



# Islands of Labor: Community, Conflict, and Resistance in Colonial Samoa, 1889-1919

## Citation

Droessler, Holger. 2015. Islands of Labor: Community, Conflict, and Resistance in Colonial Samoa, 1889-1919. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences.

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**ISLANDS OF LABOR:  
COMMUNITY, CONFLICT, AND RESISTANCE IN COLONIAL SAMOA,  
1889 – 1919**

A dissertation presented by

Holger Droessler

to

the Committee on Higher Degrees in the History of American Civilization

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

History of American Civilization

Harvard University

Cambridge, MA

May 2015

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Islands of Labor: Community, Conflict, and Resistance in Colonial Samoa, 1889-1919

### **ABSTRACT**

My dissertation follows the lives and struggles of the workers of Samoa from the last decade of the nineteenth century until the end of the Great War. Drawing on a wide range of sources—from travel reports and court depositions to photographs and maps—my dissertation reconstructs the experiences of Samoans as well as migrants from Melanesia, Micronesia, and China. This diverse group of peoples living in Samoa harnessed their own energy and that of their natural environment to create a colonial world often beyond their own control. At the same time, they succeeded in re-creating their own lifeworlds in ways that often defied the limits of this colonial world. I argue that community, conflict, and resistance among workers in colonial Samoa can best be understood by delving deeply into the particular dynamics of particular workscapes. Five workscapes—the subsistence economy, the plantation, the ethnographic show, the building of infrastructure, and the colonial service—became crucibles of lived sociality and, over time, political solidarity for the people living and laboring in colonial Samoa. As much as German, American, and New Zealand colonial officials tried to keep workers apart from one another, they succeeded in overcoming racial and colonial boundaries and formed new kinds of community.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA-KA	Auswärtiges Amt-Kolonialabteilung
ANZ	Archives New Zealand
BArch	Bundesarchiv
DHPG	Deutsche Handels- und Plantagengesellschaft der Südseeinseln
LMS	London Missionary Society
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NAS	National Archives Samoa
NHHC	Naval History and Heritage Command
NMPL	Nelson Memorial Public Library
RKA	Reichskolonialamt
SKC	Samoa-Kautschuk-Compagnie
SPG	Samoa-Plantagen-Gesellschaft
SSG	Safata-Samoa-Gesellschaft
StAH	Staatsarchiv Hamburg
StAM	Stadtarchiv Munich
UCC	Upolu Cacao Company
URCE	Upolu Rubber and Cacao Estates Ltd.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing about workers in Samoa was a lot of work. I appreciate the opportunity to thank the people and institutions that made my work possible. My dissertation originated in a research paper I wrote for a seminar on “Transnational America” at Harvard’s Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History in 2009-10. I would like to thank the seminar conveners, Walter Johnson and Vince Brown, for their early encouragement. My first foray into Samoan history benefitted immensely from conversations with fellows Joshua Guild, Paul Kramer, Gunther Peck, Suzanna Reiss, Patrick Wolfe, and Cynthia Young. Since then, Paul has become an indispensable guide to U.S. imperial history for me. Thanks to the Warren Center, and to Walter and Vince in particular, for bringing such a stimulating group of scholars together.

Further on in graduate school, I met Sven Beckert who quickly became my primary advisor. Sven’s unbridled enthusiasm for history—especially in its labor and global forms—pushed me to ask big questions without losing sight of the details. As historian and advisor, he is my model. David Armitage emerged at the right time during my research and has been a superb critic and reliable supporter ever since. His scholarship has been a great source of inspiration for my own interest in the Pacific. Jennifer Roberts was not only chair of the American Studies Program during my formative years, but has offered crucial advice on my project from the beginning. Her acute sense of the materiality of history has motivated me to pay closer attention to the sensory dimensions of labor in Samoa. I am also thankful for her logistical support during my time in graduate school. Last but not least, Damon Salesa, at the University of

Auckland, has been a passionate outside reader who intervened at crucial moments of my research. His insistence on approaching Samoan and Pacific history beyond the categories introduced by colonialism continues to shape my own understanding of workers in Samoa.

My time at Harvard was immeasurably enriched by a community of scholars across the disciplines. For crucial feedback and stimulating conversations, I am thankful to the following fellows at Harvard's Weatherhead Initiative on Global History, headed by Sven Beckert and Charlie Maier: Claudia Bernardi, Amitava Chowdhury, Julio Decker, Marcelo Ferraro, Norberto Ferreras, Omar Gueye, Maral Jefroudi, Andrea Komlosy, Amit Mishra, Steven Serels, Eric Vanhaute, Florian Weber, and Jie Yang. Special thanks to Jessica Barnard for being such a good team player. At Harvard, I have received further guidance from Homi Bhabha, David Blackbourn, Allan Lumba, Werner Sollors, and John Stauffer. Arthur Patton-Hock was a rock in the ebbs and tides of graduate school. I am deeply thankful for his timely advice and general good cheer.

The research for this dissertation would not have been possible without the financial assistance of several institutions. At Harvard, I appreciate the support of the Center for European Studies, the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, the Committee on Australian Studies, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the History Department, the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, and the Weatherhead Initiative on Global History. I would also like to thank the staff at the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C., especially Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson and Bryan Hart, for making my stay both productive and pleasant.



My ideas have improved enormously by the comments of a number of scholars, both in the United States and elsewhere. First among these, I would like to thank Chris Capozzola at MIT for his encouraging words and constructive criticism. His generosity towards younger scholars is exemplary. For comments on individual dissertation chapters, I am grateful to Christopher Balme, Michael Hochgeschwender, Malama Meleisea, Robert Rydell, and Hilke Thode-Arora. For their probing questions, I would like to thank participants at the Northeastern University Graduate Conference *Empires and Technologies in World History* in March 2012, at the American Studies Association Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in November 2012, at the Association for Asian Studies Conference in San Diego in March 2013, at the Fourth European Congress on World and Global History (ENIUGH) in Paris in September 2014, at the *Labor and Empire* conference at UC Santa Barbara in November 2014, and at the *Circulation of (Post)Colonial Knowledge: A Transpacific History, 1800-1980* workshop at the University of Zurich in March 2015.

My sincere gratitude goes to the staff at the various archives I visited around the world. In Samoa, the staff at the Nelson Memorial Public Library in Apia, So'ona'alofa Sina Malietoa at the National Archives of Samoa for granting my access to German colonial records that were in the process of digitization, and the staff at the University of the South Pacific Alafua campus. In American Samoa, I am grateful to Joel Klenck for hosting me and to the staff at the American Samoa Historic Preservation Office for providing a perfect environment to do my research. In Wellington, I would like to thank the staff at Archives New Zealand, especially Uili Fecteau for taking me down into a storage room to look at material that had not been catalogued yet. In Australia, my thanks

goes to the staff of the National Archives of Australia and the National Library of Australia, both in Canberra, and of the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney. In Germany, I would like to thank the staff at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde, who responded to my request to look at every available shred of paper (and microfilm) on Samoa with expertise and kindness. The same is true for staff at the Bundesarchiv Koblenz and Freiburg, i.B. Thanks also to the staff at state and city archives in Hamburg, Berlin, and Munich for their assistance. In the United States, I am grateful to the staff at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C., College Park, MD, and San Bruno, CA. At the Tozzer Library at Harvard, I would like to thank Gregory A. Finnegan for his help in identifying ethnographic material.

Over the years, my research (and soul) was sustained by the presence of a group of dear friends around the world. I shared many ideas, drinks, and laughs with them, which helped me put my research in proper perspective. Among these friends are Stephanie Bosch Santana, Lowell Brower, Steven Brown, Jr., Marisa Egerstrom, Brian Goodman, Aaron Hatley, Raul Hernandez, Raj Hooli, Luvena Kopp, Stephan Kuhl, Pablo Lastra, Mo Lotman, Theresa McCulla, Giovanna Micconi, Wanda Moore, Erin Mosely, Stefanie Müller, Zach Nowak, Scott Paulsen-Bryant, Edmund Ratka, Summer Shafer, Anna Su, Gernot Waldner, Philippe Wimmer, and Christa Wirth.

My family back in Germany has supported my passion for history as far back as I can remember. They gave me books, compact discs, flight tickets, and so much more. My sister and my niece have an unmatched talent to remind me of the truly important things in life. I hope my father, a teacher himself, will learn a bit about Samoan history and what I have been up to over the past few years. My mother asked some of the most pressing

questions about my dissertation (most prominently, when are you done?) and was always there for me when I needed her. It is impossible to thank my parents for all they have done for me. I dedicate this dissertation to them.

Finally, my dissertation would not have come about as it did without my wife Joy. She danced into my life just as I embarked on my journey into Samoan history. Cheerfully, she dissected my arguments with a lawyer's eye and turned many an unfortunate phrase into something much more elegant. Countless conversations with her not only made my writing better, but, more importantly, made me a better person. I am looking forward to dancing with her into our future.

For my parents  
and all working people in Samoa, past and present

## INTRODUCTION

On December 30, 2011, hundreds of Samoans had to cancel their birthday parties. That Friday was skipped so that the island nation could catch up with people living west of the International Date Line running through the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Earlier in summer, then Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, argued the date switch would improve business relations with major trading partners in Australia, New Zealand, and China. Since hundreds of thousands of Samoans lived in Australia and New Zealand, crossing the date line would also make it easier to communicate with family and friends in the diaspora. With the stroke of a pen, an entire country had jumped over the date line.

Curiously enough, this was not the first time Samoa had travelled in time. Over a century ago, in 1892, Samoa celebrated two consecutive Fourth of Julys, to join the eastern side of the recently established International Date Line. Then, as in 2011, economic motives led the Samoan King Malietoa Laupepa to force the change. American traders had lobbied for the time alignment for a while, hoping to facilitate business with their main shipping destination in San Francisco. Robert Louis Stevenson's mother Margaret remembered the time-bending event in one of her letters from July 1892: "In former days, communication was entirely with Australia, and it was simpler and in every way more natural to follow the Australian calendar; but now that so many vessels come from San Francisco, the powers that be have decided to set this right, and to adopt the date that belongs to our actual geographical position. To this end, therefore, we are

ordered to keep *two Mondays* in this week, which will set us straight.”<sup>1</sup> As Mrs. Stevenson intuited, there was nothing natural about a country’s position in relation to the International Date Line, let alone about the line itself.

In October 1884, the International Meridian Conference convened in Washington, D.C., to determine a prime meridian that would become the standard for international time-keeping and traffic. After some predictable wrangling between the French and British delegates, the conference decided to pick the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, United Kingdom, as the location of the zero meridian. Slicing the earth’s surface into twenty-four time zones raised the question of where to draw the anti-meridian, a line that would soon after become known as the International Date Line. With the Atlantic world on their minds, the delegates found it easy to accept the geometric solution to the problem by drawing the line through the middle of the Pacific Ocean. As far as Euro-American delegates were concerned, there were too few islanders living in the region to matter. As the lone voices from the Pacific invited to Washington, the delegates from the independent Kingdom of Hawai’i had a hard stand, indeed.

As a historian, I was fascinated by crossing the International Date Line myself on a ferry from Pago Pago, American Samoa’s capital, to Apia in Western Samoa in the summer of 2012. After all, moving across the International Date Line, as I did, offers the only opportunity for time travel available to human beings today, despite what theoretical physicists and science fiction authors might have us believe. My ferry ride from Pago to Apia would take six long and rugby-filled hours to bridge the seventy miles between the two capitals. As I travelled into the future at a speed of twelve knots, I began to think

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Stevenson, and Marie C. Balfour, *Letters from Samoa, 1891-1895* (London, UK: Methuen, 1906), 191.

about the longer history of Samoa that I had come to study. To understand why Western Samoa crossed the date line in 1892 and again in 2011, we need to go back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when a whole host of new lines were being drawn in and around Samoa.

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Date lines are not the only lines Samoans have crossed over the past two centuries. In the early nineteenth century, the line separating war and peace in Samoa had been thin, indeed. Most Samoan wars revolved around the succession to chiefly titles, the murder of title-holders (*matais*), or around women.<sup>2</sup> A large-scale war involving the A'ana district was raging when the first Christian missionary from the London Missionary Society (LMS) arrived in Samoa in 1836. Soon joined by Methodists from Tonga and the French Marist Brothers, the LMS missionaries drew their own lines around believers and non-believers. By mid-century, a German trading firm by the name of Godeffroy & Co. established its headquarters in Apia and set up lines of trade in tropical fruits such as coconuts. And starting in the 1860s and 1870s, government officials and traders from Germany, Great Britain, and the United States began sketching lines around what they saw as their separate spheres of influence in the Pacific. It was in this context of intensifying commercial and military competition among the self-proclaimed “Great Powers” that the Samoan islands emerged on the maps of decision-makers in Europe and North America.

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<sup>2</sup> Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the History of Western Samoa* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, 1987), 22.

The ensuing history of Samoa has usually been told from the perspective of the European and American diplomats whose voluminous records are readily accessible. In an influential study, historian Paul M. Kennedy famously characterized the negotiations, conferences, and treaties involving these South Pacific islands as the “Samoa Tangle.”<sup>3</sup> In 1889, representatives from Germany, Great Britain, and the United States agreed at a conference in Berlin to share control over Samoa’s commercial capital Apia under an unprecedented tridominium. After a decade of renewed military conflict and economic instability, a second Berlin conference split the islands into a western part that became German and an eastern part under U.S. Navy rule. In his reading of the diplomatic sources available at the time, Kennedy makes a convincing case for the importance of Samoa in the series of international crises leading up to the Great War. The Samoans themselves play second fiddle in the concert of the “Great Powers.” Yet, it was precisely the great bargaining power of the Samoans themselves, accumulated through clever diplomacy and hard-won battles against Euro-American troops, that shaped the course of Samoan history during these crucial decades.

Rather than approaching Samoan history at the turn of the twentieth century as a diplomatic tangle, my dissertation puts Samoa’s entanglements in the global webs of colonialism and capitalism front and center. As a result of an expanding plantation agriculture, Samoa became home to a highly diverse group of people from around the Pacific world. Besides the 35,000 Samoans who lived on the islands at the time, several thousand migrant workers came to work on Samoan plantations from other parts of the Pacific, particularly the Gilbert Islands (today Kiribati), the Solomon Islands, and New

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<sup>3</sup> Paul M. Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle: A Study in Anglo-German-American Relations, 1878-1900* (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1974). For a recent reprise of Kennedy’s book, see Hua Wang, *The Samoan Tangle and Diplomacy of Great Powers, 1871-1900* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2008).



Guinea. Beginning in the early twentieth century, they were joined by several thousand more from China. My dissertation argues that this motley crew of workers, not the European and American diplomats and Navy officials, made and re-made colonial Samoa. The global connections that drew Samoa into the orbit of Euro-American traders, planters, and politicians can only be understood by paying close attention to the very local connections Samoan, Melanesian, Micronesian, and Chinese workers forged with one another.

The decades on either side of 1900 formed an important transition period for Samoans and many other colonized peoples. Samoa in 1889 and Samoa in 1919 were very different places. First and most importantly, the islands had lost their formal political independence as Great Britain, Germany, and the United States struggled over control. After 1900, the forty miles of ocean that separate the islands of Upolu in German Samoa and Tutuila in American Samoa became an international boundary. While the people living on the islands continued to share the same day of the week, the economic and political trajectories of German and American Samoa began to diverge. Second and closely related, the rudimentary plantation system of the 1880s underwent an explosive expansion in the following decades. Samoan subsistence farming came under pressure from a growing plantation economy dominated by foreign traders and manned by migrant workers from China and other Pacific islands.

Last but not least, Samoa became increasingly entangled in the shipping, communication, and even entertainment networks that encircled the globe at the end of the nineteenth century. Workers erected new hospitals, administration buildings, and a coaling station for the U.S. Navy in Tutuila. Radio stations in American and German

Samoa connected the islands to imperial metropolises and warships, and offered easier access to news. For their part, Samoan performers in ethnographic shows used the new infrastructure to travel to distant places, becoming cultural ambassadors in the process. And the new languages of the colonizers brought along new forms of employment for Samoans who became interpreters and clerks. Colonization changed the social and natural landscape of Samoa forever. Uncovering the aspirations held by workers on plantations, on show stages, and in governor's offices reveals a social world beyond the control of colonial officials at the time and, too often, beyond the purview of historians.

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My dissertation charts Samoa's transition from older ways of life to the globally connected world of colonial capitalism through the experience of workers. The "labor question," as plantation owners and colonial officials perceived it, was central to colonialism, its political economy, and the integration of Samoa into the global economy at large. Considerations of political economy also influenced Samoa's first jump across the date line in 1892 and they did so again in 2011. In both cases, workers seeking opportunities for a better life paved the way for Samoa's ties to other parts of the Pacific. At the end of the nineteenth century, the copra produced by Samoan growers and indentured laborers from Melanesia and Micronesia had become so valuable to American traders that they pressured the Samoan head of state to align with the Californian day. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Samoa's economic and personal ties to China, Australia, and particularly New Zealand swayed the Samoan Prime Minister back west.

The thousands of Samoans who migrated to Australia and New Zealand in search for work and education were, again, trailblazers for Samoa's future. Exploring the history of labor in colonial Samoa is key to understanding the islanders' ongoing travels across space and time.

*Islands of Labor* follows the lives and struggles of the workers of Samoa from the last decade of the nineteenth century until the end of the Great War. A diverse group of peoples living in Samoa harnessed their own human energy and that of their natural environment to create a colonial world often beyond their own control. At the same time, they succeeded in re-creating their own lifeworlds in ways that often defied the limits of this colonial world. While colonial subjection shaped the lives of workers in Samoa in many ways, they never ceased to be subjects of their own destinies.

Thousands of workers—locals and newcomers—laid the foundations of colonial Samoa. Independent Samoan producers who sold surplus copra to traders were essential to the prosperity of German and American Samoa. So were the thousands of Melanesian, Micronesian, and Chinese contract laborers who picked and processed coconuts and cocoa, tapped rubber trees, and weeded plantations grounds. Workers also built most of the colonial infrastructure necessary to connect Samoa internally and with the rest of the world: trails, roads, docks, and even a radio station. Cash crops found their way to market on these very roads and docks.

Given the heterogeneous group of workers in colonial Samoa, the main focus of my dissertation lies on the ways in which workers from different backgrounds related to each other. More specifically, I ask how the particular forms of labor workers engaged in shaped their relationship with fellow workers and to colonial authority, more broadly.

Under which conditions did forms of sociality among workers congeal into more solid bonds of solidarity and when did these bonds pose a challenge to outside rule? And finally, I am interested in the longer-term effects of these social bonds that emerged as a response to colonial capitalism but pointed towards postcolonial, and even postcapitalist, futures.

Different forms of labor entailed different kinds of physical and psychological investment on the part of the workers. Melanesian, Micronesian, and Chinese workers on copra plantations, for example, confronted a form of labor that taxed not only their bodies, through heavy lifting and long work hours, but also their minds, through the monotony of the work rhythm. Samoan government employees who helped translate and interpret documents and speeches experienced very different strains. If demands on their bodies were restricted to head and hand, their personal proximity to the center of colonial power challenged them in emotional ways. Some, like the interpreter Charles Taylor, developed such a close relationship to their employers that lines of authority became blurred. And for those Samoan men and women who joined ethnographic show troupes to travel to the United States and Europe, working acquired yet another meaning. Theirs was a moveable workplace that took them from their home islands to unfamiliar places to be exhibited in front of unfamiliar audiences. Over time, their particular kind of performative labor enabled forms of sociality with fellow colonized peoples unimaginable at home.

In these and other instances, the requirements of specific labor tasks influenced the ways in which workers interacted with one another, with their employers, and with their natural surroundings. I refer to this broad field of social and natural interactions that

workers in colonial Samoa participated in as a *workscape*.<sup>4</sup> The narrative revolves around five worksapes, each governed by distinct dynamics, but all connected in multiple ways: the subsistence economy, the plantation economy, the ethnographic show, the building of infrastructure, and the colonial service. The dissertation's topological structure parallels its central argument. Community, conflict, and resistance among workers in colonial Samoa can best be understood by delving deeply into the particular dynamics of particular worksapes. The five worksapes, analyzed in great detail in the dissertation's five main chapters, became crucibles of lived sociality and, over time, political solidarity for the diverse group of workers living and laboring in colonial Samoa. As much as German, American, and New Zealand colonialists tried to keep workers apart from one another, workers succeeded in overcoming these racial and colonial boundaries to become part of new forms of community.

Like working people elsewhere, workers in colonial Samoa sought social interactions with their colleagues. Whether on the plantation grounds or in the Governor's office, labor was rarely a solitary endeavor. Chinese plantation workers had dens where they smoked opium and gambled. Samoan soldiers shared the same barracks. And Samoan performers in ethnographic shows spent almost every moment of their extensive travels together. For many workers in colonial Samoa, the line between work and not-work was indistinguishable. Different worksapes enabled different ways of being and working together, different *socialities*, that is. If Samoans in Savai'i working

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<sup>4</sup> I am inspired by labor historian Thomas Andrews's use of the term to describe the set of relationships between mine workers and the non-human environment in early-twentieth-century Colorado. Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 125. The idea to apply the suffix "-scape" (from Old English "to shape") to different dimensions of cultural practice stems from anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. See his *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

for their family's subsistence followed time-tested ways of labor organization according to gender, age, and status, construction workers who transported soil from cut to fill for the U.S. Navy coaling station in Tutuila followed the commands of their white bosses. After all, following shared transcripts of behavior weaves together the fabric of the social, often under quite imbalanced power relations.

At times, more solid bonds of solidarity broke their way through the seams of mere sociality in a common workscape. Through shared experiences in a shared workscape, workers came to acquire a sense of shared interests that could, under certain conditions, become the basis for common political action. In most cases, the kinds of political acts workers engaged in were far from revolutionary. Plantation workers, for instance, worked slower than their employers required, ethnographic performers demanded opportunities to earn additional cash through the sale of craftwork, and construction workers struck for better wages. Sometimes, concerted political action took the form of economic boycotts that threatened the very foundations of colonial rule, such as when a charismatic *matai* from Savai'i, Lauaki, organized a movement in the early twentieth century. It was not until the early 1920s when the social bonds born in the crucible of labor united into a more sustained solidarity movement among Samoans who directed their demands for cultural autonomy and respect against the U.S. Navy and the New Zealand civil administration. In analyzing the forms of sociality and solidarity that emerged in different worksapes in colonial Samoa, my dissertation maps out the forgotten labor roots of the anti-colonial *Mau* movement.

Due to the multiracial and transitory nature of labor in Samoa, solidarity among workers did not emerge primarily from an awareness of common goals. Instead, workers

shared a common sense of vulnerability to cultural, economic, political, and environmental change. To varying degrees, workers were drawn into a colonial world beyond their own control. Samoan families, for instance, had to deal with the commodification of their natural resources, from food crops such as coconuts to the very lands they owned. The thousands of migrant workers who came to Samoa from all over the Pacific world were exposed to different kinds of vulnerabilities. Bound by contract to their employer, they had to obey orders, work hard, and still endure regular physical and financial punishment. Since most contract laborers came alone, they could not rely on the social networks that sustained the Samoan community. Even though workers experienced different degrees of vulnerability in the face of colonialism, they came to share a common understanding of themselves as vulnerable to outside forces. While it would be too much to speak of a class consciousness shared by the workers in colonial Samoa, this sense of solidarity in the face of shared vulnerability emerged clearly on several occasions at the turn of the twentieth century.

Solidarity emerged, for instance, when Samoans protested against the continuing commodification of their food supplies by German plantation owners seeking quick profits. In protecting their vibrant subsistence economy, Samoans slowed down the advance of commercial plantations on their islands and, indirectly, mitigated the further exploitation of plantation workers from elsewhere. Likewise, Samoans who participated in ethnographic shows in Europe and North America were vulnerable to exploitative managers, aggressive audiences, and local authorities. By socializing with fellow people on display, such as *hula* dancers from Hawai'i or a Dahomeyan "Princess," Samoans recognized their own vulnerabilities as participants in the politics of colonial

representation. At the same time, when they laughed and danced with fellow Polynesians in distant Chicago, the Samoan performers transcended official protocols and developed new kinds of solidarities under the radar of the colonizers.

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*Islands of Labor* is the first detailed study of working people in Samoa. My dissertation is firmly anchored in Samoa, its people (old-timers and newcomers), and its natural environment. As a contribution to Samoan labor history and Samoan history more broadly, my work stands on an archipelago of foundational scholarship, dating back to the 1970s. Around the same time Kennedy was writing his famous book, a group of Australian and Samoan historians began studying Samoa's complicated labor history. While fundamental to my own work, no major monograph emerged out of this burst of scholarship, leaving many threads hanging mid-air. More generally, these studies tended to focus on specific groups of migrant workers who came to Samoa, for example, from the Gilbert Islands, Melanesia, and China. In contrast, my dissertation tries to link the experiences of all workers in colonial Samoa together in a Pacific and even global context.<sup>5</sup> Given the renewed academic and general interest in Pacific history, historians of

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<sup>5</sup> Stewart Firth, "German Recruitment and Employment of Labourers in the Western Pacific Before the First World War" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1973); "German Firms in the Western Pacific Islands, 1857-1914," *The Journal of Pacific History* 8 (1973): 10-28; "Governors versus Settlers: The Dispute over Chinese Labour in German Samoa," *New Zealand Journal of History* 11, no. 2 (1977): 155-79; Doug Munro and Stewart Firth, "Samoan Plantations: The Gilbertese Laborers' Experience, 1867-1896," in: *Plantation Workers: Resistance and Accommodation*, edited by Brij V. Lal, Doug Munro, and Edward D. Beechert (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 101-27; Malama Meleisea, "The Last Days of the Melanesian Labour Trade in Western Samoa," *Journal of Pacific History* 11, no. 2 (1976): 126-32; *O Tama Uli: Melanesians in Western Samoa* (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1980); Nancy Tom, *The Chinese in Western Samoa, 1875-1985: The Dragon Came From Afar* (Apia: Western Samoa Historical and Cultural Trust, 1986); Ben Featuna'i Liua'ana, "Dragons in Little Paradise: Chinese



the region need to build bridges to national and global conversations without losing sight of the very local traditions of genealogy, identity, and connection. The many independent pasts of Pacific Islanders reveal the limits of Euro-American imperialism in the region as well as those of Euro-American historians writing about them.<sup>6</sup>

Asking big questions in a small place, my research on Samoa shows that historians need to focus on workers' struggles and do so from a global perspective. Global history needs a firm grounding in the very local traditions, conflicts, and fields of imagination of a particular place. Global trends can only be traced in local contexts. Among other things, my research on colonial Samoa offers a case study in the much larger story of how the global countryside was commodified by the mobilization of unfree labor at the end of the nineteenth century. This process took place in many parts of the world, at different times, and under different circumstances, but often linked to colonization projects by powerful states and companies. The expansion of commercial plantation agriculture in colonial Samoa and the recruitment of contract laborers from all over the Pacific to work on these plantations was part of this global transformation. As my research on Samoa shows, the Pacific deserves more scholarly attention as one of the post-emancipation frontier zones of colonial capitalism marked by cash crops and unfree labor migration.

At the same time, local particularities made the Samoan case different from others. To be sure, rural cultivators around the world preferred local trade and

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(Mis-) Fortunes in Samoa, 1900-1950," *The Journal of Pacific History* 32, no. 1 (1997): 29-48.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent attempt to create a conversation among the diverse group of scholars interested in the Pacific, see David Armitage, and Alison Bashford, eds., *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

independent subsistence farming over long-distance markets.<sup>7</sup> But few farmers, especially in Euro-American colonies, were able to resist growing outside demands and thrive at the same time. Despite increasing pressures to sell their land and their labor power, Samoan farmers were able to hold on to their subsistence agriculture for a number of reasons. First of all, Samoa remained at best partially integrated into global commodity chains at the turn of the twentieth century. Steamship and communication lines improved access to the South Pacific, but other tropical cash crop zones—in the Caribbean and Africa—were simply closer to major markets in North America and Europe. Second, Samoans had a long history of violent resistance against colonial intervention and more aggressive methods of extraction might have sparked renewed violence. Last but not least, colonial officials pursued policies that protected Samoan ways of life from wholesale commercialization by more aggressive planters. Although this policy of salvage colonialism undermined long-standing political structures, it did help Samoans adapt to global trade largely on their own terms. As Samoans held their own in this precarious balance between external pressure and internal change, they forged new bonds of solidarity amongst each other and with non-Samoans. In the end, the story of labor in colonial Samoa serves less as a synecdoche for the transformation of the global countryside but rather as a constitutive part of this larger process.

Beyond Samoan and global history, my dissertation also pushes historians of the United States and Germany to broaden their horizons towards the Pacific. Despite resurgent interest in the history of German and U.S. colonialism, there has been no single historical monograph on colonial Samoa that situates the islands within the region and

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<sup>7</sup> For the case of cotton cultivators in German Togo, see Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2014), 371.

within the historiography on the two colonial empires.<sup>8</sup> My dissertation attempts to fill this gap in scholarship by offering the first extensive analysis of Samoa's role in German and U.S. colonial projects, highlighting in particular the driving force played by workers. Historians of U.S. and, even more so, German labor have often ignored the experiences of workers beyond the imperial center and without citizenship. My dissertation is part of a growing wave of scholarship that tries to break that silence.<sup>9</sup> In a sense, recent works on the intersection of labor and empire represent a return to some of the questions raised by the first generation of social historians in the 1960s and 1970s. Herbert Gutman, to name only one of the most prominent members, argued early on that nonwhite, non-U.S.-born workers were central to the making of the American working class.<sup>10</sup> If his subjects were

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<sup>8</sup> The only exception is Thomas Schwarz's literary analysis of the trope of Samoa in colonial discourse, *Ozeanische Affekte: Die literarische Modellierung Samoas im kolonialen Diskurs* (Berlin: TEIA - Internet Akademie und Lehrbuch Verlag, 2013). Most of the groundwork on Germany's history in the South Pacific, including Samoa, has been laid by Hermann Hiery. See his *Das Deutsche Reich in der Südsee (1900-1921): Eine Annäherung an die Erfahrungen verschiedener Kulturen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995); Hiery, ed., *Die Deutsche Südsee 1884-1914: Ein Handbuch* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001); "Die Polizei im deutschen Samoa: Deutsche Hoffnungen und samoanische Erwartungen," in: *Barrieren und Zugänge: Die Geschichte der europäischen Expansion*, edited by Thomas Beck, Marília dos Santos Lopes, and Christian Rödel (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 266-73. For a sociological approach to German colonialism, including a section on Samoa, see George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Joseph Kennedy's rather descriptive work remains the sole monograph on American Samoa to date, *The Tropical Frontier: America's South Sea Colony* (Mangilao, Guam: Micronesian Area Research Center, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of scholarship on U.S. imperialism and labor, see Julie Greene, "The Labor of Empire: Recent Scholarship on U.S. History and Imperialism," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 1, no. 2 (2004): 113-29. Greene's own monograph on the building of the Panama Canal was a great inspiration for my dissertation. Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2009). Other influential works include Jana K. Lipman, *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History Between Empire and Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009); Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Lara Putnam, *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Gutman's *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). Closer to Samoa, Ronald Takaki's contributions to Hawaiian labor history have been influential to my own work as well. See, in particular, his *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawai'i, 1835-1920* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1983).

hard-working immigrants to the U.S. mainland, his insight applies equally to the thousands of workers in U.S.-controlled territories, on U.S. ships, and in the U.S. military beyond its shores.

In Gutman's spirit, my dissertation tries to find the workers of colonial Samoa where they spent most of their time: at work and with their families. Compared to the pyrotechnics of high-level diplomatic maneuvering, these everyday practices of laboring and living were perhaps less spectacular, but, as my research shows, no less significant. Paying close attention to the material dimensions of labor, as I do in my dissertation, promises to bridge the study of social experience and cultural practices.<sup>11</sup> Contract workers on copra plantations, for instance, sometimes developed what colonial doctors called "coolie legs," that is ulcers on their lower legs. This painful condition was the result of incessant standing, walking, and carrying crops on the plantation grounds. Workers who helped build the coaling station in Tutuila developed their own, no less exacting, relationship to the natural environment. As they cut into the hillside to gain soil for the land fill stretching into the bay, workers used shovels, carts, and often their bare hands to handle the dirt. Workers with leg ulcers and dirty hands might not have been present when international treaties about the future of Samoa were signed, but they were the ones who made colonial Samoa what it was.

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel E. Bender, "Sensing Labor: The Stinking Working-Class after the Cultural Turn," in *Rethinking U.S. Labor History: Essays on the Working-Class Experience, 1756-2009*, edited by Donna T. Haverty-Stacke, and Daniel J. Walkowitz (New York, NY: Continuum, 2010), 256f.

My dissertation is a history from way, way below and far, far away: from the plantation grounds up, across thousands of miles land and sea, but with Samoa firmly at the center of events. Inspired by social history, cultural history, and historical anthropology, I use a diversity of sources to render the workscapes in which people in colonial Samoa worked as thick as possible. My research draws on a wide range of primary sources—from travel reports and court depositions to photographs and maps—to tell the stories of working Samoans and migrants from Melanesia, Micronesia, and China. Since the colonial archives assembled by officials, bureaucrats, and plantation owners buried moments of collective experience, I am reading both along and against the archival grain.<sup>12</sup>

Reading *along* the archival grain means to pay close attention to the concerns of colonial officials captured in their reports, telegrams, and statistics. Putting colonial officials on the couch does not necessarily re-center them as the main protagonists of colonialism. Instead, taking their anxieties, apprehensions, and asides seriously reveals them as what they were: symptoms of colonial resistance. Reading *against* the archival grain follows the cues of generations of scholars looking to recover the lives and experiences of the untold numbers of people buried under colonial debris. Against the archival grain means searching for information in the spaces between, on documents and in archives themselves. Silences can be rich with the laughter of Samoan women, passive voices peopled with very active workers, and mortality statistics full of suffering and grief. In many ways, this project had not been previously realized because the sources on which it is based are spread across the globe in the archives of Samoa's colonizers, past

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<sup>12</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). For a similar approach in a different context, see Michelle R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014), 24.

and present. Oral histories, on which this study relies as much as it can, have been only partly recorded or made accessible.<sup>13</sup> Much further work needs to be done, especially with regard to the experiences of the Chinese workers who came to Samoa.

My dissertation is structured topologically, linking particular *themes* to particular kinds of *places*. Theme and place come together in five different workscapes. Each chapter captures a global process within the local context of colonial Samoa: the partial commodification of the Samoan labor system (chapter 1), unfree labor migration (chapter 2), the performative labor involved in ethnographic shows (chapter 3), the construction of transportation and communication lines (chapter 4), and the careers in the colonial service (chapter 5). If this topological structure privileges place over time, it allows for a more fine-grained analysis of local particularities and their relevance for global processes.

Chapter 1 analyzes the relationship between subsistence farming, which Samoans continued to engage in throughout the colonial era, and resistance against colonial domination. Samoans resisted colonial capitalism by holding onto their vibrant subsistence economy, which acted as a safeguard against their exploitation as wage laborers on plantations. In insisting on the limits of commodification of natural resources, especially food crops such as coconuts, Samoans succeeded in protecting long-standing ways of life. At the same time, Samoans also adapted selectively to the new colonial world by occasional wage labor on plantations and, especially, by founding copra cooperatives. In both German and American Samoa, this form of worker mutualism aimed at greater economic self-determination on the part of the indispensable Samoan

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<sup>13</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*.

producers. While the cooperative movement eventually gave in under political coercion, it helped form the nucleus of a more sustained challenge to colonial rule in the 1920s.

In chapter 2, I sketch out the colonial world made by copra, the dried meat of the coconut. As the main cash crop of the islands, copra structured the lives of thousands of Melanesian and Chinese plantation workers and independent Samoan producers.

Plantation workers struggled to turn shared sociality into the more concrete bonds of solidarity that would enable them to resist their exploitation in more lasting ways.

Moving across lines—spatial, racial, and even spiritual—was one of the main strategies of resistance pursued by workers. If plantation owners introduced new boundary lines around their plantations and even replanted coconut trees in geometric fashion, workers found ways to adapt. Chinese workers, for instance, defied the coercive conditions on large copra plantations by running away, appealing to the state, and resorting to physical violence. And a handful of brave Melanesian plantation workers relied on their familiarity with the tropical island environment to set up their own maroon communities in the interstices of colonial infrastructure.

Chapter 3 follows the travels and travails of Samoan performers who participated in ethnographic shows in the United States and Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. No less than the workers cutting copra on the islands, the men and women who left their homes to perform their “Samoanness” abroad played a crucial role in the making of empire in colonial Samoa. While most of the extensive literature on ethnographic shows has little to say about the performers themselves, let alone about the ones from Samoa, this chapter will present the Samoan performers as the skilled cultural

workers they were.<sup>14</sup> Easily the most mobile of all workers, troupe members charted out new pathways into unknown territories, much like workers had done on plantations. Balancing the exploitation of the colonial gaze against opportunities for travel and self-representation, Samoan performers became diplomats of their own. Over time, they learned to circumnavigate the demands of their Euro-American managers by reinterpreting their participation in ethnographic shows as diplomatic missions and becoming friends with fellow colonized peoples. Samoans mingled with Hawaiian *hula* dancers on the Midway in Chicago and chatted with a Dahomeyan performer in the Frankfurt zoo. Their shared workscape offered new forms of solidarity out of sight from colonial officials.

The building of the material infrastructure of empire in Samoa is the focus of chapter 4. Shipping and telegraph lines presaged Samoa's entry into an age of increasing global connections, a process bookended by the two date line crossings in 1892 and 2011. Despite its space-annihilating aura, new technologies such as the telegraph and radio still required manual labor. Construction workers who helped build the roads, telegraph lines, and U.S. naval station in Tutuila were far from mere auxiliaries of Euro-American imperialism. By contrast, these construction workers not only regularly struck for better working conditions, but also succeeded in making the new material environment their

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<sup>14</sup> Some scholars of ethnographic shows have focused on the experiences of the performers themselves, but only a few made this aspect the central focus of their analyses. Examples include Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Anne Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde: Die Zurschaustellung 'exotischer' Menschen in Deutschland, 1870-1940* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2005); Roslyn Poignant, *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Hilke Thode-Arora, *Für fünfzig Pfennig um die Welt: Die Hagenbeckschen Völkerschauen* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1989); Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of American Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Thode-Arora's recent exhibition volume, *From Samoa with Love? Samoan Travellers in Germany, 1895-1911: Retracing the Footsteps* (Munich: Hirmer, 2014) includes several chapters on Samoan performers in what she refers to as "ethnic shows" in Germany, but has only little to say about performances in the United States.



own. In the end, the building of infrastructure went hand in hand with the building of structures of solidarity among those who did the work.

In the fifth and final chapter, I look at the white-collar counterparts to the blue-collar plantation workers: soldiers, interpreters, and nurses. Colonization brought new forms of employment to the islands. Many of the workers in the colonial service were of mixed-race heritage and used their intermediary positions to become powerful brokers between colonizers and colonized. Soldiers, interpreters, and nurses acquired skills they used for individual advancement as well as political activism. Based on their intercultural education and personal networks, service workers emerged as leaders of the anti-colonial resistance movement that shook Samoan society in the wake of World War One.

*Islands of Labor* is a dissertation about those who made colonial Samoa. It covers the brief span of three decades around 1900 to tell the story of Samoa's integration into the globe-spanning system of Euro-American colonialism and its lasting effects into the present. Workers, plantation owners, and colonial officials play major roles in this story. So do coconuts, ships, and hospitals. Tracing the experiences of workers in colonial Samoa will take us far beyond the sandy shores of the South Pacific to places like San Francisco, Berlin, and Shantou. We will cross the International Date Line many times, just as Samoa's workers did. We begin our story with a journey back in time to the origins of Samoan ways of life.

## CHAPTER 1 — SUBSISTENCE

With their warm climate and ample rainfall, the Samoan islands have sustained their native inhabitants for more than three millennia. Surrounded by coral reefs, the Samoan archipelago consists of ten inhabited islands. The three biggest islands—Savai'i (655 square miles), Upolu (435 square miles), and Tutuila (55 square miles)—were home to over 35,000 inhabitants at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The islands' volcanic origin accounts for their steep and rugged terrain, susceptible to soil erosion and coastal floods in the wake of typhoons and tsunamis.

In contrast to other tropical archipelagos, such as Hawai'i or the Philippines, Samoa lacks substantial areas of relatively flat land that could be turned into large-scale plantations. Only a third of American Samoan territory, comprising the biggest island, Tutuila, and several smaller islands to the east, has ground slopes of 30 percent or less.<sup>2</sup> Due to its narrow coastal plains, overall arable land in Samoa encompasses only roughly a fifth of its total area. The largest island in the archipelago, Savai'i, is also the best suited to plantation agriculture since its central peak, the active shield volcano Mt. Matāvanu, which erupted between 1905 and 1911, rises only gradually from the coast. The rainforest that stretches over 280 square miles across Savai'i's volcanic center is home to most of Samoa's native species of flora and fauna. Despite Savai'i's topographical advantages,

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<sup>1</sup> In 1900, German Samoa had 32,815 and American Samoa 5,499 inhabitants. Twelve years later, these numbers increased only slightly to 33,554 and 6,659, respectively. Based on official censuses from the German colonial and U.S. naval administrations in Felix M. Keesing, *Modern Samoa: Its Government and Changing Life* (London, UK: G. Allen & Unwin, 1934), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Mary L. Stover, "The Individualization of Land in American Samoa" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Hawai'i, 1990), 45.

most large Euro-American plantations emerged in Upolu, the traditional center of population and commerce.

Samoa's tropical climate has shaped patterns of living and laboring. Most permanent settlements emerged close to coastlines with access to the ocean. Trading and fishing took place here and the occasional breeze promised relief from the humid air. Samoa's location just south of the equator minimizes differences in temperature throughout the year, which ranges from 65°F to 105°F. Life in Samoa is dominated by a rainy season between November and April, followed by a dry season from May to October, with at times strong trade winds from the southeast.<sup>3</sup> Samoans developed their own nomenclature to demarcate five distinct seasons throughout the year: *vāipalolo* (more rain), *vāitoelau* (nice and cool trade winds), *vāituputupu* (when plants grow in abundance), *aununu* (hurricanes and cyclones), and *tuiefu* (when the sun becomes unbearable and the soil hard as rock).<sup>4</sup> To Samoans, wind, water, and sun were inextricably connected to the changing fortunes of the soil.

Like their seasons, Samoans also divided their land into five different categories of ownership and use. First, village house lots were located close to the sea and typically included a small patch of taro plants and the family tombs. Village house lots were not used for full-scale agriculture, which was practiced on designated plantation lots, the second land category. These plantation lots were family-owned and were located behind villages, hosting major stands of coconut and breadfruit trees together with occasional taro and banana plots. On their plantation lots, Samoans cultivated food crops both for

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<sup>3</sup> Augustin Krämer, *Die Samoa-Inseln: Entwurf einer Monographie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung Deutsch-Samoas*, Vol. II (Stuttgart: E. Schweizerbart, 1902/03), 111f.

<sup>4</sup> Eni F.H. Faleomavaega, *Navigating the Future: A Samoan Perspective on U.S.-Pacific Relations* (Carson, CA: KIN Publications, 1995), 24.

their own subsistence and for sale. In this primary “coconut zone,” irregularly-spaced palm trees of varying ages overshadow extensive thickets of scrub.<sup>5</sup> Third, family reserve sections, further uphill from the plantation lots, consisted of taro, yam, and banana plots, and were not under steady cultivation. Harvested crops had to be carried a long way back to the village on the often narrow paths zigzagging through the dense forest.<sup>6</sup> Together with the plantation lots, the family reserve sections yielded the majority of food crops to Samoans. When the denser secondary tropical rainforest in these higher-lying sections was cleared, the soil provided an excellent base for taro production.

The remaining two categories of land were only of secondary significance for Samoan agriculture. The village lands were located even further uphill from the family reserve sections, but also included the reef and village common (*malae*) and the areas between village boundaries. Cultivation established use right on village lands, which the village council (*fono*) often confirmed subsequently. Pigs were hunted in the wilder village lands uphill, whereas communal fishing with large nets (*lau*) took place in the reef. District lands, finally, were primarily claimed by district councils to establish political boundaries between separate districts. Pigeons and pigs were hunted there and people also collected wild forest products.<sup>7</sup> Crucial to this Samoan taxonomy of land was the fact that ownership of land did not entail ownership of the crops the land yielded.

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<sup>5</sup> David C. Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress in Samoa: A Case Study of the Role of Traditional Social Institutions in Economic Development* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1970), 203.

<sup>6</sup> Peter H. Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa), *Samoan Material Culture* (Honolulu, HI: The Bishop Museum, 1930), 545.

<sup>7</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 269f.; Lowell D. Holmes, *Samoan Village* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 41; Robert W. Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work: Moving Up and Moving Around* (New York, NY: AMS Press, 1991), 24f.

The Samoan language reflects a social conceptualization of space quite different from European languages. In many Polynesian languages, including Samoan, the word *vā* is used to describe “spaces in between.” These spaces can be located between things like coconuts on a family field (*vānui*) or between people. *Teu le vā* (tend to the space between) functions as an important social imperative in Samoan society to this day when parents, for example, admonish their children to pay respect to status hierarchies and their proper place within them. In general, social, political, and spatial boundaries in Samoan society derive from shifting relationships between points (*mata*) rather than from sharply defined boundaries, such as those set by colonial settlers around their plantations or, for that matter, racial groups.<sup>8</sup> Hence, *matāmutia* literally means grassy area (*mutia*) made up of points (*mata*) and refers to the small taro plots next to Samoan homes. *Matāvao*, to pick another example of this point-field spatiality, describes the dynamic area between the edge of a Samoan plantation and the virgin bush.<sup>9</sup> As will become clear later, Euro-American plantation owners and colonial officials sought to introduce clearly defined and permanent lines into the Samoan natural and social landscapes. Putting fences around parcels of land, as Euro-American settlers often did, posed a fundamental challenge to traditional Samoan conceptions of space and time.

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<sup>8</sup> F.K. Lehman, and David J. Herdrich, “On the Relevance of Point Field for Spatiality in Oceania,” in: *Representing Space in Oceania: Culture in Language and Mind*, edited by Giovanni Bennardo (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2002), 187.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

## WORK RHYTHMS

The hot and humid climate of the tropical rainforest that covers most of the Samoan islands made it necessary to begin agricultural labor early in the morning. This was especially true in the dry season from May to October (*tuiefu*). A normal Samoan workday began around 6 a.m. when the rising sun allowed for the hard labor of planting, weeding, and harvesting food crops. Not unlike Melanesian and Chinese laborers on large Euro-American plantations, who were given their daily labor tasks by overseers and plantations owners, Samoan untitled men came to the *matais* in the early morning and received instructions for the agricultural work of the day. On average, it took around three hours to clear fallow land in the bush and plant 100 taros, including the time needed to walk to the plot and back.<sup>10</sup> Hard physical labor was often interrupted by spontaneous breaks which were accepted as necessary refreshment and diversion from monotonous tasks.<sup>11</sup> By noon, after the hardest part of labor was finished, most Samoans had lunch and took a nap. Afternoons were usually spent with other activities such as craftwork, fishing, or preparing food. Samoa's tropical climate also made hoarding of foodstuff impractical, making it vital to have a diversity of food sources—both nearer and farther from home—available throughout the year.

Some Samoan villages developed quite elaborate weekly work schedules, which carefully assigned particular labor tasks to particular days of the week. In Fitiuta on the small island of Ta'u (American Samoa), for instance, the weekly work schedule designated Mondays for planting and harvesting subsistence food on family lands and

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<sup>10</sup> Brian A. Lockwood, *Samoan Village Economy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1971), 135f.

<sup>11</sup> Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress*, 53.

prohibited harvesting copra and bananas. Cultivation of coconuts and bananas for household use was limited to Tuesdays. Wednesdays began early with searching for rhinoceros beetles from 6 a.m. to noon, followed by copra-cutting and repair work in the afternoon.<sup>12</sup> Thursdays were reserved for household chores, but otherwise free for other kinds of work. On Fridays, bananas were harvested for family use and cooking for the weekend began in the evening. The cooking and fishing continued into Saturday to prepare a big meal on Sunday, while little to no agriculture was allowed. On Sundays, villagers in Fitiuta—as in many other Samoan villages—enjoyed the food they had been so busy preparing and relaxed.<sup>13</sup>

Samoan *matais* designed this detailed labor management to provide order in the lives of the villagers and thereby prevent the theft of crops, which hurt the communal subsistence economy. One of the main functions of the Samoan social system consisted precisely in this kind of protection of agricultural products. To indicate that a specific coconut tree was taboo (*tapui*), Samoans attached plaited coconut leaflets or a pair of tied coconuts onto the tree.<sup>14</sup> The taboo sign on the tree informed passersby that those coconuts were to be made into copra and, thus, exempted from the widespread custom of taking fruit. If someone still dared to take coconuts from a tabooed tree, vengeance by the demon associated with the taboo was believed to be certain and lethal. Samoans who took crops together with their roots were subjected to particularly severe punishment: violators

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<sup>12</sup> First found on a DHPG plantation in November 1910, the rhinoceros beetle fed off healthy food trees and posed a considerable threat to Samoan copra plantations. Otto Riedel, *Der Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa: Erinnerungen eines Hamburger Kaufmanns* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag, 1938), 220. Remarkably, it took until December 1918 until the beetle made its way to Tutuila. Annual Report 1918/19 by Secretary of Native Affairs Noble to Governor, July 1, 1919, RG 284, NARA-SB, MF T1182, Roll 1.

<sup>13</sup> Holmes, *Samoan Village*, 45f.

<sup>14</sup> Krämer, *Samoa-Inseln*, 98f.; Buck, *Samoan Material Culture*, 551.

were tied up at their hands and feet and left to bake in the scorching sun on the village commons.<sup>15</sup> Adding to such gruesome punishment, Samoans also believed that Le Sa, the god of agriculture, protected their crops against thieves. Le Sa was said to cherish the taste of the bodies of thieves and would “go at once and devour them if prayed to do so.”<sup>16</sup> Since the long-term sustainability of agricultural production was crucial for the survival of the community, the Samoan legal and religious system reflected this priority. Samoan *matais* in Fitiuta and elsewhere, who devised these forms of labor and legal discipline, shared similar concerns about stolen crops with European and American plantation owners producing cash crops.

### **LABOR IN PROTOCOLONIAL SAMOA, 1830-1880**

If Samoa’s tropical climate made possible the abundant growth of vegetation, it also demanded constant labor to turn natural into human energy. Natural cycles of growth and decay—accelerated in Samoa’s tropical climate—necessitated and, in turn, fuelled human cycles of labor and rest. In protocolonial Samoa, labor was associated with status, age, and, most importantly, gender.<sup>17</sup> Samoan *matais*, who headed households often made up

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<sup>15</sup> Krämer, *Samoa-Inseln*, 100.

<sup>16</sup> George Turner, *Samoa: A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1884), 47.

<sup>17</sup> Following historical geographer Cole Harris, I prefer the term *protocolonial* over *precolonial* to capture the gradually increasing colonial presence in Samoa over the course of the nineteenth century. In Samoa, the protocolonial era refers to the decades following 1830 when the pioneers of colonialism—such as traders, beachcombers, and missionaries—first settled on the islands. The formal colonial era began in the 1880s when conflicts between the three colonial powers Great Britain, Germany, and the United States, as well as among rivaling Samoan parties, escalated. This colonial era was formalized in two international treaties without Samoan involvement, one in 1889 when the tridominium was established, and the other in 1899 when the colonies of German and American Samoa were officially established. In Western Samoa, the colonial era included German rule from 1900 until 1914, followed by New Zealand rule until 1962 when the colony gained its independence. For American Samoans, the colonial era has continued into the



of more than one family, managed the flow of household resources such as land, food, manufactured goods, labor information, and capital. Responsible for the long-term survival and health of their households, *matais* were less interested in the labor contribution of individual household members than in the fair distribution of the results of that communal labor.<sup>18</sup> In a sense, Samoan social security predated Bismarck's by centuries. Untitled men proved their worth by hard work, thereby increasing their chances to become *matais* themselves.<sup>19</sup> *Matais* in turn used the fruits of labor to advance their household's position within the local village councils. Hard labor and leadership were essential to climb the social ladder in Samoan society. This fundamentally communal aspect of Samoan labor provided Euro-American observers and settlers with a ready-made explanation for the perceived lack of individual motivation among Samoan workers. Samoans were essentially "communists," many Euro-Americans argued, and did not embrace the kind of work ethic needed to succeed in a capitalist world.<sup>20</sup>

To be sure, critiques of Samoan "communism"—or rather, "communalism"—revealed more about Euro-American fears in the age of capital than about the realities of Samoan life. Given the tropical climate, an average Samoan family could, indeed, provide itself with ample food with a mere six to eight hours of labor per week.<sup>21</sup> What outsiders failed to see (or refused to acknowledge) was the fundamental fact that, for

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present. Cole Harris, "Towards a Geography of White Power in the Cordilleran Fur Trade," *The Canadian Geographer* 39, no. 2 (1995): 132.

<sup>18</sup> Holmes, *Samoa Village*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> As late as the 1960s, untitled Samoan men who were engaged in local cash cropping were much more likely to obtain a *matai* title. Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress*, 75f.

<sup>20</sup> For a representative view, see Llewella P. Churchill, *Samoa 'Uma: Where Life Is Different* (London, UK: Forest and Stream Publishing Co., 1902), 232f.

<sup>21</sup> Holmes, *Samoa Village*, 24.

Samoans, labor was integral to making and maintaining social and family relations. Social prestige in Samoan society came from “the generous distribution, not the accumulation of wealth.”<sup>22</sup> As a result, Samoans only occasionally subjected themselves to the harsh discipline on foreign-owned plantations to earn cash. In contrast to Euro-American wage labor, Samoan workers gained surplus value from their communal labor in different ways. Beyond providing for their subsistence, Samoan workers gained access to political power through service to *matai* and family (*tautau*) and also accumulated specialized knowledge and skills in their particular field of labor, such as carpentry or fishing.<sup>23</sup> Like in other Polynesian societies, communalism and individualism in Samoa were not mutually exclusive motives, but coexisted alongside one another.<sup>24</sup> Colonial capitalism in the form of trade, Western goods, and wage labor would gradually accentuate individualist drives among Samoans.

Beyond this basic tension between communalism and individualism, the Samoan labor system can further be divided into three distinct types of gendered labor.<sup>25</sup> First, there were labor tasks performed exclusively by men or by women. Samoan men did most of the cooking, while Samoan women were the sole producers of *siapo*, an elaborate cloth made from the bark of mulberry and breadfruit trees.<sup>26</sup> Second, there were similar types of work done by both men and women, but with restricted applications of techniques and methods. Men fished in the open ocean, while women stayed closer to the

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<sup>22</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 141.

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Firth, *Primitive Polynesian Economy* (London, UK: G. Routledge & Sons, 1939), 364.

<sup>25</sup> F. J. H. Grattan, *An Introduction to Samoan Custom* (Apia, Western Samoa: Samoa Print. & Pub. Co., 1948), 161-165.

<sup>26</sup> This gender difference in Samoa finds its exact opposite in Melanesia. Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 32.

coast in the shallow waters of the lagoon. In agriculture, too, men tended to do the heavier work, such as clearing and planting, and women did the lighter work, such as weeding and harvesting. And finally, there were types of labor that were carried out by one gender group at an earlier stage in the process, and by the other gender group at a later stage. Men, for example, killed the pigs to be roasted and were in charge of the earth oven (*umu*), while women prepared the side dishes, such as taro, yams, bananas, breadfruit, and coconuts.

In general terms, the labor of Samoan men tended to be heavier and dirtier, while Samoan women performed the lighter and cleaner types of labor. If male labor was largely instrumental and utilitarian, geared towards the production of subsistence goods, female labor was predominantly decorative and ceremonial, producing exchange goods, such as *siapo*. If Samoan men went to the peripheries of Samoan society (the wild bush, the open sea), women stayed closer to their homes and worked in the village or the lagoon. Men performed a variety of labor tasks ranging from house and canoe construction to the manufacture of tools (such as digging sticks) and animal husbandry. They also served in the military, which became an increasingly important contribution as colonialism fuelled internal rivalries, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Samoan women, for their part, produced *siapo* and fine mats for practical and ceremonial uses. Mats were found everywhere in Samoan homes as beddings, floor coverings, room dividers, or fans.<sup>27</sup> Fine mats also played a crucial part in a range of social and political events such as marriages, funerals, visiting parties (*malaga*), and

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<sup>27</sup> On Samoan mats, see Buck, *Samoan Material Culture*, 209-227, 275-281.

formal apologies (*ifoga*).<sup>28</sup> Perhaps most importantly, fine mats represented an essential method to store wealth in a tropical environment in which most wealth consisted in perishable foodstuffs.<sup>29</sup> The labor of producing fine mats, thus, provided women with a degree of indirect influence in political and economic matters, which were usually dominated by men. Women were also leading the making of *kava*, the venerated and mildly intoxicating drink made for special occasions.

Outside their families, Samoan men and women never worked alone, but formed labor groups according to their gender. Untitled men belonged to the *'aumāga*, a voluntary society and cooperative work group that represented the main labor force in Samoan villages which consisted of no more than a few hundred inhabitants. Its main function consisted in the provision of labor and particularly military service to the village. The *'aumāga* was usually headed by the *manaia*, the son of the village's paramount *matai* and his most likely heir, who had a vested interest in proving his dedication to service. The male work group was engaged in communal activities, such as cutting copra to raise money for church, maintaining the village infrastructure, building houses, ferrying passengers and cargo, planting and harvesting taro (both on village house lots and family reserve sections), group fishing, cooking and serving *kava* at *fono* meetings. Beyond this range of work activities, the *'aumāga* also offered an arena for socializing among young men who played cricket and cards and drank together. It was especially in

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<sup>28</sup> Bradd Shore, "Sexuality and Gender in Samoa: Conceptions and Missed Conceptions," in: Sherry B. Ortner, and Harriet Whitehead, eds., *Sexual Meaning: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 203.

<sup>29</sup> Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress*, 237.

these social settings that untitled Samoan men learned the rhetorical and political skills needed to become *matais*.<sup>30</sup>

The female counterpart of the *'aumāga* was the *auauma*. It originally consisted of the female servants of the *taupou*, the daughter of the leading *matai* in a village. Headed by the *taupou*, the *auauma* brought the sisters and daughters of the *fono* members and the *'aumāga* together. In contrast to the practical labor performed by the *'aumāga*, its function was largely ceremonial, such as entertaining guests on a *malaga*. Occasionally, members of the *auauma* also helped in the construction of houses by carrying cane leaves and baskets of pebbles for the floors or weaving thatching sections and blinds.<sup>31</sup> As a result of the increasing presence of missionaries in Samoa after the 1830s, the *auauma* also assumed responsibility for the health of the village, especially its infants, and helped raise money for the church.

Labor was a decidedly communal activity in protocolonial Samoa and, for the most part, continued to be so under colonial rule. Since the household was the basic unit of production and the center of Samoan life, individual households in a village closely cooperated in subsistence production and cash cropping. Households also pooled resources to contribute to the village church and family ceremonies. Other household tasks included maintenance of the immediate household area, processing of food, care of livestock, production of manufactured items for household use, ceremonial exchange or sale, gathering of wild forest products and sea foods, and hunting for pigeons.<sup>32</sup> Daily

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<sup>30</sup> Franco, *Samoa Perceptions of Work*, 26.

