s, centered on the book Writing Culture. This book, made up of essays by various academics in the field, was the big moment where ethnographic practice was questioned and challenged together by the entire field. What was mainly rejected was positivism, texts claiming objectivity, and totalizing theories (Marcus and Fischer 1999). Ethnographers wished to divorce themselves from the idea of the ‘lone ethnographer,’ a term coined by Renato Rosaldo (1989) in the following statement:

“Once upon a time, the Lone Ethnographer rode off into the sunset in search of ‘his native.’ After undergoing a series of trials, he encountered the object of his quest in a distant land. There he underwent
his rite of passage by enduring the ultimate ordeal of ‘fieldwork.’ After collecting ‘the data,’ the Lone Ethnographer returned home and wrote a ‘true’ account of ‘the culture.’” (30).

The field of anthropology in essence picked itself apart, problematizing everything from methods, to fieldwork, to the written text. The conversation was primarily a theoretical one in which Anthropology began to recognize that culture is not definitive, stagnant, waiting to be discovered, but rather fluid and open to interpretation. Anthropologists identified that ethnographic writing is "not a reflection of the 'truth' of other cultures but a representation of them" and is therefore "morally, politically, even epistemologically delicate" (Hall 1997:200; Geertz in Hall 1997:200). Some of the main criticisms of the field are important to look at here to understand why representation was starting to be understood as “delicate.”

Edward Said’s (1979 book *Orientalism* is one of the most influential attacks on Western writings of non-Western peoples. Said states that “texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe” (1979: 94). For Said, these writings reinforce power dynamics and act as another tool of the colonizer as the ethnographer has the authority to produce the “objective” world of their subjects. (Said 1979). Abu-Lughod (1993) articulates this type of fallacy as characteristic of a majority of anthropology, stating: “Our goal as anthropologists is usually to use details and the particulars of individual lives to produce typifications. The drawback…is that generalization can make these ‘others’ seem simultaneously more coherent, self-contained, and different from ourselves than they might be” (Abu-Lughod 1993:7).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, anthropologists began to pick up the pieces. They started to unpack this postmodern crisis in order to figure out where the field should go from there. Primarily what anthropologists started working through was how to translate theory to practice, as many felt the post-modern crisis left the field at a standstill, demanding of ethnography things
it simply could not fulfill in hopes of being as ethical as possible. What emerged out of post-modernism was critical ethnography which “unlike traditional ethnographic practice, critical ethnography shifts the goal of praxis away from the acquisition of knowledge about the Other (either for its own sake or in the service of the ethnographer’s career) to the formation of a dialogic relationship with the Other whose destination is the social transformation of material conditions that immediately oppress, marginalize, or otherwise subjugate the ethnographic participant” (Brown and Dobrin 2004:5). Horner (2004) identifies three main demands were placed on this new ethnography as a result of the post-modern crisis: “an emphasis on collaboration, on multivocality, and on self-reflexivity,” which we will go through briefly (Horner 2004:14).

Marcus (2012) identified collaboration as the most prominent method to develop after Writing Culture (433). Collaboration is sought in order to “reduc[e] the distance between researcher and informant and the marginalization of the latter,” a distance that is characteristic of traditional anthropology (Horner 2004:17). One reason for the call for collaboration is to “help those who have been marginalized to speak for themselves” (Horner 2004:17). Horner (2004) identifies the shortcomings of this by pointing out logistical problems such as that of time and the likelihood of conflict of interest. A researcher, in trying to adhere to this standard, may seek a collaborator for the sake of collaboration which can easily be counter productive. At that point, it becomes about meeting a standard rather than the interest of the subject. Horner’s solution is that “we need to recognize and confront the material differences at the research site among the researchers and researched rather than assume an ideal of shared interest among equal partners, and we need to recognize the labor all contribute, and factor in the values to be accrued through such labor and how such values are realized, in planning and taking up such inquiry” (2004:22).
Multivocality calls for allowing “the ‘other’ [to] speak in the text rather than being ‘spoken about’ by the ethnographer” so that “perspectives other than the ethnographers’…can be made manifest” (Horner 2004:23). Many ethnographic texts have utilized this method, in essence letting the “other” tell their own narrative. In practice what this entails is “‘writing collaboratively with subjects,…[h]aving subjects read the research to see whether they hear or recognize their voices in the work,…[and] negotiating and modifying those parts of the texts that subjects find questionable or inaccurate’” (Blakeslee in Horner 2004:23). This has primarily been a method by feminist anthropologists in hopes of “unsilencing” their subjects. The problem with multivocality is that again, it is great in theory, but requiring it of all ethnographic texts is unreasonable because of the logistics. Criticism on such standards state that the privilege of the authors who do use multivocality is often overlooked; privilege that afforded the opportunity to utilize such a method, which is not open to everyone (Horner 2004:26).

An example of where logistics prevent use of such a method comes from my own research. On an initial research paper on Samoan Siva for my study abroad program, based on three weeks of research, I had two people, one of which was an informant, read over it in order to make sure I was not misrepresenting anything, as this was a main concern of mine. In the paper was an account of a dancer and choreographer in which he discussed with me his choreographed piece about the tsunami that hit Samoa in 2007. In his account, he told me that creating the dance was therapeutic for him. It was a way for him to explore many emotions he had been feeling after that event, one of which was anger. On reading this account, the director of my program wanted me to take it out, telling me that “anger was not an emotion commonly felt by Samoans.” She had written a book about the tsunami and said that was not a common sentiment she found in interviewing people. At this point I was stuck between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand,
I had received feedback from my informants and was told this may be one way Samoa was being misrepresented. On the other, who was I or this other person to undermine the sentiment felt by this particular dancer. Nothing in the paper was tying his experience to a broader experience felt by most Samoans, however, it could be read that way. This is where some of these strict standards, such as having subjects read the research to make sure they are being accurately represented, breaks down. That feedback can easily be contradictory as there is no uniform experience of an event.

In the end, we must look at intent in these scenarios. If standards such as using collaboration and multivocality are strictly adhered to, it creates a normative discourse to which all anthropologists must ascribe. Anthropologists will be going through a checklist every time they write ethnography. This both ignores situational differences and creates a situation where “letting the people speak for themselves or allowing them agency as actors with their own theoretical perspectives still may not escape the suspicion that the ethnographer is using them for her own ends” (Josephides 1997:29). These new methods that developed out of the post-modern crisis should be viewed as just that, methods. Ones that certain situations lend themselves to and others do not. Critics of the call for multivocality call for the need for ethnographers to recognize “‘when to write (and when to avoid writing) multi-vocal texts,’ rather than assuming that such texts in themselves carry specific value for all” (Kirsch in Horner 2004:26).

The last major change in ethnography after Writing Culture was what has been coined the “reflexive turn.” All ethnographic texts are encouraged (if not mandated) to be reflexive. The purpose of this is “as a professional safeguard against taking one’s own perspective as universal rather than local and personal, and against rewriting the experiences of those researched in one’s own terms” (Horner 2004:27). Horner (2004) recognizes the merits of this ethically, however,
again it creates a normative discourse where “a concern about research practice can be transformed into a demand for a particular kind of product as evidence of professional worthiness” (Horner 2004:27).

In essence it is a band-aid to the problems of ethnography that the 1980s debate brought to the forefront. For some texts, it can be used as a way to qualify everything the author goes on to say. As long as the ethnographer went through the motions of reflexivity in the beginning of the text, they can go on to say anything they want because it has been recognized that this is just their reading of the situation, clouded by their specific historical, political, social situation. At what point does that just become making the ethnographer and anthropology community feel better rather than actually being more responsible to one’s subjects? Also, there is the issue that self-reflexivity is itself constrained by culture: “no attempt at analyzing our assumptions is neutral or value-free; it is always a culturally and politically charged activity” (Kirsch and Ritchie in Horner 2004:28).

What existed before the postmodern crisis was a positivist, objective approach to ethnography. Now, in an attempt to overcome those problems, an equally normative discourse has been created in opposition. While this discourse is in the name of being more ethical and responsible to the subject, it is bogged down in a western notion of professionalism. An ethnographer can use these three criteria as a way to run through the motions to check their text off as a good postmodern ethnography. In other words, these criteria do not guarantee responsibility to the subject and enforcing them ignores what in my opinion was one of the best lessons that came out of this postmodern crisis: everything is situational and must be examined in its own specific context. For this reason, “rather than aiming at the development of a uniform code of professional ethics,” these three criterion should be a jumping off point through which
ethnographers “consider and develop a multiplicity of strategies, each appropriate for different circumstances, to be used by researchers and research participants to define, pursue, and achieve their common projects” (Horner 2004:31).

Critical autoethnography is a type of ethnography that emerged after the postmodern crisis in an attempt to push the idea of self-reflexivity further. What reflexivity seemed to say was that “while we should be aware of our identities and how these may affect our field research, we should continue to work toward scientific observations of people and their cultures” (Dewalt and Dewalt in Hanson 2004:184). While “the reflexive turn cleared the way within ethnography for the ethnographer to reflect on her own subjectivity,” that subjectivity is usually limited to the introduction rather than the body. What autoethnography allows the ethnographer to do is to “do systematic fieldwork and data production about subjects other than themselves, but without concealing what they learn about themselves in the process” (Hanson 2004:184).

In autoethnography, the ethnographers call attention to how their own thoughts are being shaped and reshaped by the research process. This allows the reader to understand why certain decisions are being made and not others, what angle the ethnographer is approaching the research from, and how the ethnographer’s own views and biases are constantly effecting how the data is being read. Since the research process from beginning to end is being read from one very specific lens, that of the ethnographer, this is important so that the reader can understand why the data is being read in that particular way. Rather then qualifying the research at the beginning and then writing in a seemingly objective way, the reader is constantly reminded of the researcher’s positionality and reminded that this is but one way to read the situation. Therefore, this method encourages and allows for other interpretations. Again, this should not a
method demanded of all postmodern ethnography, but one that pushes the ideas and shortcomings of reflexivity further when the situation allows.

