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**A PARADOXICAL PARADISE:
THE MARQUESAS AS A DEGENERATE AND REGENERATIVE SPACE
IN THE WESTERN IMAGINATION**

by
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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF THE ARTS**

**PROFESSOR PARK, SCRIPPS COLLEGE
PROFESSOR MARTINS, PITZER COLLEGE
PROFESSOR LISS, SCRIPPS COLLEGE**

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Its infamous repute perhaps affected me; but I thought it the loveliest, and by far
the most ominous and gloomy, spot on earth.
Robert Louis Stevenson

Introduction

In August 2013, a young family from Arizona fled the US and headed for an island nation in the South Pacific. Deserting frustrations with abortion, homosexuality, taxes and the “state-controlled church,” the family “decided to take a leap of faith and see where God led [them]” (Neuman 2013). In a wild series of unfortunate events, God apparently led them across the Pacific with no immediate solace in a foreign land. Missing their destination, the family decided to head for the Marquesas Islands in French Polynesia, but missed that destination as well and set course for other land. Thrice missing their destinations of escape, the family was eventually picked up by a Venezuelan fishing vessel and dropped off in Chile. There, a police prefect told a newspaper that “they were looking for a kind of adventure; they wanted to live on a Polynesian island but they didn’t have sufficient expertise to navigate adequately” (Neuman 2013). A sense of seaward adventure with a tropical *paradise* at journeys-end evidently took precedence over lack of navigational knowledge for this family, but there is an even greater hole in this story. Fleeing a problem-filled United States, the Arizona family had one especially grand assumption in this journey: that their new Polynesian home would be a problem-free escape to *paradise*.

This assumption is not uncommon— Pacific Islands have long seduced sailors and tourists to their lush shores. The Marquesas Islands, an archipelago among literal thousands of other Pacific islands, remains mysterious and enchanting for outsiders. Published in celebrated literature, sailors’ accounts, art and media, the Marquesas have come to occupy a certain section of the Western

imaginary as a metaphor for the ultimate escape from civilization, one that provides enlightenment in regards to human nature. As a result, the Marquesas Islands have often been subject to Western narratives that use the islands to comment on Western society.

These narratives construct a dichotomy of the West and the Marquesas Islands that enforce social evolutionary theories between the two locations and cultures, by solidifying the islands' spot in the Western imaginary as spatially and temporally backwards. Yet paradoxically, they also idealize and romanticize the concept of being spatially and temporally backwards: this "backwardness" implies an idyllic Eden liberated from the confines and systemic problems of Western, Judeo-Christian society. As such, this dichotomy categorizes the West as having strayed from its origins as humans in an authentically natural state, and bespeaks of civilization as the cause of such a departure. It thus categorizes the Marquesas *as* those humans in a natural, civilization-less state and so infers social evolution.

Western narratives that use the Marquesas Islands as a romanticized space of human nature often dismiss the dramatic colonial effects on the islands, but not always. In fact, the narratives often present a sense of guilt and mourning for the effects of colonialism that prohibited an "authentic" Marquesan identity from thriving. This *imperialist nostalgia* revolves around the paradox that:

Agents of colonialism [...] often display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was 'traditionally' (that is, when they first encountered it). The peculiarity of their yearning, of course, is that agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed [and] mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed. [Rosaldo 1989:69]

However by so focusing on this colonial guilt the islands are, to a degree, denied agency of their identity in the Western imaginary: instead of using a Marquesan perspective to address qualms of colonial guilt, the Western narratives I write of only take into account *Western* points of view. As such, the Marquesas perceived in the Western imagination is purely a Western product.

As Marquesan scholar Greg Dening phrases it, “*Enata*¹ and *Hao’e*² have a bound-together history” (Dening 2007:11). That is to say, the commonly read histories, stories, and identities we hold of the Marquesas in the West are a *product* of Western discourse. Dening further writes:

The totally other is either not known or in the context of which it is known it is changed. Ethnohistory’s preoccupation with cultures beyond the European frontier has meant, as we have seen, the pursuit of an ‘ethnographic present’ as an imagined moment prior to the impact of intrusion. It is a moment that *historically* has never existed. [Dening 2004:42]

Understanding pre-Western contact of the archipelago through the means of Western historical documentation is impossible. Knowledge of the Marquesas Islands in the West has been historically produced by Westerners, thus we can never know “the totally other,” especially if our understanding of the Other comes from the moment of Western intrusion. The West has therefore imagined knowledge of the Marquesas, and it is this realm of imagined knowledge that is produced and circulated for Western consumption. It does not take the Marquesan side into account, and cannot know its pre-contact history, and therefore denies the Marquesas agency in how they are perceived in this imagination.

¹ Marquesan word meaning literally, “man,” or “Marquesan.”

² Marquesan word meaning, “foreigner.”

My primary inspiration for this thesis comes from my time in Vaitahu, the same bay that some of the first Westerners anchored and deserted at in the Marquesas Islands. With aspirations to become an archaeologist, I participated in my first excavation with the Andover Foundation for Archaeological Research³ on Tahuata the summer following my second year of college, in 2012. Understanding that I was to be in a very remote and distant location, I felt that I was to undergo an immense adventure, exploring the remains of an ancient culture that still had its remnants in contemporary life. I felt like the quintessential anthropologist of the 20th century, going to live amongst a culture “close to its roots.” Indeed, I was only one of six Americans living on the island at the time, and engaged with the local population on a daily basis. But rather than “going native,” I came to a series of conclusions about how problematically I conceived of the Marquesas islanders’ lifestyle.

The initial shock upon my arrival at the quay in the valley of Vaitahu was not realizing how truly in the middle of the Pacific Ocean I was, but the fact that Rihanna’s “We Found Love” was playing on a stereo nearby. I soon realized that being located in the middle of quite a few continents meant that with satellite TV, one could watch over 100 channels. The local shops even contained snacks from all over the world: beer from Tahiti, cheese balls from Malaysia, and Coca Cola bearing labels in Arabic.

³ I would like to thank Barry Rolett and Emily Donaldson of the Andover Foundation for Archaeological Research for giving me the opportunity to study under their direction. Without them I would not have known of the islands’ existence, let alone conceptualize such a topic for my senior thesis. I am forever indebted to the knowledge they lent me. Wherever there are gaps in my citations for Marquesan facts, it is most likely that they should be credited.

Above all, something my professor said really struck me. As an archaeologist who has worked in the Marquesas for over thirty years, he told me how sad he is that every time he returns to the islands, a little more Western technology has been introduced. Horses and motorcycles cohabit the streets, and teenagers check Facebook on cell phones. I was embarrassed by my assumption that there wouldn't be this modern technology in so remote and culturally different a location.

On my very last day in Vaitahu, I was hunched over pig jaws and pearl shell, cleaning artifacts and organizing them to be stored in the local museum. Outside the classroom I was working in, island-wide Internet was being installed for the very first time. I, as well as my fellow dig mates, felt a sense of sadness, and could not quite understand why. Ever since leaving Tahuata over a year ago, I have been troubled with this question. It is a question that has led me to flesh out possible answers, not simply for my own understanding; after living in Vaitahu for a month and a half, I wanted to present the issues Marquesans face to a world that often does not know of these islands' existence.

There are common threads between many if not all of the Western experiences in the Marquesas that I write about, including the Arizona family's, my professor's and my own. This thesis outlines both the evolution and persistence of those experiences throughout time using specific examples in different modes of representation. I ask, why does a seemingly stable concept exist in the Western imagination across centuries that man without civilization is the ultimate freedom? In present day, why would we ever wish Tahuata not to

have Internet? As a small community drastically altered by colonialism, and as a remaining territory of France, should they not have the opportunity to become a part of the “modernized” world? I have set these personal inquiries within the field of anthropology, attempting to deconstruct how human difference and hierarchies have been produced in Western intellectualism.

In this thesis, I argue that the islands are presented in the Western imagination using colonialist ideologies, whether purposefully or not. Whether the islands are deliberately placed as backwards and barbarous to justify Western dominance, or are placed as being in a state of authentic human nature out of colonial guilt, representations of the Marquesas in the Western imagination enforce a social evolutionary theories. On the one hand, reasons for asserting the islands as savage in colonial times is obvious, but more contemporary representations of the Marquesas become much more complicated: they reveal a paradox that does not assert the Marquesas as savage, but still places the islands in an atemporal space home to primitive human in Eden. Rosaldo would articulate this as “innocent yearning” that works to capture both “people’s imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination” (Rosaldo 1989:70).

My methodology for arguing this thesis is an exploration of representations of the Marquesas in the Western imagination. Even when representations challenge the notion of Western civilization as the dominant global power, they place the Marquesas backwards in time. Doing so allows the West to confront “problems” within their own society. If the Marquesas exists as a *degenerate* space backwards in time, the West may look to the islands as a place

to *regenerate*, or to go back to living in an authentic state of human nature, without the confines of civilization. My movement through different modes of representation emphasizes the power that Western intellectualism has had in perpetuating imagined knowledge of the Marquesas.

Chapter one uncovers the first constructed meanings of *paradise*, and how notions of such a place led to European expansion and colonialism. Deconstructing these notions elucidates how scientific and anthropological theories of nature, culture and time have constructed perceptions of the Marquesas Islands in the Western imagination. I conduct a close reading of three of the first key historical documents that aided the inception of the Marquesas in the Western imagination: James Cook's three-day account of Tahuata amid his Pacific voyages, William Pascoe Crook's accounts of the islands during his attempt to convert the archipelago to Christianity and Edward Robarts' accounts of the islands after deserting a whaling ship. These three documents not only place the Marquesas into Western consciousness, but also provide the footing for further expectations and representations of the islands as backwards, savage, dangerous and heathen: a veritable *paradise lost*. Robarts' accounts also introduce a new hypothesis that the Marquesas, despite being savage, may in fact be "better" than advanced Western civilization if they are without its societal trappings. This chapter asserts the authority of discursive histories and therefore highlights the imagined knowledge of the Marquesas in Western intellectualism.

In chapter two I unpack representations of the Marquesas in three works of literature: Denis Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, Herman

Melville's *Typee*, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *In the South Seas*. I then continue to analyze three of Paul Gauguin's paintings in both Tahiti and the Marquesas. The two mediums of literature and art rework an image of the Marquesas that is romantically savage, and that also mourns the potential loss of the islands' culture due to Western influence.

Both Diderot and Melville's work use the islands as a testing ground for new conceptions of Western society as problematic. The two authors *rediscover paradise* within the Marquesas, where being savage may not in fact be negative if it means living in a historically distant and authentic state of human nature. However all three authors, particularly Stevenson, reinforce the image of the islands as dangerous and lesser than Western civilization. Yet still, the celebrated author of *Treasure Island* and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* claims the Marquesas Islands for an artistic Western class as a source of inspiration for creativity.

Gauguin elucidates a Western mourning for the loss of an authentic Polynesian, and perhaps even human, culture that Melville touched upon. By using the Marquesas and Tahiti to critique Western artistic traditions, Gauguin hopes to find *regeneration* in Polynesian aesthetics. He presents the Marquesas and Tahiti as a *rediscovered paradise*, not a savage *paradise lost*. In doing so he fixes the two cultures in a distant time and space, thereby furthering the islands in the Western imagination as existing in a past, yet desirable, time frame. Between three literary representations and three visual representations of the Marquesas, I illustrate how histories of the Marquesas are propagated in the Western

imagination. I specifically dig into the paradox of the Marquesas as a *rediscovered paradise* that offers *regeneration* to a West mourning colonialism.

Chapter three considers the Marquesas in more contemporary media representations. Firstly, W.S. Van Dyke and Robert J. Flaherty's film adaptation of *White Shadows in the South Seas* exemplifies this *imperialist nostalgia* of a lost Marquesan culture due to the West, and the perpetuation of the islands as a desirable yet temporally distant Eden. Secondly, the 21st century reality TV show *Survivor* takes place on the Marquesas Islands in its fourth season. The award-winning television program does not wholly present the more contemporary mourning for a lost Marquesan culture specifically, but still presents the Marquesas as fixed in an ancient and dangerous culture that harkens back to a time when human nature was more authentic. In fact the theme of the show *Survivor* is to win luxurious, Western prizes for learning to live in a state reverted back to an earlier, more natural time. I use this chapter to demonstrate how powerful discursive histories, literary and artistic narratives are in the Western imagination, and how they reproduce discourses.

Looking at these historical processes of representation will enlighten contemporary tourism marketing strategies that I touch upon in the conclusion to this paper. Moreover, I touch base with the contemporary political situation in the Marquesas Islands to understand how problematic it is to still view the archipelago as an escape from Western civilization, and as a place for the West to *regenerate* by reverting back to an earlier, *degenerate* state of nature.

This naturalization of peoples creates an image of a culture that is,

Beyond history, permanent, and fixed. 'Naturalization' is therefore a representational strategy designed to *fix* 'difference', and thus *secure it forever*. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable 'slide' of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological 'closure.' [Hall 2003:245]

By continuously comparing an image of the Marquesas as an Eden to a corrupted West, the Marquesas becomes static to Western eyes, pushing the Marquesas to literally exist in another time. In Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other*, he writes that, "what makes the savage significant to the evolutionist's Time is that he lives in another Time" (Fabian 1983:27). As naturalized peoples outside of Western civilization, the Marquesas are seen as existing in a separate dimension, becoming "objects or referents" of discourse (Fabian 1983:29). In other words, modes of representation that comprise the Western imagination use the Marquesas as an object of discourse on human nature and civilization, using an evolutionary scale that infers a civilizational hierarchy. In order to make those discourses clear, I move through these different modes of representation to illustrate the power that Western intellectualism has had in producing, reproducing and enforcing imagined knowledge.

My intuition tells me that the reason for my sadness about the installation of Internet on Tahuata was because I felt nostalgic for a time without technology, when humans lived in harmony with nature. I ask the reader to question why the Marquesas is a target for this nostalgia, meanwhile recognizing that this is perhaps an impossible question to answer. But I do believe that we can start answering it here, with how the Marquesas Islands became realized within the Western imagination.

Chapter One: Conceptualizing the Marquesas Islands

In realizing how the Marquesas came to be known in the Western imagination, we first need to contextualize the modes by which the Marquesas are represented throughout time. That is, we need to grasp how thought, and thereby the construction of those modes by which the Marquesas are represented, are conceptualized. In effect, I unpack how peoples other than the West are conceived of, how we come to know what we know and overall how scientific and anthropological theories have shaped our perceptions of Oceania and thus the Marquesas Islands. Specifically, I emphasize the authority that Western intellectuals have had in asserting the Other in scientific and anthropological theories as spatially and temporally distant in time. Anthropology intrinsically explores human difference, and this chapter illustrates how conceptions of difference have placed the Marquesas as a *paradise*, an Other and as backwards in time and space.

