

Audrey Lipps  
Lippsae2  
LAURE Research Process Essay

## Access from the Ends of the Earth: An Agricultural Ethnography in the Pacific

In the summer of 2016, on the Northern tip of the Big Island of Hawaii, I sat in my 1940's Japanese-style military tent, on my air mattress, next to a centipede. The centipede inched its way toward my blanket, faster than you'd think, and I leaped off the bed onto the wood pallet floor, seconds before contact. The myth goes, if you're bitten by a Hawai'ian centipede, the pain can range from an agonizing hornet sting to a mild *gunshot wound*, and I wasn't taking my chances. This encounter may seem rare, but this is the life of an ethnographer.

I moved to the Big Island from May-December of 2016 to begin what would be my three and a half year ethnography on Native Hawai'ian participation in organic agriculture, and later would allow me to travel to five islands in French Polynesia to complete an international, comparative, qualitative research study. My research could not have been completed without the help of the library. Regardless of how isolated I was in my field work, the MU library literally put a world of knowledge at my fingertips.

Prior to my tent-living, researching lifestyle, I co-created a syllabus and reading list with my adviser in the individualized studies program (The Western Program). We searched library databases, particularly *Social Works Abstract*, *JSTOR* and *Sociological Collection*, for journalistic articles and relevant literature, and most importantly, we combed through research to choose which methodologies would make the most sense in supporting the type of research that would suit my thesis. By reading ethnographies from the library databases, I decided that ethnographic research was best for what I wanted to do -- living, researching and interacting within a community. Reading about and deciding on ethnography fundamentally shaped my research going forward; making my official reading list, writing field journals, and ultimately forming my research question, *What influences the decisions of Native-Hawai'ians and non-Native Hawai'ians in participating or not in the production and consumption of organic agriculture?*

I came to this question by observing the Big Island's farmer's market demographics while interning on a small farm in the same town I would later return to in order to complete my research. It was a 10-acre, organic agriculture compound that cultivated and cared for much of the community's fresh food source. I adored and believed in the work, yet I was uncomfortable. I was a white person on sacred, indigenous land and I was not seeing anyone of Hawai'ian descent growing or buying food at the weekly farmer's market, and I wanted to know why. Soon after returning to Miami for my freshman year, I started planning. After finalizing the syllabus and reading list, I needed to find housing, and I ended up work-trading at a small Airbnb that was connected to a Native Hawai'ian cooperative farm next door. I cleaned sheets, greeted guests and managed the landscaping on the property. I slept in my large, slightly open tent every night. Hence the centipede.

In these eight months, I completed 13 interviews, over 20 field journals and 20 weekly writing reports on my experiences and reading materials, and experienced the full world of

ethnographic research. I do not know how I could have completed this research without the library's resources. During my research, above all else, the library provided essential and easy access that I otherwise would not have had. Although I did not have cellular service, I had internet access and I could download all the necessary reading that I needed from the library which helped me prepare for and complete my interviews and field journals.

After I returned from the Big Island, the library helped in the beginning stages of my data analysis and writing process, which for me was most important. I didn't know where to begin, so I went to the HOWE writing center which conveniently meets where I spend majority of my time on campus, Peabody Hall. The consultant at Howe helped me brainstorm how to write a concise abstract and introduction, which paved the way for the rest of my thesis.

Then, last summer, I did it all over again. I spent eight weeks traveling five islands of French Polynesia, including a 6.765 mi<sup>2</sup> island in the Australes Islands chain two hours south of Tahiti. I was one of only two tourists on the entire island and the bike ride to any available wifi was over an hour away. Despite this, I could still read and analyze all of my downloaded articles that I would later use for my literature background. French and Tahitian are the primary languages in Tahiti, and I don't speak either fluently. Using my broken French, coupled with historical journals and anthropological books in English from the library, I managed to complete five semi-structured interviews on Tahitian participation in organic agriculture. Being a Western major, (where we learn to do interdisciplinary work), having access to thousands of interdisciplinary articles was imperative. I needed food studies, environmental sciences, sociology, and anthropology sources, all of which the library had an abundance of resources for, often including a culmination of disciplines. Whenever I got stuck in my analysis, I returned to the library databases to help get back on track. Whenever an obstacle presented itself, the library easily removed it, including referring me to University of Massachusetts Translation Center, which translated and transcribed three of the five interviews I conducted in French. Although there were significant gaps in my research regarding both the differences in time spent in each region (eight months versus eight weeks), and a language barrier, I would not have been able to complete research at this scale without the references the library provided.

When I returned to Miami in August, my capstone seminar class met at the library, where we worked closely with librarians with interdisciplinary backgrounds to help us finalize our research in terms of sources, websites and archival work. Case by case, she helped with breaking down our theses and separating them into disciplines, which helped immensely with consolidating my themes; colonization, land distribution, classification of organic, capitalism and food economies and cultural programming and reclamation. With a comprehensive sources list that I've gathered in the last three years, I could refer back to sources I used in the very beginning to begin writing. I can't count the amount of hours I've spent in the brightly-lit walls of King; reviewing, journaling and writing my qualitative data analysis, which I am now finalizing with continued help from the library's massive database.

The last three years have categorically defined who I am and what I strive to be as a researcher. Since the completion of my research in Hawaii, I have presented at The Undergraduate Research Forum and the Race, Gender, Class & Sexuality Symposium at Miami University and once nationally at the National Women's Studies Association General Conference. Every step of this process has helped me realize my passion for research, and

particularly research that is in solidarity with my values. The library propelled and supported me in 3.5 years of undergraduate research that has set in motion the rest of my career, in academia and beyond.