My Methodology

Autoethnography is what I have chosen to employ in writing this thesis. It is specifically relevant to my thesis because as I explained in the beginning, this thesis has been clearly influenced and shaped by shifts in my thinking. I believe that by making the reader constantly aware of that context, they will be able to see why I interpret aspects of Samoan culture in the way I do. This way it is blatantly clear that my claims are far from ontological “truths” about the way things are in Samoa, but rather a product of my own historical, political, and cultural context.

I also confront the ethical dilemmas I had throughout this process through my focus on lived experiences and emphasis on “possibilities” over conclusions. The information my informants thought was important enough to share with me, I share with you. I try to frame that information exactly how they framed it. I try not to hide contradictions, not to make judgments, and to let the information speak for itself. When I engage with theory, I continuously bring it into conversation with the lived experiences of my informants. I believe that for this thesis, the most productive way to engage with the theory is to ask: “what are the impacts of the academic debates that exist?” If their impact is unclear, I question the usefulness of the analysis. I have no interest for my work to only have use in contributing to debates that stay in a purely academic sphere; that do not have implications beyond those conversations. Otherwise, the research would only be for me. I would be the one paying lip service by being reflexive in the beginning and then going on to make claims in order to contribute to the canon. To me that would be unethical, not useful, and something that has no business being written. I believe this thesis has merits
because the wonderful people who shared their stories with me in Samoa wanted their culture to be shared. I believe using that information to poke holes in the existing literature, rethinking larger taken-for-granted notions, and thinking about possible implications on the lives of my subjects is more important than drawing conclusions or providing solutions. Ultimately, I hope it will help break down texts that do produce typifications, “truths,” and bounded categories.

My Research

This information for this thesis is based on observations and twenty-five interviews conducted over a thirteen-week period from 19 April 2012 to 26 July 2012. I interviewed dance choreographers, dance instructors, dance students, dancers in the tourism industry, owners of beach *fales* (type of hotel), lecturers, high chiefs, and other village people. Informants were found based on recommendations and happenstance. Informants were contacted through either email, phone calls, or random drop-ins. Scheduled interviews were conducted at a place of the interviewee’s choice. All of the interviews followed a basic rubric (see appendix 1) but deviated based on the answers given. No interview followed the rubric exactly. Most interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Four interviews were not recorded at the request of the interviewees and for those copious notes were taken. All interviews were conducted in English as I only had a rudimentary understanding of Samoan. Observations included dances performed at *fiafias* at hotels, dance and farewell *fiafia* in the homestay village of Lotofaga, a dance practice in Apia, a dance performance in Suva, Fiji, and a dance put on for me by Vaimosa Primary School.
Chapter 3: Performing Culture

*To me dancing is like an art, when you look at a dance, it tells you a lot about someone’s personality or one’s culture or about a country. It’s like a painting...you see a lot through dancing, you can tell what’s happening through the actions and music.*

*(Teuila Keil, dance instructor & choreographer)*

**Brief overview of the Anthropology of Dance**

Dance anthropology has been an emerging subfield of anthropology since the 1960s, gaining momentum in the mid-1980s (Reed 1998). Adrienne L. Kaeppler (1978), recognizing the small scope the field had in 1978, argued that “an adequate description of a culture should place the same emphasis on dance as that given it by the members of society” (32). She recognized a fundamental hole in anthropological study up until this point because of the lack of attention given to dance, which for many societies is an integral part of their culture. She also saw great potential for dance to illuminate and bring insights into aspects of a society’s culture that may have been inaccessible before or not well understood.

The early work in dance anthropology were characterized by more positivist studies, such as that of Lomax (1968), who studied dance in order to test the hypothesis that “danced movement is patterned reinforcement of the habitual movement patterns of each culture or culture area” (Lomax in Kaeppler 1978:42). In the 70s, work mainly looked at dance’s relation to social and political structures in a given society (Hanna 1972, Royce 1972, Kaeppler 1976 in Kaeppler 1978). In the 80s and 90s, dance anthropologists started analyzing themes such as the effect of colonialism on indigenous dance, dance and its appropriation as national identity, dance and gender, and the impacts of globalization on dance (Reed 1998). These studies tended to base their findings off studies of the structures and choreographies of the dances themselves rather than the lived experiences of the dancers. For example, Yvonne Daniel (1995) studied *rumba*, a Cuban dance. She explored gender roles through analysis of the gendered nature of different
movements. She argued that “male dances use dance as an arena for exhibiting strength, courage, and bravado, while women’s dance is generally softer, subtler, more cautious, and graceful (Reed 1998:517).

**Dance Anthropology and Samoa**

There is very little literature on Samoan *siva* both within and outside the field of anthropology. The work that has been done is characteristic of the type of ethnography the “crisis of representation” criticized. One of the only academic texts written on Samoan siva is a chapter titled “The Role of the Dance,” in Margaret Meade’s highly contested book *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). The chapter is a measly twelve pages in which Meade gives a positivist account of dance in Samoa. It is unclear where she is getting her information, as she speaks matter-of-factly about the way dance is for all Samoans. She has two main claims, of which she gives little evidence to back up. Her first claim is that dance in Samoa is extremely individualistic, stating that the dance “is a genuine orgy of aggressive individualistic exhibitionism” (Meade 1928:118). Her second is that dance reduces the “threshold of shyness” in children since “the limelight is regarded as inevitable” (Meade 1928:118). She sees this effect more in boys than girls, with her evidence being that “fifteen and sixteen-year-old boys dance with a charm and a complete lack of self-consciousness” (Meade 1928:119).

Her sweeping generalizations make it unclear how she knows this information, why she believes it is can be generalized, and what the impact of this information is. Margaret Meade wrote during the time where ethnographers did not place themselves in the text. The style of the time emphasized “objective” analysis and “holistic representation,” which attempts to “contextualize elements of culture and to make systematic connections among them” (Marcus and Fischer 1999:23). Shore (1982), the second of three anthropologists to discuss Samoan *siva,*
also engages in “holistic representation.” His main argument is that in Samoa the “dance floor…is a kind of microcosm of the larger village arena” (Shore 1982:260). He argues that the distinction between center and periphery of the dance floor mirrors the center and periphery of the village. Throughout his analysis, Shore consistently refers to Samoan culture as if it is a stagnant, definable, ontological entity that is the same for all Samoans and that this specific culture is mirrored and reproduced in dance. Again, no implications for this type of analysis are given.

The most recent mention of Samoan dance in anthropological work is in a 1998 work by Jeannette Marie Mageo titled *Theorizing Self in Samoa: Emotions, Gender, and Sexualities*. Mageo, like Meade, argues that dance is a space where girls can “explore an individual way of being a self” (1998:202). She explains some of the differences between pre-colonial dance and post-colonial, arguing that colonialism made dancing more individualistic. Lived experience of the dancers is completely absent from her analysis. Her claims come from analyzing the dance moves themselves as well as reappropriated evidence from Meade. All of these texts use limited amounts of information to make sweeping claims, with little explanation of how those conclusions were drawn. None of them look at how dance functions in Samoan society or how Samoans themselves conceptualize the dance. This chapter will attempt to provide this context that is currently absent from the literature. Through the insights and information presented to me by my informant’s, I will show how dance is conceptualized as an embodiment of Samoan cultural practices and values.

**Brief Overview of Dance in Samoa**

The Samoan word *siva* literally means “song accompanying a dance.” Even though the term is now used to simply mean dance, in Samoa “dance is intrinsically no different from
Many people believe that everyone in Samoa knows how to dance, or *siva*, from birth. There is a widespread belief that “if you don’t know how to dance Samoan *siva*, you are not Samoan” (dance instructor and choreographer). In multiple interviews with students and dancers, when asked how they learned to dance, they replied some variation of “you kind of just know.” Asking this question was often off-putting to informants. It was as though I was asking them how they learned to eat. It was obvious that dancing was thought of as innate knowledge. Most informants found it hard to pinpoint an age that they had learned, with answers varying from two to ten years old. During one interview the interviewee, a man who works for the Samoan Studies Department at the National University of Samoa, stated: “you don’t usually ask ‘do you know how to dance?’ It’s a gift. All Samoan people know by the time they are six or ten years old.”

It was clear that there was no singular moment they had learned, no specific memory of being taught. When pushed further, informants identified that they learned mostly from watching and observing other family members when they were young and eventually just copied the moves. Some informants identified primary school as one of the places they learned how to dance, but it was evident that informant’s were never quite certain where they had learned. One informant stated: “when I was studying in primary school, that’s where I studied and learned the Samoan *siva*.” Later in the interview she said: “they taught it at primary school but I learned mostly from our family and the environment.” In yet another answer she said: “I can see other girls doing it, the older ones, that’s where I learned the arts of dancing.” She was extremely fluid in her answers, not seeing one as a contradiction of the other; she just had many different memories of “learning” to dance.

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1 While little reference to song will be made in this thesis, it should be understood that the two are assumed to always accompany each other.

2 Samoans often emphasize that learning via observation is characteristic of their culture.
While there was no one person who taught my informants how to dance, the only three answers were family, observing others, and primary school. While I was in Samoa, I did a homestay where I lived with a Samoan family in a rural village in Samoa. I had a homestay sister named Ana who was one and a half years old. While she does not know how to dance yet, she was always singing and she would take her older sister’s cell phone and walk around with it up to her ear playing music. Often her family would tell her, “sīva, Ana, sīva,” and she would do a little dance. Her family’s laughter would spur her on to move more. Moments such as these are why Ana will grow up knowing how to dance. There is no one single moment, or lesson, but rather Samoans grow up with dance being another part of life, similar to learning how to walk or talk.

Although some of my informants believe this knowledge is being lost in younger generations, which I will discuss later, dancing can still be seen almost everywhere in Samoa whether it is in the villages, the schools, churches, or the hotels. Many interviewees expressed that Samoan sīva represents the culture of Samoa. Traditional dance was defined by one student dancer as simply “our culture” because, as another interviewee put it, “when you’re dancing, it’s telling Samoan culture.” For many Samoans, dance is an embodiment of the country and it permeates all walks of life. A brief overview of how dance functions in Samoan life will help give some necessary context.