Constructing Difference

Johannes Fabian articulates that knowledge of the Other is a temporal, historical and political act, and becomes so with notions of *time* (Fabian 1983). The concept of time itself is a construction that has evolved and consequently affected the way the West perceives non-Western cultures, or the Other: Fabian argues that as time became secularized in the West during the 18th century, it was seen as congruent with the movement of the world. That is, rather than time being

relegated to specific religious events, time was seen as an evolution from a beginning point of *nature* and the *universe* (Fabian 1983).

This concept eventuated into social evolutionary theory and the rise of social sciences in the 18th century, that “had shown that man had risen to civilization ‘from a lowly condition to the highest standards as yet attained by him in knowledge, morals and religion’” (Stocking 1982:113). In other words, social evolutionary theory was a widely accepted theory that speculated that, “human knowledge proceeded naturally, gradually, and inevitably toward perfection” (Stocking 1982:113-14). This unilineal vision thus had to theorize that the growth of human cultures advanced from a single point in time historically distant. As Western intellectualism began to conceive of other cultures as less advanced, those cultures were thought to exist in a different time frame. As one particular author of a précis writes, “Fabian notes, world geography [was] now subordinated to conceptual geography, such that different cultures [could] now be fully regarded as living in different times within an abstract, evolutionary schema of historical development” (Strong Reading 2011). This conceptual geography spatializes time, so that the object of Western thought and discourse, the Other, becomes wholly independent from the West, and the West/Other dichotomy is created. The Other coexists with the West, yet in a historically distant time. These evolutionary schemas were often utilized to justify Western dominance in colonialism, and gave rise to the study of the Other in the social sciences.

Although evolutionary schemas have since been disregarded since the late 19th/early 20th centuries, a denial of *coevalness* still exists in some facets of

Western intellectualism. Particularly in anthropology and ethnography, the authority of writing, representing and mapping non-Western cultures as distant places that coexist with the present, results in the essentializing of the Other. The Other is thereby consistently temporalized: placed in a distinctly separate and earlier time than the West. They are not *coeval*, or existing in the present, with the West. In other words, oftentimes:

Ethnographers prefer to study events that have definite locations in space with marked centers and outer edges. Temporally, they have middles and endings. Historically, they appear to repeat identical structures by seemingly doing things today as they were done yesterday. Their qualities of fixed definition liberate such events from the untidiness of everyday life so that they can be ‘read’ like articles, books, or, as we now say, *texts*. [Rosaldo 1989:12]

This affirms colonialist ideologies that Western civilization is in fact the dominant culture and society, because it is not static, fixed and backwards like the Other. Even though notions of social evolutionary theory may be disregarded now, placing a culture as static affirms the West’s place as more advanced on an evolutionary scale. Although the mediums I explore through which the Marquesas are represented do not always accept the colonialist ideology of social evolution, they do inadvertently enforce it with the concept of temporalizing the Marquesas as existing in a past time period— just as the West simultaneously exists in a contemporary, and therefore advanced, time. The construction of the Other is thereby a temporal, historical and political act.

Representations of the Other as temporally and spatially distant thus constitute a major portion of how the West conceives of the Marquesas today. Stuart Hall articulates that representation “*is* an essential part of the process by

which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture” (Hall 2003:15). Representation is, in fact, a tangible form by which we can make sense of the world and it is through representation that truth is produced and circulated.

Hall writes in reference to Michel Foucault:

(1) Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about.

(2) It is discourse, not the subjects who speak it, which produces knowledge. Subjects may produce particular texts, but they are operating within the limits of episteme, the discursive formation, the regime of truth, of a particular period and culture. Indeed, this is one of Foucault’s most radical propositions: the ‘subject’ is produced within discourse. [Hall 2003:44]

In regards to the first point, we can look at representation in terms of *discourse*. Representations are constructed within discourse, a production of knowledge that defines what we think about and act upon. Indeed, it governs how representations themselves are constructed. Understanding the shift in anthropology in the late 19th/early 20th centuries that began thinking of human cultures as “historically conditioned cultures in place of a single sequence of evolutionary stages” (Stocking 1968:213), is helpful for understanding how regimes of truth, and therefore the construction of human cultures and human *difference*, are historically produced.

Gupta and Ferguson discuss the concept of cultural territorialization, which acknowledges, “that all associations of place, people, and culture are social historical creations to be explained, not given natural facts” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:4). In their introduction to *Beyond “Culture:” Space, Identity and Politics of Difference*, Gupta and Ferguson explain Liisa Malkki’s concept of the

metaphysics of sedentarism, “in which the rootedness of people and cultures in ‘their own’ territories is taken as the normal state in a taken-for-granted ‘national order of things’” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:7). This is especially true of the Marquesas in the Western imagination, where the islands are rooted in a constructed spatial and temporal location. The two authors write:

By stressing that place making always involves a construction, rather than merely a discovery, of difference, the authors of the essays here emphasize that identity neither ‘grows out’ of rooted communities nor is a thing that can be processed or owned by individual or collective social actors. It is, instead, a mobile, often unstable relation of difference. [Ferguson and Gupta 1997:13]

This theory of identities and places as socially and historically constructed is paramount to discerning how Western intellectualism imagined knowledge of the Marquesas. The Marquesas’ difference from the West was not merely discovered, but constructed. In the following chapters, I illustrate how difference is constructed between the Marquesas and the West, moreover illustrating the authority that Western intellectualism has had in imagining a reality of the Marquesas that denies the islands agency in how the Western imagination perceives them. Gupta and Ferguson further write that:

Discussions of identity, it seems to us, all too easily fall into the model of possession and ownership embodied in discourses about the sovereign subject: an identity is something one ‘has’ and can manipulate that one can ‘choose’; or inversely, it is something that acts as a source of ‘constraint’ on the individual, as an ascribed rather than chosen feature of life. In both cases, the individual subject is taken as a pregiven entity, identities as so many masks or cages it may inhabit. Such positions are perfectly compatible with the observation that identities (like the contents of ‘cultures’ themselves) are historically contingent. [Gupta and Ferguson 1997:12-13]

I argue that Marquesan identity in the Western imagination is an ascribed one, and has been so historically constructed that it is taken as a pregiven entity in the Western imagination. Discourses as producing regimes of truth, and representations as modes for facilitating such truth, are both tools we can use to analyze how the Marquesas has been given its own identity by the West, in the Western imagination.

Sherry Ortner writes that:

Theories of representation [...] compel us to think not only about the relationship between a signifier and its referent, but about representations as produced and consumed within a field of inequality and power, and shaped as much by those relations of production and consumption as by the nature of the supposed referent. [Ortner 1998:434]

By exploring referents of discourse and how modes of representation implement such discourses, we are able to see how colonialist ideologies of the Marquesas as backwards in a natural time and space are perpetuated throughout centuries of representation, even despite postcolonial motives to “save” the islands from Western influence. These postcolonial motives “sympathetically [present] otherness to ‘our own’ Western society. What this ignores are the significant internal differences that fracture such a complacent anthropological ‘we’” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:24). Ascribing identities as relations of difference with others as categorical entities in a postcolonial world firstly ignores the fact that “we,” the “West,” is not one singular entity of same identities⁴ (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:20). Secondly, it also ignores the other side of the equation: how the Other, such as the Marquesas, perceives its own difference from the West. By ascribing

⁴ However, I still use “we” to refer to the West in this paper, making the generalization that the majority of Western populations need to challenge their mode of postcolonial thinking.

categorical identities of difference to the Marquesas, the Western imagination denies identities that the Marquesas has constructed for itself.

Gupta and Ferguson directly quote Foucault, who articulates that “an experience is neither true nor false: it is always a fiction, something constructed, which exists only after it has been made, not before; it isn’t something that is ‘true’ but it has been a reality” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:19). The realities experienced, and then constructed as truth, over a historical time in the West constitute a Marquesas that is a paradoxical *paradise* in the Western imagination.

As Hall articulates,

Meanings have all sorts of ‘effects’, from the construction of knowledge to the subjection of the subject to the meaning offered. If they have an influence on ‘behaviour’ it is more likely to be indirectly because knowledge is always implicated in power and power implies limits on what can be seen and shown, thought and said. [Hall, quoted in Davis 2004:98]

If we take this lens that knowledge is manifested in power, then we can better understand why the Western imagination of the Marquesas Islands is problematic. Its imagined stories and identities of the Marquesas become truths and realities that “transform the responsible colonial agent into an innocent bystander” (Rosaldo 1998:70), ignoring the Marquesan side of the equation in how they are perceived within the Western imagination. I now turn to how a Marquesan identity began to be imagined and ascribed by Western intellectualism in the first place.

Constructing Paradise

In his book *Knowing Oceania* Kerry Howe explores the concept of *paradise*. He proclaims that the earliest traces of such a concept land in Indo-European, Judeo-Christian and Greek mythologies where *paradise* exists as a “golden age” with “bounteous nature,” and above all without sin and danger (Howe 2000:8); and asserts that the tropical island was constructed in the European imagination as such a *paradise*. In the West, *paradise* was believed to exist somewhere Eastward. With new navigational technologies and economic imperatives in the 15th and 16th centuries, Spain and Portugal began expanding towards non-Western regions (Howe 2000:8). Howe argues that this was, “at heart [...] ‘the search for Eden’” (Howe 2000:9), indeed a search for knowledge and control of such a *paradise*, if it existed. Islands as a *paradise* were, in fact:

Places of safety, refuge, recreation, and reprovisioning for mariners. They had strategic, economic, colonial possibilities. They offered the exotic—new vegetation, new animals, new human culture. They engendered notions of the fantastic and the inversion of values. [Howe 2000:11]

Islands were the ideal “discovery” of the West: small enough to dominate, assert control and find answers to questions of global knowledge. Those travelers who went forth out of the West heralded knowledge of Oceania that would be taken as truth. Howe writes:

Not only were islands the locations of castaways and cannibals, buccaneers and pirates and the inspiration of a literary tradition, which still exists, of adventure, privation, and wealth beyond imagining, but islands became allegorical sites and rhetorical devices. [Howe 2000:11]

In essence, Oceanic islands were locations for the West to conceptualize not only power, but also the essence of self in *paradise*, “without the trappings” of “society” (Howe 2000:12). The imagined Oceania in the Western imagination

thus becomes paradoxical: it is powerless, it is without advanced society, but it is also desirable. Its *paradise* becomes an allegory to test Western conceptions of its own society.

However as the Pacific came to view with European explorers, that desirable *paradise* was *lost* to places home to savages, fear and loathing. Western civilization strove to dominate the “untamed wilderness” of the Other (Howe 2000:15). Intellectual ideologies of humans as subject to the force of nature permitted the idea that some regions were more fit for survival than others, and thus that a *paradise* could never in fact exist (Howe 2000:21). This 19th century paradigm reverses in the 20th century, and considers that human control and culture can dominate nature, but excluded the Other as falling under this domain of human control. Being lesser and temporalized, the Oceanic Other is relegated to that distant point in time, where nature still controls human; social evolution between the West and Oceania is thereby reinforced. Howe also articulates that functionalism played a large part in the eventual essentializing of Oceanic cultures, because the West would solely attribute itself as causing social change of the Other. A fear of the “ruin” of Pacific cultures in the 20th century in a form of *imperialist nostalgia* places the Oceanic Other as stable and static, so that they may remain “untouched” by the West.

Howe also asserts that the West still perceived itself as redemptive for postcolonial Oceania in the 1920s and 1930s, but rather than save the Oceanic region from barbarism and heathenism, the West strove to save the region from their violent past by assisting them with modernization in schooling, medicine,

etc. This “imperial destiny” (Howe 2000) is still perpetuated in the Western imagination, though in the paradoxical form of attempting to save a slice of old, authentic humanity in *paradise* while never destabilizing colonial, social evolutionary theories. I explore this concept in the subsequent chapters.

Provided that the Marquesas remain embedded in this distant space and time, *paradise* may be *rediscovered*. Howe writes:

The role of imperial history was to be an agent of imperial policy. The role of postcolonial history is to be an agent of postcoloniality. Where imperial history was preemptive, postcolonial history is redemptive. Both make journeys toward self. The latter is often just as morally certain as the former, though ironically is often less conscious of itself. [Howe 2000:86]

Representations of the Marquesas Islands in the Western imagination thus reflect the contexts of Western intellectual theories, historical events and discourses. In early centuries, representations of the Marquesas echo the imperative to dominate other cultures. In later and more contemporary centuries, representations of the islands illustrate a West attempting to redeem colonialism by saving non-Western peoples from becoming Western. These postcolonial representations create expectations “of a monolithic ‘indigenous’ agency and liberation” (Howe 2000: 86).

This monolithic agency and liberation of Oceania places its cultures in that naturalized, distant time and space. Hall claims that “the logic behind naturalization is simple” meaning that, if being “natural” means being “without culture,” then naturalized peoples

Are beyond history, permanent, and fixed. ‘Naturalization’ is therefore a representational strategy designed to *fix* ‘difference’, and thus *secure it forever*. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable ‘slide’ of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological ‘closure.’ [Hall 2003:245]

The fixing of difference in the Marquesas fixes a West/Other dichotomy. Further, it strategically dismisses colonial affects in the Marquesas and leaves the islands as “different,” thus “non-Western” and thus “untouched.” Naturalizing the islands is then used to understand how humans can exist in a transcendent, lawless human state that harkens back to original notions of *paradise*. I argue that the Marquesas in postcolonial representations exist as a *paradise rediscovered* where the West can confront itself and *regenerate* in a lawless, and *degenerate*, Eden. However before that notion of *paradise* was *rediscovered*, it first had to be debunked.

Placing Te Fenua Enata⁵ into Western Consciousness

In order to conceive of how the Marquesas entered the Western imaginary in the first place, we need to backtrack to the first discursive histories written about the islands. Here, I discuss four key European men and three of their journals that shaped the historical construction of the islands, thereby providing their place in the dominant historical model of the globe. I begin with the Spaniard Alvaro de Mendaña, who first “discovered” the Marquesas, and gave the islands the name they go by to this day. I continue with the famed Captain James Cook, who stumbled across the Marquesas on a science expedition in the South Pacific. William Pascoe Crook arrived not long after on a mission, and Edward Robarts found himself deserting a ship and writing about his experiences living in the Marquesas for a time. The accounts of Cook, Crook and Robarts provide

⁵ Marquesan name for the islands literally meaning “The Land of Men.” The phrase *Te Henua Enata*, with the same meaning, is used in the northern Marquesas Islands.

insight into the inception of Western narratives of the Marquesas Islands. However before becoming that tropical *paradise* we consider the archipelago today, the Marquesas Islands had their identity formed by Western intellectuals as a place of fear, savagery and danger. Being thus conceptually shaped by the West, the Marquesas later became a ground to test Western understandings of morality and human nature (Howe 2000).