<sup>31</sup> Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea, "Daughters of Sina: A Study of Gender, Status and Power in Western Samoa" (Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1979), 435.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

social reproduction, largely carried on by Samoan women, was thus inextricably linked to the production of copra, largely carried on by Samoan men. As the guardians of family life, women guaranteed not only the continuity of cultural practices but also the very material foundations of Samoan society.<sup>33</sup>

## **THE FRUITS OF THEIR LABOR: AGRICULTURE IN PROTOCOLONIAL SAMOA**

Agriculture was the backbone of the Samoan economy. Much like their contemporaries in other parts of the world, Samoan farmers hoped to improve the workings of natural processes by calling on supernatural assistance. Samoans worshipped Le Sa as their god of agriculture, who was often incarnated as an owl. They prayed to Le Sa especially in April when the rainy season came to an end and droughts threatened their survival. Samoans gave offerings to Le Sa, hoping he would remove caterpillars from their plantations. Caterpillars were believed to be Le Sa's servants "under his orders to forage and punish."<sup>34</sup>

Under Le Sa's watchful eyes, Samoans cultivated a variety of root and tree crops, from taro to coconuts and breadfruit. Due to the advantageous climate, planting could be done all year around. Taro was the most important food crop that virtually all Samoan families relied upon. Taro planting and harvesting continued throughout the year, except

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<sup>33</sup> For a similar argument on Costa Rican women, see Putnam, *Company They Kept*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Turner, *Samoa*, ch. IV, no. 23.

during the drier months of July and August.<sup>35</sup> On average, a half-acre taro plantation per family could yield more than 1,200 tubers a year.<sup>36</sup> Most of the bigger taro plantations were located on the family reserve sections, further away from home. Taro was so important to Samoan life and culture that a family's inability to serve taro to guests indicated a fundamental breakdown in family and village relations.<sup>37</sup> Several Samoan proverbs attested to the cultural significance of taro. The saying "Let each plant two taros in a particular spot" conveyed the importance of economic self-reliance and the advantage of having both household and plantation taro in times of need.<sup>38</sup> Rock walls were erected to protect the crops against wandering pigs. Giant taro, a related species that could be grown with little initial investment, was highly cherished as emergency food during droughts.<sup>39</sup> Taro and its giant brother demonstrated the central aim of the Samoan subsistence economy to ensure the survival of the kinship group, but also to pursue political, and even military, interests on its basis. Often, growing taro demanded a heavy price from planters when the sharp machetes used to cut taro vines missed their aim and cut into their feet and legs.<sup>40</sup>

Like the taro, the coconut was not only crucial to physical survival, but also central to Samoan culture as a whole. As nourishment for body and mind, the coconut fed generations of Samoans and held their houses together. Coconut trees are among the most

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<sup>35</sup> J. Tim O'Meara, *Samoan Planters: Tradition and Economic Development in Polynesia* (Orlando, FL: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1990), 60.

<sup>36</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 42f.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 48f.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>40</sup> O'Meara, *Samoan Planters*, 59.

widespread plants in the South Pacific, providing not only Samoans but other Pacific Islanders with calories and canoes. A medium-sized coconut yields more than 1,400 calories and is rich in iron, potassium, and saturated fat. Samoans cultivated coconut trees, which they called *niu*, often close to their homes, using the different parts of the tree for different purposes.<sup>41</sup> Because growing coconut trees required little attention, Samoans were fond of saying: “Give a coconut a day and it will give you a lifetime.”<sup>42</sup>

Coconut trees are very versatile plants whose entire organism—from the palm leaves to the roots—can be used for different purposes. According to well-known Samoan oral tradition, Tuna, the unfortunate lover of Sina, had his head cut off as a final request, and from this planting grew the first coconut tree.<sup>43</sup> When Portuguese explorers brought back the first coconuts to Europe in the mid-sixteenth century, they called the fruit *coco*, or grinning face. The round form of the coconut with its three indentations, indeed, resembled a human skull; an association that influenced even Samoan Plantation Pidgin: “White man coconut belong him no grass he stop [The white man’s head is bald].”<sup>44</sup> The coconut’s anthropomorphic appearance was matched by its great practical use for humans. Shells served as drinking cups and to carry water, the palm and midrib were used to make baskets, and coconut fiber was plaited into sennit by older Samoan men to build houses and canoes.<sup>45</sup> The husking and splitting of nuts, followed by the

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<sup>41</sup> Holmes, *Samoan Village*, 43.

<sup>42</sup> Cit. in Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress*, 200.

<sup>43</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 63.

<sup>44</sup> Cit. in Peter Mühlhäusler, “Samoan Plantation Pidgin English and the Origin of New Guinea Pidgin,” *Papers in Pidgin and Creole Linguistics* (1978): 70; Darrell T. Tryon, and Jean-Michel Charpentier, *Pacific Pidgins and Creoles: Origins, Growth and Development* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004), 245.

<sup>45</sup> For a detailed description of Samoan material culture, see Buck, *Samoan Material Culture*, 551.



grating and squeezing of the meat inside, were arduous and time-consuming labor processes. As a consequence, the time invested into the preparation of a coconut tended to correlate with the special occasion or the status of the guests to be treated.<sup>46</sup>

An average family coconut grove was less than one acre in size, but could yield up to 60 nuts per tree per year.<sup>47</sup> Coconut trees took between six to eight years to mature, but some trees bore fruit for 70 years, more than the average life expectancy of Samoans at the time. Samoans did not plant coconut trees in a particular order or distance from one another, but they made sure to plant them close to taro and yam fields to have quick refreshment available for workers.<sup>48</sup> That way, Samoans knew that no spot on their islands was farther than half an hour from the nearest coconut, which could provide food and drink in times of need.<sup>49</sup> While coconut trees were owned by the families on whose ground they stood, passersby had the right to pluck or pick up a few nuts to refresh themselves.<sup>50</sup> Fallen nuts, in particular, were often left to themselves and were free to be picked up by anyone who found them.<sup>51</sup>

To harvest the still green fruits, Samoan men climbed up coconut trees that grew as tall as 100 feet. Using only a sling wrapped around their feet as support, they hugged the tree trunk with their arms and scaled the tree like a caterpillar. Having reached the top of the tree, the climber plucked the green fruits from their stems and dropped them onto

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<sup>46</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 63.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>48</sup> Buck, *Samoan Material Culture*, 550.

<sup>49</sup> William T. Pritchard, *Polynesian Reminiscences: Or, Life in the South Pacific Islands* (London, UK: Chapman and Hall, 1866), 170.

<sup>50</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 61.

<sup>51</sup> R. F. Watters, "Cultivation in Old Samoa," *Economic Geography* 34, no. 4 (1958): 348.

the ground.<sup>52</sup> Mature coconuts could be more conveniently picked up from the ground and collected in baskets, usually made out of coconut leaf midribs.<sup>53</sup> As Samoans quickly found out, ripe coconuts also made better copra.<sup>54</sup> Traditionally, young women carried the harvested fruits in two baskets, one in the back and one in the front of their bodies, connected with a stick across their shoulders.<sup>55</sup> Filled to the top, two baskets of coconuts could weigh up to 150 pounds. Young men then further processed the coconuts, trying to make use of their individual components. They used a sharpened wooden stick (*mele'i*) rammed into the ground to split off the husk of the coconut and remove it by pounding their tips on it. In a next step, Samoans straddled a wooden scraping stool (*'ausa'alo*) to scrape the open coconut against the sea shell-like part of a coconut shell fastened to the stool's point. The scraped-off pieces of the coconut kernel would then be collected in a vessel or on a leaf placed below the stool. Finally, the scraped matter was poured into a strainer and its juice squeezed into a bowl for further mixing with other foodstuffs.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to taro and coconuts, Samoans also cultivated other food crops, such as yams, bananas, and breadfruit. The most prominent among them was the breadfruit, which could be stored in pits to prepare for times when food was scarce. The breadfruit derives its name from the texture of the cooked fruit, which tastes like baked bread. Like yam, breadfruit was more susceptible to drought than taro or the coconut, which made it a less reliable part of the Samoan diet. Still, breadfruit trees are among the highest-yielding

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<sup>52</sup> Krämer, *Samoa-Inseln*, 143.

<sup>53</sup> On Samoan baskets, see Buck, *Samoan Material Culture*, 189-208.

<sup>54</sup> Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress*, 196.

<sup>55</sup> Krämer, *Samoa-Inseln*, 89. In all likelihood, it was Chinese workers who introduced this method of transportation into Samoa. Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress*, 196.

<sup>56</sup> Krämer, *Samoa-Inseln*, 129.

food plants in the world, yielding between 50 and 150 fruits per year in the South Pacific environment. Like the coconut, the breadfruit could not only be eaten, but also provided excellent timber for the construction of durable houses. The breadfruit's lightweight wood, resistant to termites and shipworms, was ideal for housing structures as well as boats. Moreover, the latex tapped from the tree, was used to caulk fishing canoes. Central to Samoan cultural traditions, *siapo* was made out of the wood of breadfruit trees. Finally, breadfruit leaves were used as oven covers, food wrappers, and platters.

Following natural cycles, Samoan labor was sporadic in nature. Experienced in this non-capitalist mode of agricultural production, Samoans gradually grasped the new opportunities that presented themselves with the increasing presence of Euro-American missionaries and traders beginning in the 1830s. After the introduction of commercial agriculture by German traders in the 1860s, Samoan workers struggled to maintain their economic and cultural autonomy as they adapted to the new world of copra.

## **THE TRANSFORMATION OF LABOR IN COLONIAL SAMOA**

In the mid-nineteenth century, the German trading house Godeffroy & Co. began its business activities in the South Pacific, establishing its headquarters in Apia in 1857.<sup>57</sup> From Apia, Godeffroy expanded its trade in tropical fruit throughout Polynesia and into Melanesia and Micronesia. In its first years, Godeffroy relied on local Samoan producers to supply the increasingly valuable cash crops. In the mid-1860s, the young and energetic Godeffroy manager Theodor Weber took advantage of a long drought, a hurricane, and a

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<sup>57</sup> Kurt Schmack, *J.C. Godeffroy & Sohn, Kaufleute zu Hamburg: Leistung und Schicksal eines Welthandelshauses* (Hamburg: Broschek, 1938), 112.

pest plague and bought twelve acres of land from starving Samoans and set up the first cotton plantation.<sup>58</sup> During the global cotton famine caused by the U.S. Civil War in the mid-1860s, a few Samoans had worked for wages on these cotton plantations.<sup>59</sup> By 1868 when the cotton boom was over, the firm already owned 2,500 acres, almost one percent of the total land area of Upolu.<sup>60</sup> Throughout the 1880s, cotton remained a valuable export product for Godeffroy, which had been reorganized and renamed into the *Deutsche Handels- und Plantagengesellschaft der Südseeinseln* (DHPG).<sup>61</sup>

By the 1880s, copra began to replace cotton as the main export to Europe and North America where it was processed into oil for soap and candles. Driven by growing demand for copra, the DHPG dramatically expanded its plantation holdings by purchasing land from Samoan *matais*. Samoans divided over these escalating land sales to outlanders. Some feared that foreign ownership would undermine long-standing ways of life based on subsistence agriculture, while others welcomed the considerable profits they reaped from the sales.<sup>62</sup> These profits often came in the form of Western arms which *matais* used to gain an advantage over their rivals. The result was what Euro-American observers innocently called “civil war,” ignoring the fact that Euro-American traders and

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<sup>58</sup> Munro/Firth, “Samoan Plantations,” 103.

<sup>59</sup> On the effects of the U.S. Civil War on global cotton production, see Sven Beckert, “Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War,” *American Historical Review* 109, no. 5 (2004): 1405-38.

<sup>60</sup> Schmack, *Godeffroy & Sohn*, 145.

<sup>61</sup> Gordon R. Lewthwaite, “Land, Life and Agriculture to Mid-Century,” in: *Western Samoa: Land, Life, and Agriculture in Tropical Polynesia*, edited by James W. Fox, and Kenneth B. Cumberland (Christchurch, NZ: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1962), 143f.; Firth, “German Recruitment,” 61; Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 149.

<sup>62</sup> Land became so scarce after this land rush in the 1880s that at the beginning of the twentieth century, an acre of land sold for up to 500 British pounds (\$100). Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress*, 110.

plantation owners actively supported different sides of competing Samoan parties and supplied them with the means to succeed. A vicious cycle of selling land for arms ensued.

Land sales also increased the power of Samoan men over women and that of *matais* over untitled men. Since possession of property conferred social prestige, the commercialization of plantation land intensified conflicts among Samoan families.<sup>63</sup> Euro-American planters were so desperate for Samoan land (and regulations so minimal) that Samoans were able to sell the same parcels of land to several buyers.<sup>64</sup> As the German firm and other Euro-American plantation owners prospered, Samoa emerged as a trouble spot for the competing colonial powers from Great Britain, Germany, and the United States. After decades of war, proxy kings, and hundreds of casualties, an international treaty divided the Samoan islands between Germany and the United States in December 1899, while Great Britain withdrew in exchange for concessions elsewhere.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century and especially after partition in 1899, the Samoan labor system was subjected to severe strains by the increasing demands of colonial administrators and foreign plantation owners. The communal social system that characterized Samoan life was put under pressure by the new plantation system introduced by Euro-American traders, who pursued their own economic interests and desperately needed workers. The famous Scottish writer, Robert Louis Stevenson, who had moved to Samoa in 1889, understood this gradual transformation of the Samoan political economy as well as anyone. In his plantation estate in Vailima, Stevenson sought to exploit the social hierarchies among the Samoan workers he employed by

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<sup>63</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 273ff.

<sup>64</sup> As a result of widespread fraud, a Land Commission installed by the colonial powers in 1893 recognized less than 10% of Euro-American claims to Samoan lands. Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress*, 110.

presenting himself as the caring father-cum-capitalist.<sup>65</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, subsistence farming and export-oriented agriculture evolved in tandem in Samoa and still coexist today.

German colonial officials, who had formally taken over the main islands Upolu and Savai'i in 1900, were acutely aware of the long-grown and complex nature of the Samoan labor system. Widespread Euro-American stereotypes about the putative laziness of colonized people, in general, and Samoan "communism," in particular, did not stand the test of social reality. In a letter to an eminent German geographer from fall 1906, Governor Wilhelm Solf defended his policy of protecting Samoan ways of life from overly aggressive planters with an insightful analysis of the dynamics of Samoan society:

The assumption that the Samoan does not work is wrong [...] Every young Samoan, who is working for planters, is, of course, missing with his labor power inside his community. The Samoan idea is that everybody who is working outside of his community owes his pay to the community because his labor power is withdrawn from the community. Hence, the little interest of Samoans to work for foreigners. For they have to, according to the communistic outlook of their community, give back to the community part or all of what they earn. In addition, working as a servant for pay is seen as despicable.<sup>66</sup>

Forcefully changing this deeply ingrained labor system, Solf reasoned, would lead to nothing but economic disaster for the white settlers. Samoans would stop buying imported goods and resort to subsistence farming to satisfy their basic needs. Most importantly, Solf warned, Samoans would refrain from cutting copra for the white traders. In light of the recent Herero rebellion in German Southwest-Africa, Solf reassuringly added, Samoans would threaten the lives of the white settlers only in case of

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<sup>65</sup> Steinmetz, *Devil's Handwriting*, 309.

<sup>66</sup> Solf to Passarge, Oct. 29, 1906, BArch N 1053/28.

“utmost outrage.” They would, however, more readily destroy foreign plantations, Solf concluded.

While social rank, age, and gender determined the kinds of labor Samoans were engaged in before the colonial era, German and American colonial officials and plantation owners tried to impose their own boundaries on Samoa’s social landscape. Samoans were increasingly reduced to laborers who were expected to produce cash crops in ever greater quantities. To be sure, Samoans had always produced a small surplus of food crops to have a reserve in case of environmental disasters or to host travelling parties and ceremonies.<sup>67</sup> Most Samoans continued their subsistence farming, but they increasingly began to sell their surplus crops to Euro-American traders. And occasionally, Samoans entered into wage contracts on larger Euro-American plantations, to earn additional cash.

Colonization changed Samoan economic, social, and cultural practices in profound ways. Beginning in the 1830s, Euro-American traders and missionaries introduced new goods into the Samoan economy, some of which, like firearms and ammunition, quickly became indispensable to Samoan warfare and politics. Other newly introduced manufactured goods (*mea palagi*) included such diverse objects as umbrellas, watches, petroleum lamps, matches, sewing machines, cloth, knives, mosquito-netting, soap, tinned meat, keged beef, tea, flour, sugar, biscuits, metal tools, belts, and ropes. Many of these manufactured goods were sold by Euro-American traders in their own stores or in stores owned by large plantation companies. A German trade report from May 1900 documented some of the imported goods that changed everyday life among Samoans:

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<sup>67</sup> Buck, *Samoan Material Culture*, 544.

Every evening, one can see a lamp burning in every Samoan hut, nearly every Samoan family owns as part of their inventory a sewing machine, which is expertly handled by the women and girls. Extraordinarily high is the demand for umbrellas, which serve as protection against rain and sunshine, at the same time, however, are also seen as a symbol of certain refinement and therefore are very popular with both sexes.<sup>68</sup>

Samoans needed cash to pay for these desirable goods as well as for a variety of new government and church services. Additionally, missionaries raised substantial amounts of cash through donations and cricket competitions, which were used to finance the construction of new church facilities and schools. A critical observer quipped in the 1890s that missionaries rang a big bell three times a day: “the first bell: a summons for the natives to bring to the priest all the taros which they have gathered, the second: all the coconuts and bananas, the third: fresh fish.”<sup>69</sup> In a trade report from April 1898, German Consul Rose worried about the large sums of money Samoans were donating to the Christian missions such as the LMS. Losers of the regular cricket matches, hosted by the mission on two or three afternoons a week, had to pay one shilling (25c) to the church’s construction fund.<sup>70</sup> Rose concluded:

If one, in addition, considers that these sums of money, as far as they remain in the country, are used in large part by the mission to purchase imported goods, especially construction material, on its own steamer, then the deep hatred can be understood, which animates the traders against this mission, irrespective of confession and nationality.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> German Consulate to Foreign Office-Colonial Office, May 30, 1900, BArch R 1001/2540.

<sup>69</sup> Cit. in Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress*, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Around 1900, one U.S. dollar was equivalent to 4 German Reichsmark or 4 shillings British sterling. The equivalents of all subsequent currencies will be given in U.S. dollars.

<sup>71</sup> Rose to Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Apr. 12, 1898, BArch R 1001/2540.



Some missionaries like the LMS in Malua and the Catholic mission in Vaia also operated their own plantations, albeit on a much smaller scale than the DHPG.<sup>72</sup> As colonial officials and traders were quick to notice, the British, French, and American missionaries were formidable capitalists in their own right.

Missionaries also introduced Samoans to new crops, such as the banana, new agricultural techniques, and accounting practices. Mission school plantations proved to be important training grounds for Samoan farmers who learned more efficient cultivation practices and gained general work experience. Since accounting skills were indispensable to the management of construction projects, such as the large churches built by missionaries around Apia, Samoans were also trained in basic commercial practices.<sup>73</sup> Last not least, Christian missionaries also had a lasting impact on Samoans' rhythm of work. By the end of the nineteenth century, Samoans began their labor-free Sundays with attending church service before they enjoyed their elaborate meals and found time to relax.<sup>74</sup>

Beyond the missionaries, the colonial administrations also demanded cash from Samoans for school and marriage fees, dog and gun licenses, head taxes, and fines. New means of transportation, such as boat launches and buses, and new forms of entertainment, such as dances and restaurants, charged money as well. Finally, Samoans saved cash as insurance against environmental disasters, such as droughts, pests, or even volcanic eruptions like the one in Savai'i from 1905 to 1911. The gradual emergence of a

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<sup>72</sup> Franz Reinecke, *Samoa* (Berlin: W. Süsserott, 1902), 201.

<sup>73</sup> Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress*, 20.

<sup>74</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 295.

cash nexus by the end of the nineteenth century not only made new products and services available to Samoans, but also confronted them with new challenges.

Over time, Euro-American money became part of the Samoan system of reciprocal exchange.<sup>75</sup> Since the traditional Samoan subsistence economy was based on the reciprocal exchange of food and fine mats mostly for ceremonial reasons and to enhance one's social prestige, cash money introduced a new kind of currency. If fine mats always remained qualitatively different from cash money, many Samoans, by the late nineteenth century, adopted the Euro-American approach to measure the value of fine mats in strictly monetary terms for their own exchange transactions.<sup>76</sup> Traders were mostly interested in copra, so Samoans increased their production whenever they needed cash or wanted to purchase goods in the trading stores. This new need for cash made copra production more central to the Samoan economy and also contributed to a more regular and regimented work rhythm on copra plantations. As more and more ships came to call at the islands, Samoans also earned cash by selling craft products, such as baskets, ornaments, and clothing to visitors.<sup>77</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, Samoans had incorporated the rules of the cash crop economy into their own system of economic exchange, so much so that a New Zealand soldier in 1914 complained of Samoans selling fruit "at exorbitant prices."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Jocelyn Linnekin, "Fine Mats and Money: Contending Exchange Paradigms in Colonial Samoa," *Anthropological Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (1991): 2. Before 1900, different kinds of specie were circulating in Samoa, including American, Mexican, and Chilean dollars, and German Reichsmark. Damon Salesa, "'Travel-Happy' Samoa: Colonialism, Samoan Migration and a 'Brown Pacific'," *New Zealand Journal of History* 37, no. 2 (2003): 172.

<sup>76</sup> Linnekin, "Fine Mats and Money," 7.

<sup>77</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 330f.

<sup>78</sup> *Auckland Evening Post*, Oct. 19, 1914.

The increasing presence of missionaries and traders had different effects on Samoan men and women. Most significantly, gendered forms of labor underwent a major transformation under colonialism. On the one hand, Christian concepts of specifically masculine and feminine duties and responsibilities denigrated some forms of labor outside of the household that Samoan women traditionally performed, such as lagoon fishing. On the other hand, the need for cash to pay for new goods gave a boost to traditionally masculine forms of labor, such as heavy plantation labor or military service. After 1900, Samoan men, by and large, stopped fighting each other in large and drawn-out wars, quit the manufacture of handcrafted tools, including fishhooks and weapons, and went fishing far less frequently. Instead, they focused more and more on producing cash crops and went to secondary school to train for the new white-collar occupations on which colonial administrations depended.<sup>79</sup>

By contrast, mission schools for girls, such as the Boarding School run by the London Missionary Society in Papauta, taught Samoan girls basic literacy and numeracy, childcare, homecraft, and domestic duties. Domestic service and nursing, two of the new paths to social mobility open to Samoan girls, were primarily seen as interim occupations that would bridge the time between the end of school and marriage. Heavily influenced by the doctrine of separate spheres, missionaries (and, to a lesser extent, colonial officials) regarded higher education as the exclusive domain of Samoan boys. As wealth and education along the colonizers' model became the new avenues for prestige and status in colonial Samoa, they remained barred to most Samoan women. Until the 1920s,

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<sup>79</sup> Caroline Ralston, "Women Workers in Samoa and Tonga in the Early Twentieth Century," in: *Labour in the South Pacific*, edited by Clive Moore, Jacqueline Leckie, and Doug Munro (Townsville: James Cook University of Northern Queensland, 1990), 68.

only a select few Samoan women had careers of their own as domestic servants and especially as nurses.

Samoan women saw their traditional forms of labor both marginalized and domesticated during the first half of the twentieth century, as missionaries imposed their doctrine of separate spheres and plantation owners expanded their cash crop economy. As a result of mandatory school attendance introduced by the colonial administrations in German and American Samoa, Samoan women did not have to spend as much time supervising their children in the mornings. Instead, new household tasks emerged: sewing, washing, ironing, cooking and baking, and cleaning the new appliances and pieces of furniture that decorated many Samoan homes by the early twentieth century.<sup>80</sup> Cooking in the earth oven (*umu*) remained the duty of Samoan men, on the islands and in ethnographic shows abroad. In addition, women were also called to help men in subsistence farming and copra cutting and drying at peak times. At the same time, Samoan men handled the marketing of the cut copra and received the payments. Hence, Samoan men retained their dominant positions in the social hierarchy and gained additional power in the economic realm through cash-cropping and white-collar jobs that required higher education. In sum, Samoan men's work was oriented towards the capitalist future—owning and managing land, earning cash, receiving higher education—while the work of most women remained entrenched in the pre-capitalist past—gardening and domestic labor.<sup>81</sup>

As bleak as these diverging gender trajectories appear, Samoan women did seize some of the new opportunities of the colonial world. For example, Samoan girls were

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 73.

highly sought after as domestic servants in the households of wealthy Euro-American plantations owners, colonial officials, and missionaries. Some Samoan women also washed clothes and cooked for the young, male, and predominantly single plantation workers from Melanesia and China. A group of Samoan women in Leone, American Samoa, even produced *siapo* for local sale and export.<sup>82</sup> Led by master artist Kolone Fai'ivae Leoso, the Samoan artists produced thousands of *siapo* in multiple colors. In the late 1920s, they sold their *siapo* to Mary Pritchard, the daughter of a Samoan mother and white American father, who exported Samoan products to traders in Honolulu.<sup>83</sup> Finally, Samoan women's committees continued the long tradition of female-only work groups and church women's auxiliaries. Founded in 1919 by Dr. Mabel Christie, the women's committees were initially set up to improve public hygiene in American Samoan villages. The committees quickly spread to Western Samoa and broadened their mandates to include fundraising, making them leading actors in the *Mau* movement against American and New Zealand colonial rule in the mid-1920s.<sup>84</sup>

## **MAKING SAMOANS WORK**

Virtually unique among Euro-American colonies at the time, Samoans under German and American rule were not directly forced to work for the export economy.<sup>85</sup> It was the very

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<sup>82</sup> Fofu I. F. Sunia, ed., *The Women of American Samoa, 1900-2000: A Hundred Years of Development and Achievements* (Pago-Pago: Amerika Samoa Humanities Council, 2005), 96.

<sup>83</sup> Siapo.com, accessed May 13, 2015, [siapo.com/kolfaiivleos.html](http://siapo.com/kolfaiivleos.html); [siapo.com/maryprichard.html](http://siapo.com/maryprichard.html).

<sup>84</sup> Schoeffel Meleisea, "Daughters of Sina," chapters 9 and 10.

<sup>85</sup> As a growing field of scholarship attests, unfree labor did not disappear with the formal end of human chattel slavery. In the German colonies in Africa as well as in German New Guinea, for instance, colonized

strength of the Samoan subsistence economy and the military muscle it supported that forced colonial officials in both German and American Samoa to pursue a strategy of accommodation. This paternalist policy of *salvage colonialism* was most visible in the German part of the colony. Governor Solf styled himself as the “father” of his Samoan “children” who protected them from the corrupting influence of Euro-American capitalist modernity, especially in the form of wage labor and consumer commodities.<sup>86</sup> In Solf’s eyes, his duty in Samoa was “merely to guard it as what it is—a little paradise—and to do my best to keep the passing serpent out of our Garden of Eden.”<sup>87</sup> Using the colony as a living experiment in social engineering, German colonial officials deemed Samoans worthy of protection from the brutal forces of colonial capitalism they had helped unleash. Not incidentally, Solf’s policy also left Samoans firmly tied to small-scale agriculture and at a safe distance from some of the new opportunities that colonization opened up. And if Solf’s salvage colonialism aimed to maintain order among the colonized, the paternalism practiced by plantation owners sought to extract as much of their labor power as possible. After a violent revolt by the Herero and Nama in German

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people were forced to work for plantation owners and the colonial administration. Arthur Gordon’s native policy in nearby British Fiji was one of the inspirations for the German administration in Samoa. Meleisea, *Making of Modern Samoa*, xi.

<sup>86</sup> I adopt the term *salvage colonialism* from historical sociologist George Steinmetz’s meticulous study, *Devil’s Handwriting*, 317ff. As Steinmetz points out (355), Solf leveraged his substantial *ethnographic capital* as an expert on Samoan culture to integrate the conflicting interests of non-German settlers, missionaries, and his colonial administration. On German ethnographers as salvage colonialists, see Harry Liebersohn, “Coming of Age in the Pacific: German Ethnography from Chamisso to Krämer,” in: *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire*, edited by H. Glenn Penny, and Matti Bunzl (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 31-46. On Solf’s salvage colonialism as a pragmatic choice rather than a principled decision, see Peter J. Hemenstall, “Indigenous Resistance to German Rule in the Pacific Colonies of Samoa, Ponape and New Guinea, 1884 to 1914” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1973), 269; and Evelyn Wareham, *Race and Realpolitik: The Politics of Colonisation in German Samoa* (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2002), 157. Significantly, the DHPG also supported Solf’s policy in exchange for continued access to cheap laborers from Melanesia. Firth, “German Recruitment,” 314.

<sup>87</sup> Cit. by Lloyd Osborne in Newton Allan Rowe, *Samoa under the Sailing Gods* (London, UK: Putnam, 1930), xii.

Southwest-Africa broke out in spring 1904, Solf's less overtly confrontational native policy gained even more legitimacy in the eyes of Euro-American settlers and the colonial press.<sup>88</sup>

Since Samoans were not forced to work and continued to rely on their subsistence economy, it is little wonder they found the cash incentives of plantation labor insufficient. Most Samoans remained land-holding producers and only a small number performed casual day labor on foreign-owned copra plantations. If subaltern workers are, by definition, forced to sell their labor power, then Samoans did not belong in this category.<sup>89</sup> Accustomed as they were to the sporadic nature of communal labor in service of their families, most Samoan men found it hard to adjust to the radically different time and labor discipline prevailing on large-scale Euro-American plantations. Perhaps the most significant difference lay in the ability of Samoan workers engaged in subsistence farming to choose the timing and intensity of their labor tasks. Plantation labor, by contrast, demanded continuous physical exertion to produce crops that would then not directly benefit one's community, but instead be shipped to distant markets in Marseilles and San Francisco. Samoans quickly came to realize this fundamental difference between their traditional subsistence labor as service to one's community (*tautua*) and the arduous labor required on foreign-owned plantations (*gālua*).<sup>90</sup> Workers attached different meanings to their labor, which greatly influenced their willingness to perform it.

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<sup>88</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, Apr. 23, 1904. Commentators even speculated about deporting captured Herero fighters to German Samoa. *Samoanische Zeitung*, July 16, Aug. 6, 1904.

<sup>89</sup> Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 34.

<sup>90</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 181.

Even under the official policy of salvage colonialism, colonial officials were constantly preoccupied with increasing copra production. Their concerns were understandable because throughout the nineteenth century and into the colonial era, Samoans were, by far, the largest producers of copra. In 1896, Samoans produced as much as 80% of overall copra exports that year on their family plantations.<sup>91</sup> The remaining 20% were produced by the DHPG, the largest foreign trading company operating in Samoa at the time. Given Samoans' preponderant role in copra production and their general unwillingness to work on foreign plantations, Euro-American plantation owners, traders, and colonial officials sought to devise different means to increase agricultural output.

Throughout the nineteenth century, violent conflicts among competing Samoan factions, often fuelled by Euro-American colonialists themselves, had put severe limits on the time and resources Samoans could devote to subsistence agriculture, often resulting in famines.<sup>92</sup> During the turbulent years of the tridominium between 1889 and 1899, German diplomats in Apia regularly reported on the relationship between war and economic stagnation. Consul Biermann noted in April 1894 that during Samoan wars subsistence production was interrupted, forcing many Samoans to consume their coconuts instead of selling them as dried copra. Even worse, the Consul observed, Samoans had to be supplied with provisions from German plantations, which offered the only sources of food in times of war. As a result, Biermann concluded, the copra trade came to a halt, plantation output decreased, Samoan purchasing power declined, and

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<sup>91</sup> Rose to Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Aug. 30, 1896, BArch R 1001/2539.

<sup>92</sup> Buck, *Samoan Material Culture*, 546.



imports and exports dropped.<sup>93</sup> Because continued warfare among Samoans—fuelled in no small part by the competing interests of the colonial powers—had a negative impact on agricultural exports, the pressure to ensure political stability on the islands increased.

In 1899, then, the unprecedented experiment in tripartite colonial rule came to an end and Samoa was divided into a German part in the west and an American part in the east. Driven by the economic interests of German traders and plantations owners (especially the DHPG), the German colonial administration lost little time in exerting pressure on Samoan farmers. On August 31, 1900, only a few months into formal annexation, Governor Solf passed a regulation which required every Samoan head of family to plant fifty coconut trees a year. On average, it took around 6,000 mature Samoan coconuts to produce a single ton of copra. Samoan officials were appointed to inspect plantations on a regular basis and punish individuals who failed their quota.<sup>94</sup> This stricter policy was hard to enforce, but did lead to a considerable increase in the number of coconut trees in German Samoa. In 1908, there were 455,280 coconut trees on German plantations, of which more than 90% belonged to the DHPG.<sup>95</sup> Between 1900 and 1913, more than one million new coconut trees were planted in Savai'i and Upolu.

Over the same time period, however, overall copra output did not increase significantly.<sup>96</sup> This was mainly due to the fact that most Samoans, while following the official dictate to plant new trees, did not substantially increase their work load and generally only produced and sold as many coconuts as they needed to survive and earn

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<sup>93</sup> Biermann to Caprivi, Apr. 30, 1894, BArch R 1001/2539.

<sup>94</sup> Solf, "Notizen zur Landwirtschaft," BArch N 1053/6, p. 292.

<sup>95</sup> Schmack, *Godeffroy & Sohn*, 291.

<sup>96</sup> Total copra output in German Samoa rose only slightly from 7,792 tons in 1899 to 9,634 tons in 1913. Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 300, 303.

cash. Even so, Samoan stands of coconut trees covered three times the area of European copra plantations.<sup>97</sup> In line with Solf's salvage colonialism, Samoan landholdings, on which subsistence farming depended, had come to be legally protected. To protect the "natural fruit lands of Samoans," the Berlin Act of 1899 had prohibited the sale of all lands outside of the municipal district of Apia.<sup>98</sup> In November 1907, a regulation passed by the German colonial administration confirmed this ban in principle, but enlarged the area in which the sale of Samoans lands was allowed.<sup>99</sup> From then on, no Samoan lands were to be sold outside of the so-called "plantation district," an area of roughly seven square miles around Apia where most of the foreign-owned, large-scale plantations were located. In addition, every Samoan was guaranteed at least 3.2 acres of land to cultivate. Its good intentions notwithstanding, the regulation clearly benefitted the largest landholder outside of the plantation district: the DHPG.<sup>100</sup> The German company now enjoyed a "virtual monopoly of land which other Europeans could buy."<sup>101</sup> A DHPG business report from 1907 duly noted that the company could now proceed to sell the majority of its uncultivated lands at a profit.<sup>102</sup>

Other strategies the colonial administrations pursued to increase agricultural production among Samoans included restrictions on Samoan visiting parties, the introduction of copra kilns, and head taxes. Samoans had a long tradition of visiting

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<sup>97</sup> Peter J. Hempenstall, *Pacific Islanders under German Rule: A Study in the Meaning of Colonial Resistance* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978), 70.

<sup>98</sup> Cit. in Richard P. Gilson, *Samoa 1830 to 1900: The Politics of a Multi-Cultural Community* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1970), 406.

<sup>99</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 260.

<sup>100</sup> Hempenstall, *Pacific Islanders under German Rule*, 53.

<sup>101</sup> Firth, "German Recruitment," 242.

<sup>102</sup> DHPG Business Report 1907, StAH, 621-1/14, p. 25.

relatives and friends in other villages and islands to exchange news and strengthen the bonds of family and friendship. These visiting parties, also known as *malaga*, often involved considerable expenses on the part of the travellers, who had to leave their plantations, and, even more so, on the part of the hosts, who were expected to provide the guests with food and accommodation. Since some of the *malaga* could last for weeks, the financial burden on both parties could be great. At the same time, *malaga* also allowed families suffering from food shortages to temporarily relieve their plantations and helped them stem local economic crises.<sup>103</sup> In any case, Samoans rarely approached cultural traditions such as *malaga* in purely economic terms. A Samoan *matai* interviewed by anthropologist Felix M. Keesing in the early 1930s defended this comprehensive outlook on life, shared by many Samoans:

The white people condemn many Samoan customs as being wasteful. Their idea is that customs that interfere with working and making money are bad. But such customs give pleasure to the Samoans and are almost their only form of amusement. To travel and to entertain those who travel makes life interesting. A life filled with nothing but work would not be worth living.<sup>104</sup>

Euro-American colonial officials had different views. Intent on putting the new colony into value, they saw Samoan *malaga* as a quaint nuisance, at best, and an inexcusable waste of time and resources at worst. As a consequence, in 1903 Solf reached an agreement with the U.S. naval administration in American Samoa that prohibited Samoans from going on *malaga* between Upolu and Tutuila. A comprehensive ban on all *malaga* would have violated Solf's overall policy of paternalist rule.<sup>105</sup> Samoans had

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<sup>103</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 293.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>105</sup> Linnekin, "Fine Mats and Money," 7.

experienced the partition of their islands in 1899 most directly when they went on *malaga* to visit relatives across the new political boundary between Upolu and Tutuila. These trips, while not impossible, became increasingly troublesome as German and American authorities stepped up control of population movements. Paradoxically, Solf and other high-ranking colonial officials had themselves adopted the practice of visiting different parts of the colony, often to great effect. The ban on visiting parties eventually caused considerable opposition among Samoan *matais*, who saw one of their ancient privileges threatened. The first *Mau* movement led by Lauaki in 1908 emerged partly in response to this ban on *malaga* as did the second *Mau* movement against New Zealand rule in the mid-1920s.

The introduction of copra kilns by colonial officials was another attempt to increase Samoan copra production. While the larger trading companies like the DHPG had been using copra dryers and kilns since the early 1890s, Samoans continued to rely on the traditional method of drying coconut meat in the sun.<sup>106</sup> Compared to sun-drying, kilns made the drying of coconuts more reliable and efficient. Three days of drying the coconuts in the sun could be reduced to one day in the kiln, using the shells as fuel.<sup>107</sup> Colonial officials followed the DHPG in giving preference to the so-called “plantation copra” over the “trader copra,” primarily because of its higher quality and storage life.<sup>108</sup> In fall 1907, a member of the German Committee on Colonial Economics recommended to the Imperial Colonial Office to purchase copra kilns and rent them out to Samoans

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<sup>106</sup> In 1902, the DHPG operated a total of 10 copra kilns in German Samoa: five kilns in Mulifanua, three kilns in Vaitele, and two kilns in Vailele. Reinecke, *Samoa*, 194, 196, 198.

<sup>107</sup> Firth, “German Recruitment,” 61.

<sup>108</sup> Reinecke, *Samoa*, 206.

during the rainy season.<sup>109</sup> Shortly thereafter, a DHPG manager wrote to Governor Solf about the need to increase the use of copra kilns among Samoans. The DHPG, the manager noted, had “already repeatedly tried to induce the natives to sell their copra either green or in nuts in order to be dried in the kilns on the trading stations of the whites. These attempts unfortunately had failed due to the resistance of the natives.”<sup>110</sup> Despite new technologies such as the copra kiln, Samoans continued to prefer their traditional method of drying coconuts in the sun. During the three days of drying Samoans constantly watched the copra to protect it from sudden rain or wandering dogs and pigs. Over night, the copra was brought into the house and stored in containers.<sup>111</sup> Sun-drying ran the risk of diminishing the copra’s quality (especially during the rainy season) and it took longer, but this mattered little in a subsistence economy with abundant crops. Far from resisting technological innovation, Samoans held on to established ways of agricultural labor and refused to give up control over this crucial part of the production process. Besides, by keeping control over drying copra, Samoans also maintained the option of shortweighting Euro-American traders by soaking copra or adding small stones and sand to their deliveries.<sup>112</sup>

Finally and most importantly, the German colonial administration introduced a head tax on all non-whites in the colony in 1901. The main aim of the head tax was to raise revenue for the colonial administration, but also to create an incentive for Samoans to enter into wage labor. It was the robust nature of the Samoan subsistence economy that

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<sup>109</sup> Supf to Imperial Colonial Office, Sept. 7, 1907, BArch R 1001/7991.

<sup>110</sup> Hanssen to Solf, Dec. 3, 1907, BArch R 1001/7991, p. 9f.

<sup>111</sup> Pitt, *Tradition and Economic Progress*, 197.

<sup>112</sup> Reinecke, *Samoa*, 206.

made the introduction of a head tax feasible in the first place.<sup>113</sup> The first head tax had already been introduced during the times of the tridominium, but collecting the taxes proved to be difficult. Consul Rose reported in April 1897 that, apart from a stronger demand by Samoans for imported goods, a stricter enforcement of the head tax would help to increase planting activity among Samoans. Rose suggested collecting the head tax more regularly and comprehensively, which would motivate Samoans to work.<sup>114</sup> When the German colonial administration re-introduced the head tax in 1901, it had more success.

Initially set at 4 Reichsmark (\$1) for every Samoan in 1901, the head tax was limited to adult males only after 1903. *Matais* paid 12 Reichsmark (\$3) while untitled men continued to pay only 4 Reichsmark (\$1). By 1914, the head tax had risen to 24 Reichsmark (\$6) for *matais* and 20 Reichsmark (\$5) for untitled men.<sup>115</sup> While Chinese contract workers were exempt from the head tax, Samoans and other Pacific Islanders living in German Samoa had to pay or face serious penalties. Indeed, part of the local taxes and import duties were used to build a rudimentary infrastructure in the colony such as roads, docks, and later also telegraph lines. Yet, contrary to what Euro-American planters claimed, Samoans—let alone Melanesian or Chinese workers confined to plantations—were unable to enjoy much of this newly-built infrastructure. Responding to the demands of the growing export economy, these internal improvements primarily served the interests of the plantation owner class. Taxes and duties also ensured the

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<sup>113</sup> For cash-strapped colonial officials, head taxes were a way to kill two birds with one stone: they raised funds for the colonial administration and, at the same time, promised to secure a constant supply of labor to produce exports.

<sup>114</sup> Rose to Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Apr. 20, 1897, BArch R 1001/2540.

<sup>115</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 487.

workings of the colonial administration, especially its courts and police force, accessible only to Samoans.<sup>116</sup> If the head tax gave testament to the vibrancy of the Samoan subsistence economy, it was a form of punishment for the Melanesian workers who saw little of its benefits. Through the head tax, Samoan and Melanesian workers, who had created the wealth of the colony and had made German Samoa become independent of subsidies from Berlin by 1909, helped support a colonial system geared towards their further exploitation. Out of a fear of organized resistance, colonial officials introduced a head tax with uneven reach partly to undermine interracial solidarity among the workers in colonial Samoa.

Despite these attempts by colonial administrations to force Samoans into wage labor on foreign plantations, the overwhelming majority of Samoans continued subsistence agriculture that offered greater control over their lives. Since Samoans owned most of the land on which coconut trees grew, their surplus production dominated the copra export market throughout the colonial era. Their vibrant subsistence and cash crop economy provided Samoans not only with an insurance against environmental disasters, but, more importantly, with a strong foundation to protect their political and social self-determination against colonial demands. Samoans were thus able to respond to the introduction of a large-scale plantation economy largely on their own terms.

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<sup>116</sup> For a discussion of a similar logic in Hawai'i, see Takaki, *Pau Hana*, 73.

## **EARNING CASH AND TAKING FRUIT: SAMOANS ON EURO-AMERICAN PLANTATIONS**

Occasionally, however, Samoans chose to enter into wage contracts on Euro-American plantations. Because most Samoans preferred working independently and selling their surplus to traders, wage labor on foreign-owned plantations remained the exception throughout the colonial era. As early as the 1850s, Samoans had worked on foreign plantations on a casual basis. They demanded equal wages to those paid to Europeans—one Samoan dollar a day—which proved to be unprofitable for Euro-American planters, who preferred recruiting workers from other Pacific islands. But even after 1900, Samoans continued to work for Euro-American plantation owners as temporary laborers and overseers. During acute labor shortages, Samoans could earn as much as three Reichsmark (75c) a day plus food working on Euro-American plantations. In 1901, Samoans earned an average of one U.S. dollar for a day's plantation work, which was considerably more than what the DHPG paid its Melanesian workers (\$21-23 a year).<sup>117</sup> In neighboring U.S.-controlled Tutuila, Samoans also earned one dollar a day, including board.<sup>118</sup>

Business reports from German and British trading companies operating in Samoa at the turn of the twentieth century provide documentation for the Samoan presence on foreign plantations. Reports from the Safata-Samoa-Gesellschaft (SSG) from 1905 and 1906 listed the number of Chinese and Samoan workers employed on its copra and cocoa

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<sup>117</sup> Firth, "German Recruitment," 244. DHPG manager Riedel recounted that Samoans earned 3-4 Reichsmark (75c-\$1) per day, while their labor was not worth more than 1 Reichsmark (25c) per day. Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 83.

<sup>118</sup> Heimrod to J.S. Williams, Oct. 27, 1904, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 52.



plantations. In 1905, the SSG employed between 30 and 40 Samoan workers to cultivate its newest plantations. Roughly the same number of Chinese workers, whom companies like the SSG had eagerly recruited to Samoa, were supervised by Samoan, and later also white, overseers.<sup>119</sup> In the following year, over 100 new Chinese workers joined the SSG workforce, while an unidentified number of Samoans continued to work for the company. As the business report from 1907 noted, for heavy labor, such as clearing bush, Samoans could only be hired on temporary contracts.<sup>120</sup> By the end of 1911, the SSG employed 187 Chinese workers, but managers still complained about the lack of manpower to cultivate existing plantations, let alone expand them. According to the business report from 1911, this perceived lack of workers had to be compensated by hiring “expensive” Samoans.<sup>121</sup> In addition to these temporary plantation laborers, two mixed-race Samoans worked as overseers on the SSG plantations.

One of the SSG’s competitors in cocoa production, the British-owned Upolu Rubber and Cacao Estates Ltd. (URCE), also employed mainly Chinese workers on its rubber plantation in Alisa and on its cacao plantation in Tagamapua. Samoan workers performed contract labor for the URCE for higher rates than their Chinese counterparts. Apparently, these Samoan workers perceived the work conditions and their wages as adequate because a URCE business report noted that many Samoan workers re-engaged for one or two months after the end of their original contracts.<sup>122</sup> Samoan workers also worked for other foreign companies, such as the German Samoa-Plantagen-Gesellschaft

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<sup>119</sup> SSG Business Reports 1905, 1906, BArch R 1001/2493.

<sup>120</sup> SSG Business Report 1907, BArch R 1001/2494.

<sup>121</sup> SSG Business Report 1911, BArch R 1001/2496.

<sup>122</sup> Upolu-Cacao-Kompagnie, BArch R 1001/2499.

(SPG) and the British Upolu Cacao Company (UCC), particularly cutting wild bush for new plantations.<sup>123</sup> The Samoan workers hired by Francis Harman's UCC in early 1902, however, had all left the plantation within a few months.<sup>124</sup>

Working on Euro-American plantations, if only for limited amounts of time, posed considerable challenges to Samoan men. Timing, techniques, and general labor discipline differed greatly between small Samoan family plantations and the larger commercial enterprises. Due to the tropical climate, Samoans tried to complete most of the heavy agricultural labor in the early mornings before the sun became too intense. By contrast, Euro-American plantations were larger in size, geared towards producing large amounts of cash crops, and generally more strictly organized. Contract workers from Melanesia and China were specifically recruited to perform this kind of exhausting and monotonous plantation labor and tried to resist these coercive measures as much as they could. Samoans, who engaged in casual wage labor on Euro-American plantations, were not only unaccustomed to such a profit-oriented labor regime, but also arrived at the plantations already exhausted from their family labor in the mornings.<sup>125</sup> Agricultural techniques, too, were different. While Samoans cut as much copra as they needed to buy clothes or food, coconuts on DHPG and other plantations were usually not cut before they had fully matured and fallen to the ground.<sup>126</sup>

In summer 1903, the issue of Samoan labor contracts with Euro-American traders and plantations owners erupted into a heated debate between Samoan leaders and the

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<sup>123</sup> Report on SPG, Mar. 30, 1914, BArch R 1001/2500.

<sup>124</sup> Firth, "German Recruitment," 247.

<sup>125</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 180.

<sup>126</sup> German Consulate to Foreign Office-Colonial Office, May 30, 1900, BArch R 1001/2540.

German colonial administration. In June 1903, King Mata'afa wrote a letter of complaint to Governor Solf in which he argued that such contracts should be limited to one month "because it is our custom that no one on these islands be engaged in menial labor."<sup>127</sup> Mata'afa recounted rumors that Solf planned to force Samoans into slave-like labor; allegations probably fuelled by several "uncomfortable incidents" involving Samoan workers and Euro-American employers. In his letter, Mata'afa painted an idealized picture of the Samoan labor system: "Since childhood, we have grown up in perfect freedom and everybody is allowed to work and sleep as he pleases because our Mother Earth provides all goods through her great fertility."<sup>128</sup> He concluded his complaint by criticizing the colonizers for their blasphemous greed: "The foreigners only want to gain money through the lives of others [...], because they do not at all know the love of God in heavens."<sup>129</sup> In his defense of Samoan workers, Mata'afa clearly adopted some of the stereotypes about Samoan indolence and carefree living propagated by the colonizers, not to mention their Christian rhetoric. But his concerns about broken contracts and labor exploitation at the hands of Euro-American settlers were real. For the time being, Solf managed to dissipate these complaints in a heated *fono* meeting, but Samoans remained sensitive to the dignity of the labor they performed.

As these examples show, Samoans did make use of the new opportunities of wage labor on Euro-American plantations, if only temporarily and selectively. Their choices depended on a range of factors such as the wages they received, the current copra prices, and their need for cash to buy imported goods and pay for taxes or fines. Thus, when the

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<sup>127</sup> Mata'afa to Solf, June 25, 1903, BArch R 1001/3063, p. 81.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

end of the Great War brought higher copra prices and higher wages, a greater number of Samoans engaged in wage labor on Euro-American plantations.<sup>130</sup> The cash earned from wage labor often flowed back into practices central to Samoan culture, such as organizing a *malaga*. Some enterprising Samoans even used their cash income to expand their own plantations. For most Samoans, however, working on plantations was not a sign of assimilation to Euro-American capitalism, but rather a way to maintain social cohesion in the face of rapid change.

Beyond wage labor, Samoans also engaged with Euro-American plantation owners in a more direct manner: they took their crops. What Samoans saw as their right to make use of the natural bounty growing on their islands, settlers, who had come to Samoa to make a living by selling cash crops, interpreted as outright theft and a challenge to colonial authority. Samoans had been “taking” from foreign plantations ever since German traders “took” their lands in the 1860s. The taking of crops continued throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and into the colonial era, often more prevalent in times of war and when food was scarce. In 1886, German Consul Knappe reported that gangs of up to 90 Samoan men forcefully entered German plantations to steal crops. Plantation managers had complained that they could no longer protect their Melanesian workers who tried to protect the plantations against the Samoan intruders. An investigation had been started, Knappe noted, and the entire village of Matafaga was fined 300 Reichsmark (\$75).<sup>131</sup> Because individual thieves were difficult to identify or arrest, punishment in the form of fines was usually leveled at the entire village that lay

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<sup>130</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 184f.

<sup>131</sup> Knappe to Foreign Office, Nov. 9, 1886, BArch R 1001/2926.

close to the plantation.<sup>132</sup> According to a DHPG manager, Samoans often gained access to foreign plantations under the pretext of intending to shoot pigeons, but then proceeded to steal crops.<sup>133</sup>

Three years later, reports on Samoan thefts from German plantations resurfaced. An acute food shortage had led to an increase in Samoans stealing fruit, Consul Stübel reported. These thefts resulted in friction and, at times, violent encounters between the Samoan thieves and the Melanesian plantation workers. The DHPG manager in Vaialele, Hufnagel, had been punched to the ground and seriously injured by Samoans looking for breadfruit, Stübel noted. Trying to defend their plantation, a group of Melanesian DHPG workers had retaliated in August 1889 by beating a Samoan man named Liku to death.<sup>134</sup> In the following months, Stübel continued to express concerns about the “persistent anarchy,” especially on the two largest German plantations in Vaitele and Vaialele. According to the Consul, Samoan men had been “brutalized” by the ongoing civil war between Malietoa Laupepa, who had returned from exile in Jaluit in September 1889, and the reigning but disputed King Mata’afa. The DHPG estimated the damage done to its plantations by Samoan “looting” as high as 80,000 Reichsmark (\$20,000).<sup>135</sup>

By October 1889, things had apparently calmed down. Thefts had become rarer, Stübel wrote in his monthly report, as the food shortage had generally subsided.<sup>136</sup> In fall 1894, however, reports on Samoan crop thefts and clashes with Melanesian workers

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<sup>132</sup> Biermann to Caprivi, Mar. 20, 1893, BArch R 1001/2926, p. 14.

<sup>133</sup> Krüger to DHPG headquarters Apia, Mar. 9, 1893, BArch R 1001/2926.

<sup>134</sup> Papalu to Stübel, Aug. 3, 1889, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 61; Stübel to Foreign Office, Aug. 13, 1889, BArch R 1001/2926.

<sup>135</sup> Stübel to Foreign Office, Sept. 12, 1889, BArch R 1001/2926, p. 11.

<sup>136</sup> Stübel to Foreign Office, Oct. 8, 1889, BArch R 1001/2926.

reappeared. Apparently, Consul Biermann noted, the sentences dealt out by the Imperial Court against thieves in the preceding years did not have the desired effect.<sup>137</sup> In summer 1895, the DHPG management complained to the Consulate in Apia about a series of new crop thefts on its plantations. The letter noted that Samoans had stopped stealing as publicly as they had done before and now used the early morning hours to do so. The DHPG also explicitly accused the mixed-race Samoan and U.S. citizen Alfred Schuster and his family as a major instigator of the thefts.<sup>138</sup> In May 1896, Schuster was arrested by German DHPG employees and locked up in the plantation jail for one night.<sup>139</sup> Only in 1898 could Consul Rose happily report that thefts had declined again. He mentioned several reasons for this decrease: first, the Imperial Court had finally finished determining property boundaries; second, large parts of plantations had been secured with barbed wire to keep out roaming cattle; third, a more effective enforcement of prison sentences was in place to punish thefts; and last but not least, an extraordinarily rich harvest of food crops such as bananas and breadfruit had diminished incentives to steal crops elsewhere.<sup>140</sup>

Yet, Samoans continued taking crops from Euro-American plantations even after formal annexation in 1899. Different conceptions of space and property among Samoans and their colonizers shaped this restive practice.<sup>141</sup> Samoans defined property in agricultural products on the basis of practical use instead of formal ownership. German

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<sup>137</sup> Biermann to Caprivi, Mar. 20, 1893, BArch R 1001/2926.

<sup>138</sup> DHPG to German Consulate Apia, Aug. 15, 1895, BArch R 1001/2926.

<sup>139</sup> Blacklock to Chief Justice Ide, May 5, 1896, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 51.

<sup>140</sup> Rose to Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Apr. 12, 1898, BArch R 1001/2540.

<sup>141</sup> The global struggle over land ownership is explored in detail in Andro Linklater, *Owning the Earth: The Transforming History of Land Ownership* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2013).

and American traders and plantation owners, by contrast, had little tolerance for such a definition of property rights. After all, most settlers had come to Samoa to get rich by exporting tropical fruit. As a result, they showed little patience for the persistent Samoan incursions into their plantations and private property. The colonial administration in German Samoa asserted its power by protecting German property against these “thefts” and punished violators severely. The fact that Samoans continued “taking” what they needed from the foreign plantations reflected the changing nature of the Samoan subsistence economy at large. As Euro-American capitalists bought up more and more land to grow cash crops, Samoans had less and less flexibility in food supplies. This limitation became particularly pressing in times of war or environmental disaster. Samoans understood these threats to their economic self-determination and fought back, following the logic of their own moral ecology.<sup>142</sup>

### **CUTTING OUT THE COLONIZERS: SAMOAN COPRA COOPERATIVES**

While Samoans had been producing the vast majority of copra, by the mid-nineteenth century, Euro-American traders had monopolized the copra trade. Together with British and French missionaries, German traders were the first to open trading stations in Upolu between 1830 and 1870. They quickly moved to monopolize the import and export of goods essential to the Samoan economy. In the eyes of Samoans, traders seemed to adjust prices for the copra they bought and the goods they sold at leisure. Therefore, Samoans

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<sup>142</sup> Building on E.P. Thompson’s ideas on the moral economy of peasants, historian Karl Jacoby has coined the term *moral ecology* in his *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 3.

had long been resentful of the domineering influence of Euro-American traders.<sup>143</sup> Samoans quickly realized that Euro-American traders deceived them by 30 to 50 pounds in every 100 pounds of copra they delivered at the trading stations.<sup>144</sup> Over time, Samoans devised various strategies to resist the power of the traders. For instance, they took out large amounts of credit from traders and deferred their payments indefinitely. Lack of effective legal enforcement of debt defaults, by and large, protected Samoans from punishment. Samoans also resorted to manipulating the quantity and quality of the copra they delivered to traders by soaking copra in water before weighing or mixing greener nuts of poorer quality with better nuts.<sup>145</sup>

A few years into formal colonial rule, Samoan producers launched a more fundamental attack on the monopoly of Euro-American traders on the lucrative copra trade. In 1904, a movement to found cooperative companies swept through German and American Samoa, with quite different trajectories. Led by the German-Samoan Carl Pullack from Savai'i, the so-called *'oloa* movement—*'oloa* meaning goods, wealth, or business—sought to wrest economic control over the copra trade from dominant Euro-American traders such as the DHPG. Copra cooperatives could build on a tradition of cooperative work groups—the male *'aumāga* and female *aualuma*—that have been central to Samoan society long before first contact with Europeans. The central aim of this Samoan-run copra cooperative movement—also known as the *kumpani*—was to cut out the Euro-American middlemen, who profited from the labor of Samoans. Since

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<sup>143</sup> Despite these complaints, a growing number of mixed-race Samoans found employment as traders in the 1890s. In 1895, the DHPG alone employed four mixed-race Samoans in its trading stores. BArch R 1001/2478.

<sup>144</sup> Firth, “German Recruitment,” 245.

<sup>145</sup> Lewthwaite, “Land, Life and Agriculture,” 149.



Samoan producers closely followed changing copra prices in London and San Francisco, they were painfully aware of the fact that Euro-American traders underpaid them for their copra while, at the same time, overcharging them for imported goods.<sup>146</sup> A slump in the global market price for copra from nine (2.25c) to five (1.25c) pfennigs a pound provided the final spark for the economic independence movement.<sup>147</sup>

In response to depressed copra prices, Pullack promised Samoan copra producers no less than 16 pfennigs a pound—a quite unrealistic if appealing figure.<sup>148</sup> Samoan leaders supported the *'oloa* as a way to regain political through economic power and campaigned for participation in the company as a patriotic venture.<sup>149</sup> At the same time, conflicts among white German settlers—especially between Governor Solf and the newly arrived plantation owner Richard Deeken—further encouraged Samoans in their attempts at economic cooperation.<sup>150</sup> At the same time, Samoan cooperatives were part of a wider move towards cash crop cooperatives that swept across the world at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>151</sup> Similar to cooperative movements in other parts of the world, the Samoan *'oloa* movement was based on democratic decision-making, profit-sharing, and mutual solidarity. Challenged by colonial capitalism, Samoans became subaltern capitalists themselves.

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<sup>146</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 315.

<sup>147</sup> Hempenstall, *Pacific Islanders under German Rule*, 43.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 225, n36.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>150</sup> Firth, “German Recruitment,” 258.

<sup>151</sup> On cotton cooperatives, see Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 338.

The Samoan cooperative movement did not only pose an economic challenge to the most vocal part of the Euro-American population, but also threatened the political legitimacy of the colonial state itself. Given this profound economic and political threat, Governor Solf moved quickly to suppress the *'oloa*. Colonial officials criticized the self-government of the cooperatives as mere window-dressing and directly threatened their leaders with punitive measures.<sup>152</sup> The colonial administration was also concerned about potential alliances between the Samoan *'oloa* movement and some of the newly arrived and very vocal smaller settlers who challenged the colonial administration on its handling of labor relations. In a letter to Solf from February 1905, Acting Governor Schultz wrote that his fears that the “machinations of the Deeken clique would be an evil example for the natives” had unfortunately materialized.<sup>153</sup> Richard Deeken, the leader of these small settlers, was even said to be the potential successor to Pullack as the manager of the *'oloa*. Schultz added that there were rumors that Deeken was busy collecting signatures among Samoans for a petition against Solf.<sup>154</sup> It is not clear whether these rumors turned out to be true, nor did Deeken ever become formally involved in the predominantly Samoan-led *'oloa* movement. Seen from the Governor’s mansion, however, the *'oloa* cooperatives were closely associated with challenges to colonial authority from white settlers.

In December 1904, the *'oloa* company introduced a tax ranging from four (\$1) to eight (\$2) Reichsmark (*lafoga oloa*) on all Samoans to finance its business activities.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> BArch R 1001/3064, p. 92ff.

<sup>153</sup> Schultz to Solf, Feb. 2, 1905, BArch N 1053/132, p. 25.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>155</sup> Hemenstall, *Pacific Islanders under German Rule*, 44.