In village life, people will usually perform sīva Samoa to open and/or close all meetings and ceremonies. Fiafas (parties) are thrown when the village has guests from overseas, for which many different dances are performed. Dance is also a big part of birthday and wedding celebrations, where the bride will perform her own sīva. Another common use of dance in village affairs is to raise money. This is explained by one informant in the following statement:
“Sunday schools will have fundraising, a little fundraising. That’s where the children will have to perform siva to entertain people and get some money. Sometimes they have the siva called the tausala, where each different family will have a tausala or one member of the family, especially the girl, will perform the dance, and the family will put in money. It’s more or less like a competition.”

At the end, the family who earned the most money for their tausala (another term for taualuga) is recognized, and all proceeds go to the church. The women’s committee of the village also sometimes uses this form of competition in order to raise money for various projects. Examples, given by interviewees, were for the village water system or the beautification of the village.

Children grow up dancing in school functions and youth groups at church. For example, “prize givings” and “culture day” are events that most secondary schools have. Prize giving occurs on the last day of school and, as explained by one informant, is “where the teachers will announce who has come first in the class, second, something like that. After the prize giving, then the teachers and school committee will call upon all those prize givers to come up for the siva.” Those students will perform in front of the parents and the rest of the school. Culture day occurs once every year and is a celebration of Samoan traditions. For the event, the school divides into four houses or groups, which compete. Part of the competition is a dance competition. For some of my younger informants, culture day was one of the first events they remembered dancing for growing up.

Church youth groups, which are a big part of village life, are also a main place where youth dance; in this setting it is mostly dancing for and about God. White Sunday is another first formal event that children dance in. White Sunday is a holiday in Samoa that occurs in October and is a day dedicated to the celebration of childhood. Children perform dances, receive presents, and are often served their meal first (they are normally served last). In addition, the youth group
usually puts on dances for all major holidays: Easter, mother’s day, father’s day, Christmas day, New Years day, etc. In one interviewee’s village, on “Easter day, the message will usually be Jesus died to forgive all the sins” and so the youth group would perform to deliver that message.

Since dance is a part of life at home, church, and daily village affairs, many interviewees felt that it is impossible to think of dance and Samoan culture as separate from each other. One informant states: “it’s a complete upbringing thing…it is so inter-meshed in the culture like it’s just, I can’t even talk about it without it being…you can’t even say it’s important because it’s so much a part of everyday.”

**Dance: An Embodiment of Samoa- Daily Life**

Dancing is a vital part of Samoan culture and as we just saw, plays a role in everyday life. According to Allan Alo, a dancer and choreographer, Samoan dance “mirrors society and whatever society is at the time: sometimes satirical, sometimes celebration, sometimes just a social comment on what’s happening in society.” The conceptualization of dance as a mirror of society is common in dance anthropology of non-western cultures. For example, Kealiinohomoku (1967) writes about how Hopi dance “mirrors” everyday life in that the “gestures…reveal traditional everyday activities…include[ing] grinding corn and hunting activities” (1967:344). Samoan *siva* also embodies the life and culture of the Samoan people.

Similarly to dance of the Hopi, dance movements in Samoa replicate daily life. Moves that constantly reoccur in Samoan dances often represent everyday activities such as collecting the coconut or the breadfruit from the tree, two staples in the Samoan diet. An example is the *sāsā*, a dance performed sitting down to the beat of a drum. There are four beats per movement and the dance can contain “a lot of cultural aspects of [Samoan’s] lives in it: rowing the canoe,

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3 The *sāsā* has been defined as “a male dance accompanied only by percussion instruments” and “a quick seated dance with intricate, precise arm movements” (McClean 1999:162). All *sāsā*’s I watched, including one my group performed, were performed by both men and women.
doing the *umu*⁴, the women cleaning the garden, or the women cleaning the house” (Dancer & Pacific Outreach Coordinator). As part of my study abroad program, SIT spring 2012, our group learned a *sāsā* to perform during our home stay. Our *sāsā* specifically contained moves representing the preparation of breadfruit for the *umu*: picking the breadfruit from the tree, scraping it, pounding it, and ultimately eating it.

I also had the opportunity to observe a *sāsā* performed for me by year 7 (age 10-12) at Vaimosa Primary school in Apia, Samoa. Figure 1 below shows the starting position of the dance, with the boys and girls seated head faced down, awaiting the beat of the drum. The theme of this particular *sāsā* was making coconut cream. The girls used the boys’ knees to mimic the motion of husking the coconut (see figure 2), which is usually done on a wooden pole, carved with a sharp point, and planted firmly in the ground. They then used the boys’ heads to mimic shredding the coconut (see figure 3) and would throw away the imaginary empty husk (see figure 4). The boys then imitated the motion of squeezing out the coconut shreds, which creates the cream, into a “bowl,” which in this case was emulated by the girls’ holding out their arms to form a circle (see figures 5 & 6). In an interview after this dance was performed, the choreographer, who is the performing arts instructor at the school, told me that these types of dances are sometimes used to teach the kids how to make Samoan foods. Instead of explaining it verbally, he teaches them the dance, which essentially shows the steps involved in the preparation of various foods.

An important ceremony in Samoan society is the *ava* ceremony⁵, which is used for special occasions such as to welcome guests or for chiefly meetings. The importance of the

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⁴ An *umu* is an earth oven. Rocks are heated up by fire. The fire is then put out and food, wrapped either in tin foil or leaves, is placed on top. The food is then covered by palm fronds and left to steam.

⁵ Kava is “a fermented beverage traditionally consumed ritually or ceremonially (though sometimes merely for its euphoric and soporific effects) in Melanesia, New Guinea, and Polynesia. The drink is made from the dried and
ceremony is emphasized in the following statement: “no constitutive gathering, no important undertaking, no valediction, no consequential ceremony, no momentous event… is complete and worthy the name without the kava ceremony” (Tuvale 2006). The entire process of this ceremony is often represented in dance. Various moves represent everything from the preparation of the *ava* to the preparer throwing the strainer behind herself to be caught and wrung out before returned to her.

The close mirroring of daily life in dance moves is explained further in an account from Fiona Collins, a Lecturer of Performing Arts at the National University of Samoa. She states that one can watch an *ava* ceremony or a woman weaving, or any other aspect of Samoan culture. If all of the sound surrounding the activity is blocked out and music added, it would become a dance. Then and there, one is watching Samoan *siva* because that is how close the dances are to daily activities. These types of movements are evident in both the *sāsā* and the *mā‘ulu‘ulu*. While the term *siva Samoa* refers to dance broadly, it is often used interchangeably with *mā‘ulu‘ulu* because it is the most common dance. In fact, only one informant ever referred to it

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ground root of the *kava* plant mixed in water” (Hays 1991:398). Kava ceremonies are used to welcome important gusts and mark important social events (Hays 1991).
Figure 3

Figure 4
by this formal name. Others simply called mā’ulu’ulu either Samoan siva, siva Samoa, or ‘traditional dance.’ The mā’ulu’ulu has been described in text as a seated dance, but in my experience it is a group dance performed standing and has a narrative arc, with the movements reflecting the words of the song accompanying it (see figures 7-10).

In one interview, my informant broke down the individual hand movements, and explained how they all come from everyday life. There is a basic hand movement in the traditional dance where the fingers are pressed together and form the shape of a long cup (see figure 7). The dancer then rotates the wrist, bringing the hands in and out in a circular motion. This informant, who works for the National University of Samoa in the Samoan Studies Department, told me that this comes from the movement Samoans make when they beckon for someone to come to them. He identified other actions as emulating wringing out laundry, making the coconut cream, and actions of the ava ceremony.

There is also a common movement of slapping oneself that appears in both the traditional dance and the fa’ataupati (slap dance). I was told that “when you slap, when someone asks you for your hand or to be a friend,” and if you don’t want to, this is one of the common actions, common reply whether you are a boy or girl. Or if you want someone to have a job for you and if he or she doesn’t want you, you just [slaps self], this means, this shows how tough you are, tough man.” He also stated that the slap dance has the same philosophy. When talking about this dance in particular, he gave an additional explanation, which has to do with mosquitoes. In the

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6 In a description of a mā’ulu’ulu performed at The Fourth Festival of Pacific Arts in 1985, it was said: “The mā’ulu’ulu is a dance by men and women while singing in chorus. Although it is basically danced in a seated position, in this recording there are also some dancers who kneel and some who stand” (Tomoaki no date). Another author in his description of the dance said it “is a seated dance…performers tend to be young, and the dance itself may have originated as a missionary approved substitute for the pūula” (McLean 1999:160-162).
7 The term ‘friend,’ which is the direct translation of the word uo, is usually used to refer to a significant other rather than a platonic friend.
slap dance, which is traditionally and in my experience only performed by men\(^8\), the movements consist of slapping oneself and clapping one’s hands together in rapid succession. It is similar to step dancing. He explained that slapping oneself comes from the act of slapping away a mosquito to chase it away. Slapping one’s hands together in the air emulates trying to kill the mosquito when it flies in the air. It is unclear whether this is a widely held interpretation or if there are multiple interpretations of these movements.

Dance: An Embodiment of Samoa—Cultural Values

Beyond showing aspects of daily life in Samoa, *siva* also embodies various cultural values of Samoa in how the dance is performed. It shows “what you do in life as a Samoan” (Tanu, son of a high chief, choreographs dances for his family owned beach *fale*\(^9\)). For example, there is a strong culture of men protecting women and this same informant explained that this is why “when the ladies dance, they [men] dance besides them; it’s like protecting them from other people trying to disturb them.” In recent decades, a man can often be seen running to lie down on his stomach for the woman dancing in the *taualuga*\(^{10}\) (last and most important dance) to step on (see figure 11). The reason stated for this dance move, by Tanu who choreographs dances for the beach *fale* his family owns, is that “she’s so special, she’s a queen of our village...you have to make her stand out.” The woman who usually dances in the *taualuga* is called the *taupo* and is

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\(^8\) The *fa’ataupati* has been defined as “a standing men’s slap dance. The only accompaniment is the highly audible sound of body percussion as the men slap their sides, chests, inner arms and other parts of their bodies with open palms” (McLean 1999:160). This explanation was my experience of the dance as well. This dance was commonly performed at hotels.

