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Troubling Paradise: Exploring the Experiences of National Student Exchange Participants to the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

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Abstract

This research seeks to contribute to an understudied aspect of student mobility, domestic study away within the U.S. national context. It presents a case study of one such program and focuses on the experiences of students from the continental U.S. who participated in an exchange to Hawai‘i. Critical Qualitative Inquiry was utilized to foreground a decolonial critique of both student mobility practices and popular conceptualizations of Hawai‘i. The findings indicate that participants imagine and experience Hawai‘i as foreign and familiar as they negotiate their place here as both students and visitors. Not wanting to be thought of as tourists, participants emphasized the importance of being respectful while on exchange, and many demonstrated that by taking courses which focused specifically on Hawai‘i. As a result of these classes, many participants were able to develop a more complicated and nuanced understanding of Hawai‘i which troubled notions of this place as an idyllic paradise. The article concludes with suggestions for study away practitioners to support decolonial interventions in student mobility programming, particularly in Hawai‘i.

Keywords: decoloniality, exchange, Hawai‘i, student mobility, study away

Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly being called upon to engage in comprehensive internationalization, which the American Council on Education (ACE) defines as “a strategic, coordinated framework that integrates policies, programs, initiatives, and individuals to make colleges and universities more globally oriented and internationally connected.” Arguably the most visible component of the internationalization efforts that HEIs engage in is student mobility (White & Lee, 2020). Referred to as education abroad or, more commonly, study abroad, there is a wealth of research, programs, and organizations which focus on international student mobility. For example, there is a journal dedicated to education abroad research and scholarship (Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad) and thousands of study abroad programs for U.S. students to choose from (offered by colleges and universities as well as program providers, such as AIFS: American Institute for Foreign Study; API: Academic Programs International; CIEE: Council on International Educational Exchange; IES Abroad; IFSA: Institute for Study Abroad; ISA: International Studies Abroad; SIT: School for International Training). There are also numerous U.S. professional organizations for international educators (for example: AIEA: Association of International Education Administrators; CIES: Comparative & International Education Society;

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Diversity Abroad; Forum on Education Abroad; IIE: Institute of International Education; NAFSA: Association of International Educators). In contrast, there is much less attention given to other types of student mobility.

This qualitative research explores an often overlooked and understudied aspect of student mobility programming - domestic study away within the U.S. national context. One such program, National Student Exchange (NSE), is highlighted, in particular the experiences of students from the continental U.S. who spent one or two semesters living and studying in Hawai‘i. By consciously foregrounding the specificity of place - Hawai‘i - the voices and lived experiences of individual student participants in this domestic study away program are contextualized. Critical Qualitative Inquiry is utilized to provide a decolonial critique of both student mobility practices and the manufactured tourist gaze in Hawai‘i.

The findings explore the unique positionality of Hawai‘i as both foreign and familiar and the ways in which participants negotiated their dual roles of students and visitors. The importance of being respectful was emphasized by participants, and many demonstrated this by consciously taking classes which focused specifically on Hawai‘i. This allowed participants to have a deeper, more complex, and nuanced understanding of Hawai‘i, troubling popular notions of this place as a multicultural paradise. Animated by a desire to disrupt the circuits of coloniality that are immanent to student mobility practices and to conceptualizations of Hawai‘i, this article concludes with some thoughts and suggestions for practitioners.

Literature Review

Problematizing the Abroad/Domestic Dichotomy

As stated earlier, student mobility research and practice in the United States tend to focus primarily on study abroad or education abroad. By their very names, these ubiquitous terms privilege foreign or international destinations deemed “abroad.” Abroad then functions as a type of shorthand and stand-in for what is deemed foreign, different, and other. The construction of abroad as distinct from the domestic presumes a coherence around nation states which may not be warranted (Anderson, 1983). Buckner & Stein (2019) write “that when ‘international’ is defined as ‘abroad’ or ‘foreign,’ there is an implicit assumption about identities assumed to be ‘local’ or ‘national.’” (p. 12). The positioning of abroad as distinct from the domestic assumes a specious homogeneity in both places and spaces. Further, it essentializes people and cultures, both abroad and at home, and elides the fact that there can be substantial differences within a given country. The abroad/domestic dichotomy has also led to the privileging of international experiences over domestic ones in the field of student mobility. The exotification of abroad positions it as distinct from domestic experience (Doerr, 2016) and has led to a bias in the field which valorizes that which is deemed abroad over domestic locales, which are too often seen as somehow lesser. Miller (2015) affirms this, writing that student mobility tends to “privilege exotic destinations over transformative learning potential and underestimate the value of programs much closer to home” (p. 223).

The construction of abroad as fundamentally different from the domestic reifies a belief in the foreign other as distinct from the self and fails to recognize the possibilities for encountering and engaging with difference domestically. Is it, for example, necessary to travel to another country in order to engage with diverse communities? Twombly et al. (2012) argue that students can “make gains in cross-cultural awareness without crossing an international border” and raise the possibility that a “semester in Appalachia” (domestic) could conceivably be more productive for a student from Seattle, Washington than a semester in nearby Vancouver, Canada (international) (p. 10-11). When the student mobility field prioritizes and privileges international experiences over domestic ones, “we are limiting our students’ opportunities to also learn locally and regionally” (Sobania, 2015b, p. 21). Given the diversity within the United States, it is certainly possible for students to experience difference, engage with diverse cultures, and learn valuable cross-cultural skills, even while staying within the nation’s borders. Reilly & Senders (2009) question “how much longer it will be tenable to hold, as we have in the past, that the term ‘abroad’ represents a meaningful difference” (p. 262). Olson et al. (2007) argue that “the domestic and the global need to be in conversation with each other” (p. vii), and Sobania & Braskamp (2009) make the case for rethinking the terms study abroad and education abroad and instead adopting the language of study away. This larger umbrella term recognizes and affirms the value of both international and domestic student mobility programs and is “a more inclusive way to label all academic credit-earning off-campus study programs, whether they took place overseas or here in the United States” (Sobania, 2015a, p. 2).

Domestic study away programs have the potential to expose U.S. students to the “wide array of global cultures, religions, languages, and practices” within the United States and encourage cross-cultural engagement and development, which are so desperately needed in the nation today (Weinberg, 2015, p. xii-xiii). Perhaps we need to shift our energies in the field of student mobility away from the traditional focus on *where* students go (geographical differentiation) to *how* students go (the ways in which they engage with difference, regardless of their program location). In this vein, Buckner and Stein (2019) argue for internationalization as “a way to ‘encounter difference differently,’ that opens up possibilities for examining and re-examining biases, stereotypes, and hegemonic assumptions about ways of being and knowing” (p. 14), which can happen both abroad and domestically.