The German colonial administration moved quickly to suppress this direct challenge to its control over taxation and the copra trade. At the end of December, Solf strictly prohibited the payment of any copra tax to the cooperatives, sowing seeds of disunity among the supporters. When Solf left for a trip to New Zealand at the end of the year, the threat seemed on the wane. Solf's departure, however, sparked a revival in the cooperative movement. Rumors began circulating that Solf was conspiring with Euro-American traders against Samoan producers and had been recalled by the Kaiser.<sup>156</sup> One of the Samoan village mayors, Malaeulu, even ventured to encourage his fellow Samoans to "scrape his [i.e. Solf's] body with *pipi* shells" if he continued to oppose the '*oloa*.<sup>157</sup> Under heavy pressure, Acting Governor Schultz decided to arrest Malaeulu and another movement leader in late January 1905 for disturbing the peace and spreading false rumors about the Governor. On January 31, several *matais* broke into the prison in Vaimea and freed the two prisoners, as a sign of Samoan independence and solidarity.<sup>158</sup>

Meanwhile, internal conflicts within the movement were rising to the surface. Members of the Mata'afa party quickly returned the freed prisoners to jail and pleaded Schultz for a full pardon, which he refused. When Solf finally returned in mid-March 1905, the '*oloa* movement was nearly defunct.<sup>159</sup> With a series of powerful speeches and a calculated show of strength, Solf exploited the divisions within the Samoan leadership and ordered the Samoan government in Mulinu'u to be dissolved. In suppressing the copra cooperatives, Solf succeeded in curtailing Samoan self-government more broadly.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>157</sup> Cit. in *ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>159</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 87.

If the German colonial administration ultimately managed to quell the spread of the *'oloa* movement for the time being, ideas for greater Samoan self-determination survived and resurfaced after a few relatively quiet years. As one of the most gifted *matais* from Savai'i, Lauaki had been at the forefront of the original *'oloa* movement before abruptly retreating from it when the administration's strong opposition became evident. Indeed, Solf and Schultz had been warned back then to send Lauaki into exile while they could, but Solf had decided to pardon him.<sup>160</sup> When Governor Solf left Samoa for another leave of absence in mid-1908, Lauaki revived the idea of a copra cooperative as part of a more general challenge to colonial rule. A short visit of the U.S. Navy's so-called "Great White Fleet" to Pago Pago in August 1908 further encouraged Lauaki in his challenge to German colonial rule.<sup>161</sup>

Initially supported by Mata'afa, Lauaki made plans to reorganize cooperatives in Upolu and Savai'i. In later testimony, Lauaki recalled that Mata'afa explained the plan to found an independent copra trading company at a meeting at his residence in Mulinuu: "A large wooden shed would be erected in Mulinu'u here, for the receiving of all the goods and then disperse them to all the districts of Samoa. A large ship would be obtained for the purposes of bringing the goods from America."<sup>162</sup> Two Samoan clerks were to organize production and trading in each district. Samoan producers would receive four cents per pound for their copra. Moreover, the copra cooperatives would set up an insurance against the risk of bad weather at the time when government taxes were due.

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 48f.

<sup>161</sup> An armada of brand-new U.S. battleships was sent around the world by President Theodor Roosevelt to showcase the U.S. Navy's new blue-water capabilities, passing by Pago Pago on August 1, 1908. One of the main reasons Roosevelt sent the fleet around the world was to back up legal bars to Japanese immigration to the United States. On Lauaki and the fleet visit, see *ibid.*, 56.

<sup>162</sup> Statement by Lauaki to Williams, Feb. 27, 1909, BArch N 1053/30, p. 148.

Lauaki's rebellion lasted longer than the initial 'oloa movement and was probably the most serious challenge to German colonial rule in Samoa. Rather than a mere "rearguard action" by a traditionalist minority, Lauaki's rebellion stood in a longer line of Samoan cooperatives.<sup>163</sup> Ultimately, however, it too failed. Internal divisions between Lauaki and Mata'afa, along with Solf's return combined to end the rebellion. Like Mata'afa before him, Lauaki was arrested and sent into exile in Saipan in the German-controlled Mariana Islands. Although ultimately unsuccessful in the face of a firmly entrenched colonial administration, the Samoan copra cooperatives showed how Samoans creatively adapted to the rapidly changing world they found themselves in.<sup>164</sup>

Samoan cooperatives resurfaced under New Zealand occupation during the Great War. Founded in 1914, the Toea'ina Club was an informal association made up of leading *matais* primarily to settle land and titles disputes.<sup>165</sup> The club also organized social events such as cricket matches and ran a copra trading business with its own motor-boat, funded solely by Samoan capital. When economic losses and misconduct by the Samoan manager put the club into dire straits, the New Zealand military administration took over and in April 1916 dissolved the company.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Hempenstall interprets the rebellion as a failed attempt to revive the power of a group of talking chiefs around Lauaki, see Hempenstall, *Pacific Islanders under German Rule*, 56. In contrast, I stress the deeper roots and future-oriented character of the rebellion.

<sup>164</sup> A few years later, Apolosi Nawai founded the Viti Trading Company in nearby Fiji, in a similar quest for greater economic autonomy. For his activism, Nawai was twice sent into exile by the British colonial administration. Brij V. Lal, *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 48-54; and Timothy J. Macnaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience: A Study of the Neotraditional Order under British Colonial Rule Prior to World War II* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1982), 75-92.

<sup>165</sup> Meleisea, *Making of Modern Samoa*, 116.

<sup>166</sup> Lewthwaite, "Land, Life and Agriculture," 161.

In American Samoa, the cooperative movement assumed quite a different form. The U.S. naval administration that controlled the main harbor of Pago Pago on Tutuila pursued a paternalist policy similar to its German counterpart to the west. Since the U.S. Navy was mainly interested in securing a deep-sea port and coaling station in the South Pacific, the naval administration had little mandate and resources to meddle in Samoan affairs. In line with the Berlin Treaty of 1899, Governor Tilley passed the Native Lands Ordinance in 1900, which prohibited the alienation of Samoan land. In both American and German Samoa, foreigners were thus not allowed to purchase Samoan land. To raise revenue and increase copra production, the U.S. administration introduced a tax in 1901, to be paid in copra deliveries. Samoans were slow to pay this new tax and were supported by Euro-American traders who even tried to keep the Samoans from cutting copra to pay taxes rather than sell it for export. In the eyes of the naval administration, the fact that taxes needed to be paid in copra protected “child-like” Samoans from exploitation by scrupulous traders. According to Governor Uriel Sebree, Samoans often sold copra below market prices, while the naval government took great care to use the collected taxes for their benefit. “In some villages,” Sebree continued, “the natives have already resolved to sell wholesale rather than individually, and thus get a higher price.”<sup>167</sup> Even without the aid of colonial paternalism, copra producers in American Samoa, too, came to appreciate the advantages of collective bargaining in a cash crop economy.

In 1903, the naval administration cut out the Euro-American traders and formally took over the sale of Samoan copra. In doing so, the U.S. Navy acquired the monopoly on the copra trade in Tutuila, a position similar to the DHPG’s economic clout in German Samoa. Samoan producers delivered their copra to stations run by the government where

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<sup>167</sup> Sebree to Ass. Sec. of Navy, Aug. 9, 1902, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 35, Item 347, p. 4.

they received a standard price per pound, somewhat lower than the projected annual bid. This margin allowed the government to pay additional expenses such as transportation and wages for Samoan weighing clerks. After the annual output was awarded to the highest bid from an American or Australian firm, the remaining surplus was returned to the *matais* in proportion to the copra cut by their family members. Instead of cash, copra receipts were issued to Samoans payable by the government, which could be used to purchase goods in trading stores with official licenses.<sup>168</sup>

In 1902, Samoans in Manu'a founded their own copra cooperative. The Manu'a Cooperative Company took over the copra trade between the main island Tutuila and the much smaller Manu'a islands 75 miles to the east. The company operated stores in several villages across the islands and owned three motor-boats to ship copra to Pago Pago for export to San Francisco. The cooperatives worked well for a few years, but since Samoan members could buy goods on credit, company debt kept rising and rising. By 1907, rumors of embezzled funds and accumulating debt led Governor Moore to act as a trustee for the company, a role his successors continued.<sup>169</sup> Since this involvement in Samoan copra business put the highest political representative of the United States in competition with local merchants and antagonized them, Governor Stearns decided to withdraw his personal liability in September 1913. In January 1914, the people of Manu'a gave their consent to selling out their company, but they could not reach an agreement satisfactory to the government and creditors. To avoid the comingling of political authority and economic interest, the supervision of the company was turned over from the Governor to the Secretary of Native Affairs, Alexander Stronach, in May

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<sup>168</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 341.

<sup>169</sup> Crose to Sec. of Navy, July 14, 1911, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 40, p. 7.

1914.<sup>170</sup> Stronach and Stearns agreed that the cooperative had failed economically and recommended shutting it down as soon as all the remaining debt was collected. As Stearns put it in no uncertain terms: “The natives are absolutely incapable of managing their own affairs in financial matters and it is believed that permitting them to establish co-operative stores and co-operative schooners has been a mistake.”<sup>171</sup>

In stark contrast to the *'oloa* cooperatives in German Samoa, then, the Manu'a cooperative came under indirect Navy control, run by white American managers.<sup>172</sup> When a hurricane devastated Manu'a in January 1915, the cooperative was practically put out of business. Half of the 1,500 inhabitants of Manu'a had to be relocated to Tutuila because most of the food crops had been destroyed, including the larger part of the cooperative's copra stock.<sup>173</sup> It took several years for agricultural production in Manu'a to recover, but the cooperative venture on the island never did. By 1919, the former store of cooperative was used as a naval dispensary and wireless radio office.<sup>174</sup> The following year, the Manu'a Cooperative Company officially closed.<sup>175</sup>

Despite these difficulties, the system of selling copra through the naval government in American Samoa proved so successful that Samoan producers in neighboring German Samoa began demanding higher prices for their copra.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, as a form of economic paternalism, the copra system in American Samoa had clear parallels

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<sup>170</sup> Stronach to Gov., June 30, 1914, NARA-SB, RG 284, MF T1182, Roll 1.

<sup>171</sup> Stearns to Sec. of Navy, July 21, 1914, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 42, p. 20.

<sup>172</sup> Stronach to Gov., June 30, 1914, NARA-SB, RG 284, MF T1182, Roll 1.

<sup>173</sup> Stronach to Gov., July 1, 1915, NARA-SB, RG 284, MF T1182, Roll 1.

<sup>174</sup> Noble to Gov., July 1, 1919, NARA-SB, RG 284, MF T1182, Roll 1.

<sup>175</sup> Noble to Gov., Aug. 1, 1920, NARA-SB, RG 284, MF T1182, Roll 1.

<sup>176</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 341.



to Solf's salvage colonialism in German Samoa. In both colonies, the Euro-American administrations feared Samoan naiveté vis-à-vis scrupulous traders and proceeded to regulate the copra production and sale. In German Samoa, regulations were passed to increase production and protect Samoans, who produced two-thirds of overall copra, from Euro-American traders out to make a profit. In American Samoa, the U.S. Navy assumed a similarly paternalist attitude towards Samoan copra producers and even became their agent in securing higher prices. Since virtually no foreign-owned plantations existed in American Samoa and the copra market remained relatively small, the naval government could become the middleman for the Samoan producers who cut almost all copra themselves. Given the powerful interests of the DHPG and competing smaller plantation owners, the colonial administration in German Samoa could not aspire to such a powerful role. The American Samoa government-run copra economy worked quite smoothly until 1921 when difficulties in paying out the surplus money to communities led the government to introduce individual payments.<sup>177</sup> In their own ways, Samoans in both Western and American Samoa grew more adept at navigating the capitalist marketplace and, in doing so, adapted their subsistence economy to new realities.

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Samoans resisted colonial capitalism in two major ways. On the one hand, their subsistence economy allowed Samoans to retain much of their self-determination in the face of colonization, guaranteeing the continuity of their culture and the integrity of

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 491.

traditional social structures. More than supplying a vital source of food, subsistence farming provided a kind of social insurance in times of crisis and the basis for anti-colonial resistance. Particularly in comparison to other colonized people at the turn of the twentieth century, Samoans, by and large, managed to navigate the introduction of plantation agriculture on their own terms. While large tracts of Samoan land were sold to Euro-Americans over the course of the nineteenth century to be turned into profitable cash crops, long-grown social and economic structures such as the *matai* system and household-centered subsistence farming came under pressure, but survived through the colonial era. In colonial Samoa, at least, the traditional owners of the means of subsistence triumphed over the new owners of the means of cash crop production.

On the other hand, Samoans resisted colonialism by selectively adapting to new circumstances. Emboldened by a strong and vibrant subsistence economy, Samoans only occasionally engaged in wage labor on Euro-American plantations, primarily to earn the cash needed for imported goods, government taxes, and church donations. More importantly, Samoans also founded copra co-operatives to undermine what they—in many cases, rightly—perceived as monopolistic practices by Euro-American plantation owners and traders. Since resistance was inevitably structured by domination, Samoan copra cooperatives were an attempt to beat the colonizers with their own weapons. German and American colonial officials understood this fundamental challenge to their policy of extracting resources from the islands and quickly sought to suppress the co-operative movement. While the copra cooperatives eventually gave in under coercion, they helped form the nucleus of a more sustained challenge to colonial rule in the 1920s.

## CHAPTER 2 — PLANTATION

In late April 1904, Ko Tuk Shung confronted a group of angry plantation workers from China. As personal servant of the Governor of German Samoa and interpreter at the Imperial Court, Shung was one of the most influential Chinese living in the colony. The workers wanted Shung's advice in a delicate matter. Their boss, the German plantation owner Richard Deeken, had complained that cash money and vegetables had been stolen on his two-thousand-acre cacao plantation in Tapatapao, a few miles south of the capital Apia. When the thefts remained unresolved, Deeken had decided to punish his Chinese workers by cutting their wages. Did Deeken have the right to do so, the outraged workers demanded to know from Shung. Unsure himself, Shung in turn had asked his employer Governor Wilhelm Solf who replied that the laborers could complain in the German Imperial Court. But before Shung could pass on Solf's suggestion, the workers decided to take matters in their own hands and composed a letter of complaint against Deeken, accusing him not only of withholding their wages, but also of repeatedly humiliating and beating them. In a gesture of social deference, they had then asked their Chinese overseer Ah Tsung to forward their letter to the Court.

In the letter, the workers defended themselves against Deeken's accusations by pointing out that "after a good hard day's work we feel more inclined to lay down and have a good rest instead of roaming about at night to steal things from our own master's house."<sup>1</sup> When Deeken found out that his overseer had assisted the workers' protest, he set out to punish Tsung, probably because he could not imagine his own workers to be

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<sup>1</sup> Solf to District Judge, Apr. 10, 1904, ANZ Wellington, SAMOA-BMO Series 4, Box 73, T40/1904, Vol. 1, p. 3.

savvy and courageous enough to file a complaint on their own. Past midnight on April 28, four Chinese laborers carried Tsung on a stretcher to the colonial administration building in Apia. There, Imperial Doctor Dr. Julius Schwesinger confirmed that Tsung had been severely whipped and had suffered heavy injuries in his face and on his arms. As court investigations revealed, Deeken had hit Tsung with a “dangerous tool”—a leather whip—and “in blind anger” had tried to hit him “wherever he could.” Tsung eventually recovered from his life-threatening wounds. In June 1904, the Imperial Court sentenced Deeken to four months in jail for physically abusing his overseer.<sup>2</sup>

Among other things, Deeken’s trial revealed the realities of plantation life in colonial Samoa—a world marked by broken contracts, physical violence, and organized resistance by Chinese workers. Relying on their close personal links, Chinese workers in German Samoa used an underground communication line that stretched from Deeken’s plantation all the way to the Governor’s kitchen. Chinese workers shared information and organized collective action across different workscapes. By making public what should have remained secret, Tsung and his fellow Chinese workers had, indeed, challenged the colonial order of things. And in the end, the workers succeeded in bringing Deeken’s abuses to light, paving the way for future resistance against violent plantation owners.

As plantations remade the lives of thousands of Samoans, Melanesians, and Chinese, this diverse group of workers carved out precarious livelihoods in the new world of copra in which they found themselves. Since work discipline on plantations was harsh, workers resisted the heavy demands on their bodies through a whole arsenal of behaviors, ranging from keeping crops for themselves and appeals to the state to maroonage and violent attacks on overseers. Resistance against colonial subjection turned workers in

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<sup>2</sup> “Urteil gegen Richard Deeken,” June 16, 1904, BArch R 1001/2320, p. 139.

Samoa into subjects of their own lives and allowed them to forge bonds of solidarity beyond the spatial, social, and racial boundaries maintained by the colonial regimes.

## **THE PEOPLE TRADE TO SAMOA**

As we have seen, Samoans continued subsistence agriculture in the face of increasing outside pressure on their lands and labor. Under its paternalist veneer, Governor Solf's salvage colonialism was an acknowledgment that the economic, political, and military strength of the colonized Samoans made it impossible to force them to work. As a consequence, plantation owners had to turn elsewhere for their labor supply. In the 1860s, Godeffroy had built its trading empire in the South Pacific by recruiting laborers mostly from the Gilbert Islands (part of Kiribati), and, by the late 1870s, also from the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) and the Solomon Islands.<sup>3</sup> Located between Samoa and the Godeffroy trading stations in the Marshall Islands, the Gilbert Islands offered an ideal recruiting pool for company ships on their way back to Apia. More importantly, regular and severe droughts on these low-lying coral atolls forced their inhabitants to seek alternative means for survival, including contract labor in Samoa, Fiji, and Tahiti.<sup>4</sup> Unlike other Pacific Islander contract laborers at the time, most Gilbert Islanders went to Samoa in family groups, which made them even more attractive to Godeffroy because women and children were better at picking and weeding and received lower wages.<sup>5</sup> By 1885, a

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<sup>3</sup> The first 81 Gilbertese Islanders were recruited—or rather taken by force and deception—in 1867. Munro/Firth, “Samoan Plantations,” 102f.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 103ff.

<sup>5</sup> By the late 1870s, men received \$2 per month, often payable in tobacco, plus rations, while women and children made \$1. *Ibid.*, 123 n18.

total of nearly 5,000 Pacific Islanders—almost half from the Gilbert Islands—had been recruited to Samoa, most of them by the DHPG.<sup>6</sup>

Beginning in the early 1880s, the DHPG sought to diversify its labor pool and began recruiting laborers in Melanesia, especially in New Guinea, the New Hebrides, and the Solomon Islands. Living in a similar tropical environment, Melanesian men had the skills and experience necessary for plantation labor in Samoa. On these islands, however, the DHPG faced serious competition from recruiting vessels bound for Queensland and Fiji. Seen from Apia, Melanesian workers were creatures of the DHPG, but, in reality, Samoa was only one of many destinations for Pacific Islanders looking for work at the time. Besides, recruiting Melanesian workers involved additional costs. Not only were so-called “beach payments” needed to convince local chiefs and relatives to allow recruits to leave their islands, but nearly all were single men as opposed to the Gilbert Islanders whose women and children provided cheaper labor.<sup>7</sup> After 1889, the year when the tridominium introduced a greater degree of political stability on the islands, imports of laborers from Melanesia increased further.<sup>8</sup> Between 1885 and 1913, the DHPG recruited a total of 5,746 laborers from German New Guinea to Samoa.<sup>9</sup> As copra prices continued to rise in the years after German annexation in 1900, more and more

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<sup>6</sup> Of the total 4,857 workers, 2,250 were from the Gilbert Islands (46%), 1,201 from the New Hebrides (25%), 693 from New Britain and New Ireland (14%), 618 from the Solomon Islands (13%), and 95 from the Caroline Islands (2%). Stübel to Bismarck, Jan. 27, 1886, BArch R 1001/2316.

<sup>7</sup> Munro/Firth, “Samoan Plantations,” 114f.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the origins of labor recruitment before 1900, see Firth, “German Recruitment,” 24-84.

<sup>9</sup> Hahl to Imperial Colonial Office, Nov. 16, 1913, BArch R 1001/2313.

Melanesian workers arrived in Samoa.<sup>10</sup> Since these recruiting trips from New Guinea to Samoa were long (nearly 3,000 miles) and arduous, an average one out of seven recruits passed away *en route*.<sup>11</sup>

The DHPG maintained its exclusive access to laborers from Melanesia into the years of formal German rule—a crucial basis for its business success.<sup>12</sup> Other plantation owners, especially newcomers with little seed capital, quickly took offense at this competitive advantage for the biggest economic player in German Samoa. Richard Deeken, one of the newly arrived adventure capitalists mentioned at the opening of the chapter, risked a direct confrontation with Governor Solf over the issue of labor supply. To circumvent the labor monopoly of the DHPG, smallholders led by Deeken pushed the colonial government to recruit contract laborers from China.<sup>13</sup> Earlier regulations passed by Samoan leaders and Euro-American diplomats in the 1880s had explicitly prohibited the recruitment of Chinese workers. With its labor monopoly in Melanesia, the dominant DHPG opposed the import of Chinese workers by its smaller competitors. In the end, however, the new settlers prevailed. After months of difficult negotiations between a German agent and local authorities in Shantou, the first transport of three hundred Chinese contract workers arrived in Apia in April 1903. Since Chinese laws prohibited

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<sup>10</sup> Between 1900 and 1913, the average price of Pacific copra in Europe almost doubled. Firth, “German Recruitment,” 135.

<sup>11</sup> Estimate based on reports in “Kontrolle über die melanesischen Kontraktarbeiter,” NAS, IDO 4 F2 II 4, Vol. 1.

<sup>12</sup> During the years of German rule in Samoa, the DHPG paid out an average dividend of 21%. Firth, “German Recruitment,” 242.

<sup>13</sup> For a succinct summary of the debates about importing Chinese workers to German Samoa, see Firth, “Governors versus Settlers,” 155-179.

the emigration of contract laborers, the Chinese recruits signed their labor contracts only after they had boarded the steamer in Hong Kong.<sup>14</sup>

In German Samoa, the Chinese workers took up a number of jobs. Most worked on plantations cutting copra, overseeing fellow workers, and cooking. Others worked in domestic service or helped the colonial administration build roads and docks. A handful of the new arrivals from China worked as traders, bakers, tailors, and box-makers. From the beginning, Euro-American traders feared competition by their Chinese counterparts and called on the administration to withdraw their licenses—with little success.<sup>15</sup>

Between 1905 and 1913, six additional transports brought a total of almost 4,000 Chinese workers to Samoa.<sup>16</sup> Contract workers had to spend the three-week journey from mainland China to Samoa on bunk beds in the hot and stuffy holds of the ships.<sup>17</sup>

Chinese labor migrants, most of them young men, had a long and complex history of movement and settlement throughout the Pacific world, dating back to at least the sixteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Tens of thousands of Chinese men worked on plantations in the Dutch East Indies, Malaya, Queensland, Hawai'i, and as far as the Caribbean, enduring the hardships of exhausting work for little pay and even less legal protection.<sup>19</sup> With their

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<sup>14</sup> Report by Wandres, May 20, 1903, BArch R 1001/2319.

<sup>15</sup> Moors to Solf, *Samoanische Zeitung*, Apr. 4, 1903, BArch R 1001/2319.

<sup>16</sup> Tom, *Chinese in Western Samoa*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-37.

<sup>18</sup> Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008); and Ching-Hwang Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins: China's Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch'ing Period, 1851-1911* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> Walton Look Lai, "Asian Contract and Free Migrations to the Americas," in: *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives*, edited by David Eltis (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 229-58.



meager earnings, workers helped support their families back home in China. The Chinese workers who had filed a complaint against Deeken in 1904 had stressed family remittances as one of their main motivations to come to Samoa: “We are very poor and have come all the way from China to earn a little money for the maintenance of our aged parents and relatives in China who are exceedingly poor.”<sup>20</sup> Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, Chinese labor migration to Samoa constituted a rather small yet consequential episode in this global story.<sup>21</sup> Resilient and enterprising, the first generation of Chinese workers who stayed on the islands laid the foundations of a dynamic Chinese-Samoan community still present today.<sup>22</sup>

As in other colonial settings, racialized hierarchies of labor shaped recruitment practices and the treatment of laborers on Samoan plantations. While Melanesians did most of the unskilled, hard physical labor, some Chinese recruits also performed skilled labor tasks, like tapping rubber trees, and worked as domestic servants for Euro-American traders and colonial officials.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to Samoans and other Pacific Islanders, Chinese workers were generally portrayed as obedient, experienced, and hard-working plantation workers. Some German planters even had plans to produce a more efficient workforce by racial mixing, preferably between Samoans and Javanese.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Solf to District Judge, Apr. 10, 1904, ANZ, SAMOA-BMO Series 4, Box 73, T40/1904, Vol. 1, p. 3f.

<sup>21</sup> Adam McKeown’s work has been crucial in embedding Chinese migration into global history. See his *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), esp. chapter 2; and his more recent synthesis, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Liua’ana, “Dragons in Little Paradise,” 29-48; A.S. Noa Siaoisi, “Catching the Dragon’s Tail: The Impact of the Chinese in Samoa” (M.A. Thesis, University of Canterbury, NZ, 2010); Tom, *Chinese in Western Samoa*.

<sup>23</sup> Wareham, *Race and Realpolitik*, 111.

<sup>24</sup> Erich Langen, “Deutsch-Samoa,” *Jahrbuch über die deutschen Kolonien*, Vol. 5 (1912): 219.

Plantation owners and colonial officials used racial stereotypes to divide workers and make them more productive, but their identities remained in flux. If the migrants on Samoan plantations came to see themselves more and more as New Guineans, Solomon Islanders, and Chinese, they also forged affective ties with fellow workers.

As the labor demands of plantation owners brought workers from different parts of the Pacific world to colonial Samoa, a diverse community emerged on the islands. At the close of the nineteenth century, German Samoa's capital, Apia, was a small settlement of a few hundred souls. John La Farge, an American painter who visited Samoa in fall 1890 together with Henry Adams, described Apia as “an orderly little place strung along what might be called a street or two, the main of which is on the beach, and goes by that name. There are stores, a few hotels and drinking places, warehouses and residences of the consuls [...] Further back and right and left all is Samoan and native.”<sup>25</sup> Less than two decades later, the *Cyclopedia of Samoa* captured the global origins of the people living in the Samoan capital in hyperbolic fashion: “And surely there never was a spot on the face of the globe which in proportion to its population had so many nationalities represented in it as Apia, the capital of Samoa. Germans, Britishers, Americans, Frenchmen, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, Chinese are all represented.”<sup>26</sup>

And yet, this listing of mostly Euro-American residents of Apia completely ignored the even larger number of Pacific Islanders who had come to Samoa in the preceding decades. By 1907, German Samoa was home to almost 1,500 Pacific Islanders

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<sup>25</sup> John La Farge, *Reminiscences of the South Seas* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1912), 97.

<sup>26</sup> N.A., *The Cyclopedia of Samoa, Tonga, Tahiti, and the Cook Islands* (Papakura, NZ: R. McMillan, [1907] 1983), 3. In addition to the 258 Germans, 106 British, 35 Americans, and several other Europeans, there were around 815 “half-casts” and more than 33,000 Samoans in German Samoa in 1906. Wareham, *Race and Realpolitik*, 177.

of whom 886 were Melanesian contract laborers for the DHPG and 583 free settlers, including 185 Tongans, 167 Niueans, and 65 Solomon Islanders.<sup>27</sup> The roughly one thousand workers from China alone were outnumbering the Euro-American settlers in Samoa by far.<sup>28</sup> On the eve of World War One, no fewer than 12,500 Pacific Islanders and 3,800 Chinese had, at one point, worked as contract laborers in Samoa.<sup>29</sup> The people living in turn-of-the-century Samoa, while certainly global in their origins, found themselves in radically unequal circumstances.

## **THE WORLD COPRA MADE**

Cash crop agriculture radically transformed the natural environment of Samoa. Coconut trees, which had been growing in uncontrolled fashion in Samoa for centuries, were replanted in straight lines to control workers and measure their work progress. Samoans usually planted coconut trees twenty to twenty-six feet from one another, while on foreign-owned plantations the average distance between trees was increased to thirty-three feet.<sup>30</sup> Plantation owners also introduced clear divisions both among different plantation lands and within them, according to the different uses to which they were put. A map of the largest DHPG plantation in Mulifanua 25 miles west of Apia, for instance, listed five distinct categories of plantation lands: first, ripe palm trees; second, not-yet-ripe palm trees; third, palm trees and cotton; fourth, cotton; and, fifth, a mixed category

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<sup>27</sup> Hermann Hiery, "Die deutsche Verwaltung Samoas 1900-1914," in Hermann Hiery, ed., *Die Deutsche Südsee 1884-1914: Ein Handbuch* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001), 670f.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 672.

<sup>29</sup> Munro/Firth, "Samoa Plantations," 101.

<sup>30</sup> Krämer, *Samoa-Inseln*, 138.

including provisions, bananas, and sheds.<sup>31</sup> Every parcel of land was carefully classified into one of these categories and numbered from 1 to 115. A system of pathways bounded and linked these different categories of land in straight and parallel lines. The resulting geometrical system of lands with different degrees of exploitation provided not only a much-needed grid of intelligibility for plantation managers, but also allowed for better control of the workers who were tasked with making the land useful.

[Figure 1: Map of DHPG plantations in Mulifanua]<sup>32</sup>

[Figure 2: Photograph of Mulifanua plantation showing straight lines of trees]<sup>33</sup>

Despite such maps, the ability of overseers to exert visual control over their workers was not evenly distributed across plantations lands. Various factors determined the limits of their visual regime of power: the thickness of the vegetation, the steepness of the hills, the accessibility on roads and paths, and the proximity to villages and other plantations. Workers used their superior knowledge of these environments to escape the hardships of plantation discipline.

Since coconut trees took more than six years to mature, only a small percentage of the substantial plantation lands, which the DHPG had amassed over the decades, were under cultivation at any time. In 1893, the DHPG owned a total of 6,900 acres of coconut trees, of which 4,450 acres (65%) were in full cultivation, yielding about 2,100 tons of

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<sup>31</sup> “Mulifanua-Plantungen,” table no. 5, *Ländereien und Pflanzungen der Deutschen Handels- und Plantagengesellschaft der Südseeinseln zu Hamburg in Samoa*, Commerzbibliothek Hamburg.

<sup>32</sup> Copyrights for this and all subsequent photographs and maps still need to be secured.

<sup>33</sup> *Cyclopedia of Samoa*, 80.

copra ready for export.<sup>34</sup> One acre of good plantation land could yield more than half a ton of copra per year, with one worker cultivating around five acres.<sup>35</sup> Managers were ever hopeful of expanding the areas under cultivation. For workers, plantation areas that appeared empty on maps meant full days of planting, nourishing, and weeding. As the DHPG plantations expanded at the turn of the century, an ever bigger labor force was needed to turn wild strips of coconut trees into ripe and marketable tons of dried copra.

Life on a plantation alternated between back-breaking work and soul-crushing boredom. A usual day on a copra plantation began before sunrise around 6 a.m. Workers were woken either by overseers or by a signal that had to be answered from the workers' barracks.<sup>36</sup> After putting on their clothes, workers lined up on a parade ground in front of their barracks to be physically examined by the plantation doctor (looking especially for wounds on legs and feet) and were then assigned their daily labor tasks by the plantation manager.<sup>37</sup> Workers toiled under a searing sun from early morning until the hour-long lunch break at noon. In the hottest summer months from December to February, temperatures could reach more than 100°F with humidity levels of up to 95%. After lunch, workers went back to cutting copra from 1 p.m., when the South Pacific sun was most intense, until quitting time around 5:30 p.m. Half-an-hour later, dinner was served, looking much the same as lunch.<sup>38</sup> Remembering his daily work schedule in the years

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<sup>34</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 89.

<sup>35</sup> Reinecke, *Samoa*, 206; Schmack, *Godeffroy & Sohn*, 280.

<sup>36</sup> Krause/Marggraff to SSG, Sept. 19, 1904, BArch R 1001/2492, p. 159.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Each Chinese worker was guaranteed a daily supply of 32 ounces of rice, 10 ounces of salted fish or meat, and 10 ounces of vegetables. "Chinesische Angelegenheiten," *Samoaianische Zeitung*, May 9, 1903, BArch R 1001/2319, p. 161. Solf increased these minimum provisions in 1905 and again in 1906.

before World War I, Mala Pasi Tavita from New Britain confirmed the basic outline of what was expected of the Chinese workers. Work, according to Tavita, began at sunrise and lasted until 5 p.m. with a one-hour lunch break at noon.<sup>39</sup>

According to oral testimonies, Melanesian workers on DHPG plantations received sufficient food rations, including fresh and tinned beef, rice, local produce such as taro, yams, and bananas, and along with tea, sugar, and tobacco.<sup>40</sup> One worker even recalled the amount of food wasted after dinner: “Generally the boys were not great eaters and when we sat down for an evening meal we drank a lot of tea but ate only a small amount of food. Leftovers were given to the pigs.”<sup>41</sup> According to government regulations, Chinese workers received rice together with five ounces of slated or dried fish and five ounces of conserved Chinese vegetables or fresh local vegetables.<sup>42</sup> Although Melanesian and Chinese plantation workers had enough food to eat, they—in stark contrast to Samoan workers—still depended on their employers to ensure their survival. This dependency on food, exacerbated by the monopoly of the plantation stores, gave plantation owners additional leeway in their interactions with workers.

Workers cleared underbrush, cut copra, and carried loads of harvested coconuts every day of the week except Sunday. Some particularly motivated workers used their time off-contract to work for other employers, often illegally, receiving one Reichsmark

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<sup>39</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 27.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>42</sup> “Chinesische Angelegenheiten.” By comparison, Chinese workers on Peruvian cotton plantations in the 1870s received 1.5 lbs. rice a day. Vincent C. Peloso, *Peasants on Plantations: Subaltern Strategies of Labor and Resistance in the Pisco Valley, Peru* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 23.

for half a day.<sup>43</sup> To curtail this practice, the DHPG ran a series of ads in the *Samoanische Zeitung* that warned other employers to hire the company's Melanesian workers without explicit permission.<sup>44</sup> According to government regulations on the Chinese workers, Sundays ought to be free from plantation work and reserved solely for the maintenance of buildings (and other time-sensitive tasks) as well as for the cultivation of the workers' own vegetable plots. In addition to Sundays, four traditional Chinese holidays, such as Chinese New Year's Day, were also declared work-free.<sup>45</sup> The original Chinese labor contract limited the daily working hours to a maximum of ten hours with a pay of six U.S. dollars or ten German Reichsmark per month. At the end of their contracts, workers were guaranteed free passage back to China. A wage book was required to list the wages of each worker, potential reductions as a result of penalties, and other relevant information concerning payment. In the early 1900s, Chinese workers on DHPG plantations earned roughly 1.90 Reichsmark (47c) a day.<sup>46</sup> Workers received their pay in two monthly installments, one on the second and the other on the last Sunday of each month.<sup>47</sup>

Many migrant workers took time to get used to plantation life. As on other cash crop plantations at the time, control over the timing of work emerged as a central bone of contention. Melanesian workers recalled that plantation work was divided into several work gangs headed by a "boss boy." This boss boy was in charge of keeping a steady eye

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<sup>43</sup> Müller to Imperial Court, Apr. 20, 1905, NAS, IDC-3 F2 III 2b Vol. 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, Feb. 1, 1902.

<sup>45</sup> "Chinesische Angelegenheiten."

<sup>46</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 188.

<sup>47</sup> "Zur Chinesen-Einfuhr," *Samoanische Zeitung*, May 9, 1903, BArch R 1001/2319, p. 159.

on the workers to prevent unnecessary loafing during work hours. A white overseer or Samoan policeman would check on the workers' progress in regular intervals, usually every hour.<sup>48</sup> Among Chinese workers, several overseers were selected to ensure production continued smoothly. These so-called *tandyls* were often fluent in Cantonese and used Samoan Plantation Pidgin—a simplified form of Pidgin English sprinkled with words from New Guinean languages, Samoan, and German—to communicate with their white superiors. While most of the Melanesian and Chinese overseers were selected on the basis of their language and leadership skills, some vied for these positions to escape the physically more demanding stoop labor. Time discipline on plantations even affected the realm of language. Melanesian workers conversant in Samoan Plantation Pidgin coined a new word—*belo*—to describe the bell that announced the noontime break on plantations.<sup>49</sup> This aural sign introduced a new *zeitgeber* (literally, “time-giver”) into workers' lives, providing a stimulus to setting their biological clocks according to the needs of the plantation schedule.<sup>50</sup>

At the forefront of the global commodification of labor, plantation workers in colonial Samoa did not differentiate between work and non-work. Under constant supervision by overseers and managers, workers were gradually socialized into a time-discipline geared towards the incessant movement of their bodies—by physical force, if

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<sup>48</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 27.

<sup>49</sup> On the large DHPG plantations in Vaialele, Vaitele, and Mulifanua, a variant of Pidgin English, known as Samoan Plantation Pidgin emerged during the 1880s. While DHPG workers recruited from Melanesia were the principal speakers of Samoan Plantation Pidgin, their white and mixed-race employers, white labor recruiters, as well as Samoans living close to the plantations also used this new language. Chinese workers did not use Samoan Plantation Pidgin, but a form of Samoan Pidgin. Peter Mühlhäusler, “Samoan Plantation Pidgin English and the Origins of New Guinea Pidgin: An Introduction,” *The Journal of Pacific History* 11, no. 2 (1976): 122f.; Mühlhäusler, “Samoan Plantation Pidgin English” (1978): 75.

<sup>50</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 68.



necessary. Since plantation owners not only owned land, but also hired the physical energy of their workers, they tried to get as much out of them as possible. In the eyes of a plantation owner, every minute lost in idleness or unfocused work was money wasted. In response, workers developed intimate and often idiosyncratic ways of engaging with their natural surroundings.

Ti'a Likou, a labor recruit from New Britain who had arrived in Samoa around 1910, was one of many plantation workers assigned to the task of collecting fallen coconuts and weeding young trees.<sup>51</sup> Mature coconuts—known to Samoans as *popo*—at some point became too heavy for the branches to carry them and dropped down from the crowns. One coconut tree carried around sixty coconuts.<sup>52</sup> Workers, like Likou, were sent to roam through the plantation to look for these fallen coconuts and collect them. When they found a coconut on the ground, workers bent down to the ground, picked the fallen fruit up with a swift and coordinated movement of arm and hand, and repeated this movement over and over again. Experienced workers tried to avoid the physical pain of sustained stoop labor and, instead, used their bush knives to pierce the nuts, pick them up from the ground, and toss them into baskets. Some workers carried their own baskets on the back, while others preferred the help of mules which transported two sheet iron baskets on either side of their backs.<sup>53</sup> Full baskets were initially unloaded simply on the sides of the rectangular paths crisscrossing the plantations.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 85.

<sup>53</sup> In 1907, the DHPG plantation in Mulifanua employed 40 horses and 120 donkeys to help workers with transporting copra. *Cyclopedia of Samoa*, 82.

<sup>54</sup> Rose to Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Apr. 12, 1898, BArch R 1001/2540; DHPG Business Report, 1902-03, BArch R 1001/6522, p. 710.

In a next step, so-called “ox boys” picked the harvested nuts up in light carts drawn by oxen and brought them to the station and copra kilns for further processing. At the kilns, the young male workers split up the nuts with axes, before predominantly female and older male workers then cut out the meat from the husk. Finally, the coconut meat found its way into the kiln where it was dried for 24 to 36 hours. Coconut husks were used to fire the kilns.<sup>55</sup> Through extended exposure to hot air, the copra shrank, sometimes up to 40 per cent. Before being loaded onto ships for export, the copra was usually cooled down in a storage shed and then collected in bags.<sup>56</sup> Even the ashes left over from the kilns were afterwards re-used as fertilizer on the plantations.<sup>57</sup>

[Figure 3: Machine in the Garden – Photograph of copra kiln]<sup>58</sup>

The whole process even taxed the workers’ noses since the odor of dried copra was “extremely disagreeable and penetrating.”<sup>59</sup>

If collecting fallen coconuts exerted a heavy toll on workers, weeding young coconut trees did even more so. As the DHPG map indicated, copra plantations in colonial Samoa did include other crops (such as cotton, cocoa, or rubber), but grew increasingly monocultural as global demand for copra began to soar in the years around

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<sup>55</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 85.

<sup>56</sup> Reinecke, *Samoa*, 204f.; Kenneth B. Cumberland, “Plantation Agriculture,” in: *Western Samoa: Land, Life, and Agriculture in Tropical Polynesia*, edited by James W. Fox, and Kenneth B. Cumberland (Christchurch, NZ: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1962), 251.

<sup>57</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 85.

<sup>58</sup> Fox/Cumberland, *Western Samoa*, 224.

<sup>59</sup> Mary Poyer Kniskern, *Life in Samoa from 1915 to 1919*, 10.

1900. And with crop monoculture came the imperative to protect the most valuable crop—the coconut—from natural competition by other plants and insects. As plantation managers turned coconut trees into cash crops, other plants transformed into weeds, and insects, which fed off coconut trees, into pests. A sturdy and fast-growing plant with a telltale name posed a particular threat to the efficient management of copra plantations: the “touch-me-not” (*mimosa pudica*). The touch-me-not not only concealed fallen coconuts, but also painfully stung into human and animal feet. Concerned about the plant’s spread, plantation owners introduced buffalo grass (*monerma*) from North America, which successfully pushed the touch-me-nots aside. Since cattle did only graze on young touch-me-nots, plantations managers decided to cut older plants and allow cattle to take care of the rest. Soon, however, the buffalo grass threatened to replace the touch-me-nots it was meant to contain by depriving the soil of humidity, and had, in turn, to be checked by fires.<sup>60</sup> Alongside the cattle which was allowed to graze freely and controlled fires, workers had to help protect coconut trees from this new threat.<sup>61</sup> Hence, Likou, like many other plantation workers, again bent low to cut smaller bushes and ferns around coconut trees and ensure their efficient growth into cash crops. As the hands who picked up fallen coconuts and cut weeds around trees, workers suffered the physical toll of export-oriented plantation agriculture in colonial Samoa. Susceptible to invasive species like the buffalo grass and locusts, plantation monoculture changed the Samoan environment forever.

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<sup>60</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 185.

<sup>61</sup> Franco, *Samoa Perceptions of Work*, 148; Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 301.

## ISLANDS OF LABOR

If producing copra for export was the primary goal of Samoan plantations, their impact on the people working on them went far beyond. Since workdays were long and only Sundays were off, workers spent most of their waking hours at work on plantations, with little distraction for their bodies and souls. Migrant workers from Melanesia and China also lived on the plantations they worked on, making work and leisure almost indistinguishable. Samoans, by contrast, retained the comfort and familiarity of their homes and followed a much more flexible work schedule.

Workers were confined physically within the limits of the plantation, both day and night. They were not allowed to move around or leave the plantation at will. During field work, workers were under constant surveillance by overseers, their fellow workers (who sometimes reported other workers), and by plantation owners themselves. In the eyes of the largest employer of plantation laborers, Chinese workers quickly adapted to this coercive work environment. In a business report from 1907, the DHPG managers in Samoa reported their “general satisfaction” with the newly-arrived workers from China, “after overseers have now gotten sufficiently used to their treatment.”<sup>62</sup> In a remarkable inversion of colonial realities, the DHPG managers maintained that plantation overseers, rather than the workers themselves, had to go through a process of “seasoning” to get adjusted to their new workplace and its harsh discipline. This brief sentence offered a glimpse into the conflicts that dominated life on copra plantations in Samoa. It foregrounded the initial challenges in the “proper” management of the Chinese labor force, rather than the serious challenges faced by those being managed. Chinese workers,

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<sup>62</sup> Business Report 1907, StAH, 621-1/14, p. 26.

the statement revealed, had to be “educated” into accepting the new constraints on their bodies, sometimes even by violence. In their attempt to displace this seasoning process from worker to overseer, the DHPG managers highlighted the conflict-ridden nature of “solving” the “labor problem” in colonial Samoa.

Surveillance and work discipline were harsh, particularly on the bigger plantations. In his first report to Berlin after the arrival of the Chinese in April 1903, Governor Solf already complained of “unfortunate misdemeanors in the treatment and provisioning of the Chinese” on the part of planters.<sup>63</sup> Chinese workers were also severely limited in their physical mobility beyond the plantation. Every Chinese laborer had to carry a badge with an identification number and a legitimation card anywhere he went.<sup>64</sup> They were not allowed to leave the plantation without the explicit consent of the plantation owner. If they wanted to go to Apia, they needed a special pass from the plantation boss. The legal contract, which most Chinese workers had agreed to in Shantou without knowing its full details, thus revealed its true face on the plantations in Samoa.<sup>65</sup> Colonial law reduced human beings with more than physical needs into mere hands satisfying the burgeoning needs of a cash crop economy. Getting as much labor power out of the worker while maintaining order was the principal aim of labor contracts. Hence, workers who refused to work were severely punished for breaching the contract. After lobbying from European and American merchants in German Samoa, Chinese

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<sup>63</sup> Solf to AA-KA, May 24, 1903, BArch R 1001/2319.

<sup>64</sup> Identification badges were common in other plantation economies at the time. On sugar plantations in Hawai’i, for example, workers had to wear so-called “bangos.” Takaki, *Pau Hana*, 54.

<sup>65</sup> Liua’ana, “Dragons in Little Paradise,” 32.

workers who wanted to stay on the islands after their contracts ended were not allowed to purchase land or engage in trade.<sup>66</sup> Some still decided to stay.

Most larger plantations in colonial Samoa were located far away from bigger settlements. In many ways, they formed islands within islands. Workers experienced the isolation of plantation life both physically and socially. In the rare instances when workers were allowed to leave the plantation, they immediately felt the sheer geographical distance that separated them from the outside world. The three main plantations of the DHPG on Upolu were Vaialele (four miles east of Apia), Vaitele (four miles west of Apia), and Mulifanua (25 miles west of Apia). Given the lack of well-maintained paths or roads, especially in the first years of German rule, Mulifanua and Vaitele were thus located at formidable distances from the commercial capital Apia. To reach the plantation in Mulifanua, for example, it took three to four hours by horse and, depending on weather conditions, up to six hours by boat.<sup>67</sup> The physical isolation of the plantations also heightened the sense of social isolation among workers. Beyond the plantation boss, his family, and his overseers, workers were on their own. As one Melanesian worker remembered, plantation life was exceedingly boring. For most, a normal day consisted of little else than working, eating, talking, and sleeping.<sup>68</sup>

Colonial officials were acutely aware of the dangers of social isolation on plantations. When the first 300 Chinese contract laborers arrived in April 1903, Governor Solf and recruiting agent Friedrich Wandres advised planters outside of Apia to take at

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<sup>66</sup> “Chinesische Angelegenheiten.”

<sup>67</sup> Reinecke, *Samoa*, 194. Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 86. *Mulifanua* literally means “land’s end” or “land’s bottom” in Samoan.

<sup>68</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 18.

least three laborers to prevent their running away to join their fellow countrymen.<sup>69</sup> Since some of the smaller plantation owners could afford only a few of the expensive new Chinese laborers, the Governor's advice was not always heeded. Although German colonial officials had helped organize the recruitment of additional workers from China, they had little influence over exactly which plantation owner took how many laborers. Initial orders were sometimes disregarded and some of the remaining workers from a transport had to be distributed as well.<sup>70</sup> As a consequence, a few Chinese workers ended up alone or virtually alone on smaller plantations. They compensated their social isolation by holding on to institutions and practices from back home: mutual benefit societies, smoking opium, and gambling.

Melanesian workers, who had been settling in Samoa for decades, initially shared a sense of social isolation with Chinese workers. Over the years, however, labor recruits from the same islands of origin forged lasting bonds during their time in Samoa. Similar language and customs helped newly arrived workers, known as *nubois*, to rebuild social ties severed by migration and hardship. Labor migration of able-bodied men had direct consequences for Melanesian subsistence economies, as women and children were forced to increase their own labor contribution. Not all of the Melanesian men who came to Samoa were alone, however. According to Ti'a Likou, a worker from New Britain, "quite a few Melanesian women" were working on Samoan plantations in 1910.<sup>71</sup> Exact

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<sup>69</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, May 2, 1903, BArch R 1001/2319.

<sup>70</sup> Some of these "surplus" laborers were contracted to the colonial government itself, mainly for domestic service, office work, and construction (see Chapters 4 and 5).

<sup>71</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 15.

numbers were not collected, but roughly one in four Melanesian recruits was female.<sup>72</sup> As wives of the Melanesian labor recruits, they joined their husbands in cutting, and especially, in preparing copra.<sup>73</sup> They soon earned a reputation for their skills and speed—and their lower wages.<sup>74</sup> In the early 1900s, Melanesian workers on DHPG plantations earned roughly 1.35 Reichsmark (34c) a day.<sup>75</sup> To prevent conflict, plantation owners erected separate open tin-roofed barracks with concrete floors and timber walls for couples and simpler barracks for the overwhelming majority of single men.<sup>76</sup>

At the same time, the fact that most workers from Melanesia had signed contracts of three years posed considerable challenges to the formation of more permanent community life. While many Melanesian laborers returned to their home islands after their contracts ended, some extended their contracts and remained in Samoa. A few of these *olbois* married Samoan women, putting down the roots for a Melanesian-Polynesian community still present today. The overwhelming majority, however, returned to New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, or the New Hebrides after one or two contracts and offered useful advice for the next generation of labor recruits in their home islands.<sup>77</sup> By the mid-

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<sup>72</sup> Mühlhäusler, “Samoa Plantation Pidgin English” (1978): 80.

<sup>73</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 83.

<sup>74</sup> Firth, “German Recruitment,” 257.

<sup>75</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 187.

<sup>76</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 15.

<sup>77</sup> Overall, more than 6,000 New Guineans went to work in Samoa between 1879 and 1913. Mühlhäusler, “Samoa Plantation Pidgin English” (1976): 125. Between 1887 and 1912, 5,285 workers were recruited from the Bismarck Archipelago and the German Solomon Islands to work on DHPG plantations in Samoa. Firth, “German Recruitment,” 327.



1920s, only around 120 Melanesian *blakbois*, as they were called in Samoan Plantation Pidgin, remained in Samoa.<sup>78</sup>

Some of the returning Melanesian workers managed to amass a considerable fortune (mostly in the form of Western goods such as clothes, jewelry, knives, and watches), which they leveraged to climb the social ladder of their home societies. Their years as plantation workers in Samoa, especially their acquisition of Samoan Plantation Pidgin, conferred not only useful skills, but also social prestige on Melanesians who returned to their homes in New Ireland and elsewhere.<sup>79</sup> Many returning workers used their experiences in Samoa to rejoin the agricultural economies of their native islands. As early as the mid-1880s, the German Consul in Apia had defended the recruitment of workers for Samoa by suggesting that returning workers become the pioneers of plantation agriculture in their home islands.<sup>80</sup>

For some, isolation from their fellow workers was the price to be paid for lighter work. Servants who worked for plantation owners or colonial officials, for instance, generally had less demanding physical work, but, at the same time, were often also excluded from the social life of their peers on plantations. Tapusini Peni Maluana from Nissan Island, for instance, came to Samoa around 1909 and worked as a domestic servant in the home of the German manager of the DHPG plantation in Vaialele. Recalling his early days in the new workplace, Maluana noted that he missed the company of fellow Melanesians and local Samoans, which field workers, especially on large

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<sup>78</sup> Mühlhäusler, "Samoan Plantation Pidgin English" (1976): 123.

<sup>79</sup> Mühlhäusler, "Samoan Plantation Pidgin English" (1978): 109.

<sup>80</sup> Stübel to Bismarck, July 23, 1886, BArch R 1001/2316. Indeed, the first plantation in German New Guinea, started by a British trader in 1885, employed 150 North Solomon Islanders who had previously worked in German Samoa. Mühlhäusler, "Samoan Plantation Pidgin English" (1976): 125.

plantations, enjoyed.<sup>81</sup> Other Melanesians, who came to Samoa and worked as servants on plantations, had different experiences. Tui Sakila, for example, described his job as a messenger boy on a large plantation as “very tiring.”<sup>82</sup> As a messenger boy, he had to run from plantation house to the fields and back several times a day to deliver important—and sometimes less important—messages for his boss. Like Tapusini, Tui appreciated any opportunity to chat with friends and fellow workers on his way. But because speedy delivery of certain messages (for example, concerning changes in the work schedule) mattered a great deal on copra plantations, Tui and other messengers had little time to waste. Their world, too, was driven by the master’s clock.

As these cases of Chinese and Melanesian workers illustrate, the experience of social isolation depended on the size and location of the plantation as well as the type of work. To a certain degree, white settlers, plantation owners, and officials shared a sense of social isolation with the workers they employed. Both Euro-American and non-Samoan laborers were minorities in colonial Samoa and had travelled a long way from their families and homes in Europe, the United States, and the Pacific. But this is where the similarities ended. White Europeans and Americans in colonial Samoa had, by and large, come to the South Pacific voluntarily, while the contract laborers arrived under much more coercive circumstances. Most significantly, their common experience as workers added another layer to their sense of social isolation. As workers, most Chinese and Melanesians shared a more pronounced sense of alienation, not only as a consequence of being uprooted from their home societies, but also due to the difficult

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<sup>81</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 10.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

new work environments they found themselves in. For them, Upolu, Savai'i and Tutuila were, indeed, islands of labor.<sup>83</sup>

In this regard, Chinese and Melanesian workers were also quite different from most Samoans who were generally not geographically displaced and continued to maintain their long-standing community ties in the face of colonization. Since Samoans were not directly forced to work on foreign-owned plantations, they also remained relatively shielded from the worst excesses of work discipline directed at contract workers from elsewhere. Throughout the colonial period, Samoans continued to rely on their traditional subsistence base, which guaranteed the continuity of the larger contours of Samoan community life. By resisting the wholesale commodification of their labor power, Samoans managed to escape the harshest forms of discipline and punishment exacted on plantation workers from Melanesia and China.

When efforts to manage the labor force through spatial and temporal discipline failed, plantation owners resorted to more aggressive methods. Workers who broke one of the many formal and informal regulations that governed life on the plantation could face serious consequences. Depending on the severity of the transgression, the spectrum of punishment stretched from monetary fines and imprisonment to flogging and the death penalty. Physical violence against workers on Samoan plantations was not uncommon, though less common than in other German colonies or in the Pacific colonies of other colonial powers.<sup>84</sup> As in other German colonies at the time, corporal punishment in

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<sup>83</sup> In colonial Hawai'i, too, "plantations made so little distinction between work site and home that managerial regulation reached into the private sphere." Gary Y. Okihiro, *Pineapple Culture: A History of the Tropical and Temperate Zones* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 142f.

<sup>84</sup> According to a 1883 health report by Donald Ross, a British surgeon in Apia, Samoan workers were better cared for than those in Fiji or Queensland. Stübel to Bismarck, Jan. 27, 1886, BArch R 1001/2316.

Samoa helped colonial authorities to routinize their precarious claim to power.<sup>85</sup> Yet in German Samoa, it was rarely the colonial authorities that resorted to corporal punishment, but rather plantation owners and their overseers themselves. As the largest employer in German Samoa, the DHPG even ran its own jail in Vaitele where workers were interned and, in some cases, punished with forced labor.<sup>86</sup>

Flogging was the most widespread form of physical punishment for workers who violated plantation regulations. Plantation owners generally cited running away, laziness, disobedience, insulting behavior, and not bowing low to masters as reasons for the flogging of their Chinese workers.<sup>87</sup> Plantation owners were all too aware of the symbolic power of flogging as the terror of physical pain and public humiliation of one worker disciplined many others.<sup>88</sup> Physical violence on Samoan plantations even entered the linguistic realm. In Samoan Plantation Pidgin, the verb “to kill” meant “to hit,” as in “white man he kill a plenty” (“the white man gave me a good beating”).<sup>89</sup> From the receiving end of plantations workers, the act of hitting seemed to have been virtually

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On working conditions in Queensland, see Adrian Graves, *Cane and Labour: The Political Economy of the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1862-1906* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993).

<sup>85</sup> Trutz von Trotha, “‘One for Kaiser’: Beobachtungen zur politischen Soziologie der Prügelstrafe am Beispiel des ‘Schutzgebietes Togo’,” in: *Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus in Afrika: Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Peter Sebald*, edited by Peter Heine, and Ulrich van der Heyden (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1995), 527. After a scandal, Governor Hahl outlawed the flogging of Chinese workers in German New Guinea in January 1903. Stewart Firth, *New Guinea Under the Germans* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 116; Andreas Steen, “Germany and the Chinese Coolie: Labor, Resistance, and the Struggle for Equality, 1884-1914,” in: *German Colonialism Revisited: African, Asian, and Oceanic Experiences*, edited by Nina Berman, Klaus Mühlhahn, and Patrice Nganang (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 147-60, here 149.

<sup>86</sup> Reinecke, *Samoa*, 198.

<sup>87</sup> Liua’ana, “Dragons in Little Paradise,” 32 n19.

<sup>88</sup> Firth, “German Recruitment,” 259.

<sup>89</sup> Solf’s diary, 1895, n.p. Cit. in Mühlhäusler, “Samoan Plantation Pidgin English” (1978): 72; Firth, “German Recruitment,” 259.

indistinguishable from the ultimate punishment of death. Other workers were subjected to solitary confinement. Many Chinese workers feared imprisonment most of all because of the well-known cruelty of Samoan police wardens.<sup>90</sup> Likewise, a Melanesian worker recounted this dreadful experience in an interview over a half-century later, describing solitary confinement as a common practice on plantations.<sup>91</sup> Usually, workers were confined in a small hut without light over night to numb their senses. As a form of punishment, solitary confinement amplified the stifling atmosphere of physical and social isolation that dominated plantation life more generally.

Monetary punishment in the form of fines represented the softer but no less coercive end of the spectrum of work discipline on Samoan plantations. Workers were fined for the smallest of violations against their work contracts, including coming late to work or working too slowly. Plantation owners used fines to counter the weapons of the weak wielded by workers who struggled to hold on to their humanity in an adverse environment. Since contract workers had only agreed to the coercive work environment in Samoa in return for wages and free passage, fines imposed by employers hit workers particularly hard. Some plantation owners punished workers who did not fulfill their quotas by adding labor tasks for Sundays.<sup>92</sup>

Plantation owners and colonial administrators were acutely aware of the disciplinary power of handing out fines to workers. In an article about the death sentence for the Chinese worker Jso Hoo, the *Samoanische Zeitung* in 1909 reminded its readers

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<sup>90</sup> Liua'ana, "Dragons in Little Paradise," 38.

<sup>91</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 10, 27.

<sup>92</sup> Harry J. Moors, "Theodore Weber," *Samoa Times*, Nov. 14, 1924.

that the Chinese workers feared fines more than corporal punishment or a jail sentence.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, the article went on to argue, only the ultimate physical punishment—the death penalty—could have a deterrent effect on the Chinese workers. Perceptions among the workers themselves were certainly quite different. If some workers might, indeed, have worried more about being fined than whipped, this preference was surely not a general rule, as the article claimed. In the eyes of employers, fines had the advantage of effectively withholding wages for already performed labor. And that was precisely why workers thought them unfair.

Violence, and the threat of violence, permeated plantation life. If plantation work can be understood as a form of physical torture through repetition, then plantation workers in colonial Samoa experienced their share, day after day, and year after year. The torture of everyday plantation routines represented only one part in a whole series of violent experiences that workers endured. These stretched from physical punishment in the form of whippings, beatings, and confinement, to the ultimate punishment: death. Whether through tuberculosis, accidents, or as the consequence of physical punishment, death came to plantation workers in many guises. Workers, however, were disciplined not only by the exercise of physical violence itself, but also by being made witnesses to spectacles of violence. Most plantation owners understood the power of enacting spectacles of violence, hoping to deter future resistance.

But ultimately, plantation managers had to strike a fine balance between the imperatives of profit maximization and social peace to ensure the smooth workings of their plantations. And it was this need for balancing exploitation with social order that opened up opportunities for workers to resist.

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<sup>93</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, July 3, 1909, R 1001/2338.

## **RESISTING PLANTATION DISCIPLINE**

While plantation owners had a vested interest in getting as much labor out of their workers as possible, workers attempted to carve out moments of freedom under this oppressive system. Some workers tried to resist the new and demanding work rhythm head-on and quickly found out that their bosses did not shirk from using violence to get their money's worth. Many others succumbed to the restrictive plantation rules on the surface, while resorting to other means of subversion under the radar of official control. Labor regulations on Samoan plantations proved easier to compose than enforce.