\(^9\) Beach *fales* are accommodations for tourists; this particular one is on the island of Savai’i and is run by the family of the High Chief of the village.

\(^{10}\) *Taualuga* has been defined as “the last dance or finale of a series. It is danced, according to Moyle, by a small group of people flanking a high-ranking person of either sex. It is not named in early literature and, on this account, may be of comparatively recent origin” (McLean 1999:161). This is further explained by Grattan: “This type of dancing consists of arm, hand, finger, leg and foot movements, largely in one position” (Grattan in McLean 1999:163).
Figure 7—Mā’ulu’ulu

Figure 8--Mā’ulu’ulu
Figure 9—Mā’ulu’ulu

Figure 10—Mā’ulu’ulu
either the daughter of a chief or someone high up in the community. She dances alone in the center while men dance on the periphery (see figure 12-13). Traditionally, the mānaia (eldest single son of a high chief) can also dance the tauualuga. The only time I saw a male take on this role was during the dance performed for me at Vaimosa Primary school where the performing arts instructor danced a tauualuga to close off the performance (see figure 14-15).

Other texts that have also discussed that those who dance around the taupo are meant to make her stand out. Shore’s (1982) informants describe the ai’aiuli (which is danced by those dancing on the periphery of the taupo) as crazy dancing, or “clowning,” performed in order to make the taupo’s dance look nice (259). Shore explains that the logic is such that “the wilder and more disordered the periphery, the more graceful and ordered the center appears by contrast” (Shore 1982:260). Mageo (1998) speaks about the tauualuga and ai’aiuli as well, arguing that while Samoans explain the “clowning” to be done in order to make the taupo stand out, it is instead an excuse to engage in “the less than respectful segments of Joking Nights,” which were banned by missionaries, under the guise of a “Christian style of dancing”11 (Mageo 1998:198). While the ai’aiuli never came up in my research, I did witness this “clowning” on multiple occasions in the village of Lotofaga, at hotel performances, and when Vaimosa Primary put on their dance for me (the kids engaged in clowning as the Performing Arts Instructor performed the tauualuga, see figure 14-15). While I am not sure if Mageo’s analysis is correct, the ai’aiuli did appear to be purposefully comical and done in jest. Max thrust his pelvis to the music multiple times at the end of his tauualuga (see figure 16), sparking laughter from the children because it is

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11 Dance in Samoa underwent many changes while they were under colonial rule. Missionaries tried to ban dance altogether. As a reaction to this, Samoans changed and renamed certain aspects of dance to make it more acceptable to the missionaries. One of the main changes was in promiscuity; pre-colonial dance “featured sexual display and elopements” whereas post-colonial “siva featured village princesses, who became symbols of the ideal of female premarital chastity that missionaries promoted” (Mageo 1998:200).
uncharacteristic as the dance is usually extremely graceful. While I was extremely confused by
the movement at the time, it was possibly his way of engaging in “clowning” with the students.

Other cultural values are embodied by dance as well. One dancer describes that dance aided
her understanding of Samoan culture, especially the cultural value of respect. Samoans are taught
to respect their dance and understand its cultural significance (student dancer). Respect for elders
is a cultural aspect represented in the dance itself. For example, one dancer stated that in his
village “you dance slow and don’t sing too loud” as a way to respect elders. The emphasis on a
slow pace in the village is often contrasted to the fast pace dancing that occurs for tourists in the
hotels, which will be addressed later.

A main cultural aspect that was made strikingly clear through my studies of Samoan siva was
Samoan’s emphasis on hospitality. While this aspect of the culture is not embodied in the dance
performance itself, it is a big part of the dance culture. The dance performance I discussed earlier
performed by Vaimosa Primary School was a performance put on just for me. I went to the
school to see if I could interview the principle about how dance is used at her school. She was
busy at the time and asked if I could come back on Friday. She said she would get some teachers
together whom I could interview as well. When I arrived for our meeting that Friday, a flower lei
was immediately placed around my neck and startled, I was brought into the year 7 class and
introduced. I was asked to introduce myself in Samoan, after which I was told the students would
perform for me. They left the class to change out of their uniforms and into outfits appropriate
for dance. This included pulatasi’s\textsuperscript{12} for the girls and a dress lavalava\textsuperscript{13} with no shirt for the boys
(refer to figures 1-6).

\textsuperscript{12} Made out of cotton, a floor length skirt and matching top, formal wear.

\textsuperscript{13} A lavalava is a piece of cloth worn as a skirt; daily wear for both Samoan men and women. Lavalava’s are usually
casual wear but dress lavalavas are made of thicker, more expensive material and are similar in formality to dress
pants for men. It is what most men wear to church.
Figure 11- Boy ran in for the *Taupo* to step on; Tanu Beach Fale

Figure 12- *Taupo* dancing the *Tauluga*, Tanu Beach Fale
Figure 13- Taupo dancing the Taualuga, Tanu Beach Fale

Figure 14- Max performing the taualuga; children dancing the ai’aiuli to either side
Figure 15—Max performing the *taualuga*; children dancing the *ai’aiuli* to either side

Figure 16—Max “clowning”
They set up a chair outside for me and poured me a cup of *cocoa samoa*\(^\text{14}\). By the time the kids were set up and ready to perform, it seemed as though the entire school had gathered around to watch. Awkwardly, I was the only one sat down in a chair with the teachers and faculty standing and other students sitting on the floor. The students then performed the *sāsā* described above and the girls performed a *mā ’ulu ’ulu*. Afterwards, Max, the choreographer performed a *taualuga*, as discussed above. Once it was over, the students went back to class and I sat down with Max and two other teachers to start our interview.

When I left the primary school, I was stunned. I was so flattered that the school would go through all that trouble for my research. Everyone was so willing to help and put on the performance because they wanted to share their culture with me. In the interview afterwards, I found out that entertaining visitors from overseas is one of the main occasions for which the students perform. This reminded me instantly of my homestay experience in the village of Lotofaga where my study abroad group stayed for a week. The night before we left to return back to the other side of the island, we had a *fiafia*. It was here that we performed our *sāsā* as well as a few other dances, which I will go into more detail about later. Originally I had thought that we were merely participating in a common village event. When I returned to the village later on my own to stay with my homestay family one more time before returning to the states, I interviewed my homestay mother about dance. During this interview I found out that the village holds these *fiafias* as a farewell party to visitors from overseas. The women’s committee\(^\text{15}\) practices virtually all week for the dances they perform at this event. For many of the girls in my program, their family’s also spent the week sewing them a custom made *pulatasi*. At the end of

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\(^{14}\) Samoa’s version of hot chocolate, made from Samoan cocoa beans which are roasted, peeled, crushed, and mixed with hot water and sugar.

\(^{15}\) “Women’s committees exist today in all communities, playing an important role in community affairs as an unofficial arm of local government” (Hays 1991:288).
the *fiafia*, there was a gift giving ceremony where the village as a whole presented our group with gifts including *lavalavas*, handbags, jewelry, and other small trinkets. The entire event was created for us.

At first, this use of dance surprised me, but upon further reflection it made complete sense. I cannot emphasize enough how much Samoa’s culture is based on hospitality. One of my experiences over the summer, volunteering for an NGO, made that crystal clear for me. This NGO, called Women in Business Development Inc. (WIBDI), works on various projects to help families make and save a cash income. One of the projects is a microfinance project. The team in charge of this makes home visits every few weeks and collects money the family has saved up over those weeks. The families have an account with the NGO where that money is kept. I went along in the car as Gloria and Ola, the leaders of the project, paid visits to the families. At the first three stops, the women they were trying to see were not home. I felt a little frustrated because we had already been driving for an hour with nothing to show for it. What immediately struck me was that Ola and Gloria did not seem the least bit fazed. I thought it was weird that so many people would miss these appointments. What I found out later that day was that there were no appointments. Ola and Gloria informed me that they do not tell their clients when they are going to drop in. This is because if the families knew when they were coming, they would prepare a big meal as is custom when a family has guests. Since these are already impoverished families, WIBDI does not want them going beyond their means to accommodate them. It would defeat the purpose the organization is trying to achieve. As a result, out of the eight stops we made that day, only three were successful.

I witnessed the generosity Ola and Gloria were referring to throughout the trips I made with the NGO. On one stop, when we arrived, a man and his son were doing some work around the
house. As soon as he saw us, the man yelled at his son to stop what he was doing and get us some coconut juice. He immediately dropped the wood he was holding and went to get three coconuts, which he prepared for us to drink. On a stop later that day, it was pouring rain. When we pulled up to the house, a teenage boy ran out to the car with an umbrella to escort Ola to the house. Another day, at three of the stops we were served full meals. The family would often yell to each other in Samoan and eventually one of the children would come out with some dishes. We were always encouraged to eat as much as we could. If we managed to finish our whole plate, the client was always extremely pleased. Ola and Gloria told me that if they knew we were coming it would be even more elaborate because they would cook something specifically for us. This kind of hospitality is so embedded in the culture of Samoa that it only makes sense that it is made manifest through dance as well.
Chapter 4: Samoan Siva in an Increasingly Global World

My apprehensions about westernization and how it might be “corrupting” Samoa influenced my choice to look into how dance functions within the tourist industry. I thought it would give me some prime examples of how “tradition” was changing and being negatively appropriated. What I found out later in my research is that people believe changes to siva are occurring everywhere, rather than exclusively within the tourist industry. Located in all of these conversations were assumptions about “tradition,” “culture,” and “authenticity.” These assumptions were similar to the ones I had been making at the beginning of my trip. Through looking over these interviews and relevant literature, I began to break down and problematize these assumptions.