Recognizing the value for U.S. students of both international and national student mobility, this paper consciously employs the language of study away and presents the findings from a qualitative research study focusing on a domestic exchange undertaken by students from the continental U.S. who spent one or two semesters on exchange in Hawai‘i. By focusing on domestic study away, an understudied topic, I seek to challenge the often-perceived notion that domestic student mobility programs are somehow lesser than international ones. I argue that domestic mobility, as study away, has the potential to widen our view of the student mobility field and to trouble the neat borders and demarcations between notions of home and away, self and other, local and foreign.

Contextualizing Study Away to Hawai‘i

This research focuses on National Student Exchange (NSE), a domestic study away program which provides accessible, collegiate exchange opportunities for undergraduate students at over 175 member colleges and universities throughout the U.S., Canada, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Of all the campuses available within the NSE consortium, one is by far the most popular choice for students – the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM), which I will be focusing on.

Prior to coming on exchange to UHM, the participants in this study, who were from the U.S. continent, knew little about Hawai‘i beyond what they saw in the media – films (i.e.: Lilo and Stitch, Moana), television (i.e.: NCIS Hawaii), and increasingly, social media. People now have the opportunity, as Mostafanezhad and Norum (2018) state, “to know places intimately despite living very far away from them – or by having very little, if any, actual contact with them” (p. 31). Participants in my study, like most visitors, come to “know” Hawai‘i before they ever set foot in the islands through popular culture, media representations, and what Urry (1990) refers to as the “tourist gaze.” Hawai‘i is always, already over-inscribed and marked by the tourist gaze (Aikau & Gonzalez, 2019; Bacchilega, 2006; Buck, 1993; Gonzalez, 2013; Lyons, 2006; Miller-Davenport, 2019; Skwiot, 2010; Sperb, 2022; Strain, 2003). This research explored how the manufactured tourist gaze circulated among NSE students and the ways in which they may have either reaffirmed or resisted this.

The tourist gaze is shored up by the state’s tourism apparatus (Strain, 2003), and tourism continues to be the dominant industry in Hawai‘i. The Hawai‘i Tourism Authority (HTA), has cultivated and marketed Hawai‘i to the world, and their brand marketing makes the bold statement that “Hawai‘i is a destination paradise.” Buck (1993) discusses the “production of paradise” as “an all-encompassing code” in Hawai‘i that permeates all aspects of life in the islands (p. 179). However, the invocation of paradise, which celebrates the natural beauty of the islands and promotes a sense of pleasurable escape, occludes a darker history. As Cachola (2019) states, “beneath the facade of paradise are histories of upheaval, war, and displacement” (p 283). Trask (1999) reminds us that “(t)he myth of an unspoiled paradise somewhere in the Pacific is belied, of course, by the realities of nuclear poisoning, impoverishment, racism, and exploitation” (p. 51).

Yet the paradise trope is ever present in relation to Hawai‘i and obscures the far more complicated and less photogenic reality of Hawai‘i, one which includes the illegal overthrow and continued occupation of the Hawaiian Kingdom, continued disenfranchisement of Native Hawaiians, an exorbitant cost of living, high rates of homelessness, prolific environmental degradation, and an overreliance on tourism and the military, to name a few examples. Despite this, Hawai‘i continues to be overdetermined, laden with signifying practices that imagine this place as a tropical, exotic, paradise with endless sunshine, beautiful beaches, breathtaking scenery, fruity tropical drinks, and hula girls who willingly offer up a lei (a garland, usually of flowers, that is typically worn around the neck and given to mark a greeting, celebration, love, or friendship). In addition to being constituted as a multiracial paradise (Sperb, 2022), Hawai‘i has been marketed to the world as an exotic place (Stodola, 2022), and a stepping stone to Asia (Desmond, 1999). In this way Hawai‘i is marked as a foreign place. Yet, as part of the United States, it is also seen as a familiar space. I argue that it is the positionality of Hawai‘i as both foreign and familiar which draws so many visitors, including students, to our shores. Visitors to Hawai‘i can get a taste of the exotic, the foreign, and the other, but do so within an overall context that is still safely familiar and (somewhat) American. Hawai‘i, as the most racially diverse state in the U.S. (Hubbard, 2021), has been marketed “as an exotic, almost foreign destination” but one that is “safely under American control” (Pierce, 2004, p. 135-136). With its majority Asian population, Hawai‘i is often seen a “gateway for Americans into the realm of the foreign” and “a space between the domestic and the global” (Miller-Davenport, 2019, p. 121).

While imagined and experienced as markedly different from the continent, Hawai‘i is also situated (often uncomfortably and definitely problematically) within the United States, due to the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, annexation, and statehood. As the 50th state, Hawai‘i boasts most of the familiar trappings of American culture, while at the same time being markedly different from the other 49. You do not need a passport or visa to travel to Hawai‘i from the continental U.S. and once here, you can experience difference (the exotic, the foreign, the other). It is around this lure of both the foreign and the familiar that Hawai‘i is often constructed, imagined, and experienced.

Theoretical Framework

This research is informed by decoloniality, which Mignolo & Walsh (2018) state "is not a new paradigm or mode of critical thought. It is a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice, and praxis" (p. 5). In other words, decoloniality is a multi-faceted approach, working simultaneously through different circuits. While there have been calls to decolonize places and people, attention has also been focused on the need to decolonize minds (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986), methodologies (Smith, 2021), and practices (Stein et al., 2021). Decoloniality must be advanced on all of these fronts and in all aspects of life in order to resist coloniality (Mignolo, 2020). As such, it is an ongoing process that is never finished.

How might student mobility practices be informed by decoloniality? Study abroad, in particular has been rightly criticized as performing a kind of colonial (re)enactment (Sharpe, 2015; Woolf, 2021; Tekle, 2021; Adkin & Messerly, 2019; Arvanitakis & Ogden, 2021; Caton, 2011; Caton & Santos, 2009; Ogden, 2007; Zemach-Bersin, 2007; and Zemach-Bersin, 2009). For example, Arvanitakis and Ogden (2021) make the link between colonialism and study abroad participation explicit when they write:

> Like early colonials, education abroad students today yearn to be abroad, to travel to worlds different from their own, and to find excitement and see new wonders. Like children of the empire, education abroad students all too often arrive with a sense of entitlement as if the world is theirs for discovery and consumption (p. 43).