Resistance among plantation workers took many shapes and changed over time. Plantation workers relied on a wide array of practices to defy the demands of their employers and improve their living conditions. Among the most lasting forms of resistance was the workers' refusal to give up their cultural traditions in the face of a new and harsh environment. In fact, they developed entirely new forms of living and communicating, such as pidgin languages. Language was a central arena in the conflict between plantation owners and workers. Hence, the names given to these practices differed widely between workers and their bosses. What plantation owners called "theft," for instance, many workers simply understood as "taking" a fair share of their fruits of labor. Not only in name, Euro-American notions of private property clashed with the moral economy shared among the workers of the Pacific. As in other parts of the colonial world, a pragmatic sense of mutual solidarity emerged on copra plantations in Samoa. Examples for this growing sense of solidarity abound, both within racial groups and

increasingly without. Over time, plantations became important crucibles out of which interracial solidarity among workers emerged.

In early 1906, 400 Chinese workers banded together and sent a letter to the Chinese Embassy in Berlin, by way of Honolulu and Washington, to complain about their working conditions. In their petition, the workers wrote about the cruel treatment they faced on German plantations and asked for an official to be sent to Samoa to protect them.<sup>94</sup> Later that year, more than 60 Chinese workers on Deeken's plantation in Tapatapao struck in protest against a cruel overseer, while some Chinese workers even committed suicide.<sup>95</sup> Apparently, conditions for Chinese workers on Samoan plantations had not improved since Deeken's conviction in summer 1904.

Outraged at these and other abuses, the Chinese government sent a special commissioner to German Samoa to represent the Chinese workers. In March 1908, commissioner Lin Shu Fen arrived in Apia to investigate the work conditions on the islands.<sup>96</sup> Touring the plantations, Fen caused quite a stir among German plantation owners and colonial officials. At the end of his month-long visit, Fen confirmed the allegations made by the workers about their cruel treatment and sent a damning report back to China.<sup>97</sup> The following year, a second official, Lin Jun Chao, visited the plantations and reached similar conclusions. Lin recommended a series of reforms,

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<sup>94</sup> Steen, "Germany and the Chinese Coolie," 152.

<sup>95</sup> Firth, "German Recruitment," 261.

<sup>96</sup> German Consulate Fukien to RKA, May 3, 1907, BArch R 1001/2323.

<sup>97</sup> Report by Lin Shu Fen, enclosed to Rex to Bülow, July 20, 1908, BArch R 1001/2323.



including the abolition of flogging and identification badges, and called for better food for the workers.<sup>98</sup>

In contrast to their fellow workers from Melanesia and Micronesia, Chinese workers thus came to enjoy legal protection and political support from their home government. In May 1911, Chinese in German Samoa achieved legal status equal to Euro-American settlers.<sup>99</sup> And by 1913, the German colonial administration had met most of the Chinese calls for legal equality and better working conditions.<sup>100</sup> Starting in the 1890s, Chinese officials had implemented policies to protect overseas Chinese communities and attract migrants back to their homeland. These efforts by Qing officials intensified after the Republican revolution in 1911. German Samoa emerged as one of the test cases for Chinese nationalist agitation.<sup>101</sup> On May 28, 1912, Chinese consul Lin informed his U.S. colleague in Apia that China had become a republic and that the new national flag would be flown from the consulate starting June 1.<sup>102</sup> Political change at home, however, went beyond mere symbolism for the Chinese workers in German Samoa.

While the majority of Chinese workers at the time were technically “free” migrants who signed labor contracts upon arrival in Southeast Asia and other parts of the Pacific world, German plantation owners recruiting Chinese workers to Samoa could simply not afford this legal nicety. Together with the lack of a Sino-German treaty

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<sup>98</sup> Firth, “German Recruitment,” 264.

<sup>99</sup> AA to Chinese Legate Berlin, Sept. 13, 1911, BArch R 1001/2328.

<sup>100</sup> Schultz to RKA, Feb. 10, 1913, BArch R 1001/2328.

<sup>101</sup> Wareham, *Race and Realpolitik*, 119.

<sup>102</sup> Lin to Mitchell, May 28, 1912, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 77. As Lin did not fail to mention a year later, the United States officially recognized the new Chinese Republic on May 2, 1913.

regulating the emigration and employment of Chinese workers in German territories, this impression of ‘coolie labor’ fueled opposition by the Chinese government.<sup>103</sup> Combined with a desperate need for workers among new plantation owners, legal and political protection by their home government gave Chinese workers a powerful avenue for redress and generally made them less vulnerable to excessive punishment. As Melanesian workers later recalled, better legal protection directly translated into better living conditions for Chinese workers.<sup>104</sup>

In August 1914, New Zealand occupied German Samoa. For Chinese workers, the transfer of power from one empire to another did little to change the poor living conditions they confronted. For example, conflicts over withheld and reduced wages continued throughout the Great War. As in other areas, the new rulers from New Zealand maintained the German labor regulations.<sup>105</sup> Recruitment of new workers from China and Melanesia came to a halt during the war as German plantations were expropriated. Indeed, military governor Robert Logan’s main motive to repatriate Chinese plantation workers was to reduce the productivity and value of the former German plantations. Throughout the war, Melanesian plantation workers whose terms had expired were forced to stay in Samoa. They were needed to do laundry for the New Zealand soldiers, while the remaining Chinese workers cooked for them.<sup>106</sup>

Since the outbreak of the war, Euro-American plantation owners had put their Chinese workers on short rations for fear of a large-scale rebellion. Logan did nothing to

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<sup>103</sup> Firth, “Governors versus Settlers,” 168.

<sup>104</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 42.

<sup>105</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 313f.

<sup>106</sup> Unnamed soldier’s letter, ANZ, War Archives, Samoan Expeditionary Force, Series 210/3/12.

change that.<sup>107</sup> In late August 1914, hundreds of Chinese workers left their plantations and came to Apia to protest against the reduced rice rations.<sup>108</sup> Following Logan's orders, Samoan policemen set out to quell the rebellion and started clubbing the Chinese workers. According to a New Zealand soldier who witnessed the brutal suppression of the Chinese rebellion, the Samoan policemen "used their batons freely and blood flowed."<sup>109</sup> Several Chinese were beaten up so severely that they had to be treated in the hospital. One of them later died of his injuries.<sup>110</sup> The following May, Logan issued a harsh ordinance which punished the exclusively Chinese crime of "loafing" with a fine of up to thirty shillings (\$7.50).<sup>111</sup> Influenced by widespread fears of the "yellow peril," Logan soon thereafter began sending Chinese workers back home. Between 1914 and 1920, over 1,200 Chinese workers returned to China without being replaced.<sup>112</sup>

The mass repatriation of Chinese and also Melanesian workers combined with a horrific flu epidemic created a large-scale labor shortage on Samoan plantations. Copra production peaked in 1917, but then nose-dived as workers left the islands.<sup>113</sup> At war's end, a copra boom intensified the labor shortage. Beginning in August 1920, the New Zealand administration reversed its policy of repatriation and started recruiting new Chinese workers. The flu epidemic that had killed over a fifth of the Samoan population

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<sup>107</sup> Michael Field, *Mau: Samoa's Struggle Against New Zealand Oppression* (Wellington, NZ: Reed, 1984), 13.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>109</sup> L. P. Leary, *New Zealanders in Samoa* (London, UK: W. Heinemann, 1918), 90.

<sup>110</sup> Hermann Hiery, *The Neglected War: The German South Pacific and the Influence of World War I* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 167.

<sup>111</sup> Field, *Mau*, 31.

<sup>112</sup> Liua'ana, "Dragons in Little Paradise," 34.

<sup>113</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 152.

had also killed plans to force Samoans on plantations. Between 1920 and 1934, eight new transports brought a total of over 3,000 Chinese workers to Samoa.<sup>114</sup>

Gradually, some of the harshest labor regulations were dismantled, culminating in the abolition of contract labor itself in 1923.<sup>115</sup> Labor protests, however, continued. In August 1929, 300 Chinese workers went on strike over the failure to resolve a dispute over their foremen. A dozen Chinese strikers received gunshot and baton wounds when the New Zealand police attacked them.<sup>116</sup> Only a few months later, the police used similar methods to suppress a demonstration by the Samoan *Mau* movement that challenged colonial rule. In many ways, the “weapons of the weak” pioneered by plantation workers since the 1880s had helped prepare the ground for this fundamental challenge to colonial rule.<sup>117</sup> Apart from appeals to the state and large-scale protests, workers in colonial Samoa also found other ways to resist plantation discipline and, in doing so, forged new bonds of community with one another.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, colonial officials introduced strict racial segregation to prevent contact among Samoans, Melanesians, and Chinese. Most fundamentally, Melanesian and Chinese workers on copra plantations were not allowed to mingle with Samoans who lived in neighboring villages. Officials and plantation owners alike were afraid of interracial mixing for moral and security reasons, but had fewer qualms about taking Samoan wives themselves. Samoan leaders, too, were arguing against the importation of Chinese workers mainly because they feared sexual liaisons

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<sup>114</sup> Tom, *Chinese in Western Samoa*, 36.

<sup>115</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 357.

<sup>116</sup> Liua’ana, “Dragons in Little Paradise,” 44.

<sup>117</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

with Samoan women would put the purity of the Samoan race in danger. Social realities in the colony turned out differently. Many of the Chinese workers who wished to stay in Samoa became gardeners, fishermen, and tailors. One of the men, Tsung Sui, was employed as a plantation overseer and in 1911 applied to settle permanently as a tailor. Others, like Wong Kau and Lai Man, who were working as policemen for the colonial administration, changed their careers and became gardeners and fishermen.<sup>118</sup> Freed from plantation life, it was primarily these Chinese workers and others like them who started families with Samoan women.<sup>119</sup>

Melanesian workers, too, crossed the colonial color line. Many Melanesian workers stayed in Samoa after their contracts ended (some voluntarily and many not) and a good number of them also started families with Samoan women. Over time, a full-fledged Melanesian enclave emerged around the LMS mission in Tufutafoe on the western tip of Savai'i. Apparently, the Melanesian workers who remained in Samoa wanted to be as far away as possible from the plantation belt around Apia. Despite feelings of racial superiority on the part of many Samoans (reinforced by Christian missionaries and colonial officials), Melanesians tried to escape the boredom of everyday plantation life by seeking out Samoans for friendship and romantic encounters. The pressure to leave behind the stifling air on the plantations must, indeed, have been great. Ignoring the official ban on interracial mixing, some Melanesian workers stole themselves away from the plantation and attended Samoan church services in nearby

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<sup>118</sup> Chin to Schultz, July 24, 1911. BArch R 1001/2327, p. 7.

<sup>119</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 43.

villages. To make communication easier, church services for plantation workers were held in Samoan Plantation Pidgin until the 1960s.<sup>120</sup>

Tui Sakila, a labor recruit born in the Bismarck Archipelago who had arrived in Samoa around 1912, remembered that “[s]ome New Britain boys (probably Tolai) had had mission contact before being recruited. They would get up early on Sunday morning, wash and get dressed up and sneak off to church in a village adjoining the [DHPG] plantation [in Mulifanua]. They would come straight back after services, put on their old clothes and sit around as though nothing had happened.”<sup>121</sup> Tui quickly added that he never joined these clandestine church visits because he was too scared. According to Tui, Samoan village leaders and pastors “had been warned to report such incidents to the [German] authorities.”<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, Tui recounted that Samoan villagers “had friendly feelings to the church-going laborers partly because the laborers generously gave them sticks of tobacco.”<sup>123</sup> It was not until the end of World War One that the New Zealand authorities, which had taken over German Samoa, relaxed the ban on interracial mixing and recruited Samoans to work on plantations to relieve the acute labor shortage.<sup>124</sup> Governor Logan forced those Melanesian workers whose contracts had expired to stay in Samoa because he needed them to do the dirty work for the New

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<sup>120</sup> Mühlhäusler, “Samoan Plantation Pidgin English” (1978): 86.

<sup>121</sup> Meleisea, *O Tama Uli*, 35.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 10.

Zealand soldiers. In December 1914, the disgruntled Melanesian workers went on strike for better wages, but tensions soon subsided.<sup>125</sup>

Melanesian workers who secretly joined Samoan church services on Sunday mornings were among the pioneers in forging ties of interracial solidarity. By joining the spiritual and communal space that Christian churches provided for Samoans, these Melanesian workers risked serious punishment from their employers. Given widespread Samoan racial prejudice towards Melanesians, the initial personal encounters between Melanesians and Samoans in these small churches perched on the edge of plantations must have been charged. Melanesians left their plantations to join Samoans to worship and socialize with them and one another out of purview from Euro-Americans. In doing so, they crossed not only spatial, but also racial and spiritual boundaries.

Workers also resisted the hardships of cutting copra by social and physical escape from the plantation. Many workers absconded from their workplace, sometimes for days, sometimes for years, sometimes never to return. Their superior knowledge of the inaccessible terrain surrounding many plantations often aided workers in their escapes. Likewise, lack of comprehensive supervision made leaving plantations easier. When La Farge and Adams visited a village close to the DHPG plantation in Mulifanua, La Farge noted “two blacks, or Solomon islanders, dressed in lava-lavas in the Samoan way, who have taken refuge here, having escaped from the German plantation further on.” The local Samoan *matai* told La Farge that the two runaways “are quiet and well-behaved,

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<sup>125</sup> James N. Bade, ed., *Karl Hanssen's Samoan War Diaries, August 1914-May 1915: A German Perspective on New Zealand's Military Occupation of German Samoa* (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2011), 79f.

and that they go to school like the others about them.”<sup>126</sup> As reports from plantation companies attest, desertions like the one recorded by La Farge were quite common. In March 1893, for instance, Krüger, a DHPG manager in Mulifanua, reported that Ragaub, “a good, docile boy and competent worker,” had deserted from the plantation a month earlier.<sup>127</sup> Apparently, a worker by the name of Ratonga, who had run away already three times, had visited the workers’ barracks on the plantation and had tried to persuade the DHPG workers to run away as well. According to the DHPG manager, Ratonga had told the workers that “living with the Samoans is much nicer than living on the plantations—you do not need to work, you can do what you like, etc.”<sup>128</sup> Ragaub seemed to have been converted by Ratonga and he decided to follow him. The DHPG manager suspected that “old deserters” like Ratonga were sent by Samoans to convince more workers to quit their contracts. Outraged at the “despicable” refusal by Samoans to surrender these runaways, Krüger called on policemen to be sent all the way from Apia to catch them, but to no avail. As this example shows, plantation managers were acutely aware of the lived solidarities among Samoans and other Pacific Islanders.

Chinese workers, too, ran away from their plantations. A Chinese workers’ register kept by the German colonial administration offers a unique window into the almost constant movement across plantation landscapes. Started by the German Chinese Commissioner around 1913, the register consisted of a standard ledger book with

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<sup>126</sup> La Farge, *Reminiscences of the South Seas*, 262. Towards the end of his stay in Samoa, La Farge recounted the story of a Samoan man who had allegedly been killed and eaten by Solomon Islander runaways after he survived a shipwreck off Manono Island. Even though La Farge cast some doubt on the veracity of the incident, it becomes clear that he—in accordance with dominant Euro-American perceptions at the time—saw Polynesians as the more beautiful and civilized race vis-à-vis the darker-skinned Melanesians. La Farge, *Reminiscences of the South Seas*, 283-286.

<sup>127</sup> Krüger to DHPG headquarters Apia, March 9, 1893, BArch R 1001/2926.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.



categories in German and entries kept in English.<sup>129</sup> The New Zealand military administration that took over German Samoa at the beginning of the Great War deemed the register useful enough to maintain it through the early 1930s. To keep track of Chinese workers, the register recorded the following pieces of information: a running number allowed authorities to determine how many Chinese workers lived in German Samoa and when they had arrived. All in all, the register, which spanned the years 1913 to 1932, consisted of 847 entries. A second column recorded the “control number,” which since May 1904, was given to every newly-arrived Chinese worker to be carried with him on an identification badge at all times. Chinese workers had to wear the control number on their left upper arm for everybody to see and could be arrested and punished for failing to do so.<sup>130</sup> Individual names of workers were not listed until after this control number, in a third column. Next to the name, the number of the transport on which the worker had arrived from China was included. The proximate columns were entitled “monthly pay” and divided into the three years of a standard contract, but actual entries in the register often withheld this information and instead listed the date when a new note had been entered. Another column was reserved for the name of the employer and the final column included miscellaneous “notes” on the worker. It is this final column that opens up an entirely different perspective on Chinese workers in permanent defiance of plantation discipline.

The German Chinese Commissioner (and New Zealand officials after 1914) used this last column in the workers’ register to record the current whereabouts of workers, in

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<sup>129</sup> “Register, German Chinese Commissioner, 1913-1932,” ANZ Wellington, SAMOA-BMO Series 2, Box 3, Item 12.

<sup>130</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, June 4, 1904, p. 1.

addition to other occurrences he deemed noteworthy. Among the most common pieces of information listed were: “returned to plantation,” “fishing in the seaside,” “arrested by policeman,” “arrested by natives in the bush in Malua,” “came to Chinese Commissioner’s Office,” and “sentenced for disobedience.” The comments also included several false alarms of desertions (“returned himself to plantation”) and information about the successful repatriation of a worker, or notes like “deserted to avoid repatriation.” The fact that a majority of the workers included in the 1913 register had such a comment attached to their names belied the official rhetoric of tightly regulated plantation life found in so many of the regulations passed by colonial administrations.

Judging from the register, Chinese workers were almost constantly on the move. Most workers left their plantations only briefly to visit friends on other plantations or simply go fishing. Others ventured away for much longer and some never returned. Wong Sang, for example, who had arrived in Samoa on June 24, 1913, was listed as a “runaway about four years ago from Saninoga.” Where Sang had run away to, much less why, was unknown. Intriguingly, Chan Mow Quan was listed on the same day as Sang with a similar comment: “Runaway to Sydney about four years ago. Seen by Policeman No. 3455 in Sydney about three years ago.” To be sure, Sang and Quan had arrived in Samoa on different transports and had worked for different employers. And yet, the fact that they both were believed to have run away from their plantations sometime in 1909 and were listed next to each other in the register was remarkable. Did they run away together? Was Sydney, where Quan was last seen, by a fellow Chinese, listed as policeman No. 3455, also Sang’s new home? And how did they get to Australia in the first place? Unfortunately, the available historical sources do not provide answers to these

and related questions. Still, the stories of Wong Sang and Chan Mow Quan—as incomplete as they are—point to a community of Chinese workers in defiance of the strictures of plantation life in colonial Samoa.<sup>131</sup>

If only a small minority managed to escape Samoan plantations wholesale, many other Chinese workers resisted their exploitation in their own ways. The register is replete with cases of Chinese workers actively seeking redress for the wrongs inflicted on them. On March 1, 1915, for instance, Fong Kin “came to office with complaint re wages,” the register recorded. Kin worked for the Upolu Rubber and Cocoa Estates Ltd., a London-based company that had survived the colony’s take-over. Apparently, conflicts over wages also survived into the new colonial regime. The brief comment did not specify what Kin’s complaint was exactly about. Judging from earlier instances of wage conflict, the likely cause for Kin’s complaint was either withheld or reduced payment of wages. For Chinese workers like Kin, then, the transfer of power from one empire to another in August 1914 did little to change the poor living conditions they confronted.

After the end of world war, the running numbers started by the German Chinese Commissioner abruptly ended. But his successor from New Zealand, Chinese Labor Commissioner Robert Carter, continued the register. As in many other areas, the new colonial rulers found it useful to maintain the laws passed by the Germans to regulate labor relations. While recruitment of new workers from China and Melanesia came to a halt—to the chagrin of plantation owners—and German plantations were expropriated, everyday life on copra plantations had continued relatively undisturbed at the beginning of the war. Soon, however, the mass repatriation of Chinese and Melanesian workers

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<sup>131</sup> At the same time, escapes from plantations also functioned as a safety valve, letting of steam and allowing the system of labor exploitation continue relatively undisturbed. For a similar argument on sugar plantations in Hawai’i, see Takaki, *Pau Hana*, 151.

combined with a flu epidemic that followed in the war's wake created a large-scale labor shortage on Samoan plantations. Cocoa and rubber plantations, likewise, peaked in 1917, but then nose-dived as Chinese workers left the islands.<sup>132</sup>

Some particularly courageous workers chose to leave the oppressive atmosphere on plantations completely behind, seeking a new life beyond the plantation system. As in colonies in other parts of the world, these maroons evaded the control of plantation owners and colonial officials alike and established a precarious form of living outside, or more precisely, alongside the plantations they had fled. In the spectrum of resistance, maroonage lay somewhere between the everyday forms of resistance many workers practiced and Chan Mow Quan's decision to leave the islands and find a new start in Australia. The maroons chose permanent escape from plantation life, even if they stopped short of leaving Samoa.

Life in maroon communities was rough. Based on the scarce historical evidence on maroons in colonial Samoa, it is difficult to determine if there were even enough maroons to even make up a community. Some entries in the register of Chinese workers pointed to the existence of such a netherworld in between Samoan villages, large-scale plantations, and the hills thick with tropical vegetation. How did maroons survive in the interstices of colonial plantation agriculture? One of the few existing glimpses into this maroon world comes from the island of Tutuila in American Samoa.

In January 1901, a maroon from the Solomon Islands found refuge on board the U.S.S. *Abarenda* under the command of Benjamin F. Tilley. According to Tilley's report, the unnamed Solomon Islander was found "in the woods of Tutuila where he had been a fugitive for more than twelve years." Through an interpreter in Apia, Tilley learned that

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<sup>132</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 152.

the man had originally come to Upolu to work on a German plantation. After he was treated badly there, he and two companions had run away, making it over to Tutuila on a raft: “There they fled to the woods and remained as outcasts,” Tilley noted. His companions had died by the time Tilley took the maroon on board. Although a “perfect savage” in Tilley’s eyes, the 45-year-old man was “very industrious and useful on board ship, doing willingly all kinds of menial work.” Perhaps because of his work ethic, the ship crew took a liking to the runaway and gave him clothes. Tilley concluded his report to Washington with a request to continue the ration he had issued for him and to retain him on board.<sup>133</sup> Little else is known about this maroon from the Solomon Islands who, together with two friends, had successfully escaped the harsh plantation discipline on Upolu for a different kind of life in the backcountry of Tutuila. After a dozen years of relative freedom, he returned from the margins of the colonial world and joined the crew of a U.S. Navy ship. He was not the only maroon in Tutuila.

In a letter to the Department of the Navy from June 1923, Naval Governor Edwin T. Pollock offered the story of a “wild man” captured by a Samoan as an exotic vignette of life in the colony.<sup>134</sup> Pollock retold the story first mentioned by Robert Louis Stevenson in his *Footnote to History* of the escape of four “black boys” from Upolu. According to Stevenson, one was drowned or killed by a shark, one died or was killed after trying to abduct a Samoan girl, another died, presumably about 1910, and the fourth remained in the hills. Pollock went on to describe what happened on May 8, 1923:

a Samoan, among the hills north of Pago Pago Bay, saw this fourth ‘wild man,’ clad only in nature’s vestments, descending a coconut tree. The young Samoan overcame the ‘wild man,’ bound his hands and brought

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<sup>133</sup> Tilley to Ass. Sec. of Navy, Feb. 1, 1901, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 34, p. 263f.

<sup>134</sup> Pollock to Sec. of Navy, June 23, 1923, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 37.

him into the Naval Station, where he was the sensation of the day among the Samoans, and the whites as well. The Samoan who made the capture was an escaped prisoner. After the return to the Naval Station where the prisoner have him up, the ‘wild man’ would not separate himself from his captor for any length of time. Up to the present time no one has been able to converse with this man; although one other black boy, who has lived in the island of Tutuila for some years, tried to talk to him. However, they apparently spoke a different language. The ‘wild man’ is naturally well along in years (his hair is almost white), and he is not strong physically. He appears quite contented and satisfied to remain here peacefully where he is well treated.<sup>135</sup>

[Figure 4: Bonds of Resistance – Photograph of Samoan captor (left) & Melanesian “Wild Man” (right)]<sup>136</sup>

What Pollock did not mention was why this captured Melanesian worker would not separate himself from his Samoan captor. Strangely enough, the unnamed Samoan captor was himself an escaped prisoner. In their own ways, then, both the anonymous Samoan and Melanesian man were captives of the colonial world that enveloped them. The Samoan had escaped a prison sentence for an unknown crime, while the Melanesian seemed to have left the world of copra behind much earlier and with similar courage. Not much more is known about them. Perhaps they both were maroons who had been living in the jungle together for a while. They might even have been strange allies who found themselves on the fringes of colonial Samoa and decided to make common cause by turning themselves in. In any case, this odd Samoan-Melanesian duo offers evidence that the colonized succeeded in forging affective ties beyond the control of their colonizers.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

Plantation agriculture reshaped life in colonial Samoa in fundamental ways. As Euro-American settlers turned the natural environment of Samoa into natural resources to be sold on a world market, they also transformed the social landscape on the islands. The new global and unequal community of workers that emerged in the wake of colonization struggled to retain a sense of humanity in a hostile world of copra. In a strategy of divide and rule, Euro-American authorities segregated the colonial workforce along racial lines and sought to prevent contact among Samoans, Chinese, and Melanesians. Maximizing profits from the sale of copra, plantation owners argued, necessitated this racial segregation and harsh work discipline. A range of factors determined how vulnerable workers were to violence and death: the kind of labor tasks they performed, their gender and race, the distance of their plantation from Apia, and whether or not they enjoyed support from state institutions—in the colony or from back home.

Resistance to the demands of plantation agriculture came in many guises, and over time, transcended racial boundaries. Chinese workers, for instance, successfully improved their working conditions through appeals to their home government. Many Melanesian workers defied the coercive conditions on large copra plantations by physical escape, temporary and long-term. Samoans, who could not be forced to work on Euro-American plantations, managed to maintain much control over their daily lives through subsistence farming and selling surplus copra to traders. With a vibrant social life based on substantial economic self-determination, Samoans succeeded in protecting their ways of life from the overbearing demands of the colonizers while selectively adapting to the changing dynamics of the new colonial world. Forging interracial solidarity with

newcomers was one of these adaptations, which would prove critical for the more substantial challenge to colonial rule that shook Samoan society in the 1920s.



### CHAPTER 3 — PERFORMANCE

On a sunny day in May 1893, a group of Samoan women were busy chatting with a group of Hawaiian women. Their meeting did not take place in Honolulu or on one of the many ships crisscrossing the Pacific at the time, but on a busy street in downtown Chicago, Illinois. As the entertainment area of the World's Columbian Exposition, the Midway Plaisance hosted a truly international crowd of performers for an equally international crowd of spectators. Amidst this mixture of languages from around the world, Samoan and Hawaiian words could be heard. Lola, Siva, Fetoai, and Mele—the four female members of the Samoan troupe performing in Chicago—found a way to communicate with the six *hula* dancers from Hawai'i, turning the Midway into a Polynesian middle ground. By the time the fair closed in October, two of the Hawaiians had become so close to their fellow Polynesians that they decided to make a stop in Samoa before returning to Hawai'i. Far from being mere conscripts of colonial interests, Samoans on American and European stages made new friends in unexpected places.<sup>1</sup>

As one of the most popular forms of urban entertainment at the turn of the twentieth century, ethnographic shows offered Euro-American visitors a glimpse into foreign cultures without the cost of long-distance travel. The shows presented the everyday lives of “primitive” peoples, emphasizing (and often eroticizing) their physical attributes in picturesque “natural” settings, ranging from zoos and theaters to world's fairs and colonial exhibitions. Combining popular entertainment with didactic elements, the ethnographic shows also functioned as advertisement for the white civilizing mission

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<sup>1</sup> Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 95; Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

and colonial trade.<sup>2</sup> As “ethnological show business,” the performances were marked by a tension between claims for cultural authenticity and commercial success.<sup>3</sup> Over the course of a quarter century, Samoans participated in seven ethnographic tours to Europe and the United States. The first tour, from 1889 to 1891, brought the Samoan pioneers to the United States and Europe, while the following tours included three exclusive visits each to the United States (1893, 1904, 1915) and Europe (1895-1897, 1900-1901, 1910-1911). Since the tours featured several stops, sometimes even two stops in the same city, Samoans were among the most widely seen ethnographic troupes at the time.<sup>4</sup>

Samoan performances on American and European stages served ambivalent purposes. On the one hand, colonial authorities generally encouraged Samoans to participate in ethnographic shows and even assumed direct control over the logistics of travel. By exhibiting Samoan ways of life, American and German colonial officials hoped to convince metropolitan audiences of the success of their respective colonial projects in the distant South Pacific. More than other ethnographic shows at the time, the Samoan shows blended the natural beauty of the islands with the physical beauty of its inhabitants into a harmonious whole, offering Euro-American spectators a seductive alternative to industrial modernity.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the organizers of the ethnographic troupes also

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<sup>2</sup> David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 25-64.

<sup>3</sup> Bernth Lindfors, ed., *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Between 1875 and 1914, more than 300 ethnographic shows—so-called *Völkerschauen*—toured through Germany alone. Among many others, the tours included Native Americans, Eskimos, Nubians, Togolese, Herero, Dahomeyans, and Singhalese. Thode-Arora, *Für fünfzig Pfennig*, 115ff.

<sup>5</sup> Sierra A. Bruckner, “The Tingle-Tangle of Modernity: Popular Anthropology and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Imperial Germany,” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Iowa, 1999), 365ff.

sought to impress on the minds of the Samoan visitors the economic, military, and cultural superiority of the colonizers.

Samoans themselves, on the other hand, pursued their own interests with their participation in ethnographic shows. Over time, Samoan performers used their trips to Europe and the United States more and more consciously as a way to represent their own culture, including the central role of social rank within their community. High-ranking *matais* such as Tuvale and Tamasese came to understand their travels as diplomatic missions in the spirit of a Samoan *malaga*, or travelling party. They brought gifts and prepared speeches for their German and American hosts and insisted—quite successfully—on meeting with top leaders in person. In addition, going on a trip abroad also promised a strategic advantage to Samoan leaders in their power struggles with competitors at home.

The dialectics of performative labor—representing the fruits of colonization while, at the same time, representing the interests of the colonized—marked the ethnographic show as a particular colonial workscape with its own dynamics. Since Samoans were asked to perform specific labor tasks on stage—such as collecting coconuts or preparing *kava*—, they re-enacted forms of material labor through the immaterial labor of performance. While climbing a tree to fetch a coconut in a zoo certainly involved physical exertion, it remained an isolated action, to be performed at specific times and in front of an audience to be entertained. Collecting coconuts in Samoa rarely featured these elements of explicitly performative nature. The preparation of *kava* and the performance of dances and songs, however, blurred the lines between cultural practice and performative labor because Samoans participated in these activities both at

home and abroad. Samoan singers tried to reproduce an authentic version of their cultural repertoire when they performed in ethnographic shows, not only because they were expected to do so by the organizers and visitors (who included high-nosed ethnologists), but also because they wanted to do a good job in front of their Samoan and Polynesian peers. When performing Samoan cultural practices, then, Samoans operated under the constraints of a double audience with related but not coextensive cultural references and quality standards. As we shall see, these and other challenges emerged already during the first tour in 1889.

### **BAD OMENS: THE FIRST SAMOAN TROUPE IN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE, 1889-1891**

In June 1889, Robert A. Cunningham arrived in Apia in search for a Samoan troupe to tour the United States and Europe. Born in Quebec, Cunningham had moved to California in 1856 to mine for gold, but quickly turned to other sources of wealth in the entertainment industry in San Francisco. He first worked for the famous Barnum & Bailey circus and then as an independent impresario of popular shows featuring “freaks” and exotic peoples. In 1883, Cunningham tricked a group of Aborigines from Queensland into taking part in an ethnographic show in San Francisco.<sup>6</sup> Six years later in Samoa, Cunningham sought to recruit another troupe of exotic peoples to be showcased in front of American and European audiences. Against strong opposition from leading *matais*, including Tamasese and Mata’afa, and lacking official permission from the tripartite

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<sup>6</sup> Poignant, *Professional Savages*, 77-110.

government, Cunningham had to move on to Tutuila to find Samoans who were willing to go with him.

The nine Samoans recruited in Tutuila included five men (Atofau, Manogi, Leasusu, Lealofi, and Letuugaifo) and four women (Mua, Foi, Tasita, and Tu). In the American press, Atofau was dubbed the leader of the troupe. His relative prominence among the other members was further elevated by the claim that he was one of the Samoan heroes who had rescued German and American sailors after the devastating hurricane in March. A New York newspaper referred to Silaulii, who joined the troupe in San Francisco, as a “Princess” and Lealofi was said to be a poet and composer of songs.<sup>7</sup> These specific details not only pierced through the generic presentations of exotic peoples displayed in ethnographic shows, but also pointed to the division of cultural labor the Samoans were expected to enact.

Similar to other forms of labor in colonial Samoa, the Samoan performers in ethnographic shows entered labor contracts with their employers. Cunningham offered the first Samoan troupe a three-year contract that included expenses, free clothing, and free passage to and from the United States. The monthly wage for the Samoan performers was \$12.50, half of what Samoans could earn working on Euro-American plantations at the time, but, considering the free food and clothing, substantially more than what Melanesian (\$8.45/month) and Chinese (\$11.70/month) plantation workers were making. Samoans preferred the less physically demanding labor of performance to the backbreaking stoop labor on copra plantations. Beyond the financial compensation, participating in an ethnographic show offered other opportunities as well: “travel-happy”

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<sup>7</sup> *New York Clipper*, Oct. 26, 1889.

Samoans could sail the world, see new places, and meet new people.<sup>8</sup> Visiting the United States and Europe also allowed Samoan travellers to buy Western goods, such as jewelry and sewing machines, which would confer prestige and economic clout upon return.<sup>9</sup> Samoans who went on tour overseas shared similar hopes with contract laborers from Melanesia and later China who returned from Samoan plantations with trunks of valuable goods.

In August 1889, Cunningham and his hastily assembled Samoan troupe shipped to San Francisco on the steamer *Alameda*.<sup>10</sup> There, they were joined by Silaulii, who had been sent to a school by missionaries years earlier.<sup>11</sup> According to newspaper reports, the troupe performed *siva* dances to great acclaim in San Francisco and other parts of California. At the end of August, the troupe moved on to Chicago where an American visitor, J.S. Cottrell, fell in love with ‘Princess’ Silaulii. Cottrell followed her to Minneapolis, where the troupe was giving performances at the Dime Museum, and eloped with her on September 19, 1889. The couple was alleged to have left to return to San Francisco because Silaulii intended to go back to Samoa. According to a newspaper article, Silaulii said that she did not “expect to marry her American lover. He was only to look after her until she reached California.”<sup>12</sup> For unknown reasons, she never made it there. Silaulii died on her way back to California, probably of a combination of

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<sup>8</sup> Damon Salesa, “Misimoo: An American on the Beach,” *Common-Place* 5, no. 2 (2005), <<http://www.common-place.org/vol-05/no-02/salesa/index.shtml>>; Salesa, “Travel-Happy Samoa,” 171-88.

<sup>9</sup> Imada makes a similar argument about the Hawaiian *hula* dancers who entered into performance contracts because they “gave them a chance to earn a decent living, tour the powerful country that had colonized theirs, and increase their individual prestige and fame.” Imada, *Aloha America*, 114.

<sup>10</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, Aug. 19, 1889.

<sup>11</sup> *Watkins Express*, Aug. 29, 1889.

<sup>12</sup> *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Sept. 20, 1889, p. 4.

malnutrition and fever.<sup>13</sup> Contemporary U.S. newspaper reports and Samoan oral memory confirmed that the whole troupe suffered from malnutrition throughout the tour.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, Silaulii would not be the last victim on what would turn out to be a disastrous first tour.

In October 1889, the rest of the troupe made their way to the Atlantic coast and performed, among other venues, at Koster and Bail's Theater in New York City. To advertise his Samoan show, Cunningham produced a pamphlet featuring photographs and a lurid narrative of their alleged capture.<sup>15</sup> Cunningham's macabre marketing strategy turned out to be closer to reality than expected as the troupe crossed the Atlantic in spring 1890. While giving shows in Belgium in April 1890, troupe leader Atofau passed away, probably as a result of a pulmonary disease.<sup>16</sup> Atofau's body remained an object of anthropological interest even after his death. Belgian scientists removed the skin of the lower body of his corpse to study Samoan tattooing.<sup>17</sup> Neither Cunningham nor Atofau's fellow Samoans seemed to have had enough influence to prevent his corpse from being used for these "scientific" purposes. Atofau's fellow traveller Tu died shortly afterwards in Cologne, Germany, on April 25, 1890.<sup>18</sup> Since both Atofau and Tu succumbed to pulmonary diseases after a European winter that Samoans were simply not used to, Cunningham's bad management was indirectly responsible for this human tragedy.

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<sup>13</sup> *New York Clipper*, Oct. 26, 1889.

<sup>14</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 108.

<sup>15</sup> Poignant, *Professional Savages*, 199.

<sup>16</sup> *Samoa Times*, Aug. 15, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 89.

<sup>18</sup> *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, Apr. 26, 1890.

In the summer of 1890, the remaining troupe of seven Samoans moved on to the capital of the dominant colonial power in Samoa: Berlin. There, they performed at prominent entertainment venues such as Castan's Panoptikum and the Flora of Charlottenburg, "one of Berlin's more luxurious entertainment establishments that combined a park, palm garden, and stage with an excellent location beside the river Spree."<sup>19</sup> Beyond these popular venues open to the general public, the Samoans also gave a "lecture-performance" to the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory. Anthropologists at the time relied on impresarios like Cunningham to deliver study objects from distant places and, in turn, offered to authenticate them to shield impresarios from police scrutiny and to attract visitors.<sup>20</sup>

Introduced by one of the leading German anthropologists, Rudolf Virchow, the Samoan troupe's visit straddled the border between science and entertainment. After the performance, Virchow proceeded to take their body measurements—a common practice among physical anthropologists at the time, who were keen on empirical data on the peoples they studied.<sup>21</sup> A heated debate ensued among the white German anthropologists present about the authenticity of the Samoans, who themselves must have been puzzled by the sight of bearded white men fighting about their "Samoanness." Virchow defended the Samoan troupe by arguing that "beneath the potentially deceptive signs of theatrical

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<sup>19</sup> Christopher B. Balme, *Pacific Performances: Theatricality and Cross-Cultural Encounter in the South Seas* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 128. On panopticons in Imperial Germany, see Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*, 81-87.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 18f.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Stephen J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1981).



performance,” there lay the core of authentic Samoan culture.<sup>22</sup> The politics of cultural authenticity shifted with the particular settings in which ethnographic troupes, like the Samoans in Berlin, appeared.

The troupe’s extended stay in Berlin also involved a story of interracial romance and a mysterious death.<sup>23</sup> In July 1890, the wife of the wealthy retired Berlin merchant Max Hauke took a liking to Leasusu and Lealofi and convinced them to desert their troupe. Mrs. Hauke went on to scandalize the bourgeois neighborhood of Charlottenburg by having the two Samoan men accompany her in a carriage, dressed in fashionable European outfits. Only ten days later, her 45-year-old husband suddenly passed away under dubious circumstances. Nobody knew if his unexpected death was connected to his wife’s Samoan romance, but newspapers—from as far away as the United States—suspected as much. The widowed Mrs. Hauke, for one, paid their early passage home to Samoa, which prompted Cunningham to sue her for the portly sum of \$100,000 for the loss of “his savages.”<sup>24</sup> It is unlikely that Cunningham ever received his compensation, but he did return back to New York with the remaining five Samoans in the fall of 1890.

In New York, Cunningham transferred the Samoan troupe to an agent named Marshall, allegedly telling him: “I’ve got all out of them that I could. Now you take them and see what you can do.”<sup>25</sup> Such a “transfer” was, of course, nowhere mentioned in the labor contract the Samoans had signed at the beginning of the tour in summer 1889.

Cunningham seemed to have had enough of the problems his Samoan troupe had created

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<sup>22</sup> Balme, *Pacific Performances*, 129.

<sup>23</sup> Interracial romances were common at ethnographic exhibitions. See, for instance, Thode-Arora, *Für fünfzig Pfennig*, 115ff., 168-178.

<sup>24</sup> *Samoa Times*, Oct. 18, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Samoa Times*, Aug. 15, 1891, p. 2.

and decided to “sell” them to another manager at a discount. Marshall then went on to tour the troupe through the United States in the fall and winter of 1890-91. Exhausted from the severe climate and even more severe travel schedule, Letuugaifo died of consumption in Denver, where his body was embalmed by a local undertaker and placed on display in a pine box.<sup>26</sup>

Marshall then abandoned the remaining four members—Manogi, Tasita, Mua, and Foi—in New York. Van Cullen Jones, a reporter for the *New York World*, found them there “in a deplorable condition” and managed to arouse the attention of the federal government with his reports on their plight.<sup>27</sup> U.S. Secretary of Treasury Charles W. Foster eventually appointed Jones to escort the Samoans home, with expenses shared by the federal government, the *New York World*, and a public subscription.<sup>28</sup> Jones took the five Samoans with him on a train to California, but Manogi did not live to see the Pacific: he died in a private Pullman Palace railway car *en route* through the Rocky Mountains and was interred in Rawlins, Wyoming, with a headstone marking his grave. Ultimately, only half of the original ten members—Tasita, Mua, Foi, Leasusu, and Lealofi—made it back alive to Samoa.

Not only had five of the original ten troupe members died by the end of the tour, but their ruthless impresario had also abandoned the remaining members and had cheated them of their rightful wages. As the surviving members of the first Samoan troupe to tour the United States and Europe complained after their return to Samoa, Cunningham had

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<sup>26</sup> Poignant, *Professional Savages*, 200.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Roslyn Poignant, “Captive Aboriginal Lives: Billy, Jenny, Little Toby and Their Companions,” in: *Captive Lives: Australian Captivity Narratives*, edited by Kate Darian-Smith, Roslyn Poignant, and Kay Schaffer (London, UK: University of London, 1993), 52.

withheld parts of the wages guaranteed under their contract. Apparently, Cunningham had even “borrowed” \$41 from each member, which was all they had left on their return to New York in fall 1890.<sup>29</sup> Cunningham’s tour was a human tragedy with lasting consequences for all subsequent troupes. If five Samoans—Silaulii, Atofau, Tu, Letuugaifo, and Manogi—had to die in the service of empire, the performers who followed in their wake made sure things would go differently.

### **POLYNESIAN ENCOUNTERS: SAMOANS AT THE WORLD’S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION IN CHICAGO, 1893**

After this disastrous start, it took two years until plans to take another troupe of Samoan performers abroad resurfaced. Charles Mason Mitchell, U.S. Consul in Apia and an occasional actor himself, came up with the idea of taking a Samoan troupe to the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Mitchell told his American friend and fellow Apia resident Harry J. Moors about his idea. Born in Detroit, Moors had worked as a blackbirding agent in the Gilbert Islands before coming to Samoa in 1875. There, he had become a successful trader and planter and got married to a Samoan woman. In the 1890s, Moors expanded his trading and planting interests into the entertainment sector, which, at the time, was virtually nonexistent in Apia. A gifted amateur showman, Moors built the first theater in Apia and became the first to show films and put up a wrestling match.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Samoa Times*, Aug. 15, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Theroux, “Rediscovering ‘H.J.M.’, Samoa’s ‘Unconquerable’ Harry Moors,” *Pacific Islands Monthly* 52, no. 8 (1981): 51.

Moors jumped at Mitchell's suggestion and intended to recruit a dozen Samoans, two dozen Wallis Islanders, five Tongans, and a Fijian.<sup>31</sup> Given the bad experiences with Cunningham's first tour and Moors's long-standing support of Malietoa's archrival Mata'afa, Malietoa strictly opposed another recruitment of Samoan performers.<sup>32</sup> Resorting to the dubious recruiting skills he had acquired in the blackbirding business, Moors managed to circumvent this powerful opposition and enlisted four mixed-race Samoan women (Lola, Siva, Fetoai, and Mele), two Wallis Islanders/Uveans (Sesefa and Pasilio), two Rotumans (Amosi and Sali), and one Fijian (Simi).<sup>33</sup> According to the contract, performers were to receive \$12 a month for their services.<sup>34</sup> Moors's original plan to bring at least a dozen Samoans and even more Wallis Islanders had failed, so he had to settle for a much smaller group.<sup>35</sup>

Moors's "Samoan" troupe consisted of a heterogeneous crew from Polynesia and Melanesia. Only four of the nine troupe members were actually from Samoa. The four Samoan women probably knew each other from the islands, while the rest of the group, by contrast, came from neighboring but culturally and linguistically quite different Pacific islands. Simi, who was described as a former sailor from Fiji, probably had been to Samoa and other major ports in the Pacific before. By the late nineteenth century, Melanesian and Polynesian navigators had already been travelling from one Pacific

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<sup>31</sup> Joseph Theroux, "H.J.M.: Showman, Author, Farmer, and Crusading Politician," *Pacific Islands Monthly* 52, no. 9 (1981): 59.

<sup>32</sup> Mabeu to Blacklock, Feb. 27, 1893, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 44.

<sup>33</sup> *Samoa Weekly Herald*, Dec. 30, 1893.

<sup>34</sup> Salesa, "Misimooa."

<sup>35</sup> A newspaper article noted that Moors had originally intended to recruit 25 Samoans. *Samoa Times*, Feb. 25, 1892.

island to another for millennia. Simi and his fellow travellers in Moors's ethnographic show troupe thus stood in a long line of Pacific Islanders on the move.

Amosi and Sali were born in Rotuma, a tiny group of islands north of the Fijian main islands and part of the British colony of Fiji since 1881. An ethnic minority within Fiji, Rotumans shared more cultural and linguistic similarities with their neighbors in the east and south, from Samoa, Wallis Island/Uvea, and Tonga, than with Fijians. Sesefa and Pasilio, finally, were from Uvea, a Polynesian kingdom sandwiched between Rotuma and Samoa. Part of the Tongan maritime empire from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, Uvea had become a French protectorate in 1887. Culturally and linguistically, then, the Samoans shared many traits with their fellow travellers from Rotuma and Uvea. And even the Fijian sailor Simi, whose ethnic roots mixed Melanesian and Polynesian elements, was familiar with the cultures and languages of his Polynesian neighbors. Their common experiences on ships and on stage in Chicago brought the group even closer together and allowed them to forge deeper bonds of solidarity.

As a Samoan newspaper noted, the performers were, “when in Chicago, to give dances, sing songs and in every way treat visitors to a faithful representation of Samoan manners, customs and mode of living.”<sup>36</sup> To provide such a “faithful representation” of Samoan culture, the troupe took along a 70-foot canoe, several smaller boats, three large houses, *tapa* costumes, weapons, fire sticks, fishing devices, *kava* bowls, and ceremonial headdresses.<sup>37</sup> In spring 1893, the troupe embarked for Honolulu, where they had a

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<sup>36</sup> *Samoa Times*, May 13, 1893, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Harry J. Moors, “Some Recollections of Early Samoa,” *Samoa Times*, Aug. 7, 1925, p. 3; Salesa, “Misimoo”; J. C. Furnas, *Anatomy of Paradise: Hawaii and the Islands of the South Seas* (New York, NY: W. Sloane Associates, 1948), 419.

break-in performance at the Opera House.<sup>38</sup> They reached Chicago via San Francisco just in time for the opening of the world's fair on May 1, 1893. The huge canoe (*taumualua*), used for large *malaga*, needed two 34-foot-long railway cars to transport it from San Francisco to Chicago. At almost every freight stop, people autographed the Samoan canoe with their names and addresses, much to Moors's chagrin who ordered the thousands of penciled inscriptions to be sandpapered off. Despite this involuntary mail service and the narrow tunnels of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the canoe arrived safely at the fairgrounds only a few days after the troupe did.<sup>39</sup>

Celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christopher Columbus's first voyages to the Americas, the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition was a gigantic feat of engineering—in concrete and in human beings. Its two main sections—the White City and the Midway Plaisance—mirrored in layout the fair's central message of racial and cultural evolution: the fruits of white civilization in the form of huge machines and beautiful art in the White City and the exotic bustle of titillating but racially inferior nonwhite peoples on the Midway.<sup>40</sup> Frederic Ward Putnam, director and curator of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, was originally in charge of the historical and cultural exhibits at the fair. When it became clear that Putnam knew more about science than entertainment, the fair organizers replaced him with the San Francisco-based entrepreneur (and later, New York Congressman) Sol Bloom. Inspired by his visit to the Algerian Village at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1889, Bloom set up more exotic

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<sup>38</sup> Furnas, *Anatomy of Paradise*, 419.

<sup>39</sup> Moors, "Some Recollections of Early Samoa," *Samoa Times*, July 4, 1924, p. 3; Moors, "Some Recollections of Early Samoa," *Samoa Times*, Aug. 14, 1925, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> The fair's official guidebook recommended visiting the Midway only after the White City. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 62.

and dramatic showcases on the Midway to interest visitors.<sup>41</sup> Other attractions on the Midway included Carl Hagenbeck's animal circus and a number of "native villages" representing Germany, Ireland, Java, and China.<sup>42</sup>

[Figure 5: Photograph of Samoan Village]<sup>43</sup>

The Samoan troupe set up their village on the corner of Madison Avenue and 60<sup>th</sup> Street, right between the South Sea Islanders exhibition and Hagenbeck's animal show. Many of the troupe's six daily performances in Chicago continued those of Cunningham's first tour: *kava* ceremonies, war dances, sitting *sivas*, and boat races. The official fair concession also granted performers the right to manufacture and sell woven hats and mats, fiber cloths, filigree, and carved work in their village.<sup>44</sup> Produced in public by the female members of the troupe, these items gained in cultural authenticity and, hence, in cash value.<sup>45</sup> Performative labor, regulated in contracts, thus enabled other

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<sup>41</sup> Burton Benedict, "The Anthropology of World's Fairs," in: idem, *The Anthropology of World's Fairs: San Francisco's Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915* (Berkeley, CA: Lowie Museum of Anthropology, 1983), 49f. According to Furnas, Bloom said that "for reasons best known to himself, he does not care to discuss the Samoans' career at the Fair." Furnas, *Anatomy of Paradise*, 419, n2.

<sup>42</sup> Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 47f. On the central role of world fairs in contemporary U.S. debates on immigration and imperialism, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples At Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York, NY: Hill & Wang, 2000). On the ethnographic gaze at world's fairs, see Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 46-85. On Hagenbeck's pioneering role in organizing animal and ethnographic shows, see Thode-Arora, *Für fünfzig Pfennig*, 115ff.

<sup>43</sup> C.D. Arnold, and H.D. Higinbotham, *Official Views of the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Photo-Gravure Co., 1893), plate 96.

<sup>44</sup> Contract with Leigh S. Lynch, Oct. 30, 1891, Chicago History Museum, World's Columbian Exposition, Concession Agreements, Vol. 1, "Villages of the Dutch East India Settlements," p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Ewan Johnston, "'Polynesien in der Plaisance': Das samoanische Dorf und das Theater der Südseeinseln auf der Weltausstellung in Chicago, 1893," *Comparativ* 9, no. 5/6 (1999): 95.

forms of earning money. But woven mats were not the only elements of Samoan culture on sale in Chicago.

With their physical beauty, the four women in the troupe attracted special attention among the male visitors. Judging from surviving photographs, the Samoan women were required to cover their breasts, and their dances were probably less sexualized than earlier ones in the private show rooms of Europe.<sup>46</sup> However, Moors did select the Samoan women Lola and Fetoai partly because of their attractive looks. Lola, in particular, aroused the interest of both visitors and photographers. In a photographic collection of the fair, Lola was described as a “Polynesian Belle” and “one of the great features of attraction in the South Sea Island Exhibit.” The caption emphasized Lola’s natural beauty in visual as well as auditory terms:

Her name is Lola. She is a pure Samoan, but her features are European in every lineament. Lola has a magnificent physique which with jet black eyes and stately bearing gives her the appearance of a queen. And yet as she softly lisps the letters which spell her pretty name, her smile and manner are as soft and gentle as it is possible to imagine.<sup>47</sup>

By the time of the Chicago fair, Lola’s characterization as a royal beauty, with manners as lush as the tropical vegetation of her home islands, had congealed into a recognizable trope in Euro-American perceptions of the South Pacific and its inhabitants. Photographs with poetic captions formed part in a larger colonial discourse, conveying the availability of feminized Pacific islands to predominantly male spectators.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Benjamin C. Truman, *History of the World’s Fair, Being a Complete and Authentic Description of the Columbian Exposition from its Inception* (Chicago, IL: Mammoth Pub. Co., 1893), 572; Furnas, *Anatomy of Paradise*, 419.

<sup>47</sup> N.A., *Photographs of the World’s Fair: An Elaborate Collection of Photographs of the Buildings, Grounds and Exhibits of the World’s Columbian Exposition, with a Special Description of the Famous Midway Plaisance* (Chicago, IL: Werner Co., 1894), 351.

<sup>48</sup> Gabriele Dürbeck, *Stereotype Paradiese: Ozeanismus in der deutschen Südseeliteratur, 1815-1914*



The Samoan performers on the Midway found other ways of confounding expectations and asserting their own wills. As a newspaper reported, the Samoans had given each other haircuts and had begun dressing in American clothes soon after their arrival in Chicago. Moors, the article reassured its readers, had to put a halt to this “civilizing process.”<sup>49</sup> In an act of colonial mimicry, the Samoan performers seemed to have developed their own sense of fashion and succeeded in subverting the clear-cut lines between “civilized” and “uncivilized” peoples. By the 1890s, several Western fashion items such as dresses and umbrellas had been introduced in Samoa and had come to be regarded as status symbols. It is no wonder then that Samoans and their fellow islanders would grasp the opportunity to wear American clothes and get Western-style haircuts when they stayed the United States. Their new dresses and haircuts were made possible partly by the monthly wages they received as ethnographic performers.

Dancing and singing were central parts of the performances in the Samoan Village. *Siva* dances were an indispensable element of traditional Samoan hospitality, as many Euro-American visitors to the islands knew.<sup>50</sup> Over time, the Samoan *siva* evolved into a metonymy of Samoan culture, a ritual straddling the line between authentic

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(Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007); Gabriele Dürbeck, “Samoa als inszeniertes Paradies: Völkerausstellungen um 1900 und die Tradition der Populären Südseeliteratur,” in: *Die Schau des Fremden: Ausstellungskonzepte zwischen Kunst, Kommerz und Wissenschaft*, edited by Cordula Grewe (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), esp. 73-78; Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Margaret Jolly, “From Point Venus to Bali Ha‘i: Eroticism and Exoticism in Representations of the Pacific,” in: *Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, edited by Lenore Manderson, and Margaret Jolly (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 99-122.

<sup>49</sup> N.A., “Samoan Surprises,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, June 14, 1893, supplement.

<sup>50</sup> Adams and La Farge even grew tired of the obligatory dances when they visited Samoa in 1890. It is not known if Adams avoided the Samoan Village in Chicago for that reason. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), chapter 22; La Farge, *Reminiscences of the South Seas*.

Samoan custom and commercialized performance for non-Samoans.<sup>51</sup> The eroticism of some of the dances performed by Samoan women certainly added to their appeal among male visitors of ethnographic shows. In Chicago, the Samoan troupe performed club and sitting dances accompanied by call-and-response songs on a regular basis. A handful of these memorable Samoan performances on the Midway were recorded on a phonogram by the American ethnomusicologist Benjamin Ives Gilman.<sup>52</sup> Samoan performative labor became nowhere more palpable than in these dances and songs.

While most of their time—including the shows Gilman recorded—was spent inside their village, the Samoan troupe also ventured outside. For performers even more so than for visitors, the Midway was a bustling middle ground to meet, mingle, and make new friends. The Samoans in Chicago were no exception. Right next to the Samoan Village, a South Sea Islander Exhibition had set up its operations, with daily show performances similar to the ones in the Samoan Village. The South Sea Islander Exhibition hosted its own performance troupe, the Polynesian Star Company, which included all of the over 300 Pacific Islanders at the fair. While the troupe consisted mostly of Javanese performers, who had their own village as well, there were also Fijians, Tongans, and Samoans among them.<sup>53</sup> Thrown together in the Polynesian Star Company, the performers came from various parts of the Pacific—including Java in the Dutch East Indies—and had quite different cultural and linguistic traditions. In between show breaks, the Polynesian Star Company must have been a polyphony of Pacific

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<sup>51</sup> Balme, *Pacific Performances*, 144. A parallel development made the *hula* a metonymy of Hawaiian culture. Imada, *Aloha America*, 13.

<sup>52</sup> For an overview of the collection held at the Library of Congress, see Dorothy Sara Lee, ed., *The Federal Cylinder Project: A Guide to Field Cylinder Collections in Federal Agencies*, Vol. 8 Early Anthologies (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1984).

<sup>53</sup> *Photographs of the World's Fair*, 313.

languages, stories, and music. Bringing so many different Pacific Islanders together so far way from home, the Polynesian Star Company was, indeed, a crucible of community for the Samoan travellers in Chicago.

The Samoans especially mingled with a group of fellow Polynesians who also had their own show at the fair: the Hawaiian *hula* dancers. To fill up their 300-seat theater five times a day, the six *hula* performers from Hawai'i played with the erotic expectations of the mostly male visitors, but rejected requests to dance topless and sometimes had to resist the physical advances of particularly aggressive men with punches.<sup>54</sup> Compared to the Samoans' monthly wage of \$12, the *hula* dancers from Hawai'i received \$20 a month under a six-month contract.<sup>55</sup> They, like the four Samoan women in Moors's troupe, were exposed to the lurid gaze of the white male visitors—part and parcel of the fair's aim to present their home islands as available targets for virile colonizers.<sup>56</sup>

But the Polynesian women proved quite adept at deflecting the colonial gaze by creating bonds of female solidarity beyond the official transcript. The Samoan women certainly had much to talk about with the Hawaiian women, and because Hawaiian and Samoan share similar grammars and vocabularies, they learned to communicate without interpreters.<sup>57</sup> One of the Hawaiian *hula* dancers, Jennie Kapahukulaokamamalu Wilson,

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<sup>54</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 71.

<sup>55</sup> In the 1890s, nonwhite plantation laborers in Hawai'i were earning an average of \$12 a month, but white performers in dime-museums and similar entertainment venues in the United States could make up to \$2,000 a month. Imada, *Aloha America*, 75.

<sup>56</sup> On the gender dimensions of colonialism in the Pacific see, for instance, Jolly, "From Point Venus to Bali Ha'i"; Teresia K. Teaiwa, "bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans," *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 87-109.

<sup>57</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 95.

vividly remembered her interactions with the neighboring Samoans: “We used to go over [to see them] from the back entrance. We talk all the time.”<sup>58</sup> A group of Hawaiians was also present when the Samoans hosted French-American zoologist Paul du Chaillu in their village, preparing a roasted pig for him and over forty fellow performers from the Pacific.<sup>59</sup>

What exactly the Polynesian performers talked about remains unknown, but between tales of shared exploitation as cultural workers in an exoticized entertainment setting, there must have also been moments of fun, laughter, and the surprising joy of cultural familiarity far from home. Two of the Hawaiians—Nakai and Kanuku—seemed to have become such good friends with the Samoans that they decided to join them and visit Samoa before returning home to Hawai’i.<sup>60</sup> A chance encounter in distant Chicago thus resulted in lasting friendships among Samoan and Hawaiian performers. The Samoans and Hawaiians, who became friends in Chicago, were not the only Pacific Islanders who appropriated turn-of-the-century exhibitions for cultural exchanges with fellow islanders. At the International Exhibition of Arts and Industries in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1906-07, for instance, Maoris exchanged gifts and ceremonial greetings with Cook Islanders and Fijians.<sup>61</sup> On subsequent travels to Europe, Samoan performers

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<sup>58</sup> Kini in interview, cit. in *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> N.A., “Had a Novel Feast,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, September 7, 1893: 1.

<sup>60</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 95.

<sup>61</sup> On the Christchurch Exhibition, see Amiria J. M. Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 220-227. On Polynesian exchanges at the exhibition, see Ewan Johnston, “Reinventing Fiji at 19th-Century and Early 20th-Century Exhibitions,” *Journal of Pacific History* 40, no. 1 (2005): 36f. In 1906, a Samoan mixed-race trader by the name of Sam Meredith applied for permission to bring a Samoan troupe to the Christchurch exhibition, but the German Colonial Office rejected the request, probably due to fears of excessive Anglo-Saxon influence. Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 139.

would continue to meet fellow performers from other parts of the colonial world and broaden their cultural horizons.