Dening writes that, “it is a mistake to underestimate the strength of literate man’s urge to record his presence or to measure it by the small percentage that is published. It is on this strength that historical reconstruction depends” (Dening 1974:20). Historical reconstruction denies the Marquesas agency in how they are perceived in the Western imagination simply because of the authority Western intellectuals hold in creating truth and ascribing identities to be consumed by others. By constructing imagined knowledge of the Marquesas, these intellectuals have enforced social evolutionary theories that are perpetuated today.

Before the Marquesas was put onto geographical, cultural and conceptual maps, the theorized southern landmass Terra Australis Incognita gave way to the initial imagination of the Pacific region. In the 12th century, speculations of a southern landmass to equal that in the north led to Spanish explorations in the South Seas (Howe 2000). By 1595, the Spaniard Alvaro de Mendaña stumbled across the Marquesas instead of the Solomon Islands he hoped to chart (Dening 2004:5-15). Sailing into the bay of Vaitahu on Tahuata in the southern isles, his crew became frustrated with inexplicable cultural differences. They saw the islanders’ curiosity with their foreign objects as thieving, and consequently left

Vaitahu having killed 200 of the islanders (Denning 1980:11). Placing this experience and this land on a map for the first time, Mendaña named the islands *Las Marquesas de Mendaña*, after his patron, the Marquis de Cañete, Viceroy of Peru (Denning 1980:11; Knowlton 1964:303-4). To this day, they are called the Marquesas Islands.

The islands had not seen another foreigner until 179 years later in 1774, when Captain James Cook set forth on a mission to test the chronometer for calculating longitude (Cook 2003). Cook's expeditions would herald "the exposure of the hitherto isolated Pacific islands to the wider world" (Howe 2000:14). Moreover, his journals would herald an image of the Marquesas in the Western imagination. Rather than "discover" a wealthy, Eden of a southern continent, Cook "found" a *paradise lost* (Howe 2000:14-15). That is, the fabled Terra Australis became a dangerous place home to savages. Cook anchored in the same bay on Tahuata as Mendaña, he and his crew only remaining three days. Yet still, they asserted power by renaming the bay "Resolution Bay," from the name Mendaña had given it: "Madre de Dios." (Denning 1974:2). To this day, the bay goes by both its Marquesan and Western name: Vaitahu and Resolution Bay.

In the short passages he writes about the Marquesas, Cook asserts his literary authority and leaves behind an identity of "savage" islanders to be interpreted as truth by future navigators. Cook writes:

You must look well after these people or they certainly will carry off some thing or other, these words were no sooner out of my mouth and had hardly got into my Boat, when I was told they had stolen one of the Iron Sta [n] chions from the opposite Gang-way, I told the officers to fire over the Canoe till I could get round in the Boat, unluckily for the thief they

took better aim than I ever intend and killed him the third Shott... [Cook 2003:341]

Cook speaks to his interpretation that the “Natives” then recognized “the effect of [their] fire Arms but the event proved other wise for the boat had no sooner left the Kedge anchor than a Canoe put off from the Shore” (Cook 2003:341). He believed the islanders to be “in great dread of the Musquet,” and yet the islanders “nevertheless [...] would very often exercize their tallant of thieving upon [them], which [he] thought necessary to put up with as [their] stay was likely to be but short among them” (Cook 2003:341). Cook’s attitude towards and perception of the Marquesas are immediately problematic, though expected as a product of his colonialist time.

Cook’s claim that “you must look well after these people” asserts Western authority over the islanders. Rather than acknowledge any cultural misunderstanding between the two groups, Cook immediately weaves the islanders into a Western cultural framework. In doing so, the Marquesans become misbehaved “Westerners” instead of culturally different Marquesans. Cook proves this assertion by illustrating an example of “theft.” Using firearms and “putting up” with the perceived Marquesan thievery, Cook writes as if the Marquesans have intruded upon their property, not the other way around.

Having thus been “retarded” (Cook 2003:342) by the islanders, Cook and his men established a form of trade on shore. He writes:

Toward Noon a chief of some consequence, attended by a great number of People, came down to us, I made him a present of Nails and Several other Articles and in return he gave me some of his ornaments, after these Mutual exchanges a good under Standing Seemed to be settled between us

and them so that we got by exchanges as much fruit as Loaded two boats and then return on board. [Cook 2003:342]

Despite this “good under Standing,” the newly established market soon became “spoil’d” (Cook 2003:343). The islanders were unhappy with the nails given to them, and Cook claims that it was not “bad design [...] against the Nation” that made them shoot their arms. Cook illustrates that “strict honesty was seldom observed” (Cook 2003:342) in the Marquesas. Once again, Cook places the Marquesas in a Western framework of trade that led to the perception of the islanders as dishonest thieves. A product of his colonial time, Cook dismisses cultural difference and delegitimizes Marquesan behavior.

Departing the islands to supply their ship elsewhere (Cook 2003:343), the famed Captain James Cook disappears “with a view of leaving the Isles altogether” (Cook 2003:344). Though he may have left the Marquesas altogether, his words about the islands as home to dishonest thieves were to be referenced and taken as truth by his succeeding explorers. The Marquesas is, in this point in historical time, not the *paradise* it was once expected to be.

In 1797, the English ship *Duff* took off with members of the London Missionary society to “deliver those who would preach the message of the Lord’s salvation” (Cook 2003:97). Among the crew was a 22-year-old man named William Pascoe Crook, who rather than land at Tahiti with the rest of the mission, decided to remain in the valley of Vaitahu, the same bay that Mendaña and Cook had anchored at. Another man on the crew, William Harris, remarked:

I have no doubt [that Crook] will contrive many things to benefit the poor creatures he lives with; and as the valley is capable of great improvement, I should not be surprised to hear of this and the islands adjacent becoming

very plentiful places by his means. He has various kinds of garden seeds, implements, medicines & c; an Encyclopaedia and other useful books [...] His manly behavior at this season did him great credit; the tears glistened in his eyes, but none fell; nor did he betray the least sign of fear to enter upon his work alone. [Crook 2003:21]

If the Marquesas were to Mendaña and Cook a source of geographical and scientific knowledge, then the Marquesas to Crook and his mission was a place fit for redemption. Referring to the islanders as “poor creatures,” and Crook as “manly,” educated, and beneficial for the islands’ salvation, Harris makes a similar assertion as Cook: that the uneducated Marquesan can only be helped, or saved, by the superior Western man (which fortifies a the notion of social evolution).

In between documentation of Marquesan customs, flora and fauna, Crook has realizations “that made the romantic Rousseauesque dreams of natural man seem grotesque” (Denning 1974:5). After having a difficult time converting the islanders to Christianity, and experiencing ritual cannibalism and common warring between valleys, Crook eventually left the islands on a ship passing by, deserting notions of the islands as *paradise*. His accounts of the Marquesas are some of the most important manuscripts regarding the Marquesas today. Crook may have been unsuccessful in his missionary endeavors, but succeeded in providing documents for *his* succeeding explorers to read and understand. The accounts are ethnographic in nature and incept a new inquiry. Crook asks: if the Marquesas have “no other law [...] how can they be conscious of no other transgression?” (Crook 2003:55). Unlike Cook, Crook questioned what cultural

difference would look like without condemning a non-Western culture as inferior. The Englishman Edward Robarts took this question further.

Robarts' accounts of the Marquesas take place after his desertion from a ship in 1798. He first appears in history in the journals of the Russian expedition to the Pacific: in 1804, Adam Johann von Krusenstern and his crew arrived at Nukuhiva in the northern isles, met by both Robarts and Jean Cabri, a Frenchman (Denig 1974:7). Cabri left with the Russians, ending his Marquesan career in Moscow and St. Petersburg making a spectacle of his tattoos and Marquesan dancing, his altered body even examined by scientists. Eventually he ended this masquerade at fairs in Brittany and Paris (Denig 1974:8). On the contrary, Robarts "had created a network of relations in different parts of the islands" (Denig 1974:9). Krusenstern wrote of Robarts:

I have no doubt that he would effect more good than the missionary Crook, who remained for some time on this island, was able to perform; for the latter had no other idea than that of converting the Nukuhiwers to Christianity, without recollecting that it was first necessary to make them men; for this purpose Robarts appears to me more proper. [Denig 1974:10]

It is not made entirely clear what "to make them men" means, but we can infer that Krusenstern meant something along the lines of "civilized man," once again placing the islands as people in need of salvation of some sort. Robarts was to live on the islands for eight years, subsequently recording his experiences much like Crook. Among documentation of Marquesan society, culture, and flora and fauna, Robarts began to question, not convert, Marquesan society in relation to his own.

At the end of his journals, Robarts remarks upon the hospitality and courteousness of the islanders, a marked contrast to previous identities ascribed to

the islands' peoples, and so mentions: "they are guilty of pilfering, But I beg leave to ask where will you find a race of honest men?" (Robarts 1974:255). By providing a sort of justice for Marquesan behavior, Robarts writes to his readers: "I beg leave to remind my Impartial reader that these people is man in his naïve state, situated on Islands in the middle of the sea, far distant from any Polished people, excepting the few ships that touch there" (Robarts 1974:259-60). Despite questioning common perceptions of Marquesans as uncivilized, Robarts still addresses this problematically. Being "distant from any Polished people" does not account for being unpolished. Although it may result in being naïve of Western culture, it does not result in being naïve.

This perception of the Marquesas as a naïve Eden perhaps stems most clearly from commentaries on government. Robarts remarks upon an apparent absence of government on the islands, ignorant of the *tapu*⁶ system that organizes Marquesan society. He writes:

There is one thing to be observd among these people, that every one does as he chuses on his own ground, haveing no real common law among them. I have often been surpriz'd that they dont commit outrages oftener than they do, For I am apt to think was either of the Polished Nations at their own will and nothing to curb them more then what these people have, there would be no liveing. For, when two families Quarrel among these people, and they draw a spear, there is allways more or less neighbors will endeavor to compose them, and if they fight and none Killd or sevearly wounded, they will set down with as much composure, as if nothing had happend. They will eat and drink and be good friends. [Robarts 1974:259]

⁶ Marquesan word literally meaning, "forbidden." *Tapu* is an intricate system that organized Marquesan society into various classes depending on what a group of people was or was not permitted to do. This form of societal structure was often seen as based on superstition to Westerners. Variations of *tapu* still exist today, though I cannot speak to its contemporary structures.

In this illustration, Robarts articulates something that has not yet been expressed in writing. Creating a government-less image of the Marquesas, Robarts describes something idyllic: the idea that man can live peacefully, and eat and drink merrily with neighbors after having just fought, *without* any political system. He dismisses the *tapu* system and asks his readers to examine if life without a “Polishd” government would be so outrageous. In doing so, he further defines the Marquesas as man in ultimate nature, bringing back the Terra Australis mindset that *paradise* is possible in the South Pacific. He then asks his readers a last question:

But let me ask my Impartial reader a fair question. Which of the two is the greatest Savage, the man who has Every Education given him, or the poor untaught Indian who has none? Here is no Police Office, no Court of Requests. But turn ourselves and take a view of Hicks Hall, which stands at the Bottom of Clerkenwell Green, London & of the Publick Office in the Borough Southwark. Next is the office in Worship Street, Finsbury Square, and the one in Hatton Garden. Peep into Bow street and stop at Tothill Fields. The above mentioend offices you will see daily crouded with wretches of both sex, whose countenances and crimes are of the darkest hue. Here is a large field to reflect in and view the out casts of Europe, acting some their tragic and some their Comic Parts. Here you see the Queen, the Jilt, the Nun of easy virtue, the Beau, the Lounger and sometimes the simple Farmer in search of their watches or cash that the fair nuns of the Strand, Parliament Street, or the Hundreds of Drury have deprivd them of the night before. Haveing thus painted with a favourable brush a few characters on the stage of Europe, must now leave my courteous reader to his own private thoughts, and I trust that he will Join me in Lamenting the situation of those Benighted, but Hospitable race of mankind which Inhabit the several groupes of Isles in the South Seas. [Robarts 1973:268]

Having juxtaposed an English city scene with his journal of Marquesan experiences, Robarts evaluates the consciousness of human difference two centuries after Mendaña placed the island nation on a literal, geographical map. Robarts inadvertently builds upon Crook’s original musings of savagery, and asks

his readers to question whether or not there is one true savage over another. While these are indeed progressive thoughts for the late 18th/early 19th centuries, there is one word in particular that stands out in this passage: “Lamenting,” with a capital “L.” Robarts rightfully laments the Western point of view of the Marquesan as uncivilized, but I believe that we can infer that he also laments Western influence preventing an “authentic” Marquesan identity from existing. This type of mourning, or *imperial nostalgia*, for a blissfully lawless Eden is perpetuated and reinforced in later representations of the Marquesas, which I will explore in chapters two and three.

The evolution of Western perceptions in these three sailors’ accounts is clear. Cook was on a pursuit for scientific knowledge and found uncivilized folks in need of civilizing; Crook strove to save peoples in the eyes of God and instead questioned cultural difference; and Robarts deserted a whaling ship, leaving us with an account of the Marquesas and his musings at its difference in culture and government from Western society. These accounts are not alone, for “nearly every major visitor to the islands in the early nineteenth century left his confused and piecemeal picture of Marquesan life” (Denig 1974:20). And “in the twenty years after Crook’s arrival nearly fifty ships had visited the Marquesas and some thirty-one deserters had stayed on the islands for shorter or longer periods” (Denig 1974:28), not to mention the sandalwood traders that came to the Marquesas in 1810 and exploited the resource to the point of near extinction in only six years (Denig 1974:4). However, the accounts I choose to focus on are exemplary of how the Marquesas was first conceived in the Western imagination.

Cook's journals immediately set the bar for a sort of Western hold on the Marquesas, as if the islands and their culture belong to the West: the islands support the conception of the advancement of European knowledge, a metaphor for what Europe advanced *from* (man in an uncivilized state). Dismissing cultural difference, Cook ascribes an identity of the islands as a place of chaotic, unruly thievery: *paradise is lost*. Cook lands in Vaitahu on a mission to lead the Marquesas to salvation, thus creating a metaphor of the islands as home to the unsaved man without religion, and who better to save them than the Western man? Despite his failure converting the islands, Cook leaves behind an image of Marquesan society as religion-less and government-less, but with a progressive question: can the Marquesas even be conscious of the fact that they behave so lawlessly? Although the question may be progressive, it provokes an illusion of Marquesans as without logical thought. They may be unconscious that they are unlike the West, but they are still unconscious.