When I first started reading literature on these topics, I encountered authors, such as Schechner (1990), who argue that the desire to preserve tradition is an inherently western notion. Schechner questions: “But is ‘purity’ of any kind obtainable or even desirable? Could not such a desire be an apology for what cannot be undone, namely colonialism?…is not this apology, far from a correction, a continuation of colonial thinking?” (Schechner 1990:56). I believe that the way I viewed tradition while I was in Samoa was this type of colonial thinking. I was using this western notion of tradition which privileges “early or presumed original elements,” “an investment in singularity,” and “a denial of multiplicity” (Schechner 1990:33). I find it important to criticize authors that do the same because the desire to preserve “tradition” creates a cycle in which in order to preserve tradition, one must define tradition therefore reducing it to a definable singular entity. Those definitions are usually created by western scholars, who tend to reduce
“plural styles or traditions… to one ‘best,’ ‘original,’ ‘primary’ model or ideal from which the others derive or deviate,” rather than the indigenous community (Schechner 1990:33).

These constricting definitions create the tradition. This is especially problematic with dance because, as Thomas (2003) argues, “dance is a performed art constituted through the embodied practices of the performers on each and every occasion of its performance. As such, it cannot be fixed or located in any one performance” (2003:123). Therefore to create a definition or representation of exactly what constitutes “traditional” or “authentic” dance would be extremely difficult because no singular performance will be representative of the whole. What makes it even more difficult is “dance, unlike other arts, does not leave a record of its existence in the form of a tangible object, like a painting, a script or a musical score. Rather, as it comes into being in performance, so it is gone” (Thomas 2003:121). So there is not necessarily anything to hold on to.

However, the research presented in this chapter presents a side that is not taken into account in the literature. As I will show, the desire to retain and preserve “traditions,” even if the meaning of that term is contingent on the person, does exist for indigenous peoples in Samoa. This put me at a standstill where on the one hand I was finally overcoming my own ignorance in my desire to preserve “tradition” but on the other, the idea that “tradition” was an inherently western notion and should therefore be rejected as a colonialist project, was also not completely true. For this reason, this chapter attempts to lay out those contradictions and find productive ways to analyze them. I feel that rather than get caught in an unproductive standstill of which side is right, it is necessary to instead look at why these categories are used, what they actually mean, and how they can be reconceptualized.
Dance as Entertainment: Effects of Tourism on Samoan Siva

Samoan’s economy depends significantly on tourism and dance plays a central role in the marketing of tourism. Most hotels and beach fale accommodations have fiafia nights where dancers perform for the hotel guests. Usually this occurs after dinner is served and the guests sit and watch as the dancers take stage. These can be either formal, where there is a strict divide between audience and performers or informal, where chairs are casually pulled up and at the end guests join the dancers to learn some of the moves. In my experience, the dance groups are comprised of the owners’ family or hotel employees, rather than an outside group. The dancers perform a variety of dances, usually including a sāsā, mā’ulu’ulu, fa’ataupati, and less commonly a siva afi (fire dance). Many interviewees believe that the tourist market is driving the future of dance and what it is becoming in Samoa, meaning that as Samoan siva changes within the tourist industry, greater implications may result for the art of Samoan siva as a whole.

There are many different views about the place of dance in this aspect of life in Samoa, both positive and negative. Located in these apprehensions are larger taken-for-granted assumptions about “tradition” and “authenticity.”

Samoan is often known as a country that has held fast to its cultural traditions despite colonization and westernization. Many people use the term “samoanize” to refer to how Samoa appropriates elements from the western world and adapts them to their traditions. Most interviewees echoed this sentiment in an almost unanimous belief that the dances performed in the tourist industry do not stray far from their traditional form. One informant states that in Samoa, “they are so anal to the culture” so what one sees in the hotels “is fairly true to what you see out in the village.” The dances are not viewed as a bastardization of their traditional form, as some believe has happened with dances such as hula in Hawai’i: “in the hotel version of the
"hula, the sacredness of the dance has completely evaporated…the purpose is entertainment for profit" (Trask 1999:140).

However, dancers across the board, academics, students, and dancers in the hotels, report that dance for tourists is “tailored to that kind of audience.” By tailored, they are mainly referring to the faster pace of the dance and music, which dancers and choreographers at four different tourist establishments recognized as the main, if only, difference between dance in the hotels and in the village. One dancer at Aggie Greys Hotel in Apia, who has been dancing there for over twenty years, explained that their dances used to be slower, but after receiving feedback from the tourists, they switched to a faster pace to please the tourists.

Since the movements of the dance themselves remain the same, most informants did not view the tourist dance as inherently different or problematic. For example, Java, who dances for her family’s beach fale, says the dances have the same meaning to her whether she is performing in her village or for the tourists. In this case, the beach fale is located directly across the road from her village in Savai’i. The younger members of the family walk across the street and perform as they would in their village, albeit faster and usually with the accompaniment of a stereo. It makes sense that conceptualizing of these dances differently would be extremely difficult. Fiona Collins, a New Zealand born Samoan, believes that “so long as you have the right form and integrity to look after the culture, then it’s okay to perform.”

Allan Alo, Pacific Outreach Coordinator for Polynesia, sees the issue differently. Allan, who used to dance for tourists himself, sees the change in context itself as something that necessitates the dances as different. He states: “dance is only perceived to be understood by people who are from the context that that dance was made.” Since “there’s no time for people to come and watch a dance, for example, and get a full history, a talking lecture on it,” the sole
purpose of the dance instead shifts to being something “that is fun, you know, energetic.” He goes on to say: “although they [tourist dancers] try to maintain the essence of what it is all about, they kind of, compromise is such a big word, such a harsh word, but they kind of appropriate it to attract the audience, the tourism audience.” For this reason, Allan believes the dance in this context has no depth.

Another informant, also against “tailoring” the dance, states: “the Samoans try to…they think that when palagis (term used to refer to foreigners) come to Samoa they have to provide the service more like palagis.” She believes that Samoa “should stick to the old one, to the old way of dancing rather than trying to entertain the palagis by using some of the European stuff.” By ‘European stuff,’ she was referring particularly to the use of European music that occurs in some hotels.

So why exactly did informants believe that the dances performed in the tourist industry are almost identical to what is performed in the village? The majority was merely considering the movements and form of the dance itself. Since the movements remain the same, that was viewed as the dance remaining the same. However, only a few informants considered how context can have an impact on what is actually being performed. A look at relevant literature in the field of dance anthropology is important to consider here. Debates about the decontextualization and appropriation of indigenous dances are prevalent in the field. There are those who believe decontextualization has a large impact on the dance itself, shifting meanings and ultimately altering authenticity. On the other hand, some argue that authenticity is relative and therefore there is no reason to consider dance in the tourist industry inauthentic.
Sarkar-Munshi (2010) argues against the appropriation of indigenous dance forms because of the harm that results from their “decontextualization” (26). She gives an example of classical dances in India:

removing it from its context means taking away most of its functions and leaving it with only one overwhelming task, that of entertaining the audience. This in turn makes it absolutely necessary for the form to be attractive enough to do the job of entertaining to the hilt. Thus arises the need to gift-wrap the performance in what is ‘acceptable,’ ‘attractive,’ ‘presentable,’ and ‘refined’ to its new bigger, varied, and cosmopolitan audience (Sarkar-Munshi 2010:31).

Sarkar-Munshi uses a distinction between “classical” dances and “neo-classical” to distinguish between traditional indigenous Indian dances and those that have been “appropriated” and “restructured.” The term “neo-classical” is used to “acknowledge[] the fact that they have all been restructured and reconstructed in order to fit a model, unknowingly prepared to cater to a group of norms built to fit western performative models as well as Sanskritic aesthetic requirements” (Sarkar Munshi 2010:34). While not using the terminology, she essentially argues that the “classical” form is authentic while “neo-classical” is a westernized version.

This reading can be ascribed to what is happening in Samoa. To Sarkar-Munshi, the change in pace that occurs in the tourism industry in Samoa would be an example of this “gift-wrapping,” and fitting the dance into “western performative models.” The dance in this context seemingly has no function, as it would in the village context when performed as part of a ritual.

Adrienne Kaeppler, who is known for her work on dance in Tonga, has also looked at the Pacific more generally and argues points similar to Sarkar-Munshi. In her article Polynesian Dance as ‘Airport Art,’ she divides Pacific dance into 4 categories: traditional, evolved traditional, folk, and airport art (Kaeppler 1977). Essentially, increasing from left to right, these are categories of how “westernized” the traditional form of the dance has become. What makes a
dance considered “airport art” is when the fact that the dance is being performed becomes more important than the content and poetry of the dance. Therefore, “although based on traditional dance movement,” they are “removed…from their original context,” and have been made “into a form of entertainment” (Kaeppler 1977:76). Kaeppler argues that in this process “deeper meanings of these dances have been lost” and “what remains is what Euro-American taste has found acceptable and marketable” (1977:77).

As the basis for her argument, Kaeppler traces some of the changes to dance that have occurred in Tahiti, Hawaii, New Zealand, and Tonga due to colonization and colonizers’ suppression of certain dance forms. For example, prior to Western contact, Tahitians used dance to satirize society and chiefs in order to bring social change (Kaeppler 1977:75). Missionary influence suppressed this function of dance and European aesthetic preferences (such as fast hip movement) infiltrated the dances. Kaeppler considers Tahitian dance the most westernized of Polynesian dance because it is devoid of its original context (1977).

Kaeppler contrasts Tahitian dance with Maori dance. She argues that while Maori dance has changed, the changes have been motivated by themselves rather than by westerners (Kaeppler 1977). For example, for the Maori “action songs are entirely a 10th-century development, but they were not evolved in response to a tourist market. Rather they were developed to appeal to the younger generation of Maoris in order to instill a feeling of pride in their cultural heritage in an effort to revitalize Maori culture” (Kaeppler 1977:79). Kaeppler categorizes these as folk dances because they are “unmistakably Maori” and “meant mainly for themselves” (1977:79). What makes this so is that their dance cannot be easily understood by outsiders because “if one does not understand the poetry, action songs may quickly become boring to the uninitiated observer” (Kaeppler 1977:79). Even though this new dance form uses
western music, Kaeppler does not believe it should be put in the negative category of “airport art” although she sees potential for it to move there eventually (specifically, if hip movements are added) (1977:80).