As the fair came to an end in late October 1893, the Samoan Village was dismantled. H.N. Nichols, manager of the South Sea Islands Village, sold more than seventy Samoan objects to Putnam who passed them on to the newly founded Field-Columbian Museum. Among the objects were fans, clubs, bowls, two slit drums, and four canoes. The Samoan craftsmen and owners of these objects did not receive their fair share of the five hundred dollars Nichols charged the museum.<sup>62</sup> According to Moors, the museum even paid the portly sum of \$1,500 for the large *taumualua*, but it was probably Moors himself who received the money.<sup>63</sup>

After the fair's close, Moors found other other ways to make money. In December 1893, Moors and his troupe returned to Samoa and after a two-week break, he returned to the United States with a second troupe of 42 islanders.<sup>64</sup> From January to July 1894, the troupe performed at the California Midwinter International Exposition in San Francisco. Located initially in a theater near the fair's south entrance, the Samoan troupe was so popular that it moved to center stage on the Vienna Prater. As the fair's official history noted, "the physical perfection of the men and women among these South Sea Islanders was the talk of the time during their sojourn."<sup>65</sup> After the San Francisco fair closed in

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<sup>62</sup> Nichols to Putnam, Nov. 21, 1893, Field Museum, World's Columbian Exposition Collections, Anthropology Department.

<sup>63</sup> Moors, "Some Recollections of Early Samoa." *Samoa Times*, July 4, 1924, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Moors, "Some Recollections of Early Samoa," *Samoa Times*, Aug. 21, 1925, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> N.A., *The Official History of the California Midwinter International Exposition* (San Francisco, CA: H.S. Crocker Co., 1894), 151.

summer 1894, several troupe members moved on to New York where they signed up for another season.<sup>66</sup>

Moors, for his part, seemed to have made money with his Samoan troupes in Chicago and San Francisco because he came back to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904 with a larger troupe. Upon his return to Samoa, he also bought large tracts of land around Apia and in Savai'i where he planted cocoa and grazed horses and cows.<sup>67</sup> Besides the performers who joined the Barnum & Bailey show, two of the Chicago veterans (Siva and Mele) re-enlisted when two German brothers took the next troupe to Europe in 1895. Apparently, their experiences in Chicago—despite initial fears of a repeat of Cunningham's disastrous first tour—did not keep them from signing up again.

### **THE “BELLES OF SAMOA”: MARQUARDT'S TROUPE IN EUROPE, 1895-97**

In summer 1895, less than two years after the Chicago troupe had returned, a third Samoan troupe prepared for their tour, this time bound for Europe. Carl Marquardt, whose brother Friedrich was Apia Police Chief at the time and was married to a mixed-race Samoan woman, had probably heard about the success of Moors's trip to Chicago.<sup>68</sup> A German-born writer and amateur ethnologist himself, Carl teamed up with his brother to recruit Samoans for a tour to Germany and other parts of Europe.<sup>69</sup> Despite concerns

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<sup>66</sup> Moors, "Some Recollections of Early Samoa," *Samoa Times*, Aug. 14, 1925, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> Theroux, "H.J.M.: Showman," 59.

<sup>68</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 93.

<sup>69</sup> In 1899, Carl Marquardt published a groundbreaking study of Samoan tattooing. Carl Marquardt, *Die*

about the members' health after Cunningham's first tour, when five Samoans had died, Marquardt succeeded in convincing 42 Samoans to join his troupe—an unprecedented number. Aware of these earlier difficulties, Marquardt negotiated a detailed contract with Malietoa, which set out the conditions of employment in English and Samoan. The length of the trip was limited to two years, the performers would receive 64 Reichsmark (\$16) per month (40 Reichsmark to be paid on tour, the rest to be paid after return), and they had to agree to specific duties, including obeying Marquardt's orders.<sup>70</sup>

Most importantly for the Samoan performers, the organization of their troupe followed the logic of social rank and duty within Samoan society. Of Marquardt's originally intended number of 42, 32 Samoans actually went on tour, including 25 women and seven men. Nearly all performers were recruited in villages around Apia and were members of influential Samoan families.<sup>71</sup> Amitua, for example, was the son of a Samoan Supreme Judge under Tamasese, while the other six men were sons of *matais*.<sup>72</sup> One of them, Phineas, son of Laiataua, Governor of Manono, had been a police sergeant in Apia in 1893.<sup>73</sup> Among the two dozen women were Faagalo, who knew Phineas from their common childhood in Apia, and her younger sister Manaima, a gifted weaver.<sup>74</sup>

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*Tätowirung beider Geschlechter in Samoa* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1899).

<sup>70</sup> Carl Marquardt, *Der Roman der Samoanerinnen und die Geschäftspraxis des Berliner Passage-Panoptikums* (Berlin: Selbstverlag, 1897), 26.

<sup>71</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 95.

<sup>72</sup> The male members included: Amitua, Phineas, Eliga, Kautane, Sulusulu, Ene, and Lepuupa. *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>74</sup> The female members included: Faagalo, Manaima, Siaumau, Ema, Faamu, Asiasi, Solema, Aumaga, Mamele, Tolopa, Sanonu, Tai Taupa'u, Moto, Eulopa, Ivi, Faapiva, Malia, Fai Atanoa, Soo, Pola, Tiu, Polivia, Kakala, Faapito, Mele, Lautiti, Tatolina, Tuivale, Alaisa, Tautala, Siva, Tui, Tilesa, and Tai II. *Ibid.*, 93.

Siva and Mele were the two women who had already been to Chicago with Moors. They jumped at the opportunity to join the next troupe and explore different places.

On June 26, 1895, the group of 32 Samoans and their manager Carl Marquardt boarded the steamer *Taviuni* and traveled from Apia to Sydney. During their week-long stop there, the Samoan women bought warm clothes, veils, and gloves, no doubt remembering the tragic deaths on the first tour.<sup>75</sup> At the end of July, the troupe reached Bremerhaven in northern Germany and began its first set of shows at the Passage-Panoptikum in Berlin in September 1895. At this commercial entertainment theater, the Samoans sang original songs about their long travels, including a sorrowful farewell song that became very popular among visitors.<sup>76</sup> Their up to eight daily performances also featured boxing matches and a staple of the earlier tours, the preparation of *kava*.<sup>77</sup>

Since the local press had described Fai Atanoa as the most beautiful, dubbing her “Princess Fai,” panopticon director Richard Neumann selected her to prepare the *kava* during the shows. This outside intervention into long-standing Samoan customs sparked strong opposition among the other members of the troupe. Some male members threatened outright violence against Fai because other women were of higher social rank and deserved the right to perform the task. Other men tore down pictures showing Fai as a “Princess” and threatened, upon return to Samoa, to parade her through the villages strung to a stick like a pig to be roasted. Given these explicit threats, Fai wisely refused to go along with the theater director’s request. When Malietoa was informed of the events in faraway Berlin, he sent an indignant protest letter to Marquardt, which convinced the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>76</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, Sept. 19, 1895.

<sup>77</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 99.



German press to change Fai's title from "Princess" to a simple "Miss." This episode showed the long reach of high-ranking Samoans, who exerted their social control across thousands of miles.<sup>78</sup> Ultimately, the confusion about Fai's proper rank and its resolution according to Samoan customs proved that the Samoan performers, backed by their leaders at home, were able to protect their own interests more forcefully than on earlier tours.

While in Berlin, the troupe gave another special performance at the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory, but this time without live body measurements. Again, the Samoan performers had increased their bargaining power. As part of his recruiting permission, Marquardt probably had to vouchsafe for the safety of the Samoan women vis-à-vis Tamasese and Malietoa.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, their bodies remained out of reach for the German anthropologists, if not for a photographer, who shot a series of pictures of the troupe, which the performers went on to sell afterwards.<sup>80</sup> Following stops in Copenhagen and Düsseldorf in the spring, the troupe began a four-week stay at the zoo in Frankfurt am Main at the end of June 1896. With five daily shows, the Samoans were quite busy performing their Samoanness for the benefit of record numbers of visitors.<sup>81</sup> And indeed, when troupe members were beginning to feel exhausted only a few days into their stay, Marquardt extended their lunch break for one

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>80</sup> Balme, *Pacific Performances*, 130; Dürbeck, "Samoa als inszeniertes Paradies," 83.

<sup>81</sup> On July 5, 1896 alone, over 21,000 people visited the zoo, prompting city officials to add extra trams. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, July 7, 1896, p. 1.

hour and reduced their daily work load from ten to nine hours.<sup>82</sup> According to amused newspaper reports, the Samoans swam and dived once a week in the zoo pond, some cleaning their bodies and hair with soap—that “yardstick of civilization”<sup>83</sup>—while others started fishing in the pond.<sup>84</sup> Some Samoan women’s favorite pastime seemed to have become the German children’s game of “Klicker,” which involved throwing small clay balls into holes in the ground.<sup>85</sup>

Most of the other daily routines, like eating food, were not within public view. In the mornings, the Samoan performers received tea and 120 fresh rolls a day, and for lunch and dinner, boiled beef or ox meat with rice, cucumbers or salad, as well as mixed bread as much as they desired. A female cook prepared their food in a special kitchen, a newspaper noted, not without surprise.<sup>86</sup> In stark contrast to these daily meals, pigs were roasted in an earth oven (*umu*) only on Sundays—an event explicitly advertised in local newspapers. The Samoan men who prepared the meal received the pig ready to be roasted directly from the zoo’s butcher and served the final product, first to the women in their troupe, and then to hungry visitors, who found the meat “soft and mellow, but too little salted for German tongues.”<sup>87</sup> If food functions like a cultural grammar, then the

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<sup>82</sup> *Kleine Presse*, July 1, 1896.

<sup>83</sup> “Die Samoanertruppe im Wasser,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, July 12, 1896, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> *Kleine Presse*, July 15, 1896.

<sup>85</sup> “Samoa in Frankfurt,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, July 10, 1896, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> “Samoa in Frankfurt,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, July 8, 1896, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*; “Samoa in Frankfurt,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, July 10, 1896, p. 1.

*umu* symbolized to German spectators the Samoan culture of communal labor and sharing.<sup>88</sup>

After stops in the zoos of Leipzig, Dresden and St. Petersburg, the troupe returned to Berlin for a second stop in March and set up shop again in the Passage-Panoptikum. As during their first stay at the theater, the performers became embroiled in another scandal. In May 1897, the Berlin press reported that Marquardt had encouraged the Samoan men of the troupe to castigate their women with whips. On top of this physical mistreatment, reports also claimed that the Samoan men and women were kept in a small and dark room, received insufficient and bad food, and no pay.<sup>89</sup> Marquardt defended himself against these accusations with a 32-page pamphlet in which he provided precise details on the food and payment given to the performers. According to Marquardt, they received one pound of meat per day and person, plus potatoes, rice, bread, milk and tea at their pleasure.<sup>90</sup> As Marquardt's testimony stood against the newspaper allegations, the Samoans themselves were given no voice at all in the debate. A police investigation, including medical examinations of the Samoan women, failed to confirm the accusations, and it was eventually dropped.

Meanwhile, another conflict arose between the Samoan women and the theater director Neumann. German men who came to the Samoan shows—some even equipped with Samoan dictionaries—had repeatedly tried to touch the Samoan women on stage and in some cases succeeded.<sup>91</sup> While some of the most aggressive men had to be kicked out

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<sup>88</sup> Victor Turner, and Edith Turner, "Performing Ethnography," *The Drama Review* 26, no. 2 (1982): 48.

<sup>89</sup> Cit. in Marquardt, *Roman der Samoanerinnen*, 4f.

<sup>90</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 111.

<sup>91</sup> Marquardt, *Roman der Samoanerinnen*, 20.

of the theater, Neumann surely appreciated the informal advertisement for his erotic performers. In an attempt to avoid another scandal and potential repercussions in Samoa, Marquardt defended the moral integrity of Samoan women against advances from their overly intrusive male admirers. Six Samoan women even fled the Panoptikum and sought refuge at a female cashier's home in Rixdorf.<sup>92</sup> Eventually, a compromise was reached: the Samoan women did not have to sit at the customer tables, but still got in contact with the audience. At some point, Neumann accused Marquardt himself of sexually abusing the women—a claim difficult to prove and probably a ploy to create publicity for the show.<sup>93</sup>

As in the more general allegations concerning mistreatment, lack of food, and withheld wages, the Samoan women did not figure in these debates among white men. Yet, the female troupe members were by no means helpless victims. For example, they used their European travels to spend part of their wages on fashionable hats, red scarves, and fur coats.<sup>94</sup> They also actively resisted the supervision of their white managers by secretly absconding from the Panoptikum. Mamele and Pola simply took matters in their own hands and fled the theater with a young German man. They were eventually found in a hotel in Swinemünde on the North Sea island Usedom, where they stayed with a 21-year-old technician named Alfred. Apparently, Alfred had been visiting the panopticon every day for as much as five hours at a time, and had convinced two of his objects of interest to run away with him.<sup>95</sup> Alfred was only one of several young German men who

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>93</sup> Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde*, 171.

<sup>94</sup> Marquardt, *Roman der Samoanerinnen*, 11.

<sup>95</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 111.

were quite enamored with the Samoan women on stage and followed them on their tour through Europe.<sup>96</sup>

In August 1897, after stops in Vienna, Dresden, and Leipzig, the Samoan troupe returned to the zoo in Frankfurt am Main for a second stint. Beyond the daily performances, which were much the same as during their first stay, a local photographer began selling postcards to zoo visitors with portraits of the Samoan women.<sup>97</sup> Visitors to ethnographic shows collected signed postcards as souvenirs that provided proof of personal contact with the performers.<sup>98</sup> If similar rules prevailed in the Frankfurt zoo as in Chicago, the Samoan models received a fee for their labor or a percentage of the sold postcards.

In 1893, the Samoan performers in Chicago had mingled with their fellow Pacific Islanders, particularly the Hawaiian *hula* dancers on the Midway. Four years later, in the zoo in Frankfurt, the Samoan troupe received another visitor: Gumma, the “Warrior-Queen” from Dahomey. Gumma, who had been to the Frankfurt zoo as part of a troupe of Amazon warriors in August 1891, was then staying in nearby Darmstadt.<sup>99</sup> Whether she had heard about the Samoans performing in Frankfurt or not, Gumma, with a male

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 201. One Berliner travelled to Copenhagen after seeing Fai’s portrait and gave her a golden bracelet. Ibid., 106.

<sup>97</sup> “Aus dem Zoologischen Garten,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Aug. 14, 1897, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> Eric Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck’s Empire of Entertainments* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2008), 91. Thode-Arora, *Für fünfzig Pfennig*, 168-178.

<sup>99</sup> “Aus dem Zoologischen Garten,” *Kleine Presse*, Aug. 13, 1897, p. 4. In a series of ethnographic shows touring Europe during the 1890s, Gumma was cast as the “chief warrior-queen” of a corps of African “Amazons.” On the Amazon shows, see Bruckner, “Tingle-Tangle of Modernity,” 278ff.; Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*, 95-99. It is not known whether Gumma had already been part of the Dahomeyan Village at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 where she might have encountered a Samoan troupe for the first time. On the Dahomeyan Village on the Midway, see Robert W. Rydell, “‘Darkest Africa’: African Shows at America’s World’s Fairs, 1893-1940,” in: *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, edited by Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 136-142.

companion (and interpreter), came to visit them just after they had finished a sumptuous *umu* dinner. She chatted freely with the Samoans, some of whom spoke English, and held young Peter, born in St. Petersburg in February, in her arms.<sup>100</sup> Le Pupa, whom the local press dubbed the “leader” of the troupe, examined Gumma’s dark skin color—an interest in somatic features he evidently shared with German anthropometrists like Virchow. But Le Pupa’s physical contact with his fellow nonwhite performer might have signaled a much more intimate connection among peoples whose strangeness became familiar under the unlikely circumstances of the ethnographic show. Gumma herself seemed not to have minded Le Pupa’s keen interest in her skin and immediately bought one of his photographs before giving two of her own to the Samoan women. They appreciated the gift and exclaimed in German “fein, fein! [fine, fine!]” as they passed them around.<sup>101</sup> Among ethnographic performers like Gumma and Le Pupa, self-portraits functioned as souvenirs to be sold to white visitors, but apparently also as business cards that could be exchanged as tokens of respect and mutual memory.<sup>102</sup> Gumma responded with a dignified smile to the Samoan women’s giggles and proceeded to take a tour of the zoo, which, indeed, must have stirred up memories from her earlier stay.<sup>103</sup> From the Chicago Midway to the Frankfurt zoo, Samoan performers defied official transcripts in surprising ways. Through their curiosity, ethnographic shows staged for the colonizers became crucibles of cross-racial encounter that attested to the shared humanity of the colonized.

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<sup>100</sup> “Aus dem Zoologischen Garten,” *Kleine Presse*, Aug. 13, 1897, p. 4.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Gumma had extensive experience selling her photographs—group pictures for one Reichsmark (25c) and bare-breasted solo portraits for two Reichsmark (50c)—to German audiences. Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 134.

<sup>103</sup> “Bratfest bei den Samoanern,” *Frankfurter General-Anzeiger*, Aug. 13, 1897, p. 2.

In the fall of 1897, after two-and-a-half years abroad, the troupe ended its tour through Europe and reached Samoa in December.<sup>104</sup> Many performers brought loads of gifts and Western goods back home with them, including three bicycles.<sup>105</sup> Marquardt's first tour was not only the longest (30 months) and best paid (\$16/month), but also included the greatest proportion of female performers (78%) of all ethnographic tours at the turn of the twentieth century. Somewhere along the way, Faagalo and Phineas, the former police sergeant, discovered they shared more than a sense of adventure. They fell in love while on tour and got married upon their return to Samoa.<sup>106</sup> Newly wed, they moved to Fiji to work as lay preachers for the Samoans living there. They bought some land and ran a laundry, staying for seven years. In 1905, they returned to what had become German Samoa and Phineas decided to pick up his old job and entered the German colonial police.<sup>107</sup> Phineas had not only found love on tour, but also discovered the benefits of serving the colonial empire he had visited a decade earlier.

### **“OUR NEW COMPATRIOTS FROM SAMOA”: TUVALE’S *MALAGA* IN EUROPE, 1900-01**

In 1900, the German flag was raised in Apia. Following the Berlin Treaty of 1899, Upolu and Savai'i had become German colonies, while Tutuila was now officially part of American Samoa. Given this change in political status, German colonial officials thought

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<sup>104</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 110.

<sup>105</sup> *Samoa Weekly Herald*, Jan. 1, 1898.

<sup>106</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 95, 112.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

it would be fitting to send another ethnographic troupe from the new colony to Europe. The Marquardt brothers, again, offered to recruit a group of Samoans, but this time, with the direct involvement of a leading Samoan: Te'o Tuvale. Born into an affluent family of pastors and civil servants, Tuvale was a powerful *matai*, who had spent time in Fiji in the 1880s and had worked as assistant clerk to his half-brother Le Mamea, the government interpreter. Marquardt hoped that under Tuvale's leadership, his second tour to Europe would avoid the conflicts about rank and gender that had plagued the 1895 tour. With the respect he commanded among his fellow Samoans, Tuvale, indeed, managed to recruit a more cohesive and stable group of performers and successfully organized its travels. Even more importantly, Tuvale did not see the tour primarily as an ethnographic show, but rather as a travelling party (*malaga*), with its Samoan members offering song and dance in exchange for European hospitality and respect.<sup>108</sup> As a result, the Samoan group consisted of a diplomatic delegation, led by Tuvale himself, and a cultural group made up of *taupou* Naitua and a number of talented performers.<sup>109</sup> The high status of *matais* like Tuvale freed them from performative labor abroad. With this division of labor grounded in Samoan traditions, the travellers made the tour their own.

Marquardt himself, in line with German colonial officials, planned to use the tour to stress the fact that Samoa was now a German colony. Consequently, he highlighted the martial prowess of Samoan men more than the beauty of Samoan women, as in earlier tours.<sup>110</sup> Marquardt's and Tuvale's conceptions of the tour, however, were far from

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>109</sup> Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, *Tamaitai Samoa: Their Stories* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1996), 25.

<sup>110</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 121.



mutually exclusive. If Tuvale opened the troupe performances with a speech that conveyed his joy about fact that Samoa was now German, he also made sure that he would meet up with German dignitaries, including Emperor Wilhelm II himself.<sup>111</sup> The official theme of the meeting of two warrior peoples on equal terms could be made compatible with the Samoans' understanding of a "goodwill" tour.<sup>112</sup> And as businessmen like Marquardt knew, exotic visitors with royal heritage rarely failed to attract visitors.<sup>113</sup>

Marquardt and Tuvale recruited a group of 29 Samoans, including 10 men and 19 women. Among the male members were many direct acquaintances of Tuvale's, which ensured greater discipline.<sup>114</sup> Most prominent among the female members was Naitua, the only daughter of *matai* Atoamalefuaiupolu So'onanofo. A mere 17 years old at the time, Naitua became the official *taupou* of the troupe, in accordance with her father's rank.<sup>115</sup> Taking a large collection of objects with them, including arms and daily use objects, the troupe departed Apia on January 17, 1900.<sup>116</sup> Their performances in Europe featured many of the same elements from earlier tours: songs, dances, collecting nuts from a coconut tree, preparing *kava*, war scenes, fist fights, and, as a new addition, showcases of

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Balme, *Pacific Performances*, 132f.

<sup>113</sup> Alexander C. T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 48.

<sup>114</sup> The male members included: Te'o Tuvale, Faitau, Taulago Aiono Tavita, Leuelu, Tufue, Laifa, Po, Naoupu, Faiumu, and Tolio. Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 120f.

<sup>115</sup> The female members included: Naitua, Iloga, Iulita, Sovita, Mu, Tanuli, Mele, Vaifanua, Sieni, Faatafue, Leoo, Faosoo, Tae, Fili, Elena, Laititi, Faalataina, Taalili, and Alisa. Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 121; Balme, *Pacific Performances*, 133.

Samoaan cricket. Probably due to Tuvale's direct involvement in the planning of the tour, the maximum number of shows per day was reduced from eight to six.

After initial stops at a panopticon in Cologne and the Berlin Zoo in the spring, the Samoaan troupe moved on to the political highlight of their tour. At a navy parade in Kiel on June 28, 1900, Tuvale realized one of the central goals of his diplomatic mission and met with the German Head of State, Wilhelm II. Both Tuvale and Wilhelm II gave obligatory speeches in their native tongues, while in a reversal of colonial hierarchies, Carl's brother Friedrich Marquardt helped interpret the speeches.<sup>117</sup> After this formality of both Samoaan and German diplomatic culture, Wilhelm II and Tuvale had a friendly conversation before the Kaiser turned his attention back to the parade. Three weeks after their encounter in Kiel, Tuvale received a golden wristwatch from Wilhelm II through German Consul Rose, while the Samoaan women were given rings, bracelets, and scarves. The German officials even sent a collection of toys to boy Peter. Upon receiving these gifts, the Samoaan troupe reportedly broke out in an improvised show to give thanks to the Kaiser.<sup>118</sup> The Samoaan performers seemed to have been so impressed by these gifts that even a year later when they returned to one of their mainstays, the Frankfurt Zoo, they set up a table to exhibit the collection of watches and rings they had received from the Kaiser.<sup>119</sup> Lying not far from the cultural objects they had brought with them from

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<sup>117</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 127.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> "Samoaaner in Frankfurt," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, June 20, 1901, p. 2.

Samoa, these royal gifts were easily incorporated into the symbolism of Tuvale's diplomatic mission.<sup>120</sup>

In May 1901, while the troupe was in Germany, the Colonial Department of the German Foreign Office issued a ban on recruiting colonial subjects for public display.<sup>121</sup> Modeled on existing bans on exporting laborers from German colonies, the new ban prohibited the export of ethnographic troupes from German colonies for the purpose of exhibiting them abroad.<sup>122</sup> The *German Colonial Society* had lobbied for such a ban since the mid-1890s when a series of widely reported scandals involving ethnographic performers (particularly at the 1896 German Colonial Exposition in Berlin) dominated the German press.<sup>123</sup> Advocates argued that a ban on exhibiting German colonial subjects abroad would protect the physical and moral integrity of the performers, but, even more importantly, help contain the escalating voyeurism of their white German spectators.<sup>124</sup> In addition, supporters also cited the alleged loss of cultural authenticity among performers, who wore Western clothes, spoke European languages, and were not afraid to mingle with racially superior Germans.<sup>125</sup> Against considerable odds, performers had succeeded

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<sup>120</sup> On the politics of collecting ethnographic objects in Imperial Germany, see H. Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>121</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 126; Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire*, 98-102; Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde*, 275; Bruckner, "Tingle-Tangle of Modernity," 375-424.

<sup>122</sup> Harald Sippel, "Rassismus, Protektionismus oder Humanität? Die gesetzlichen Verbote der Anwerbung von 'Eingeborenen' zu Schaustellungszwecken in den deutschen Kolonien," in: *Kolonialausstellungen: Begegnungen mit Afrika?*, edited by Robert Debusmann, and János Riesz (Frankfurt/Main: IKO-Verlag für interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1995), 56f.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>124</sup> This critique of ethnographic shows emanated especially from German missionary societies. Bruckner, "Tingle-Tangle of Modernity," 390-403.

<sup>125</sup> Balme, *Pacific Performances*, 131f.; Bruckner, "Tingle-Tangle of Modernity," 407.

in transforming ethnographic shows into cultural bridges and a form of commercial labor based on ethnic diversity. As the predominantly white visitors were turned into passive spectators, the threat to white supremacy could only be contained by banning the shows altogether.<sup>126</sup> The subsequent tour with Tamasese in 1910-11 would need special permission to circumvent this ban.<sup>127</sup>

Meanwhile, the Samoan troupe visited Zurich and Cologne in winter 1900 before moving on to Munich in April 1901. There, the Samoans performed in Hammers Panoptikum, a commercial entertainment theater known for its exotic as well as erotic shows. While the rest of the troupe gave shows in the theater, Tuvale continued to pursue his diplomatic mission in other parts of town. After some inquiries, he managed to meet up with Prince Regent Luitpold who presented him with a portrait with a personal dedication. After his meeting with the German Head of State in June 1900, Tuvale also succeeded in shaking hands with the leader of the Bavarian royal family—who held a somewhat similar position as Tuvale occupied in Samoa.<sup>128</sup>

After stops at zoos in Dresden, Frankfurt am Main, and Leipzig in summer 1901, the troupe returned to Samoa in December.<sup>129</sup> According to his own report, Marquardt did not make a profit from the two-year tour. With Cunningham's tour in mind, he also

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<sup>126</sup> Alexander Honold, "Der Exot und sein Publikum: Völkerschau in der Kolonialzeit," in: *Rassenmischehen, Mischlinge, Rassentrennung: Zur Politik der Rasse im deutschen Kolonialreich*, edited by Frank Becker (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004), 374.

<sup>127</sup> Bruckner, "Tingle-Tangle of Modernity," 422. Carl Marquardt himself reacted to the ban by exporting ethnographic objects from Samoa to museums around the world, using local contacts through his brother and sister-in-law. Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 54.

<sup>128</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 127.

<sup>129</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, Mar. 29, 1902.

made sure to receive official confirmation that he brought back the Samoans healthy.<sup>130</sup> The actual manager of the Samoan troupe, Tuvale, was in more than good health upon his return. While on tour, he had fallen in love with Naitua, the *taupou*, when he cared for her during a sickness. Much like Faagalo and Phineas four years earlier, Naitua and Tuvale got married right after their return and would go on to raise nine children together.<sup>131</sup> Even before his return to Samoa, Tuvale, together with Tolo, was hired by Imperial Judge Schnee as a clerk.<sup>132</sup> Several other young *matais* who were part of the troupe also entered the German colonial service as policemen, when they returned.<sup>133</sup> One of Tuvale's sons, Atoa Te'o Tuvale, followed his father's footsteps in the colonial service and became chief interpreter of the independent Western Samoa's Legislative Assembly. Tuvale himself did not live to see the day of Samoan independence in 1962. He passed away in 1919, only briefly after New Zealand had taken over German Samoa.

### **MEET THE SAMOANS IN ST. LOUIS, 1904**

Two years after the return of the last troupe, another world's fair was on the horizon in the United States: the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904.

Commemorating the centennial of Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the world's fair was designed to showcase the rising global power of the United States. Under the leadership of the president of the American Anthropological Association, W.J. McGee,

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<sup>130</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 129.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

the fair's anthropological exhibit was the largest to date and included more than 2,000 human exhibits from around the world.<sup>134</sup> To represent the largest colony that the United States had recently acquired, an enormous "Philippine Reservation" was mounted on the fairgrounds in St. Louis, stretching over 47 acres, filled with six "native villages" and a total of 75,000 exhibits. Over a thousand Filipinos participated in the performances, including Igorots who attracted large numbers of visitors because they publicly consumed dog meat.<sup>135</sup>

Given the unprecedented numbers and diversity of ethnographic performers, the St. Louis fair was a veritable field research station for the study of nonwhite racial types.<sup>136</sup> Modeled on the Midway Plaisance in Chicago, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition organizers designed a mile-long entertainment strip called "The Pike," where a number of exotic shows took place.<sup>137</sup> Like in Chicago, Hagenbeck's animal show again performed in St. Louis and added to the sensationalist character of the Pike. Other visitors from abroad had more difficulties attending: the Chinese delegates to the fair were subjected to excessive restrictions, primarily because the U.S. government and several western states had passed exclusion acts to keep Chinese migrant workers out.<sup>138</sup> A year after desperate German plantation owners had finally succeeded in importing Chinese workers to German Samoa, public debate and policy in the United States aimed

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<sup>134</sup> Jose D. Fermin, *1904 World's Fair: The Filipino Experience* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2004), 151.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 1-4; Christopher A. Vaughan, "Ogling Igorots: The Politics and Commerce of Exhibiting Cultural Otherness, 1898-1913," in: *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, edited by Rosemarie G. Thomson (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1996), 223f.

<sup>136</sup> Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 163.

<sup>137</sup> On the "polyglot" Pike, see Nancy J. Parezo, and Don Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 234-265.

<sup>138</sup> McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, 241.

in the opposite direction. Avoiding these diplomatic countercurrents, a team of Chinese and American impresarios organized a Chinese village on the Pike, complete with theater, bazaar, and tea house.<sup>139</sup>

Unlike the Chinese delegation, the Samoan performers were more than welcome in St. Louis since the 1901 ban did not prohibit exhibitions outside of Germany. It was again the entertainment veteran Moors who ventured to recruit a group of Samoans to bring to the world's fair. Given his success in Chicago a decade earlier, Moors, who had in the meantime become one of the largest taxpayers in German Samoa, was probably eager to go on another tour. The troupe of fifty Pacific Islanders, most of them Samoans, who went with him to St. Louis seemed to have been eager as well. Most of them knew about the tragic first tour organized by Cunningham in 1889, but had also heard about the exciting adventures, material gain, and love stories of the subsequent tours. Some Samoan *matais* in Tutuila seemed to have been so eager to go to St. Louis that in June 1903 they approached Governor Edward B. Underwood, who was sympathetic to the idea. Similar to his German colleagues, Underwood reasoned that a Samoan presence on the fair would not only showcase U.S. colonial interests but also educate the Samoans about the superiority of their colonizers. He even suggested to arrange an interview with President Theodor Roosevelt either in St. Louis or in Washington, D.C.<sup>140</sup> Unprecedented in number and ethnic diversity, Moors's St. Louis troupe also brought an unprecedented

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<sup>139</sup> Mark Bennett, ed., *History of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, Comprising the History of the Louisiana Territory, the Story of the Louisiana Purchase and a Full Account of the Great Exposition, Embracing the Participation of the States and Nations of the World, and Other Events of the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904* (St. Louis, MO: Universal Exposition Publishing Co., 1905), 722.

<sup>140</sup> Underwood to Ass. Sec. of Navy, July 10, 1903, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 35, p. 8.

amount of props and objects with them. A whole ship had to be chartered to transport the troupe and its stage materials across the Pacific.<sup>141</sup>

Upon arrival in San Francisco in April 1904, Moors first bought warm clothes for the troupe members who were not used to the chilly springs of Northern California. In St. Louis, Moors needed to aggressively advertise the Samoan troupe to fairgoers, who had by then acquired quite some experience in ethnological slumming. To attract attention, Moors circulated a flier that quoted Julian Hawthorne, son of the more famous Nathaniel, who heaped lavish praise on the performers. According to Hawthorne, Moors's troupe was "the most delightful and refreshing performance at the Fair," including a young Fijian man, who "looks just like an antique statue of a Greek God, or Faun" and a Samoan woman, Lola, "as beautiful at all points as any young woman I should care to see."<sup>142</sup> Newspapers, too, praised the show for "the best dancing in the Plaisance. It makes no pretense to grossness, but is simply downright savage."<sup>143</sup> One reporter even pointed out that the Samoans were not cannibals anymore and were, to the contrary, so Christianized that, alone among the World Fair's companies, they refused to perform on Sundays.<sup>144</sup> Among the show's many visitors was a familiar face from back home: Richard Williams, the Irish-born governor of Savai'i, who had spent a few months of his vacation in Europe before travelling back to Samoa through St. Louis.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Furnas, *Anatomy of Paradise*, 420.

<sup>142</sup> Julian Hawthorne, *Humors of the Fair* (Chicago, IL: E.A. Weeks & Co., 1893), 169.

<sup>143</sup> Cit. in Furnas, *Anatomy of Paradise*, 420.

<sup>144</sup> Cit. in *ibid.*, 421.

<sup>145</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, Oct. 22, 1904, p. 2.



The Gilbert Islanders among the troupe members seemed to have been the most popular dancers among fair visitors. As Moors knew all too well from Gilman's recordings in Chicago in 1893, traditional Samoan music relied mainly on percussions. To produce a more wholesome musical experience for the visitors, Moors simply hired the services of a Mexican orchestra to accompany Samoan dancing.<sup>146</sup> Polynesian dancers, thus, received music support from the eastern fringes of the Pacific. Apparently, Moors's mixed-race daughter also participated in the performances and later remembered that the Samoan women in the troupe "cautioned her not to encourage cheap skates by stooping to pick up anything smaller than a quarter."<sup>147</sup> By 1904, the Samoan performers had grown wise to the rules of the erotic marketplace on world fairs.

Like on earlier tours, the performers also made extra money by selling postcards and curiosity objects from their islands that they produced during show breaks. In these side shows of receiving tips and selling curios, performative labor enabled other forms of paid labor and additional opportunities for profit. To be sure, Samoans and other Pacific Islanders had been selling "native" objects as souvenirs to visitors to their islands since the early nineteenth century. From this historical perspective, their sales in world fairs were a logical extension of this conscious participation in the commodification of Polynesian culture. And yet, the fully commercialized setting in which the performers appeared in ethnographic shows lent these interstitial economic transactions a different flavor. If Samoan performers already offered their cultural authenticity on stage, they could continue to make money with it when the spotlights were off. By selling fine mats

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<sup>146</sup> Furnas, *Anatomy of Paradise*, 420.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

and other Samoan curios, the female troupe members actually received cash for work that went unpaid at home.

Besides selling curios, the performers used their spare time to explore different parts of the fairgrounds. Provided they remained in “native costume,” they enjoyed free entry to all other shows on the Pike.<sup>148</sup> Samoan performers were particularly drawn to fellow Pacific Islanders and subjects under U.S. colonial rule such as the Hawaiians, whose native products were exhibited on the fair.<sup>149</sup> Since the Filipino “reservation” was the largest of the fair, the Samoans probably also ran into one of the thousand Filipino performers from time to time. What they talked about in these encounters (and in what language) remains unknown. Judging from earlier exchanges with the Hawaiian *hula* dancers in Chicago and “Princess” Gumma in Frankfurt, the Samoan performers must have been good listeners, equipped with an extraordinary curiosity for foreign cultures and languages. And on one of their strolls through the fair, the Samoans might even have come across a collection of plants from their home islands—part of the German Educational Exhibition in St. Louis.

When the fair drew to a close in December 1904, Moors continued the tour to other cities in the United States. For another year-and-a-half, they barnstormed the country from coast to coast, performing as much as twice a day.<sup>150</sup> As had happened on earlier tours through urban entertainment theaters in Germany, the Samoan women, in particular, became the objects of intense interest among male spectators, at times aggressively so. Following a series of incidents, Moors decided to set up stricter rules for

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 421.

<sup>149</sup> Bennett, *History of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition*, 481.

<sup>150</sup> Furnas, *Anatomy of Paradise*, 421.

the Samoan women against socializing with the men in the audience. As a result, the women started dancing with their chins up in the air to prevent eye contact with unwanted suitors.<sup>151</sup> Samoan dancers seemed to have had few problems incorporating Moors's disciplining measure and adapted their performances accordingly. After seven months in St. Louis and an additional eighteen months on the road, the Samoan troupe finally returned home in mid-1906.

### **SAMOANS IN UNEXPECTED PLACES: TAMASESE'S DIPLOMATIC MISSION TO EUROPE, 1910-1911**

Spurred on by his successful tours to Chicago and St. Louis, Moors planned on bringing another Samoan troupe to Sydney in summer 1908. In June 1908, Moors asked the German colonial administration for permission to set up a Samoan Village in Sydney, with 60 Samoans and other islanders from Fiji, Fortuna, and the Gilbert Islands.<sup>152</sup> In the prevalent mode of advertising colonial products, Moors ostensibly planned to create public attention for business opportunities in Samoan cacao. Additionally, he argued that by including other islanders, the Samoan Village would prove the racial and cultural superiority of the "natives" of German Samoa. Citing the 1901 ban on exporting colonial subjects for exhibitions, the German Colonial Office dismissed Moors's request. Fears of Samoan performers being exposed to Anglo-Saxon political and cultural influence in Australia, and under an American manager, might have been additional factors. Possibly, Moors tried to use his Sydney plans as a pretext to circumvent the official German ban on

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> RKA to Schultz, Sept. 21, 1908, BArch R 1001/2269.

recruiting Samoans for exhibitions, but failed.<sup>153</sup> Since the ban did not extend to travels of colonial subjects within the Pacific, a Samoan entrepreneur named Limu Aitufele was able to take a group of fellow Samoan performers to Fiji in 1902.<sup>154</sup>

Friedrich Marquardt, too, had applied for permission to recruit Samoan troupes in 1904 and 1907, but had likewise failed to convince the authorities in Berlin. It was not until 1910, when Marquardt, with heavy support from Governor Solf, succeeded in organizing another Samoan tour to Europe. Starting in July 1909, Marquardt had begun lobbying the German Colonial Office by arguing that the Samoans saw themselves as Germans and should be allowed to visit Germany.<sup>155</sup> According to Marquardt, Samoans themselves were saying: “We are, after all, Germans. Why would anyone want to ban us from seeing Germany?”<sup>156</sup> In addition, another Samoan troupe in Germany would reinforce the benevolent reputation of the colonial administration, now in its tenth year of rule. Facing growing tensions between Tamasese, who offered to lead the troupe, and his rival Mata’afa Iosefo about the question of title succession, Solf reached an agreement with his superiors in Berlin by framing the tour as a diplomatic mission.<sup>157</sup> Marquardt received special permission to recruit another troupe only after Solf had started to actively support a temporary lifting of the ban in Berlin.

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<sup>153</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 139.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> Balme, *Pacific Performances*, 133.

<sup>156</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 140. In contrast to African ethnographic shows at the time, the Samoan shows emphasized traits Samoans shared with their German colonizers. Balme, *Pacific Performances*, 132; Jutta Steffen-Schrade, “Samoaner im Frankfurter Zoo,” in: *Talofa! Samoa, Südsee: Ansichten und Einsichten*, edited by Gerda Kroeber-Wolf, and Peter Mesenhöller (Frankfurt/M.: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1998), 382.

<sup>157</sup> Balme, *Pacific Performances*, 134; Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde*, 275.

Conflicts with the German Colonial Office did not subside with this special permission granted to Marquardt. The terms of the labor contract Marquardt offered his recruits in late January 1910 caused another wave of criticism from Berlin. As with all earlier tours, travel expenses, accommodation, food, and even medical treatment, were paid for. For their services, the Samoan performers were to receive 24 Reichsmark (\$6) per month, with an additional four Reichsmark (\$1) for performances on Sundays. Half of this monthly wage was to be paid every first of the month and the rest after the troupe's return. This was, by far, the lowest monthly wage of all Samoan tours. The contract also included wage cuts for breaches of contract if, for example, performers, who were referred to as Marquardt's "servants," refused to follow his orders or protested against the censorship of their correspondence to family and friends back home.<sup>158</sup> Furthermore, the performers were not allowed to wear European clothes and the women among them could not cut their hair.<sup>159</sup>

The Colonial Office took exception to several elements of the contract, especially the potential wage cuts and—remembering the premature return of Leasusu and Lealofi in summer 1890—the lack of a deposit in the case of an early return home. Self defended the terms of the contract as modeled on earlier versions and personally vouchsafed for Marquardt's good record. Ultimately, the Samoan performers signed Marquardt's contract under the original terms and even spread rumors that the colonial administration would pay for Tamasese's travel expenses and probably had something special planned

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<sup>158</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 140.

<sup>159</sup> "Ausführung von Eingeborenen zum Zwecke der Schaustellung," NAS, IG-24 F2.

for him.<sup>160</sup> Not unlike the contract laborers from Melanesia and China who had come to Samoa to work on copra plantations, the Samoan performers' desire to travel, make money, and make new friends outweighed the harsh labor discipline they faced on tour.

On February 10, 1910, a group of 28 Samoans, including 10 men and 18 women, left Apia for Hamburg, via Sydney and London. Carefully selected by Tamasese himself, all performers came from high-ranking families whose individual names were, for the first time, listed in Marquardt's official show brochure.<sup>161</sup> Alongside Tamasese's wife Va'aiga and two daughters from earlier marriages, his son Mea'ole, who would become the first Head of State of independent Samoa in 1962, joined the troupe.<sup>162</sup> Similar to the 1901 tour, the show program included dances, fights, *kava* preparation, rowing in outrigger canoes, and, as a popular addition, watersliding on a specially constructed rock modeled on the waterfalls in Papaseea.<sup>163</sup> Tamasese, like Tuvale before him, did not participate in these performances.

At the first stop, the Hamburg Zoo, in May and June 1910, tens of thousands of visitors, including many school classes, came to see the Samoans slide down their replica waterfalls. Even more so than on earlier tours, the performers sold postcards showing portraits and Samoan scenes and kept the proceeds from these sales to themselves.<sup>164</sup> In late May, the Samoans put down their performer hats and took a tour of the zoo

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<sup>160</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 141.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 142; Dürbeck, "Samoa als inszeniertes Paradies," 92.

<sup>162</sup> The male members included: Tamasese Lealofi, Mea'ole, 'Ai'ono, Saili, Talesito, Pao, Tito, Eteloma Aiono, Vaegau, and probably also Titipa Setefano. The female members included: Va'aiga, Pu'emalo, Soli, Tautau, Faiiluga, Faiilalo, Feagai, Soolenini, Sina, Leuta, Fiaono, Toe, Pepa, Faiai, Fasiiloilo, Metita, and Lonola. Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 141f.

<sup>163</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 219; Balme, *Pacific Performances*, 134; Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 145.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

themselves, feeding the giant and unfamiliar elephants. Defying their preconceived roles as exotic performers, the Samoans also became interested spectators of another ethnographic show when they visited the premiere of the circus show *Farmerleben* [A Farmer's Life] then on tour in Hamburg, which featured scenes and stunts set in the American Wild West.<sup>165</sup>

While his fellow Samoans were engaged in performances of their own and of others, Tamasese used his time to visit an old friend from Samoa who had retired to Hamburg: former DHPG manager Otto Riedel. Married to a Samoan-born wife, Riedel was quite surprised when Tamasese and his wife suddenly rang their doorbell. In his memoirs, Riedel recounted the scene:

One day—we were then living on Adolphstraße—my wife and I heard some commotion at the front door. Our Hamburg maid gave a shrill scream, and a dark voice hollered into the house: ‘Bella! Bella!’ — My wife [Bella Decker, born in Samoa] rushed outside. There there stood Tamasese and his second wife Vaalinga. The huge Samoan simply pushed our maid aside when he was sure that the Riedels were living here and then rushed towards my wife and me. Tamasese envisioned his trip to Germany a little different from his managers. He probably looked at it as a kind of visit with new friends. He did not like the fact that he would be shown in zoos, the more so as he was not housed adequately. Marquardt apparently did not want him to come close to me. But Tamasese and his wife simply jumped into a car and told the Hamburg driver: ‘Otto Riedel!’. He could not imagine that there would be anybody in Hamburg who did not know me. The driver, with whom Tamasese naturally could only communicate through gestures, reacted very wisely. He looked into a phone book, found my address there, and brought his exotic guests right there where they wanted to go.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 144. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show was the most popular ethnographic show at the time in Europe. Robert W. Rydell, and Bob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Germans, in particular, were fascinated by Karl May's adventure novels which featured heroic Native Americans. H. Glenn Penny, *Kindred by Choice: Germans and American Indians Since 1800* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire*, 107-115.

<sup>166</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 219.

Riedel himself agreed with Tamasese's disgust at being exhibited in zoos, feeling that "good faith was betrayed here."<sup>167</sup> Riedel, in any case, was happy to see Tamasese, as was his wife, who immediately started speaking Samoan with the unexpected guests. While they stayed in Hamburg, Tamasese and his wife would visit the Riedels' home regularly, prompting Riedel to admire "the self-assurance with which these Samoans found their way around [in Germany]."<sup>168</sup> While, on earlier trips, the Samoan travellers had made new friends with Hawaiian *hula* dancers in Chicago and Princess Gumma in Frankfurt, Tamasese was keen on seeing old friends again in Hamburg.

After a series of stops at zoos in Frankfurt, Cologne, Breslau, and Dresden, the Samoan troupe set up their exhibition at one of the most famous entertainment fairs in Germany: the Oktoberfest in Munich.<sup>169</sup> For the entire two weeks of the beer festival's centennial, the Samoans had a "native village" set up on a huge separate exhibition space, north of the Theresienwiese, where they rowed on a small lake, slid down rocks, and roasted pigs. The Samoans competed with other more or less exotic attractions at the Oktoberfest, such as a show featuring dwarfs and giants, an agricultural exhibition (including cows and pigs), an airship, and an Eskimo troupe.<sup>170</sup> Carl Gabriel, the organizer of the "Samoa in Munich" show, had, in fact, complained about the Eskimo show, which was organized by a rival impresario. The Munich city administration,

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> In Breslau, Tamasese took a trip in the airship *Parseval*, which, like him, travelled on to the Oktoberfest in Munich. Asked if he was scared during his daring flight, Tamasese mixed Samoan bravado with the nonchalance of an experienced tourist on a grand tour through Europe: "Scared! Why should I be? If white men are to afraid to go up in airships, why should we Samoans be? No one will say, surely, that we are cowards [...] There is no more courage needed to go in on an airship than to go on an ordinary ship or a train." *Sydney Morning Herald*, Nov. 9, 1911.

<sup>170</sup> Ernst von Destouches, *Die Jahrhundertfeier des Münchener Oktoberfestes: Gedenkbuch* (Munich: Lindauer, 1912), 44.



however, would hear none of it.<sup>171</sup> Despite this direct competition, Gabriel's Samoa show turned out to be a big success. A well-known actor and experienced impresario based in Munich, Gabriel operated Hammers Panoptikum, where Tuvale's troupe had performed in April 1901, and had organized a successful "Tunis" show together with Carl Marquardt in Munich in 1904.<sup>172</sup> Gabriel probably relied on his old contact Marquardt to bring the Samoans to Munich.

On September 26, 1910, the Samoan troupe received a guest of honor: Prince Regent Luitpold of Bavaria. For two hours, Luitpold strolled through the Samoan Village and chatted with the performers. Tamasese even explained the intricacies of Samoan tattooing to Luitpold, who in return bestowed upon Tamasese a centennial medal and a golden ring.<sup>173</sup> Later on, Tamasese also met with the Bavarian King Louis II, and gave him a fine mat, a *kava* bowl, and a fan.<sup>174</sup> Like Tuvale before him, Tamasese understood his travel to Europe as a diplomatic mission and welcomed every opportunity to exchange gifts and speeches with Germany's political leadership. He succeeded in securing meetings with high-level officials in Munich, but, more importantly, also with the top brass in Berlin.

After spending the three-month winter quarter in a villa in Joachimsthal outside Berlin, the Samoan troupe returned to Castan's Panoptikum in Berlin for a two-month stint in February 1911. Towards the end of their stay in Berlin, former Governor of

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<sup>171</sup> Gabriel to Ansprenger, Sept. 11, 1910, StAM, Oktoberfest, No. 114.

<sup>172</sup> Anne Dreesbach, "'Neu! Grösste Sehenswürdigkeit! Neu! Zum ersten Male in München!' Exotisches auf dem Münchner Oktoberfest zwischen 1890 und 1911," in: *Gleich hinterm Hofbräuhaus waschechte Amazonen': Exotik in München um 1900*, edited by Anne Dreesbach, and Helmut Zedelmaier (Munich: Dölling und Galitz, 2003), 23, 27.

<sup>173</sup> Destouches, *Jahrhundertfeier des Münchener Oktoberfestes*, 79.

<sup>174</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 219f.

German Samoa and then head of the Colonial Office, Solf, hosted a lavish dinner in the posh Hotel Adlon, which over a hundred select guests attended. To represent Solf's credentials as an able colonial administrator, the Samoans gave a special performance at the dinner.<sup>175</sup> Afterwards, Tamasese was even more impatient to see the German Emperor and reiterated his request to Solf. Tamasese's incessant pressure finally paid off on May 26, 1911, when he and three aides (including the old *matai* Ai'ono) were invited to a spring parade of the German military in Tempelhof. Donning a brand-new tailor-made white suit that had cost 70 Reichsmark (\$17.50), Tamasese was introduced to Wilhelm II by Solf. Tamasese kissed the Emperor's hand and struck up a friendly conversation with him. To make this chat among royals possible, Tamasese's wife Va'aiga interpreted the Kaiser's German into Samoan.<sup>176</sup> Central to Samoan diplomatic etiquette, Tamasese handed two fine mats to Wilhelm II, who later responded by sending Tamasese his portrait. Tamasese also gave a speech in which he stressed the lasting friendship between Samoa and Germany. The Berlin press lauded him, calling Samoans good carriers of colonial propaganda.<sup>177</sup>

Despite this instrumentalization for colonial purposes, Tamasese never forgot that day and, allegedly, even continued to believe in a German victory until the very end of the Great War.<sup>178</sup> In an interview with a Sydney newspaper on his way back to Samoa, Tamasese remembered his encounter with German royalty in exuberant terms:

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<sup>175</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 169.

<sup>176</sup> Leary, *New Zealanders in Samoa*, 110.

<sup>177</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 173.

<sup>178</sup> Riedel, *Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa*, 220. Riedel's memory was undoubtedly skewed by the colonial revisionism that came to dominate Weimar and Nazi Germany. Florian Krobb, and Elaine Martin, eds., *Weimar Colonialism: Discourses and Legacies of Post-Imperialism in Germany after 1918* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2014).

“Everybody was very kind to us. I was given a seat in one of the Royal carriages, and was taken to one of the Kaiser’s castles. It was wonderful.”<sup>179</sup> He also said that he was very impressed by the size of the German army and the electric trams in Berlin.<sup>180</sup> Critics of the ban on allowing German colonial subjects to travel for exhibition purposes were certainly glad to hear Tamasese’s remarks. After all, it was they who had argued as early as the 1890s that visiting ethnographic troupes from the German colonies would be impressed by Germany’s technological and cultural superiority and, consequently, think twice about armed resistance. Tamasese, for his part, while duly impressed by the size of the German army, pursued his own diplomatic agenda while on tour. Following Samoan traditions, Tamasese, like Tuvale in 1901, insisted on meeting with his aristocratic counterparts in Germany eye to eye. With a mix of pressure and politeness, he managed to turn the tour of an ethnographic troupe, originally designed to present Samoans as “kindred spirits” to German audiences, into a *malaga* among equals.<sup>181</sup> On their way home, the performers were chatting “pleasantly enough of the long ‘malaga’ (journey) they had made to the Fatherland.”<sup>182</sup>

After almost a year abroad, the Samoan performers finally returned home on November 22, 1911.<sup>183</sup> According to family memory, Pu’emalo, Tamasese’s daughter from his first marriage, enjoyed her travels through Europe immensely and would have liked to stay longer. Her reluctance to go back to Samoa probably had something to do

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<sup>179</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, Nov. 9, 1911.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Balme, *Pacific Performances*, 123.

<sup>182</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, Nov. 9, 1911.

<sup>183</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 168.

with the fact that she had fallen in love on tour. Pu'emalo and Eteloma had become a couple as they were travelling through Europe and were expecting a child when they returned to Samoa. Like Naitua and Tuvale before them and Faagalo and Phineas even earlier, Pu'emalo and Eteloma found love in unexpected places far from home.<sup>184</sup>

## **THE SAMOAN VILLAGE AT THE PANAMA-PACIFIC EXPOSITION IN SAN FRANCISCO, 1915**

Half a year into a world war that brought a new colonial power to Western Samoa, another Samoan troupe left Apia to perform abroad. Celebrating the opening of the Panama Canal under U.S. control, the Panama-Pacific International Exposition opened in San Francisco in March 1915.<sup>185</sup> Since German Samoa had come under New Zealand military administration in the first weeks of the war, chances for recruiting performers there were slim. Instead, the American impresario Richard Schneidewind went to American Samoa to put together a group of Samoan performers for San Francisco. Born in Detroit, Schneidewind had been a private in the Medical Corps of the U.S. Army during the Spanish-American War in 1898. He stayed in Manila working as a mail clerk until he was fired for smuggling.<sup>186</sup> After visiting the Igorot Village at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904, Schneidewind founded the Filipino Exhibition Company that, between 1905 and 1908, brought three separate Igorot troupes to the

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<sup>184</sup> According to family memory, Pu'emalo also found a Singer sewing machine on tour, which she proudly brought back with her to Samoa. *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>185</sup> For an analysis of the fair's imperial and gender dimensions, see most recently Sarah J. Moore, *Empire on Display: San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013).

<sup>186</sup> Personal Name File "Schneidewind," NARA-CP, RG 350; Vaughan, "Ogling Igorots," 228.

United States. In 1913, he cheated a troupe of 55 Igorots, who he had brought to the Ghent Exposition in Belgium, out of their contractual wages (a meager \$5/month) and simply abandoned the group, eight of whom died there. Responding to a protest letter sent by two Igorots to President Wilson in October 1913, the U.S. Consul in Ghent took charge of the troupe and eventually paid for their passage back to Manila.<sup>187</sup>

Schneidewind's ruthlessness in Ghent harkened back to Cunningham's irresponsible management of the Australian Aborigines and the first Samoan tour to the United States and Europe in 1889. Partly in response to this scandal, the Philippine Assembly prohibited further exhibitions of Filipinos in 1914.<sup>188</sup>

In early February 1915, the Samoan troupe under Schneidewind's management boarded the steamer *Niagara* in Pago Pago bound for Vancouver via Honolulu. The troupe consisted of 23 Samoans, including 13 men and 10 women.<sup>189</sup> According to the passenger list, eight of the performers were married and all were listed as U.S. citizens, which they technically were not.<sup>190</sup> In stark contrast to the 1904 tour to St. Louis, when impresario Moors had chartered a whole ship for the performers and their equipment, the troupe bound for San Francisco travelled only third class. It was not without irony that

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<sup>187</sup> General Classified Files, No. 13431-56, 13431-71, NARA-CP, RG 350.

<sup>188</sup> Claire Prentice, *The Lost Tribe of Coney Island: Headhunters, Luna Park, and the Man Who Pulled Off the Spectacle of the Century* (Boston, MA: New Harvest, 2014), 320.

<sup>189</sup> The male members included: Onesai, Sete, Mutu, Sale, Tasali, Taa, Taaviliga, Leasio, Umu, Tetame, Setu, Tui, and Peti. The female members included: Yui, Tulima Nellie, Faasala, Faapusa, Veve, Tauvali, Faapepe, Sema, Vaaia, and Feteai. NARA-DC, RG 85, A3422 Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at Honolulu, Hawai'i, Vol. 84, p. 218.

<sup>190</sup> Alone among U.S. passport holders today, American Samoans are only U.S. nationals and not full U.S. citizens. They are, for example, not allowed to vote in presidential elections or hold federal office. A group of American Samoans is currently filing a lawsuit against the federal government for birthright citizenship. For more information, see [equalrightsnow.org/tuaua](http://equalrightsnow.org/tuaua).

they were on their way to an exposition that celebrated the opening of the Panama Canal as a crucial passageway to U.S. political and economic claims in the Pacific.<sup>191</sup>

When they arrived in San Francisco on February 16, the performers set about constructing a Samoan Village in the fair's "Joy Zone"—a staple of U.S. world fairs since Chicago's highly successful Midway Plaisance.<sup>192</sup> As on earlier fairs, the Samoans performed dances and songs, including "It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary," a song that had become popular among British soldiers in the Great War that had overshadowed the fair from the start.

[Figure 6: Photograph of Samoan dancers in mid-air]<sup>193</sup>

According to American author Laura Ingalls Wilder, who visited the fair in September 1915, the Samoan performers "all seemed very much pleased with themselves that they could sing it and all smiled when they began."<sup>194</sup> Wilder went on to note that the Samoans "seemed cold, poor things [...] when they left the stage wrapped up in heavy

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<sup>191</sup> Naval commanders and visitors alike stressed the increased importance of American Samoa after the opening of the Panama Canal. Stearns to Sec. of Navy, July 21, 1914, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 42, p. 16; Charles B. Davenport, Edwin Conklin, Richard Ely, Edward C. Franklin to President Wilson, Dec. 15, 1914, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 43, p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> The Joy Zone in San Francisco helped visitors forget the much less joyful events in that other Zone surrounding the Panama Canal. For a masterful account of the workers who built the canal, see Greene, *Canal Builders*.

<sup>193</sup> Abigail M. Markwyn, *Empress San Francisco: The Pacific Rim, the Great West, and California at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

<sup>194</sup> Laura Ingalls Wilder to Almanzo Wilder, Sept. 4, 1915, in: Roger L. MacBride, ed., *West from Home: Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder to Almanzo Wilder, San Francisco, 1915* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1974), 39.

bathrobes.”<sup>195</sup> For the freezing Samoans, it was indeed a long way from home. As early as April 1915 the Samoan performers had requested permission to surround their exhibition stand with glass. As the assistant director for concessions and admissions noted, the Samoans “cannot stand the cold and several of them have contracted severe illness from exposure.”<sup>196</sup> It is not recorded if the permission was granted, but, judging from Wilder’s comments half-a-year later, the Samoan performers had to wear heavy bathrobes to shield themselves from the notoriously chilly winds hitting San Francisco from the Pacific.

The Samoan troupe was, however, not alone in San Francisco’s cold. As in Chicago, fellow Polynesians from Hawai’i were also present at the San Francisco fair, this time even with a village of their own. In it, visitors could admire reproductions of Waikiki beach and the Kilauea volcanic crater, while scantily-clad Hawaiian women dove into the water.<sup>197</sup> If the organizers of “native villages” such as the Samoan and Hawaiian ones in San Francisco promised visitors a titillating travel in time and space, the Polynesian performers themselves experienced their travels no less dramatically. The Samoan performers in San Francisco again mingled with their counterparts from Hawai’i as they had in Chicago more than two decades before. Backstage, in the shabby quarters

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>196</sup> Bryan to Connick, Apr. 18, 1915, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Panama-Pacific International Exposition Records, Carton 63, Folder 46.

<sup>197</sup> Frank M. Todd, *The Story of the Exposition, Being the Official History of the International Celebration Held at San Francisco in 1915 to Commemorate the Discovery of the Pacific Ocean and the Construction of the Panama Canal*, Vol. 2 (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1921), 352.

where the performers were living, Polynesian languages, food, and dances merged into an alternative middle ground of colonized people.<sup>198</sup>

Besides the Samoan and Hawaiian villages, fairgoers could also walk through a replica of Beijing's Forbidden City. All parts were shipped from China and then reassembled on the other side of the Pacific by Chinese laborers, who, according to a local newspaper, "wore American clothes [and] did their work effectively with ineffective tools—the best test of good workmen."<sup>199</sup> Chinese workers were helping to build the infrastructure of empire not only on copra plantations and dock stations in Samoa, but also on the fairground in San Francisco. If skilled labor unions and fair organizers had agreed to what became known as the "Pax Panama-Pacifica" ahead of the fair's opening, the thousands of unskilled fair workers, including the various ethnic performers, had their own battles to fight.<sup>200</sup>

In line with the fair's representation of labor was the miniature model of the Panama Canal itself. Spread over five acres, it allowed visitors to watch miniaturized ships pass through the model canal as they listened to educational lectures, emphasizing technology's triumph over nature.<sup>201</sup> The workers, however, who built the canal in Panama—as well as its miniature model in San Francisco—played no visible part in the exhibition.<sup>202</sup> Similarly, when Samoans were building their own "native villages," their

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<sup>198</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 95.