While Arvanitakis and Ogden are discussing study abroad, I argue that the colonial mindset they describe is also applicable to study away, particularly to Hawai'i. Despite idealistic underpinnings (i.e.: invocations of intercultural exchange, cross-cultural understanding, and global citizenship), student mobility programs often end up reinscribing oppressive relations between hosts and visitors and enabling problematic othering practices. We might also want to consider how study away could be part of a larger conversation around what Sheller (2018) calls mobility justice. She states that "(h)ow, when, and where people, goods, and capital move is, in all respects, a political question" (Sheller, 2018, p. xii). Who has the resources and opportunities to be voluntarily mobile for education and leisure? Who does not? Despite calls to diversify study abroad, U.S. participants continue to be quite homogeneous and not reflective of the larger population (Hamir & Gozik, 2018; Lorz et al., 2016; Salisbury et al., 2009; Salisbury et al., 2011; Woolf, 2021). The historical data from the Open Doors report on study abroad show that the largest number of participants identify as White (68.6% for 2023 data collected for academic year 2021-2022). The next largest group of participants identify as Hispanic/Latino (11.9%). Other groups are in the single digits in terms of percentages. While there is increased awareness of the need to expand access to study abroad, there has not been a corresponding or significant change in who participates, and students of color remain underrepresented.

Additionally, Chakravarty et al. (2020) remind us that despite the glorification of travel, it is also "historically associated with invasion, colonialism, annexure, slavery, human trafficking, and spread of infectious diseases" (p. 131). In the context of Hawai'i, for example, travelers brought with them introduced diseases which led to what Stannard (1990) calls the "great population collapse of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" of Native Hawaiians (p. 336). Thinking about mobility and travel to Hawai'i means confronting the ongoing historical legacy of colonization (Trask, 1993) and settler colonialism (Fujikane, 2008; Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2013) in these islands. As Aikau and Gonzalez (2019) point out, there is a long and troubling history of "overstaying, ill-behaved, and overreaching 'visitors' to Hawai'i" whose presence has had disastrous implications for the land and the indigenous population of Native Hawaiians (p. 9). This project, then, argues for decolonial interventions on two fronts: 1) in relation to student mobility, and 2) with regard to thinking about Hawai'i. This research, at the intersection of both of these, is a call for us to consider how we might support and engage decoloniality, particularly with student mobility programming to Hawai'i.

Methodology

The methodological framework for this project was grounded in Critical Qualitative Inquiry and the work of scholars such as Agyepong (2019), Cannella (2015), Cannella and Lincoln (2015), Carspecken (2019), Denzin (2015), Kincheloe et al. (2012), Koro-Ljungberg and Cannella (2017), Leistyna (2012), Pasque and Perez (2015), Shields (2012), Steinberg (2012), Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2017), White (2015), and Winkle-Wagner et al. (2019). Four key aspects of Critical Qualitative Inquiry guided this study: 1) an attention to issues of power and privilege, 2) a commitment to social justice and change, 3) an embrace of open-ended, fluid, and creative research, and 4) a recognition that critical inquiry is an ongoing practice. I endeavored to implement these guiding principles in my study in all stages of the research process, from designing the interview protocol, conducting the interviews, analyzing the data, interpreting the results, and writing up the findings.

The research questions for the project focused on the ways in which the specificity of place, namely Hawai'i, shaped the assumptions and expectations of participants and informed their perceptions and experiences while here. In-depth interviews were utilized as the research method, which Hesse-Biber (2017) describes as a "collaborative process" between

the researcher and the participants "based on mutual interest, respect, and compassion" (p. 122). The interviews were framed as an opportunity for participants to talk story about their exchange. Talk story, according to Steele (2012), "is a Creole English phrase referring to the casual exchange of narrative with a sense of mutuality" (p. 39). Talk story is also described as "a communal practice of sharing stories" (Rosa, 2014, p. 105) and one that is "intimately tied to local identity" in Hawai'i (Rosa, 2014, p. 5). The use of talk story aligned well with my methodology of Critical Qualitative Inquiry since it is grounded in a sense of reciprocity and relationship building and is particular to Hawai'i.

One way in which I utilized talk story was how I started each interview. I asked participants ahead of time to bring something to our talk story session that they felt signified their exchange experience to Hawai'i. Participants brought and shared various items (photos, mementos, souvenirs), as well as stories and memories with me. Beginning the interviews with the students taking the lead and sharing what they thought was important and meaningful provided an opportunity for them to actively participate in and direct our talk story conversations. Our resulting talk story journeys took us to new and often unexpected places, which is in keeping with the open-ended, fluid nature of Critical Qualitative Inquiry.

Additionally, utilizing talk story was a conscious choice and an effort to disrupt some of the inherent power differentials between interviewer and interviewee. Talk story is a collaborative meaning making venture and is "different to the formality of the interview process" (Cook, 2023, p. 6). Therefore, talk story was a way for me to also embody Critical Qualitative Inquiry's attention to power and privilege.

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from former National Student Exchange (NSE) students from the continental United States who completed an exchange to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa between Fall 2021 and Fall 2022. All participants signed an informed consent letter, acknowledging that their participation in this research was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty to them. To maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of those in the study, all participants were assigned a pseudonym. Thirty-nine former NSE participants were contacted about participating in this study, and fourteen agreed to take part in the research project. In-depth, semi-structured interviews, which included talk story, were conducted with these fourteen participants. They were done using Zoom since I was in Hawai'i and most of my participants were on the continent, and interviews ranged from forty-five to ninety minutes.

The majority of the participants in the study (85.7%) identified as female, which is keeping with the overall trend in NSE and student mobility generally, both of which are overrepresented by women. My sample was more diverse than the overall NSE population. For 2022, 60.4% of all NSE participants identified as White, but in this sample, six of the fourteen participants self-identified as White (42.8%). Two participants identified as Asian, one as Black, and one as Hispanic/Latino. Three participants identified with multiple categories, and one student chose not to self-identify. Participants were drawn from various host campuses across the continental United States (Boise State University, Iowa State University, Queens College CUNY, Rutgers School of Arts & Sciences, Stony Brook University, University of Massachusetts Amherst, and University of Minnesota Twin Cities) and were majoring in a variety of different fields (Art, Art History, Business, Communications, Event Management, Gender Studies, Marketing, Mathematics, Psychology, Public Health, Sociology, and Undecided).

Results

A number of themes emerged from the interview data with the NSE participants. The first theme affirmed that Hawai'i, as discussed in the literature review, was imagined and experienced by the participants as both foreign and familiar. The second theme examined how participants negotiated being students and visitors, while simultaneously not wanting to be viewed as tourists. This led to a discussion of the importance of being respectful student visitors to Hawai'i and the ways in which participants endeavored to embody this.