The main point is that Kaeppler views dances in her “traditional” and “folk” categories as ones that retain traditional values and although evolved are still indigenous. “Airport art,” however, is slowly erasing local, traditional features and the dances are losing their meaning in order to preference the performance. Kaeppler’s last main point in the article is the fear that "the learning of dances of other islands has begun to obscure the distinctive local features and subtle poetry or traditional dance styles and may even lead to the creation of a pan-Polynesian style which would be airport art par excellence in which poetry would be meaningless to observer and performer alike and the performance would completely dominate" (1977:83). This is interesting because for this point Kaeppler fails to mention that many dances have been borrowed and reappropriated between islands in pre-contact times. For example, the Tongan dance styles ‘ula and mā ‘ulu’ulu were imported from Samoa in the 1800s; Kaeppler is cited as the source of this information (McCLean 1999:135). These traditions have been borrowing from each other for centuries. It is unclear then what exactly Kaeppler defines as “traditional” and “indigenous.” Why is the addition of hip movements and alterations in costume (also characteristic of airport art) enough to say a dance has become devoid of local meanings? Why is Maori dance exemplified as “traditional” and true to its roots when it incorporates western music? Why does she, an American anthropologist, have the authority to create these definitions?
Daniel (1996) also talks about the commodification of dance forms, specifically in the tourism market. Whereas Sarkar-Munshi and Kaeppler emphasize the importance of context to the “authenticity” of a dance, Daniel argues the other side, stating that “dance performance for tourists remains ‘authentic’ and creative” (Daniel 1996:782). He argues that this must be the case because the tourist audience desires and is paying for an “authentic” experience. While that particular argument is not very strong, Daniel goes on to problematize the notion of “authenticity,” arguing it is one that is always changing and being reconceptualized. He identifies that “with outside contact, foreign elements and structures have been incorporated within traditional dance performance and over time, these “new” (restructured or reinterpreted) forms and styles have emerged as “authentic” for the performing community” (Daniel 1996:784). For Daniel, how the performing community conceptualizes dance is what is most important.

In light of these three authors, what can we say is happening in Samoa? Moyle (1991) speaks of how dance in Samoa relays stories through “the Polynesian poetic practice of indirect referencing to key subjects” (52). Dance movements, especially in the mā ‘ulu’ulu, will often relate to the words in the song, and so “demands that an audience actively concentrate on identifying each allusion as it is heard and possibly also seen” (Moyle 1991:52). For this reason, Moyle states: “the extent of audience appreciation is…in direct proportion to the extent of its cultural knowledge” (Moyle 1991:52). Kaeppler, who would most likely label Samoan dance as it exists within the tourist industry as “airport art,” similarly argues that “the casual observer can be entertained or astonished without understanding and may, in fact, lead to misunderstanding of Polynesian culture rather than appreciation in cross-cultural perspective” (1977:82). When I initially did my research I was whole-heartedly on the side of Sarkar-Munshi and Kaeppler. I
believed when these dances take place within the tourist industry, the meaning and context is lost in a way because tourists are observing the moves but it remains superficial; they do not have the cultural repertoire necessary to understand the dances. Also, the change in pace can be viewed as directly changing the cultural meanings embedded in the dance. As stated in the previous section, the reason the dance is performed slowly is out of respect for the elders so when the pace is changed the meanings and context behind the dances may be altered as well.

However, it is not as black and white as authentic versus inauthentic. If the performing community decides, as Daniel argues, that this is an “authentic” and “true” representation of Samoan dance, then it more productive to look at what “authentic” means in this context rather than damning the appropriated/decontextualized form as illegitimate. What is being performed is inherently different in this new context and that is where the tension lies. Performing for a western audience and having the dance divorced from its ritual context necessitates that the dance is not *exactly* the same. They are being performed for different purposes. In the village, the elaborate allusions embedded in the dance are used to tell a story, one that the western audience may never be able to understand (as Moyle and Kaeppler argue). However, the dances for the tourists are meant to showcase a part of Samoan culture rather than get across these deeper meanings and stories. The discomfort lies then in the question: is this actually cultural communication or is it pure spectacle? This is a more productive question to consider instead of is the dance “authentic” or is it “airport art?” (We will go deeper into the problems with the notion of authenticity later.)

“Gift-wrapping” the dance and engaging in western aesthetic practices in order to make the dance more marketable is problematic in some ways. It makes it seem like dance is purely a spectacle. To some, the dances are purely entertainment with money being the primary return.
However, to many of the dancers themselves, performing for the tourists is an extension of the hospitality and desire to share the culture with others that was discussed earlier. One dancer at a beach *fale* in Savai’i enjoys performing for tourists because he believes that “dancing has really given them [tourists] a lot to learn about the culture and the way we live here.” While what exactly tourists are taking away from the dances is unclear and not part of this project, the intent is cultural communication. There is an entire organization called the Samoa Tourism Industry that oversees and stresses the importance of cultural integrity within the tourist industry, so that they do not become a bastardized form. So, the fact that the elements of the dances are true to form can be a type of “authenticity.” The dancers are showing the tourists their unique form of dance. The tourists might not understand the nuances of it, they may never know why or when it is performed in its “normal” context, but nonetheless they are seeing an important part of Samoan culture. The performers are able to share a part of their culture with the audience, which is desired and important to both performer and audience member.

However, while this might be all well and good, what some informants brought to light is the possibility of dance in this context to have larger implications for the dance forms as a whole. Some believe the dance in this context is affecting the dancers themselves. One informant states that the dancers are “losing it [the culture behind the dances]…they expect something from the tourists…it’s not personal anymore”, just simply about entertaining for the money (dance instructor & choreographer). Allan Alo expressed this as well. In speaking of his days as a dancer in the tourist industry he states: “we were kind of driving our dances towards a tourism market and it became less meaningful…just all smiles and no real expression of what the real issue was.” There was never, however, any articulated link as to why dancing for tourists specifically would affect the dancer’s understanding of Samoan *siva* as a whole. The fear of
something being “lost” is not exclusive to the tourist industry and is wrapped up in larger issues of westernization occurring within Samoa.

Other Changes and Westernization

Outside of the industry, there is also fear about the culture of Samoan *siva* being lost. Fiona Collins, a performing arts instructor, states that “probably a generation ago it [Samoan *siva*] was something more nurtured” whereas now she believes a great majority of students at the National University of Samoa (one of two universities in Samoa) would not know as much about it. Teuila Keil, who instructs a few different dance classes, states one of her motivations as being to “encourage the younger people to get back into dancing because we’re slowly losing the culture.” Various examples of how Samoan *siva* is changing came up throughout my interviews and they were often linked to westernization. This section will look at those changes and then examine further exactly what “losing the culture” means.

A big change recognized by people was in the music itself. One interviewee informed me that when she was growing up, when they danced in schools they would only dance to Samoan songs, but today European songs are sometimes used. She goes on to state:

“I think dancing in Samoa is becoming more contemporary. There’s a mix of our European and other island songs in the Samoan siva, not like we had it before where it was pure Samoan dance. Today, even the beats, you can tell from the beat, because the way we had it before it’s only a guitar or the mat that was used to make the music for the dance. Today people are now using CDs, there will be a lot of backup like drums, electric guitars; it’s different from what we experienced.”

When she was growing up, the dance group would sit together and sing the songs themselves. The backup music would be played by guitar and drumming on mats. Today, someone will often DJ the music from a stereo. In the interview, she emphasized that since technology has reached all of Samoa, even the outer villages on the more rural island of Savai’i, this change can be seen
everywhere. Because of changes such as these, she believes “the arts of pure Samoan dancing are steadily fading away from us.”

There are efforts to preserve the traditional form of Samoan siva. For example, Independence Day is a time when traditional dance is showcased. For independence, there were many taupo dressed up in fine mats\textsuperscript{16} with elaborate headdresses to highlight traditional clothing for their sivas. Church dedications are also big community events and so another time where traditional dress is highlighted. Two of my interviews, conducted in the village Faleula, were with sisters who had flown in from Australia for the dedication of the new Mormon church that had recently been built in the village. In recalling the event, they said it was a huge dedication and that a lot of people had come from overseas. For the event, there was a lot of dancing. There were a lot of taupos dressed up for the occasion with elaborate headdresses and fine mats. They acknowledged that this kind of dressing up is an accolade to the “traditional” dress.

Although when Vaimosa Primary School performed their dance for me, they used a sound system, in the interview afterwards I was informed that for culture day specifically they do things differently. They will use various items from the environment to drum on the mats, songs are sung live, and more traditional clothes are worn. Max, the performing arts instructor at Vaimosa Primary, explained that this teaches the students about the traditional aspects and history of the dance. Most primary schools have culture day for the intentional purpose of keeping knowledge of traditions alive. This type of concerted effort is also characteristic of some song and dance competitions in Samoa. For example, one interviewee told me that for one of the national Samoan song competitions called the Teuila Festival, the competition does not allow any modern equipment. The groups have to use rolled mats made out of bamboo, the dancing

\textsuperscript{16} One interviewee indentifies that “in the old days, [Samoans] usually used the fine mats or the tapa (cloth made from tree bark) to perform the dance, but today people just use the new fabrics like the pulatasti (made from cotton).”
group has to sing themselves, and stereos and electric instruments are not allowed. They do this in order to preserve the traditional forms of siva. Drama was caused during a different competition one year because of the groups dress, showing that it is a big point of contention. The dance group, including the girls, wore their lavalavas very short to showcase their malu (traditional women’s tattoo). This is something that would usually never happen. In the village, girls have to wear a lavalava that covers their knees. The malu particularly is traditionally meant to be hidden and only uncovered on certain occasions. People were angry that these traditional customs were not being honored and respected by the group, especially in a competition that espoused to showcase “traditional” dance.

Another change that was highlighted by one interviewee who was born and raised in Samoa but now lives overseas in Australia, is that of the movements themselves. She stated: “the youth today, they dance most of the Palagi dances…most of them use the contemporary dance. Most of them use other actions. You know they change.” The influence of “contemporary dance,” which in this case the interviewee is referring to western dances, is born out of the increased access and use of technology occurring in Samoa. The younger generation has greater access to televisions and the Internet than did the older generation. As a result, they are learning and incorporating movements they see on MTV and elsewhere on television or YouTube. Three of the younger interviewees mentioned learning hip-hop from these mediums.