Robarts builds upon this inquiry, asking his readers to question who is the real savage: man without civilization who seems to act peacefully, or man with civilization with a network of crime and discontentedness? He draws upon the nature of anthropology as understanding human difference by pointing out that advanced civilization may not, in fact, provide insight into authentic human nature. In this argument, the Marquesas acts as a metaphor for man outside law and order. The islands are used to point out faulty Western conceptions of civilization: notions of *paradise* or *Eden* are brought back into the Western imagination as places to explore the origins of human nature. But if Western

intellectualism uses *its* imagined knowledge of its difference from the Marquesas as being “superficially human” and “authentically human,” we need to understand that this is a subjective, imagined and ascribed dichotomy.

All three of these accounts write of the Marquesas as culturally confusing, chaotic, mysterious, ominous, wild and dangerous (especially in regards to cannibalism). However this dark, lawless and cryptic painting of the Marquesas soon becomes further idealized from the original notions of *paradise*. That is, past the literal and figurative heavy rain clouds so often described atop the islands’ craggy cliffs, is a land that is untouched by Western civilization. It becomes an idyllic and romantic setting where man can exist and *regenerate* outside of law and order harmoniously, as if he is close to nature. I explore this romanticization in the following chapters.

Chapter Two: Creative Commentary on the Marquesas and the West

With the emergence of historical documents on expeditions and desertions at the Marquesas Islands, new modes of representing human difference also surfaced in the form of literary stories and visual art. In contrast to the discursive histories I previously analyzed, these representations present Marquesan savagery in a positive light— in fact romanticizing it. They deliberately place the islands as backward in time and space, in order to prevent Western influence from infiltrating the original state of human nature that is the Marquesas. I use three literary pieces and three works of art to illustrate this fact: that in mourning colonialism, the Western imagination *rediscovers* a *paradise* within the Marquesas, where humans exist in harmony with an unrestrained state of nature; but that by so mourning and *rediscovering* this *paradise*, the Western imagination perpetuates the colonialist ideology of a social evolution.

I firstly argue this fact in literature. In the heat of 18th century debates of rationality and irrationality, major contributor to the *Encyclopédie* Denis Diderot wrote a fictional satire of a past historical account of the South Pacific. Using Tahiti as a counterpoint for Europe, he explores concepts of nature and culture and above all uses the islands to comment on Western civilization. Acclaimed American authors Herman Melville and Robert Louis Stevenson both document their time on the islands, but not in the same manner of past explorers. Melville stretches the truth of his stay, making his travels romantic, dramatic, exciting and *literary*. Like Diderot, he uses his Marquesan experience to comment on Western civilization. On the other hand, Stevenson affirms identities of the Marquesas as

savage and less advanced than the West. However he does discuss the islands as a poetic escape for artists who may find inspiration there, thereby finding his own source of *regeneration* in the Marquesas.

Secondly, I argue this poetic escape using artwork by French artist Paul Gauguin, who spent his last years in Tahiti and the Marquesas in the late 19th century expounding those notions of Diderot, Melville and Stevenson. He finds a source of *regeneration* in both locations, acknowledging that being in a time-backwards and natural state of humanity is more authentically human. Gauguin paints his vision of the South Pacific as being inhabited by free societies, while also mourning Western colonialism: he strives to legitimize savage, *degenerate* behavior and present it as necessary to *regenerate*. Yet, in order for him to legitimize that behavior, we find that he needs a time-backwards Marquesas and Tahiti to do so.

In this chapter I argue that these postcolonial literary and artistic devices bolster the Marquesas backwards in time and space, thereby enforcing a social evolution between the West and the Marquesas. They romanticize this backwards existence of the Marquesas, claiming that in being so historically distant the islands rest in an authentic and transcendent state of human nature. The authors and artists I write about attempt to save the archipelago in that space in a form of colonial guilt and *imperialist nostalgia*: a mourning of the loss of Marquesan culture due to Western influence. These authors and artists hope of finding *regeneration* in the Marquesas, recognizing that their own Western culture may

be inferior and inauthentic. However in order to make this assertion, we find that these Western artists need to enforce the concept of a time-backwards Marquesas.

Enlightenment Thought on Western Civilization and Polynesia

Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, published in 1772, acts as a commentary to Louis Antoine de Bougainville's travel log *Voyage autour du monde*. In his satire of these accounts, Diderot critiques Western European society for its conceptions of savagery and civilization. In one particular chapter, he creates a fictional dialogue between a Tahitian elder, Orou, and a European chaplain. In this dialogue, Orou confounds ideas of morality and the Christian God. Orou presents his wife and daughters to the chaplain, hoping that he will sleep with one of them as a mutual gesture. The chaplain declines saying that, "his holy orders, morality and decency all prohibited him from accepting Orou's offer" (Diderot 1992:47). Orou replies: "I don't know what you mean by 'religion', but I can only think ill of it, since it prevents you from enjoying an innocent pleasure to which Nature, that sovereign mistress, invites every person" (Diderot 1992:47). He further argues:

To please the priest, you'll be forced to oppose the magistrate; to satisfy the magistrate, you'll be forced to displease the great craftsman; (and to satisfy the great craftsman,) you'll have to abandon Nature. And do you know what will happen then? You'll come to despise all three of them, and you'll be neither a man, nor a citizen, nor a true believer. You'll be nothing. You'll be out of favour with each form of authority, at odds with yourself, malicious, tormented by your heart, miserable and persecuted by your senseless masters, as I saw you yesterday when I offered my daughters (and wife) to you, and you cried out, 'But my religion; my holy orders! [Diderot 1992:51]

Communicating through Orou, Diderot comments on what he sees as the ironic nature of Christianity, where arbitrary rules command an individual's actions. Those rules are often broken, leaving one faithless, a non-contributing member to society, and thus "tormented." To obey such rules, Diderot comments, is to "abandon Nature." Thus, the fictional satire illustrates a Western desire to live like an indigenous person who does not engage with societal rules.

Diderot accomplishes the presentation of this desire and his critique of Western civilization by creating a binary opposition between Tahiti and Europe (McDonald 1976). Whereas Tahiti remains in "nature," the West remains in a "cultural" world. The Tahiti/Europe and nature/culture dichotomy "bespeaks of a continuing preoccupation with origins— whether those of the self, of language, or society— which constitutes not only the initial but the crucial phases of the utopian process" (McDonald 1976:248). Diderot's focus on "nature" as leading to utopia "emblematically signals the return to both the individual and the collective transparency of man's being" (McDonald 1976:248-49). However, that conclusion may only be reached *through* constructing such a dichotomy.

Diderot's satire is thereby a moral commentary that speaks to Europe's social institutions but does not in fact reject them, which "confirms the value of social structure; the norm is actually reinforced by the focus on transgression" (McDonald 1976:250). By so focusing on Western transgression from nature, Diderot does not deconstruct a social evolutionary scale between Tahiti and Europe. Instead, he uses the backdrop of a "natural" society in order to envision a fictive society that abolishes the essentials of bourgeois society (Rex 1990), but

that does not necessarily revert back to lawless society. Diderot acquaints the Western imagination with such moral statements, enforcing the notion that locations such as Tahiti can be used as a testing ground for such statements.

Dramatic 19th Century Literary Encounters in the Marquesas Islands

Nearly a century later, Herman Melville left a financially depressed New York in January 1841 and set sail for Nuku Hiva in the northern isles. By 1844 Melville allegedly returned home, and had drafted an account of his journeys in his first book, *Typee*, by 1845. Based on his adventures in Taipivai Valley, the book was sent for publication in London by John Murray. Often critiqued for its fictitious reading, Melville was required to reduce his writing to a more “factual” basis. That is, Melville was to exclude much of his erotic descriptions of Marquesan women, and add more passages about Marquesan rites and customs (Stern 1982:18). The final copy of *Typee* was published in England (Stern 1982:19). By 1846, English and American editions of the final book, *Narrative of a Four Month's Residence Among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas Islands; or, A Peep at Polynesian Life*, were published and copyrighted (Stern 1982:19).

A four-week stay extended to four months, Melville's first book is an ambiguously nonfiction writing and social commentary (Bryant 1996:XI). Melville elucidates the conversation of what it means to be savage by putting it in the context of religious conversion and colonialism in the Marquesas. Embodying the ultimate escape from Western confines, Melville himself deserts a whaling

ship with a partner, who is then later killed on his way to escaping the island back to the West. The two deserters land in Taipivai Valley, a place with a “reputation for ferocity,” with “tales of natives luring sailors ashore with their fresh water, fruit, and women only to capture, kill, and devour them” (Bryant 1996:XV). Melville’s narrative begins with the fear of being killed and eaten, clearly due to the historical accounts that ascribe the Marquesas as dangerous. However as his narrative progresses, Melville’s perspective on the Marquesas Islands dramatically alters.

For the majority of the book, Melville is inflicted with a leg injury that slowly, but never quite fully, heals. When Melville’s partner disappears, Melville is left to his own devices and thus completely free from Western influence. It is only then that his leg is healed and he is simultaneously inducted into Marquesan society, marked by the reception of his new Marquesan name Tommo. A metaphor for being inflicted with cultural misunderstanding and Western laws, as the leg heals so does the audience’s image of the Marquesas. Eventually, “a utopic Eden, a realm of ‘perpetual hilarity’ free of the economic upsets that fatherless Melville had himself endured” unravels and becomes the dominant narrative of the Marquesas in this account (Bryant 1996:XVII).

Melville draws heavily upon past accounts of the Marquesas, especially Cook’s, and while those accounts “had seen depravity in Taipivai; Melville saw a happy, moral people living without money and beyond the power and poverty of the industrial West” (Bryant 1996:XXIII). In his introduction to the book, John Bryant notes the weight *Typee* thus holds in Western intellectual thought. He

writes:

[...] Since the discovery in 1983 of the *Typee* manuscript, scholars, critics, and general readers alike have latched on to this odd, fluid text precisely because its oddities and fluidities reveal so much about the tensions within American postcolonial culture, Pacific and European imperialisms, race and ethnicity, the writer and his audience. Indeed the pleasures of this text lie in our confrontation with its odd fluidity: its revisions, its arrested romance, its embrace and then betrayal of island culture, its interruption of adventure for discourse on anything from popguns and breadfruit to tattoo, taboo, and cannibalism. [Bryant 1996:XXX]

Indeed, Melville flits back and forth between critiquing the West, commenting on agriculture and ceremonial rites, to providing dramatic and exciting near-death scenes for the general reader to enjoy. Bryant claims that Melville's work may not be the most important in Western intellect, but it remains one of the most celebrated works of fiction set in Polynesia. Melville's dramatic and romantic scenes perhaps create the most vivid image yet created of a *rediscovered paradise* that is held in the Marquesas.

Before departing home, Melville writes in his book:

Hurra, my lads! It is a settled thing; next week we shape our course to the Marquesas! The Marquesas! What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit up! Naked houris— cannibal banquets— groves of cocoa-nut— coral reefs— tattooed chiefs— and bamboo temples; sunny valleys planted with bread-fruit-trees— carved canoes dancing on the flashing blue waters— savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols— *heathenish rites and human sacrifices*. [Melville 1996:5]

Whether read or orally transmitted, Melville still purposefully recalls visions of the Marquesas Islands from the past and uses these images of cannibals and strange heathenish practices to guide himself forward into these new waters. In fact, he says he “felt an irresistible curiosity to see those islands which the olden voyagers had so glowingly described” (Melville 1996:5). Yet upon arrival he writes that, “no description can do justice to its beauty; but that beauty was lost to

me then, and I saw nothing but the tri-colored flag of France trailing over the stern of six vessels” (Melville 1996:12). Melville immediately resets his tracks and begins to re-envision Taipivai Valley for himself, falling prey to the mourning of a “lost” Marquesan culture and the romanticization of a time-backwards Marquesas.

He exclaims: “how often is the term ‘savages’ incorrectly applied! None really deserving of it were ever yet discovered by voyagers or by travellers. They have discovered heathens and barbarians, whom by horrible cruelties they have exasperated into savages” (Melville 1996:27). In stating this, Melville asserts two claims. One: that Marquesans were once heathen barbarians but that two: were only ascribed that identity when Western documenters and colonizers sailed ashore. Categorizing the islands as heathen and barbaric reinforces social evolutionary theories and places the archipelago backwards in time and space, but also acknowledges that they only became savages with Western eyes. This categorization reinforces critiques of Western society made possible by the Marquesas. Melville then rhetorically asks, “‘Yet after all,’ quoth I to myself, ‘insensible as he is to a thousand wants, and removed from harassing cares, may not the savage be the happier man of the two?’” (Melville 1996:29). Melville intellectually conceptualizes the Marquesas in this new manner that both denies cultural savagery and yet uses it to test new Western concepts of mourning and romanticization of a time-backwards Marquesas.

The author even goes so far as to apologize to a Marquesan man for his cultural misunderstanding: “Kory-Kory, I mean thee no harm in what I say in

regard to thy outward adornings; but they were a little curious to my unaccustomed sight, and therefore I dilate upon them” (Melville 1996:83). Although Melville may apologize for his misunderstandings, or perhaps even the spectacle he makes of these unfamiliar sights, he still fixes the Marquesas in his utopian yet barbarous Eden, writing that: “civilization does not engross all the virtues of humanity: she has not even her full share of them. They flourish in greater abundance and attain greater strength among many barbarous people” (Melville 1996:202). A land without civilization then, must be a land a thousand times more virtuous than the West. Melville contradicts this statement, saying: “let the savages be civilized, but civilize them with benefits, and not with evils [...] Civilization is gradually sweeping from the earth the lingering vestiges of Paganism, and at the same time the shrinking forms of its unhappy worshippers” (Melville 1996:195). By still making the claim that the Marquesans may yet need civilizing to a degree, especially in regards to spirituality, Melville perpetuates the tension of a land that needs to be saved from both its own savagery and by outside influences. Melville thus continues the notion that Westerners have control over the islands, and uses his own literary authority, perhaps inadvertently, to perpetuate such a notion.