Hawai'i as Foreign and Familiar

As noted earlier, Hawai'i is particularly appealing as both foreign and familiar, and the interview data affirmed this. Located approximately 2,500 miles from the California coast, Hawai'i is geographically removed from the continental United States and often conceived of being abroad. This physical distance appealed to many of the participants in my study. For example, Sarah stated that she chose Hawai'i because of "the fact that it was off the mainland and like it was just like, it was just far away." Ashley said, "I just chose it, because also, like I didn't wanna be, like, close to home." Helen commented that she was "very excited to try, to like, go to new places. And it's funny, Hawai'i is the, like, farthest place I could have chosen."

In addition to physical distance, many of the participants specifically noted the cultural differences in Hawai‘i, which marked it as a foreign place. For example, Hannah recalled that “when I started looking into exchange, I kind of was looking at campuses that would provide the biggest impact culturally, so I would kind of be able to get, like, a sense of a different culture.” Similarly, Rebecca also chose to go to Hawai‘i because “it was just, just a different culture.” Madison commented “Hawai‘i is so different, like, the culture here is so different and it’s just, like, it’s nothing like anywhere in the United States, anywhere else like on the mainland.” Olivia also noted “how much, like, Hawaiian culture is different from just the mainland.” Hannah stated that in Hawai‘i there is “definitely more of a mix of all different cultures, races, ethnicities there, and here I feel like my home specifically is very kind of whitewashed, a lot of, like European descent. So that was very different to see a bunch of different cultures kind of colliding.” John also remarked on “definitely a big culture difference” in Hawai‘i and how “there’s not as much diversity on the mainland as there is in Hawai‘i for sure.” Cai discussed how “the racial makeup, and the experience is just so different there, and you don’t know until you actually go there.” As Patricia said, “Yeah, there’s so many differences… so many different views there and yeah, way different ways of, like, living, in day to day.” Denise stated, “as for differences, there’s so many!” In comparing where he was from and Hawai‘i, John also reflected that “they’re just so different.”

This very difference contributed to Hawai‘i being viewed as a foreign place by so many of the students from the continental U.S. When asked why she chose Hawai‘i for her exchange, Ashley said, “I thought it would be really cool to be on an island and study abroad, like still in the U.S., but far enough where it was like it didn’t feel like home. Like a very different atmosphere.” Ashley framed her NSE experience as “study abroad” but also “still in the U.S.” She further explained:

> When people think traditionally, like, study abroad they are, like, oh, did you go to Europe or Spain or, you know, somewhere over there? And I was like, no, I went to Hawai‘i. And they were like, oh, okay, that’s cool. But like, it’s still kind of abroad, because it’s not like in your home place. Even though it is like, owned by the U.S., it’s still kind of abroad.

In reflecting on her exchange to Hawai‘i, Hannah stated, “I’ve been kind of on the East Coast my whole life, and that’s kind of how, what I identify the U.S. as, is kind of just like life over here, so I kind of just wanted something that felt like I wasn’t at home.” In selecting UHM for her exchange, Hannah said she was “just kind of trying to get somewhere I would feel like I was not in the United States basically” and that while in Hawai‘i, “I definitely felt like I was abroad.”

John, who is Native Hawaiian and part of the Hawaiian diaspora, made the point that Hawai‘i should feel abroad. He asserted: “It should feel abroad, because you are. You cannot go to Hawai‘i and act like how you do back on the mainland, back home. You just can’t go to Hawai‘i and just think that you’re home or where you were living, because it’s not the same. It’s just, not.” Related to this sentiment that Hawai‘i should feel abroad, Hannah stated:

> I kind of put myself in the position where I was taking classes and talking to other students that really identified more with Hawai‘i as a nation rather than as a state. So, I think I kind of positioned myself in the place where I could feel like I really was somewhere else, and not in the U.S.

Negotiating Being Both a Student and a Visitor

The data illustrated that NSE participants to the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) negotiated two often contradictory roles - visitor, here primarily for pleasure, and student, here presumably to learn. On the one hand, NSE students shared many of the same motivations of tourist visitors to Hawai‘i, specifically the pursuit of pleasure. Tourism has commodified Hawai‘i as a “pleasure zone” (Desmond, 1999, p. 463), and the NSE students I interviewed sought out the sights and sites here and pursued pleasure at every turn. Participants regaled me with the different and pleasurable activities they engaged in, such as surfing, skydiving, swimming with sharks, hiking, zip lining, sailing, stand-up paddleboarding, camping, beaching, and traveling to other Hawaiian islands.

Yet, NSE participants were also positioned as students and differed from tourists in a number of ways. First, as students attending UHM, the participants in my study were here for more than just a ten-day vacation, instead spending a full semester and sometimes two semesters in Hawai‘i. The longer length of their stay in the islands is one thing that distinguished NSE participants from tourists. Kristen made note of the length of time she spent in Hawai‘i on exchange as different from a typical tourist trip. She said:

> It’s obviously one thing to kind of visit a place, but then being able to, I mean, I know that I didn’t like live in Hawai‘i for like years or anything, but I kind of got like the opportunity to, like, live there for a more extended period of time and, like, get into kind of like a routine. I think it’s, I think that’s kind of cool compared to just, like going somewhere for a week or something.

In addition to the length of time NSE participants spent in Hawai‘i as compared to typical tourists, the academic nature of NSE also marked student visitors somewhat differently than tourists. NSE participants were in Hawai‘i and attending UHM to learn and take classes towards fulfilling an academic degree. Madison made a distinction between her

previous vacation to Hawai‘i as a tourist and her NSE exchange as a student. She said, “So when I went on vacation a long time ago, it was very like, you know, we did all the tourist stuff, and, like the normal, Hawai‘i vacation.” Madison contrasted this with her exchange, of which she said, “I don’t know, I tried to do as much as I could that was just, like, not like a lot of touristy stuff.”

Not Wanting to be Seen as a Tourist

While participants in the study negotiated the roles of both students and visitors, they also expressed an ambivalence about being viewed as tourists and sought to distance themselves from being seen as such. The word tourist often has negative connotations, and many people instead seek to describe themselves as travelers or visitors (Crawshaw & Urry, 1997). D’Eramo (2021) discusses “the disdain which every tourist feels toward tourists” and the “anxious concern” to differentiate and conceive of oneself instead as a “traveller” as “just one of the countless ways in which individuals perceive themselves as taking up a different position to the one they really occupy in social space” (p. 159). Indeed, several participants made a point to distinguish themselves from tourists and their accompanying touristy attitudes and behaviors.