Rural v. Urban

The change in movements and decreased knowledge of Samoan siva is also a specific problem of urban areas. As urbanization continues, this problem may escalate since traditional dance is usually nurtured within the village setting. One informant told me that dance does not happen in the town areas as much as in villages because there are not as many occasions for it.
People who live close to Apia, the capital, live mostly on freehold land and therefore are not considered villages. They do not have mātai (chiefs\textsuperscript{17}), women’s committees, etc. Therefore, most of the dancing that occurs is solely in the schools or churches. They do not have the ceremonies common in villages.

One informant, Nola, grew up in town. She stated that she does not know Samoan sīva that well because of where she was raised. In her interview, she was able to pinpoint primary school as the place where she learned how to dance. There was no one around to learn via observation. This was probably the result of one of the main differences between freehold land and villages: life is more private with less interaction with the families around you. Nola went into detail of the differences between growing up in town versus the village setting. When you grow up on freehold land it is more isolated. Usually, the only family you have near you is your close immediate family whereas in the rural villages, you live with your big extended family and know everyone in the village well. Village life is dictated by the mātai whereas there is no one ‘in charge’ of freehold land. Another big difference is that everyone is responsible for the upbringing of children rather than just the child’s parents. For Nola, growing up on freehold land meant she was not raised as much fa’asamoa\textsuperscript{18} as she would have been had she grown up in a village. For this reason, Samoan traditions, such as dance and cooking Samoan food, were not as strong in her upbringing.

Often her family would stay at home and on weekends they would go to the beach for a day or the movies at night, since they did not have village activities to go to. There were no fiafia

\textsuperscript{17} “Mātai are the heads of Samoan families and are variously described as chiefs, custodians, leaders, and administrators” (Toleafoa 2005:2). In villages, “formal political control within the community is exercised by the council of mātai (fono) with the ‘aumaga (the untitled men’s organization) serving as executive body. Women’s committees exist today in all communities, playing an important role in community affairs as an unofficial arm of local government” (Hays 1991: 288)

\textsuperscript{18} Literally means “the way of Samoa,” used to refer to Samoan culture. This informant specifically is using it to refer to being raised more “traditionally” in terms of customs and practices.
nights, ava ceremonies, or other events connected to village affairs. Therefore, the first occasion to dance for was culture day. For her, growing up, dance was just something she did in school. Now, the only time she dances is when her tennis club is having a fundraiser or her grandchildren have a family event at their school. While she recognizes that dance is a huge part of Samoan culture, calling it a “centerpiece at all events,” she states that she does not know “formal dancing,” which is “what the village people know.”

Another major difference between free-hold land and the village is that people on free-hold land either purchase all of their food or get it from relatives who live in a village, but mostly the former. This is because families who live on freehold land do not own a plantation or land to harvest their own food. Their lives are much more about cash economies than the village people. This in it of itself can be a possible explanation for why that makes it harder to know Samoan siva. In his interview, Allan Alo explained that urban areas are not learning traditional dance because it is not as natural for them. In the rural areas, the people live it. They grow up working on plantations, growing food, going fishing, helping prepare Samoan foods, participating in the ceremonies, etc. All of the actions come from these aspects of life, so according to Alo, when you grow up in the village, it is already a part of you.

Two different informants explained to me that one of the ways you can determine whether someone is a good dancer or bad dancer is by the number of different actions they use when they dance. If someone keeps using the same action over and over, they will not be considered a good dancer. One of the informants went on to explain that it is also how people determine how brave you are. His explanation of this was that the actions you know come from the jobs you have performed, i.e. fishing, preparing food, and washing clothes. So, when you know more moves you have worked more. He stated that “our culture is determined by your
bravery, it is determined by your job.” People who live in town have to learn these moves whereas for people who live in villages, the movements are already part of their body language.

Sarkar-Munshi (2010) argues that the rural to urban shift necessarily changes “traditional” dance by taking it out of its original context. She uses India as an example, where in the 1950s, there was a campaign to re-introduce traditional dance to the general population. To do this, dancers were sometimes brought from their rural villages to teach dance in urban areas (Sarkar-Munshi 2010). The urban learners were completely separated from the traditional context. The dances could not be learned in-context because the original context was wrapped up in village life. The result was that the dances took on “new narratives,” received “facelifts in terms of costumes,” and were made into “shortened presentable items” (Sarkar-Munshi 2010:35). The end result is a dance form that attempts to act as a representation of Indian culture, but where the only characteristic of the “traditional” form leftover is the name of the dance itself.

The rural-urban divide is more ambiguous in Samoa, as a small portion of the population lives on freehold land, than seems to be the case in Sarkar-Munshi’s research, but there is a fear that Samoa is on a similar path: where urban areas will be increasingly divorced from “traditions.” In regards to Samoan siva, if dance is equated with daily life, it makes sense that dance in an urban context necessarily will be different. After all, daily life is different. What needs to be explored further is why most informants view these changes negatively. What is the “pure” Samoan dance that is fading away, as one informant put it? What does it mean to say “the culture” is being lost? What exactly are people referring to when they speak of “traditional siva?”

This type of rhetoric makes it appear as if “traditional” dance and the culture that surrounds it is a stagnant, ahistorical, entity that is currently being “lost” and “destroyed” due to
forces such as globalization and urbanization and that is inherently bad. What this ignores is that “all cultures are becoming, changing in order to survive, absorbing foreign influences, continuing, growing. But this does not mean that they become any less Samoan” (Wendt 1983: 77). What it also ignores is that “our [Pacific Island] cultures, contrary to the simplistic interpretation of our romantics, were changing even in pre-papalagi times through inter-island contact and the endeavors of exceptional individuals and groups who manipulated politics, religion, and other people” (Went 1983:76). Dance, like culture, in Samoa has always been in a state of becoming. As mentioned earlier, dance today is drastically different than it was in pre-colonial times. Missionaries banned various dances and others received a face-lift in order to satisfy the colonialists and to keep them from banning dance altogether. Further changes have been made even in just the past decade. For example, as stated earlier the movement of a man running to lie down at the feet of the taupo for her to dance upon, is a new move, as previously no one was allowed to make physical contact with her.

So what are people referring to when they say “traditional dance?” As Hau’ofa (1985) argues, “if by ‘traditional’ we mean purely indigenous, as many people have taken the term to imply, then there are very few things in the Pacific islands today that could be labeled ‘traditional’” (153). Hau’ofa argues that even native languages have been influenced by outsiders, let alone everything else. For example, “the present aristocratic systems of Fiji and Tonga are in fact the creations of the 19th century—mixtures of indigenous and non-indigenous elements. Yet these systems are considered ‘traditional’ by Fijians and Tongans alike” (Hau’ofa 1985:153). The use of terms such as “traditional” and “authentic” are therefore very problematic and nebulous. This goes back to Daniel’s (1996) point that what is considered “authentic” or in
this case “traditional” is always being reconceptualized and redefined by societies. The widespread proclivity to engage in this rhetoric is interesting to explore further.

Samoans have had a high level of interaction with the West for a long time. Currently, more Samoans live outside of Samoa than inside. That majority live in western countries such as the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. Therefore, the influence of the west on the lives of Samoans and Samoan culture is extremely complex and inseparable. There is no such thing as “pure” Samoan dance or “pure” Samoan culture if “pure” means devoid of outside influence. It is possible that the use of these terms comes from the uncertainty and state of great flux that globalization causes, a type of cultural uprooting and change that is unprecedented because usually these changes to culture happen over longer periods of time. In the face of globalization, people may be grasping to hold on to their “culture,” seeing it as a stagnant, identifiable entity to be retained. There is a need to hold on to ones cultural identity, which necessitates definitions and clear markers of that identity, because it is being challenged and called into question by globalization.

Kaeppler (1977) argues: "nationalism may yet prove to be the most compelling reason for the retention of older traditional dances, although they may, in fact, have little meaning to an islander's present world view except as an exercise in cultural identity" (83). It makes sense that in the face of globalization, nationalism would grow stronger in an attempt to maintain the identity of the nation. It also makes sense that a desire to retain society’s current conception of “traditional” dance would play a large role in this exercise of nationalism because as interviewees consistently emphasized, Samoan dance is intrinsically interweaved with their identity as a Samoan. One dancer stated: “if it weren’t for dance, I wouldn’t be able to know or
understand what Samoan culture is or what my identity as a Samoan dancer is.” Another agreed describing that dance has helped her understand what it means to be a girl growing up in Samoa.

Samoans’ desire to share dance and their culture with others is further evidence of this widespread nationalism and pride in being Samoan. Samoans recognize their culture as unique, as something to be celebrated, and as something to maintain precisely because it sets them apart from other cultures. One of the youngest male dancers I interviewed, a 21 year old who has performed in festivals overseas, stated: “It [dance] is important because it is my culture cause there’s no other Samoan dance out there in the world. It’s only one country—Samoa—and when I do that dance everyone knows that I’m from Samoa. That’s why it is really important to me. It’s a big part of my culture.” At these festivals, the uniqueness of *siva Samoa* automatically marks him as Samoan. He is extremely proud to show his culture, to perform Samoa, and represent his culture. Another interviewee explained that when she dances, “it makes me really glad, really proud of who I am; being Samoan.” Multiple people expressed the view that “the western sivas—anybody and everybody can do that” whereas “Samoan dance it’s only in Samoa” and “it’s pretty hard for other people to learn our dance.”

While it makes sense that desires to hold on to “tradition” would arise particularly in the face of globalization, which can be thought to threaten these “traditions,” it is unclear how those desires functions in the long run. It seems that trying to keep things exactly as they are or were will only result in a romantic nostalgia for a lost ideal; an ideal that can never be attained. One solution is to rethink the very categories we have. Dalidowicz (2010) offers important insights in reconceptualizing what “tradition” means specifically in an increasingly global world. In her article *Re-Exporting ‘Tradition’: The Transcultural Practice of Kathak in Kolkata and the Creation of a New Female Body*, she discusses western influences on the traditional Indian dance
of Kathak. She argues that increasing global interactions necessarily have changed Kathak but that does not necessitate that the dance form is any less ‘traditional’ or ‘authentic.’