A few years later, Robert Louis Stevenson set sail for the Pacific in 1888, his travels including a stay in the Marquesas Islands. He documents these travels in his book *In the South Seas*. Upon arrival in the northern isles, Stevenson writes:

There was no beacon, no smoke of towns to be expected, no plying pilot. Somewhere, in that pale phantasmagoria of cliff and cloud, our haven lay concealed; and somewhere to the east of it—the only sea-mark given—a certain headland, known indifferently as Cape Adam and Eve, or Cape

Jack and Jane, and distinguished by two colossal figures, the gross statuary of nature...and Jack and Jane, or Adam and Eve, impending like a pair of warts above the breakers. [Stevenson 1998:6]

The author immediately sets the tone of the Marquesas as remote and removed from civilization, calling the land “Cape Adam and Eve,” and accentuating the isles as an untouched Eden, home to uncorrupted man. He adds, “I was now to see what men might be whose fathers had never studied Virgil, had never been conquered by Caesar, and never been ruled by the wisdom of Gaius or Papinian” (Stevenson 1998:9). He looks at his perception of man without “knowledge,” and thus sets the tone for his journals as exploring a place inhabited by naïve natives.

Unlike Melville and Diderot, Stevenson calls Marquesans “among the most backward and barbarous of islands,” supporting this claim by writing: “a lamp and one of White’s sewing-machines” were “the only marks of civilization” (Stevenson 1998:14). Yet, he himself mourns the changing culture writing that, “so simply, even in South Sea Islands, and so sadly, the changes come” (Stevenson 1998:21). Furthermore he adds,

And in a perspective of centuries I saw their case as ours, death coming in like a tide, and the day already numbered when there should be no more Beretani, and no more of any race whatever, and (what oddly touched me) no more literary works and no more readers. [Stevenson 1998:22-3]

Despite calling the islanders backwards and barbarous, he also compares the civilization with his own. In mourning the “death” of Marquesan culture, he also mourns a future death of his own culture. By insinuating that the death of the Marquesas has come, but not of the West, Stevenson almost infers that the West is stronger and more resilient to change, casting a shadow of weakness on the

Marquesas Islands and thereby enforcing a civilizational hierarchy on a social evolutionary scale.

Stevenson also writes of the islands as static despite their cultural change. He articulates that on the islands, “the face of the world was a prehistoric emptiness; life appeared to stand stockstill, and the sense of isolation was profound and refreshing” (Stevenson 1998:19). By asserting the islands as “prehistoric,” he places the islands backwards in time, furthering them as an uncivilized and barbarous nation that never advanced with the time. By asserting the islands as “empty,” he illustrates the islands as void of any meaning. Life there was “stockstill,” indicating a civilization incapable of changing and advancing. And yet, Stevenson finds all of this “profound and refreshing.” Stevenson recalls an ambiguously real Marquesan proverb: “the oral waxes, the palm grows, and man departs.” In reaction to this he writes, “so this is surely nature” (Stevenson 1998:27). He reflects that, “with the decay of pleasures, life itself decays” (Stevenson 1998:33).

For Stevenson, to live in nature, although uncivilized, provides a natural rhythm to life as well as a sort of inspiration. He writes: the islands’ “infamous repute perhaps affected me; but I thought it the loveliest, and by far the most ominous and gloomy, spot on earth” (Stevenson 1998:91). He is enchanted by the “barbarous” nation and claims that “many of the whites who are to be found scattered in the South Seas represent the more artistic portion of their class; and not only the poetry of that new life, but came there on purpose to enjoy it” (Stevenson 1998:87). Stevenson thus proclaims the islands for his own, artistic

kind. With no “poetry” in civilized West, he invites artists to the South Seas to find “poetry” in an “ominous” but “lovely” Eden, as if the South Seas were created as a refuge for Western artists to revel and *regenerate* in a state of authentic, but *degenerate*, human nature.

Paul Gauguin’s Regeneration in the Marquesas Islands

One such Western artist seeking refuge in the Marquesas was Paul Gauguin, who sailed to the South Pacific in 1891 to compile his last works of art before his death on Hiva Oa in the south in 1903 (Dorra 2007:271). His paintings and sketches depict his perception of Tahitian and Marquesan life, which “would only shed light on its author’s universe” (Staszak 2004:353). Staszak asserts that, “the many paintings do not inform us about the landscapes of the place but on the expectations of a society and on its view of Eden. Thus Gauguin did not paint Tahiti, but his Tahitian dream” (Staszak 2004:353). Not unlike his literary predecessors, Gauguin perceived Tahiti and the Marquesas as a sanctuary from Western civilization. He thus painted an Eden that illustrates the Western imaginary of a simple and free society. Gauguin’s paintings of Polynesia are set in the style of *primitivism*:

A rejection of canonic Western art, perceived as inauthentic, and by its quest for regenerative inspiration in alternative expressions, perceived as being truer because simpler and freer. Artists adopting these new references sought to free themselves from the conventions and ambitions of Western art, in particular those of the naturalists, the impressionists and the neo-impressionists, in order to grasp a deeper truth beyond deceiving appearances. [Staszak 2004:353-4]

Seeking a “deeper truth” than can be found in Western artistic traditions, Gauguin incorporates Polynesian aesthetics into his paintings, and essentially rejects Western expectations that inhibit artistic expression from being “true.” This rejection is an attempt to illustrate an authentic state of humanity, and a marked effort “to save degenerating people, help them to recover their lost glory” (Staszak 2004:357)— an effort that would make Gauguin’s legacy paradoxical (Staszak 2004:358). Gauguin’s mourning of a “degenerating people,” the Tahiti and Marquesas he painted, would at first seem anti-colonial, but simultaneously “reproduces and affirms colonial stereotypes” (Staszak 2004:358).

With his desire to fix the Marquesas and Tahiti in primitivism, their “Otherness is inscribed in time (he belongs to the dawn of Humanity), but also in space (he is exotic)” (Staszak 2004:353). So while the primitivism movement contests notions of civilization, it yet reinforces the West/Other dichotomy because it endeavors to “regenerate a West gone astray and on its last legs” (Staszak 2004:358). In other words, the West cannot be critiqued or *regenerated* without the *degenerating* Other.

These illustrations of the “Tahitian dream” are notoriously erotic and sexualized (Dorra 2007), an indicator of Gauguin’s expectation of a natural, lawless and thus sexually “free” society. Art historian Henri Dorra asserts that, “Gauguin was particularly sensitive to the individual freedoms that the Tahitians appeared to enjoy— especially sexual freedoms— as well as such traditional personal qualities as mutual tolerance and generosity, which made such freedoms possible” (Dorra 2007:165). This contrast to Western norms struck Gauguin who

wrote to his wife in a letter, saying:

What a beautiful evening this is! Thousands of individuals do as I do tonight, they are letting themselves live, and their children raise themselves without assistance. All these people go everywhere, to whatever village and on whatever road they wish, sleep in a house, eat, etc...without even saying thank you— they would themselves expect no more in return. And we call them savages? They sing, they never steal, my door is never shut. [Dorra 2007:165]

By claiming that the peoples are “letting themselves live,” Gauguin, like the previous historical and literary authors I discussed, questions *who* is the “real savage:” is it the West with its confining laws, or French Polynesia, which merits a free life? He even addresses past discourses, like Cook’s, to justify Polynesian behavior by claiming, “they never steal.” Gauguin furthers the letter to his wife by writing that:

The Tahitian soil is becoming totally French, and little by little this age-old state of affairs will fall into oblivion [...] Our missionaries brought with them a great deal of Protestant hypocrisy, and they [now] take away part of the poetry, not to mention [having contributed to] the venereal diseases that have afflicted the whole race (without having harmed it too much, I must say). [Dorra 2007:165]

Falling prey to the search for a Polynesian and even human authenticity independent of Western influence, the artist became encapsulated by Polynesian aesthetics and used them as the primary influence for his work until his death (Dorra 2007:271). Attempting to create an image of Tahiti and the Marquesas before the islands fall into “oblivion,” Gauguin illustrates his own interpretations of the islands: a romanticized place of free will. Like Stevenson, Gauguin refers to these Polynesian islands as a poetic and artistic land, and attempts to capture that poetry before it is taken away by outside influence. However unlike Stevenson, he does not refer to his Polynesia as savage, but rather high above it.

Dorra comments,

The romantic in Gauguin took an unambiguous delight in pointing out—albeit indirectly—the horrors of the most blood-thirsty ancient practices. But in the spirit of the Age of Enlightenment, he sought, if not to justify them, then at least to understand them as reflecting the needs and capacities of a society very different from his own. [Dorra 2007:164]

So while Gauguin captures a Western audience by expressing the “ominous” and “dark” culture so alluring to Westerners, he also seeks to justify that dark side and extract it from the concept of “savagery.” In doing so, he romanticizes the darker side of non-Western, thus authentic, human nature. Staszak writes that:

Under the influence of *fin-de-siècle* anti-modernism, disgusted by a materialistic and hypocritical Western civilization, [Gauguin] aspired to a lost authenticity, to an elsewhere that is both geographical and spiritual, that the imaginary of the period makes him seek in the Tahitian Eden, in the [woman] representing the primitivist figures of Eve, of the good savage, of the child and the animal. [Staszak 2004:354]

Projecting this nostalgia for a simpler and freer time, Gauguin puts Tahiti and the Marquesas in an unreachable, virtuous and even desirable Eden. Although he produces an image of a “good savage,” this exotic and seductive image “is possible and legitimate only in relation to Western superiority” (Staszak 2004:358), therefore problematic in its own right. Inadvertently or not, Gauguin still perpetuates colonialist notions of the islands as in need of salvation in one form or another, but also always in stark contrast to an ironically civilized but *degenerated* West.

In “Dialogue between Tefatou and Hina,”⁷ Gauguin examines two Marquesan deities: Hina, the Goddess of the Moon and Tefatou (otherwise known as Fatu), the God of the Earth. The dual painting and accompanied manuscript

⁷ See Figure 1 in the Appendix.

serves as an interpretation for a mythical dialogue between the two deities, as translated and accounted by a Frenchman. The manuscript recalls a conversation between Hina and Tefatou regarding the necessity of death, reproduction and rebirth (Dorra 2007:187-88). In his own interpretation of the myth, Gauguin reproduces the two deities as lovers, reinforcing Marquesan culture as virtuous in the value it places on the necessity of “cycles of regeneration” (Dorra 2007:189).

In this illustration he uses Marquesan motifs of the body: oval-shaped eyes bisected by a horizontal line, squat bodies, bent knees, and arms close to the body (Kjellgren 2005; Ivory 2002; 2005). He emphasizes Hina’s vulva with her legs spread, and gives tattoos to both deities’ buttocks. Hina and Tefatou’s hands and feet frame two intertwining flowers, and the black background and green foreground give the impression of hills and mountains connected to a bed of grass. Two miniature palm trees and two flowers rest in the foreground.

Inferring fertilization, the natural landscape and two intertwining flowers both emphasize a natural beauty in reproduction, further emphasized by Hina’s openly displayed vulva. Dorra comments that the oversized heads are “typically Marquesan,” but the jaunty arms are not (Dorra 2007:187). In doing so, he transforms “the figures into puppets” (Dorra 2002:187), playfully illustrated with watercolors. By reinterpreting an ancient myth, already translated by another Westerner, Gauguin literally plays with these Tahitian and Marquesan subjects as puppets. As such, Gauguin sheds light not on his views of French Polynesia per se, but on his perceptions of his own society. By sexualizing the Marquesan myth, Gauguin is able to make a statement on sex that he could not back home, where

the subject is so often taboo. And by placing the sexual characters in such a setting, he naturalizes and normalizes sexuality. The deities of life and death connect, emphasizing a *regeneration* of life so simple and free in Polynesia. This motif of *regeneration* bolsters Gauguin's efforts to *regenerate* a "dying" people, as well as to break away from Western artistic traditions and *regenerate* his own artistic ability.

"Arii matamoe (The Chief is Asleep), or The Royal End"⁸ disrupts "the familiar Tahitian idyll, the stereotyped dream of an easy, tranquil, and sensual life in the tropics that helped impel the world-weary artist on his voyage" (Allan 2012:75). Front and center, a decapitated head strikes the viewer immediately. A faint hint of blood stains the white pillow decorated with red and yellow flowers, making the display "ritualistic, ceremonial" (Allan 2012:75). Wooden sculptures of Tefatou and Hina lie in the back right corner (Dorra 2007:209), perpetuating the motif of life and death, of *regeneration*. They stand almost in guard of the sanctuary of the dead, dividing the space from the land of the living (Allan 2012:75). The two mourning figures represent Gauguin's recurrent motifs of biblical Eves. The crouched figure,

Derives from a Peruvian mummy [... that] appears in his work as a symbol of death, often with overtones of fear, repression, and guilt, which he associated with the biblical figure of Eve. The adjacent figure facing outward had more positive, life-affirming, love-embracing connotations for the artist. [Allan 2012:79]

Gauguin, then, perpetuates the theme of life and death, and cycles of *regeneration* in this painting. Additionally, the two figures in the doorway represent death. One is cloaked in red, a symbol of death, while the other holds an axe, potentially the

⁸ See Figure 2 in the Appendix.

victorious warrior (Dorra 2007:209). Lastly, a mask resting next to the table may represent the chief's generic ancestor. Casting the decapitated head in dark shadows and encompassing it with symbols of life and death, Gauguin again naturalizes and normalizes a "savage" ritual of war. By creating a Marquesan space in the painting with traditional figures, motifs and rectilinear designs (Dorra 2007:209), he adds to an imaginary authentic Marquesan state.

Gauguin places the giant head on a plush pillow as if it is a great trophy. While a giant, decapitated head on display may seem an act of savagery Gauguin does not necessarily portray the head as such. He glorifies it. The head sits like a regal statue on a plush white pillow— the color white perhaps indicating the purity, not the darkness, of the act, and flowers are placed next to the head as if given in praise. The title of the painting even hints at this romanticized perception of war in a primitive state. At one point translated at an 1893 exhibition, it was formally titled *la fin royale*, or the Royal End. The Tahitian word *Arii* indicates a high chief, and the words *mata* and *moe* mean sleeping/closed and eyes/face (Allan 2012:79), recalling that the head is the most sacred part of the body in ancient Marquesan culture, and the place that holds both spiritual and ancestral power (Allan 2012:79). It has been argued that the "royal end" may refer to the death of a Tahitian king that died after Gauguin arrived on the island (Allan 2012:80). The painting, then, symbolizes the end of traditional culture. Gauguin wrote:

With him disappeared the last vestiges of the ancient ways and grandeur. With him Maori [*sic*] tradition has died. It is truly finished. Civilization, alas! triumphed— soldierly, commercial, and bureaucratic. A profound sadness seized hold of me. To have traveled so far to find this, the very

thing I was fleeing! [Allan 2012:81]

In his nostalgic search for pre-contact Polynesia, a state of Eden, Gauguin disregarded the fact that the king's death was memorialized with European ceremonies, not Tahitian. Gauguin recognized:

The cruel impossibility of connecting in the present with the 'primitive' cultural origins about which he fantasized, that allowed him the license for such idiosyncratic 'inventions' as *Arii Matamoe*. So that Gauguin could rekindle his own art, the 'Tahiti of long ago' in some respects *had* to have passed away. [Allan 2012:82]

In order to comment on Western society, Gauguin produces an imagined ritual and space, furthering a discourse of Tahiti and the Marquesas as all at once romantically savage and fearful, yet harmonious, simple and free. Keeping in mind his Western audience, the decapitated head confronts the Western viewer, who may recall images of the guillotine (Allan 2012:83). The image's "bizarre spatial tensions" of Marquesan and Western motifs suggest "more of a dream than waking reality" (Allan 2012:86), leaving the viewer to decipher if the packed illustration rings Tahitian/Marquesan authenticity, a confrontation of Western society, or both.