For example, in relation to her exchange, Helen stated: “I didn’t wanna come in and just seem like a tourist or something.” Madison said, “I never wanted to come to this island and just be like all the other people who come here.” Hannah said, “I didn’t want people to feel like I was a tourist, kind of coming in and like taking things.” As a result of his exchange to Hawai’i, John talked about how he and his friends decided that “they just hate being like, being a tourist” and “they just don’t want to be a tourist anywhere” because so many tourists “don’t understand there’s a culture, don’t understand, like to respect it” and how that was “embarrassing to watch almost.” Hannah expressed the desire for her future travel to be more than just tourist trips. She stated:

> Even though I want to travel, I definitely want to dive into more, more cultures rather than just doing a trip with touristy things, and visit, you know, what you are supposed to do when you go to a place. So, I think I’m definitely more intrigued to see what different parts of the world, you know, have as their culture and what their backgrounds are, and to be able to experience it firsthand rather than doing touristy things.

NSE participants not wanting to be viewed as tourists in Hawai‘i is understandable given recent sensational stories of these types of visitors behaving badly here, including a man urinating and making obscene gestures atop Mauna Kea, which is considered sacred (Dukelow, November 18, 2022), thirty-three swimmers filmed harassing a pod of dolphins (Alund, March 29, 2023), and a man urinating at Kīlauea, which is home to the goddess Pele (Martinez, January 8, 2023). During the interviews, students brought up examples of misbehaving tourists in Hawai‘i and sought to distance themselves from them. For example, Ashley said of tourists: “They’re either like touching the seals or they’re like stressing out the animals, or they’re like bringing non-safe sunscreen into the ocean and killing the coral and stuff like that, stepping on the coral, literally. I literally saw someone, like, stepping on the coral at Hanauma Bay.” Madison recalled how “we went, like on a kayaking tour and everything out to the Mokes (Mokulua islands), and we, like, heard this story about how like a monk seal came up on shore and then this guy was like throwing rocks at it, so that was kind of crazy.” Amy commented on when “going and swimming places you see people like, just like, walk on coral or like, walk in certain areas, and you’re, like, is that right? Like can we do that, cause like you just see a lot of videos of, like tourists doing whatever they want, and it’s, like, questionable.”

These types of behaviors by tourists have led many in Hawai‘i to rethink our overreliance on the tourist economy and the accompanying problems that accompany over-tourism (Bourlin, March 26, 2021; Lyte, May 11, 2021; Compton, June 23, 2021; Blair, July 15, 2021; Stinton, September 13, 2022; Wong, October 1, 2022; Dethlefsen, February 15, 2023). The Spring 2022 Hawai‘i Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) Resident Sentiment Survey found that 92% of residents agreed that “visitors need to be educated about protecting Hawaii’s natural environment and cultural resources” and 67% agreed that their island is “being run for tourists at the expense of local people” (Yee, August 26, 2022). This survey also voiced serious concerns about the impact of tourism in Hawai’i, including issues of overcrowding, damage to the environment, higher prices/higher cost of living, traffic problems, and tourists’ lack of respect for culture/tradition/land. Given these views of tourists and tourism, it is understandable that NSE participants did not want to be associated with or identified as tourists.

The Importance of Being Respectful Visitors to Hawai‘i

Acknowledging that many tourists to Hawai‘i engage in behaviors which demonstrate a lack of respect for the cultures, peoples, and places here, some NSE participants sought to distance themselves from that. John, the only Native Hawaiian in the study, talked at length about how many tourists and even other NSE students were not respectful and even became defensive about their behavior in Hawai‘i. He said:

> I realized how arrogant a lot of tourists and some NSE students were at first when they were called out by locals for behaving improperly or disrespectfully. They got defensive about it and made some comments about how this is America, and they did not think they were in the wrong because they thought Hawai‘i was THEIR paradise instead of the home to an indigenous population. Personally, if I were in a place where there was a unique culture and I was behaving in a way that was wrong and got called out for it, I would be open and listen to why I was in the wrong and learn from it. Instead, a lot of tourists that come to Hawai‘i are unfortunately so out of touch and uneducated about the history of our islands, and I hope people educate themselves before deciding to vacation or come to Hawai‘i.

John spoke about the need for visitors to "educate themselves" and indeed, prior to coming to Hawai‘i, most participants expressed knowing little beyond the tourist focused tropes of Hawai‘i. For example, Amy admitted, "I knew, like, absolutely nothing besides it was a tropical vacation spot for people." Ashley stated, "I thought everyone just, like, wakes up, eats breakfast, goes surfing, like, hangs by the beach all day."

One way in which participants sought to "educate themselves" was to embrace their role as students and consciously take classes which focused on Hawai‘i in order to learn about the places and peoples here. I was pleased that of the fourteen participants in this research study, twelve of them took at least one course which focused on Hawai‘i, which is strongly recommended by the UHM NSE faculty coordinators. Seven of the fourteen students took an introductory Hawaiian studies course, which provides an overview of the unique aspects of the native point of view in Hawai‘i and in the larger Pacific with regards to origins, language, religion, land, art, history, and modern issues. Participants also took courses focusing on indigenous politics, Hawaiian language, indigenous women's health, Polynesian surf culture, Pacific Island studies, and racism and ethnicity in Hawai‘i.

Kristen took a Hawaiian studies course which she said, "kind of, like changed the way of like, how I would like, kind of just view or like move through my daily life." She went on to discuss how the class and what she learned made her realize:

> It's like a privilege that I was able to kind of just be there just because of, like the issues that I was learning about in the class. It kind of just gave me a different perspective of Hawai‘i and like, how to move throughout my day just trying to be like, just very respectful of the locals and the natives and everything.

Kristen further discussed how taking classes which focused on Hawai‘i while on exchange at UHM made her reflect on "how I view my position, like in terms of maybe like Hawaiian society" and made her be "extra respectful and extra, like, cautious about things, just because I don't want to offend anyone."

Hannah explained why she took two Hawai'i-focused courses while on exchange to UHM. She said:

> I really just wanted to immerse myself in the culture as much as I can, and I'm definitely glad I did, because I really think that I did that more than some of my peers did that were on exchange. But I yeah, I really just wanted to learn about where I was, and kind of pay respect to that. Because I knew that I, that's what I would have been doing if I was going somewhere else. So, I kind of figured just because I'm in the United States, why shouldn't I do that?

Amy, who took a Hawaiian studies course, shared a similar sentiment, saying:

> I think it was only respectful to go into, like a persons, like place, like land and community, that it would be ignorant to like not try to learn the culture or understand the history. I think that's very important for any place you go to, so that motivated me. Plus, I knew nothing of it before besides it's like colonized land. And then, just, I think it was very educational. I knew no information before so just, it kind of enlightened me, and I like now just share information I learned about that with just anyone, if it, like, comes up in conversation.

Madison took four classes which focused on Hawai‘i and expressed the following: "I knew that, you know, if I had just taken random classes I don't care about, like it wouldn't have done as much for me. But just being able to, like find ways, like to connect with the island and like the people here was, like, super important to me when coming here." Helen said:

> I didn't wanna come in and just seem like a tourist or something and not learn anything about where I was. Because yeah, coming into it with not a lot of knowledge I wanted to learn, and I especially wanted to like, be the most respectful or right, not just like come in and just like live there and go to the beach every day and be like that was cool and then not come home and know anything about where I'd been.