<sup>199</sup> "The Forbidden City at the Exposition," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2, 1915, supplement.

<sup>200</sup> In spring 1915, the Somali performers staged a labor stoppage after their employer failed to pay their wages. Fair organizers, with the help of immigration officials, deported the Somali men and women to Angel Island. Markwyn, *Empress San Francisco*, chapter 6.

<sup>201</sup> Moore, *Empire on Display*, 181-189.

<sup>202</sup> Greene, *Canal Builders*, 363ff.



material labor played no part in the performative labor it enabled and which, in turn, represented other forms of material labor, such as plucking coconuts from trees. This representation of “traditional” forms of labor also helped transport racial stereotypes that made possible the ongoing exploitation of workers in U.S. colonies such as Samoa.

When the Panama-Pacific Exposition ended in December 1915, the Samoan troupe returned back home to a world transformed. World war had disrupted the copra economies of both American Samoa and New Zealand-occupied German Samoa. Copra prices in the city from where the performers returned were at an all-time low. While the Samoan performers struggled to find their bearings in a newly unstable economic and political environment, their manager Schneidewind went back to his native Detroit to work as a cashier and timekeeper at a street railway company. He, too, it seemed, had to look for new opportunities.

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On long journeys on ships and railways, from Sydney to Hamburg and San Francisco to Chicago, the experience of communal travelling through unfamiliar territories united all Samoans who went on tour abroad. Like James Cook a century and half before them, the Samoan performers who left their islands went on voyages of discovery of their own. On their travels, they discovered the joys of performing together and the empowering feeling of forming intimate yet fleeting communities with fellow colonized peoples. But the Samoans overseas also discovered that performing for Euro-American audiences was hard work that demanded discipline and sometimes created conflicts within the group and

without. Euro-American impresarios, for instance, saw profit as the only measure of success, while fellow troupe members tested established hierarchies of rank and gender far away from the social control of their home islands. Going abroad to earn money and respect against these odds, these Samoan performers were the pioneers of today's labor diasporas overseas, stretching from Sydney to Auckland and Honolulu to Los Angeles.

The cultural tradition of going on *malaga* differentiated Samoan performers from other ethnographic troupes of the time. Most comparable to the Samoan travelling parties were the Hawaiian *hula* dancers who toured the world around the same time and encountered their fellow Polynesians in Chicago in 1893 and, again, in San Francisco in 1915. Very much like their Samoan counterparts, “Hawaiian performers were not merely passive objects in Euro-American tourist economies, but resisted and negotiated with colonization through their own ‘traveling cultures’ and consumer practices. They carved out their own homes, political expressions, and diasporic networks in view and out of view of foreign audiences.”<sup>203</sup> Hawaiian *hula* dancers preferred their participation in a commodified spectacle over the alternatives at home: the hard toil of plantation labor or low-level service jobs.<sup>204</sup> And if the commodification of Hawaiian *hula* performances by the end of the nineteenth century had turned dancers into wage laborers firmly embedded in colonial capitalism, the ineluctable embeddedness of *hula* in Hawaiian culture set equally firm limits to its commodification.<sup>205</sup> Samoans, too, defended the integrity of the

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<sup>203</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 19.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 75. Rydell argues that Africans on stage at U.S. world's fairs, too, “turned showcases of empire into theaters of resistance.” Rydell, “Darkest Africa,” 136. For a related account that interprets stage performance as an avenue for physical and social mobility as well as for forging community bonds, see Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), esp. 15, 108.

cultural practices they performed in front of Euro-American audiences, even as they seized the new opportunities for travel, money, and prestige.

While the Samoan performers worked far from home, they shared many similarities with their fellow workers back home. Most glaringly, their packed show schedules, sometimes with up to six performances a day, revealed the physical demands of performative labor. At every stop, the performers had to build their own accommodations and stages on which they would reenact the physical labor of collecting coconuts for the entertainment of visitors. The labor contracts the performers signed before going on tour introduced a strict regime of labor discipline and managerial control reminiscent of plantation labor in Samoa. The workscape of the ethnographic show might have been on the move and far away from Richard Deeken's whip in Tapatapao, but it nevertheless limited the free movement of the performative laborers beyond the impresario's eyes. Finally, going on tour with an ethnographic troupe was a gateway from and to other jobs in the colonial economy in Samoa. If the performative labor on stage was, in part, colonial service, moving to other positions in the colonial administration back in Samoa was relatively easy and common. Several show veterans—such as Phineas and Tuvale—joined the colonial service upon their return to Samoa. Marked by its own dynamics, the workscape of the ethnographic show remained intimately connected with other forms of labor within the islands.

## CHAPTER 4 — INFRASTRUCTURE

When Samoa came under formal German and American control in 1900, the world around the islands was growing smaller. Steamships carried people, goods, and information ever farther. Trade interests went hand in hand with military planning of the growing naval forces of both Imperial Germany and the United States. In the wake of the War of 1898, the U.S. Navy established fleet headquarters in the Philippines and Hawai'i. The Imperial German Navy, for its part, set up its Pacific Fleet in the treaty port of Kiaochow southeast of Beijing. One of the leading German naval strategists, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, argued in 1899 that the Samoan islands would be of “great strategic value to the German navy, as an important stopping place on the voyage from Kiaochow, via our possessions in the South Seas, to South America.”<sup>1</sup> As plans for building a canal through the isthmus of Panama resurfaced at the beginning of the twentieth century, the strategic importance of coaling stations was increasingly hard to ignore. Euro-American competition for control over Samoa was fuelled by and, in turn, fuelled the expansion of colonial infrastructure such as steamships, telegraph cables and, later, wireless radio.

Technologies of communication and power projection were not simply passive “tools of empire,” as some historians of technology have claimed.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the expansion of infrastructure in such places as Samoa actively produced colonial spaces dependent on access to markets for cash crops and vulnerable to gunboat diplomacy. In the eyes of colonial officials, infrastructure was essential to economic development and

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<sup>1</sup> Tirpitz to Bülow, Oct. 11, 1899, cit. in E.T.S. Dugdale, ed., *German Diplomatic Documents, 1871-1914*, Vol. III, 73.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1981).

hence to the success of the colonial project as a whole. The economic and military significance of colonial infrastructure made those who helped build it important actors. Not only did construction workers contribute their labor to put the colony into value for foreign traders and military officials, they also put this new infrastructure to their own uses.<sup>3</sup>

The hundreds of Samoans, Melanesians, Micronesians, and Chinese who built the coaling station in American Samoa and the wireless radio station in German Samoa developed a shared sense of exploitation as both colonized and working people. Over time, they succeeded in transcending the spatial and racial boundaries set up by the colonial administrations. Even prison laborers who were forced to work for the colonial administrations found moments of sociality with fellow workers and relatives, much to the anger of white settlers. As workers helped build the material infrastructure of colonial Samoa, they developed structures of solidarity which bound them closer to one another, both across racial and colonial boundaries.

## **CARRYING COAL TO PAGO PAGO**

In the context of the new navalism of the 1880s, Samoa gained in importance for the U.S. Navy because of its strategic location between Hawai'i and Australia and its potential as a coaling station for the expanding steamship fleet.<sup>4</sup> In 1872, U.S. Navy Commander

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<sup>3</sup> On workers in the Suez Canal Zone, see Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869-1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup> On the importance of coal in late nineteenth-century America, see Paul Shulman, *Coal and Empire: The Birth of Energy Security in Industrial America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

Richard Meade had negotiated a treaty with Samoan *matais* that guaranteed the right to build a coaling station in the port of Pago Pago on the eastern island of Tutuila. But given the growing influence of other imperial powers in the region—including Great Britain and France, and later Germany and Japan—the interests of the U.S. Navy in one of the most well-protected harbors in the South Pacific were far from undisputed. In 1887, the U.S. Navy secured the right to establish a coaling and repair station in Pearl Harbor from Hawaiian King Kalakaua, but the search for other useful naval bases continued. In summer 1898, the Navy’s General Board found the location of Pago Pago “so suitable in case of operations in that quarter, that [...] political possession of the whole island in which the port is, or at least of ground sufficient for fortifications, is desirable.”<sup>5</sup> Military planners and politicians became more alert after 1898 when the United States annexed Pacific islands from the Philippines and Guam to Wake Island and Hawai’i. During the War of 1898 against Spain, U.S. Admiral George Dewey was even forced to purchase British coal in Hong Kong before attacking Manila because there was no U.S. coaling station in the area. And in 1899, Bartlett Tripp, the U.S. member of a commission sent to Samoa, urged policy-makers in Washington to keep Pago Pago as the “Gibraltar of the Pacific.”<sup>6</sup>

In the same year, the Berlin Treaty united Savai’i and Upolu into a German colony, while the United States was guaranteed the harbor of Pago Pago in Tutuila. Pago harbor was one of the best in the entire Pacific. With an anchorage depth of over forty feet, Pago harbor stretches nearly two miles inland along a rectangular bend to the west.

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<sup>5</sup> Cit. in Kennedy, *Samoan Tangle*, 143.

<sup>6</sup> Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1899* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), 638.

Millions of years ago, the harbor formed the crater of a volcano, whose ridges today rise up to 2,300 feet from sea level. Except for the occasional hurricane and tsunami, Pago harbor offered an ideal anchorage for the steamships of the turn of the twentieth century. Anchored westward, a surveyor noted, the harbor could accommodate a dozen ships, all “well protected against wind and swell.”<sup>7</sup>

By contrast, the new German colony to the west lacked a well-protected harbor. While Apia harbor was equipped with a short wharf and leading lights, it was not as deep as Pago and its entryway a mere third of a mile wide. Besides a coral reef that divided the harbor in two, Apia was exposed to the north to hurricanes such as the one that hit in 1889 and sank several German and American warships. Apia harbor usually stored around 1,000 tons of coal, but loading often proved difficult because of heavy seas. The German colonial administration estimated that approximately two million British pounds would be needed to make the harbor safe and, given the more suitable harbor of Pago nearby, decided not to go ahead with the improvement of Apia port.<sup>8</sup>

Initially, the U.S. Navy refrained from investing in the expansion of infrastructure in Pago. After Meade secured the right to establish a coaling station in Pago in 1872, little construction took place. For over two decades, coal was sent only very sporadically to Pago, as a State Department report noted, “because it had been deemed more advantageous and economical to purchase coal when required by vessels in those

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<sup>7</sup> *U.S.S. California* to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Nov. 1908, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1083, N-1-b, Reg.-No. 1374, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> The harbor in Saluafata, 12 miles east of Apia, offered better protection, but was considerably smaller. Saleaula in Savai'i was the best harbor on the island, but provided little protection and a poor holding ground. British Foreign Office, Historical Section, *Pacific Islands* (London, UK: H.M. Stationery Office, 1920), “Former German Possessions in Oceania,” 35f.

waters.”<sup>9</sup> Most coal for Pago and Apia came from the U.S. east coast, Cardiff in Wales, or from closer-by Australia and New Zealand. By 1897, the U.S. Navy had purchased “certain lands on the shores of Pago Pago to be used as a Naval station” and had successfully surveyed the harbor.<sup>10</sup> In fall 1898, a civil engineer was sent to Tutuila to purchase additional land for the erection of a coaling station and other facilities.<sup>11</sup> Over half-a-year before the Berlin Treaty granted official recognition to U.S. interests in the eastern islands, the expansion of the Navy facilities began. In February 1899, a company based in San Francisco, Healy, Tibbetts & Co., was awarded the contract to oversee the construction and began sending construction material, manufactured in Pittsburgh, to Pago.<sup>12</sup>

Samoan workers did most of the dirty work for the U.S. Navy in Tutuila. To increase anchorage and construction space, workers added a huge land fill at Swimming Point in Pago Harbor. Over the years, workers transported hundreds of thousands of cubic feet of soil from a cut in the hills just behind Swimming Point. This so-called “fill dirt,” was usually drawn from the subsoil and contained little organic matter to prevent the settling of the soil over time. Fill dirt was a mixture of rocks, stones, and sand, which made it difficult to transport. To alleviate the burden of manual labor, workers laid tracks for a small cable car from the cut to the land fill to help them move the soil.<sup>13</sup> Cable cars soon became the preferred way to lessen the cost of hauling heavy material to

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<sup>9</sup> McAdoo to Sec. of State, Dec. 30, 1896, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Cridler to Shade, Dec. 14, 1897, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Cridler to Osborn, Aug. 5, 1898, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> 1904 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 94, p. 71.



construction sites in Tutuila. In 1904, for instance, when work for a new water reservoir was started, workers first laid tracks for a cable car. In contrast to the iconic 95-ton Bucyrus steam shovels used in the Panama Canal Zone around the same time, workers in Pago had to rely on more basic tools.<sup>14</sup>

On the new land fill, a series of new buildings were erected. The largest structures were two sheds that could store up to 4,000 tons of coal for Navy ships calling at Tutuila.<sup>15</sup> In front of the coal sheds, a broad, steel-reinforced coal wharf was built into the bay to allow for the loading of coal. In addition to these coaling facilities, the land fill also provided space for a copra shed, a storehouse, and by 1904, an ice house and a carpenter and blacksmith shop. From the start, members of the U.S. Navy stationed in Tutuila or visiting on a ship participated in construction and maintenance activities of all sorts.

Commandant Charles B. Tilley, the first Governor of the naval station in Tutuila, personally brought additional construction material, such as wooden piles and timber, by ship from Auckland in February 1900. According to Tilley, construction work proceeded slower than expected partly because of heavy rains and partly because the U.S. contractor had problems with its workforce. “The climate at this season,” Tilley reported to Washington, “is rather hard on the workmen and it is difficult to make them do much. Quite a number of the contractor’s men have become dissatisfied and have gone home and he now has but twelve of the party of twenty-five workmen who came out from the

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<sup>14</sup> Greene, *Canal Builders*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> At the time, the biggest U.S. battleships could carry around 2,000 tons of coal. Norman Friedman, *U.S. Battleships: An Illustrated Design History* (London, UK: Arms and Armour Press, 1986), 104.

United States last summer.”<sup>16</sup> To fill this labor shortage, the construction company recruited Samoan workers for the comparatively low daily wage of one dollar. At the same time, common laborers from the U.S. mainland earned around two dollars per day.<sup>17</sup> However, Tilley noted that the contractor apparently did not “know how to get along with the natives and at times they refuse to work for him although they are always glad to work for the Government at the same price.” Despite these delays, Tilley was optimistic that the coal wharf and shed would be completed by September 1901.<sup>18</sup>

As in neighboring German Samoa, the management of workers posed a threat to the plans of the colonizers. Tilley’s comment hinted at competing notions of work between Samoans and Americans. While the U.S. contractor supervising the building of the coaling station expected Samoans to simply follow instructions, the workers themselves had different ideas about their work conditions. Given a long tradition of cooperative work among Samoan households, construction workers for the U.S. Navy demanded more than just a fair wage. They wanted to be treated in a fair and respectful way as well. A foreign contractor that did not “know how to get along” with them violated a crucial principle of Samoan culture. Even though little is known about the precise details of these conflicts, we know from German Samoa that Samoans who engaged in wage labor to earn cash did so only in times of need and under conditions similar to established ways of cooperative work. The U.S. contractor brought in from the mainland by Tilley did not take into account these significant cultural differences. The

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<sup>16</sup> Tilley to Sec. of Navy, Feb. 23, 1900, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 34.

<sup>17</sup> Report on Native Government by Secretary of Native Affairs, E.W. Gurr, Nov. 18, 1901, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 35.

<sup>18</sup> Tilley to Sec. of Navy, Feb. 23, 1900, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 34.

Samoan workers, though earning welcome cash, refused to work when they felt disrespected. Tilley's final remark that Samoans were "always glad to work" for the naval government revealed more about the Navy's paternalist self-image than the realities on the ground. In several instances, Samoans refused to work for the naval administration, especially when they felt mutual trust was betrayed.

Contrary to Tilley's plans, the coaling station was not yet finished in September 1901. Commandant Governor Uriel Sebree, who replaced Tilley in November 1901, expected the dredging of coal to be completed by the next steamer in mid-January 1902. Sebree went on to note: "Some grading has been done on the Station by native labor. Forty to fifty natives being employed at a time, per week. They have been taken from the different villages each week."<sup>19</sup> The Samoan workers were facing a daunting task. In March 1901 alone, they moved more than 70,000 cubic feet of soil from the coastline at Swimming Point and placed it in the land fill. At the same time, forty workers were busy grading the area around Observation Point to the east. They were blasting out stone and removing material that had been excavated before, but had rolled down again and piled up.<sup>20</sup>

American Samoa's tropical climate continued to defy plans by U.S. Navy officials to remodel it for their own purposes. Mudslides were a common danger to workers and the maintenance of buildings, roads, and docks. Tutuila's tropical vegetation also posed an ongoing threat to man-made infrastructure. "A great deal of labor is necessary," a 1908 report noted, "to prevent the quick growing tropical vegetation from over-running everything." To domesticate nature, the report went on, human labor was in constant

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<sup>19</sup> Sebree to Ass. Sec. of Navy, Dec. 24, 1901, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 34.

<sup>20</sup> Bloch to Sebree, Nov. 2, 1902, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 35, p. 2.

demand: “A gang of men are almost continually employed removing the debris and rotting vegetable matter carried into the station by the excessive rains from the steep surrounding hills.”<sup>21</sup> This uphill battle against American Samoa’s natural environment was waged predominantly by Samoan workers. In contrast to short-term construction labor, maintenance labor allowed workers a more regular interaction with the natural environment and with fellow workers.

Beside this continuous process of managing nature, Navy officials also sought to manage Samoan labor power. As Sebree noted in his report, workers were recruited from different villages each week. By rotating Samoan workers from different villages, Navy officials ensured that regular maintenance and plantation work continued alongside the Navy’s own construction projects. Grading work remained a continuous necessity as well as a problem in Tutuila. In 1903, for example, grading had to be discontinued for several months because not enough workers could be found. The arduous nature of the work was certainly part of the reason why not many Samoans or other Pacific Islanders could be recruited.<sup>22</sup> Despite these difficulties, workers hired by the naval government completed a concrete dam that formed a new water reservoir in December 1904.<sup>23</sup> By 1905, when workers finished two additional land fills and a causeway to Goat Island, “all grading was done by dump cars filled and operated by hand.”<sup>24</sup> The use of machines like dump and trolley cars distinguished the infrastructure workscape from the plantation workscape where mechanization remained limited to copra kilns.

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<sup>21</sup> 1908 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 106.

<sup>22</sup> 1903 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 90, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> 1905 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 97.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

In February 1902, the coaling station was finally finished. Beside delays in the shipment of material and the labor shortage, the Navy engineers and their workers also faced other challenges. The sea bottom around Swimming Point, it turned out, was “peculiarly unstable.” As a result, the wharf had to be built twice. Overall, the costs for material and labor for the coal sheds, the wharf, and the storehouse amounted to over \$282,000 (roughly \$7.6 million in 2015 dollars).<sup>25</sup> But the completion of these major construction projects did not spell an end to the labor shortage.

Securing labor remained a perennial problem throughout the first decade of formal U.S. colonial rule over Tutuila, at least in the eyes of Navy officials. In August 1903, government carpenters were busy working on the foundations of a new Court House and other office buildings. The new Court House next to the old Government house at Pago harbor occupied an area of 80 by 76 feet and, according to a newspaper report, was set to be “quite a handsome structure.”<sup>26</sup> Rumor had it that Governor E.B. Underwood would even follow Samoan custom and give the workers a “blow-out” with tea and cake upon move-in. It is not known if Underwood followed through on this promise, but only a few months later he offered a more pessimistic view of the labor situation in Tutuila.

In November 1903, Underwood complained about the “great scarcity of labor,” which thwarted construction plans for necessary buildings, including an additional coal shed, an office building, and a quarters for officers. To tackle these pressing construction projects, Underwood reported, only a handful of skilled workers were available: “We have two very good carpenters, who came out from the United States under contract last

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<sup>25</sup> 1902 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 83.

<sup>26</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, Aug. 8, 1903, p. 5.

February, one good white carpenter, and two fair half-castes, carpenters. Other so-called carpenters have been given trial but have been found to be lazy, indifferent, or migratory.”<sup>27</sup> Samoans had more promising alternatives to gain their living, for example, by producing copra or by joining the colonial service as soldiers and clerks. According to this list of skilled workers in Tutuila, white and black carpenters from the U.S. mainland continued to arrive in Tutuila under contract, relieving some of the labor shortage.<sup>28</sup> These newly arrived contract workers complicated colonial hierarchies of race and status. If African American construction workers faced racial discrimination at home, their U.S. citizenship elevated their status among Samoan and Melanesian workers in Tutuila. As seen from Pago harbor, U.S. labor history at the turn of the twentieth century looks far more complex.

Racial hierarchies also shaped Underwood’s perception of the relative skills of the workers. Three of the good carpenters were probably white Americans, while two mixed-race carpenters were described as “fair.” Given Underwood’s racialized choice of words, the other “so-called carpenters” seemed to have been local Samoans who did not meet the Governor’s expectations. The fact that Underwood characterized them as “lazy, indifferent, or migratory” has to be seen in connection with long-standing racial stereotypes about Samoan indolence. According to the idea of native indolence, Samoans, like other colonized people at the time, were lazy, unreliable, and inconstant workers who could not be tasked with complex and long-term labor projects. Colonial officials in nearby German Samoa similarly portrayed Samoans as living in a tropical paradise in

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<sup>27</sup> Underwood to Ass. Sec. of the Navy, Nov. 24, 1903, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 35, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> At the time, American carpenters in Tutuila earned between \$3.50 and \$4 a day. Report on Native Government by Secretary of Native Affairs, E.W. Gurr, Nov. 18, 1901, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 35.

which work was superfluous. Around the same time, the government newspaper in German Samoa observed, with unconcealed *schadenfreude*, that the U.S. Navy officials could not motivate Samoans to work for them. According to the newspaper, even the fuelwood needed for the warship stationed in Pago had to be imported from Apia.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to these racialized notions of labor, Samoans had developed a complex system of constructing houses. Samoan carpenters were organized into craft guilds, mirroring family structures with apprentices (*tufuga fa'i fale*) and master builders (*matai tufuga fa'i fale*). Carpentry was a hereditary profession, but apprentices had to prove their worth to be elected to the guild in their home district.<sup>30</sup> Master builders received their title through seniority and practical experience. Around 1900, between 50 and 70 master builders lived in Samoa, leading their own craft guilds. Master carpenters, who were able to make durable houses and canoes, enjoyed a status similar to *matais* and were allowed to drink *kava* right after them.

The construction of a new Samoan house was a major challenge of organizing labor and material. For the duration of the construction (an average of nine months for a medium-sized house), carpenters and their journeymen literally moved into their patrons' homes and received food and accommodation in return for their services. A mutual and sacred contract was entered into between a carpenter and a *matai* whose family had to cut and transport wood for the house to be constructed.<sup>31</sup> The reciprocal expectations of labor, food, and accommodation in exchange for the construction skills of the carpenter

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<sup>29</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, Mar. 19, 1904, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> E. S. C. Handy, and Willowdean C. Handy, *Samoan House Building, Cooking, and Tattooing* (Honolulu, HI: The Bishop Museum, 1924), 15.

<sup>31</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 80.

team had to be honored by both sides, otherwise a construction project might easily be abandoned halfway. Samoan carpenters, thus, had considerable, if unspoken, control over their work process, payment, and personal dignity.<sup>32</sup>

This form of organizing construction labor—including strikes, the tabooing of employers, and the expectation of immediate rewards—distinguished Samoa from other Polynesian societies.<sup>33</sup> Samoan carpenters proved flexible enough to adapt their long-standing traditions to changing times. When copra prices plunged dramatically after the Great War, the carpenter guild departed from tradition and decided to loosen the requirement of lavish feasts during the construction process. As a result, Samoan clients could better afford the heavy expenses involved in the building of a new house and the construction business soon picked up again.<sup>34</sup>

These communal construction projects, based on reciprocity and respect, clashed with the public works policies of German and American colonial officials. Given their efficient system of organizing labor that guaranteed a steady income and high social status, Samoan carpenters did not depend on joining the construction projects of the U.S. Navy. Dismissive comments, such as those by Underwood, provided evidence for this simple fact. In any case, the naval government in both American and German Samoa relied on Samoan carpenters to build the necessary material infrastructure. Despite such negative views of Samoan work skills, Samoan carpenters successfully built a new

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<sup>32</sup> John B. Stair, *Old Samoa: Or, Flotsam and Jetsam from the Pacific Ocean* (London, UK: The Religious Tract Society, 1897), 157.

<sup>33</sup> Buck speculates about the foreign origins of the Samoan system, which required the immediate provision of food and payment to carpenters. Buck, *Samoan Material Culture*, 679.

<sup>34</sup> Handy/Handy, *Samoan House Building*, 17.



church house for the London Missionary Society in 1902, a lumber shed and boat house in Tutuila in 1906, and a new hospital in Motoootua (near Apia) in 1912.<sup>35</sup>

Samoans and Americans were not the only workers in Tutuila. The naval administration also employed a number of “colored laborers” in construction projects. These might have been African American workers under contract for the Navy, but, more likely, were migrants from other parts of the Pacific, such as Niue, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, and New Guinea. The 1903 census also listed a dozen “Asians,” eight of whom worked on the station ship, and five “Africans” (or African Americans), four of whom worked on the station ship.<sup>36</sup> Since the 1870s, thousands of migrants from Melanesia and other parts of Polynesia had been coming to Upolu to work on copra and cocoa plantations. Some found their way to neighboring Tutuila in search of work and freedom from the often harsh discipline on large-scale plantations in German Samoa. Overall, Navy officials preferred workers from Niue over those from other parts of the Pacific, but still found them to be not “very profitable.”<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to German Samoa, there were no Chinese workers in American Samoa at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since the 1880s, anti-immigration legislation had excluded Chinese migrants from entering several states on the U.S. west coast and Hawai’i.<sup>38</sup> Similar restrictions applied to American Samoa. In 1910, Governor John F. Parker made this legal bar to Chinese migrants explicit: “There are no Chinese inhabitants [in American Samoa],” he noted, “the Chinese Exclusion Act having been

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<sup>35</sup> 1906 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 100, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Census of 1903, NARA-SB, RG 284, MF T1182, Roll 4.

<sup>37</sup> Moore to True, Aug. 6, 1906, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 36.

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971).

declared by the High Court to be in force at this Station.”<sup>39</sup> Given this hostile climate towards immigration from China, Navy officials in Tutuila had few alternatives but to rely on workers from other parts of the Pacific.

In November 1904, a group of Samoan government officials asked Governor Underwood why “colored laborers in the employ of the government” did not pay more than two dollars in taxes, even though they were using large amounts of money from the government. Samoan leaders were concerned that the tax burden was not equally distributed among the inhabitants of American Samoa and petitioned the naval government to increase taxes on foreign workers. Underwood defended the status quo by arguing that these workers did not receive “the same benefits and advantages from the government that Samoans do.”<sup>40</sup> As guest workers, the Melanesians and non-Samoan Polynesians who lived and worked in Tutuila helped expand U.S. colonial rule and, therefore, aroused the anger of the Samoan taxpayers.

This debate about the collection and proper use of tax revenue foreshadowed one of the major complaints of the anti-colonial *Mau* movement in the early 1920s. By then, *Mau* leaders would accuse U.S. Navy officials even more directly of misusing the funds collected from Samoan taxpayers. The Samoan petition to raise taxes on foreign workers employed by the naval administration also pointed to the limits of interracial and inter-class solidarity in colonial Samoa. If racial hierarchies shaped the perception of U.S. Navy officials, Samoan leaders entertained their own prejudices and animosities. While construction workers developed a sense of shared exploitation regardless of race, Samoan government officials were motivated by a different kind of class consciousness. As

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<sup>39</sup> Parker to Ass. Sec. of Navy, Mar. 9, 1910, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 38.

<sup>40</sup> Questions by Native Government Officials, Nov. 22, 1904, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 36, p. 1.

members of the colonial administration, Samoan government officials shared with their white American colleagues a top-down perspective on labor management. But, at the same time, Samoan government officials realized that non-Samoan construction workers helped entrench U.S. Navy rule over the islands. Samoans who joined the colonial administration were acutely aware of other workers in the service of U.S. colonialism, but grew blind to the class exploitation they all shared.

Protests against colonial rule revolved around claims not only over people and their labor power, but also over their lands. On one of the Navy maps, the land fill on which the coal sheds were erected was marked as “reclaimed land.” This act of reclamation had two sides: on the one hand, the coal sheds were erected on an artificial, man-made fill that quite literally “reclaimed” land from the ocean with soil from a nearby cut into the hills. On the other hand, the material act of reclamation of land also had a symbolic dimension. Together with the wharf, copra shed, storehouse, and other buildings erected on this reclaimed land, the coal sheds represented the primary elements for U.S. claims on Tutuila. Hence, the reclaiming of “native” lands to build a coaling station linked the construction of material infrastructure to U.S. political and military claims on the islands at large. A photograph portraying Flag Raising Day on April 17, 1900, provides visual evidence for the intertwined nature of reclamation.

[Figure 7: Photograph of Flag-Raising Day, April 1900]<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hoisting of the American Flag in the Samoan Islands, Apr. 17, 1900, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 34.

As the photograph shows, the ceremony took place right on top of the cut from which the soil for the land fill was drawn. Participants in the ceremony had filed up Sogelau Hill in Fagatogo before the flag was raised. Below the flag-raising ceremony, scores of Samoan workers and their American supervisors momentarily ceased their busy activities and watched the spectacle above. Most were dressed in white shirts and black *lava lavas* and some were holding umbrellas to protect themselves against the sun. The angle of the photograph draws a straight line of vision from the wharf's steel bars at sea level, across the cable-car tracks where the backs of workers reinforce the view upward, onto the top of the cut. There, a group of Navy officials and Samoan dignitaries had congregated to raise the U.S. flag, which towers over everything. Land reclamation, the photograph's perspective suggests, merged seamlessly with U.S. claims over Tutuila's land and its people. Indeed, the photographer stood on the very steel bars on which the new wharf would soon be erected. His panoramic vision would not have been possible without this part of the construction process that preceded his shot. When the flag-raising ceremony had come to an end, workers resumed cutting away the front of Sogelau Hill to fill in the harbor reef. By reclaiming land, the Navy and its local workers quite literally turned the soil of Tutuila's coastal hills into additional space to be colonized.<sup>42</sup>

This visual representation of U.S. claims over Tutuila offered a very limited view on the protracted struggles on the ground. As on the U.S. mainland at the time, strikes were not uncommon among workers in Tutuila. In late August 1905, for example, Melanesian and Polynesian workers employed by the naval government went on strike

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<sup>42</sup> In 1900, the U.S. Navy owned 16 acres of Tutuila's total land area of 35,000 acres. By 1903, that area had more than doubled to 38 acres. Memo on Samoan Islands by Bureau of Equipment, Feb. 6, 1900, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 34; 1903 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 90.

over reduced wages. On August 23, 1905, Governor C.B.T. Moore received orders from the Navy Department to cut the wages of government laborers from one dollar to 80 cents a day. When Moore announced this wage cut to begin September 1, the government workers united and adopted a resolution to quit work. Their task at the time was to add another land fill to the east of Swimming Point. Due to lack of blasting powder, material for the fill had to be broken out by hand—a back-breaking task which might have contributed to the workers’ decision to strike.<sup>43</sup>

Striking against the threatened wage cut brought the Samoan workers closer to their colleagues from other parts of the Pacific. As Moore noted in his 1905 report to Washington, “nearly all of the people employed are not natives of the American islands.”<sup>44</sup> A 1906 report contradicted Moore’s claim, noting that Samoan workers, not other Pacific Islanders, had struck and had “continued in their refusal to work for nearly a month.”<sup>45</sup> Most likely, the group of strikers consisted of workers from both Samoa and other islands. Non-Samoan Pacific Islanders, in particular, resisted the proposed wage cut because they had come to Tutuila for the express reason to earn cash. In a defiant act, these labor migrants from Micronesia and Melanesia had crossed the recently drawn colonial boundary between German and American Samoa in search for better employment.

Governor Moore’s reaction to the workers’ challenge to government authority was soft-spoken, but firm. Moore informed the workers that they would “not be permitted to remain idle about this island” and would be treated as vagrants if they did not find

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<sup>43</sup> 1906 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 100.

<sup>44</sup> Moore to Ass. Sec. of Navy, Aug. 28, 1905, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 36, No. 184, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> 1906 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 100, p. 16.

other employment.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, he reassured the workers that they would not be forced to work for 80 cents a day, but that those who were willing to continue with reduced wages would be protected by the government. Moore defended the reduced daily wage as “sufficient,” but also hinted at the possibility of reintroducing the old daily wage of one dollar, if necessary.<sup>47</sup> The Navy Department in Washington and its representatives in Tutuila seemed to have been testing the waters for saving labor costs.

The workers themselves did not budge for several months. Only in October 1905, Moore reported that the labor situation had straightened itself out. Even though he failed to mention any more details, it is safe to assume from his choice of words that the workers finally caved in and accepted the wage cuts. A new deck for the coal dock was being laid, Moore announced, and new quarters for the officers were about to be completed as well.<sup>48</sup> Despite their courageous stand against the wage cut, the Melanesian and Polynesian laborers were back at work. When the second major fill was completed in 1906, they had moved more than 270,000 cubic feet of earth.<sup>49</sup>

As the 1905 strike showed, the infrastructure workscape posed unique problems for worker solidarity. Because most construction projects in colonial Samoa took only weeks or months, workers had less time to forge lasting bonds of solidarity than on plantations where contracts extended three years or more. In American Samoa, the U.S. Navy recruited skilled workers from the mainland to lead the construction projects. And

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<sup>46</sup> Moore to Ass. Sec. of Navy, Aug. 28, 1905, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 36, No. 184, p. 3. At the same time, U.S. officials also used vagrancy laws to discipline workers on the U.S. mainland and in the Panama Canal Zone. Greene, *Canal Builders*, 62, 139f.

<sup>47</sup> Moore to Ass. Sec. of Navy, Aug. 28, 1905, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 36, No. 184, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Moore to Ass. Sec. of Navy, Oct. 9, 1905, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 36.

<sup>49</sup> 1906 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 100.

since there were only few other workers available, Samoans did most of the manual labor in Tutuila. Both the limited length of labor projects and the different racial composition of the workforce made organized resistance against low pay and bad working conditions more difficult than in other workscapes. As seafaring people, Samoans knew about the central role of labor in making communication and travel work for a long time.

## ISLAND ROADS

Like all Pacific Islanders, the people who settled Samoa three millennia ago were master navigators. Probably arriving from Fiji, 700 miles to the southwest, the first settlers were descendants of people who had successfully sailed thousands of miles through unknown seas, spilling from Southeast Asia into the island Pacific. European explorers, such as Bougainville, recognized this ancient Samoan heritage by naming the group Navigator Islands in 1768.<sup>50</sup> Samoans regularly rowed and sailed in between their islands as well as to neighboring island groups in Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu, Tokelau, and Niue. Samoans who joined American whaling ships and Christian missionaries in the 1830s journeyed much farther. Travel often combined trade with politics and cultural exchange. Samoans who went on *malaga* to visit friends, relatives, and political allies living in remote villages or on different islands maintained personal ties and often forged new ones.

The formal division of Samoa in 1900 interrupted long-standing links between Savai'i and Upolu in the west and Tutuila and Manu'a in the east. The new colonial boundary between German and American Samoa turned what used to be a short journey

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<sup>50</sup> Sylvia Masterman, *The Origins of International Rivalry in Samoa, 1845-1884* (London, UK: G. Allen & Unwin, 1934), 14.

by boat into a border crossing with considerable personal and political risks.<sup>51</sup> For the longest time, Samoans had been following established paths on and between their home islands. The Samoan word for path—*ala*—applied to both land and sea, as in *alāva 'a*, a well-defined boat track within the coastal reef or, more generally, a shipping lane. Expert Samoan navigators knew these safe pathways through the reef through inherited tradition and personal experience and at high tide or during bad weather used their knowledge to steer their boats safely through the reef.

Rudimentary roads hugged the coastlines of all Samoan islands, passable by foot all year round. Samoans knew the best way to get from one village to another, in good and in bad weather. With the introduction of draught animals such as horses, oxen, and mules for commercial agriculture, these footpaths were a thing of the past in the eyes of enterprising Euro-American officials, plantation owners, and traders. Since the 1860s, the only major roads in Samoa were those leading to large foreign-owned plantations. Probably the most important of these plantation roads stretched from Apia all the way to one of the major DHPG plantations in Mulifanua, 20 miles to the west. The Mulifanua road and others were built by the Micronesian and Melanesian workers of the DHPG, starting in the 1880s. By 1893, small trucks were running on these plantation roads, carrying crops, tools, and food.<sup>52</sup> Access to market became so important in Upolu that plantation lands with connection to roads sold for almost double than those without.<sup>53</sup> After 1900, old *ala* came under pressure on both land and sea, even as Samoans kept on

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<sup>51</sup> Salesa, “Travel-Happy Samoa,” 183.

<sup>52</sup> Biermann to Caprivi, May 23, 1893, BArch R 1001/2539.

<sup>53</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, Mar. 26, 1904.



using their well-worn pathways. The main ports in Apia and Pago Pago were at the center of this “rewiring” of Samoa.<sup>54</sup>

[Figure 8: Map of roads and ports in Samoa]

Besides accommodating military and commercial ships, German and American colonial officials pursued an active policy of constructing roads. In the spirit of internal improvements on the U.S. mainland throughout the nineteenth century, constructing new roads, as well as improving and extending existing ones, was designed to facilitate the transportation of cash crops to global markets. Consequently, most roads newly built or extended before 1900 followed established trade routes or connected foreign plantations to ports. The port of Apia became increasingly important as an entrepot for export goods such a copra and cocoa and import goods such as foodstuffs and manufactures. Similar centripetal forces turned Pago harbor into a commercial hub on which most roads in Tutuila converged. Both German and American colonial officials pushed ahead with the expansion of the road system for yet another reason. With decades of violent internal and imperial conflicts still fresh in their minds, these officials hoped to use an improved transportation and communication infrastructure, centered on roads and ships, in case of military emergencies. Better roads and more regular visits from warships meant more power for the few white men on the islands.

Since the days of the tridominium, German consuls in Apia were complaining about the lack of investment in road building.<sup>55</sup> Given the relative weakness of the

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<sup>54</sup> Salesa, “Travel-Happy Samoa,” 174.

tripartite government in general, this was hardly a surprise. The only workers who could be forced to build roads were either plantation workers on contract for the DHPG or prisoners. In 1893, the municipal council of Apia encouraged police sergeant Fritz Marquardt to use prisoners for public works.<sup>56</sup> Two years later, Marquardt would step down from his office as police chief to organize the second Samoan ethnographic show tour together with his brother Fritz. As supervisor of prisoners engaged in road work, Marquardt must have learned a thing or two about managing workers.

In 1894, a number of imprisoned Samoan *matais* in Upolu were hired by Euro-American settlers to build a mile-long road leading to the boundary of the municipality of Apia. Following Samoan custom, the *matais* were not only fed by their employers, but also delegated the hard labor to relatives. As U.S. consul Blacklock commented in disbelief, the *matais*, who were actually serving prison sentences, “appeared to be having a real good time, and were always laughing and joking, and enjoying themselves generally.” According to Blacklock, the prisoners “used to knock off work every afternoon about three o’clock and go for a bathe in the river before returning to the jail for the night.”<sup>57</sup> Through the 1890s, high-ranking Samoans were able to escape the disciplinary measures, including manual labor, by resorting to traditions of cooperative work gangs. As Blacklock’s tone indicates, Euro-American officials were desperate for a more forceful approach to road work.

After 1900, officials in both colonies complained about the difficulties they faced motivating Samoans to build and expand roads. German colonial officials even bribed

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<sup>55</sup> For these reports, see BArch R 1001/2539.

<sup>56</sup> *Samoa Times*, Dec. 23, 1893.

<sup>57</sup> Blacklock to Ass. Sec. of State, May 22, 1894, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 5, p. 166.

Samoa villages with wagons to make them widen their narrow paths.<sup>58</sup> In August 1901, residents of Matautu in Savai'i were forced to build roads for a new plantation. To punish vocal opposition to the German take-over in Savai'i, Governor Solf ordered the arrest of six leading orators and had them removed to Upolu to perform road work. Part of the initial opposition in Matautu for which the leaders were punished was the residents' refusal to build roads for a new plantation in the area. Unlike the imprisoned *matais* from 1894, the exiled orators from Savai'i could not rely on relatives to assist them with the hard labor.<sup>59</sup>

Only a few months after this incident, U.S. officials in Tutuila faced similar difficulties with the building of roads. In November 1901, U.S. Rear Admiral Silas Casey stressed the importance of building roads to link isolated villages, but cautioned against the labor costs necessary to do so: "The Samoans," he explained, "are satisfied with their narrow tracks, and when called upon to make the roads wider they expect the Government to compensate them for their work." To finance the construction of roads, Casey suggested raising the import duties to ten percent and taxing Samoans "in labor for their share of the expense."<sup>60</sup>

Fair compensation for such hard manual labor as building and maintaining roads remained the central bone of contention between colonial officials and workers. In June 1902, the Samoan government, which retained considerable authority over local matters, ordered a group of Samoan road workers to strike for better pay and food. According to

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<sup>58</sup> "Former German Possessions in Oceania," 35.

<sup>59</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 84.

<sup>60</sup> Report on Pago Pago by Casey to Sec. of Navy, Nov. 19, 1901, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1086, N-5-a, Reg.-No. 02/39, p. 4.

the German construction supervisor Stünzner, a Samoan policeman from Mulinu'u appeared one morning and, in the name of Lauaki and all Samoan village councilors (*faipule*), called on his fellow Samoans to stop working. Stünzner reassured the workers of the colonial administration's protection, but the policeman countered that the Samoan government would throw everyone who went to work in jail. The threat of jail convinced the Samoan road workers who all left their work soon afterwards.<sup>61</sup>

Ostensibly, lack of adequate food was Lauaki's main complaint, but the workers' reluctance to leave work cast doubt on the legitimacy of his claim. According to their German boss, who had a vested interest in keeping the road work going, each Samoan worker received four pieces of biscuit with tea at 8 a.m. and three-quarters of canned meat, bananas, and rice at noon. In the evenings, they were given no food because they went home to eat. In fact, Stünzner claimed, the Samoan workers employed in road work had so much food that they passed on two pieces of biscuit and rice to their relatives. To give out more food, he objected, would be "an outrage" and would only help feed the inhabitants of Mulinu'u at the expense of the German colonial administration.<sup>62</sup> In the end, Stünzner's interpretation of the strike turned out to be correct. Lauaki and the other Samoan *faipule* soon apologized and the road workers took up their labor tasks again. In Solf's absence, Acting Governor Heinrich Schnee tried to avoid further disaffection and punished none of the strikers. Apparently, Samoan government officials, led by Lauaki, merely wanted to siphon off more food for themselves.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Stünzner to Schnee, June 18, 1902, BArch N 1053/25, p. 33.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>63</sup> Note by Schnee, July 8, 1902, BArch N 1053/25, p. 35.

There is only one additional piece of evidence that Samoans worked voluntarily in road construction in German Samoa. From July to November 1909, a number of Samoans joined the road work for daily wages of two Reichsmark (50c) in cash and 75 Pfennigs (19c) for food. The Samoan workers likely made an exception to their dislike for road work because a long drought had led to a shortage of food.<sup>64</sup> Like their German counterparts in Upolu, U.S. officials in Tutuila also quickly found that unpaid road work sparked little interest among Samoans.<sup>65</sup> If they worked on roads at all, another report noted, a whole village “works at it, say for one or two days, or perhaps a week, and then the people rest for a week.”<sup>66</sup> Instead of maintaining roads, as Euro-American officials wanted, Samoans maintained long-standing labor practices based on cooperation and need.

Given the difficulties of forcing Samoans to work on roads, the administrations in German and American Samoa sought out other workers. In German Samoa, it was mostly Chinese and even a few white men who were employed in road work. Other Samoan and Chinese prisoners were forced to clean administration buildings and adjacent properties.<sup>67</sup> In fall 1904, the German colonial administration opened new barracks for the Chinese workers under government contract, including beds for 40 workers and overseers, a storeroom, and a separate kitchen.<sup>68</sup> By the end of 1907, six of the Chinese workers applied to the colonial administration for a one-year extension of their labor contracts

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<sup>64</sup> Report by Brenner, Dec. 17, 1909, NAS, IG 4 F3 I 4a Vol. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Underwood to Ass. Sec. of Navy, July 10, 1903, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 35, p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Sebree to Ass. Sec. of Navy, Aug. 9, 1902, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 35, Item 347, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Annual Report 1910/11, BArch RD 15/2.

<sup>68</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, Nov. 26, 1904, p. 1.

under the condition that they were allowed more opium.<sup>69</sup> Two years later, Stünzner's successor as road construction supervisor seemed to have gotten along with his Chinese workers just fine. In a report to the Governor, he requested to use parts of his fund to purchase gifts for Chinese holidays in order to "give the Chinese a treat."<sup>70</sup>

Major roads on foreign-owned plantations were usually maintained by plantation workers themselves, such as the Chinese workers on the DSG plantation in Tapatapao.<sup>71</sup> Both German and American colonial administrations also forced prisoners to build roads. Much like during the construction of the U.S. coaling station in Tutuila, convict laborers for the German Samoan government transported soil and rocks on a light trolley placed on a moveable tramline that extended over 3,000 feet. In U.S. consul Charles E. Parkhouse's view, the Samoan and Chinese prisoners were "not so satisfactory as contract labor."<sup>72</sup> Free labor ideology thrived among U.S. diplomats at a time when forms of unfree labor dominated most of the global countryside. In reality, however, prisoners also worked for the U.S. naval government in Tutuila, building roads and loading copra.<sup>73</sup>

Samoan and Chinese workers who were looking for casual employment adapted to changing economic circumstances and chose the kind of labor that would earn the most cash. Chinese workers hired by the German colonial administration could earn between 15 and 25 Reichsmark (\$3.75-6.25) a month, including food. Most Chinese workers built

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<sup>69</sup> List of Chinese Workers Employed by the Government, Dec. 9, 1907, NAS, IG 4 F3 I 4a Vol. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Report by Brenner, Dec. 17, 1909, NAS, IG 4 F3 I 4a Vol. 1.

<sup>71</sup> DSG to AA-KA, Nov. 21, 1904, BArch R 1001/2484.

<sup>72</sup> Parkhouse to Ass. Sec. of State, Aug. 27, 1908, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 8, Jan. 8, 1904-Dec. 1, 1908, p. 339.

<sup>73</sup> Dwyer to Parker, Sept. 17, 1909, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 38, p. 6.

and maintained roads, others kept the custom docks free from sand.<sup>74</sup> In 1913, the German colonial administration hired an average of forty Chinese workers, thirty of whom built roads, while the rest were craftsmen and wagoners.<sup>75</sup> Samoan day laborers received up to three Reichsmark (75c) a day without food. In times of high copra prices, Samoans either cut more copra on their own plantations or joined Melanesian, Micronesian, and Chinese workers on Euro-American plantations. As German colonial officials did not fail to notice, Samoans usually preferred plantation labor over road work.<sup>76</sup>

The slow pace of road-work frustrated military officials more than most. In 1907, a mere three miles of new roads was built, while repairs due to heavy rains and resulting landslides needed to be made.<sup>77</sup> A military report from fall 1908 indicated that no trail in Tutuila was passable for artillery except on mule-back and complained about the lack of local guides.<sup>78</sup> “Each native,” a report from a visiting U.S. warship found, “knows the trails in the immediate vicinity of his village, and some of the main trails, but was easily lost a little distance from home. There did not seem to be any one with a comprehensive knowledge of all the means of communication in the Island and it is most important for purpose of defense that there should be.”<sup>79</sup> The report concluded with a recommendation to train Samoan guides as part of the *fita fita* guard (chapter 5). A few years later, the

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<sup>74</sup> Annual Report 1910/11, BArch, RD 15/2, p. 186.

<sup>75</sup> Annual Report 1913/14, BArch R 1001/6523.

<sup>76</sup> Annual Report 1910/11, BArch RD 15/2, p. 186.

<sup>77</sup> Parker to Sec. of Navy, July 25, 1908, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 37, p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> Myers (*U.S.S. West Virginia*) to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Oct. 29, 1908, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1083, N-1-b, Reg.-No. 1374.

<sup>79</sup> Report on Fortifications and Defenses (*U.S.S. California*) to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Nov. 1908, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1083, N-1-b, Reg.-No. 1374, p. 15.

pace of road work in Tutuila had picked up. In 1910, workers built nine miles of new roads and repaired an additional 8.5 miles of existing roads. They also reinforced a number of bridges with Australian hardwood and blasted out boat passages through reefs with dynamite.<sup>80</sup> The use of blasting powder radically transformed the centuries-old system of boat tracks (*alāva 'a*).

Yet, apparently, the building of infrastructure still proceeded too slowly for U.S. Navy officials. In 1911, Governor William M. Crose laconically summarized the state of road work in Tutuila: “There are no roads in Tutuila which would be dignified by that name in the United States.”<sup>81</sup> The “roads,” he lamented, were little more than trails mainly because Samoans refused to work on road construction unless they were paid for all their work.<sup>82</sup> Partly out of frustration with this perceived lack of progress in road-building, Crose issued an “Act Concerning the Construction and Maintenance of Roads” on October 17, 1911. According to the act, Samoan counties were to furnish labor for the construction of roads. For roads with “public utility,” half of the labor cost was to be carried by the naval government, which also provided materials for blasting and to build bridges. For roads of only “local importance,” the naval government was only to offer materials. Samoans who refused to perform road work could be fined double the daily wage for each day missed or even thrown into jail for four days.<sup>83</sup> Since prisoners could be legally coerced to work for the colonial administration, this draconian provision turned the building of roads into a regime of forced labor. The system did not, however, have the

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<sup>80</sup> Crose to Sec. of Navy, July 14, 1911, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 40, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> “Act Concerning Construction and Maintenance of Roads,” Oct. 17, 1911, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 41.



intended effects. In 1921, Governor Waldo A. Evans introduced a special road tax of \$2.25 to pay for the construction and maintenance of roads. Prisoners who were detailed to road work still went out in gangs every day, but had new help in the form of a ten-ton road roller and a three-ton Denby truck.<sup>84</sup>

The construction of roads pitted colonial officials and workers against one another in particular ways. For Samoans, used to their own ways of moving around their home islands, road work seemed hardly necessary and unnecessarily hard. If not forced to as a form of punishment, Samoan workers only engaged in road work when other options for earning cash were not available. To say that road-building helped discipline Samoan communities to colonial control is to tell only half the story.<sup>85</sup> As in other arenas of colonial life, Samoan workers proved creative in adapting this unprecedented form of hard labor to existing practices, such as cooperative work gangs and occasional wage labor. For the Chinese workers employed by the German colonial administration, building and maintaining roads was merely another, if often more physically demanding, form of contract labor. There is little evidence to reconstruct the role of Micronesian and Melanesian workers in road-building, probably because most continued to work on plantations throughout their contracts. With the help of these workers, a network of roads crisscrossed northwestern Upolu by 1914, the most densely integrated part of colonial Samoa. By that time, Samoa had also become enmeshed in interimperial struggles to connect far-flung colonies into modern communication networks.

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<sup>84</sup> Annual Report by Evans, July 1, 1921, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 36, p. 6.

<sup>85</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 298.

## TELEGRAPHIC IMPERIALISM IN GERMAN SAMOA

The first years of the twentieth century were marked by the “telegraphic imperialism” of major imperial powers.<sup>86</sup> After decades of political wrangling and several interimperial conferences, the British cable across the Pacific was finally completed in December 1902. Stretching from Vancouver via Fanning Island (3,200 miles, the longest distance between two cable stations anywhere in the world) and Fiji to Auckland, the British cable completed the so-called “All-Red Line,” which linked the major British colonies around the world. Now cabling Sydney from London via the Pacific took only an hour, instead of a day, and cost half the price.<sup>87</sup> It took similarly heated debates and backroom dealings before the U.S. Pacific cable from San Francisco via Honolulu reached Manila on July 4, 1903. In masking the crucial financial backing from British telegraph companies, the opening of the U.S. cable on such a symbolic date encapsulated the general shift from economic to political considerations in the building of communication lines at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>88</sup>

The German Empire was the third major player in the race for laying cables across the Pacific. Increasingly uneasy with its dependence on British lines, German officials planned their own or, at least, neutral lines that would connect Berlin with its distant colonies in China, New Guinea, and Samoa. A unique joint venture, the German-Dutch Telegraph Company eventually installed a cable from Menado in the Dutch East

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<sup>86</sup> Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism: Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire, 1830-1920* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>87</sup> Hugh Barty-King, *Girdle Round the Earth: The Story of Cable and Wireless and Its Predecessors to Mark the Group's Jubilee, 1929-1979* (London, UK: Heinemann, 1979), 142.

<sup>88</sup> Daniel R. Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851-1945* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991), 101.

Indies via Yap to Shanghai in fall of 1905.<sup>89</sup> Germany now, too, had its own submarine cables in the Pacific. In addition, German Navy officials attempted to compensate for the relative lack of cables vis-à-vis Great Britain by investing in the new technology of wireless radio.<sup>90</sup>

If the telegraph bound together distant British, German, and U.S. colonies, it also deepened the technological gap between colonizers and colonized. In German Samoa, as in other colonies, the colonized had little to no access to the new technological wonders. Far from being an engine of peace and progress for everyone, as the evangelists of technology had claimed for at least half a century, the telegraph and its successors, in fact, had quite different effects on the lives of colonized people around the globe. More than 10,000 miles from Berlin, the German colony of Samoa posed considerable challenges for officials trying to keep their superiors at home informed of local developments. German consuls in Apia had been complaining about the lack of adequate communication lines with Berlin since the 1860s and these complaints intensified as other colonial powers began to compete for control over Samoa in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Although Samoa remained relatively isolated from the rest of the world until the beginning of the twentieth century, the communication revolution did transform life on the islands themselves. By the 1880s, a local mail service had developed in Samoa. Between 1885 and 1900, New Zealand-born photographer John Davis had run the post office in Apia. And in September 1886, the German steamer *Lübeck* from the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>90</sup> Heidi J.S. Evans, “‘The Path to Freedom’? Transocean and German Wireless Telegraphy, 1914-1922,” *Historical Social Research* 35, no. 1 (2010): 213.

Norddeutscher Lloyd had started a mail service from Sydney to Apia and Tonga.<sup>91</sup> Yet, as the islands remained contested among Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, so did their mail service. Only after the raising of the German flag in 1900 did the mail system further expand. Until 1909, seven additional post offices opened throughout Upolu and Savai'i. The Imperial post office in Apia delivered letters twice every three weeks along the north coast of Upolu and around Savai'i.<sup>92</sup> The mailmen were initially drawn from the Samoan *fita fita* guard. Later on, two Samoans were selected by a *matai* and paid a respectable monthly salary of 48 Reichsmark (\$12) by the German government.<sup>93</sup> The two Samoan assistants who worked in the German post office continued to do so right up to the world war, but then refused their services to the New Zealand military administration.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, steamships brought news and mail to Europe and the United States from Samoa roughly every three weeks. Mail packages to Germany were either sent to Bremen or Naples via Sydney through ships of the Norddeutscher Lloyd (47 days). Alternatively, letters to Europe could also be sent via Pago Pago to San Francisco through the Oceanic Steamship Company via Vancouver (41 days).<sup>94</sup> The Samoa Shipping & Trading Company ran a steamer, the *Maori*, from Apia

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<sup>91</sup> Willy Schmidt, and Hans Werner, eds., *Geschichte der deutschen Post in den Kolonien und im Ausland* (Leipzig: Konkordia-Verlag, 1939), 347.

<sup>92</sup> "Former German Possessions in Oceania," 32.

<sup>93</sup> BArch R 1001/2686.

<sup>94</sup> "Former German Possessions in Oceania," 32.

to Pago twice every three weeks until just before the war when the German ship *Staatssekretär Solf* took over.<sup>95</sup>

Sending telegrams from or to Samoa posed even more difficult challenges. Before the wireless station finally opened in German Samoa in 1914, telegrams from Samoa were carried by ship to one of the nearest cable stations in Suva, Fanning Island or Auckland via local middlemen. The *Samoanische Zeitung* ran regular ads offering the services of the Pacific Cable Board for Telegrams to customers in Apia. The telegrams were sent from the British cable station on Fanning Island through a local agent at the International Hotel, a Mr. Easthope, who also happened to be the owner of the hotel. Customers were advised that the Oceanic Company's steamer called at Fanning Island four days after leaving Pago Pago and the telegram could then be sent on to basically anywhere in the world. If a passing ship did not lay anchor at port, Samoan couriers would sometimes swim out into the bay to deliver the mail.

[Figure 9: Photograph of swimming couriers]<sup>96</sup>

Telegrams to Samoa had to be sent to one of these stations first and then on to Samoa as standard mail through one of the steamship lines. This complicated procedure contrasted sharply with the almost instant connection that British colonies such as nearby Fiji or the U.S.-occupied Philippines enjoyed and forced military planners to look for alternatives. To this end, German colonial officials opened a local telegraph system on

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<sup>95</sup> Heimrod to Williams, Oct. 27, 1904, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 52.

<sup>96</sup> Hermann Hiery, *Bilder aus der deutschen Südsee: Fotografien 1884-1914* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), 263.

the two main islands of Upolu and Savai'i in 1906.<sup>97</sup> In 1907, Apia and neighboring plantations were connected by telephone.<sup>98</sup> By 1914, more than 150 stations were in operation, stretching over 100 miles across the islands.<sup>99</sup> Despite the small number of people living on the islands, they attracted considerable traffic. Plans for a further extension of the local telegraph system from Apia to the western tip of the island in Mulifanua were thwarted by the onset of the war. There is little evidence on who used these local telegraph lines, much less how, but it seems likely that white European settlers as well as visitors to Samoa accounted for the overwhelming majority of telegrams sent through these domestic lines.<sup>100</sup>

German colonial officials were quite alert to the necessity of having close communication lines to their far-flung Pacific colonies. In the wake of the rebellion on the Micronesian island of Ponape in winter of 1910, which resulted in the deaths of 7 German officials and more than two dozen Micronesians, German military officials demanded better and faster access to information to Berlin as well as between colonies. The connection to the Imperial Navy station in Kiaochow in China was seen as particularly crucial in case of another military emergency. Newspapers in both Germany and Samoa began lobbying extensively for a cable or wireless connection after the Ponape rebellion and they redoubled their efforts in 1912.

A Berlin newspaper, for instance, complained in January 1913 that “the news coverage reaching the German colonies still remains in dire straits and the German

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<sup>97</sup> Around the same time, there were 14 telephones in operation in Tutuila. 1905 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 97.

<sup>98</sup> Heimrod to Ass. Sec. of State, July 23, 1907, NARA-CP, RG 84, Vol. 8.

<sup>99</sup> “Former German Possessions in Oceania,” 33.

<sup>100</sup> Schmidt/Werner, *Geschichte der deutschen Post*, 351ff.

colonial newspapers are still dependent on Reuter telegrams, which often times carry reports hostile to Germany.” The article went on to say that Samoa seemed to be the most isolated of all German colonies. To illustrate Samoa’s isolation, the newspaper reported that the promotion of former Governor Solf to Colonial Secretary had reached Samoa only by way of a newspaper from New Zealand.<sup>101</sup> In response to this article, the *Samoanische Zeitung* in Apia explained the archipelago’s isolation and confirmed that the *Auckland Weekly News*, which arrived with the Union Steamship line, had, in fact, brought the news of Solf’s call to Berlin. The news from Germany arrived via cable from Fiji, the article elaborated, usually three days after the publication of the weekly Samoan newspaper. That is why the newspaper could publish important news even before the official cable arrived in Samoa. Despite this privileged access to information, the Samoan newspaper concluded with a passionate critique of the island’s far-from-splendid isolation from the rest of the world: “Three weeks we are totally cut off from the world, without receiving any message, and what we are then able to read in a colonial newspaper that is relevant for us, is very scant. Samoa should finally be linked to the rest of the world by cable or wireless just like New Guinea.”<sup>102</sup> By 1913, the long-standing calls for a better integration of Samoa into the global communications networks became increasingly hard to ignore for German decision-makers.