Similarly, Gauguin's "Manao tupapau (The spirit of the dead keeps watch)"⁹ depicts a complex death scene. A girl as the centerpiece lies belly down upon a bed with the ghost of death's arm lying horizontally across the bedding (Dorra 2007:209). She is naked, represented in a "natural" and free state. Gauguin attempts a Tahitian/Marquesan space again, using traditional motifs and a natural landscape, and places the girl and the spirit "on the same plane of reality" (Staszak 2004:354). Gauguin was attempting to reproduce a scene that he had

⁹ See Figure 3 in the Appendix.

apparently witnessed, where he found a young girl in a dark room, startled and in fear when Gauguin stumbled across her. He thought of her as if coming face to face with a spirit. The title *Manao Tupapau* is better understood if translated to the more direct, “[She] thinks of, or believes in, the ghost [and] the Spirit [of the dead] or the ghost watches over her” (Dorra 2007:217). Lying naked, the girl is almost seduced by the spirit. Thus, the imminent shadow of death is sexualized, again emphasizing the motif of *regenerative* cycles.

The constant illustration of life and death are perhaps then symbols of indigenous culture being led to the “oblivion” Gauguin wrote to his wife about, and also of the possibility of *regeneration* in the Marquesas. Before a cultural oblivion happens, Gauguin attempts to fix the Marquesas in the past, as a *paradise*, where one can *regenerate* in a non-Western environment. In this painting, the girl does not await a gory and sudden death like the decapitated chief’s head in *Arii Matamoe*, but lies with the ghost of death who looms at the foot of the bed, as if waiting patiently but presently for the girl’s eyes to close.

In these three works of art, Gauguin incorporates Polynesian aesthetics and traditional Marquesan designs and symbols. By incorporating these, his artwork may appear to be more “truthful,” thereby illustrating and fixing the authentic indigenous culture Gauguin wished to share with the rest of the world before his passing, and before Polynesia’s cultural “oblivion.” He leaves behind images of French Polynesia natives as living naturally but merrily: hence the frequent depiction of naked women in his work of the region. And, he puts a different light on the notion of “savagery,” which may not be savage but rather

mere acts of human nature. He paints a romantic and undoubtedly beautiful picture of French Polynesia, but one that leaves behind an *imperialist nostalgia* for the islands before they were touched by French colonialism, as if their current negotiated culture is a lesser one. Today, Gauguin's grave rests on Hiva Oa, and is used to market the Marquesas Islands to tourists as the inspiration for the celebrated artist's work. The Marquesas were used by Gauguin to illustrate *his* lamentations and musings on contemporary political thought, further sustaining the Marquesas in the Western imagination as transcendently primitive.

The illustrations of Gauguin's romantic adventure lured artists, future film directors and some of the first tourists to Tahiti and the Marquesas. The opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 and the established steamship connection to Tahiti in 1924 fired "the imagination of artistic production" and a sense of South Pacific adventure. An Office of Tourism was opened in Papeete, Tahiti in 1930 and in 1961, with the opening of an airport in Papeete, tourism officially blossomed (Staszak 2004:359). Most tourists rarely traveled outside Tahiti, but those who ventured to the Marquesas did "not fail to visit [Gauguin's] tomb" on Hiva Oa. In fact in 1921, an administrator mentioned that Gauguin's tomb had "become a sort of pilgrimage for foreign tourists" (Staszak 2004:359). There is evidently a link between Gauguin and the beginnings of tourism in Tahiti and the Marquesas, even seen in contemporary tourist advertisements that harp on the fact that the famous painter "was there." Staszak writes that:

Gauguin was not so unlike the present-day tourist in that he had also come to Tahiti in search of the exotic and the picturesque, often represented in his work of the scenes of the photographs and postcards on sale in the curio shops of Papeete, and now his work functions as an incentive to

tourists to flow into Tahiti. His work was never intended for Tahitians: it is therefore not surprising that it should be on offer for the Western public to whom it was intended in the first place and which flocks to Tahiti indirectly because of him. [Staszak 2004:359]

Gauguin's contribution to Tahiti and the Marquesas as a romantic, free and virtuous Eden still lasts to this day, making the islands feel like an accessible and poetic escape from Western civilization. Though as Staszak adds,

This enchanted vision of the tropical island is also dependent on the idea of a preserved nature where the indigenous people live an easy, harmonious and authentic life. This nostalgia for a lost paradise is not so distant from the spirit of primitivism, which confronted the failure of civilisation and of Western art with the model of 'first' arts and societies. [Staszak 2004:359]

The outcome of Gauguin's artwork is thus paradoxical (Staszak 2004:361). While the artist, as so many before him, critique Western society, he spurs a discourse that a fixed Eden must be necessary in order to perpetuate those critiques. Now, tourists flock to French Polynesia in search of that authentic life, a movement that attempts to destabilize the concept of the "savage," yet simultaneously leaves the islands behind in time and space, enforcing a colonial, social evolutionary scale.

Gauguin's work does not present a postcolonial Tahiti and Marquesas, but rather illustrates Western perceptions of the globe at that time. Gauguin's work is thus crucial to understanding *why* the West started to categorize the Marquesas as they are today. These categorizations, "from colonization to the development of tourism" produce "Elsewheres," an added element to the West/Other dichotomy. Negatively, the Marquesas as an Other are critiqued for being barbaric. Positively, the Marquesas are used to critique the West. Regardless of how the islands are used, the Marquesas Islands are defined within a Western framework to benefit Western purposes, whatever those may be. In the case of the authors and artists I

write about, the Marquesas archipelago is deliberately placed backwards in time (a *degenerate* space), so that they may find a sense of *regeneration*.

Diderot uses Tahiti as a counterpoint to the West to envision a utopic society; Melville challenges notions of savagery and looks to the Marquesas to articulate why Western civilization is in-authentically human; Stevenson claims the islands for an artistic class to find inspiration from a raw source of life; and Gauguin attempts to *regenerate* his own artwork with that same inspiration. In effect, these sources mourn colonialism and Western infiltration, which prohibits an authentic Marquesan culture, and therefore an authentic human culture, from thriving. As a response to this, the representations I disentangle fix the Marquesas in the past so that they may “save” the archipelago from cultural “oblivion.” This *imperialist nostalgia* valorizes

Innovation, and then yearn[s] for more stable worlds, whether these reside in our own past, in other cultures, or in the conflation of the two [...] When the so-called civilizing process destabilizes forms of life, the agents of change experience transformations of other cultures as if they were personal losses [...] more genuinely innocent tender recollections of what is at once an earlier epoch and a previous phase of life. [Rosaldo 1998:70]

This romanticized life in a natural state where *regeneration* may be found in a type of lawless *paradise* is only made conceptually possible if the Marquesas is fixed in time, reinforcing a colonialist ideology of a social evolutionary scale. The next chapter examines how this ideology is reproduced in more recent modes of representation.

Chapter Three: Reproducing a Paradoxical Paradise

More than 100 years after Gauguin passed away on Hiva Oa, visual representations of the Marquesas Islands would reach a broader and more general audience with the introduction of film and reality television in the 20th and 21st centuries. In this chapter, I explore how performance is constructed in two forms of media, and how they reproduce imagined histories of the Marquesas from centuries past. Firstly, I look at MGM's first sound picture *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1928) that narrates a story of Western influence, colonial guilt and *regeneration* in the Marquesas. Secondly, I look at the 21st century reality show *Survivor* that featured a season on Nuku Hiva in 2004. While MGM's film perpetuates postcolonial commentaries on Western civilization by using the Marquesas as comparison, *Survivor* enforces both savage and romantic identities of the islands by essentializing their culture. Both mediums are influential in the Western imagination in that they reproduce representations of the Marquesas constructed from centuries past— especially a time-backwards Marquesas— illuminating how imagined histories and identities of the Marquesas are produced and consumed by Western audiences and taken as truth.

Mourning Colonialism/Finding Regeneration

Directed by W.S. Van Dyke and Robert J. Flaherty, *White Shadows in the South Seas* is based on the novel of the same name, written by Frederick O'Brien in 1919 (who also contributed to the film). The book had “helped to set off a wave of popular interest in the islands and cultures of the South Pacific” because of its

“escape” from WWI memories (Geiger 2002:98). Although the picture was in fact filmed on Tahiti with mainly white actors and actresses (Geiger 2002), the Oscar-winning film describes itself in captions as being “produced and photographed on the natural locations and with the ancient native tribes of the Marquesas Islands in the South Seas.” The film challenges Western influence in the Marquesas by romanticizing its perceived escape-like, pre-colonial, “ancient” and therefore “natural” *paradise*.

Although the film is MGM’s first sound picture, dialogue is not spoken but rather displayed in full screen captions. In the beginning of the film, the captions describe the Marquesas as “the last remnant of an earthy paradise,” “islets fresh from the touch of God,” and that have “memories that lingered from the Morning of Creation.” If fresh from the touch of God, the Marquesas are once again perpetuated as a romanticized Eden. In effect, the film:

Envisions not only the multiple and conflicting dimensions of the American image of the South Pacific but projects the idea of otherness in the American imagination, revealing the deep-seated uncertainties that arise when Western selves and “native” others collide. [Geiger 2002:99]

White Shadows in the South Seas works to challenge the South Pacific of the Western imagination as barbarous and savage, but yet reproduces the Marquesas in the same imagination as the Eden from which the unhappier West stemmed from. These conceptualizations make the Marquesas of the West even more multi-dimensional. By reproducing the idea of using the Marquesas as a testing ground for what a perceived authentic human state is like, the West confronts itself in a questioned, but not quite destabilized, social evolutionary scale.

The plot centers on an unhappy, drunk doctor who mourns Western influence on the islands that exploits Marquesan labor for profit off of pearls (which, as an aside, are not even found in the Marquesas). Scenes of Marquesans swimming for pearls take place underwater with close-ups of intimidating sharks and octopi, complicating this Eden as both idyllic and dangerous. However, the dangerousness of the island landscape is only confronted by the Marquesans when the white men force them to. The doctor, upset with this corruption of the pristine Marquesas, confronts the man in charge of the pearl exploitation.

Fearing the doctor's dissent, the man knocks the doctor out and sends him off to sea bound to a ship. When the doctor comes to, he finds himself in a different, untouched pre-colonial Marquesan community not far away. He happens to stumble across a gaggle of naked women swimming in a pool, and once they notice the bedraggled, white doctor, they scream and sprint off—clearly never having seen a white man before. He follows the women, only to stumble across a group of Marquesan men also. It is then that both women and men receive the doctor in a simulated first contact. He is deemed a god by this group of Marquesans, and is seductively massaged by the group of women and given a feast in his honor: whereas on the Western-corrupted side of the Marquesas the doctor is unhappy and drunk, on this untouched side he is able to *regenerate* with food, massage and honor.

In fact, the whole tone of the film drastically changes upon the arrival of the doctor in this Marquesan community. On the Western-corrupted side of the island, the cinematography is black and white, but on the non-corrupted, pre-

colonial side of the island, the cinematography is in a warmer, sepia tone. As the doctor falls in love with this uncorrupted *paradise*, so he also falls in love with a young Marquesan woman. At first, the doctor finds himself in trouble at his welcome feast by looking flirtatiously at this woman, as she is *tapu*, or the “forbidden virgin” of the community. The cultural misunderstanding is forgiven and the doctor has his way, ironically shifting Marquesan culture as he condemned it on the other island. By placing the doctor as a god, and by allowing him to fall in love with the forbidden virgin, a social evolutionary scale, though intending to be criticized, is instead reinforced: the Western man still has control and power over the Marquesas. Yet still, the idea of finding love in an uncorrupted *paradise* lends hope to Western *regeneration* in a time-backwards, authentically human and *degenerate* state of nature.

The film continues to follow the courtship of the doctor and his Marquesan lover, Fayaway, harping on the simple nature of love that is made possible in *paradise*. It isn't until the doctor finds a pearl that the attention is once again drawn towards Western weaknesses. The doctor is flabbergasted when two Marquesan men dispose of the pearls they find, and cannot conceive of the fact that no value is placed on them. He is torn about what to do, but then quickly succumbs to his fault and takes a pearl into his own possession. At night, he makes a signal for Western ships to pick him up so that he may sell it.

Fayaway finds the doctor in a mad, greedy frenzy and feels utterly betrayed. It is then that the doctor snaps out of his greed as if the idea of love, or the betrayal of the authentic Marquesan native, triumphs over Western

selfishness. However, it is too late. In the morning the ship with the evil pearl exploiter comes to shore and immediately causes a violent ruckus, resulting in the death of the doctor. The film ends in the colder black and white cinematography, with shots of the pre-colonial Marquesan community transformed into a Western trading post, including Fayaway dressed in Western clothing. The film leaves the viewer with a sense of loss and frustration, as the loving and warm Marquesan community becomes Western, and thus visibly darker. The viewer is left to mourn this transition, as if the Westernized Marquesas is a lesser culture. Moreover, by attempting to thwart notions of Western influence in the Marquesas, the film actually reinforces the colonialist ideology of social evolution: for in order to *regenerate* as the drunken doctor did, an authentic, time-backwards Marquesas needs to exist as an escape for the unhappy Westerner.

Finding Regeneration in a Degenerate Space

Nearly a century later, the popular reality TV series *Survivor*, with its Emmy-award winning host Jeff Probst, first aired in 2000 on CBS. Despite their different contexts, *White Shadows in the South Seas* and *Survivor* do in fact present similar quandaries. The Marquesas in these two productions are grounded in an escapist narrative that makes the archipelago seem desirable and authentically human, but only if a civilized West exists in contrast (in other words, this imagined Marquesas is dependent on a civilized West). Perhaps the denial of Marquesan agency in the Western imagination is most clear in this example: *Survivor: Marquesas* allows its American contestants and viewers to

create and consume their own interpretation of the Marquesas without taking into account Marquesan narratives.