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Urry (1990) details how travel and tourism are motivated by a desire for "pleasurable experiences" and "different scenes… which are out of the ordinary" (p. 1). The unique positionality of Hawai‘i as simultaneously foreign and familiar provided student participants an opportunity to explore and experience both the difference and the pleasure which Urry

discusses. In many ways, difference is experienced as pleasure, as long as it is not too threatening. Hence, the familiarity of Hawai‘i, as part of the United States, was in many ways an ideal space for students to experience and engage with difference.

All of the study's participants remarked on the differences of Hawai‘i from the continental U.S. I was interested in the ways in which students, particularly those who took Hawai‘i-focused courses, were able to move beyond just experiencing difference as pleasure and were able to engage with difference in more complicated and oftentimes uncomfortable ways. Many participants who took these courses were exposed to an alternative viewpoint besides the manufactured tourist gaze, which marks and markets Hawai‘i as a multicultural paradise infused with aloha (which Pukui and Elbert, 1986, translate variously as "love," "affection," "compassion," "kindness," and "greeting.")

For example, from taking Hawai‘i-focused courses, students reported learning about such things as militarism in the islands (Amy); the bombing of Bikini Atoll (Denise and John); the importance of names (Hannah); colonization (Rebecca); the water contamination by the military at Red Hill (Ashley); the centrality of and relationship to the land (Sarah, Helen, and Olivia); how Hawai‘i illegally became a state (Hannah); the opposition to the 30 meter telescope on Mauna Kea (Kristen); the importance of the local and Hawaiian culture (Jessica); the fight for sovereignty (Cai); and the out-migration of Native Hawaiians to the continent for economic reasons (Rebecca). Arguably these students may not have learned about these things which subvert the tourist focused gaze on the islands if they had not taken the Hawai‘i-focused classes. The knowledge participants gained as a result of these courses helped many of them contextualize and better understand the experiences they were having in Hawai‘i and to consider the impact of visitors like themselves to the islands.

Hannah, who took three Hawai‘i focused courses, stated, "I feel like a lot of people, especially for where I'm from, kind of think of Hawai‘i as a vacation rather than a, you know, land with its own people. So, it's kind of telling the people from home what I was learning about and kind of the effects they have." Ashley spoke about how visitors need to consider how their actions matter and affect Hawai‘i. She said, "There's a lot of stuff that I feel like people who are non-native don't know or don't seem to understand I guess about the island, about people who travel into it, about the way that, like the things that you do on the island matter and like, affect everyone, basically, which I think is, like, so important." Cai expressed the importance of understanding what your presence as a visitor in Hawai‘i means, saying, "I truly do believe you cannot see and appreciate the beauty and the resilience and the care, the love of Hawai‘i and its people, until you understand or like, begin to engage with the cost of you being here, and the cost of people being here."

These student statements above challenge the overwhelmingly individualistic focus so common in study away, which emphasizes the impact of the experience on the participants (what they gain, how they grow, what they learn, what they discover). Instead of this rampant individualism, students were able to shift ever so slightly to center not only themselves, but also the space and place they were in. Many were able to consider the effect and the impact of visitors and themselves on and in Hawai‘i, gaining an appreciation of the values of place and community in Hawai'i, which are so important.

Those who took Hawai‘i-focused courses especially grappled with reconciling the touristic depictions of Hawai‘i as a multicultural paradise and pleasure destination with less pleasant realities of this place, including the lack of affordable housing, exorbitant cost of living, environmental degradation, and ongoing legacies of colonialism and settler colonialism. As Cai stated, "I think it's important to hear not just all the pretty stuff" about Hawai‘i. By consciously taking Hawai‘i-focused courses, many of the participants learned about and came to understand that Hawai‘i is not just an idyllic paradise overflowing with sunshine, surf, sand, and smiles. Scratch the surface and there are certainly tensions and fissures, which most visitors to Hawai‘i do not see or want to acknowledge.

This research demonstrated that study away students do have a desire to move beyond being just tourists and to engage with the particularity of place in more complicated and nuanced ways. Many students were able to critically examine the role of visitors, including themselves, to Hawai‘i, and their impact on the islands. This self-awareness can be a crucial first step in resisting the individualistic and extractive focus of study away and challenging the colonial mindset inherent to most student mobility programming.

As a result of this research and as a scholar/practitioner in the field of global education, I offer up the following suggestions to encourage student mobility programming, particularly to Hawai‘i, to be more reciprocal, responsible, and ultimately, decolonial.

Critically examine how we are marketing study away programs to attract student participants

There is increased awareness and concern over how study away and especially study abroad programs are marketed and promoted to students (Adkin & Messerly, 2019; Tekle, 2021; Zemach-Bersin, 2007; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). Consumerism has suffused both higher education and study away programming, and both compete for ever increasing numbers of students. The study away marketplace is a crowded one, with programs vying for the attention of students and their accompanying fee-paying dollars. This has led to ever more sophisticated advertising and marketing for student

mobility programs, which too often tend to "endorse attitudes of consumerism, entitlement, privilege, narcissism, and global and cultural ignorance" (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p. 303).

In promoting student mobility to Hawai'i there is an added layer of troubling representational practices to contend with. Problematic tourist tropes which reaffirm Hawai'i as a multicultural, tropical paradise abound. For example, the NSE consortium uses the actual language of paradise to market "spotlight destinations," including Hawai'i. The NSE consortium features a webpage entitled "Beaches. Paradise Found" and which has the tagline "Classes. Sand. Rinse. Repeat." Additionally, a NSE consortium promotional poster entitled "The Islands are Calling" features Hawai'i and states:

> NSE's island universities deliver a multicultural global experience in a tropical learning environment. Let your exchange adventure begin where beaches are endless and palm trees grow. Pack your sunscreen and contact your NSE coordinator today!

While these marketing materials may seem harmless, the language of "paradise," "multicultural," "tropical," "beaches," and "palm trees" is in fact reaffirming and reinscribing stereotypical tropes and touristic fantasies of what beaches and islands, and by extension, Hawai'i, can offer. It is important to remember that representational practices matter and are never innocent. As Hall (1997) tells us, "we give things meaning by how we represent them" (p. 3).

Scholars and practitioners in the field of student mobility could benefit from asking ourselves questions which may be difficult, such as: How are we marketing our programs? What messages are we conveying? How are we conditioning the expectations and experiences of students? Might there be other ways that we can market our study away programs which do not reify problematic tropes and othering practices?