Dalidowicz tells the story of Pendit Chitresh Das, a dancer born in Kolkata who immigrated to California in his 30s. He teaches Kathak and often travels to and from India where he teaches and performs as well. Dalidowicz argues that “Das’s ongoing participation in a western dance world included an incorporation of western ideals, aesthetic preferences, and beliefs about art, performance, the body, and gender” (2010: 207). However, Das maintains a strong emphasis on tradition. Dalidowicz reconceptualizes what is usually thought of as tradition, arguing that “implicit in Das’s discourse on tradition” is “this intersection of Indian and western values” (2010: 208). This means that tradition and western values do not have to be mutually exclusive.

What is important to consider here is that “the wider field of dance in India exhibits a long-standing interest in intercultural choreographies, fusion works, and a shift toward modern styles of Indian dance” (Dalidowicz 2010: 209). Although Das’s desire to re-emphasize tradition was born in a western context and his dance too was influenced by contemporary dance, he was pushing back against the rapid modernization that was already underway in India (Dalidowicz 2010: 209). Dalidowicz’s argument is important because it makes us rethink the meaning of “tradition” in a rapidly globalizing world where nothing is free of outside influence. To Dalidowicz, even for local Indian dancers, who have never left home, “experiences of the west, and the larger transcultural dimension, pervade every level of their training and bodily experience in Kathak” (2010: 221). Her main argument and one that is important for the debate about authenticity and in reconceptualizing “tradition” is that “the apparent transcultural influence and dynamism in Das’s teachings did not negate the authenticity of the style for Das or
for local dancers. The integration of new ideals of fitness, health, and self-assured femininity did not compromise the integrity of the form as they were rearticulated around traditional Indian ideas “ (Dalidowicz 2010: 221).

Attempts are being made to negotiate rooting oneself in tradition while simultaneously being a subject of modern society. Allan Alo, the Pacific Outreach Coordinator at the University of the South Pacific in Samoa, is similar to Das in that he works directly with exploring dance in the face of westernization. Born and raised in a rural village in Samoa, Allan moved to New Zealand for High School. After receiving graduate and post-graduate degrees overseas, Allan started working at the Oceania Center for Arts, Culture, ad Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. Here, he started a dance group, comprised of students from Samoa and other pacific islands, with the aim of “draw[ing] from the traditional elements such as motifs, values, the essence of [Pacific] dances and their stories…but then at the same time us[ing] western genres of dance such as ballet, jazz, hip hop, and blend[ing] them together.” The reason behind this is so that the performers can represent their own voice but at the same time “honoring what [their] ancestors used to do” (Alo Pacific Outreach Coordinator).

Allan is now working at the University of the South Pacific campus located in Alafua, Samoa. He is trying to bring this type of choreography to students in Samoa. He believes that the blending of elements from different cultures offers a way to find a unique voice as a person who is from the pacific, but is also constantly influenced by westernization and an increasingly global world. That identity is explored through the creation of moves and dances. Allan explains that this type of dance allows dancers to “present who [they] are as Pacific peoples today.” Fiona Collins, a Samoan dancer who was born and raised in New Zealand, states: “when you’re creating dance…a lot of you goes into that.” Dance helped her “getting through understanding
what it is to be a ‘Pacific island woman,’” being from both New Zealand and Samoa. In speaking about dance that encompasses a multiplicity of cultures, Allan states: “our dances, in a way, at the Oceania center are unique and attempts to be authentic in that we have those stories to draw on, those motifs, and those values and be creative at the same time because our dances also try to suit the youth….It’s about identity, We draw on those things so that we can present who we are as Pacific peoples today.” To Allan, this is a way to reclaim the affects of globalization. As Hamasaki (1983) states: “the only valid culture worth having is the one being lived out now…knowledge of our past cultures is a precious source of inspiration for living out the present. (An understanding also of other peoples and their cultures is vital)” (76).

When we see that culture is becoming, we see notions of authenticity attempt to constrict culture as static. We need to move past the deadlock where we are constantly trying to recover this lost ideal that can never be recovered. Continuously being caught up in what is being “lost,” in how traditions are being “destroyed” results in a paralyzing nostalgia that never confronts the inevitability of change. Instead, reconceptualizing this situation allows us to confront new ways of maintaining national identity and uniqueness of cultures in a globalized world. What dancers like Das and Alo are trying to do is to reclaim the situation, direct the change, and reestablish dance’s ability to express individuality and national identity.
Conclusion

This thesis attempts to break down taken-for-granted assumptions about “tradition” and “authenticity,” terms that become especially complicated in an increasingly global world. I attempt to confront these assumptions that were held by not only me, but my informants and scholars as well. Primarily, I attempt to confront a paradox. On the one hand both indigenous Samoans and western scholars argue that “tradition” must be preserved and maintained, especially in an increasingly global world. On the other they argue that “tradition” is a western construction. Some argue it is another colonialist project and others, a result of imperialist nostalgia: we want to preserve what we have destroyed. However, even though “tradition” is near impossible to define and there are many different conceptualizations of what constitute it, the rhetoric of “preserving tradition” is nonetheless prevalent in indigenous communities in Samoa. It can be argued that that rhetoric was planted there by colonialists, by westernization, etc. However, whether or not that claim is true, denying indigenous communities the right to preserve tradition based on the notion that tradition is a western construct is just as colonialist. It is “us” deciding for “them” and continuing to exert the west’s power over the non-west.

On the other hand, arguing that cultures should maintain their traditions at the price of rejecting forms of “western” development, a mindset I held throughout much of my time in Samoa, is yet again colonialist. Throughout much of this project I felt this was an insurmountable paradox. However, through the process of writing this thesis, I have discovered that the contradictions do not have to put us at a standstill. Instead, I argue that we need to use these contradictions as jumping off points to look at more important implications. Why do people talk about culture as if it is stagnant? Why might someone want to maintain tradition? Why does authenticity matter? How can we reconceptualize what tradition and authenticity
mean? In this thesis I provide possible answers to these questions. It is my hope that the possibilities suggested here open up gaps in the existing literature. I hope it makes us rethink the categories we have; the very categories I had to problematize and overcome myself.

In the end, this is merely “a practice of authority displaying its ambivalence…confronting a peculiarly displaced and decentered image of itself,” as I fully recognize that I do not have the answers and my way of conceptualizing these issues has been determined by my own positionality (Schechner 1990:61). While in some ways that may be limiting, it is what made this thesis possible. I hope that in constantly trying to bring the conversations back to the lived experiences of my informants and focusing on real life implications, I show more productive ways of confronting these issues.
Work Cited


**Appendix 1: Interview Questions**

*Note: These were used as prompts for the interview, no interview followed these questions exactly*

Rubric for interviews conducted during 3-week program research project:

**Dance instructors**
1. What is the importance of dance in Samoan culture?
2. How do you choose what aspects of Samoan culture to include in your dances?
3. How big of a role does the audience you are targeting play in those decisions?
4. How has dance impacted your life?
5. Has it helped facilitate your understanding of self?
6. Do you think dance can be a space for negotiating social/cultural issues? How so? And what issues are discussed in your dances?
7. Do you think dance can act as a vehicle for social change? How so? Is that limited to an academic and/or professional sphere?
8. Do your messages reach villages?
9. What is different between your dances and dance in a purely village setting?
10. What do you believe is the importance of expression through dance? Especially for youth
11. Do you think dancers performing for say, tourists, have a different responsibility?

**Dance students (college level)**
1. What is the importance of dance in your life/ what does dance mean to you?
2. What do you believe is the importance of dance for Samoan youth today?
3. Does dance aid in self-expression? How so?
4. Do you think there is a difference between the type of dance you do and those who dance for tourists? Explain

**Dancers who dance for tourists**
1. What is the importance of dance in your life/ what does dance mean to you?
2. What is the meaning behind the dances you perform (at blank hotel)?
3. Do you dance outside of here?
4. Are those dances different/ have different meaning to you? Explain
Rubric for interviews for ten-week research continuation:

1. How old were you when you learned how to dance?
2. How did you learn how to dance?
3. What is the importance of dance in your life or what does it mean to you?
4. Where would you dance growing up? For what occasions?
5. How do you feel when you are dancing?
6. What themes or stories do the dances tell?
7. Do you know any of the history behind the dances or moves?
8. Have you seen any changes in the dance?
9. Do you think the youth today are learning dance in the same way you learned it?
10. How do you view dance in the tourist industry?
11. What makes someone a good dancer versus a bad dancer?
12. Do you see differences in the use of dance in the rural villages or Savai’i versus the Apia area?
Appendix 2: Glossary of Terms
Definitions in quotation marks, unless otherwise noted, are from the Samoan Dictionary by G.B. Milner 1966.

Ai’aiuli- clouting dance; “to humble oneself so as to draw attention to another” (Milner in Mageo 1998)

Ava or kava- shrub; “a beverage made with the dried and pulverized root of that shrub mixed with water”

Cocoa Samoa- Samoan hot chocolate, made from Samoan cocoa bean

Fa’asamoa- “custom, way of life of Samoa”

Fa’ataupati – slap dance

Fale- Samoan house

Fiafia- party, entertainment

Lavalava- piece of cloth tied around the waist as a garment

Malu- traditional women’s tatoo

Mānaia- “chiefs son (a special position which is institutionalized and endowed with certain ceremonial duties and privileges

Matai- “titled head of a Samoan extended family (formally elected and honoured as such)”

Mā’ulu’ulu- group dance, most common dance

Palagi- foreigner

Pulatasi- formal outfit for women made of cotton; consists of a long skirt and matching top

Sāsā- “kind of dance”; in my experience performed sitting down to the beat of a drum

Siva- song accompanying a dance; “dance”

Siva afi- fire dance

Taupo- village princess, performs the last and most important dance; “title of village maiden (a position held according to Samoan custom by a virgin singled out for her charm, looks, and manners. Among her duties is the preparation of kava)”

Tausala or taualuga- last and most important dance, performed by a taupo

Umu- earth oven; used to cook Samoan meals