Survivor pits a group of strangers onto remote locales, placing them in two “tribes.” The two tribes are given minimal survival supplies, and are forced to create their own societies and learn to live off of the land. Apart from the time building their communities in these remote locations, the tribes compete in challenges in order to win rewards such as blankets and candy bars. Additional challenges each week determine which tribe has “immunity.” The team that loses immunity has to attend “tribal council,” where one member of the tribe is voted out. Eventually, the final group of contestants becomes one tribe, and each member competes against each other. After there are two remaining contestants, the group of ten finalists returns to “tribal council” in Manhattan, where the “sole survivor” is voted on democratically by the finalists. The winning contestant attains a large sum of money.

Neal Saye asserts that the nature of reality shows create a “spectacle world” where “the image overcomes and redefines reality, rendering the viewer a passive consumer of appearances” (Saye 2004:12). Taking a given image as “real” creates a hyperreality, where “the distinctions between real and unreal become blurred” (Saye 2004:13). *Survivor* produces a hyperreality simply because it creates its own world that is neither American, nor the culture the season takes place on. The show creates a new society between two worlds, leaving the viewer to negotiate and consume three worlds as authentic. Rose and Wood call this hyperreality “hyperauthenticity,” where “reality shows may serve

as utopian places where the viewer can engage in creative play space” (Rose and Wood 2005:295).

This hyperauthenticity is neither “real” nor “fake,” but its own space for interpretation. It exists outside “the real world,” yet is “real.” Therefore, it can be a utopia where the viewer can fantasize about what is happening and accept it as authentic (Rose and Wood 2005:295). Even more so, the contestants have the ability to construct their own world as authentic. This is especially true of *Survivor: Marquesas*, where the contestants isolate themselves by creating a boundary between both a Marquesan and an American reality and in doing so, create their own parallel reality that denies outward issues. *Survivor: Marquesas* is almost the embodiment of this thesis, being a paramount example of an imagined Marquesas by the West. In the “creative play space” that reality television makes possible, both viewers and contestants are given the ability to imagine and consume their own Marquesas as “real.”

The original two contestant tribes on *Survivor: Marquesas* on Nuku Hiva were called “Maraamu” and “Rotu,” the Marquesan words for wind and rain. The show centers on the opposition of Americans against each other as they metaphorically battle for their lives. The opening sequence to each episode is composed of a mix of chanting in an ambiguous language and Marquesan phrases, and action shots with only sudden and fleeting images of Marquesan men with tattooed faces, tikis and a lusciously green and craggy landscape. With these mere blips of Marquesan sounds and images given to the audience firsthand, we are left to our own devices to puzzle together our own imagined cultural image.

The producers, narrators and contestants of the show give little attention to culturally specific symbols and motifs used in the game and selectively choose which cultural customs and traditions to focus on, furthering all participants of the reality show to produce imagined Marquesan identities with the minimal images given to them/us. Unsurprisingly, the show chooses to focus on the ancient practice of cannibalism by thematically tying it to the drama of the show so that from the get-go, *Survivor* stages the Marquesas Islands as a dangerous, unforgiving and perpetually ancient land.

For example, rather than take developed roads to their “tribal” settings at the start of the show, the contestants have to row ashore on homemade rafts in a rough Pacific Ocean¹⁰. The tribes anchor on their respective beaches only to discover how little supplies are given to them. The contestants remark that they “gotta be close to Mother Earth,” need to work with the elements, and “use what nature has given” them. The land thus appears wild and extremely far removed from developed life, emphasized in the introduction to the show, which dictates that they are “thousands of miles to the nearest land.” The concept of being so far away and reverting back “to nature,” places the Marquesas Islands in a time warp, where Nuku Hiva is spatially distant and temporally backwards.

This is emphasized by the lack of food in the two tribal settings, which enforces social evolution. Instead of researching Marquesan food culture beforehand, the contestants are left to figure out how to dine on the lands’ resources themselves. With little to no knowledge of traditional Marquesan food preparation, the contestants struggle to feed themselves adequately. Therefore,

¹⁰ See Episode 4001: “Back to the Beach.”

many challenges have a reward of food at the end such as pizza, beer, fancy meals on a cruise ship and candy bars. The contestants always dream and stare almost erotically at the site of such “delicacies,” and the winners of them savor each bite as if they had never tasted anything better. Without American treats and alcohol, the survivors struggle every day not only for their health, but also for their general wellbeing. Frequent conversations, with a sharp increase towards the end of their 39 days, are about what desserts the contestants are craving. This “back to nature” lifestyle leaves the contestants literally and metaphorically hungry for something better and more developed.

Similarly, one of the larger challenge prizes is a night aboard a cruise ship. The two winners are offered a break from tribal life to eat a fancy European feast and take hot showers¹¹. Reinforcing luxury as a reward from surviving off of the land reinforces social evolution simply because if a contestant overcomes the struggle of natural life, luxury awaits. Further challenges enforce this social evolutionary scale with other luxury prizes such as blankets and pillows. The idea that a more comfortable and “civilized” lifestyle is *attainable* puts the Marquesas on a much lower pedestal than Western comforts. Nothing about the houses and hotels on the rest of the island is mentioned, and the representation of the Marquesas as fixed in a natural, backwards and *degenerate* time is reinforced.

Later, two contestants win a day of Marquesan feasting and traditional dance performances¹². Little explanation is given in regards to the dancing and the feast, but the focus is on the two Americans who laugh at having no clue to what

¹¹ See episode 4010: “The Princess.”

¹² See episode 4009: “Two Peas in a Pod.”

is going on. The two winning contestants attempt to converse with the Marquesans, who either don't speak English or were told not to (as a reality TV show, this is ambiguous). The winning contestants are appreciative of the traditional Marquesan day, but rather than have the contestants learn about these traditions, the show capitalizes on the luck the two Americans have that they were able to experience this— as if it is a privilege to see an authentic human experience. This one-sided perspective bolsters identities of the Marquesas in a Western imagination, simply because it does not present a Marquesan explanation of the traditions being shown and provided. The Marquesas, then, are denied agency of their identity in the Western imagination in this way.

Because the contestants are placed in isolation, it often seems as if the island has not been inhabited since ancient civilization. The show alludes to ancient Marquesan traditions but never to contemporary life, furthering the idea of the islands as spatially distant, temporally backwards and static. Moreover, the traditions that are alluded to are almost always in relation to cannibalism and sacrifice. The host mentions that the islands are “steeped in violence,” but only in reference to the common warring between valleys and ritual cannibalism¹³. Never does he mention the violent effects of colonialism. In fact, the image given to us from *Survivor: Marquesas* is wholly independent from colonialism, emphasizing this ancient time warp and the constructed parallel reality of the “tribes.” So as the contestants battle for their metaphorical lives, the parallel is drawn to ancient Marquesan warring and cannibalism and the effects of colonialism denied.

¹³ See episode 4014: “A Tale of Two Cities.”

One particular episode in the latter half of the season marks a shift in the game when fewer people remain, the competition gets fiercer and island-fever tempers are flaring¹⁴. A group of contestants happen upon a skull and reflect upon how ominous this is, especially because it is next to a *paepae*. One player claims in a side interview that *paepaes* are where “ancients rituals such as cannibalism” took place. *Paepaes* are in fact simply leftover house platforms. The skull would have been buried and somewhat decayed if left for hundreds of years, but facts aside the parallel between cannibalism and the increasingly competitive and dangerous situation of the game is quite evident and purposeful.

In truth, it would appear that each time the show gets more dramatic cannibalism or warriors are alluded to. One of the last challenges with the few remaining contestants involves the host who recounts a Marquesan story about a legendary chief who goes undercover to prevent a valley from attacking his own, by attacking theirs first¹⁵. The contestants scramble in the dark on the same location this allegedly happened, in order to answer true or false questions about the story. Probst makes a point to emphasize that this chief killed the neighboring valley’s chief in order to create a unified society. As such, he says that he “feasted on the old chief” in order to inherit his power. Fittingly, as one of the last challenges in the now singular tribe, each competitor fights for their spot in the game, thereby inheriting more power as one after the other gets voted out of the game. Capitalizing on the Marquesas as a dangerous but powerful land adds to the drama and thematic content of the game, but does not expose a complete picture

¹⁴ See episode 4007: “True Lies.”

¹⁵ See episode 4012: “A Tale of Two Cities.”

of the land that is host to the players of the “Marquesan game” (and so are savage and mysterious identities of the islands reproduced for both participants and viewers to interpret and consume).

I quote “Marquesan game,” because the contestants of this *Survivor* season so often play at living like an ancient native who relies on the land for survival. The final three survivors even make the transition to becoming Marquesan in a ritual before their last challenge¹⁶. Because the three survivors have made it this far in the game living in nature, the game allows them to partake in a purification ceremony and attain symbolic, painted-on Marquesan tattoos. Like Melville and the doctor in *White Shadows in the South Seas* who gain Marquesan names and are thus symbolically inducted into Marquesan society, the three contestants who made it to the end are also awarded the chance to become Marquesan. The game, despite its luxurious challenge rewards, still also romanticizes this natural and wild island living.

The contestants constantly complain about how filthy, nasty and dirty everything is, how monotonous the life is, but at the same time reflect that, “God sent them” there, that this adventure was in their stars and that living so simply reminds them “what it’s like to be a human being.” One particular contestant gets voted off once the others realize that the sole reason he came onto the show was because he wanted to create a new human society¹⁷. And so it appears that going to back to these human roots results in the privilege of becoming a bona fide human being, thus Marquesan, but also of the luxury of money and commodities

¹⁶ See episode 4013: “The Sole Survivor.”

¹⁷ See episode 4005: “The End of Innocence.”

of having accomplished the Marquesan survival game. The image of the Marquesas in the contemporary Western imagination thus becomes so complexly multi-dimensional.

The contestants, despite the misery of being covered in bug bites and constantly starving, frequently mention how much they have gained from this experience. They remember what it is like to be human again, but above all that they no longer take anything for granted. It is ironic then, that the homecoming ceremony back in the states is so celebratory. At the last tribal council that eliminates the third from last contestant, the camera follows Probst as he takes a helicopter back to Manhattan¹⁸. The camera shoots a lingering image of the Statue of Liberty, giving the impression of liberty after a long 39 days of survival living in the Marquesas Islands. When Probst welcomes the New York audience, he yells out that they are now “on the best island on Earth— Manhattan.” The audience roars and anticipates the final vote that is cast in a makeshift tribal council on the stage. This whole scene elucidates the liberty of the homecoming to the States. Despite living in a foreign culture, the aim of the game was to represent Americans fighting in a challenge on their own, not them acclimating to Marquesan culture (or ancient Marquesan culture at that).

By successfully completing such a challenge, the contestants are rewarded once again their freedom, as if they were imprisoned on Nuku Hiva. The whole idea of liberty and luxury of this Manhattan homecoming reinforces the hierarchy of the Marquesas Islands as backwards in time and space, but also the idea of the Marquesas as an adventurous enlightenment for these Americans also holds. The

¹⁸ See episode 4013: “The Sole Survivor.”

archipelago, in keeping with the Western themes of past, is used to inform the West of ways they have been living wrong. Yet at the same time, the social hierarchy is not destabilized, and the idea that the Marquesas exists for these contestants to learn such modes of living, bolsters colonial and historical themes. Moreover, the show becomes an extremely powerful metaphor *for* the Western imagination. The Western imagination, like the societies on *Survivor*, creates its own imagined, hyperreal worlds that deny outward issues and atemporalize the Marquesas.

Conclusively, despite being produced nearly one hundred years apart, the narratives of *White Shadows in the South Seas* and *Survivor* have a common thread. They:

Become immersed in a primitive world that promises to restore simpler, more stable categories for positive identification, perceived as being under attack in the West. Yet the narrative also suggests coexisting fears of being indelibly marked by falling too deeply into the primal, sensual power of otherness. It is easier, perhaps, simply to stay at home, resigning oneself to the superficial, commodified boundaries of the civilized. Even paradise is somewhere ‘out there’ and can destroy the wanderer’s ability to return to the comforting, bourgeois values of home and hearth. [Geiger 2002:100]

Being referred back to a more natural point in time, these two productions explore the benefits to living in a simpler and thus more “human” time, where less categories of identification were perceived to be created, leading to a more positive sense of self. In effect, there is less worry. Both of these productions challenge Western categories of identification, and look to the Marquesas as a place for restoration and *regeneration*. Yet, neither production strives to “revert”

back to that primitive, *degenerate* state. The West confronts itself, but does not thwart, its dominant power.

These narratives idealize native life, but also threaten, “to enfold the wary traveler in its unhealthy and degenerate embrace” (Geiger 2002:100). These two productions present the tools necessary to imagine a Marquesas that has the ability to *regenerate* the West, by enforcing the concept of the islands as spatially and temporally backwards. This creates an idea that in order to *regenerate*, a society would have to *degenerate*, or move backward in time and civilizational development to *rediscover paradise*.

These narratives are constructed, reproduced and perpetuated only providing that the Marquesas *exists* as the footing for Western thought. In this chapter, I have illustrated how identities of the Marquesas can be reformulated and transformed through creative representations, and how the authority of such discursive, artistic and cinematic histories can maintain those images and identities as truth. The Western imagination, both intellectual and cinematic, has perpetuated the islands as a “natural” and thus *degenerate* land, yet also, paradoxically, as a place for *regeneration* in an “authentic” state of human nature. In order for this concept to exist, this imagined Marquesas as a *rediscovered paradise* is dependent on a civilized West, thereby enforcing the colonialist ideology of a social evolutionary scale. Moreover, by solely using Western intellectualism in the Western imagination to formulate such a paradox, the Marquesas is denied agency in how they are perceived within this imagination.

Conclusion

Independent from the Marquesas in the Western imagination is the reality of its contemporary sociopolitical situation. Subjected to colonialism, the Marquesas Islands remain an overseas territory of France to this day. During the late 19th century, the French established a colonial government on Tahiti. The famous island became the central point of what is now French Polynesia. Papeete, Tahiti remains the capital of the territory, which is composed of the Austral, Marquesas, Society, Tuamotu and Gambier Islands. As the capital and most famous island in French Polynesia, Tahiti has become an economic and political center, turning the Marquesas into a “remote, ‘country’ outpost— its dwindling population neglected and, in many respects, left to fend for itself” (Moulin 2001:77).

In 1989, the Marquesas requested that France recognize the Marquesas as a new overseas territory separate from Tahiti, but that wish was not granted. As contemporary Marquesan historian Jane Freeman Moulin writes,

In some ways it is difficult for the French administration back in Paris to view the Marquesans as a distinct people. With such a small population, some might think it hardly worth the trouble to divide these people from their neighbors. After all— they are all Polynesian! [Moulin 2001:87]

There are several issues imbedded in this statement: while the Marquesas struggles to be recognized by France (and much of the world) as socially, culturally and politically independent from Tahiti, they are fighting a hard battle at home in Polynesia. Simply put, “Tahitians tend to view the Marquesans as a very small minority group living on the periphery of a Tahiti-centric country.