In thinking about NSE to UH Mānoa and Hawai'i, for example, we can invoke more than just palm trees, beaches, sand, sun, surf, aloha, and paradise. For example, since NSE is an academic program, we could highlight the course offerings at UHM, many of which are unique and offered nowhere else in the world. We could also focus on UHM's stated goal of becoming a Native Hawaiian Place of Learning and what this might mean for student visitors who come here.

Encourage and support students in engaging with local places and peoples

Kinginger (2010) says that "American students abroad are often placed in programs that do not foreground the importance of engagement in local communities" (p. 219). While Kinginger is speaking about study abroad, the same can be said about study away programs like NSE to Hawai'i. The nature of student mobility programming has changed from that of the past, in part due to technology and the widespread ease of communication. The ubiquity of mobile phones and the corresponding attachment to them, especially among young people, means that they can always be connected to friends and family from back home even while studying away. Participants can, as Kinginger (2010) asserts, "choose to screen out their local environment, and the people in it, in favor of extensive interactions through an electronic umbilical cord, with people they already know" (p. 223). This works to discourage local engagement with people and place.

Additionally, too often students who participate in study away programs, instead of engaging with the local place and local community, choose to interact primarily with other participants in the program, thereby creating a safe bubble for themselves (Citron, 2002; Craik, 1997; Engle & Engle, 2002). If participants never fully disconnect from their friends and family back home and surround themselves and interact primarily with students also on exchange, how does this contribute to cross-cultural engagement and mutual understanding, which are the stated goals of study away? If the point of these programs is for participants to experience and engage with a different campus, different geographical location, different culture, and people different from themselves, how are we ensuring this happens? It is not guaranteed that cultural learning will happen, "particularly if students are confined to their own cultural perspectives in making sense of differences" (Talburt & Stewart, 1999, p. 173). Thus, it is not surprising that so many study away participants are "experiencing the local culture through sunglasses, camera viewfinders, and bus windows" (Arvanitakis & Ogden, 2021, p. 47).

How can we work against this tendency in study away? How might we encourage students to get out of their bubbles and safe spaces and to actively engage with difference, to interact with local communities and local peoples? Consciously centering the places and peoples in the host locations students travel to is one way to disrupt the consumer focused and individualistic tendencies in study away. Situating participants in relation to places and their peoples means encouraging, supporting, and guiding students to do more than merely occupy a place, in this case, Hawai'i. Johnson (2021) argues that it is the responsibility of student mobility professionals "to ensure that students engage with place, people, and environment responsibly and intellectually, with a sense of history and an eye to the future" (p. 206). Ideally, study away practitioners would consciously build into their programs both formal and informal opportunities for participants to interact with, learn about, and learn from local places and peoples they visit. They could also provide opportunities for participants to decenter themselves and give back to the local peoples and communities. I argue there needs to be more of a sense of reciprocity in study away, rather than the one-sided, extractive practices which undergird most student mobility programming.

Consider kuleana

Pukui and Elbert (1986) translate kuleana as "right," "privilege," "concern," and "responsibility" (p. 179), and this Native Hawaiian concept is one that I argue could be applied to student mobility practices writ large. As Goodyear-Kaʻōpua (2013) says, "kuleana can be a concept that drives learning when posed as a question (what is my kuleana?) and when the learner is open to deep self-reflection" (p. 154). Both study away participants and practitioners would benefit from considering kuleana. What is the kuleana of mobile students to the places and peoples they visit? What is the kuleana of professionals like me working in the field?

In the context of this research project, there is the added layer of thinking about one's kuleana in and to Hawaiʻi. Kajihiro (2021) reminds us that one's kuleana varies, depending on one's position – "Kānaka ʻŌiwi, local residents or various differently situated visitors" (p. 148). While our kuleana might not be the same, all of us, if we are in Hawaiʻi, have kuleana to this place and to the indigenous people here. As Fujikane (2021), says, "(w)e need to help shoulder the kaumaha (weight, burden, grief) of settler colonialism by doing the difficult work that Indigenous people do against and beyond the settler state" (p. 15). Kajihiro and Fujikane both write and situate themselves as Asian settlers in Hawaiʻi and ask other settlers to think about their kuleana to Hawaiʻi and the "Kānaka ʻŌiwi people.

Keeping this in mind, what is the kuleana of NSE students from the continent who come to Hawaiʻi on exchange? What is my kuleana to the NSE students who exchange to UHM and as a scholar/practitioner in the field of student mobility? Finally, what is my kuleana as a local, hapa (person of mixed ancestry, according to Pukui and Elbert, 1986) settler in Hawaiʻi? These various situated identities of mine do not always or necessarily align. For example, in my role as a NSE faculty, part of my job is to market UHM and Hawaiʻi to recruit more students. Yet as a local settler committed to decoloniality, I wonder whether Hawaiʻi needs ever more visitors, even if they are students.

Perhaps we need to rethink the dominant messaging in the field of student mobility that more is necessarily better. Instead of focusing on how many students come to UHM, we could look at how these students do their exchange and how we might encourage decolonial engagement. The reality is that the NSE program is not going to stop sending students to Hawaiʻi, and in fact the UHM program is being called on to increase the numbers of students who come to our campus. Similarly, tourists are going to keep arriving by the planeload to Hawaiʻi. So where does that leave us? This research has demonstrated that many student visitors to Hawaiʻi do have a desire to be more than mere tourists and do want to consciously engage with place. The question is how to do this in the face of pervasive representations of Hawaiʻi as a multicultural tourist paradise, full of friendly locals and natives. In addition to these popular and troubling narratives about Hawaiʻi, students must also contend with the dominant messaging in study away, which encourages individualistic, consumeristic, and extractive practices. The combination of both of these often makes it difficult for students to negotiate a different relationship with Hawaiʻi without some sort of intervention.

It is all too easy to be lulled by tourist tropes about Hawaiʻi and by problematic conceptualizations of study away. To disrupt the pull of these forces requires concerted energy and effort, both on the part of the students and on the part of practitioners. How might we make the sort of decolonial interventions which would trouble both the foundational narratives of study away and the touristic tropes of Hawaiʻi? It is here that I think kuleana can be instructive. By invoking kuleana, we can consider how we can contribute to making both study away programming and Hawaiʻi more pono (translated by Pukui and Elbert, 1986 as "goodness," "uprightness," as well as that which is "fitting," "proper," "fair," and "just"). This, in turn, relates back to one of the guiding principles of Critical Qualitative Inquiry, a commitment to social justice.