While plans for a wireless chain had been discussed in Berlin for quite some time, the German Colonial Office did not begin making more specific plans until the fall of 1909. Technical problems, especially the high degree of atmospheric interference close to the equator, delayed the introduction of wireless radio stations throughout the Pacific. It

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<sup>101</sup> *Die Post*, Jan. 17, 1913.

<sup>102</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, Apr. 6, 1913, p. 2.

took until spring 1912 before a subsidiary of the German-Dutch Telegraph Company was founded and granted a concession to build wireless stations along a strategic line running from Kiaochow, Yap, Rabaul, Nauru, to Samoa.<sup>103</sup> Germany was not alone in realizing the benefits of the new wireless technology to circumvent British hegemony in submarine cables. Around the same time, the U.S. Congress provided \$1.5 million for the establishment of a chain of high-powered radio stations in the Panama Canal Zone, California, Hawai'i, Guam, American Samoa, and the Philippines. The first station, built in record time near Honolulu, opened in August 1912.<sup>104</sup>

Meanwhile, the newly founded German South Seas Company for Wireless Telegraphy, together with the leading German wireless company Telefunken, sent an expedition to Samoa in April 1912 to begin planning the wireless station. Solf pulled the bureaucratic levers in Berlin to secure a state subsidy and speed up the construction process.<sup>105</sup> From a purely technical standpoint, a wireless station in Samoa had the additional advantage of connecting easily with the British station in Fiji, around 700 miles to the southwest, and from there, with the British cable to Australia and New Zealand as well as to Canada. But the strategic advantages of an independent wireless chain in case of war were dominant in the minds of German decision-makers. Beyond the wireless station in Kiaochow, which had been in operation since 1906, additional German stations in the Pacific opened in Yap and Nauru in December 1913.

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<sup>103</sup> *Elektrotechnische Zeitschrift*, Sept. 19, 1912, p. 990.

<sup>104</sup> Hugh G. J. Aitken, *The Continuous Wave: Technology and American Radio, 1900-1932* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 137. For a general account, without specific reference to Samoa, see also Jonathan R. Winkler, *Nexus: Strategic Communications and American Security in World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>105</sup> "Former German Possessions in Oceania," 41.



Construction of the station in the hills of Tafaigata, five miles southwest of Apia, began in earnest in the summer of that year. German chief engineer Richard Hirsch had arrived in Apia in May 1913 and had purchased a piece of land for the station. Next, Hirsch directed Samoan and Chinese workers to build a six-mile-long small-gauge railway to transport machines and tower parts uphill.<sup>106</sup> A self-made locomotive carried the construction material for nearly three miles to the bottom of the hill where workers had to drag and push it uphill the rest of the way. Given this arduous task, an acute labor shortage slowed down the project. In response, the German government had to pay the mostly unskilled workers three Reichsmark (75c) a day, more than double the usual rate for contract laborers at the time.

Initially, only a dozen Chinese contract laborers worked to clear the underbrush and carry material to the construction site.<sup>107</sup> The Chinese contingent was soon enlarged to twenty-eight, and forty additional workers from various Pacific islands joined them shortly afterwards. The German construction team was highly conscious of potential conflict among the multiracial labor force. In reports to his employer Telefunken in Berlin, Hirsch claimed that the “proper treatment” of the workers helped avert more violent conflicts or even the intervention of colonial troops. As an example, he cited animosities between Chinese workers from Shanghai and others from Hong Kong. In response to interracial conflicts, Hirsch argued, strict racial segregation and “lots of patience” were needed.<sup>108</sup> German officials had to rely on every available worker to perform the physically demanding construction labor. Racial segregation of the

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<sup>106</sup> Plans for a light railway connecting Apia to the west coast of Upolu were never realized. *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>107</sup> Annual Report 1913/14, BArch R 1001/6523.

<sup>108</sup> Hirsch to Telefunken Berlin, Aug. 25, 1913, BArch, Files of the Imperial Post Office, No. 15376.

workforce was not only a response to real interracial conflict, but also a testament to the danger of revolt against harsh work conditions. As in the construction of the U.S. naval station in Tutuila, the building of the wireless station in Upolu came at a price for the Chinese, Melanesian, and Samoan workers.

Samoan laborers cut down trees around the construction site, but German authorities were not satisfied with their performance and introduced task work to ensure faster progress. It is significant that the newly arrived chief engineer Hirsch seemed to have imbibed quite fast the racial stereotypes of Samoans pervasive among white European settlers: “The Samoan,” he noted, “represents the strange type of the gentleman savage; good manners, wonderful grandezza, and pyramidal laziness.”<sup>109</sup> Yet, the radio tower in Apia was built by workers who gave the lie to the selective gaze of their colonizers.

The labor shortage was exacerbated by the poor health of workers and bosses alike. While the latest transport of Chinese workers had recently arrived in Apia, it had to be put under quarantine due to cases of smallpox. The new Chinese workers could thus not immediately be used for building the station. To finish the construction, Hirsch eventually leased laborers from German planters on specially designed and quite costly contracts.<sup>110</sup> At its high point, twelve tons of heavy construction material was transported from port to work site each day. Work conditions were harsh. Nonwhite workers and their white German bosses suffered from malaria and other tropical diseases. No fewer than twenty-eight workers of a total work force of 174 were affected by inflammatory wounds on their feet and had to stop working. For their part, German engineers and staff

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Telefunken to Imperial Post Office, Aug. 15, 1913, BArch, Files of the Imperial Post Office, No. 15376.

suffered from dysentery and fever. The enduring labor shortage even forced Telefunken back in Berlin to ask the Colonial Office to hire prison laborers.<sup>111</sup>

In dire straits because of depressed natural rubber prices, the Samoa-Kautschuk-Compagnie (SKC) offered the German government 50 Chinese laborers in May 1914. Equally short of cash, Governor Schultz forwarded the offer to Telefunken, which he thought could make good use of the additional workers in the final stretch of finishing the radio tower. Eventually, 27 Chinese laborers were picked up at the Company's headquarters, transported to the construction site, and paid 32 Reichsmark (\$8) a month, all courtesy of the German government.<sup>112</sup> This state-sponsored labor assistance program showed the importance of the wireless station for the German colonial administration in Samoa. After months of excruciating labor in the tropical heat, the station was finally completed on June 30, 1914.<sup>113</sup> In the process, the wireless station rewired Upolu's natural and social environment.<sup>114</sup>

As the exploitation of this motley crew of colonial workers shows, the making of empire was a daunting physical task, borne by those who rarely saw the fruits of their toils. The labor conditions tolerated by the German-run telegraph company belied the dominant self-representation of imperial communication lines as a means of peace and progress for everyone. If colonial officials had to continuously weigh their desire for

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<sup>111</sup> Telefunken to Imperial Post Office, Mar. 23, 1914, BArch, Files of the Imperial Post Office, No. 15377.

<sup>112</sup> Tecklenburg to Vogel (SKC), May 2, 1914, NAS, IG 135 F2 I4a Vol. 3.

<sup>113</sup> Reinhard Klein-Arendt, "Die Nachrichtenübermittlung in den deutschen Südseekolonien," in Hermann Hiery, ed., *Die Deutsche Südsee 1884-1914: Ein Handbuch* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001), 177-197, here 191f.

<sup>114</sup> The U.S. wireless radio station in Tutuila beat its German counterpart by just a few months. That station opened in June 1914 on an 850-foot high mountain ridge overlooking Pago harbor. Initially, communications with Honolulu were still unreliable, but a stronger transmitting set soon resolved this technical issue. Stearns to Sec. of Navy, July 8, 1914, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 42.

increased access to information with security concerns over telegraph lines in foreign hands, they also had to rely on the colonized to build these new means of communication. As the history of German Samoa shows, the telegraph did not bring peace and progress, but quite the contrary: the first message that the newly built wireless station received from Berlin was news that war had erupted in Europe.

On August 29, 1914, just a month into the hostilities, troops from Great Britain and New Zealand occupied German Samoa. They encountered no resistance from the German authorities. Governor Schultz had been staying night and day at the new wireless station waiting for news from Europe. The initial plan to completely destroy the station was eventually abandoned, not the least because German officials believed that Samoans “saw the [400-foot tall] station tower as a visible sign of the Emperor’s power.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, when British forces arrived in Samoa, German engineers quickly removed some vital parts to disable the wireless station. Under no circumstances should the newly-built German wireless station fall into enemy hands. The British attempted to rebuild the big tower, but caused the explosion of one of the giant wheels, which tore through the station roof and further damaged the tower. A Samoan bystander lost his leg in the accident.<sup>116</sup> New parts had to be imported and the entire station had to be slowly rebuilt.<sup>117</sup> As a U.S. official reported home, the wireless station in Apia ceased operations on August 22, 1914.<sup>118</sup> Throughout the war, the British had to rely on their cable link in Fiji to

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<sup>115</sup> Schmidt/Werner, *Geschichte der deutschen Post*, 356.

<sup>116</sup> Reinhard Klein-Arendt, *Kamina ruft Nauen! Die Funkstellen in den deutschen Kolonien, 1904-1918* (Köln: W. Herbst, 1996), 262.

<sup>117</sup> Schmidt/Werner, *Geschichte der deutschen Post*, 356.

<sup>118</sup> Bullard to Navy Dep., Sept. 28, 1914, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 43.

communicate with London. Meanwhile, German mail service and local telegraph lines within Samoa, now under British censorship, continued uninterrupted throughout the war.

Even though the Germans gave up their colony without a fight, Samoa had been at the center of interimperial competition in the Pacific for decades. Communications—or, rather, lack thereof—played a crucial part in this clash of empires over a group of islands thousands of miles from London, Berlin, and Washington. In the end, the cable that would bring peace and progress to Samoa brought only hardship for the people who built it. And its completion was followed in short order by a world war that, in the eyes of Samoans, merely replaced one colonial power with another. Indeed, during the war and after, the New Zealand administration continued the public works policy started in the German era.<sup>119</sup>

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If colonial officials saw the building of infrastructure as a way to increase their control over colonial subjects, the workers in colonial Samoa seized the new opportunities that came with such construction projects. On the one hand, workers welcomed an additional avenue for earning cash, which had become increasingly important to acquire manufactured goods, pay taxes, and contribute to churches. The 1905 strike by workers engaged in the construction of the U.S. naval station in Tutuila was one in a series of conflicts highlighting the crucial issue of fair wages. On the other hand, building and improvement of infrastructure such as roads, ports, and storage buildings not only served the interests of foreign traders and military officials, but also home-grown initiatives such

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<sup>119</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 304.

as the Samoan copra cooperatives in both German and American Samoa. With more frequent shipping connections to markets in Europe, Australia, and the United States, Samoan copra producers gained greater economic clout, if not real autonomy. And even if these new means of connection were largely outside of the control of islanders themselves, they offered new and more regular ways of interacting with the wider Pacific world and beyond.<sup>120</sup> In these and other ways, the hard labor of grading roads and carrying steel bars became a crucible for worker solidarity.

The building of material infrastructure in colonial Samoa exposed the ways in which environmental, political, and economic vulnerability intersected. Mudslides became a more frequent occurrence as workers cut into coastal hillsides to fill up areas for new buildings for the U.S. naval station in Tutuila. The extension of shipping facilities in the shallow harbor of Apia likewise increased the risk of damage from seasonal hurricanes. And the formal integration of German and American Samoa into wider circuits of colonial naval power, including regular visits from German and American warships, raised the stakes of large-scale Samoan resistance against colonial rule. Steamships and telegraph lines allowed colonial officials in the Pacific not only to communicate better with their colleagues in distant capitals, but also to request military support in the form of warships. The sheer vastness of the Pacific Ocean made long-distance technologies such as the telegraph and wireless radio all the more significant for colonial control. In this way, Samoa's gradual integration into global communication networks shifted the balance of power towards the colonial state.

As environmental, political, and economic vulnerabilities intertwined, workers in colonial Samoa gained new opportunities to delay and disrupt the smooth workings of

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<sup>120</sup> Salesa, "Travel-Happy Samoa," 184.

ports, roads, and telegraph lines. Workers fortifying old roads or building new ones knew the natural environment better than anybody else, including their own employers. This familiarity with the local terrain—the firmness of the soil, the availability of shade, the existence of dense bush—proved to be useful knowledge in the hands of workers seeking to escape the discipline of hard labor. Workers engaged in the monotonous work of maintaining government buildings and roads, for instance, found comfort in the regular interactions with familiar parts of the natural environment and with fellow workers.

At the same time, the infrastructure workscape challenged workers in unique ways. In contrast to plantation or service labor, most of the construction labor was short-term, often a matter of weeks or months. Contracts on plantations lasted three years or more and careers in the colonial service sometimes transcended generations. Thrown together for much shorter terms, construction workers had fewer opportunities to get to know one another and organize collective action. In addition, construction workers relied more heavily on imported machines and techniques than did plantation workers whose agricultural skills made them desirable to plantations owners in the first place. Given the short-term and more mechanized nature of construction labor, bonds of solidarity among workers took longer to grow and only occasionally bridged racial lines. The 1905 strike against wage cuts remained one of the rare direct confrontations between a cross-racial coalition of construction workers and their employers.

Colonial officials welcomed the improved communication lines with their superiors in the distant metropolises, even as they worried about the workers who built them. The annual reports by German and American colonial officials were replete with references to the various construction projects under way on the islands, but often relied

on the passive voice to distract attention from the actual workers who built the infrastructure. Whereas the so-called “labor question” played a prominent role in debates on plantation agriculture in colonial Samoa, workers figured much less explicitly in reports about the building of new infrastructure. In the eyes of colonial officials, at least, the latest technologies such as steamships and radio stations operated by invisible hand. Both German and American officials saw the building of colonial infrastructure as a way to impose modern ways of life on Samoans and other colonized people.<sup>121</sup> Since Germany and the United States entered the colonial scramble at a time when new technologies became available, integrating colonies like Samoa into global transportation and communication lines reinforced their claim to “enlightened” colonial rule. As we have seen, however, the diverse group of workers who built the colonial infrastructure developed structures of solidarity that bound them closer together.

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<sup>121</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, [1950] 2001), 77.



## CHAPTER 5 — SERVICE

As far back as she could remember, Grace Pepe wanted to help people. So when in February 1914 the U.S. Navy opened a Training School for Nurses in her native Tutuila, Pepe was one of the first Samoan women to enroll. As part of her studies, she learned anatomy, physiology, and the basics of patient care: how to diagnose a fever and how to treat an open wound. The nurses also received training in public hygiene and women's health care—two areas of particular concern to the Navy officials. With her great enthusiasm and quick wits, Pepe excelled in school. In the words of the Navy's chief medical officer, Pepe was “an apt pupil and an exceptionally good nurse.”<sup>1</sup>

As a reward, Pepe was transferred to the Naval Hospital on Mare Island, north of San Francisco, for further training. After over six months of clinical work there and at the Children's Hospital in downtown San Francisco, Pepe returned to Tutuila in early 1920.<sup>2</sup> But Pepe kept on travelling. Eager to put her newly-gained medical knowledge and experience into practice, she visited village after village in Tutuila, “lecturing on various health topics.”<sup>3</sup> Samoan nurses like Pepe performed the crucial work of mediating between Samoan and Euro-American interests, values, and knowledge. Trained by colonial officials to “enlighten” their fellow islanders, Samoan service workers reinterpreted this paternalist logic according to their own goals and the needs of their

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<sup>1</sup> Braisted to Sec. of Navy, Apr. 18, 1919, Records of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, General Correspondence, 1896-1925, NARA-DC, RG 52, Box 367, File 124942.

<sup>2</sup> *Annual Report of the Surgeon General, U.S. Navy, Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery to the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1920* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920), 746.

<sup>3</sup> NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 36, p. 6.

community. In doing so, they became leaders in Samoa's quest for greater self-determination.

Colonial service included a wide spectrum of occupations and training positions, ranging from soldiers to translators and nurses. In some ways, workers in the colonial service sector represented the white-collar counterparts to the more physically exacting labor on plantations and roads. Nevertheless, service workers faced similar challenges in their jobs and found similar ways to confront them. As with subsistence farming and ethnographic performing, most workers in the service economy, particularly those in the police force and in health care, were native Samoans. Most service workers, moreover, were men. Except from female nurses and a handful of house servants, Samoan men had better chances for social advancement in the colonial service.

The most striking feature of the colonial service workforce was the prominent role that mixed-race people played in it. Unlike on plantations, descendants of Euro-American and Samoan parents were overrepresented in jobs that involved intercultural and multilingual skills such as translators, interpreters, and government clerks. Drawing on their biracial and bicultural family background, service workers of mixed-race descent occupied crucial intermediary positions in colonial Samoa. Colonial administrators depended on them to translate, interpret, and mediate between colonial policy and local circumstances. At the same time, colonized people, including many workers in other occupations, found their mixed-race intermediaries in government offices and hospitals to be important sources of information. With such influence, service workers needed to keep the trust of both sides. Exploring the ways in which colonial intermediaries, such as the

service workers in Samoa, negotiated this contradictory world offers insights into the very workings of colonialism itself.<sup>4</sup>

## **SAMOAN WARRIORS**

As early as the mid-nineteenth century, security was one of the major concerns of the Euro-American colonizers in Samoa. For centuries, supporters of leading *matais* competing for the succession of titles were usually well-armed with clubs and knives and knew how to wield them. Starting in the 1860s, many Samoans purchased Western-made firearms, especially rifles, in exchange for land titles. This arms-for-land sale accelerated the loss of native lands, while also increasing the overall military prowess of Samoans. As a consequence, even before German, British, and American diplomats agreed on tripartite rule over the municipality of Apia in 1889, the disarmament of Samoan soldiers had become a top priority.

Parallel to the efforts to reduce Samoan firepower, a municipal police force was established in 1888 to maintain “peace and order” in the commercial center of Apia, where virtually all Europeans and Americans resided.<sup>5</sup> By the summer of 1888, fourteen young Samoan men, all from the most powerful families, had enlisted for a two-year term and received Prussian infantry training by Captain Eugen Brandeis. Rifles and

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<sup>4</sup> For a similar call to study the social history of colonial intermediaries, see Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily L. Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, “Introduction,” in: *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa*, edited by Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily L. Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Becker to Bismarck, Jan. 9, 1888, BArch R 1001/2673, p. 3.

ammunition for the new police force were on their way from Germany.<sup>6</sup> After the division of the islands into German and American Samoa in 1900, both colonial administrations were quick to establish their own Samoan security forces in the image of the police force during the tridominium. The Native Guard, or *fita fita* (Samoan for soldier), was born.

[Figure 10: Photograph of *fita fita* in German and American Samoa]<sup>7</sup>

In American Samoa, one of Commander Tilley's first requests to the Navy Department was for permission to enlist Samoans as landsmen in the U.S. Navy. In 1900, he was authorized to enlist 58 men for four years. Guard members were equipped as infantry, had one 3-inch landing gun, and were trained by a U.S. Marine Sergeant "in infantry drill, in boat drill, and *to a certain extent* with the field gun."<sup>8</sup> The qualification "to a certain extent" revealed the limits of trust U.S. Navy officials were willing to extend to their Samoan orderlies. Too much combat expertise, they feared, could backfire.

Most members were sons of *matais* and took immense pride in their official capacity. Similarities to the emphasis on etiquette and discipline in Samoan culture certainly accounted for part of the attraction to the newly established guard. Serving as a *fita fita* offered considerable prestige in Samoan society, not the least because it conformed to the ideal of service to the community. In that sense, colonial officials and

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<sup>6</sup> Fritze to Admiralty, Aug. 13, 1888, BArch R 1001/2673, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Morlang, *Askari und Fitafitita: "Farbige" Söldner in den deutschen Kolonien* (Berlin: Links, 2008), 130ff.; Report on American Samoa by Colby, Mar. 30, 1924, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1084, N-1-b, Reg.-No. 17336-A, Annex No. 1 "Naval Station," p. 25-29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24 (emphasis added).

Samoan leaders agreed, *fita fita* guards set an example for other Samoan youth.<sup>9</sup> Their uniforms made visible the merging of American and Samoan culture in the Native Guard as a whole: a turkey-red cap, a white cotton undershirt, and a sash of the same turkey-red color mixed with a white *lava lava* banded at the hem with rows of stripes denoting the soldier's rank. True to Samoan custom, the *fita fitas* did not wear shoes.<sup>10</sup> With their display of muscular masculinity, the Samoan soldiers fulfilled one of the stereotypes Euro-American audiences expected when they came to see Samoan men in ethnographic shows.

Another major incentive to join the guard was the good pay. Membership in the *fita fita* guard offered a welcome source of cash for the individual soldier and his extended family. Into the 1930s, service in the *fita fita* guard was one of the best-paid jobs available to American Samoans. The money they spent in local stores and the Navy commissary also helped fuel economic growth on the islands. In 1901, a landsman in the Native Guard received \$25 a month and a coxswain in one of the Navy tugboats even made \$35 a month.<sup>11</sup> Upon visiting Tutuila in fall 1901, Rear-Admiral Silas Casey, Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Navy in the Pacific, was so impressed by the Native Guard that he recommended raising their pay to match that of regular U.S. Marines.<sup>12</sup> At least in pay, Samoan soldiers became the equals of their American colleagues.

Initially set up merely to maintain order and enforce court decisions, the tasks of the Native Guard diversified as colonial administrations spread their control over the

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<sup>9</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 133, 347.

<sup>10</sup> Kniskern, *Life in Samoa*, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Casey to Sec. of Navy, Nov. 19, 1901, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1086, N-5-a, Reg.-No. 02/39.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

islands. In American Samoa, the native guards began to help in construction projects and guarding Navy buildings. Because the *fita fitas* remained small in number, however, the U.S. Navy Captain of the Watch continued to be necessary to guard government property, particularly at night.<sup>13</sup> Apart from guard duties, the *fita fitas* also provided the crew for the Governor's barge with twelve rowers and a coxswain.<sup>14</sup>

From early on, the *fita fita* guard also assumed another service function: musical entertainment. In 1902, two U.S. Navy musicians were sent to Tutuila to teach the Samoan *fita fitas* how to organize a band and perform music.<sup>15</sup> The new U.S. naval station band consisted of seventeen pieces and quickly mastered the instruments to the delight of all inhabitants.<sup>16</sup> After 1905, the band gave public concerts twice a week from a brand-new bandstand which they had built themselves.<sup>17</sup> Within the prestige-laden Native Guard, the band members emerged as the true "aristocrats of American Samoa."<sup>18</sup> As the *fita fita* band showed, Samoans were engaged in performative labor not only abroad, but also at home. To be fair, the kind of American military music the Samoan band members played on duty had little else in common with the call-and-response songs troupe members performed at the Chicago world's fair.

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<sup>13</sup> 1906 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 100, p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> Report on American Samoa by Colby, Mar. 30, 1924, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1084, N-1-b, Reg.-No. 17336-A, Annex No. 1 "Naval Station," p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Tuala Sevaaetasi, "The Fitafita Guard and Samoan Military Experience," in: *Remembering the Pacific War*, edited by Geoffrey M. White (Honolulu, HI: Center for Pacific Islands Studies, School of Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Studies, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 1991), 182.

<sup>16</sup> Kniskern, *Life in Samoa*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> 1905 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 97, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 347.

The ranks of the Native Guard continued to swell in the first years of U.S. rule, so much so that new barracks had to be built to house them. The old barracks, constructed by members of the guard themselves, consisted of a concrete building made from native lime and rock. As a 1906 report indicated, the walls of the old barracks were crumbling from age and tropical climate and had turned soft and mushy. Besides, the old barracks also served as the naval station prison, which overtaxed its capacities. The Navy officials in Tutuila requested funds for new barracks to be made with Oregon Pine, redwood, iron roofing, and concrete walls. In the new building, there would also be space for a separate room for the station band.<sup>19</sup> As soon as the funds were granted, the *fita fitas* went to work. All in all, they broke more than 5,400 cubic feet of rock for the barracks. Except portions of carpenter work, members of the guard performed all labor.<sup>20</sup> After a few months of delay, the new barracks were completed in November 1908. According to the official report, the barracks were “in every way most satisfactory, dry and cool.”<sup>21</sup> Upon completion, Guard members officially moved into the two-story structure with an arched Mission Revival-style veranda facing the parade ground. To accommodate Samoan custom, though, many of the guard members were allowed to sleep at home with their families.<sup>22</sup> In any case, the fathers of the guard members, most of them high-ranking *matais*, must have been proud of their sons, since the feast that followed its dedication

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<sup>19</sup> 1906 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 100, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> 1908 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 106, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> 1909 Report of Expenditures and Estimates, NARA-DC, RG 71, Entry 56, Vol. 109.

<sup>22</sup> Report on American Samoa by Colby, Mar. 30, 1924, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1084, N-1-b, Reg.-No. 17336-A, Annex No. 1 “Naval Station,” p. 24.

ceremony, where guests consumed over 25,000 food items, was one of the largest ever held in Samoa.<sup>23</sup>

The Native Guard did not always enjoy such unqualified support among civilian Samoans. Especially early on, there were several reports on violent clashes between *fita fitas* and other Samoans living in Tutuila. In the summer of 1903, for example, Tafito and Pau, two Samoan men from Fagalogo, attacked a *fita fita* against whom they had a grievance. They were stopped by the police and thrown into prison. At that time, the old Native Guard barracks still housed the naval station prison, which put the two violators face to face with the colleagues of the attacked guard. “Whilst in their cells,” a newspaper article noted, “they were set upon and ill-treated in a most disgraceful manner by several of the Fita Fitas, who were on guard at the gaol.” For their conduct, five native guards received prison sentences with hard labor for terms ranging from one month to two years. In addition, they were all dismissed from the Native Guard. Tafita and Pau themselves were sentenced to four months imprisonment each for their physical attack on the guard. The article concluded with a dire warning: “It is to be hoped that this will be a lesson to the Fita Fitas, as their behavior towards both whites and natives has been – to say the least – very aggressive.”<sup>24</sup> As this episode showed, the *fita fitas* who were tasked with keeping order on the island, from time to time, needed to be disciplined themselves.

Other members of the guard, however, were models in military discipline and loyalty. During his time as Governor from 1915 to 1919, John M. Poyer employed a personal servant and bodyguard: Talalotu. In the recollections of Poyer’s daughter, “no more military man ever stood at salute than the Governor’s orderly, Talalotu [who]

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<sup>23</sup> *American Samoa Historic Preservation Office*, accessed Feb. 4, 2015, [ashpo.org/walktour/13.html](http://ashpo.org/walktour/13.html).

<sup>24</sup> *Samoanische Zeitung*, Aug. 8, 1903, p. 3, BArch R 1001/2320.



followed the Governor at a respectful distance, whenever he left the house, and wore a dagger in his belt.”<sup>25</sup> Talalotu was so close to the Poyer family that he named his first son after his boss, John Martin Poyer, and his second son after the Governor’s private secretary, Luther Williams Cartwright. Rumor had it that after the Poyers had left Tutuila in 1919, Talalotu even named his third son after the Governor’s daughter, Mary Porter Poyer, as a sign of his loyalty.<sup>26</sup> Accounting for a whiff of colonial nostalgia on the part of Mary Poyer, Talalotu’s dedication to his job as a *fita fita* guard and personal servant to the U.S. Governor seems indisputable. Service workers in colonial Samoa, like Talalotu, often developed a deep sense of loyalty to their employers, who, in turn, depended on them to run their administrative business. And as isolated episodes of violence against local civilians showed, the *fita fita* guard in American Samoa was a crucial pillar of the colonial administration.

Forty miles to the west, in German Samoa, the colonial administration established a similar Samoan guard, also naming them *fita fita*. A contingent of Samoan government soldiers was recruited only months after the hoisting of the German flag. The leading Samoan *matai*, Mata’afa Iosefo, had pushed the new German administration to enlist Samoan soldiers, hoping it would increase Samoan influence (including his own) on colonial decision-making.<sup>27</sup> As in American Samoa, the German Samoan *fita fitas* were mainly tasked with maintaining order on the streets and guarding government buildings, including their own four Samoan *fales*. Over time, their functions extended into other service sectors such as delivering mail and rowing boats. Some Samoan leaders, like

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<sup>25</sup> Kniskern, *Life in Samoa*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Hiery, “Polizei im deutschen Samoa,” 269.

Mata'afa, thought that the Native Guard was too small in number. In a letter to Solf from August 1901, Mata'afa derided the *fita fita* as “a mere dancing-class for the pleasure and enjoyment of the Samoan people.”<sup>28</sup> For Mata'afa and other leaders, Samoan participation in the colonial service increased their own influence over the colonial administration.

By 1905, the German administration was employing 31 regular soldiers for 20 Reichsmark (\$5) per month, six privates for 24 Reichsmark (\$6) per month, two corporals for 30 Reichsmark (\$7.50) per month, and one sergeant for 60 Reichsmark (\$15) per month.<sup>29</sup> In addition to their salaries, the soldiers also received a daily provision allowance of 80 Pfennigs (20c) and, on public holidays, even free cake. Compared to other jobs accessible to Samoans at the time, the monthly salary of the *fita fitas* in German Samoa was relatively low, but the job was steady and safe, with opportunities to advance within the ranks to earn more money and status.<sup>30</sup> Most importantly, serving as a *fita fita* conferred considerable prestige in Samoan society and offered access to the most powerful officials in the colony. This was the bargain of collaboration for Samoan soldiers.<sup>31</sup>

Governor Solf had to defend even these moderate expenditures against attacks from the German colonialist press and a group of new settlers, led by Richard Deeken,

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<sup>28</sup> Mata'afa to Solf, Aug. 13, 1901, NMPL.

<sup>29</sup> Basic Guidelines for Pay and Provisions for Police Force, Apr. 1, 1905, BArch R 1001/2673, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> In 1910, a Samoan construction worker made roughly 82 Reichsmark (\$20.50) per month.

<sup>31</sup> Ronald Robinson, “Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration,” in: *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, edited by Roger Owen, and Bob Sutcliffe (London, UK; Longman, 1972), 121.

who wanted the Samoan guards replaced by soldiers from German New Guinea.<sup>32</sup> Both long-standing settlers and Solf agreed that replacing the Samoan *fita fita* with Melanesian soldiers would incite racial prejudice among Samoans and endanger the safety of the colony.<sup>33</sup> Solf's trust in his Samoan soldiers had limits, however. When a military confrontation with Lauaki's followers appeared imminent in early 1909, the Governor ordered the German police commissioner to secretly remove all firing pins from the *fita fita* rifles.<sup>34</sup> A contingent of sixty Melanesian soldiers from German New Guinea was called in to protect the colony. Even though the Melanesian soldiers never saw direct combat, calls to permanently replace the Samoan *fita fitas* resurfaced in the wake of Lauaki's rebellion. Perhaps precisely because they were never really needed, the Samoan *fita fitas* continued to enjoy official support.<sup>35</sup> Apart from this exceptional intervention and repeated calls for a permanent deployment, German Samoa remained the only German colony in the Pacific without a Melanesian police force right until the end of German rule in 1914. On the one hand, a more muscular security presence would have undermined Governor Solf's policy of salvage colonialism which relied on non-violent coercion to preserve Samoan ways of life. On the other hand, the German Navy Asiatic Squadron in Kiaochow was only two weeks away from Samoa in case of military

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<sup>32</sup> Solf to AA-KA, Jan. 31, 1904, BArch N 1053/25, Vol. 6, 91904, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> "Die schwarze Schutztruppe," *Samoanische Zeitung*, May 8, 1909.

<sup>34</sup> *Koloniale Zeitschrift*, Vol. 11 (1910), p. 196.

<sup>35</sup> In stark contrast to indigenous soldiers in other German colonies, such as the Askari troops in German East Africa, the Samoan *fita fitas* never saw direct combat. On the Askari, see Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*.

contingencies. For their part, the veterans of the Native Guard were proud of their service and held regular meetings in their own Fita Fita Club in Matautu.<sup>36</sup>

After their three-year enlistment term, *fita fitas* who spoke good English could join the German Samoan police force as *leoleo* (policeman). The *fita fita* guard, thus, became a training ground for other security services in the colony. The *leoleos* dated back to the days of the tridominium and were kept on duty after 1900 to ensure the continuing safety for Euro-Americans in Apia. Soon thereafter, they also were tasked with safeguarding the new government jail in Vaimea. In 1902, only seven *leoleos* worked for the German colonial administration.<sup>37</sup> Four years later, their number had increased to 22. After 1903, the Samoan *leoleos* received an additional mandate: supervising the newly arrived Chinese contract laborers. Given the expanding commercial plantation agriculture on Upolu and Savai'i, the Samoan policemen came to play a more direct role in entrenching colonial power on the islands. Their new supervising role on plantations eventually led to clashes with Chinese workers. Although the Samoan policemen and soldiers never saw real combat, they were essential to the security and prosperity of the colony.

Conflicts between Samoan policemen and Chinese workers were common. In November 1905, for instance, a Chinese worker by the name of Ah Che was struck by Fatu, a Samoan policeman, for not wearing his identification badge. According to Fatu's testimony, he had encountered Che on the street without his required identification number. When he had tried to arrest him and force him to jail, Che resisted, forcing Fatu to push him. A witness report contradicted Fatu's story and confirmed Che's version that

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<sup>36</sup> Coerper to Wilhelm II., May 16, 1909, BArch R 1001/2673, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> "Name List of Policemen, Apia," Apr. 18, 1902, NMPL, I.4 Vol. 1.

he was directly hit by Fatu in front of the jail. Moreover, in an evaluation by his employer, Fatu was described as “generally quite useful, but tending to violent acts.” If German colonial officials relied on Samoan policemen to keep plantation workers in check, they did not tolerate excessive punishment meted out by them. The following month, Fatu was fined 20 Reichsmark (\$5) by the German Imperial Court for abusing Che.<sup>38</sup> Here, as in the flogging of workers by plantation owners, the colonial state’s monopoly on violence was at stake. And even though Samoan policemen, like Fatu, were technically part of the colonial administration, Chinese workers, if they presented a convincing case, could expect legal protection, not the least because of their crucial importance for the economic future of the colony.

In the following years, German plantation owners continuously asked the colonial administration in Apia to send Samoan *fita fitas* to maintain order on their plantations.<sup>39</sup> In February 1910, for instance, SSG manager Zwingenberger wrote to Solf to send him three *fita fitas* to protect his SSG employees against attacks by Chinese workers.<sup>40</sup> Clashes between Samoan *fita fitas* and Chinese workers culminated in February 1914 in a much-publicized shoot-out that cost four *fita fitas* and three German plantation owners their lives.

On February 8, 1914, a group of four young Samoan *fita fitas*—Ao, Faalili, Fili, and Sefo—went to watch an American Western movie in the new cinema in Apia. Two years earlier, Harry J. Moors, impresario of two Samoan ethnographic show troupes, had introduced screenings of American cowboy pictures and British war films to the town

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<sup>38</sup> Moors to Imperial Court, Nov. 27, 1905, NAS, IDC-3 F1 III 1b, Vol. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Schultz to RKA, Sept. 24, 1910, BArch R 1001/2495.

<sup>40</sup> Zwingenberger to Solf, Feb. 1, 1910, BArch R 1001/2495.

hall in Apia, exciting Samoan youth and exasperating colonial officials alike.<sup>41</sup> After the movie had ended, the four adolescents proceeded to a plantation hut where a group of Chinese workers were gambling. They stole money from the workers and destroyed the gambling den.<sup>42</sup> To make their escape, they also stole four horses, four rifles, and 300 cartridges from the apartment of a German policeman. When a group of German plantation employees confronted them, the Samoan “cowboys,” as they were described in the press, immediately opened fire, killing a German plantation manager and his overseer.

In response, Governor Schultz recruited a group of Samoan policemen, Samoan civilians, and German settlers to hunt the runaways down. On February 11, 1914, they found them hiding in a hut in Malie. High noon was close. As it later became clear, Samoan bystanders had tried to intervene to stop the battle, but the four shooters had told them to go away. They wanted to die this way, they boasted, killing as many “slave-makers” as possible.<sup>43</sup> After a final shoot-out that lasted four hours, Sefo and another young German volunteer, Otto Hellige, was killed, while Faalili and Fili were lynched by several of the Samoan hunters, led by Saga. Only Ao survived heavily wounded and was hanged two days later in the government jail in Vaimea.

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<sup>41</sup> Hiery, “Polizei im deutschen Samoa,” 271.

<sup>42</sup> A report by U.S. naval governor Mitchell in Tutuila told a different story about the events. According to Mitchell, the four Samoan men had been gambling with the Chinese workers, but had been caught and sentenced to jail. Apparently, plantation owners did not approve of Samoan guards and Chinese workers co-mingling below their radar. After the guards had succeeded in escaping from jail, they returned to the Chinese make-shift casino and took their revenge. Perhaps they blamed one of their Chinese gambling colleagues for revealing their presence in the den. Mitchell to Stearns, Feb. 10/11, 1914, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 42.

<sup>43</sup> Report by Kruse, Feb. 18, 1914, NMPL, IV.13.

As colonial officials in both Samoas blamed the bad influence of “cowboy pictures” being shown in Apia for this “killing spree,” the deeper fault lines that the fatal shoot-out laid bare were conveniently ignored. Conflicts between Samoan *fita fitas* and Chinese workers were a direct consequence of the divide-and-rule strategy pursued by the German colonial administration. Samoans, Melanesians, and Chinese were racially segregated on plantations and even in hospitals, making cross-racial solidarity more difficult. The Native Guard was one of the most segregated colonial institutions. Offering steady pay and social prestige, the Guard was only open to Samoans, not to the Chinese or Melanesian migrants. In fact, the number of Samoan policemen increased in proportion to the number of Chinese workers arriving in Samoa. Tensions between Samoan soldiers and Chinese workers on plantations were further exacerbated because both competed for the favors of Samoan women. At the same time, Samoan government employees were also voicing their dislike of intimate relationships between Chinese men and Samoan women. Moreover, Samoans blamed the Chinese newcomers for rising crime rates on their islands.

The timing of the shoot-out was no coincidence. The following day, the Samoan *fita fitas* were scheduled to receive a public warning about their repeated attacks on Chinese workers.<sup>44</sup> With official sanctions looming, the Samoan youngsters seized the last opportunity for dramatic and fatal action. Looking for ways to save money, Governor Schultz used the events to finally dissolve the Samoan *fita fitas*. Only the oldest and longest-serving members were transferred to other service jobs within the administration.

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<sup>44</sup> Report by Pusch, Feb. 15, 1914, ANZ, Archives of the German Colonial Administration, 6051.

But when New Zealand troops occupied German Samoa a few months later, many of the former *fita fitas* and *leoleos* reenlisted with the new colonial power in town.<sup>45</sup>

As this violent episode showed, cross-racial conflicts could easily spill over into outright resistance to the German employers of Chinese workers and to the colonial presence as a whole. Far from being a mere “decorative adjunct” to the colonial administration, Samoan soldiers, if tested, did not shirk from using their military training even against the German settlers they were meant to protect.<sup>46</sup> The seeds of racial conflict colonial officials had deliberately sown would come to haunt them.

### **BETWEEN WORLDS: THE ADVENTURES OF CHARLES TAYLOR**

Since the days of the tridominium, Samoans had worked for the German, British, and American diplomatic representations as clerks, translators, interpreters, and aides. Le Mamea, for instance, worked as English-Samoan interpreter for the tripartite government and joined his half-brother Te’o Tuvale as a member of the ethnographic show troupe touring through Germany in 1900. Tuvale had actually apprenticed as assistant clerk in Le Mamea’s office since 1878 and, after his return from Germany, was hired by Imperial Judge Heinrich Schnee as a clerk. Tuvale later became Governor Solf’s secretary and interpreter. One of Tuvale’s sons, Atoa Te’o Tuvale, followed his father’s footsteps in the

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<sup>45</sup> Löhneysen to Bernstorff, Sept. 30, 1914, BArch R 1001/2624, p. 87.

<sup>46</sup> Hemenstall, “Indigenous Resistance to German Rule,” 274.



colonial service and became chief interpreter of Western Samoa's Legislative Assembly after independence in 1962.<sup>47</sup>

Another long-serving government clerk was Meisake, who had started his career in 1879 as Under-Secretary of State for the Samoan government. He went on to work as a clerk and interpreter for various German consuls in the 1880s and 1890s, before Solf kept him on in the Governor's office in 1900. Not long after, Meisake asked Solf for a pay raise, but the Governor declined. According to Solf, Meisake then threatened to leave for Tutuila and work for the U.S. naval administration. Meisake said he was sick of German close-fistedness. In all likelihood, Meisake did not act upon his threat and never switched employers. In any case, Meisake's insistence on a fair wage for his long work experience showed that Samoan service workers knew what they were worth.<sup>48</sup>

The number of Samoan and Chinese government employees soared after 1900 as the German and American colonial administrations needed more and more local help in their daily operations. Speeches needed to be translated, letters needed to be filed, and floors needed to be swept. Beyond the colonial administration buildings, Samoans and Chinese were employed as plantation inspectors, tax collectors, teachers, boat crew, and runners.<sup>49</sup> Among the first 300 Chinese workers who arrived in Apia in April 1903, were seven overseers, along with four house servants and four non-contracted craftsmen.<sup>50</sup> The German administration soon began hiring several Chinese workers for its customs office

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<sup>47</sup> Thode-Arora, *From Samoa with Love*, 127.

<sup>48</sup> Solf, "Ten-Year Program," BArch R 1001/4789.

<sup>49</sup> Budget for Samoa, 1901, BArch RD 15/12.

<sup>50</sup> Report by Wandres, May 20, 1903, BArch R 1001/2319.

and construction department.<sup>51</sup> By 1908, more than 60 Chinese contract laborers were working for the German administration, most in road construction and in the hospital.<sup>52</sup> The two chief clerks in the Chinese Commissioner's office, Lau Ah Mau and Wang Ah Kau, received the highest salaries of all: 60 Reichsmark (\$15) a month.<sup>53</sup> Even though the German agent Wandres had relied on Chinese interpreters on his recruiting trips to China, no official Chinese interpreter worked for the colonial administration in German Samoa until 1912. In May of that year, Tsang Shin Lun was hired for 300 Reichsmark (\$75) a month to interpret and translate between Chinese and English.<sup>54</sup>

Translation work also emerged as one of the most important services Samoan government employees could offer. Le Mamea, Tuvale, and Meisake had been trailblazers in this regard. Governor Solf quickly acquired conversational Samoan and could understand most of the spoken language, but legal regulations and especially official speeches demanded a command of formal Samoan beyond his reach. To bridge the language gap, the German administration hired translators and interpreters who were native Samoans and had also learned German and English. This requirement made Samoans of mixed-race descent ideal candidates for these positions. Their daily labor routines included office work, translating official correspondence and legislation, and interpreting speeches given by the Governor and other high-ranking colonial officials. Similar to Samoan performers in ethnographic shows, service workers were engaged in a particular kind of performative labor.

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<sup>51</sup> "List of Chinese Workers Employed by the Government," Dec. 9, 1907, NAS, IG 4 F3 I 4a, Vol. 1.

<sup>52</sup> "List of Chinese Workers Employed by the Government," Feb. 1908, NAS, IG 4 F3 I 4a, Vol. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> "Personal Files Concerning the Chinese Interpreter Tsang Shin Lin," NAS, IG 14 F6 IA 101, Vol. 1.

One of the most influential and longest-serving interpreter in colonial Samoa was Charles T. Taylor.

[Figure 11: Photograph of Charles Taylor]<sup>55</sup>

Born in 1871 in Matautu to a shipbuilder from Liverpool and a Samoan mother, the young Charles grew up speaking both English and Samoan. Among his Samoan friends, he was known as Sale. When it became public that Charles's father was already married to a woman in New Zealand, he deserted his son and moved back there. To avoid the disgrace of illegitimate birth, a German family in Upolu adopted Taylor, who quickly became fluent in German. At the age of fifteen, Taylor's gift for languages was discovered by the British Consul in Apia who in 1886 hired him to be his official interpreter. This marked the beginning of Taylor's long and productive career at the center of the linguistic melting-pot that was colonial Samoa.

His position as interpreter at the British Consulate in Apia offered Taylor other opportunities as well. When Henry Adams and John La Farge arrived in Samoa in the fall of 1890, Taylor became their personal interpreter. It was through him that the famous American visitors gained access to Samoan culture. Without Taylor's linguistic assistance, La Farge would not have been able to learn about Samoan myths nor would he have been able to reach some of the remote villages in which he drew his famous sketches. Adams, for one, acknowledged Taylor's important mediating role in his letters

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<sup>55</sup> Harry J. Moors, *With Stevenson in Samoa* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard & Co., 1910); *Cyclopedia of Samoa*, 64.

when he recalled that “our boy Charley” translated Samoan sermons.<sup>56</sup> Adams’s paternalist tone revealed the ambiguous relationship Taylor had to negotiate with his employer, veering between intimacy and condescension.<sup>57</sup>

While Taylor was working as an interpreter for the British Consulate, he also clerked in the store of Harry J. Moors, the American trader who had brought a Samoan troupe to the world’s fair in Chicago in 1893. It was likely Moors who introduced Taylor to another famous visitor to Samoa: Robert Louis Stevenson. The world-renowned Scot had come to Samoa in December 1889 to escape the obligations of a star author and strengthen his weak physical frame. Moors, a good friend of Stevenson’s, recalled that it was Taylor who first taught Samoan to Stevenson. Always the ironist, Stevenson referred to his teacher as “Charlie Taylor—the sesquipedalian young half-caste.”<sup>58</sup> After Stevenson passed away in 1894, Taylor continued the poet’s efforts to translate Samoan poetry into English, with the help of Australian journalist William F. Whyte.<sup>59</sup> Taylor also became more outspoken about his deceased boss. In an article for the *Samoa Times* published in February 1895, Taylor accused Stevenson of providing guns to the Tamasese’s followers in his challenge to the German-supported Malietoa. In March 1895, Taylor was sentenced to three months in jail for slander.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> J. C. Levenson, ed., *The Letters of Henry Adams*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 354.

<sup>57</sup> Besides Taylor, Adams and La Farge also depended on the help of their Japanese servant Awoki who compiled a dictionary of Samoan names and words for his bosses. To La Farge’s dismay, it was Awoki who received “the truest affection and good-will” of the Samoans: “We are too far up and too white, and cannot play.” La Farge, *Reminiscences of the South Seas*, 80, 279.

<sup>58</sup> Moors, *With Stevenson in Samoa*, 107.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 109. Born in Australia, Whyte visited Samoa and Tonga as co-editor of the *New Zealand Herald*. Following in Moors’s footsteps, Whyte went on to tour the United States with a Maori troupe in 1910.

<sup>60</sup> Samoan Supreme Court Decision, Mar. 21, 1895, BArch R 1001/2549, p. 16.

After his release from jail, Taylor's life quieted down as he got married to Tipesa Timaio of a respected Samoan family from Savai'i. After 1900, the British consulate closed in Apia and Taylor had to find a new job. It did not take long before the new German administration secured Taylor's services. Taylor's considerable experience, together with his ability to speak German, the increasingly dominant language in town, made him an important asset to the administration. Taylor quickly became not only government interpreter at the Samoan High Court, but also office clerk and Governor Solf's personal interpreter.<sup>61</sup> These were busy days for the thirty-year-old man.

For young gifted Samoans like Taylor, the colonial world opened up new possibilities far beyond their home. Since Taylor had proved himself a valuable interpreter both to Solf and the administration at large, the Governor decided to send him to the home of his adoptive parents: Germany. Taylor must have been thrilled at this opportunity. To be sure, Solf did not have Taylor's personal happiness in mind when he made the decision to send him almost 10,000 miles away. For Solf, like the colonial officials and managers of the ethnographic show troupes, such a long and expensive journey promised the chance to impress upon the minds of Samoans that the German Empire was a cultural and military powerhouse. In Taylor's case, the main motivation for his trip to Germany was simply to improve his German language skills. Yet, beyond these practical considerations, Samoan service workers like Taylor seized these new opportunities for travel with heartfelt conviction. A desire for learning and seeing the world combined to make such trips so alluring to Samoans.

So in the spring of 1902, Taylor began his long trip to Germany, calling at Sydney before passing through the Suez Canal to reach the northern port city of Bremen. From

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<sup>61</sup> *Samoanisches Gouvernements-Blatt*, Vol. III, No. 21, Apr. 4, 1903, BArch RD 224-2/3/4.

there, he travelled on by train to the small town Witzenhausen, just south of the famous university city Göttingen in central Germany. There, he enrolled in the German Colonial School for Agriculture, Trade, and Commerce Wilhelmshof, which had opened only three years before his arrival. Founded by German colonialists, industrialists, and missionaries, the Colonial School offered practical training to Germans and colonial subjects alike in plantation agriculture, handiwork, and other skills useful in the German colonies. As a rule, the school only accepted students between the ages from 17 to 27, but when Taylor arrived, he was already over 30 years old. Solf's political influence and personal friendship with the school's director likely had opened the door.

At school, Taylor took primarily German classes together with courses on office-keeping. Taylor did not participate in the more physically demanding curriculum such as agricultural courses, partly because Solf had warned the school's head teacher ahead of Taylor's arrival that he, like many other "half-castes," could not withstand too much physical exertion.<sup>62</sup> According to Solf, Taylor also exhibited "a heavily Samoan imagination."<sup>63</sup> Ignorant of his boss's comments, Taylor wrote to Solf about his daily schedule at the school and even asked the Governor for additional money to buy gifts for his fellow students.<sup>64</sup> Probably not coincidentally, Solf happened to be on home leave in Germany at the same time when Taylor attended the Colonial School and kept in regular touch with him through mail. Taylor's monthly salary was suspended while in Germany, but Solf sent him money from his personal pocket.<sup>65</sup> Fearing what Taylor might do with

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<sup>62</sup> Solf to Weber, Apr. 29, 1902, NAS, IG 14 F4 IA 19.

<sup>63</sup> Solf to Weber, June 8, 1902, NAS, IG 14 F4 IA 19.

<sup>64</sup> Taylor to Solf, May 17, 1902, NAS, IG 14 F4 IA 19.

<sup>65</sup> Solf to AA-KA, Feb. 27, 1902, NAS, IG 14 F4 IA 19.

his own money, Solf held fast to his policy of protecting Samoans from the dangers of Euro-American capitalism far away from Samoa. The colonial panopticon followed Taylor wherever he went.

In one of his letters to Solf from June 1902, Taylor told him about his visit to the nearby Wartburg where Martin Luther had translated the New Testament from Ancient Greek into German nearly four centuries earlier. Visiting this landmark site in German history, Taylor might have felt a sense of kinship with the brave German Protestant. If Luther translated the New Testament in a record ten weeks, Taylor did his part by sending Solf translations of letters he had requested. Even though Taylor described his visit to the Wartburg and Luther's parlor as just another place to tell his friends about back in Samoa, the historical link between these two translators was evident.<sup>66</sup>

Shortly after his momentous Wartburg visit, Taylor and Solf briefly met in person in the famous spa town of Bad Kissingen. In a letter after their meeting, Solf expressed his disappointment in Taylor for not taking his mission in Germany as seriously as he should. Solf told Taylor not only to learn how to speak German, but, more than that, also "to feel and think German."<sup>67</sup> Solf continued with this surprising advice for a mixed-race Samoan like Taylor: "In the future, try not to be three-quarters Samoan and one-quarter German, but rather seek to be three-quarters German and one-quarter Samoan."<sup>68</sup> Partly fuelled by disappointment in Taylor's progress, Solf urged his interpreter to develop the kind of cross-cultural empathy that his own paternalist system of colonial rule in Samoa rested upon. Solf's slightly curt command revealed the simple fact that he depended on

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<sup>66</sup> Taylor to Solf, June 19, 1902, NAS, IG 14 F4 IA 19.

<sup>67</sup> Solf to Taylor, July 4, 1902, NAS, IG 14 F4 IA 19.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

Taylor's translating and interpreting skills to be an effective Governor.

Taylor himself seemed to have cultivated this sort of cross-cultural intimacy with Solf when he addressed his boss as "my dear Governor" and "my dear master" in his own letters.<sup>69</sup> True to Solf's call for transcending his Samoan roots to become more "German," Taylor added the following comment to his translated letters for Solf: "I understand all what you wish to say, just from your glance."<sup>70</sup> The fact that Taylor wrote this sentence in English did little to distract from his sincere effort as a professional translator to think himself into the mind of his German boss. Quite obviously, the relationship between service workers such as Taylor and their superiors was very different from the relationship between, for example, a Chinese plantation worker and his employer. Translation work implied a degree of intimacy between worker and employer unimaginable and unnecessary in other workspaces. In what could be lost in translation, those who did the translating found their power.

Taylor's desire to be close to Solf was inextricably linked to his desire to see the world. After their meeting in Bad Kissingen, Taylor asked Solf if he could visit him in Berlin, the Empire's capital and biggest city. To Taylor's chagrin, Solf rejected Taylor's wish because, as he explained to him in a letter, such a big city as Berlin would be a danger for Taylor without proper guidance.<sup>71</sup> Apparently, Solf did not want to assume direct responsibility for Taylor beyond sending him some pocket money. For it could not have been Taylor's lack of German that would have made a trip to Berlin impossible. Solf further justified his decision by reassuring Taylor that he had only his best interests

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<sup>69</sup> Taylor to Solf, June 19, 1902, NAS, IG 14 F4 IA 19.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Solf to Taylor, July 8, 1902, NAS, IG 14 F4 IA 19.



and professional development for his “colonial career” in mind.<sup>72</sup> Taylor himself had different plans. He not only wanted to see Berlin, but other parts of the world as well. Months before his scheduled return to Samoa, Taylor had already asked Solf to change his original ticket from Bremen to Apia via Sydney. Solf must have told Taylor about his plans to return to Samoa through the United States in order to make some diplomatic visits on the way. Desperate to accompany his boss to the United States, Taylor asked: “Couldn’t I go with you, Mr. Governor, via America? That way, I could see more of the world.”<sup>73</sup> Again, Solf said no, but Taylor kept on dreaming.

Upon his return to Samoa, Taylor continued working as Solf’s interpreter, but he was not alone anymore. During Taylor’s absence, another Samoan had taken over the duties of government interpreter: Afamasaga Maua (Saga for short). Saga had joined the municipal police force in the 1890s, remaining in office after Germany took control in 1900. As Taylor’s substitute, Saga did such an excellent job that Solf promoted him to be official translator. While there is no evidence that Saga actively ousted Taylor during his stay in Germany, Saga clearly seized his chance. In February 1903, Solf made Saga his private secretary and advisor on Samoan matters. As Solf’s most trusted aide, Saga used his great personal influence to calm tensions during the Lauaki rebellion in 1908.<sup>74</sup> Saga and Taylor likely shared responsibility in translating and interpreting for the colonial administration for a few years. In 1911, Taylor passed away just before Solf was recalled from Apia to become Secretary in the Imperial Colonial Office. By that time, an

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<sup>72</sup> Solf to Taylor, July 4, 1902, NAS, IG 14 F4 IA 19.

<sup>73</sup> Taylor to Solf, May 17, 1902, NAS, IG 14 F4 IA 19.

<sup>74</sup> Hempenstall, *Pacific Islanders under German Rule*, 60.

increasing number of Samoans had followed Taylor's and Saga's lead in joining the ranks of the colonial service.

## **TAIO TOLO AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR SAMOAN EQUALITY**

In the years leading up to World War One, more than a dozen Samoans were employed in the German administration. Compared to other German colonies, particularly in Africa, more systematic efforts to integrate colonized people into the German administration came relatively late to Samoa.<sup>75</sup> Funded by the head tax, a new government school opened in 1908 to offer training to young Samoan men in military discipline, practical skills, and the German language. Its graduates often entered government service as interpreters, clerks, and craftsmen. To provide further training, especially talented students were sent to Germany or other German colonies from time to time.

When Rear Admiral Erich Gähler, commander of the German East Asian Fleet, visited Samoa in August 1910, for instance, he was so impressed by the Government School that he took two of its students with him. At the German-controlled shipyard in Qingdao, they would be trained as carpenters and locksmiths, as was also the rule with young men from Saipan. Apparently, the opportunity to travel to China was tempting to the Samoan students: "The interest was extraordinary," Gähler noted with a bit of surprise, "everybody wanted to come along."<sup>76</sup> Over the course of the following year, more and more young Samoans went on to learn basic German and entered government jobs as interpreters, clerks, drawing assistants, and medical assistants. As Governor

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<sup>75</sup> Hiery, *Deutsche Reich in der Südsee*, 298.

<sup>76</sup> Gähler to Wilhelm II., Sept. 7, 1910, BArch R 1001/2760.

Schultz, Solf's successor, reported back to Berlin, the Samoan employees saved the colonial administration money compared to hiring Europeans.<sup>77</sup> By early 1914, there were 14 Samoans employed by the German colonial administration.

Although they had some of the best-paying jobs available to Samoans at the time, the government employees were far from satisfied. On February 5, 1914, a Thursday evening, almost all of the Samoan government employees congregated at the government hospital in Motootua for a secret meeting. The meeting was organized by Taylor's successor in the office of government interpreter: Taio Tolo. Two days earlier, Taio had sent around a letter to his fellow government employees in which he announced the "secret conference" and asked his colleagues to indicate their interest to attend. Taio elaborated that the meeting would not involve official matters, but rather an open discussion among the Samoan employees about "their relations to the Germans."<sup>78</sup> As main organizer, Taio signed his own name first at the bottom of the circular letter in the name of the "high *fono* (council meeting)." That way, Taio firmly embedded the planned meeting within Samoan tradition and raised the stakes for participation. Apart from Taio himself, 14 other Samoan employees signed the letter to indicate their intention to participate in the meeting. One of them was Sepulona, Taio's brother, and assistant doctor at the government hospital. It was likely Sepulona who suggested his workplace as an appropriate place to meet. Open since 1912, the government hospital not only lay at some distance from the other government buildings and thus direct colonial control, but was also a busy place, where a get-together of such a large number of Samoan government employees would attract less attention.

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<sup>77</sup> Schultz to RKA, June 7, 1914, BArch R 1001/2760.

<sup>78</sup> Letter by Taio Tolo, Feb. 2, 1914, enclosure to Schultz to RKA, June 7, 1914, BArch R 1001/2760.

At the actual meeting on February 5, 1914, eleven of the fifteen original signatories were present: Taio Tolo, Atimalala, Sepulona, Sofeni, Hanipale, Ma'a Anae, Tauvela, Mago, Maiuu, Tasi, and Paniani. As noted in the official *fono* report, written by Paniani, both Kenape and Ma'a, had excused their absence. Why the other two employees who had signed the circular letter did not attend the meeting is not known. Besides the interpreter Taio, who was quickly elected chairman of the meeting, five of the attendees were clerks, three, including Sepulona, were assistant doctors, and one worked in the post office. As their first act, the members signed an oath in which they swore to uphold their votes in the meeting. The *fono* members then proceeded to debate several topics that agitated their minds, following a set agenda.<sup>79</sup>

First and most importantly, Taio raised the question of why the Germans and Samoans were not equal. By then, it would have become clear to all Samoan employees present why their meeting had to be kept secret. Paniani, who worked at the post office, was the first to chime in. He complained that he and his fellow Samoan post office clerks were not treated well by the Europeans. From the European point of view, Paniani claimed, the Samoan employees were “like servants or black contract laborers, so to speak.”<sup>80</sup> The assistant doctors Atimalala and Sepulona both confirmed Paniani's impressions by elaborating on their own experiences in the government hospital.

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<sup>79</sup> Reflecting their intermediary positions, Taio and his followers combined Samoan and German elements in their meeting. On the one hand, the meeting was modeled on a Samoan *fono* in which leading *matais* convened to discuss important matters, the most important of which were made binding by an oath. On the other hand, some of the formal elements of the meeting betrayed the influence of an education in German administration: the meeting minutes, the election of a chairman and secretary, and the agenda of topics to be discussed. Hiery, *Deutsche Reich in der Südsee*, 298f.