Tahiti, at [one point making up] 70 percent of the territory's population, is obviously the dominant power" (Moulin 2001:83).

Tahiti is financially supported by France, which leaves the island to unfairly distribute that money to the 129 other islands in the territory, leaving itself with the majority of the money (Moulin 2001:83). It is still speculated that France is cutting back on financial support to Tahiti, creating an economic recession in French Polynesia and above all, in the islands surrounding Tahiti (Gonschor 2010:169-172). While the majority of Tahitians hope of reaching independence from France, the Marquesans know that this would "spell disaster" for their own island nation (Moulin 2001:83; Gonschor 2010). Without the financial aid of France, Tahiti would be left with an even smaller sum of money, causing dire economic straits for the rest of the French Polynesian territory. Therefore, most Marquesans are anti-independence in this ongoing controversial battle for both literal and metaphorical independence from France, and would prefer to be supported by the country yet autonomous from Tahiti.

The Marquesas Islands thus finds itself in a "net of control" (Moulin 1994:2), struggling to have their issues recognized by both Tahitian and French governments, to whom they are so tied to. Because Tahiti sees most of the international market and especially tourism, the Marquesas are left with poor infrastructure, high prices on store-bought goods and unemployment (Moulin 1994:4). They face social discrimination from Tahiti, which has often exploited and appropriated Marquesan culture.

As French Polynesia was grouped together, the encompassed archipelagos' common heritage was taken so that it overlooked each island nations' independent identity and culture. This blurring together of Pacific cultures has led those unaware of Polynesian politics, and even the French government, to believe that there is a pan-French Polynesian identity (Moulin 1994; 2001). In Tahiti, cultural artifacts of the Marquesas such as traditional tattoos and art are often sold to tourists as Tahitian, not Marquesan. This appropriation of culture leaves the Marquesas even further in the background to being recognized as culturally independent from Tahiti (Moulin 1994; 2001).

If these issues compose a contemporary reality, then the metaphor of *Survivor's* hyperreality is still a paramount example of how the Western imagination of the Marquesas is problematic. By fixing the islands as historically distant (and thus as an authentic state of human nature that Western civilization advanced from), the Western imagination denies any outward reality of the Marquesas and enforces colonialist ideologies. In this thesis, I articulated referents of discourse to illustrate how Western intellectualism formed the Marquesas as a subject of its imagination in different modes of representation.

In chapter one, I discussed how the discipline of anthropology inherently constructs knowledge of human difference, and how that in turn constructs a dichotomy between the West and the Other. The Other is a term relegated to those *different* from the West, and was often used to justify social evolutionary schemas that legitimized Western dominance in colonialism. Western intellectualism strove to find the Other in Terra Australis, where an untouched Eden was thought

to exist. Instead, explorers such as Alvaro de Mendaña and James Cook found a *paradise lost*, where the Other was ascribed as savage, barbarous and uncivilized. The Marquesas Islands, when placed into Western consciousness, was then “subordinated to conceptual geography,” and thought to live in a different, more savage time (Strong Reading 2011). I also explored this in the journals of William Pascoe Crook and Edward Robarts, both of whom started to question the definition of “savage.”

In chapter two, I examined how Denis Diderot, Herman Melville, Robert Louis Stevenson and Paul Gauguin *rediscovered paradise* within the Marquesas. Diderot, Melville and Gauguin compare the “happy” islands to an “unhappy” West, and in so doing comment on the falsehood of “savagery.” Melville and Gauguin both lament Western colonialism in the Marquesas, and therefore attempt to save the islands by sticking them in an untouched, pre-colonial Eden. Melville, Gauguin and Stevenson all find *regeneration* in this pre-colonial Eden, realizing that reverting back to an “authentic” state of human nature, which exists backwards on a social evolutionary scale, may give inspiration to an artist or *regenerate* the human soul. Although these are all postcolonial representations of the islands, they still paradoxically enforce the colonialist ideology of social evolution by placing the Marquesas backwards in time. Moreover, they still claim the islands as a place *for* the Westerner to *regenerate*, though without the need to *degenerate to* that state of nature (thereby bolstering, again, social evolutionary theories).

In chapter three, I illustrated the power and authority that discursive histories, literary narratives and visual representations in Western intellectualism hold in imagining realities, by exploring how representations of the Marquesas are reproduced in a 20th century film and 21st century reality TV series. This chapter synthesizes how the archipelago is perpetually used to criticize the West and is perhaps above all treated as a Westerners' destiny to travel to in order to *regenerate*. Despite postcolonial motives, a social evolutionary scale with a colonial mindset is enforced by the attempt to "save" the islands in a romanticized, pre-colonial *paradise*. In this imagined knowledge and identity of the Marquesas, the Marquesas is denied agency in how they are perceived within such an imagination— especially because this imagination dismisses the serious contemporary issues that I have just discussed with its *imperialist nostalgia*.

This is especially clear in the most contemporary mode of representation: tourism marketing. Aside from a number of hotels in the Marquesas there is one cruise ship, the *Aranui III* that tours the archipelago. The *Aranui* takes tourists on day and overnight visits to the inhabited islands, meanwhile offering academic lectures on the Marquesas as well as traditional food and spectacles, with Marquesan and Tahitian guides on the ship. The cruise ship returns every three weeks not only with the tourists, but also with a load of cargo that includes groceries and practical supplies. On the *Aranui*'s Facebook page, the cruise ship is described as such:

The lush untouched islands of the Marquesas have been supplied food and resources for over six decades by the hard working crew of the *Aranui*. The *Aranui III* is a dual operating vessel, custom built with the

passenger's comfort in mind whilst still pursuing its mission to the Marquesian people! [Aranui Facebook Page 2014]

We can immediately see the parallels between this statement and the representations of the Marquesas in the past. Firstly, the cruise ship denies colonialism by asserting the islands as “untouched.” Secondly, it affirms a bourgeois lifestyle aboard while still allowing its passengers to have an “authentic” Marquesan experience.

On the same Facebook page, the “about” section is almost too easy to be picked apart. Under “mission,” the description reads “Lifeline to Paradise.” Under “description,” the caption reads as follows:

Come see the scenery, hear the sounds & smell the scents of the Marquesas Islands aboard the Aranui.

Travel through time and space and allow yourself the opportunity to be transported back in time, becoming apart of a culture, people and beauty that is unparalleled.

The Aranui 3 takes you on a 14-day adventure cruise to the untouched marvel of the Marquesas Islands. She begins the journey from the docks of Papeete (Tahiti) and heads out into the horizon, anchoring at Fakarava, Ua Pou, Nuku Hiva, Hiva Oa, Fatu Hiva, Tahuata, Ua Huka, Rangiroa.

The Aranui 3 is a working freight, crewed by Tahitians and Marquesans, that offers you a relaxing portal through paradise filled with cultural immersion, entertainment, special guests, amazing food and days packed full of activities, tours and adventure. Be prepared to kick off your shoes and basque under the Tahitian sun, but if you're up for it, make sure those shoes of yours are good for walking because you won't be able to wait to explore every inch of these remarkable islands.

This is the official Aranui Facebook page, so send us a message! [Aranui Facebook Page 2014]

The most alarming portion of this description is the marketing strategy of transporting the Westerner backwards in time and space. Allusions to the

untouched *paradise* and authentic cultural experience with the comforts and luxury of guided tours are also alarming. These two connections fit too perfectly into past representations of the Marquesas that deny their agency in the Western imagination.

The rest of the page introduces their Marquesan and Tahitian guides with accompanied photos and traditional crafts, and markets the opportunity to reach lush, untouched lands in photo albums. The page even addresses Melville and Gauguin's travels to the Marquesas as a selling point to visit them. In fact, after explaining in a photo album of Hiva Oa that Gauguin is buried there, the description reads: "this island truly touches the very root of your soul" (Aranui Facebook Page 2014), reaffirming the Marquesas as a place to *regenerate*. Another photo album is titled, "Now Bring Me That Horizon," with the description: "the picturesque views from aboard the Aranui as we sail into the distant unknown" (Aranui Facebook Page 2014). The *Aranui* further accentuates the distance, both literal and conceptual, of the islands.

Further, a photo album titled "Botany of the Marquesas" showcases the beautiful botanicals that thrive in the region. The description reads: "the Marquesas Islands are filled with amazing botanicals that have had the opportunity to grow and flourish in this untouched paradise" (Aranui Facebook Page 2014). Although it doesn't specify what regions would not be able to play host to such botanicals, we can infer that a "developed civilization," such as the West, would not have the ability to grow something so in nature. But on the other hand, islands such as the Marquesas can exist in harmony with nature, because

they exist without the confining trappings of civilization— they are able to *grow* and *regenerate* life forms. Lastly, in honors of Valentines Day, a photo album is posted with general photos of the tour entitled “The Romance of the Marquesas.” This speaks for itself: that living in an “untouched” (but very touched) region is “romantic” (but home to its own set of extremely serious issues). Other hashtags and posts claiming things such as “#adventureinparadise” and “go somewhere new” (Aranui Facebook Page 2014), reinforce the possibility of the Westerner *regenerating* abroad in an “untouched” region (that their ancestors so “touched” in the past).

Salazar writes that these “outdated [...] models [...] serve the purpose of enacting tourism imaginaries well” (Salazar 2013:683). While this strategy of invoking a *regenerative* space to attract tourists is problematic, it is important to note that is not necessarily *negative*.

While tourism:

Involves the constant (re)production of stereotypes and categories of ethnic and cultural differences across the globe [...] these (colonial) images and ideas of culture as homogenous, bounded, and unchanging are now being recycled, by people ‘embracing and promoting images of themselves as celebrated anthropological Others, subjects of foreign research books.’ [Salazar 2013:690]

In her article “Imagining Otherness: Anthropological Legacies in Contemporary Tourism,” Salazar well articulates the tension between tourism as invoking colonialist ideologies, and also of the fact that indigenous populations may “exploit themselves” in order to give themselves a global image or even a profitable living, at that. She writes that, “anthropologists have a hard time accepting that the people whom they study and have come to understand ‘actively

market primitivism and have absorbed many of its tenets into their own fabric of belief” (Salazar 2013:691). True, I myself have a hard time accepting this fact, especially if my whole thesis culminates in discussing how contemporary tourism sustains notions of social evolution.

This thesis is not centered on tourism in the Marquesas Islands; therefore I can give no straight answer to its affects on the archipelago. However, I have written that creative and intellectual representations of the Marquesas Islands in the Western imagination play into the “consequential proponents of the great nostalgic narrative of loss and possible contact with a disappearing object that forms a major motivating background to many tourism activities” (Salazar 2013:691). And so like most anthropological research, this thesis is incomplete, which Salazar synthesizes: “the hard question that begs an answer is how anthropologists should deal with the discipline’s deep implication in contemporary tourism and other cultural dynamics around the globe” (Salazar 2013:692). I cannot answer that question, especially because I do not have the authority to speak towards the benefits of tourism in the Marquesas. However, I can assert my argument that the Western imagination requires a shift in its thinking of the Marquesas as “the original, the centered, the natural, the authentic, and opposed to the ‘global,’ understood as new, external, artificially imposed, and inauthentic” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:7).

This thinking denies the Marquesas’ colonial past and fixes the islands in a naturalized and temporally distant space that exists for the West, as a space for *regeneration* and inspiration in the Western imagination. The Marquesas Islands

of French Polynesia are thus a site of nostalgia: a group of islands that harken back to when humans existed without the trappings of modern-day Western civilization. The attitudes that my professor, the Arizona family and myself had of either lamenting modernization or looking for an escape from Western civilization are clear now. Although the historical process of how those attitudes were formed is complex, the analysis is simple. In heading for the Marquesas, we too longed for a time without the confines of today's civilization. I challenge the Western imagination to question these thoughts, for it is "only by challenging such deeply entrenched thinking does it become possible for an anthropological exploration of 'the local' to proceed without succumbing to nostalgia for origins" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:7).

Perpetuating these colonialist ideologies of the West on top of a social evolutionary scale and the Marquesas on the bottom, whether "positively" or "negatively" placed, is problematic. If contemporary TV shows like *Survivor* and contemporary tourism fix the Marquesas in the past, then they will continue to be denied agency in how they are perceived in the Western imagination. And if they continue to be denied this agency, then we, the West, are perpetuating dominant colonialist ideologies. Furthermore, denying this agency fixes their difference from the West as an Other, creating an ideological closure of the islands as naturalized and time-backwards. Perhaps the Marquesas *can* teach us how to *regenerate* if it means debunking these colonialist ideologies, but that does not mean that we have to deny them agency in their perceived identity in the West. I hope this thesis elucidates how not only to better approach perceiving the islands,

but also especially how we can exist in what Fabian calls a *coeval* state with the Marquesas Islands. That is, a state where we can exist on the same plane of time and civilization as the islands, where no hierarchy is present. Furthermore, by challenging categorical identities of difference that the Western imagination has constructed and ascribed to the Marquesas, we may be able to open the ideological closure of the Marquesas as bounded and backwards.

In short, the Marquesas Islands are not a problem-free *paradise*. Perpetuating notions of indigenous Marquesans and their home as close to nature and free from the confines of Western civilization is to perpetuate ignorance of the serious issues and struggles faced on a daily basis in the islands, and the dismissal of Marquesan agency in their Western perceptions. While we can lament damage the West has done to encapsulate the islands in a social, political and cultural web of power, it cannot be a reason to continuously place them in a romantic and desirably *degenerate* state, because in reality the West will never *degenerate* to that space. We need to escape the enclosed boundaries of our Western imagination, not the confines of our own civilization. Only then will we be able to exist *coevally* with the Marquesas Islands.

Appendix

Figure 1¹⁹



Figure 2²⁰



¹⁹ "Gauguin écrivain (CD-ROM)," *Mosquito*, (2003)

<http://www.mosquito.fr/portfolio/expositions/beaux-arts/article/gauguin-ecrivain-cd-rom>, accessed April 21, 2014.

²⁰ "The Gauguin Painting that Terrified Gauguin," *Ikono*, (2012)

<http://www.ikono.org/2012/05/the-gauguin-painting-that-terrified-gauguin/>, accessed April 21, 2014.

Figure 3²¹



²¹ "Lectures," *Portland Art*, (2009)
http://www.portlandart.net/archives/2009/04/lectures_4.html, accessed April 22, 2014.

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