Reframe study away as a huakaʻi

One way we might reimagine student mobility, in particular to Hawaiʻi, is through the Native Hawaiian concept of huakaʻi, which Kajihiro (2021) defines as "a journey with purpose, entailing relationships and mutual responsibilities between traveller and resident" (p. 145-146). Further, Aikau and Gonzalez (2019) write:

> A huakaʻi is not an empty itinerary or a list of must-dos, but rather a journey defined by intention. A huakaʻi is not meant to be an easy walk in the park or a leisurely stroll along the beach. It is demanding. It demands that your journey be deliberate and purposeful, and that you remain open to what you might learn about a place and yourself (Aikau & Gonzalez, 2019, p. 246).

A huakaʻi, as "deliberate," "purposeful," and "demanding," is perhaps what student mobility programs should aspire to. Tourist sojourns are designed to maximize the ease and pleasure of the visitor. In the same way, study away programs tend to be constructed to cater to the desires of the student participants and to make their journeys as smooth as possible. With the competitive study away marketplace and the increasing commodification of these experiences, professionals involved in programming go to great lengths to make the journeys of mobile students as stress-free, painless, and pleasurable as possible. Yet is this necessarily and ultimately a good thing? Grünzweig and Rinehart (2002) argue that this trend to make study away programs pleasant and stress-free for students in effect reduces "the potential for learning and growth that

derives from direct interaction with the foreign environment and experiencing the disequilibrium induced by that experience" (Grünzweig & Rinehart, 2002, p. 17). They contend that it is through the negotiation of difference and the resulting "disequilibrium" that students truly grow, learn, and develop in meaningful ways. Perhaps we can rethink study away as an opportunity for a huakaʻi, which is attentive to kuleana and which encourages deeper engagement and learning, both with people and place.

Trustworthiness, Contributions, and Limitations

In this section I address issues of trustworthiness, as well as the contributions and limitations of this research study. In terms of trustworthiness, being explicit about one's own positionality in relation to the research can be "a mechanism to make us aware of our own assumptions and biases" and "an important step toward improving the rigor and trustworthiness of our qualitative work" (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019, p. 10-11). Keeping this in mind, I attempted to be ever cognizant of my own positionality in relation to the participants and in the context of Hawaiʻi and to engage in critical reflexivity in order to increase the trustworthiness and validity of this study.

Glesne (2016) argues that "thick description allows readers to understand the basis for the claims you make" and can lead to increased trustworthiness (p. 153). In my results section, I sought to use "thick description" and the participants' own voices to bolster the trustworthiness of the findings. Additionally, Glesne says that "(t)ime observing, participating, conversing, and building sound relationships all contribute to data that are more trustworthy" (Glesne, 2016, p. 154). As stated in the methodology section, I took the time to talk story with my participants, building rapport and listening deeply to what they each had to say. I believe this also helped increase the validity and trustworthiness of the research.

This study makes several contributions to the field of global education, particularly as it relates to student mobility. By focusing on domestic exchanges, an understudied segment of the student mobility field, this research underscores the need for a broader and more expansive understanding of how, why, and where students travel for educational purposes. Embracing the language of study away as opposed to study abroad widens our understanding of student mobility and works to challenge the foreign/domestic and global/local dichotomies which are rife in the field, and which tend to privilege international over domestic travel. An important contribution to the literature is my emphasis on place, in particular, Hawaiʻi. By consciously centering place, I sought to disrupt the individualistic and extractive tendencies in the field which prioritize participants over place. Situating this study in Hawaiʻi also provided a unique lens through which to view student mobility. Students are an undertheorized and growing segment of visitors to Hawaiʻi, and this research adds to our understanding of what their presence here means. My hope is that this project will add to the scholarship on Critical Qualitative Inquiry, study away, and decoloniality.

Despite the contributions of this study, there are several limitations. The findings of this research are limited to my particular sample, the time the data was collected, and the context of NSE in Hawaiʻi. The findings, therefore, are not meant to be generalizable. Instead, this study, bounded though it may be, offers an additional voice to the conversations around what it means to be a mobile student in the world today. Despite these limitations, I believe this research raises important questions and issues for global education and student mobility, which are particularly urgent in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as the field continues to grapple with its colonial tendencies and works to redefine its role and relevance moving forward.

Conclusion

This research project highlighted data collected from semi-structured interviews with former NSE participants from the continental U.S. who completed an exchange to UHM and Hawaiʻi between Fall 2021 and Fall 2022. In addition to exploring the lived experiences of individual NSE participants, this study also sought to foreground and consciously center place - Hawaiʻi - in an effort to disrupt the circuits of coloniality which are evident both in student mobility practices and in Hawaiʻi. The findings indicate that participants imagined and experienced Hawaiʻi as both foreign and familiar while they negotiated their roles as students and visitors. Seeking to distance themselves from tourists, NSE participants emphasized the importance of behaving in responsible and respectful ways in Hawaiʻi. In particular, those students who took courses which focused on Hawaiʻi were able to trouble the narrative of this place as a multicultural paradise and to develop more nuanced and complicated understandings of Hawaiʻi. They were also able to resist the tourist gaze in Hawaiʻi and consider the impact of visitors (including themselves) on the islands, which I argue can be a sort of decolonial intervention, which is sorely needed both in the field of student mobility and in Hawaiʻi. As Aikau & Gonzalez (2019) remind us, "(u)nless we actively work to dismantle this infrastructure and refuse the tourist imaginary, we will (wittingly or unwittingly) contribute to reproducing the occupation and colonization of these places, people, and practices" (p. 3).

This research has demonstrated that I, as a study away scholar and practitioner, and as a settler, have more work to do to support decoloniality, both in the student mobility field and in Hawai‘i. While I am asking study away participants and the student mobility field to change, it is clear that I also must change. As McArthur (2022) states,

> For genuine transformative change to occur, which is the core purpose of decolonialisation, we all need to change, and this includes western scholars. Indigenous thought tells us this. Critical theory tells us this. This is the ultimate plateau on which we must join as fellow travellers. How do we know if we have reached this place? We know because we see changes in ourselves, in our practices, our relationships – and our most treasured beliefs – and not simply see change as something that happens to others (p. 1690).

Applying a critical gaze back at myself and what I do is necessary, even if "the work of unlearning colonial desires and practices, and learning to be and relate differently, is often difficult, slow, uncomfortable, unpredictable, and even painful" (Stein et al., 2021, p. 4). Yet this is my kuleana, and as Tengan (2005) says, "kuleana also entails the responsibility and willingness to be unsettled ourselves" (p. 253).

As a result of this research, I hope to encourage student participants, the study away field, and myself to engage in practices that are less individualistic, transactional, and extractive and instead more respectful, responsible, and reciprocal. I view this project, and the suggestions made as an opening, a way to begin a much-needed conversation about how we can contribute to decolonization efforts, both in the field of student mobility and in Hawai‘i.

Mahalo nui loa (thank you very much).

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