<sup>80</sup> Report by Taio Tolo and Paniani, Feb. 5, 1914, enclosure to Schultz to RKA, June 7, 1914, BArch R 1001/2760, p. 4.

After these complaints, Taio himself intervened. The real reason why the Europeans were treating the Samoans so badly, he argued, was the fact that the Samoans were still living in “ignorance.” To make his case, Taio pointed to other island groups whose inhabitants were “waking up” after several of the local islanders had been sent to Europe for their education.<sup>81</sup> Stressing the lack of educational opportunities in German Samoa, Taio averred: “All schools in Samoa are entirely insufficient; that way, we cannot gain the education which is necessary to be equal to the Germans, except when a number of students was to be sent to Europe for training.”<sup>82</sup> Hanipale immediately supported Taio’s proposal by reminding the *fono* members that Taio himself would be travelling soon to Germany to improve his German there. This training program, Hanipale recommended, should be expanded so that more than one Samoan student would be able to travel abroad every year. Confronted with his upcoming study trip to Germany, Taio asked the meeting to refrain from discussing his travel plans until his departure. Apparently, Taio was afraid of endangering his Germany trip in case his superiors learned about the secret meeting. Beside these practical considerations, it was good Samoan etiquette to keep the debate about German-Samoan relations as impersonal and relevant to the other members as possible. And indeed, Taio concluded his comment by emphasizing the good for Samoa as a whole: “May it come about that many will travel to Germany to be taught there in different schools so that something fruitful will emerge for

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<sup>81</sup> Taio might have had the Sokeh rebellion on the Micronesian island of Ponape or the anti-colonial movement led by Apolosi Nawai in nearby Fiji in mind.

<sup>82</sup> Report by Taio Tolo and Paniani, Feb. 5, 1914, enclosure to Schultz to RKA, June 7, 1914, BArch R 1001/2760, p. 4f.

this group of islands, not for the physical well-being of the individual or of his family, but for the whole of Samoa.”<sup>83</sup>

Try as he might, it was not easy for Taio to distract from the fact that it was him who was chosen to go to Germany for language training. His position as government interpreter, which put him in close contact with the Governor, made him an important asset to the colonial administration and a likely candidate for further training. Like Charles Taylor more than a decade earlier, Taio had a crucial intermediary position in the transmission of power in colonial Samoa. If Taylor had been a pioneer in the role of intercultural mediator and multilingual genius, Taio learned how to use his privileged place in the colonial labor hierarchy to organize his fellow workers for plans bigger than himself.

In contrast to the mixed-race Taylor, Taio and his fellow conspirers in Motootua came from leading Samoan families. More than half of the *fono* members under Taio’s leadership had fathers who had worked in the colonial service before.<sup>84</sup> Family pedigree and racial purity were significant for Taio and his supporters, so they crossed out the signature of one of the original signatories two weeks after the meeting, citing his mixed-race background.<sup>85</sup> Taio himself was well-aware that the leaders of anti-colonial resistance in other parts of the Pacific world often were workers in the colonial service who had received a metropolitan education. As Taio prepared to follow in Taylor’s footsteps and take a trip to Germany, he was also pursuing an education to become a leader of his people against his teachers.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> Schultz to RKA, June 7, 1914, BArch R 1001/2760, p. 175.

<sup>85</sup> Letter by Taio Tolo, Feb. 2, 1914, enclosure to Schultz to RKA, June 7, 1914, BArch R 1001/2760.

After debating the strained relations between Samoans and Germans, the meeting moved on to other topics. Several members sharply criticized the practice of Samoan women living together with Chinese men and demanded a law banning this form of cohabitation. In response, Taio called for more caution and argued that an official ban would not be appropriate because the Chinese consul would object.<sup>86</sup> As this debate from early 1914 showed, the issue of interracial sex continued to be a bone of contention between Samoans and Chinese long after the first arrival of Chinese workers in 1903. The final topic returned the discussion to labor relations between Samoans and Europeans. Tasi complained about the fact that Samoans were prohibited from working as assistants in European-owned trade stores outside of Apia. Tasi argued that if this ban were not lifted, “no schools would be needed anymore for the Samoans because they would have no opportunity to usefully apply the things they had learned.”<sup>87</sup> Education, at home and abroad, was a central concern for the Samoan elite.

At the end of the meeting, chairman Taio reminded all attendees to keep the proceedings secret, especially from friends, relatives, and acquaintances. This was particularly important because people in Samoa were widely known for gossip and slander, Taio elaborated. Taio, for one, was well-aware of the danger the *fono* members were facing: “Even if everything is right what we have done, it would still be perceived as a ‘revolt’ against the government.”<sup>88</sup> He closed the meeting by calling on his fellow

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<sup>86</sup> Report by Taio Tolo and Paniani, Feb. 5, 1914, enclosure to Schultz to RKA, June 7, 1914, BArch R 1001/2760, p. 7.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

Samoans to be “united” and “with true patriotism true and honest to one another.”<sup>89</sup>

Together with the oath the attendees had sworn at the beginning of the meeting, Taio’s call for patriotic unity was a significant step towards a more aggressive and coordinated front against colonial rule. Born among highly educated Samoans employed by the colonial administration, this spirit of “revolt,” in Taio’s prescient phrase, would only grow stronger after New Zealand took over the islands from the German Empire. Those closest to colonial power grew closer to one another and appointed themselves leaders of the anti-colonial movement of the 1920s.

As the discussions at their secret meeting showed, Taio and his followers very much saw themselves as the enlightened avant-garde among their less-educated countrymen. Like the *ilustrados* in the colonial Philippines, Samoan government employees, such as Taio and Taylor before him, used their multilingualism and travel experiences to define themselves as a cosmopolitan elite ready to challenge their colonial rulers.<sup>90</sup> This emerging young elite, forged in the crucible of colonial service, not only challenged colonial rule from outside, but also older structures of authority within Samoan society.

Senior Samoan government employees saw Taio’s secret *fono* as an attempt to undermine their own influence.<sup>91</sup> One of them was Taylor’s successor as government interpreter, Saga. His remarkable career climbing the ranks of the colonial service turned Saga not only into one of the most influential, but also into one of the best-paid Samoans

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> On the *ilustrados*, see Michael Cullinane, *Ilustrado Politics: Filipino Elite Responses to American Rule, 1898-1908* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003).

<sup>91</sup> Schultz to Solf, May 5, 1914, BArch N 1053/132.



of his generation. By April 1912, he was earning 180 Reichsmark (\$45) a month.<sup>92</sup> Confronted with Taio's secret *fono*, Saga saw his own considerable influence in danger. After all, 41-year-old Saga was the Governor's official spokesman and Taio merely his junior colleague as government interpreter. Perhaps Taio reminded Saga of his own rise out of Taylor's shadow. Moreover, Taio's father, Tolo, was also employed by the colonial administration, which made Taio's actions seem ever more subversive. Further complicating the generational conflicts was the fact that the meeting's elected secretary was one of Saga's own sons: Paniani. To repair his public reputation and strengthen his position as top government advisor, Saga called on Governor Schultz to be awarded a German medal.<sup>93</sup> But the onset of the war robbed him of this symbolic reassurance. Like many Samoan *fita fitas*, Saga did not hesitate to join the New Zealand military administration after August 1914 as inspector of the Samoan police.<sup>94</sup>

Earlier challenges to colonial rule, such as Lauaki's rebellion that Saga helped to disperse and the copra cooperative movement, sat uneasily with the experiences and demands of government interpreters and medical assistants such as Taio and his brother Sepulona. In many ways, their demands for equal treatment and opportunity posed a more fundamental challenge to German colonial rule over Samoa. Their proximity to and implication with colonial power made Samoan government employees more likely, but also more ambivalent allies in the fight against colonialism. And beyond these tensions in

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<sup>92</sup> Despite this generous salary, Saga still had to borrow additional money from the government to feed his large family. Apparently to ensure his financial dependency, Solf continued to grant direct loans to Saga, even though Euro-American government employees had complained and despite a regulation that had explicitly banned European traders from offering loans to Samoans. Hiery, "Polizei im deutschen Samoa," 267.

<sup>93</sup> Schultz to Solf, May 5, 1914, BArch N 1053/132.

<sup>94</sup> Hiery, *Neglected War*, 168.

Samoa society, the interests of workers from other Pacific islands and China were not easy to reconcile with Samoan demands for more political and economic self-determination.

It took a few months after the *fono* in February 1914 until colonial authorities in German Samoa found out about it. At the end of April 1914, Schultz received confidential information from Samoan sources that a group of young Samoans had held a secret meeting to discuss, among other things, their status vis-à-vis their white employers.<sup>95</sup> The group, Schultz was informed, had kept written records of their meeting. Schultz immediately ordered Taio's desk to be searched where the circular letter and the meeting report was found. For better and for worse, Taio sat too close within reach of the Governor. Schultz especially appreciated having written evidence for the secret meeting because it prevented Taio and his followers from denying or embellishing their plans.

Having learned about the meeting, Schultz did not bother to go through the German Empire's legal process to punish the offenders. Instead, the Governor used his own considerable discretionary powers to deal with Taio and his followers in, as he called it, an "administrative fashion."<sup>96</sup> He summarily dismissed Taio, his personal interpreter and aide, and had him sent to German New Guinea. There, "far away from home, family, and peers," Schultz explained, Taio had a few years "to think about what is proper for him."<sup>97</sup> Like other Samoan leaders before him, Taio was sentenced to exile to

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<sup>95</sup> Perhaps Schultz received the tip through the connections of his personal servant Fatu, whom he had adopted as a five-year-old boy. When Schultz was interned in Auckland at the beginning of the Great War, Fatu went with him. The ex-Governor and his Samoan servant continued to exchange letters into the 1920s. Erich Schultz-Ewerth, *Erinnerungen an Samoa* (Berlin: A. Scherl, 1926), 146ff.

<sup>96</sup> Schultz to RKA, June 7, 1914, BArch R 1001/2760, p. 175.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

another German colony and the home of many Melanesian workers who had gone the other way to work on Samoan plantations.

Schultz was fully aware of the link between Taio's planned educational trip to the German heartland and his punishment with exile to another distant part of the German Empire. To justify his harsh decision, Schultz recalled that the German tour of Tamasese's troupe in 1910 had been pushed through against an official ban precisely because of the desired "educational and political effect" on the visitors. According to Schultz, a similar effect was to be expected from Taio's upcoming visit to Germany. Given the circumstances, however, Taio's trip to Germany had to be changed into a trip to New Guinea.<sup>98</sup> In the end, Taio was saved by the outbreak of world war that shifted the administration's priorities. All ships were suddenly needed for war purposes, and none left available to send a former Samoan government employee into exile in New Guinea.

Taio's brother Sepulona fared relatively better. He, too, was dismissed, but with the possibility of re-employment. Schultz thought that, in contrast to Taio, Sepulona had a "modest and obedient" personality and thus deserved a second chance. All other *fono* attendees were denied a scheduled pay raise and were severely reprimanded. On top of the Governor's sanctions, the Samoan government employees were strongly censored by their own fathers many of whom—including Saga—were veterans of the colonial service themselves. Challenges to colonial structures of authority intersected with challenges to familial structures of authority, as fathers saw their families' access to lucrative and prestigious government jobs in jeopardy. The next generation of Samoan government workers had come to question their loyalty not only to their employers, but, just as importantly, to their fathers.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

## THE EDUCATION OF MISS PEPE

Health care was the third major branch of the colonial service in Samoa. Women provided the overwhelming majority of medical workers in colonial Samoa. In traditional Samoan culture, women were expected to be the emotional and spiritual centers of their families. According to this gendered division of family labor, women were tasked with healing, nurturing, and comforting family members. As guardians of the sacred covenant among brothers and sisters (*feagaiga*), women played a role in Samoan society that prepared them for professional careers in nursing.<sup>99</sup> Virtually all female healers learned their skills from their mothers or other female relatives.<sup>100</sup> Medical knowledge was thus passed down through matrilineal lines.

Euro-American concepts of health invaded colonial Samoa much in the same way that diseases, like the flu, had done.<sup>101</sup> With the arrival of British missionaries in 1830, Euro-American medical beliefs and practices were introduced to Samoa. Many reports by missionaries and travellers lauded Samoans for their personal hygiene, sometimes even ridiculing their frequent baths. In addition to the influence of Euro-American missionaries, Samoan medicine also borrowed from Melanesian and Chinese workers who came to the islands.<sup>102</sup> Samoan healers (*fofō*) adopted those new medical practices

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<sup>99</sup> Lesley Barclay, et al., *Samoa Nursing: The Story of Women Developing a Profession* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 140. For a detailed account of Samoan views on illness, see Schoeffel Meleisea, "Daughters of Sina," chapter 8.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>101</sup> Kerri A. Inglis, "Disease and the 'Other': The Role of Medical Imperialism in Oceania," in: *Native Diasporas: Indigenous Identities and Settler Colonialism in the Americas*, edited by Gregory D. Smithers, and Brooke N. Newman (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 405.

<sup>102</sup> Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson, *Samoa Medical Belief and Practice* (Auckland, NZ: Auckland University Press, 1990), 72f.

that proved most effective in treating illness, such as maintaining better hygiene and incorporating new plant substances into their repertoire. As a result, pre-contact Samoan medicine was not replaced, but rather expanded, by Euro-American ideas on health. In contrast to German and New Zealand-occupied Samoa, the U.S. naval administration in Tutuila pursued an active policy of suppressing traditional healing practices they deemed “unscientific” and dangerous to Samoan health. However, despite a harsh law that required Samoan healers to be registered and prohibited anyone else from providing medical treatment under heavy penalty, U.S. health officials did not succeed in eradicating long-standing medical beliefs and practices among Samoans.<sup>103</sup>

Since the expansion of Euro-American medicine into Samoan villages required the formal consent of *matais* and the general support of Samoans, a medical division of labor emerged: illnesses deemed of Samoan origin were treated with Samoan medicine, whereas new illnesses introduced by Euro-Americans demanded treatment according to Euro-American medicine.<sup>104</sup> This pragmatic syncretism intensified after the devastating flu epidemic in 1918/1919, which not only undermined the legitimacy of Samoan medicine, but also removed an entire generation of older Samoan leaders who had defended it.<sup>105</sup> As late as the 1970s, Samoan nurses remained open to folk medicine and

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<sup>103</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 387. British officials in India pursued a similar policy of suppressing local healing traditions by passing the Medical Practitioners Registration Act in 1912. Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Pidgin-Knowledge: Wissen und Kolonialismus* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2013), 48.

<sup>104</sup> Macpherson/Macpherson, *Samoan Medical Belief*, 89.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 58. A similar process of syncretization occurred in Guam. Anne Perez Hattori, *Colonial Dis-Ease: U.S. Navy Health Policies and the Chamorros of Guam, 1898-1941* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 153.

shared a belief in the supernatural causes of many illnesses.<sup>106</sup>

Despite different approaches to Samoan medicine, colonial officials in both German and American Samoa established hospitals to promote hygiene among Samoans and improve the general health of the population. In German Samoa, the government hospital consisted of separate units segregated according to race. Beginning in 1903, a hospital for Europeans provided services for white settlers only, whereas smaller so-called “barracks” cared for the Chinese and Samoans. The official name of “barracks”—as in the military barracks that housed the *fita fita* guard—clearly marked a racial hierarchy in medical care, with considerably fewer resources and services available to Chinese and Samoan patients. Prices for bandage and drugs reflected differences in purchasing power. While Europeans had to pay two Reichsmark (50c) for medical supplies, others paid only half and poor patients nothing at all.<sup>107</sup> Medical personnel followed the racial segregation of patients. In the hospital for Europeans, only white nurses and doctors were allowed to work. On top of their monthly salary, white nurses received free accommodation, electricity, food, and laundry.<sup>108</sup> Only in the lavatories did European patients encounter one of the three Chinese attendants.<sup>109</sup> Apart from the government hospital, the DHPG paid its own doctor, Dr. Zieschank, to care for its Melanesian and Chinese plantation workers.

To address the increasing demand for medical care for Samoans, a new Government Hospital opened in Apia in 1912.

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<sup>106</sup> Schoeffel Meleisea, “Daughters of Sina,” 392.

<sup>107</sup> *Samoanisches Gouvernements-Blatt*, Vol. III, No. 42, May 6, 1905, BArch RD 224-2/3/4.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Cyclopedia of Samoa*, 66.

[Figure 12: Photograph of building of National Hospital, Apia, 1912]<sup>110</sup>

Graduates of Papauta Girls' School, the first four Samoan students—Mere Natapu, Nela Sopoaga, Vailima, and Naoafioga—were between twelve and fourteen years old when they started their training. Their basic medical training included nursing skills such as temperature taking, sponging, measuring blood pressure, and applying dressings. Many of these skills, such as how to nurse babies or how to keep things clean, proved useful beyond the hospital. If colonial officials had hoped for precisely this transmission of hygienic norms and skills into wider Samoan society, many Samoan families undoubtedly benefitted from having a trained nurse in their midst.

As the pioneer nurses recalled decades later, the work environment in the Government Hospital was marked by strict racial hierarchies. The white nurses and doctors were in charge of the hospital and commanded the respect of their Samoan colleagues. Often, it was difficult for the Samoan nurses to voice their opinions about a patient, let alone disagree with their white bosses. The relationship between white and Samoan nurses in the Government Hospital, thus, mirrored the relationship between colonizers and colonized more broadly. If the Samoan nurses took time to learn how to speak with greater confidence, their white superiors took even longer to listen.<sup>111</sup>

This unequal work environment had devastating consequences on the people living in Upolu and Savai'i under New Zealand control at the end of World War One. While Samoa was free of malaria—the great obstacle to Euro-American colonization in many

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<sup>110</sup> Barclay, *Samoan Nursing*, 3.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

other parts of the world—, a virus more common in Europe and North America proved all the more dangerous to Samoans: the Spanish influenza. Trailing the destruction and malnutrition of the Great War, the flu spread across the world like a bushfire in the fall of 1918. Sailing from Auckland on October 31 and arriving in Apia on November 7, the steamer *Talune* brought with it good news about the armistice in Europe and, at the same time, several flu-infected passengers who would spell bad news for Western Samoa. When the pandemic quickly started to spread in Upolu and Savai'i, the New Zealand military administration failed in quarantining the islands, leading to the death of over a fifth of the total population in a matter of weeks.<sup>112</sup>

Among the many Samoan casualties was 45-year-old Saga, the powerful interpreter and government spokesman. In the end, Saga's proximity to colonial power could not save his life. Indeed, the flu killed so many *matais*, church leaders, and other community leaders that it represented a deep break with the Samoan past and allowed a new generation to come into power.<sup>113</sup> While Colonel Robert Logan blamed the "ill-disciplined" Samoan nurses for this human disaster and deliberately refused outside help, his counterpart in American Samoa, Commander Poyer, managed to prevent the epidemic from entering and no casualties resulted.<sup>114</sup> A strict quarantine enforced by Samoans who patrolled the shores to keep unwanted visitors from Upolu away and a good portion of

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<sup>112</sup> In Western Samoa, nearly 6,000 people (22% of the total population) died of the flu. Half a million Americans succumbed to the virus, representing 0.5% of the total population. Worldwide, the Spanish flu claimed the lives of 50 to 100 million people, or 3-5% of the total world population. Sandra M. Tomkins, "The Influenza Epidemic of 1918-19 in Western Samoa," *Journal of Pacific History* 27, no. 2 (1992): 181-97; Alfred W. Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, [1989] 2003), 203-263.

<sup>113</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 96f. For similar social effects following earlier flu outbreaks, see Macpherson/Macpherson, *Samoan Medical Belief*, 56.

<sup>114</sup> "Epidemic Commission," *Samoan Times*, June 21, 1919, p. 4.



luck kept the flu epidemic away from Tutuila. Partly in response to this drastic difference in colonial governance, Samoan leaders in Western Samoa in January 1919 presented a petition to the new Governor Tate, demanding unification with American Samoa.<sup>115</sup>

Around the time the Government Hospital opened in Apia, similar plans were made in neighboring American Samoa. The Government Hospital in Apia served as the explicit model. In February 1911, Naval Governor William Crose asked the Secretary of the Navy for permission to erect a native hospital and several dispensaries. Prior to that, the U.S. Navy employed doctors and medical staff for its own Navy personnel and only offered medical assistance to Samoans in cases of emergency. In 1909, two Samoan Hospital Corpsmen began duty at the naval hospital, but there was still no place to go for Samoan patients.<sup>116</sup> Crose complained about an acute lack of adequate health services for Samoans in Tutuila and linked the proposed hospital to the overall Navy policy towards Samoans: “The Samoans do not yet realize the necessity of health measures, of medical treatment, and their gradual education must be continued.”<sup>117</sup> As Crose’s comment showed, providing medical care to Samoans was not an act of selflessness on part of the colonial administration, but rather inextricably linked to “educating” Samoans in the ways of Western civilization.

To finance the new hospital and dispensaries, Crose suggested that they charge the Samoans whenever possible—a radical departure from the free health care Samoans received in the German colony. U.S. Navy officials simply had even fewer financial resources than their German counterparts, partly due to differences in the metropolitan

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<sup>115</sup> Hiery, *Neglected War*, 177.

<sup>116</sup> Kress to Kellogg, July 1, 1924, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 38, p. 6f.

<sup>117</sup> Crose to Sec. of Navy, Feb. 3, 1911, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 39, p. 2.

health care systems.<sup>118</sup> In April 1911, the Navy Department granted permission under the condition that no additional expenses would be involved.<sup>119</sup> Hence, Samoans financed and built the new hospital on their own. The following year, the first hospital for Samoan patients opened in the village of Malaloa, known to locals as “the Annex” due to its location right next to the naval station in Fagatogo. In the beginning, the hospital staff included two American hospital corpsmen, an untrained female nurse, and a janitor.<sup>120</sup> Soon thereafter, the first two branch dispensaries opened in Tutuila and two more were added to serve the outlying districts and Manu’a.<sup>121</sup> Operated by Navy hospital corpsmen and Samoan assistants, the dispensaries offered free medical treatment and supplies to Samoans, whereas the hospital remained a pay-as-you-go institution.<sup>122</sup>

It took another two years before more concrete plans for the training of Samoan medical staff materialized. In July 1913, Navy Surgeon C.J. Ely requested two Navy nurses to come to Tutuila to train Samoan women as nurses and educate them about hygiene and “feminine care.”<sup>123</sup> Apparently, a few years of experience with the new Samoan hospital had revealed some significant shortcomings. Due to the remoteness of some villages in Tutuila, Ely noted, getting Samoan patients to the central hospital at the

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<sup>118</sup> Free health care was part of Bismarck’s social imperialism directed against the German left in the 1880s. On the concept of social imperialism, see Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich, 1871-1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973).

<sup>119</sup> Navy Department to Crose, Apr. 4, 1911, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 39.

<sup>120</sup> Ryan, “The Samoan Hospital,” June 30, 1926, NHC, Navy Nurse Corps Records.

<sup>121</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 386.

<sup>122</sup> In 1914, Governor Parker asked for permission to enlist a couple of young Samoan men as apprentice seamen to work in the Navy dispensaries, but the Navy Department denied his wish. Parker to Surgeon-General, Dec. 6, 1914; Braisted to Navy Dep., Jan. 25, 1915, NARA-DC, RG 52, Box 451, File 126237. In 1916, a group of six Samoan *fita fitas* commenced medical duty in the outlying dispensaries. Kress to Kellogg, July 1, 1924, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 38, p. 6f.

<sup>123</sup> Ely to Stokes, July 31, 1913, NARA-DC, RG 52, Box 449, File 126156, p. 1.

naval station in Pago proved difficult. Local and early diagnosis would improve the health situation drastically. “If we get the right people and train them properly,” the Navy Surgeon explained, “they will engender in the minds of Samoans respect for the fly, mosquito and intestinal parasites and a realization of the necessity of latrines and pure water.”<sup>124</sup> In Ely’s view, the presence of trained white female nurses and an additional two to three student Samoan nurses would induce Samoan women to seek medical care before it was too late.<sup>125</sup> In response to Ely’s report, the Navy Department ordered the establishment of a Training School for Nurses in American Samoa, hoping that the “scope of the instruction will not be beyond the comprehension of the native women.”<sup>126</sup> At the time, the U.S. Navy operated similar training schools for local nurses in Guam, Hawai’i, the Philippines, and Haiti.<sup>127</sup> American Samoa would be the latest addition to the expanding archipelago of medical training under U.S. auspices.

On February 23, 1914, a little over two weeks after Taio’s secret *fono* in the Government Hospital in Apia, the Training School for Samoan Nurses opened in Tutuila. The hospital consisted of three large houses for patients from each of the three districts and an additional three small *fales* for the *matais* of each district. Since the hospital lacked a waste disposal, nurses had to climb down a steep hill to empty and wash the bed pans in the ocean.<sup>128</sup> Regulations at the hospital reflected Samoan life in other ways as

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>126</sup> Stokes to Sec. of Navy, Aug. 26, 1913, NARA-DC, RG 52, Box 449, File 126156.

<sup>127</sup> Susan H. Godson, *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the U.S. Navy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 49ff. On U.S. Navy health policy in Guam, see Hattori, *Colonial Dis-Ease*.

<sup>128</sup> H. [Humphrey], “Letters from Navy Nurses, Samoa,” *American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 15 (June 1915): 760.

well. Because the hospital did not supply food, patients had friends deliver it directly to their mats.<sup>129</sup>

The first generation of student nurses consisted of four young Samoan women—Anna, Cora, Winnie, and India.<sup>130</sup> Due to concerns about the intellectual capabilities of Samoan women, the students initially received only elementary instruction in medicine and hygiene. They first learned the names and uses of hospital utensils, such as the thermometer, before receiving basic lessons in anatomy and physiology.<sup>131</sup> In spite (or perhaps because) of these low expectations, the apprentices were “much interested in the work.”<sup>132</sup> Above all, the two-year training emphasized practical skills in providing first aid and dressing wounds, but also included lessons in housekeeping, such as cleaning, cooking, and cutting grass.<sup>133</sup> In effect, the daily labor tasks of the Samoan nurses resembled those of a maid: mopping floors, cleaning bedpans, and making beds.<sup>134</sup>

Samoan women were attracted to the nursing school mainly because it offered a career outside of the traditional Samoan labor system, but was still compatible with community service and family care. The school was so attractive that Samoan women from Savai'i and Upolu flocked to it.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, the graduates of the Training School were among the only Samoan women at the time who earned their own cash. While

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 761.

<sup>130</sup> Ely to Surgeon-General, Apr. 7, 1914, NARA-DC, RG 52, Box 449, File 126156.

<sup>131</sup> “Letters from Navy Nurses, Samoa,” 762.

<sup>132</sup> Ely to Surgeon-General, Apr. 7, 1914, NARA-DC, RG 52, Box 449, File 126156.

<sup>133</sup> Report on American Samoa by Colby, Mar. 30, 1924, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1084, N-1-b, Reg.-No. 17336-A, Annex No. 1 “Naval Station,” p. 16.

<sup>134</sup> In this regard, the experiences of Samoan nurses were similar to those of their counterparts in Guam. Hattori, *Colonial Dis-Ease*, 144.

<sup>135</sup> Barclay, *Samoan Nursing*, 12.

undergraduate nurses received only \$2.50 a month, graduates made \$15 a month.<sup>136</sup> Only a handful of domestic servants working for Navy officials or Euro-American traders also had their independent cash income in Tutuila. In addition to their monthly salaries, the Navy government also provided free uniforms, food, quarters, and electric lights to the Samoan nurses.<sup>137</sup>

[Figure 13: Photograph of Samoan nurses in front of nurses' home]<sup>138</sup>

The interest of the Samoan nurses in training might have had something to do with the enthusiasm of their teachers. In 1908, the U.S. Navy had established the Navy Nurse Corps whose first twenty graduate nurses were known as the “Sacred Twenty.”<sup>139</sup> Two of the first graduates, Mary Humphrey and Corinne Anderson, arrived in Tutuila from San Francisco in October 1913 to assume their assignments as superintendent and assistant of the new training school.<sup>140</sup> As dedicated teachers, Humphrey and Anderson compiled a “Care Procedure Book” to guide their Samoan students.<sup>141</sup> At the same time, Humphrey complained that most student nurses spoke little English even after years of missionary school.<sup>142</sup> Despite these challenges, the first class graduated in November 1916 to great

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<sup>136</sup> Report on American Samoa by Colby, Mar. 30, 1924, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1084, N-1-b, Reg.-No. 17336-A, Annex No. 1 “Naval Station,” p. 16.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> NARA-DC, RG 52, Box 449, File 126156.

<sup>139</sup> Godson, *Serving Proudly*, 40ff.

<sup>140</sup> Stokes to Stearns, Sept. 9, 1913, NHC, Feeney Notebooks, Folder 8, Box 24.

<sup>141</sup> “Care Procedure Book, Samoan Hospital,” NHC, Navy Nurse Corps Records, Folder 2, Box 17.

<sup>142</sup> “Letters from Navy Nurses, Samoa,” 761.

fanfare. The new Chief Nurse, Ada Pendleton, awarded “large class pins of gold, with an attractive design in red and blue enamel” to the nurses and treated them to a month-long holiday trip to Apia.<sup>143</sup>

Among the first graduates of the nurse school was Grace Pepe.

[Figure 14: Photograph of Grace Pepe]<sup>144</sup>

Described as “a young Samoan of unusual mental development” by a Navy official, Pepe clearly exceeded all paternalistic expectations of the Navy men in charge.<sup>145</sup> Along with fellow nurses Initia and Feiloaiga, Pepe was a graduate of the Atauloma Girls School, established by the London Missionary Society in 1900. Before becoming a source for the nursing school, the all-girls school prepared its graduates to be the wives of LMS pastors. For example, Initia and her pastor husband Nemaia served the LMS at Lawes College in Papua New Guinea.<sup>146</sup> As in other colonies at the time, caring for souls went hand in hand with caring for bodies.

Partly in response to the crowded nurses’ quarters, Chief Nurse Hannah Workman developed a new program for the student nurses in 1919. The Samoan nurses, including Pepe, rotated between training in primary nursing in the main hospital and periods of service in outlying districts. As a result, the Samoan nurses not only learned how to

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<sup>143</sup> Lenah S. Higbee, “Letters from Navy Nurses,” *American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (December 1916), 248.

<sup>144</sup> “Pan-Pacific Women’s Conference,” *Mid-Pacific Magazine*, Vol. 36, No. 6 (Dec. 1928), 412.

<sup>145</sup> *Annual Report of the Surgeon General, U.S. Navy, Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery to the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1919* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 13.

<sup>146</sup> John Garrett, *Where Nets Were Cast: Christianity in Oceania Since World War II* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1997), 21.

cooperate with white Navy medical officers and nurses, but also developed a greater sense of enthusiasm for their work. To honor the general success of the Training School, the Navy Surgeon General assigned “Miss Grace Pepe” to the Naval Hospital at Mare Island, northeast of San Francisco, for further training.<sup>147</sup> Pepe’s training trip to the U.S. mainland had explicit didactic purposes: “It is hoped that the reports which Miss Pepe will take back to her beloved island will result in a greater interest for nursing and welfare work among the native Samoan girls and through this medium it is believed that improved conditions, particularly for the women and children, will develop in the island.”<sup>148</sup>

If the U.S. Navy had its own motives, Pepe relished the opportunity to travel.<sup>149</sup> Like Taylor and Tuvale before her, Pepe followed in the footsteps of generations of Samoans on the move. Unlike Taylor and Tuvale, however, Pepe was a woman. Apart from the female members of ethnographic show troupes, Pepe was one of the first women from Tutuila who ventured to the U.S. mainland. Together with her male counterparts in the Native Guard, Pepe’s stay on Mare Island initiated a wave of Samoan migration linked to the U.S. armed forces that has continued into the present.

Although never officially enlisted, Pepe was such an important civilian employee that she deserved further training, paid for by the U.S. Navy. In his request to transfer Pepe to Mare Island, the Chief of the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery called her “an apt pupil and an exceptionally good nurse.”<sup>150</sup> She was assigned to the Naval

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<sup>147</sup> *Annual Report of the Surgeon General*, 1919, 12f.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>149</sup> For a similar emphasis on the travel opportunities for health professionals in Guam, see Hattori, *Colonial Dis-Ease*, 8.

<sup>150</sup> Braisted to Sec. of Navy, Apr. 18, 1919, NARA-DC, RG 52, Box 367, File 124942.

Hospital on Mare Island “to supplement the training she has already received with a wider clinical experience in a large hospital.”<sup>151</sup> Two members of the Navy Nurse Corps who were scheduled to return to the mainland after duty in Tutuila accompanied Pepe on her journey to an unknown world. By June 1919, Pepe was officially registered as a skilled laborer at Mare Island Naval Hospital with a monthly salary of \$30.<sup>152</sup>

As unfamiliar as San Francisco must have been to Pepe, she did move from one island under Navy control to another. Mare Island was purchased by the U.S. Navy in 1852 for use as a shipyard. By 1910, two giant dry-docks were erected, together with other facilities, including a naval hospital. Hence, the Navy’s infrastructure and personnel were, to some extent, familiar to Pepe. She had seen American men in uniform before in Tutuila and the insides of a hospital had, by then, become second nature. And yet, the dimensions of Navy life that Pepe encountered on Mare Island were mind-boggling. Although fifty years old at the time of Pepe’s stay, the Mare Island Naval Hospital with its 250 beds and freight elevator could not be compared with the modest Samoan hospital at home in Tutuila.<sup>153</sup> Likewise, the sheer number of personnel at the U.S. Navy’s main base on the west coast dwarfed the miniscule Navy presence in Pago.

Little is known about Pepe’s daily routines in the Bay Area. Most of her days in Mare Island were probably dedicated to medical training, the original purpose of her trip. As a civilian employee, Pepe was free to leave the Navy installations on Mare Island and she might have made occasional visits to San Francisco while in training. To gain

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Arnold S. Lott, *A Long Line of Ships: Mare Island’s Century of Naval Activity in California* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1954), 102.



additional experience in a large hospital, Pepe also received training at the Children's Hospital in downtown San Francisco.<sup>154</sup> Given the distance to Mare Island, Pepe likely stayed either at the hospital's nurses quarters or in an apartment nearby during her stint there. After half-a-year on the U.S. mainland, Pepe finally returned to Tutuila in early 1920.<sup>155</sup>

Upon her return, Pepe kept on travelling. Eager to put her newly-gained medical knowledge and experience to practice, she travelled from village to village in Tutuila, handing out medicines and “lecturing on various health topics.”<sup>156</sup> Together with the other Samoan nurses assigned to different districts in Tutuila, Pepe instructed villagers in public hygiene and infant care. The handful of District Nurses also kept a comprehensive record of their work and sent back reports on all births and deaths in the districts.<sup>157</sup> Pepe usually stayed at local missions where she was also provided with food.<sup>158</sup> Her long-standing connection to the LMS provided Pepe with the infrastructure she needed to do her job. Soon thereafter, she was appointed Chief Nurse. By 1924, the Samoan Nurses Training School from which Pepe had graduated represented, in the eyes of a Navy health official, “one of the chief educational features” of American Samoa.<sup>159</sup>

Samoan nurses like Pepe had to navigate their way through treacherous waters.

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<sup>154</sup> *Annual Report of the Surgeon General, 1919*, 13.

<sup>155</sup> *Annual Report of the Surgeon General, 1920*, 746.

<sup>156</sup> NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 36, p. 6.

<sup>157</sup> Report on American Samoa by Colby, Mar. 30, 1924, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1084, N-1-b, Reg.-No. 17336-A, Annex No. 1 “Naval Station,” p. 16.

<sup>158</sup> Report on American Samoa by Colby, Mar. 30, 1924, NARA-DC, RG 38, Box 1084, N-1-b, Reg.-No. 17336-A, Annex No. 1 “Naval Station,” p. 11.

<sup>159</sup> Kress to Kellogg, July 1, 1924, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 38, p. 7.

On the one hand, the first generation of Samoan nurses was trained by the colonial administrations to educate their fellow islanders in “proper” sanitation and “enlightened” health practices. From the colonialist viewpoint, at least, health education was essential in making colonized people “modern,” that is manageable, subjects.<sup>160</sup> In this civilizing project, the policing of unhealthy practices and the policing of potentially insurgent practices went hand in hand. In fact, colonial officials increasingly came to depend on public hygiene to enforce the “good” behavior of their Samoan subjects. As late as 1924, U.S. Navy officials complained about the lack of Samoan doctors practicing Western medicine. “As practical doctors,” a Navy official suggested, “these educated Samoans would do much toward eliminating the Samoan Witch, or Devil Doctor, now causing so much harm with his bad practices and Samoan Medicines.”<sup>161</sup> Christian missionaries had been complaining about Samoan “superstition” ever since their arrival in 1830, but, in fact, Samoan medical beliefs and practices had many things in common with the Euro-American medicine practiced by missionaries.<sup>162</sup>

On the other hand, Samoan nurses reinterpreted this paternalist logic according to their own needs. Pepe and the other graduates of the Training School for Samoan Nurses in Tutuila fought to be active participants in the politics of colonial care. In fact, some Samoan villages selected women for training in Euro-American medicine who were already known and respected as *fofō*.<sup>163</sup> Out of earshot from her teachers, Pepe used her

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<sup>160</sup> For a similar argument on the U.S.-occupied Philippines, see Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>161</sup> Kress to Kellogg, July 1, 1924, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 38, p. 6f.

<sup>162</sup> Macpherson/Macpherson, *Samoan Medical Belief*, 63.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

American education in anatomy and physiology to complement and expand her knowledge of Samoan popular medicine. Pepe and other Samoan nurses like her were creative *bricoleurs* who recombined elements of both Samoan and Euro-American medicine into a new and effective mixture in the service of their community.<sup>164</sup> In the everyday encounters with rural villagers, Samoan nurses became healers who cared for the physical and psychological wounds inflicted by colonialism.

Like other service workers employed as police soldiers or interpreters, the Samoan nurses became crucial intermediaries and powerful political actors. Samoan women who worked as traditional healers and district nurses became leading members of the women's health committees founded in the early 1920s under New Zealand civil administration. Modeled on the societies of wives of *matais* and orators (*faletua matausi*), these committees included the influential women of a village, such as the wives of *matais*, and were usually led by the pastor's wife. Dressed in bright uniforms, committee members worked with fellow villagers to promote public health practices, particularly child care, hygiene, and sanitation.<sup>165</sup> In doing so, women's health committee members and district nurses who served in Samoan villages gained political influence over matters beyond medicine. They became crucial intermediaries who bridged the worlds of Samoan and Euro-American medicine and, in the process, amassed political capital that they could use to challenge outside claims on Samoan society more generally.<sup>166</sup> And indeed, experienced members of the women's health committees emerged as the leaders of the

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<sup>164</sup> For the use of Lévi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage* to describe Samoan medical practitioners, see Malama Meleisea, "Review: Samoan Medical Belief and Practice by Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 105, No. 2 (1996): 259.

<sup>165</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 382.

<sup>166</sup> Penelope Schoeffel, "Dilemmas of Modernization in Primary Health Care in Western Samoa," *Social Science & Medicine* 19, no. 3 (1984): 210f.

*mau* movement that challenged New Zealand rule over Western Samoa, including its increasing threat to Samoan self-determination in health care.<sup>167</sup>

When New Zealand troops occupied German Samoa in August 1914, over four hundred Samoan officials were kept in office from the days of the German administration.<sup>168</sup> Since their salaries were paid for by the head tax levied on Samoans, the Samoan service workers enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy, especially in local matters. Desperate to reduce the costs of military occupation and reign in the perceived “excesses” of the German period, military governor Logan uncoupled the head tax income from the financing of the Samoan administration officials and started using the funds for other purposes as well. In doing so, he threatened not only the cherished privileges of the Samoan service workers, but, more importantly, Samoan self-determination at large.<sup>169</sup> Together with the devastating flu epidemic in the fall of 1918, Logan’s aggressive restructuring of the Samoan colonial service laid the groundwork for the anti-colonial *mau* movement that gripped the islands in the early 1920s. Anti-colonial resistance became effective precisely at the moment when colonial rulers ran out of willing collaborators.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 394.

<sup>168</sup> Report by Logan, Oct. 27, 1914, ANZ, Governor-General of New Zealand, Series 21/1.

<sup>169</sup> Hiery, *Neglected War*, 163f.

<sup>170</sup> Robinson, “Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism,” 138.

Work in the colonial service left an ambivalent legacy for Samoans for decades to come. On the one hand, service jobs in the security, administrative, and health sectors offered new opportunities to learn skills and earn cash. Many Samoans appreciated these new avenues for professional advancement, which, in many cases, served not only individual interests, but also those of their families. Samoan nurses, like Grace Pepe, acquired crucial nursing skills that they could and did use to improve the general health of their families and Samoan society as a whole. Similarly, police soldiers in German Samoa and members of the Native Guard in American Samoa leveraged their military training to gain social status and launch successful careers. On the other hand, however, colonial service remained service to the colonizer. If new opportunities arose with the Euro-American colonial presence, then the new service jobs remained strictly circumscribed in terms of the lack of choice and decision-making power on the job. For example, Samoan policemen supervised Chinese plantation workers and government interpreters like Charles Taylor translated Governor Solf's speeches into Samoan.

What distinguished the colonial service from other workscapes was its deep link to colonial power. Nobody worked closer to the governors of German and American Samoa than their personal servants, interpreters, and cooks. This physical, and sometimes also emotional, proximity to powerful colonial officials afforded service workers a privileged position in the circulation of knowledge and decision-making in Samoa. While the native guards in both German and American Samoa, for example, were small in number and had mostly representative functions, members nevertheless received basic training in firearms and military discipline, which lent them prestige and paved the way for military careers for generations of Samoans to come. Likewise, nurses in both

colonies were the first Samoans to receive extended training in medical care, offering opportunities to travel and learn, which would turn them into powerful members of their community long after the Great War. Besides a handful of domestic servants, nurses were also the first female wage-earners in colonial Samoa, upsetting the long-standing gendered labor system. For the first time, Samoan women commanded control over their own cash, however limited.

It was precisely their precarious position between colonizer and colonized, foreign and local, outside and inside, that made workers in the colonial service so indispensable for both sides. If colonialists depended on indigenous intermediaries to a greater extent, the fewer resources they received from the metropole, then colonial Samoa is a good case in point.<sup>171</sup> Despite their powerful positions, the actual experiences of service workers in colonial Samoa were far more complex. Governor Solf's British-Samoan interpreter Charles Taylor, for instance, had a delicate job that cannot be understood as either collaboration or resistance. Service workers like Taylor were torn not only between the demands of their jobs and the interests of their people, but also between their own dreams and the limits the colonial world imposed on them.

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<sup>171</sup> Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism," 122.

## EPILOGUE

On December 28, 1929, the Samoan *Mau* movement went head to head with the New Zealand police.<sup>1</sup> At 5:15 a.m. that Saturday morning, three hundred *Mau* followers began a peaceful procession around Apia Bay. At 6:20 a.m., New Zealand policemen opened fire on the marching Samoans with rifles and two Lewis machine-guns, last used in France during the Great War. The Samoans, who had only their clubs, knives, and fists, quickly dispersed in all directions. Just fifteen minutes later, several Samoans, among them the *Mau* leader and *matai* Tupua Tamasese, were fatally shot and more than fifty were wounded. Tamasese passed away the following Sunday morning. All told, eight Samoans and one New Zealand constable died in the shooting.<sup>2</sup>

Years of *Mau* agitation had preceded that fateful day, which became known as “Black Saturday.” Samoans and European settlers alike had lobbied the New Zealand civil administration, in power since 1921, for greater political, economic, and cultural self-determination. Administrator Richardson’s plans to individualize lands and reform the local administration system sparked the resistance of many Samoan leaders who saw their traditional ways of life threatened. Among other things, Richardson banished a young Tupua Tamasese to Savai’i for refusing to remove a hibiscus hedge from his property, banned the exchange of fine mats, and introduced a new medical tax. In response, Samoans founded a movement under the banner of *O le Mau* (Samoan public opinion). Following in the footsteps of the ‘*oloa* movement of 1904, the *Mau* movement of the 1920s united Samoans with mixed-race Samoans and Euro-American settlers in a

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<sup>1</sup> *Mau* is Samoan for “having a steadfast opinion.”

<sup>2</sup> Field, *Mau*, 147-159.

strategic coalition. Mixed-race Samoans like O.F. Nelson, a wealthy trader and respected Samoan *matai*, played an important role in the movement. Under the rallying cry “*Samoa mo Samoa*” (Samoa for the Samoans), Nelson managed to enlist widespread support among Samoan *matais* who were themselves angry about attacks on their traditional privileges, including their right to go on *malagas* and receive titles. *Mau* followers organized boycotts of government activities and refused to cut copra and pay their taxes. Peaceful non-cooperation and civil disobedience were their main strategies of resistance.<sup>3</sup>

In neighboring American Samoa as well, a *Mau* movement formed in 1920 to protest against the excesses of Navy rule. When it became known that government officials had embezzled government funds, Samoan government officials, with the help of American critics of Navy rule, organized a highly publicized campaign against these abuses. The fact that colonial administrators, including the naval governors, were members of the U.S. Navy, a hierarchical organization based on strict discipline and regular job rotation (naval governors stayed no more than 18 months in American Samoa), exacerbated the colonial encounters. American Samoans reacted with a copra boycott and practically shut down the naval government, which depended on the taxes drawn from the sale of copra. Captain Waldo A. Evans, the new Governor sent to Pago Pago, quickly exonerated some of the accused protesters and created a more transparent native tax fund that reassured many followers of the *Mau*. Most Samoans resumed cutting copra soon thereafter.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the *Mau* movement persisted and spread throughout

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<sup>3</sup> Meleisea, *Making of Modern Samoa*, 126-147.

<sup>4</sup> David A. Chappell, “The Forgotten Mau: Anti-Navy Protest in American Samoa, 1920-1935,” *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 2 (2000): 235f.



American Samoa during the 1920s, evolving into a watchdog of the Navy.<sup>5</sup> In the end, the *Mau* movement in American Samoa turned out to be less violent and extensive than its counterpart in Western Samoa. Both anti-colonial movements, however, were driven by similar complaints about the benefits of colonial rule and inspired one another.<sup>6</sup>

The emergence of a more direct and sustained anti-colonial movement like the *Mau* gave the history of earlier labor protests deeper meaning. As my dissertation has shown, Samoan resistance against colonialism did not begin in the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> From the repeated violent clashes in the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, Samoans fought against colonial domination without succeeding in completely banishing its impact on their lives. After 1900, as the German and American administrations expanded, Samoans struggled to maintain control over their political, economic, and cultural practices. Beginning in 1904, Samoan copra cooperatives challenged the monopoly of Euro-American traders in both colonies, at least for some time. A few years later, Lauaki posed a serious threat to the legitimacy of the German colonial administration by organizing copra boycotts and hoping for the support of U.S. warships. Throughout the period, workers on commercial plantations, in construction, and in the colonial service voiced their dissatisfaction with their employers. They protested against inadequate food, bad work conditions, and low pay. In doing so, they reached across racial divides to fellow workers from other Pacific islands and China and also developed links to increasingly powerful mixed-race Samoans. Economic boycotts continued throughout the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>7</sup> Meleisea already hints at the roots of the *Mau* movement in earlier labor struggles in his *O Tama Uli*, 48. See also Liua'ana, "Dragons in Little Paradise," 44.

1920s.<sup>8</sup> In Tutuila as well, conflicts over just compensation for construction work outlasted the 1905 strike and helped fuel the *Mau* movement. A Samoan *matai* complained in a letter from November 1921 about the labor conditions in road work:

Sometimes we get paid and other times we do not. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, 1921, there was a job on the road spading the dirt on top of the crushed rock, weeding the grass and cleaning the gutters; it was hard work and there was no pay for doing it [...] These Navy men are putting this work without compensation upon us and we do not like it or them.<sup>9</sup>

In the view of Samoans, complaints against unpaid hard labor and resistance to U.S. colonial rule were closely intertwined. By enlarging the circle of solidarity and insisting on economic self-determination, workers in colonial Samoa helped pave the way for the *Mau* movement.

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Epeli Hau'ofa has reminded us that “we cannot read our histories without knowing how to read our landscapes (and seascapes).”<sup>10</sup> As my dissertation has shown, we cannot read the history of colonial Samoa without knowing how to read its different worksapes. How workers related to one another and to their employers was fundamentally shaped by the environmental and social contexts in which they operated. Chances to build forms of community and trust were generally greatest *within* specific worksapes. Plantation workers, for instance, shared similar tasks in similar natural environments and often spent

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<sup>8</sup> Keesing, *Modern Samoa*, 303f.; Chappell, “Forgotten Mau,” 249.

<sup>9</sup> Ripley to Harding, Dec. 30, 1921, NARA-DC, RG 80, File 3931, Box 34, p. 23f.

<sup>10</sup> Epeli Hau'ofa, “Pasts to Remember,” in: *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 73.

the entire day in the company of hundreds of fellow workers. Despite differences in size, crop, and location, most foreign-owned plantations in colonial Samoa established rigid lines of authority and work schedules. Faced with similar forms of exploitation, plantation workers found similar ways to resist. Some Melanesian plantation workers, for example, joined Samoan church services in villages bordering their plantation workscapes. Others, like the Chinese plantation workers, leveraged the power of their home government to improve their work conditions.

If community-building was easiest within specific workscapes, conflicts among workers most often emerged *between* different workscapes. Plantation owners and colonial officials pursued a strategy of divide-and-rule aimed at preventing workers' solidarity by racial segregation. Thus, Samoan men were hired by the colonial administrations to police Melanesian and Chinese workers on plantations. Fuelled by fears of interracial sexual encounters and crime, this colonial policy of confrontation led to several outbreaks of violence between native Samoans and migrant laborers. Racial tensions between Samoans and Chinese continued into the Great War when New Zealand annexed German Samoa.

The most effective forms of resistance against labor exploitation and colonial subjection emerged out of attempts to bridge the division of labor into separate workscapes. Workers who moved in and out of and between different workscapes were in the best position to challenge the demands of the colonizers. Chinese plantation workers, for example, knew that a handful of Chinese migrants to Samoa were employed in other occupations such as cooking or interpreting. So when a group of Chinese plantation workers filed a petition protesting the cruelty of their German plantation owner, they had

consulted their fellow Chinese who was the Governor's personal cook and Chinese interpreter at the Imperial Court. By using such connections across workscapes, workers in colonial Samoa could break down barriers of knowledge to resist violence directed against them. From plantations to the Governor's office, workers in colonial Samoa exploited the particular dynamics of their workscapes to imagine and fight for a postcolonial future.

As these examples show, degrees of unfreedom differed from one workscape to another and also changed over time. For Samoan performers in ethnographic shows, conditions of travel and work improved considerably from the first tour in 1889 to the last one in 1915. While several troupe members succumbed to pulmonary diseases and malnutrition during the first North American tour, spots in later troupes were highly sought after by the sons and daughters of high-ranking *matais*. Construction workers usually faced hard physical labor with low pay, but at times could earn extra cash when colonial authorities had tight schedules. When the German administration ordered the construction of a radio tower in spring 1914, so few workers were available that the Chinese workers who could be found had to be paid higher wages.

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The decades after the Great War brought many changes to Samoa. Subsistence farming and export agriculture continued to coexist until the 1950s, despite a period of time during the Great Depression when Samoans were forced to cut exports of food crops. Today, the Samoan subsistence economy has lost some of its material significance

because canned food can be imported from New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and even China. Trade links that were forged at the turn of the twentieth century under very different circumstances determine what Samoans today can buy in their supermarkets. In American Samoa, two McDonald's restaurants—along with several other fast-food restaurants—cater to a population of just over 55,000 inhabitants. Beyond individual eating habits, the high rate of obesity and diabetes among Samoans today constitute an element of colonial debris left over from Samoa's uneven integration into global trade over a century ago.<sup>11</sup>

Plantation agriculture on a commercial scale remains one of the mainstays of the Samoan economy, but today faces stiff competition from bigger suppliers of tropical fruit, such as copra producers in the Philippines. The long lineage of plantation expertise among Samoans continues today on the agricultural campus of the University of the South Pacific in Alafua in the southern hills of Apia. There, students from all over the Pacific, including Fiji, Tonga, and the Solomon Islands, learn how to plant, weed, and cultivate local fruit such as coconuts, taro, and bananas. As most students plan on returning to their home islands, the future of commercial plantations in Samoa remains uncertain. Cooperatives continue to thrive in Samoa and other parts of the Pacific, such as the Cook Islands, but simply offer too few opportunities for young Samoans.<sup>12</sup> One big exception is the tuna industry in Tutuila, the largest private employer in American Samoa. As part of a larger archipelago of low-wage industrialization throughout the Pacific (including the Marshall Islands and free-trade zones in the Philippines), the

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<sup>11</sup> On ruination as an “active, ongoing process that allocates imperial debris differentially,” see Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Phillipa Webb, “New Agriculture Co-op in Cooks to Unite Growers,” *Cook Islands News*, Jan. 27, 2015.

Korean and U.S.-owned tuna plant operators StarKist and Tri Marine International offer thousands of jobs, but do little to advance the local economy. In addition, they regularly threaten to move their factories elsewhere if their demands for continued low wages are not met.<sup>13</sup> Although the tuna canneries participate in the mass degradation of Pacific sea life, they also provide one of the few lifelines for American Samoans lacking alternative jobs prospects.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, Australian and New Zealand farmers are recruiting Pacific Islanders, including Samoans, to work on their orchards and vineyards under the Recognised Seasonal Employer work scheme established in 2007.<sup>15</sup> If thousands of workers came to Samoa at the turn of the twentieth century, Samoans have been leaving their islands in search for jobs since the 1950s and they do so again in greater numbers today.

Given the lack of other options, many Samoan youngsters join the growing tourism and entertainment industry on the islands. At the turn of the twentieth century, Europeans and Americans flocked to world's fairs and zoos to see Samoan dances. Today, tourists from nearby New Zealand and Australia, but also from North America and Europe, travel to Samoa to see culturally authentic performances. Then as now, authenticity is very much in the eye of the beholder. At the same time, the cultural shows that many Samoan hotels offer their guests provide employment to Samoan performers just as they did a century ago. The context, however, in which the performances take

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<sup>13</sup> Fili Sagapolutele, "American Samoa Businesses Unanimously Oppose Minimum Wage Hike," *The Samoa News*, May 5, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> JoAnna Poblete is currently doing research on the American Samoan tuna cannery workers. For a preview, see her "Bridging Indigenous and Immigrant Struggles: A Case Study of American Samoa," *American Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2010): 501-22.

<sup>15</sup> John Connell, "Temporary Labour Migration in the Pacific," in: *Migration and Development: Perspectives from Small States*, edited by Wonderful Hope Khonje (London, UK: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2015), 60-91.

place has changed dramatically. Not only do audiences today actually come to Samoa and spend money there, but they also expect a glimpse into “real” Samoan culture while on holidays. While many tourists think little about the longer history of ethnographic show performances, some seek out Samoan performers to learn their intricate movements and the histories behind them. Many performers are proud to be ambassadors of their culture and appreciate the interest of their guests. Yet, few performers are unaware of the fact that Samoa’s economy offers little else than the tourist industry to them. Some of the most enterprising Samoan performers even venture beyond their islands to participate in television talent shows. Samoans pursuing professional careers in rugby and American football follow similar trajectories.

Travel to and from Samoa has become substantially easier since the 1920s. Commercial airliners have cut travel times from weeks to hours, allowing for a busy cycle of tourists, family members, and migrant workers in and out of Samoa. Much of the subsequent construction of infrastructure in Samoa was related to the U.S. military. Despite ongoing Samoan complaints against Navy rule, U.S. military installations expanded dramatically between the opening of the Panama Canal and the end of World War Two. During the war, American Samoa played a crucial role as a supply base in the U.S. military’s island-hopping strategy to push back the Japanese Navy. This created opportunities for wage labor and military enlistment for many Samoans from Tutuila as well as Upolu and Savai’i. As members of the First Samoan Marine Battalion, the hundred or so members of the Samoan Native Guard served with pride as seamen, radiomen, boat crewmen, and guards during the war.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Franco, *Samoan Perceptions of Work*, 208-232.

Construction of a naval air base and further fortifications of Pago Pago Harbor began in the summer of 1940. At its peak, more than 1,500 laborers—three-quarters of whom were Samoan—were draining swamps, constructing land fills, and building roads. In January 1942, the Japanese Navy attacked the islands, but did little damage. American Samoa continued to be an important fueling stop and convoy terminus on vital routes through the South Pacific. After the war, the U.S. Marines moved on, but U.S. control over American Samoa—and its forever altered natural environment—remained. In 1951, the U.S. naval station in Pago Pago officially closed. The following year, more than two hundred Samoan military families were relocated to Hawai'i, starting a trans-Pacific chain migration centered around Navy bases that has continued into the present. As of 2014, recruiters for the U.S. armed forces in Tutuila boast the highest per-capita rate of enlistment of any U.S. territory. Only the U.S. military's policy on body tattoos seemed to have kept even more Samoans from enlisting.<sup>17</sup>

Many Samoans who had joined the colonial service as clerks, interpreters, or nurses continued their professional careers into the 1920s and beyond. For some families, service in the New Zealand or American government became a tradition. Le Mamea, his half-brother Te'o Tuvale, and then Tuvale's own son, Atoa, all worked as interpreters for successive governments, from the colonial period into Samoan independence. For the nurse Grace Pepe from Tutuila, a professional career devoted to the physical well-being of her fellow Samoans led to responsibilities in other arenas as well. In 1928, Pepe along with Helen R. Wilson, represented American Samoa at the first Pan-Pacific Women's

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<sup>17</sup> B. Chen, "American Samoa Recruiting Station Ranked #1 in the World," *The Samoa News*, Sept. 16, 2014.



Conference in Honolulu.<sup>18</sup> Under the eyes of honorary chairwoman Jane Addams, Pepe was one of 183 female delegates from around the Pacific world who had come to Hawai'i to exchange experiences and ideas. And in this regard, Pepe also paved the way: the American Samoan delegate to the association's second conference in 1930 was Moana Meredith, another Samoan-educated nurse.<sup>19</sup> Today, so many Samoans leave the islands to get an education abroad that health workers are desperately needed at home, especially in the rural parts of Savai'i and Upolu.<sup>20</sup>

Above all, it is the rising influence of China in the Pacific that shapes Samoan politics and trade today. If the dragon came from afar in 1903, it now rears its head on the islands in a more and more direct manner. Since the early 1990s, Chinese companies have been constructing a number of administration buildings and sports facilities in the Samoan capital Apia, among them a convention center and an aquatic center for the South Pacific Games. Virtually no Samoan workers were involved in these construction projects, as hundreds of Chinese workers and engineers were brought in, living in separate camps and even growing their own food.<sup>21</sup> The Samoan government welcomed this outside assistance, but many Samoans were outraged at the lack of local involvement. Recent plans for a casino, built by a Chinese company and exclusively targeting Chinese tourists, have sparked similar concerns on the islands.

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<sup>18</sup> "Pan-Pacific Women's Conference," *Mid-Pacific Magazine*, Vol. 36, No. 6 (Dec. 1928), 412.

<sup>19</sup> Fiona Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Race Politics in the Women's Pan-Pacific* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 105.

<sup>20</sup> Siteri Sauvakacolo, "Shortage of Skilled Health Workers Hurting All Pacific Islands," *Fiji Times*, Feb. 17, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Sean Dorney, "Samoans Worried About Chinese Workers," *ABC Australia*, last modified Mar. 19, 2011, accessed May 13, 2015, [abc.net.au/correspondents/content/2011/s3168366.htm](http://abc.net.au/correspondents/content/2011/s3168366.htm).

In many ways, casinos are the new copra in today's Pacific. Casinos are springing up from Vanuatu to New Caledonia to the Northern Mariana Islands, where a Hong Kong-based company is currently planning an integrated casino resort for over 3 billion U.S. dollars. With its heavy dependence on remittances and foreign aid, Samoa is hoping to diversify its economy and attract more tourists, from China and elsewhere. The first Chinese contract laborers who arrived in Samoa over a century ago would have a difficult time recognizing today's Pacific world. One of their descendants, Fred Wong, did not forget these early pioneers. In an interview, he said: "Who knows where Samoa would be today were it not for those thousands of 'coolies.' I am sure we owe them a debt of gratitude."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cit. in Tom, *Chinese in Western Samoa*, 107.

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